

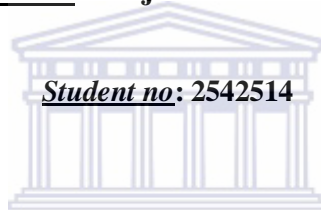
UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Department of Anthropology & Sociology

A mini-thesis in Partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Masters Degree in the
Department of Anthropology/Sociology,
University of the Western Cape

**Title: Love relationships, texting and mobility: An ethnography of cell phone use in
intimate relationships among labour migrants in Cape Town.**

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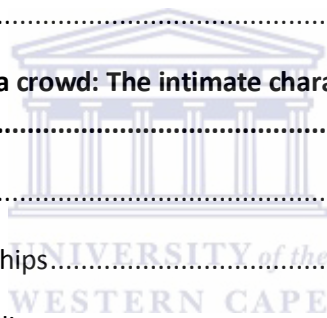
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KEYWORDS

Ethnography

Cell phones

Love relationships

Sexting

Distance

Intimacy

Marginality

Mobility

Labour migrants

Cape Town



ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the different ways in which labour migrants in contemporary South Africa make use of cell phones in their daily lives to maintain their love relationships. I start by tracing the history of labour migration and show how the gradual change of migration has played a role in the assertion of labour migrants in their communities in Cape Town. I look specifically into the use of cell phone by Setswana and Sesotho speaking migrants in Delft, Thornton, Brackenfell and Gugulethu. While the focus of the research is on the role of cell phones in maintaining love relationships between migrants and the partners they left behind 'at home', I also show how the negotiation of the cell phone in the social lives of migrants helps build wider social networks. The value of the functions of the cell phone through employed communication patterns that encourage social relations and interactions are also the focus of this thesis.

In Southern African history labour migrants have for a long time been constructed as a marginal social group; this has been a challenge for them in terms of social interaction with the wider population of the cities, where they work. Faced with such a challenge, they also struggled to keep contact with their families as making calls was costly, whereby some could also not read, thus making it pointless to write letters. Globalization, though, has brought tremendous change by introducing Information and Communication Technologies. I argue that the invention of technology such as ICTs, cell phones in particular, alleviate the problems of distance, allowing for the implementation of Internet-based resources to help romantic partners communicate. Cell phones have also helped in building networks across the world, including networks among labour migrants.

With the possibilities created by technology people are continuing to move to cities due to unemployment, thus leaving their families behind. This might not be as challenging as it previously was because of excessive communication due to unlimitedness, affordability and immediacy. In this thesis I argue that labour migrants use cell phones to mitigate the barrier of distance in long- distance relationships. It will draw from an anthropological stance which brings forth the significance of a cell phone as a social object and mediator in relationships.

This thesis will, hence, be based on an ethnographic study of labour migrants in Cape Town, looking at how the everyday use of cell phones shapes their everyday lives.



DECLARATION

I hereby declare that *Love relationships, texting and mobility: An ethnography of cell phone use in intimate relationships among labour migrants in Cape Town* is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university, and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

Marjorie Disebo Motau

May 2013

Signed.....



Prof Heike Becker

Signed.....

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I want to start by thanking my supervisor, Professor Heike Becker, for her patience and guidance during my fieldwork and the writing of this work. I want to thank the project, “Information and Communication Technologies”, mobility and the reconfiguration of marginality in South(ern) Africa”, under the leadership of Professor Francis Nyamnjoh (UCT Social Anthropology), which was funded by the South African Netherlands Programme for Alternatives in Development (SANPAD) and provided me with support for the two years of my MA studies. I also want to thank my friends and colleagues for their academic and personal support throughout the writing of this thesis, and my family for their love and support.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The economy of South Africa has relied on labour migration for more than a hundred years, ever since the diamond mines in Kimberley and then the gold mines on the Witwatersrand were opened. These mines demanded large-scale unskilled and semi-skilled male labour, which was mostly recruited from rural areas in South Africa and neighbouring countries, such as Lesotho, Swaziland and Mozambique. Many men left their families in rural areas to work in the cities, particularly in the mines, as labour migrants. The only time they were together with their families was when they came home after they had served the period of time that was contracted to them; other than that they just sent remittance home and would write, in intervals, to their intimate partners- the ones that could read.

With the development of the apartheid system the existing migrant labour became systemic, with single-sex hostels and the grand apartheid, which enforced that the labourers' families had to stay behind in the homelands (bantustans) or the neighbouring countries that provided many of the workers, especially on the mines. Moodie (2001), a professor of Sociology, has contributed to the literature on a broader study of *Changing Men in Southern Africa* by looking at the impacts of single-sex compounds on mine labourers in Pondoland, in the eastern Transkei. Moodie (2001: 299) explains that migrant mineworkers lived in single-sex compounds, barracked together from eight to fifty in a room, away from their homes for months and often years at a time. The- usually-male-migrant labourers had to sign long contracts (it varied over time but usually 12 or 18 months), which resulted in long periods of separations of those involved in intimate relationships. The consequences have been documented in an extensive literature on the impact of the migrant labour system on gender, sexuality and families (see. Wilson & Mafeje, 1963; Murray 1981; Walker, 1990; Ramphela, 1993; Morrell, 2001 and Elder, 2003).

While the heavily regulated migrant labour system came to an end, labour migration continues unabated, nowadays especially from rural areas and small towns to the big cities. Young people particularly, both men and women, leave 'home' to seek employment and a better life elsewhere. Often they leave their spouses, fiancées or sweethearts behind. While

the legal restrictions of the earlier period have been abolished, the high costs of transport remain prohibitive, so lovers are still separated for long periods. However, in the early 21st century virtually every South African owns a cell phone- about 100.48 per cent mobile penetration among its total population of 50 million (UNICEF report, 2012). The rising percentage ostensibly allow for a continuous communication despite physical separation. Cell phones were introduced in SA in the early 1990s, and have become widely available, even to the poorer sections of the population, over the past decade. The more recent generations of cell phones- now also available at prices that make them affordable for marginal sections of the population- have also introduced new technical features, which allow at almost no costs for constant and instant communication through social chat rooms such as Facebook, Whatsapp and other chat rooms they find to be cost effective.

Migration and cell phone usage are the two main focus points of this thesis. This brings to light the taken-for-granted connection between migration and the effect it has on long-distance relationships, in the presence of cell phones. The question is, firstly, has the availability of cell phones made a difference to intimate relationships where one (or both) partners have migrated over long distances in search of waged work opportunities? More importantly: What kind of difference have cell phones been making? Have they mitigated the strains of long separations of lovers? Secondly, how have the long-distance intimate relationships of labour migrants, as a mobile marginal population, been affected by the introduction and common availability of cell phones? How do labour migrants and their distant lovers make use of cell phones in order to stay in touch? What kind of language (verbal and/ or visual – images?). Do they use cell phones to make ICT technology work for their intimate relationships? Have cell phones perhaps also put additional strains on intimate relationships where the lovers involved are separated for long periods of time? What kind of strains would those be? What meaning do they attach to the use of cell phones as a mode of communication in their relationships and as a social object?

The interest of the thesis lies in how the use of cell phones help in maintaining long-distance relationships and whether the impact of cell phones make a difference in the communication of partners separated by labour migration, which was and still is common in South Africa.

1.2 Rationale

Long-distance relationships have become prevalent in contemporary life as a result of an increasing distribution of global flow, demanding labour workers, thus encouraging that people migrate to other countries and urban cities due to lack of employment in rural areas and under-developed towns. In this context, people continue to migrate to Cape Town due to unemployment. In fact, not only are people migrating to Cape Town for labour work, but professional work as well. I have found that some of the labour migrants live in Cape Town while their intimate partners remain at 'home'. The growth in the use of cell phone has brought tremendous change in how these long-distance relationships are maintained.

In 2002, the total number of mobile (cellular) phones in use worldwide exceeded the number of landlines (Donner, 2008: 3). Cell phones are constantly upgraded; now with the introduction of internet-based resources like Facebook and Whatsapp (social network sites); it makes it easy for people to not only call and send messages, but to also exchange pictures at a low rate. They serve as a way of bringing a sense of closeness between people who are not in the same geographical setting. De Bruijn et al (2009: 12) argue that the process of appropriation suggests that technologies acquire different meanings in different social contexts. Cell phones can be seen as a form of making a statement, determining whether one is found acceptable in a certain social context or as an important tool that helps in managing everyday life. Thus, the purposes of uses of cell phones vary according to the kind of relationship its users have and what impact cell phones have on these relationships.

It is generally assumed that cell phones are the most convenient to communicate with family friend and intimate partners, but may also be costly. The ways in which cell phones are navigated will determine how the costs of communication may be decreased. Labour migrants relatively fall under the low- income population. Thompson (2009: 366) demonstrates that as mobile phone use by low-income foreign workers became economically feasible in Singapore, the discursive, symbolic terrain of mobile telecommunications shifted and foreign workers became a focus of attention as potential customers for the telecoms (telecommunications companies). Adoption of new ICTs influences lifestyles and creates new mobility patterns that facilitate mobility and simultaneously link migrants with their different networks (Buijn 2000, Diop 2002, Tall 2004, Horst & Miller 2006 cf. Nyamnjoh et

al, 2010: 3). With access to ICTs one is never too far away from those they love as it is possible, through technology, to get as close as can possibly be imagined.

The role of the cell phone in the lives of labour migrants and the spaces they occupy impact on the use of cell phones in long-distance relationships. Migrants are often perceived as ‘marginalised’, and I write marginalised in inverted commas because the migrants in my study are ‘marginalised’ not so much because of their socio-economic status but because they cannot speak fluent IsiXhosa in the predominantly Xhosa-speaking environment of Cape Town’s townships, where language is considered to be one of the characteristics that authenticate one’s culture¹. Marginalisation in this study thus refers to the constraints of social interaction through language barrier. The use of cell phones may be an advantage to the migrants’ correlation with the people in their social contexts, where language might not be an issue, but the cell phones they own. Hence, it is imperative that my study explores the impact of the cell phone in the lives of labour migrants- not only in their intimate relationships, but also in other parts of their everyday lives.

1.3 Research aims

This research project is part of a bigger project on ICTs, mobility and the reconfiguration of marginality in South(ern) Africa, which investigates the diverse transformations wrought by new ICTs, in particular mobile phones, in socially marginal populations within Southern Africa, including migrants from Africa (Nyamnjoh et al, 2010). My research project specifically focuses on South African migrants who are of marginal societies, are in long-distance relationships and own cell phones. This research aims to make a contribution to both the literature on ICTs and marginal, mobile populations and love in Africa by investigating the uses of cell phones amongst labour migrants in Cape Town who are separated from their partners by distance. This is an ethnographic study that aims to explore how labour migrants navigate their cell phones to suit the demands of a long-distance relationship. I look at the ways in which migrants use the cell phone to implement different communication strategies that help in maintaining their relationship. I also interrogate the functions and value of the cell phone in a social context, looking at whether it serves the purpose of the demands of its users.

¹ Culture is in this instance referred to as a word commonly used by people to identify one ethnic group from another.

1.4 Chapter Outline

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter gave an introduction to the thesis and highlight the basic concepts and keywords that will appear in the writings of the thesis. It provided a background from which this thesis draws its ideas, highlighting the main research questions, and it also provided a rationale for the research study. It also gave a structure to the thesis by providing a chapter outline, with a concise and detailed summary for each chapter.

Chapter Two: Love relationships, cell phones and mobility in Contemporary South Africa

In this chapter I will provide theoretical literature on the concept of love, ICTs and migration. I aim to interrogate the use of ICTs by looking at the navigation of the cell phone in the everyday lives of migrants. I will provide a background on the influences of migration, the difficulties that come with being a marginal group and the impact that migration has on relationships with friends, family and companions/spouses.

Chapter Three: A field of technology and emotions

This chapter will provide a brief background of Cape Town, and then introduce the field in which my research was conducted, highlighting and discussing the key concepts that will arise in the description of doing fieldwork. I also present the methodological approach followed to collect the data, reflect on the research process and my relationship with my research participants. I have highlighted the challenges that I experienced while doing fieldwork as well as ethical challenges I faced and how I overcame them.

Chapter Four: The cell phone

This chapter looks at the implementation of a cell phone in a social context, drawing from the work of Appadurai on “*The social life of things*” and Miller on “*Material culture*”, mainly focusing on the aesthetics of the cell phone itself. It will also look at how the individual perceives the role of a cell phone as a personal tool and as a relationship mediator, and what characteristics of the cell phone contribute to these perceptions.

Chapter Five: Three is not always a crowd: The intimate character of the cell phone in long-distance relationships

In this chapter I will discuss the difficulties experienced by relationships that are at constant battle with distance, how cell phones mitigate that distance and to what extent they do so. The chapter will also look at how cell phones are used to communicate feelings and emotions in these relationships, the difference that this tool makes in combating the strain that distance puts on relationships and look at the construction of gendered stereotypes that come into play through migration and the use of cell phones. This chapter will also include recommendations that can be considered in improving the study of ICTs and migration.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

This chapter will basically highlight the important points that build this thesis and draw an overall conclusion based on what has been discussed.



CHAPTER TWO: ICTs, Love relationships and mobility in contemporary South Africa

2.1 Introduction

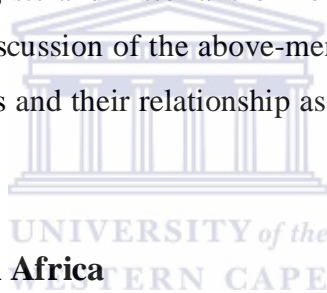
Anthropology has expanded its focus over the years due to the new transformations that the world is undergoing. One of the topics that have recently received great attention in the field of anthropology is that of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the impact that they have on the everyday life. The introduction and consumption of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) – the Internet and mobile telephony in particular – have accelerated remarkably in Africa since the late 1990s (De Bruijn et al., 2009). Studies range from the use of cell phones in different contexts- its costs, its upgrades, and its impact on social life. ICTs have developed a vast way of making communication possible and this has triggered an interest on cell (mobile) phones and its uses in the social sciences.

The introduction of ICTs appear to have created a tremendous shift in mobility across the globe; as a result, creating possibilities that seemed far less in reach before technology could exist. These possibilities have led to a constant influx of migrants to different parts of the world in pursuit of opportunities they are less likely to come across in their places of origin. For example, opportunities that offer possibilities of good education, employment and better health care. Labour migration has been the most prevalent form of migration and has ignited interest in the anthropological field, and it still continues to be an issue that is studied under influences of recent changes in the world, like the introduction of ICTs in Africa (De Bruijn, 2008; De Bruijn et al., 2009; Thompson, 2009). De Bruijn et al (2009: 15-16) demonstrate that the mobile phone compresses distance between people, thereby making it possible for people to cope in new ways with long periods of separation from family and friends, and it is all thanks to the symbolic presence that the mobile phone provides.

In South Africa, long-distance relationships have been prevalent since the introduction of migrant labour systems that were formed in the apartheid era. Long-distance relationships still prevail in contemporary life as a result of an increasing distribution of global flow demanding labour workers. The demand for labour workers has influenced the migration of people from rural areas to other countries and urban cities because of the lack of employment

in rural areas. Before the introduction of cell phones in the 1990s, being a labour migrant was difficult, particularly for migrants who left their families in the rural areas where they come from. This resulted in many of these migrant workers finding other companions in the cities and cohabiting with them or even getting married without their wives knowing- men were the ones that usually migrated to urban cities to become labourers.

Chapter two focuses on academic literature relating to the concepts of love, ICTs and labour migration. This chapter draws on three bodies of literature: firstly, the increasing number of anthropological studies of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), especially its social uses among marginal, mobile populations; secondly, the surplus studies conducted by anthropologists on the history of labour migration. Thus, I will provide a brief background on labour migration in South Africa and how the labour migration system has changed throughout the eras of political ruling. Thirdly, I will introduce the still small body of literature, written by anthropologists and historians on romantic and sexual love in Africa. This chapter also consists of a discussion of the above-mentioned concepts as a contribution to broader anthropological studies and their relationship as a contribution to the study of this thesis.



2.2 Welcoming ICTs to South Africa

“Technology is viewed as a powerful and autonomous agent that dictates the patterns of human social and cultural life”.

- Bryan Pfaffenberger (1988: 239)

In 1989, when only landline phones were available, only 45.4% of the population had access to service lines (<http://www.vodazone.co.za/history>). By now however, mobile phones have long surpassed traditional landlines as the most common voice communication technology - particularly due to the marked growth in new mobile phone users in most so-called developing countries (Feldmann, 2003 cf. Kreutzer, 2009: 1). One point often made is that many marginal people never had access to landlines. According to SouthAfrica.info (2011) South Africa is one of the fastest growing mobile communications markets in the world. As of 2009, there were over 46.4-million mobile users in South Africa, ranking the country 26th worldwide in terms of subscriber numbers. This number mobile users, I argue through observation, has increased ever since 2009 as a result of the access that people have to cell

phones. By access, I refer to what the Human Science Research Council defines as ‘the ability to use a communication network at a reasonable distance and at an affordable price, which provides relevant information and has the necessary capacity’ (http://www.hsrc.ac.za/HSRC_Review_Article-62.phtml); hence there is an increase in social mobility.

Social mobility allows for people to move across different spaces while being granted the ability to remain connected to the network of people that are not located in the same geographical spaces that they are. Social mobility somehow shames distance as it breaks the boundaries of communication that distance supposedly creates. For example, my research informants are informed about what events occur in their partners’ lives because they communicate as often as they can. Thato, one of my key informants, for instance owns two phones, using two different networks (Vodacom and Cell C) to bargain from the special offers that these networks offer. His girlfriend owns one phone but two sim cards that are from the same networks Thato uses. This, he says, is an affordable way for him and his girlfriend to communicate because they take advantage of the offers, like free Airtime, SMS bundles and data bundles.

It has been argued by authors such as Beger and Sinha (2012:12) that South Africa’s mobile telephony has been a fundamental factor in reducing the communication gap between urban and rural demographics, as it provides access to areas underserved by main telephone lines and other ICT infrastructure. Expanding quickly, with over 620 million mobile connections as of September 2011, Africa bears the second largest mobile market in the world (ibid: 5). Beger and Sinha (2012: 12) elaborate that ICT studies show that in the majority of the least developed countries (South Africa included in this study), mobiles with prepaid services are the “only means of communication” for rural and socio-economically disadvantaged households.² Mobile trends and services like Facebook, Whatsapp and Twitter are seen in the country as a way to “accommodate their local income and lifestyle” (Beger & Sinha, 2012: 12). This rapid growth of the use of ICTs in Africa, particularly South Africa, has led to a constant upgrade of technology, as South Africans are fast catching on the innovation of technology, and are constantly looking forward to the next best features of these ICTs; hence

² International Telecommunication Union (ITU), ‘ICT and Telecommunications in Least Developed Countries’, 2006, < http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ldc/pdf/ictand_telinldc-e.pdf> (accessed 07 February 2012).

I argue that South Africa is fast catching on to the innovation of cell phone usage. The question remains: How is this possibly related to labour migration?

2.3 A brief background on labour migration in South Africa

In 1866, diamonds were discovered in the Northern Cape- a discovery that transformed South Africa from a predominantly subsistence agricultural economy into a modern capitalist economy (Whiteside, 1988: 1-2). The exploitation of diamonds led to an inflow of immigrants seeking their fortunes (ibid); as many migrants relied mainly on the recruitment of labour workers by the diamond mines. Gold mines were then opened on the Witwatersrand near Johannesburg in 1886 and spread east and west (Moodie & Mdatshe, 1994: 1). The opening of the gold mines, like the diamond mines, demanded large-scale unskilled and semi-skilled male labour, therefore increasing the inflow of migrants into the two cities, Kimberley and Johannesburg. Whiteside (1988: 2), the director and professor at the Health Economics & HIV/AIDS Research Division in Durban, argues that from the very beginning of the development of the mining sector, most of the unskilled labour was provided by the black population. He elaborates that four years after the discovery of gold, some 14, 000 blacks were employed on the mines and by the turn of the century there were 100, 000 blacks (ibid).

According to Jeeves & Crush (1995: 11) the gold mines became critically dependent on foreign labour in the 1960s, and accounted for 80 percent of foreign mineworkers in the early 1970s. The population of migrants on the mines was mainly dominated by migrants from other countries such as Malawi, Mozambique, Angola, Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. It is argued by many scholars that as the demand for labour increased, a system was developed under the apartheid regime to control the inflow of migrants into urban cities (see Crush & James 1995; Moodie & Ndatshe 1994; Whiteside 1988). Laburn-Pearl (1995: 37) argues that the migrant labour system has operated since the first mines on the Witwatersrand were established, with the result that until as recently as the late 1980s management and the state viewed mineworkers as temporary residents of urban industrial areas. Migrants were then accommodated in single-sex, regimented, company-owned compounds or hostels, located close to the mine shafts on mine property (ibid).

Many studies have been conducted with an interest in the hostel life experienced by labour migrants: these studies can be traced back to Ramphele's *"A bed Called Home"* (1993); Elber's *"Hostels, Sexuality and the Apartheid Legacy: Malevolent geographies"* (2003); Moodie & Ndatshe's *"Going for Gold: Men, Mines and Migration"* (1994). Laburn-Peart (1995: 39) argued that hostels are part of the legacy of racial discrimination and economic exploitation, and as a direct result of such discriminatory policies, the state and the corporate economy felt no need to oblige to the provision of housing or welfare benefits for families of migrant workers in urban areas. This instinctively led to the commencement of sexual relations among mineworkers and the sexual relations of mineworkers and town women. According to Moodie and Mdatshe (1994: 121) there was an entire set of rules that governed these relationships, whose parameters were well known and enforced by black compound authorities. The involvement of mine migrants in such relationships contributed to the migrants' extension of staying in the city, rather than returning to their families in the homelands.

The collapse of influx controls in the 1980s and the reincorporation of the homelands in the 1990s erased these boundaries and provided people with new freedom of movement (Crush & James, 1995: xi). The establishment of the National Union Mineworkers (NUM) in 1982 renewed pressure for more family accommodation to alleviate the worst effects of labour migration (Laburn-Peart, 1995: 38). Labour migrants were thus granted the right to housing accommodation. Whiteside (1988: 10) demonstrates that in June 1986, the Abolition of Influx Control Act³ was passed, repealing the various laws relating to influx control. Crush (1995: 25) elaborates that miners were then increasingly employed on fixed annual contracts with fixed periods of leave. By the late 1980s the vast majority of miners employed were on standardised 52-week agreements with four to six weeks' annual leave (ibid). Workers began to return regularly and repeatedly to the same mine and were now forced to spend a greater and greater proportion of their working lives away from home living in the hostels, therefore increasing the stresses on family life (ibid).

Labour migration in South Africa continued to grow as other cities started to develop, calling for not only unskilled and semi-skilled male labour, but highly skilled and non-gendered

³ For the first time South African mineworkers could legally settle with their families in the townships close to the mines and were no longer restricted to single-sex hostel life (Laburn-Peart, 1995: 38). The abolition of the pass laws had little effect on the foreigners as they remained subject to other legislation governing their right to enter and remain in South Africa (Whiteside, 1988: 11).

forms of work. Posel (2001: 1) demonstrates that on the contrary, temporary labour migration within the country appears to have increased, driven particularly by the rise in female labour migration. With globalisation allowing for such mobility, migration not only occurs amongst male, but also amongst female. In her paper, Posel (2003; 1) suggests that there is no evidence nationally to support the assumption that circular labour migration 'ended' or even declined during the 1990s. What has happened is that reasons for migration have shifted, because not only is it about the demand of unskilled and semi-skilled labour, but seems to also be a result of lack of employment for the highly skilled in rural and urban-underdeveloped cities.

With the diamond mines closing in Kimberley, and the town not having much to offer, many have moved away to seek better opportunities in cities like Cape Town and Johannesburg. According to Smith (2005: 6) national migration trends indicate that, of the nine provinces, only Gauteng and the Western Cape show a net growth in the number of migrants. Moreover, there is therefore a net inflow of people to Gauteng and the Western Cape from the other seven provinces. Kearney (1986: 331) accordingly states that contemporary migrants are predominantly workers moving from areas where they were born and raised to others where they can find a higher return for their labour. Adepoju (2006: 27) also argues that people essentially migrate when they are unable to satisfy their aspirations within the prevailing opportunity structure in their locality, region or country. ICTs facilitate migrants in their moving, making it unproblematic to leave their loved ones behind- as they depend on mobile communication to facilitate with maintaining relationships with family and friends.

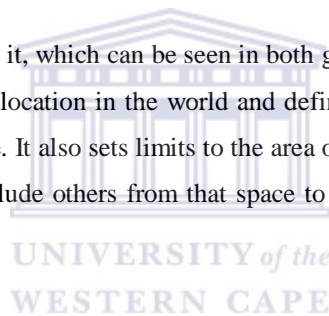
Migration to other cities may not only cause strain on the migrants' relationships with their family and friends, but may also make it difficult for migrants to adapt in a new context where cultural practices may be different from those they have been exposed to in their hometowns. This kind of difficulty may create a certain sense of exclusion in the migrants' understanding of the context that they are in.

2.4 The dynamics of being a minority: living on the margins

The exclusion of African migrants seems to be a major factor in the documentation of the history of South African labour migration. Mamphela Ramphele (1993), a medical doctor,

former anti-apartheid activist and anthropologist, argues that labour hostels were occupying impoverished, isolated and degrading spaces in the South African landscape. Ramphele (1993: 3) demonstrates that African migrant workers “have been excluded from effective participation in the political and economic institutions of South Africa through racial discrimination policies pursued by various governments over the years”. The labour migrant system has played a crucial role in the positioning of migrants in the urban spaces they occupy. Space, therefore, became a defining factor of the margins created to exclude labour migrants. Ramphele unpacks the concept of space and goes into detail on the ‘various dimensions of space’⁴ in which aspects of interaction and social relations, racial discrimination policies, language, and migrant’s perception come into play. These aspects all play a crucial part in restricting migrants from political, economic and social inclusion. Imperative for the study on labour migrants’ use of cell phone is to draw on Ramphele’s use of the physical space, and should be understood in this context as such:

“Space has a physical dimension to it, which can be seen in both geographical and architectural terms. It sets the limits to one’s physical location in the world and defines the parameters of the space one can legitimately appropriate for use. It also sets limits to the area of legitimate access, and by virtue of that may establish the right to exclude others from that space to ensure uninterrupted or unhindered use” (Ramphele, 1993: 3).



The constraints that are set for migrants in the physical space hinders with their interaction and social relations with others, influencing migrants’ perceptions of space and how they these perceptions affect the way in which they identify themselves. A clear example of could be that of Wilson and Mafeje (1963) early research in the Capetonian township of Langa. Wilson and Mafeje illustrate the process by which Xhosa-speaking migrants (1963) became urbanized in the township of Langa. The study conducted by Mafeje and Wilson on social groups in Langa shows how people living in the township were categorized and how the social construction of migrants unfolds as they try to assert their belonging in Langa. They explain that in Langa, migrants and townsmen did not mingle much and lived separately- “A true migrant is readily identified by his dress, his gait and manners, and his speech (ibid: 17). What is highlighted in their study are the group divisions which existed within the township, categorizing migrants as *amagoduka* (meaning those who go home).⁵ They stated that the

⁴ Physical space, political-economic space, ideological-intellectual space, and Psycho-social space (see Wilson & Ramphele, 1993: 2-10).

⁵ Wilson and Mafeje (1963).

amagoduka were looked down on by townsmen as “country bumpkins”, and were said to be “ignorant, uncivilized and were laughed at for being gullible” (ibid: 16). This kind of behaviour towards migrant could be interpreted as another excluding process by other social groups in Langa. While Wilson and Mafeje (1963) highlight the factors that set migrants and townsmen apart, leaving migrants at the margins, Ramphele (1993: 127) documents the view of the marginalised society, stating that many of those interviewed in her study attested to the indignity of being members of ‘bedholds’ and being treated with disrespect by other people, including other Africans living in the neighbouring townships; explaining why migrants tend to associate with those who are from the same villages and areas that they are from (see Wilson & Mafeje’s discussion about *home-boys*).

The reluctance to associate or be associated with certain societies or social groups is more likely to leave migrants on the margins, and as much as this collide comes from both the majority and minority group, what remains an ambiguity is to what extend migrants, as a minority group, are being marginalised, and what is being done to combat whatever boundaries that exist. Ramphele (1993: 1) argues that migrants have developed creative strategies to cope with the limitations of their social reality. Could cell phones be one of those strategies added to the lives of contemporary South African migrants? Marginality restricts migrants from building social structures in the areas that they live in, therefore limiting them from certain social contexts, and most likely to awaken the migrants’ longing for home. Home’ is also a central category for understanding the maintenance of love relationships over vast distances, and the role of communication therein, such as the usage of cell phones investigated in this thesis

2.4.1 ‘I went away, but my heart stayed home’: migrant talks about home

Home is usually referred to as a person’s place of origin or a place where one lives with his/her family. The attributes that determine whether migrants feel at home in an unfamiliar place vary, and can change over time, as are reflections about where home is. Migrants’ home-making experiences can tell us a great deal about how well they are settling in, and adapting to, the society they have moved into and how socially cohesive this society is (Philipp & Ho, 2010: 83). It is easy for some migrants to settle in new spaces than others; hence some migrants yearn for home while others create home in the urban cities they migrate to. Some

of the studies mentioned earlier in this chapter indicate how the Abolition of the Influx Control Act in 1986 has changed migrants' decisions to either return to the homelands or settle in urban areas. Although studies on labour migration tend to focus on the latter, the former cannot be completely dismissed.

Studies of migration in South Africa focus mainly on how the political transformation has changed the pattern of migration from migrants being allowed to stay for certain duration in urban areas while working in the mines, to the abolition of the different pass laws that were implemented to restrict migrants from permanently settling in these urban areas. Although many migrants have settled in the urban areas, there are those who have return to the homelands, and these pay less attention to the migrants who return home, but have highlighted the talks of migrants about their homes and the enforcement cultural practices in the cities by the migrants. Wilson and Mafeje (1963: 19) say that young men in their study talked about stick fights, and dances, and love-making at home. This is also mentioned by Mayer (1963: 174) where he argues that migrant men from East London, in the Eastern Cape Province, socialised with men from the same village or homeland, often speaking about country matters, as a way of to resist urbanization.

While some migrants reminisced about country life, many were negotiating their place in the urban society and creating other homes. For many, the urban life was their way out of the rural areas and returning was no longer an option. They opted to stay in the urban areas, even under derogatory and discriminative conditions. Hostels, informal settlements and township housing became home for them.

2.4.2 Home away from home: When the unfamiliar becomes familiar

Simon Bekker's article, "*Diminishing returns: Circulatory migration linking Cape Town to the Eastern Cape*" is a demonstration of how migrants from the Eastern Cape choose Cape Town as a city to migrate to and the reason for these migrants to build permanent households in Cape town. Bekker (2001-2002: 6) argues that attractions to Cape Town relate to comparative advantages in finding a site, in regular income, in jobs, and in accessing economic and social infrastructure. He draws from the argument of Cross at el (1999) on reasons for migration, stating that:

Migration decisions around where to go relate not only to immediate questions like site access or job access, but also stretch outward further to include the entire range of resources the household expects to access through its acquisition of a site. Both social and informational and environmental resources are locality-bound, and change with migration. (Cross et al, 1999 cf. Bekker, 2001-2002: 2)

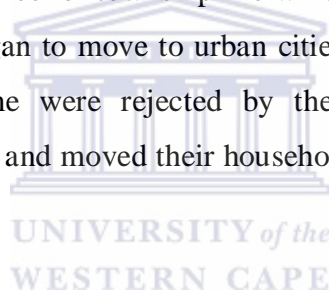
Bekker (2001-2002: 2) therefore elaborates that improved access to such resources, or at least expectations in this regard, form a primary explanation for migration. Ndegwa et al (2007: 224) argue that the relationship between migration, poverty and health must therefore be understood within the specific socio-economic context that regulated labour and human movement and settlement in Southern Africa. These arguments brought to attention by Cross et al (2009), Bekker (2001-2002) and Ndegwa et al (2007) allocate some understanding into why many migrants decided to settle in urban areas where resources to their basic needs are easily accessible, even for those who did not have proper housing and were discriminated and humiliated by being accommodated in migrant labour hostels.

Mamphela Ramphela (1993), in her book titled *Home* illustrates another ideology of home. She introduces that the migrants' beds were literally perceived as their home by these migrants' therefore defining the constraints of 'home' life in the absence of a 'household' for those who live in South Africa's township hostels. This study was conducted in the townships of Langa, Gugulethu and Nyanga. The term 'space' is taken on a number of levels such as the political spaces to organise for change, and the limits on these in a society in which hostels have never been officially acknowledged either as legitimate extensions of the working environment or as domestic spaces accessible to the families of those living there (Nuttall, 1994: 341). Ramphela highlights in her study that those who brought their families to live with them in the hostels experienced problems as children were not allowed to play outside due to the complaints of noise by other migrants who had no families. Ramphela's study relates to my study as it discusses the meaning makings of 'home' by migrants in Cape Town, only that her study focuses on hostel life in the 1990s, while my study focuses on different styles of living two decades subsequent to her study.

Bell Hooks is an African-American author, feminist and social activist. Her book, titled *Belonging: a culture of place* (2009) is a noteworthy illustration of how she explores the meaning making of home and belonging through her own experiences of moving from place

to place, from country to city and back again, finally ending back in Kentucky, her place of origin. This book tackles many issues such as home place and land, and issues of local and global environmentalism and sustainability; linking these issues to the politics of race, gender and class. Examples of such politics are demonstrated in studies by Mayer (1963); Wilson and Mafeje (1963); Ramphela (1993). These studies show that often migrants who come from the homelands already have an existing family, though they take up other households in the urban areas they move to.

The investigation on mine-marriages and town-women puts the reluctance of migrants to return home into perspective. Moodie and Mdatshe (1994) have explored this in an extensive study on migrant workers on the Welkom mine. They have found that between men and boys were a created for young boys to fulfil the duties of the wives at home by “washing and ironing their husbands’ clothes and packing everything neatly” (Moodie & Mdatshe, 1994: 126). The town-women offered a feel of township life which hostel migrants yearned for. On the contrary, country women began to move to urban cities to live with their husbands who were not returning home. Some were rejected by their husbands, while others were accommodated by their husbands and moved their household from the homeland to the urban areas.



Home is, therefore, created. Home is a constantly changing context. Migrants move away from the families they have to and create other families, in other contexts- usually unfamiliar; thus creating their own homes. For people to settle in these unfamiliar places, they have to familiarize themselves with their surroundings. Every context has its unique attributes and not all of these attributes are for people to adopt, but rather become accustomed to in order to avoid the feeling of estrangement. “No one is seeking timeless paradise; and no one, however nostalgic, is really seeking to turn back the clock- what people are seeking is not so much the home they left behind as a place that they feel they can change, a place in which their lives and strivings will make a difference- a place in which to create home” (Stack, 1996 cf. Hooks, 2009: 221).

2.5 Love in the life of a migrant: an anthropological perspective

ICTs and its uses has increasingly become a study subject in anthropology, however the other key aspect of my research, love, remains a rare topic in anthropological research. Cole and

Thomas (2009) demonstrate that anthropologists and other scholars have largely ignored the topic of love in Africa. They argue that despite the sights and sounds of love in varied African media, scholars have rarely addressed the topic (Cole & Thomas 2009: 2). The anthropologist Rachel Spronk (2009: 183), who has done research on love in contemporary Kenya argues, though, that what is new about love now are the sheer volume of representations and debates about intimacy in the public domain and the introduction of a therapeutic ethos into those discussions. Taking into consideration the compilation of studies in the book *Love in Africa* (2009), love is becoming a prevalent topic for anthropologists, and more importantly, it is a topic that is starting to encourage new public discussions.

Recent literature on love shows how love is constructed in different contexts, through all spectrums that influence the way in which love is viewed in contemporary Africa. For example, Cole and Thomas (2009), in their edited book, *Love in Africa*, shows how the media contributes a great deal to the views of the audience on the dynamics of love, citing work done by Fair (2009) on the construction of romance in the 1950s and 1960s by Zanzibari audiences, through Hindi films; Spronk (2009) who, in her chapter, explores how young professionals' expectations and practices of intimacy are shaped by postcolonial transformations, consumer capitalism, and the engagement of therapeutic ethos⁶ (183). Another study in the book is that of Maquelier (2009) on love, poverty, and the educational values of televised dramas in Niger, where she suggests that foreign television dramas are seen as a medium of development by impoverished youth looking for moral instruction as well as training in the language of love (ibid: 205). The book underlines other dynamics of love, bringing to our attention the various ways in which we can understand the construction of the meanings of love.

Love relationships, unlike other relationships, appear to require great attention for their survival and both partners have to be willing to be part of such a relationship- both partners have to equally interact and communicate with each other to strengthen their relationship. Jantz and Murray (1998) explain that while two- way Internet communication is a great blessing to many people, for some it creates an arena for temptation to cross personal boundaries; and so does migration. Thus, the argument by Urry (2007: 228) that 'strong ties depend upon communication' seems to stand on a very firm ground. Depending on what part

⁶ "Therapeutic ethos insist that the solution to romantic problems lies in self-knowledge and reflexivity" (Spronk, 2009: 183)

of the phenomenon is most interesting to the researcher, mobile communication, like the Internet and landlines before it, can be seen as a system that changes and creates new relationships and networks or as one that amplifies and strengthens existing ones (Donner, 2006: 7). My research interest is on the function of mobile communication as one that amplifies and strengthens existing relationships that stretch across space.

2.6 The cell phone that knows no boundaries: the connection between ICTs, migration and love relationships

As more families are 'broken up' in this globalised economy, the demand for maintaining ties across the miles will only increase. Mobile communication in particular, has become so commonplace and integral to the everyday lives of people from all social strata that social policy pertaining to migrant workers needs to take into account such realities.

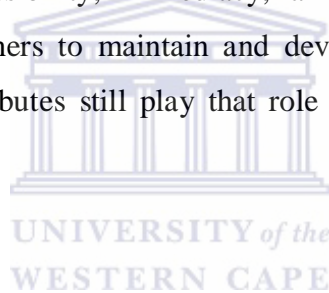
(Thomas & Lim, 2010:10)

Migration and mobility enable people to create multiple networks that are neither homogenous nor confined to particular geographical spaces (Nyamnjoh et al, 2010). Given that cell phones are used to maintain relationships and are generally seen as very important to people, they are likely to be perceived by romantic partners as important for their relationships because of the cell phone's ability to keep them connected over distance and time (Miller-Ott et al, 2012: 19). It appears that the cell phone makes the intimidating obstacle of distance seem beatable. Jin and Pena (2010: 40) argue that mobile communication shares some similarities with face-to-face communication. For example, more frequent mobile and face-to-face communication was significantly associated with less perceived loneliness, and individuals in romantic relationships used mobile phones more frequently than those not in romantic relationships (Jin, 2007 cf. Jin & Pena, 2010: 40)

Cell phones have proven to be the most convenient to communicate with family friend and intimate partners, but may also be costly. Thompson (2009: 366) demonstrates that as mobile phone use by low-income foreign workers became economically feasible in Singapore, the discursive, symbolic terrain of mobile telecommunications shifted and foreign workers became a focus of attention as potential customers for the telecoms (telecommunications companies). Adoption of new ICTs influences lifestyles and creates new mobility patterns

that facilitate mobility and simultaneously link migrants with their different networks (Buijn 2000, Diop 2002, Tall 2004 cf. Horst & Miller 2006). With access to ICTs one is never too far away from those they love as it is possible, through technology, to get as close as can possibly be imagined. Levinson (2004: 97) argues that in the service of true love, the almost always available phone can truly be heroic.

The process of creating relationships is now accelerated and intimacy is hurried because today's technologies make it possible for partners to sustain constant connection (Solis, 2006: 4). From the developing world, (Goodman 2005, cited in Donner, 2006: 7) interprets self-report survey data from mobile users in South Africa and Tanzania in this way, observing that mobile phones are being used more frequently to manage strong ties, particularly those of family, than for maintaining or adding weak ties. According to Solis (2006: 1) autonomy and anonymity were the attributes of the texting technology that made initiation of romantic relationships easier while accessibility, immediacy, affordability and privacy were the characteristics that enabled partners to maintain and develop their romance into a highly intimate relationship. These attributes still play that role in relationships, with the help of regularity of course.



2.7 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the rapid changes that migrants are experiencing in South Africa; it discusses the connection of the study of ICT/cell phone use among migrant workers to studies of the rarely investigated topic of love in Africa. Information and Communication Technologies have made a vast contribution by creating ways in which people maintain relationships that are destitute of face-to-face interaction. The introduction of ICTs have also contributed to the developments of technology of South Africa, introducing affordable ways in which people can communicate across boundaries of space and time. To construct a technology is not merely to deploy materials and techniques; it is also to construct social and economic alliances, to invent new legal principles for social relations, and to provide powerful new vehicles for culturally-provided myths (Pfaffenberger, 1988: 249). The role of the cell phone in the lives of migrants studied for this research goes beyond communication with long-distance partners; it helps them create new networks in the social and geographic

spaces that they occupy. This has allowed for excessive mobility, with one less issue to be concerned with- being disconnected from loved ones.



CHAPTER THREE: A field of technology and emotions: setting the scene

3.1 Introduction

A field of technology and emotions is a suitable description for an arena in which my ethnographic study of the use of cell phones among people in long-distance love relationships was conducted. The field provides a clear understanding of how labour migrants conduct and maintain their relationships through the use of the cell phone that functions as a social and personal object, and is of significance to the maintenance of long-distance love relationships. This chapter provides the setting in which these interactions take place. I introduce the four different locations in which the study was conducted by looking at the geographic and social spaces in which my informants interact with others. It also gives the background of the informants who took part in this research and demonstrates how the experiences of the field were shared with me as the researcher. The chapter also highlights the ethical challenges experienced while conducting fieldwork and how these challenges were dealt with.

3.2 A brief background on Cape Town

Since the migrants I worked with currently live in Cape Town it is important to start with the characterisation of the city. Cape Town is one of South Africa's capital cities and the oldest of the country, going back to the 17th century when it was founded by the Dutch settlers. It is perceived by many migrants to offer ample opportunities, ranging from employment to better education; for all these reasons there has been an influx of migrants into the city for decades. During the segregation and apartheid periods, as Wilson and Mafeje (1963: 17) argued, migration to Cape Town was selective. It was mostly adult men who had had some schooling in the reserves, and had worked in the Johannesburg mines or smaller towns (ibid). More recently, Nontembeko Poswa and Rasmus Levy conducted an introductory study for the Strategic Development Information and GIS Department to highlight the migration phenomenon in Cape Town based on eighteen (18) interviews of migrants from the Eastern Cape living in Monwabisi Park (referred to as Endlovini), Khayelitsha. Khayelitsha is the biggest township in the Western Cape Province. Endlovini is an informal settlement situated near the Khayelitsha cemetery and in close proximity to Monwabisi Resort, hence the name

Monwabisi Park (Poswa & Levy, 2006: 7). Poswa and Levy (2006: 3) found that migration to Cape Town primarily takes place for employment related reasons, seeing that job opportunities in the Eastern Cape are few and far between. They also argue that migration is furthermore encouraged by prospects of better education and better health care in Cape Town (ibid).

Although it is clear that migration to Cape Town is mainly in search of employment, labour migration by Black⁷ Africans from the Eastern Cape to Cape Town has been visible since the 1960s (see for example Wilson and Mafeje, 1963). Black African migration to Cape Town was seen as threat and as kept under control for such a time that it could no longer be controlled. Western (2001: 624) demonstrate that the apartheid regime did not only try to sharply limit Black African employment in the Western Cape, it also was in a position of “quasi-monopoly” in the provision of housing and chose, for example, to build no family housing at all for Black Africans from 1972 through 1979. Only in the 1980s was Khayelitsha announced by parliament as a development by the state to house black Africans (Seekings et al., 1990 cf. Ndegwa et al., 2007: 226) in response to a severe housing shortage for black Africans in the Western Cape (Ndegwa et al., 2007: 226). Ndegwa et al (2007: 226) explains that Khayelitsha was intended to ease this shortage and accommodate squatters in the Crossroads area. Mears (1997: 609) also explains that the plan was that informal residents of the existing older African⁸ townships such as Langa, Nyanga and Gugulethu⁹, as well as those of the squatter camps (formerly called informal settlements) of Crossroads and KTC , would be moved to Khayelitsha.

Studies conducted on labour migration to Cape Town show that owning houses did not limit migration, as there were other alternatives that came in to play, for example, the labour migrant hostels (Ramphela, 1993, further discussed in chapter 3) and informal settlements in Black African townships ((Poswa & Levy, 2006). Townships in Cape Town and the informal settlement that exist within the townships have become one of Cape Town’s tour attractions. Western argued that the “Coloured Moment”¹⁰ is ending because the immigration of Black Africans into the Western Cape has been proceeding at such a rate over the last fifteen years

⁷ ‘Black’ is a racial classification prevalent in South Africa for people of darker pigmentation.

⁸ ‘African’ is a racial classification for black.

⁹ The townships that came into existence to occupy African labour migrants

¹⁰ “A slice of time of Coloured demographic preponderance that will have lasted some sixty years” (ibid).

that “Africa is, indeed, finally going to end up at the Cape” (Western 2001: 623). By Africa, he not only refers to African migrants from the Eastern Cape, but African migrants from all across the African continent.

Cape Town is still grappling with the transformation of the country from the apartheid era to what is now known as democracy. This transformation questions whether there has been a change in the direction in which the city is headed and how it is perceived by both insiders and outsiders. Besteman, an anthropologist from the United States, argues that Cape Town is a fundamentally weird place in many ways, saturated with the legacy of apartheid that one cannot help but feel unsettled (2008, 29).

Transforming Cape Town is an illustration of the politics of inequality in post-apartheid South Africa, focusing particularly on the divisions brought upon by racial segregation, poverty and transformation in a democratic city of Cape Town. The book gives a detailed description of how Capetonians¹¹ struggle to make sense of a country that promised democracy, yet still fosters the apartheid legacy. Besteman came to Cape Town as a responsible member of faculty at a United States college for American students who were in South Africa for a study abroad programme of six months. The time span grew longer as she began to familiarize herself with the social and geographic spaces that puzzled her. She then took interest and spent the next two years conducting further research collecting field data by attending different ventures that contributed to her interest. She attended public events, performances and workshops. She also went on township tours and had formal interviews and informal conversations with colleagues.

Besteman argues that ignorance and inequality are what saturates life in Cape Town today (2008: 83). By ignorance, Besteman is referring to Capetonians’ lack of acknowledgement the diversity and political, economic and social equality among people of different races. Cape Town is a highly dislocated city, separated by different socio-economic classes and racial groups. Andrew Tucker (2009: 26) , a deputy director of the University of Cambridge for Gender Studies, wrote ‘*Queer visibilities: space, identity and interaction in Cape Town*’ argues that Cape Town has pushed forward with new elite leisure and tourist developments

¹¹ Capetonians is a classification of people who were born in Cape Town.

such as the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront¹² and the International Convention Centre. Moreover, he argues those racial tensions and gross and enduring social, cultural and economic inequalities continue to define the city (ibid). However, Cape Town is also well-known for its tourism attractions, as it is acknowledged as the most beautiful city in South Africa.; the city's main attractions being Robben Island, Table Mountain and the townships. It is one of the cities that have contributed significantly, through its tourism expressions, to the marketing of South Africa worldwide. Pondering at all of these characteristics of Cape Town, Besteman pre-eminently describes it as:

A city of remarkable beauty and fearsome poverty gloriously situated at the southern tip of Africa. It is a thriving multiracial city with strong ties to rural South Africa and to the international arena.....In Cape Town; fabulous wealth rubs shoulders with devastating poverty. (2008: 3-4)

The fissure between poverty and wealth in Cape Town is extremely visible to go unrecognized, even for an outsider. The city is separated in such an appalling manner to an extent where when touring the townships, one cannot help but notice the tumult that exist within, by noticing the ways that people use as a means to survive. The sight of five stands next to each other, selling the same food products, but hoping to make a profit, or the constant traffic catastrophe because every *Iphela*¹³ (mini-taxi) is chasing to pick up the next person they see waiting to get onto one, or the informal settlements that never cease to exist, despite the houses that are being built. While this goes on in the townships, there is a sort of calm atmosphere that penetrates the suburban areas of Cape Town. There are many wealthy people in Cape Town who only live in affluent areas and socialise in their surrounding areas and will probably never get to see “the other side”, which is the township.

Part of the politics of life in Cape Town is the issue of the influx of migrants into the city. The flow of migration, mainly labour migration contributes to some of the socio-economic problems that already exist. Robert Mongwe is a PhD intern for the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) who conducted research in the year 2010 on “*Race, class and housing in post-apartheid Cape Town*”. He argues that Cape Town has experienced an upsurge in housing shortage, especially for African and coloured people due to the significant

¹² Cape Town's most visited destination which has the highest rate of foreign tourist and is situated at the heart of Cape Town's working harbour.

¹³ An Isixhosa township term for cockroach. It is commonly said that these mini-taxis are all over, just like cockroaches.

growth of urban migration since the end of apartheid in the 1990s (Mongwe, 2010); and the correspondent increase of informal settlement. (Ndegwa et al., 2007: 224) argue that the relationship between migration, poverty and health must therefore be understood within the specific socio-economic context that regulated labour and human movement and settlement in Southern Africa.

On the other hand, Cape Town is a magnificent city. It has an impression that draws its visitors back once they have experienced the life that is lived in it- what Besteman describes as seduction. For someone like myself who came to Cape Town from the inland (dry, either hot or freezing cold) town of Kimberley, Cape Town has the most unusual climate. Even after having lived in the city for some years now, I am still amazed how the smell and the feel of its ever-cool breeze bring a sense of tranquillity. Life in Cape Town has no set pace, allowing everybody to move at a pace that best suits them as individuals. The social life brings out its diversity, as the social spaces are scattered in different locations, yet accommodating people of any race or class. It is also rapidly becoming a tolerant city in what most cities in South Africa are grappling to deal with, one of which being homosexuality¹⁴. However, tolerant as it is, there are unspoken boundaries that exist within these social spaces that supposedly allow people to explore and be able to identify, and these are also somehow limiting to living a complete, fulfilling Cape Town life; but it is because of these joys of exploring and identifying that Cape Town is called the 'Mother City'¹⁵.

3.3 Conducting fieldwork in different locations

Fieldwork was conducted in four different locations of Cape Town, namely; Gugulethu, Delft, Brackenfell and Thornton; and Kimberley, in the Northern Cape. The aim for conducting research in Kimberley was to compare the use of cell phones amongst people who are in long-distance relationships but have remained 'at home', ei., in their areas of origin, with that of people who are migrants in Cape Town; both migrants and those 'at home' were people who are in long-distance relationships. A few interviews were conducted in

¹⁴ Andrew Tucker's (2009) "Queer visibilities: space, identity and interaction in Cape Town" is a detailed discussion of a study on queer men in Cape Town.

¹⁵ In the words of Selwyn Davidowitz, an accredited Cape Town tour guide/operator: "In the 1930's some unknown party wrote to the local Cape Town newspaper claiming that Cape Town was the only city in South Africa that could justly call itself a metropolis" and because the word metropolis is derived from the Greek derivation of meter or metros meaning mother and polis meaning city, the nickname of "Mother City" was born. (http://www.capetownmagazine.com/whats-the-deal-with/Cape-Town-Mother-City/125_22_10867)

Kimberley, but not sufficient to sustain my aim, as it became difficult to conduct research in two different towns because of time constraints. In this thesis I therefore focus on the fieldwork conducted in Cape Town.

Every cultural formation, I argue, differs in accordance with the context in which it occurs; hence Marcus (1995: 96-98) argues against doing ethnography in one field site, where an overall understanding is drawn from findings of a bounded society- “for ethnographers interested in contemporary local changes in culture and society, single-sited research can no longer be easily located in the world system-perspective” where culture and society are bounded. Drawing from Marcus’s comprehension of multi-sited ethnography, my research was conducted in four different locations across Cape Town. These locations include Gugulethu, Thornton, Brackenfell and Delft. I did not select these specific locations, but rather the participants chosen determined where fieldwork would be conducted. These locations all have unique features that distinguish one location from the other.

Gugulethu (meaning our pride in Xhosa language), often called ‘Gugs’ in township lingo is a colourful combination of vibrant life and a local example of the problems associated with poverty. It was originally called Nyanga West and was established in 1968 (Mpofana, 2002: 18), and its function at that time was to receive people who were forcibly removed from areas reserved for the coloured population. It is an African township, dominated by Xhosa-speaking people. The houses in Gugulethu are the four-roomed houses that were built when the township was established, though many of the people living there are transforming Gugulethu by constructing their houses, building more rooms to accommodate their families. There are also other kinds of accommodation in Gugulethu, including the old migrant worker hostels where families live now. Gugulethu was characterized by poor road infrastructure (Mpofana, 2002: 24), which have now been developed; and other developments have taken place over the past decade. These developments include Mzoli’s, a butcher where people can buy meat and braai¹⁶ while socialising; the Gugulethu Shopping Square Centre (locally known as ‘Gugulethu Mall) and even the Gugs Wine festival, the first wine festival organised in any South African township. It is 20km from the centre of Cape Town. Gugulethu is known to be a township that has gained recognition through the likes of a social ‘hang-out

¹⁶ A South African term for grilling or roasting meat over open coals.

spot'¹⁷, popularly known as Mzoli's and the history that the township embrace. Celebrities from all over South Africa 'hang out' here as do national and international visitors, who would like a township experience in Cape Town.

Mzoli's is principally a popular day and night spot that happens to be butchery, but it is also a place to hang-out in the township on the outskirts of Cape Town, with a bit of a 'reputation' amongst locals for general drunkenness and disorderly behaviour (<http://www.savenues.com/attractionswc/mzolis-place.htm>). People dress up to attend the bustling butchery, which is also a music venue and something of a fashion extravaganza. It is more of a fashion parade than it is a meat place. Those who take to the atmosphere are aware to bring their own alcohol or buy it in a nearby liquor store, since there is no alcohol sold at Mzoli's. It is one of the township tour attractions in Gugulethu. Another one of the township tour attractions is a historical monument called the Gugulethu Seven Memorial. This was built to commemorate the killing of seven young black activists from the Cape Township Gugulethu on 3 March 1986 by the then South African 'security forces' (<http://www.savenues.com/attractionswc/mzolis-place.htm>). Today the sculpture stands on a busy corner on NY1 in Gugulethu, closer to where the seven were killed, where any passerby can see it.

Thornton, on the contrary, is one of Cape Town's suburban areas, and is about 10km away from the city centre. It is a quiet suburb dominated by a middle class coloured community, explaining why an informant who lives in this area spends most of his time in Langa, saying that he finds Thornton to be a boring area, and feeling rather isolated. He says that Thornton lacks the township feel that he experiences in Langa, Cape Town's oldest black township, where his Setswana-speaking friends live. The name Langa was derived from the name Langalibalele- a famous chief who was imprisoned on Robben Island for rebelling against the government (<http://www.townshiptourscapetown.co.za/about-langa>). Langa (meaning sun) was established in 1923 to receive black labour workers who were forcibly removed from urban areas. Migrant workers were accommodated in Langa as the only African township, until other townships like Nyanga, Gugulethu and Khayelitsha were established. Langa is one of the townships that draw attention to the historical background of African labour migration and housing in Cape Town. Before approaching Langa, I pass a bridge that gives a full

¹⁷ A place where people go to unwind and socialise.

picture of the township. Entering the township, one is welcomed by the busy roads as there is only one entrance leading public transports in and out of Langa.

Brackenfell is a northern suburb of Cape Town, known for its property development, offering affordable apartments to students and working-class people. Brackenfell lies behind what is locally known as the 'boerewors curtain' - a home-grown term for an invisible curtain that ostensibly divides English and Afrikaans speaking people in Cape Town. Entering the area, one is struck by the amount of apartment complexes passed along the way. It is about 29km from Cape Town and is located in such a way that its occupants have access to malls and other outdoor explorations. Many of the flats in Brackenfell are occupied by black men and women who are either in tertiary education or working in a variety of occupations. The houses, on the other hand, are occupied mostly by a middle-class white population. There is not much going on in Brackenfell after working hours; people seeking entertainment go to the Cape Town CBD or townships like Khayelitsha and Gugulethu to socialise. The streets are rather quiet and more often people are seen in cars. One of the recent developments is the Fairbridge Mall.

Delft was established in 1989, as a project of the previous House of Representatives during the Tri-cameral (Apartheid) era (Waggie, 2008: 11). It was established as an Integrated Service Land Project (ISLP) for "coloured" and "black" people in the urban areas of the Western Cape, with low or no income (ibid). Delft consists of a large community in the north of Cape Town, about 28km away from the city centre. It is a mixed community of coloured and black inhabitants, and is also growing in its number of Somalia inhabitants, owning Spaza Shops. Spaza Shops are Small-scale, home based, grocery stores offering residents convenience in access to necessities, such as bread and milk (Charman et al., 2011: 1). Delft is divided into two sections, now known as Delft and Delft South. According to Western (2001, 632-633) Delft South now stands as one of the first truly post-apartheid examples of non-racial community interaction and urban transformation. One of its recent developments is supplying inhabitants living in informal settlements with houses.

However, all of the four locations form different contexts which have influences on each of the informants. They each bring a distinctive way of looking at Cape Town, showing how diverse people's lives are. It is also helping me understand how they have the same experiences in different contexts, which is in this case a long-distance love relationship, in

different contexts and how they maintain their relationships within these contexts; something that can only be achieved through multi-sited ethnography.

It took a period of five months (March – July 2012) to collect data in the primary field. My key informants were four young men and one woman, all in their late twenties or early thirties. My informants had migrated to Cape Town from the Northern Cape, North West and the Free State to seek better education and employment. The informants were purposefully selected in line with the research aims to assess how migrants navigate the use of cell phones to prevail over the distance in their love relationships- looking at how cell phones mediate a sense of togetherness in relationships where the parties involved several numbered kilometres apart due to migration. Conducting fieldwork gave an understanding that cell phones not only serve as mediators in my informants' relationships, but also as social tools, connecting them to a range of other people, like family and friends. The cell phone allows them to create new relationships and explore dimensional possibilities of social networks like Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter and 2go.

Finding people to work with me in this research was the biggest difficulty. I found my informants through people I knew directly or indirectly from my hometown of Kimberley in the Northern Cape. I asked these acquaintances to connect me with people that they knew as being in a long-distance relationship. After finding informants who were willing to be part of the research, I explained to them what my research was about, the ethical implications involved and their rights as informants in this research. I started observing the spaces in which they moved and their interactions with people in these spaces, and also generally observed interactions of the people who lived in these spaces. My first encounter with each of them started with us 'hanging out' so as to gain their trust- though it was a process- before I actually asked questions related to my research. With the process of gaining trust, the second encounter led to speaking about the main concepts of this research, and the research grew with time. My key informants were four young men and one young woman, which I call in my thesis in my thesis as Thato, Neo, Masego, Tshepo and Ofentse.¹⁸

Thato is a male who is in his late twenties (he did not tell me his age, which I however estimated based on the year 2005 he matriculated). He is from Bloemfontein.

¹⁸ Not their real names.

He came to Cape Town in 2006 after matriculating from high school. He first lived in Salt River with his uncle, while looking for a job. Thato came to Cape Town because his uncle told him to come live with him while he looks for a job, since his family could not afford to pay for tertiary education. He worked for a while as a machine operator at a food manufacturing company (he could not remember the name of the company). The company he worked for closed down, and he went back home to Bloemfontein. Six months later he was back in Cape Town. He got an industrial job, handling heavy cutting machinery within a month of his return to Cape Town, and then moved to Gugulethu, where he is currently renting a backyard room. He likes the company of friends, alcohol and music, and is quite popular among the community members, even at the local tavern in the area. Thato met his girlfriend Dineo in 2006 while he was living in Salt River. They met through a mutual friend. Thato says that for him it was “love at first sight” because he had fallen in love with her the first time he laid back to her hometown of Kimberley in the Northern Cape to take care of her sick father. They call each other two or three times a week, but chat almost every day on ‘2go’. ‘2go’ is a social networking site that they often use to send instantaneous back and forth messages at a low rate. Thato is working for the municipality on contract, reading water metres. His girlfriend and their two children depend on his income.

Neo is in his late twenties (he too did not give me his age); he is from Taung, a small rural area in the North West Province of South Africa located on the N18 between Vryburg in North West and Jan Kempdorp in the Northern Cape. He first came to Cape Town in 2007 and lived in the Army Base in Wynberg, as he worked with the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) as a soldier after matriculating high school. He left Cape Town in the same year, and after his contract expired with the SANDF he has difficulty finding employment in the North West Province, and decided to move to Cape Town in 2009 to look for a job. Neo says that he was not interested obtaining a tertiary education, until recently when it dawned on him that he needs education to get a good job. He has attempted to study but lacks discipline, though he insists that he wants to try and study again. He resides in Thornton, but spends most of his time in Langa and is currently working as a Customer Inspector for the South African Revenue Services (SARS). Neo has been romantically involved with Tshepiso for four years. They have been friends since High School and only

started dating four years after completing Grade 12. Neo very outgoing and his girlfriend is more comfortable when they are around each other so that she can keep an eye on him, since she does not approve of Neo's social lifestyle. They communicate by calling each other and chatting on Whatsapp Facebook. His girlfriend still lives in Taung and she is unemployed.

Tshepo is a 31 year male from Kimberley, who came to Cape Town to visit a friend in September 2008. He was unemployed at that moment and decided to stay longer than he intended to look for a job, seeing that his effort to find a job in Kimberley was in vain. While staying with his friend, he worked for two years at a bakery, and then decided to take up security courses. He is now working as a Security Guard at Tygerbeg Hospital. He is currently living as a boarder in Delft. He does not go out that much, but has friends in Langa and Delft, who are also from Kimberley. His girlfriend, Dimakatso, is in Kimberley and she is unemployed. Dimakatso and Tshepo are High School sweethearts, but the financial problems they have encountered in the 2008 have caused a lot of strain in their relationship. Tshepo has is concerned about their relationship and says that they love each other, and now that he is employed there is no threat in their relationship. They frequently communicate via phone call, 2go and less frequently use SMSes since 2go serves the purpose of SMSes.

Ofentse is from Warrenton in the Northern Cape. He is a 27 year old male who stays in Delft. He came to Cape Town in 2005 to stay with a family member while trying to find a job with his Grade 12 qualification and taking a 6month computer course that his aunt paid for. He became a waiter for five months, then he started to miss being with his family in Warrenton and went back home. He came back to Cape Town in 2010 and got a job as a call centre agent for a retail company where he still works. Ofentse is adventurous and has always wanted to travel the world. He says that he is not ready to further his education because he still wants to explore the world and see what it has to offer. He also says that he has no financial responsibilities, except to send his girlfriend an allowance. Ofentse and Mpho, started a romantic relationship in their final year of schooling and have been together ever since. Mpho is a computer course at the Universal College Outcomes in Kimberley. They use Facebook, phone calls and Whatsapp to communicate.

Masego, while also being from Kimberley, is different from my other informants in several ways. First of all, she is a 26 year old woman. Also, unlike the others, she is a well-educated professional migrant who first came to Cape Town to study at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (Bellville Campus) in 2006. She finished her diploma in Marketing in 2008 and remained in Cape Town to work for CHEP SA, a globally leading company in pallet and container pooling service serving many of the world's largest companies. She is still employed with the same company as a Customer Representative. Her reason for remaining in Cape Town after finishing her studies is because she felt that jobs in her field are scarce in Kimberley. She lives in a two-bedroom flat in Brackenfell, which she shares with a woman friend. Her boyfriend Lebogang at first remained in Kimberley, but he too left the town, moving from Kimberley in April 2012 to work as a veterinarian in Mpumalanga. Masego and Lebogang have been romantically involved since 2010 after they met at a club in Kimberley. Masego used to often go to clubs and parties, but now enjoys the comfort of her flat and being active in church. Masego and Lebogang communicate with each other via phone calls and SMSs, because Lebogang requested that they stop using chatting sites. She does not know the reason of Lebogang's request, but suspects that it was related to the ordeal Lebogang went through. Lebogang was stabbed several times in his own yard one Saturday night and was left to die, but luckily one of his friends found him lying helplessly in a pool of blood and called the paramedics. He was rushed then to hospital and his wounds were treated and he fully recovered. As evidenced by their formal education and professional employment, Masego and her boyfriend are in a different social class than the other migrants, and have more (financial) access to communication resources.

Building personal relationships with informants is always crucial in anthropological research, perhaps even more crucial in my research because it is of a sensitive and personal topic. My informants only trusted me because I had also revealed some information about me, and revealing myself to them allowed for a personal relationships to be built even though they could not be oblivious to the difference in gender and class between myself and them (except for Masego, who is my "peer"), and the fact that I was writing about them. They allowed me into their world and that gave me a bigger picture of who they are and the lives they lead. A relationship was build between me and my informants that allowed for deeper conversations about their backgrounds and the things they experienced while growing up and their

relationships with their families. They not only told me about their lives, but also allowed me to experience with them their lives in Cape Town by availing themselves to me and including me in their social activities, like watching movies, ‘chilling’, going to church and partying.

My research consisted of unstructured and structured interviews, participant observation, informal conversations and diaries of their phone conversations with their partners. I participated in their activities; because participation in the everyday lives of people is a means of facilitating observation of particular behaviours and events of enabling more meaningful discussions with informants (Davie, 1999: 71). I listened in on Thato’s phone conversation with his partner, I read my participants messages, especially the ones that they would offer to show me when they are trying to explain an incident that took place, most likely a quarrel with their lovers. My informants and I would normally call or SMS each other to arrange our next meetings or to stay in touch and for them to keep me updated on the new developments in their relationships. I would comment on Ofentse’s Facebook statuses, having indirect exchange of ideas and opinions with his friends, and sometime get to observe how he conducts his relationship with his girlfriend on social networks- the things he says about her or to her on Facebook.

I conducted research on their uses of the cell phone by looking at the features that their phones encompass and how they use these feature to reach across distance. I questioned how these features assist in the communication of migrants and looked at the context in which different conversations occur. I also looked at how the use of the cell phone makes it financial possible for migrants to stay in constant communication with their intimate partners ‘at home’- what kind of strategies they employ to make communication accessible and affordable. These strategies ranges from the cell phone contract networks they use- the rates at which they charge phone calls, SMSes, and the use of Internet-based resources; to the time spent conversing with their intimate partners and other people on the cell phone through either one of the features the cell phone allows. By communicating with my informants through the use of the cell phone I also observed which form of communication they prefer, either as a way of saving costs or saving time, or both. Looking at all these factors, I gained an understanding of how cell phones allow for migrants to employ communication strategies that help them to keep communication constant, therefore helping intimate partners to maintain their relationships despite the distance barrier. It also helped me understand the

relationship that the migrants have with the cell phone in connection with maintaining relationships that already exist, and creating new ones.

The ownership and usage of a cell phone extends beyond maintaining their love relationships and connecting them to a vast network of people. It is its convenience and the status that is attached to owning a cell phone that they value more. For some, like Masego, Tshepo and Thato, being able to stay in touch with the important people in their lives is enough for their cell phone usage. They do not attach value to the brand of cell phones they own, but rather value the ability of the cell phone to be able to reach across boundaries of distance. For others, like Ofentse and Neo, a cell phone has to possess features that enable them to stay on par with the latest digital trends. They value a cell phone with technical features that enable them to reach people across different networks, and they also value the social status that is attached to popularly branded cell phones because cell phones of that kind- the ones with access to Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp and other sorts of social networks give a sense of social mobility.

My interactions with the informants varied. I mostly visited Masego on Saturdays and Sundays. She would cook for me while we caught up on gossip (our family homes are in the same street in Kimberley and she had just returned from a short visit at home- where we were both born and raised, and are familiar with the customs- more often than I did), spoke about fashion, men, and God. Masego is a very active member of a Born-Again Church she goes to, though she initially was baptised in the Catholic Church. I went with her to church; she introduced me to her pastor, who suggested that I join the church. I also met one of her friends in Cape Town who came to visit one Saturday while I was there and we all indulged in a conversation while she cooked (she always cooks when I am there). In the time spent together, I discovered that she is a soccer fan, something I could for once not relate to. I watched a soccer match with her and she talked me through it, going on about how she could not wait for her boyfriend to come back from a work trip in Ghana so that she can brag about her team winning (they are fans of two rival teams). That gave me an idea of the things they shared in common and what they talk about besides the intimate details of their relationship.

With the men, on the other hand, I spent time in the taverns and clubs they went to, but I did not fully participate in their activities; one of the things that set us apart is that I don't drink alcohol. They also purposely excluded me from their conversation with their friends,

especially when they were talking about women. “Drinking” is a practise where people indulge in alcohol (often with friends, and sometimes with acquaintances) while having conversations about any kind of matter in their lives. “Drinking” to my participants is a way of socializing, it is part of ‘chilling’. I did not participate in these conversations because I wanted to get an understanding of how men influence each others’ viewpoints on different issues, and also because of language barriers as some had Xhosa-speaking friends, so they switched languages between me and their friends, depending on who they were conversing with. The men I was with were impressed that I was not drinking alcohol, saying that it is dignified- an indicator of the male views on women and alcohol.

A few incidents occurred that indicate my exclusion from their conversations; for example, the signals that Thato and her friends gave each other when the woman who had just called him on his cell phone walked into the tavern and he sent his friend to talk to her, or Ofentse with whom I went to Mzoli’s to enjoy the meat and the social atmosphere and he hurriedly sent me home because he had just met a young woman at Mzoli’s and wanted to take her home with him, and my presence was apparently presenting an obstacle to his plans. Unlike the other young men, Tshepo is not outgoing. He spends most of his free time locked in his bedroom, sleeping. He shares a house with two other young men, who are also boarders, but keeps to himself. He says that Delft is an unpleasant place to socialize in, and he refuses to travel far just to have fun. Tshepo does drink alcohol though, most times to unwind and at other times he drinks to get drunk, but prefers doing that in the comfort of his own space. He stays at his place when drinking mainly because it puts his girlfriend’s mind at ease.

My visits to my informants would consist of conversations on the new developments in their relationships, the things they do to get themselves out of the messy situations they sometimes got themselves into. We also engaged with cell phones, its uses, what kind of information they store on these phones, how reliable they are and why they can’t live without them, As a technologically challenged person, I also asked them why they chose the phones that they have, what it is about these cell phones that makes them unique to the rest of the other cell phones and why the constant need to upgrade. Our conversations also included the issue of intimacy, and how they dealt with the lack of intimacy in their relationships, also looking at how the lack of intimacy impacts their sexual relationships.

I have conducted life history interviews with five key participants and extensive informal discussions with people outside my field that I knew to be in long-distance love relationships. Most importantly, I conducted extensive observations of everyday life of my informants, in their different contexts.

3.4 Reflexivity: the researcher and her field

“Going into the field”, I was always cautious of my position and how I represented myself to my participants, as that would determine what kind of data I would receive. My decision to keep a diary where I wrote down my field observations and reflected on the activities of the day helped me understand my position in the field- how I was influencing the different characteristics of the field and how I could improve that. Referring back to my field notes guided me to more appropriate methods of collecting data and illustrated to me whether the data collected was conforming to the aims and objectives of my research. It also helped me to build follow-up questions, whether in interviews or informal conversations. Interviews were limiting to my informants as they answered only to what I asked them. I realized that the research called for an approach where I was not just a researcher, but a woman who is far away from home, with feelings and a cell phone; thus could relate to the significance of a cell phone in a migrant’s life. By taking this relative approach I dug a hole into a mine field, and it produced, so to speak.

This approach encouraged more informal conversations between me and my informants, though my informants sometimes seem to forget that I was a researcher who was always observing and always listening. I engaged in informal conversations because it allowed them to willingly speak openly, without me controlling the direction of the conversation. My control as a researcher was only highlighted when I came back into the field with follow-up questions or clarifications on the uncertainties that sprung out while I went through my field notes and the conversations that occurred. I observed how they spoke on the phone, or what their reactions were when they got a phone call or a text message, and questioned how I influenced their responses to these gestures. I remember how non-existent I felt when I came out of the other room to find Masego smiling so broadly while talking to her boyfriend on her cell phone, unaware of my presence; or the partly nervous, partly amused grin on Thato’s face when he told me that he just got two consecutive ‘Please Call Me’ texts from both

girlfriends he was concurrently having relationships with. Thus; I argue that the knowledge produced was not just a result of a researcher in the field asking questions, but also that of my interaction with my informants in the field.

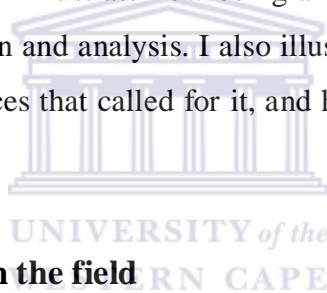
I continuously had to question how myself influenced the research- being a young woman in the same age group, speaking Setswana and Sesotho, and being a migrant from Kimberley. The people that I worked with regarded me as one of them- Masego and Tshepo introduced me as their 'home girl', and for the others, being a Setswana and Sesotho speaker automatically qualified me as one of their own. Masego and I have grown up in the same street in Kimberley; as children we played together, went to church together and shared the same circle of friends; only later did we grow apart when we were in our teens. Doing this research with her recreated our friendship. She revealed details to me of how she and her boyfriend met; the kind of relationship they have and also spoke to me about her feelings towards her boyfriend. The young men in my research were rather interested in me as a person and were baffled as to why I was doing my masters rather than working- some envied my ability to reach this educational level and saw me as a role model, while others were more interested in my relationship and social life, especially my association of friends. They also took this as an opportunity to confirm their suspicions about the crazy things that students "get up to"; referring to the student exposure to parties, allowances, alcohol and sex, which they assumed I was a part of.

I was aware that certain assumptions were made about me by my male informants when I entered the field. Neo thought I was 18 years old, Tshepo thought I was a snob, Ofentse said I came across as too strong and that intimidated him, and Thato assumed that I was watching my weight (I am of a very slender built), because he was surprised when I told him that I never say no to an offer of fish and chips. Also aware that I am a young woman, the men in my research felt the need to impress; hence the willingness to cooperate and contribute to the production of knowledge. Their aim to impress went beyond knowledge production to them making sure that I am well hosted when I went to see them. They bought me food (Tshepo often cooked for me), and took care of the drinks when we went out. Thato always refused that I come see him when he did not have money in his pocket. Though none of them made a pass at me, Neo tended to be flirtatious, always dismissing his act as a joke. They called or texted me every time I left the field to find out if I arrived safely. By providing and protecting me as a woman, they allowed their role as men, not to be compromised in the research;

therefore striking a balance between researcher/informant relationship and man/woman relationship.

When granted the chance to talk about their relationships, my participants mostly dwelled on their problems, elaborately how they always have to prove themselves to their partners that they are not cheating, how expensive maintaining a long-distance relationships was and how their partners did not appreciate the efforts they were making to make their relationships work. Tshepo claimed to know how to handle the problems in his relationship and said that he had learned that women love drama. Masego was at ease with her relationship, because she spoke to her boyfriend on a daily basis. The fact that I was a researcher who also became a friend made me susceptible to listen to their problems, which I estimate, is my end of the bargain for them allowing me into their space.

In presentation of my reflexivity, I illustrate how being a researcher in a field contributes to the complexities of data collection and analysis. I also illustrate how contexts influenced my shifting roles and the circumstances that called for it, and how that influenced the amount of knowledge produced.



3.5 Challenges encountered in the field

Considering that this is a sensitive topic that compels people to divulge information about their relationships, which they prefer to keep private, I struggled to find people to participate in this research. Four people that initially agreed to participate withdrew from the research as they found it to be invading their private lives, and felt uncomfortable to discuss matters of their love lives with such a 'young girl'; it is true that I look rather younger than my age (25 years), also considering that they were older than the informants I eventually worked with. I found it rather challenging that my informants are not users, or if they are, not steady users of internet-based resources such as Facebook, Whatsapp and Twitter. For those who are on Facebook, it is for meeting new people and re-connecting with friends, and those on Twitter were more interested in what their favourite celebrities had to say about their lives. They found Mxit, the first network site that was introduced on phones with internet access in South Africa to be outdated, and are instead using Whatsapp, while one is using 2go, which are the current popular network sites. They did not mind showing me pictures of them and their

partners, but refused to have their pictures used in this thesis, as they feared that their identities will be exposed when I told them that it will be used for academic literature. Their decision to remain anonymous was influenced by the topic of this thesis.

Fieldwork was carried out during weekends because informants were working on weekdays and having to connect with them during the evenings would have required me to sleep over at their places of residence, which was quite an inconvenience. The living spaces for Thato, Tshepo and Ofentse are too small and cramped to accommodate an extra person and Neo was not comfortable with me sleeping over, hence he did not have a problem with driving me back to where I live. All of the male informants have each rented a room. There are those like Thato, who had days where he came back from work before lunch, and Tshepo, who worked shifts, and they allowed me to spend time with them on weekdays. I spent time in the field from as early in the day as possible, depending on how long it takes to get there, since I had to take two taxis, which is one of the modes of public transport, to get to each one of these locations from where I live; but somehow I always stayed until late, especially in Gugulethu and getting a taxi, which serves as one of the modes of public transport in Cape Town, back to residence was always a problem. Thornton is the furthest from where I stay, and getting there is much more of a hassle than the rest of the other locations, but I only had to make sure I get there because Neo drove me back to campus residence.

Doing research in a field as a young black woman in the spaces where the study for this research was conducted also appeared to be a grave challenge because of common sexist behaviour. It sometimes became uncomfortable for me to walk in Delft, where men and boys would throw remarks at me when walking from the taxi stop to where my informants stayed or offer to escort me there, because they could clearly tell that I was not from around there.

Instead of asking one of my informants residing in Delft to wait for me at the taxi stop every time I went there, I chose to endure these challenges by convincing myself that, as a woman, I will encounter such incidents everywhere I go, so I saw no point in running away from it. I had encountered something quite similar, but more intense when I went to a tavern with Thato and his friends, and we kept on being joined by one friend after another, interested in who I was. It got so tense because every time I looked up, one of them was staring at me. To top it all off, I had the owner of the tavern coming to confront me about my age as he said he had been watching me for a while, but he could not wonder any longer, and had to come and ask

how old I was. He was astounded to learn that I am not as young as he might have thought, and I asked him if he wanted proof because he seemed dubious, but he said no.

Considering that two of my informants conducted relationships in Cape Town-based intimate partners, in addition to the long-distance relationships I was researching, I was faced, with having to create an impression that I was of no threat to the women they were dating in Cape Town. I left the reassuring part of the relationship to my informants, who also had to explain to their Cape Town partners what our relationship was. This was not enough for one of my informants' partner who insisted on coming to his place (accompanied by two friends) to come and validate once she had called and my informant told her that he had a visitor who happened to be a woman. She only relaxed when we were introduced and my response indicated that I already knew about her. As a woman, I found it amusing, but as a researcher I became concerned with how this was going to hinder with my research, in case she was not comfortable with her boyfriend spending time with me. My concern was not only with one informant, but all of them including even Masego, because every time I went to see any of my informants, I literally prayed that I do not arrive at any of my informants' residences to be told that they are withdrawing from the research, and fortunately for me, none of them did.

3.6 Ethical dilemmas

I had explained to my research informants from the beginning of what my research was about, the reason for doing the research and how I was going to present the research data. The informants were also made aware of their rights to refuse the exposure of any information they were not comfortable in revealing. Importantly I reassured them that they could withdraw from the research whenever they felt like they could not continue to be a part of it. Confidentiality and anonymity was adhered to during the research process and in the writing-up. In the thesis, the names of the participants were replaced with pseudonyms in order to protect their identities (as an honour to their request). Whatever information used in this thesis, consent was granted.

I went into the field with the possibility in mind that my role as a researcher will at some point be mistaken for that of a friend or a “therapist”, dealing with such a complex and sensitive topic. Love is an exceedingly personal issue, and should be handled with vigilance.

However, it makes it quite easier for people to talk about their relationships if the person they talk to can relate to their situation since I am also a migrant from Kimberley and was in a long-distance relationship at the time I was conducting fieldwork; hence the comfort (though not complete, but well enough) of my informants to talk to me. Considering the state of their relationships, I refrained from making any judgements by not comparing the different situations, but rather looking at the context in which each of these relationships with their partners are maintained. Though my relationship with each key informant varied because of my position as a researcher, there was a level of friendliness that grew with time in the field and it is in this growing friendliness that the dilemma began.

A dilemma occurred when a few of my informants turned to me for advice on how to deal with problems in their relationships. As a friend, I was left with the responsibility of being supportive and reassuring that things will work out; while as a therapist, my opinion on how to deal with the dynamics of such a relationship was of value. I do think, though, that because of my research topic, my participants thought I knew better; hence they always initiated a response from me when talking about the problems in their relationships. What was mainly a predicament for me was when one of my male informants required me to speak for all the women and make him understand why “we” are so complicated, because at that point he was facing problems in his relationship and did not know how they arose, and therefore he concluded that women, including myself, are difficult. I was left in a position whereby whatever defence I came up with for myself would comprise other women. I explained that not every woman is the same, and that sometimes matters are better communicated when both parties are in a calm state.

The ethics of my research continued to be a challenge as I spent more time with my informants, and because I spent more time with one informant more than the rest of the other informants, as he had days where he came back from work early or he took a day off, he became relaxed in sharing more about his relationship/s and his friend, who happened to be someone I acquainted with. He did ask me not to tell anyone who was connected to this friend of his, and though some things I felt I wanted to confront this friend about, I refrained from doing that as it would be going against the anthropological code of ethics. I felt that these ethics is a researcher’s obligation to his/her informants, and every field questions these moral obligations at one point or another. The researcher’s responsibility is to find a way of dealing with these ethical dilemmas without compromising the informants’ confidentiality.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has given an understanding of the context in which my research was conducted by giving a brief background of Cape Town and the areas in which my participants are located. By introducing my informants, I also created a clear outlook of the subjects of this research and how they engage with their cell phones in a manner that is consistent with the research question. By setting the scene, I have shown that as a researcher, I influenced the production of knowledge in the field which I conducted research, through the relationships I built with my informants. It also gives an understanding of how I researched migrants' use of the different communication strategies (discussed in Chapter 4) to gain knowledge of how they keep communication constant in order to help maintain their love relationships. This chapter is a gateway to understanding the analysis of the field data which will be laid out in the following chapters.



CHAPTER FOUR: “My cell phone”: The social implementations of the cell phone by labour migrants

To say that technology is humanised nature is to insist that it is a fundamentally social phenomenon: it is a social construction of the nature around us and within us, and once achieved, it expresses an embedded social vision, and it engages us in what Marx would call a form of life.

Pfaffenberger (1988: 244)

4.1 Introduction

Cell phones play an important role in shaping the contexts in which social occurrences take place. The role of the cell phone in the context of the marginal labour migrant as social and mobile object may comprise the migrant in the broader social context of the communities they live in. This chapter draws on the ethnographic data that was collected in my field on how the labour migrants navigate and implement the cell phone in their social contexts. The chapter also focuses on the aesthetics of the cell phone, where migrants look into the functions of the cell phone that they deem valuable in their love relationships, their networks with family and friends and the networks that they build in their everyday interactions in their surroundings, in relation to what Thompson (2009: 360) argues, saying that mobile phones plays crucial role in building and maintaining a sense of community¹⁹ and connection to others.

4.2 The adorned cell phone: aesthetics of a social object

Cell phones differ in brands, features and networks; thus the costs also range. In contemporary South Africa many people who are part of marginal social groups also own mobile phones. They have become increasingly important because they serve as an infrastructure service, an economic sector, a development tool and as a household expenditure that maintains social capital and contribute to economic management (Scott et al, 2004). I have observed that the widely distributed phones among labour migrants are usually the ones that have Internet access and technical features at a lower rate. Thompson (2009:

¹⁹ ‘community’ as a product of cultural systems (2009: ibid).

360) argues that mobile phones have become a crucial new communications medium in the lives of socially and economically less-advantaged individuals. This is due to the many ways that cell phone networks have sought to reduce the prices, offering affordable mobile communication through Internet-based resources which can be accessed through the cell phone, such as Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, Mxit and 2go.

In essence, a cell phone's sole purpose was to connect people who are defied by distance and eventually increase mobility. Cell phones appear to have done more than what they were expected to do and have far exceeded their purpose. They are now designed to store any kind of information, depending on the model, which is why they serve such a fundamental purpose in modern societies. It is in these exceeding purposes that people are relatively drawn to their cell phones than they are to other people. For example, the attachment that people have to their phones and the purposes it serves has contributed largely to the decline in time spent on face-to-face conversations and more on social network sites. The cell phone creates a new dimension of social interaction among the human species- interaction with the cell phone creates different forms of relationships- be it social, romantic or economic. De Bruijn et al (2009:12) argue that the process of appropriation suggests that technologies acquire different meanings in different social contexts. Cell phones can be seen as a form of making a statement, determining whether one is found acceptable in a certain social context or as an important tool that helps in managing everyday life. Thus, the purposes of uses of cell phones vary according to the kinds of relationships its users have and what impact cell phones have on these relationships.

A cell phone has the capability to bridge distance barriers, making those who are geographically distant seem close. It serves as a mediator in long-distance relationships, but the extent to which it does so is determined by the user's relationship with his/her cell phone. When used to the best of its ability, it allows for unlimited communication and the building of social networks; therefore creating extended relationships.

One Sunday afternoon Ofentse decided that we should go to Mzoli's and on our way there we talked about his cell phone. He had promised his friends that he would meet them at Mzoli and that they would get to meet me, because they were suspecting that there was more to our relationship as researcher and informant since they had heard about me, but not met me yet. While talking to Ofentse in the back seat of a taxi to Gugulethu (we were sitting next to each

other) about the use of his cell phone in keeping contact with family and friends, and sustaining his intimate relationship, Ofentse promoted his cell phone as the best. He took out his cell phone from the pocket trying to show me the features that he was talking about while he said “You can never go wrong with a Blackberry. I mean its free internet for the whole month, so I can BBM²⁰, go on Whatsapp and Facebook. Well it’s only 60rands for BIS²¹ every month.” His enthusiasm when speaking about his cell phone made him sound like he was selling it to me. Ofentse said that even though he liked the Blackberry brand, he did not like using the Blackberry Curve model because he had realised that many people used it, so he changed that model for the Blackberry Bold model that was more expensive and the technical features more advanced. He was adamant in his statement that he can rather not own a cell phone than own one that is owned by “almost everybody he knows.”

For Ofentse, owning a certain kind of cell phone is a social status. His decision to change the same brand of cell phone from one model (Curve) to another (Bold) demonstrates that he does not want to be seen as common, owning a cell phone that the majority of Blackberry owners have. In addition to the many things that a cell phone can do, it also plays a role in how people identify themselves, rather shaping their social and cultural structure. Pfaffenberger (1988: 239) argues that as inhuman as our technology may seem, it is nonetheless a product of human choices and social processes. Moreover, he argues that technology is viewed as a powerful and autonomous agent that dictates the patterns of human social and cultural life (ibid). Cell phones have their own personalities, because they take on a life of their own as social objects; hence they differ in brands, features and networks; thus the costs also range. With technology’s constant upgrade, there is an awareness that people’s identities change with every upgrade (Pertierra, 2005); therefore suggesting that the concept of identity is rather unbounded.

A study by Raul Pertierra (2005) highlights the influence that cell phones have on a Philippine society. Pertierra (2005) conducted a study on the socio-cultural effects of mobile

²⁰ BBM is an acronym for BlackBerry Messenger. It is an Internet-based [instant messenger](#) application that allows messaging between BlackBerry users. It was developed by the manufacturer of the BlackBerry,

²¹ BIS is an acronym for Blackberry Internet Service. It is the component of the Blackberry Internet Solutions, which allows you to integrate your Blackberry device with up to 10 supported business or personal email accounts, send and receive instant messages, and browse web content while on the go.

<http://www.blackberryforums.com.au/forums/general-bis-discussion/29-what-bis.html>

phones in Philippine society. His work particularly looks at how mobile phones have affected notions of identity and the rise of the sexual subject, discovering that mobile phones allow absent subjects to exercise a daily presence in their communities of origin. Similarly, in my study cell phones allow for my informants to be present in their communities of origin, most importantly in the lives of their family and friends. The cell phone's ability to keep communication constant helps my informants to maintain what Pertierra (2005) refers to as "absent presence"- this allows them to have an impact in the lives of their family and friends, including their intimate partners, even though they are not physically present.

Pertierra's study shows that the use of the cell phone has different impacts depending on how its user implements it in order to facilitate his/her requirements. The purpose of the cell phone in the lives of migrants is in essence to connect them to relationships that are defied by distance. Data from the field shows that migrants are exploring the extent to which cell phone facilitate communication patterns with their lovers and other social networks- what feature they employ to communicate better and affordable price plan that the cell phone networks offer. Field data has also shown that how the cell phone creates mobility pattern that facilitate mobility and simultaneously link migrants with their different networks (Buijn 2000, Diop 2002, Tall 2004, Horst & Miller 2006 cf. Nyamnjoh et al, 2010).

Arjun Appadurai (1986) has explored the different dimensions in which an object can attain social and economic value. His work looks at the way in which objects have the ability to create a social situation that abides to the value that is bestowed upon them. Appadurai (1986: 5) therefore argues that even though from a theoretical point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a methodological point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context. In as much as people deem cell phones necessary for human connection, they also are aware of the cell phone's power to influence their social contexts. Scott et al (2004) points out that they have become increasingly important because they serve as an infrastructure service, an economic sector, a development tool and as a household expenditure that maintains social capital and contribute to economic management.

4.3 Not just a cell phone: the significance of owning a cell phone in a long-distance romantic relationship

While conducting fieldwork, I discovered that owning a cell phone goes beyond its social status. More than anything, a cell phone to my informants, is significant because it connects them to their loved ones, especially their intimate partners. Though for Ofentse and Neo, the brand and feature of the cell phone adds significance, for Masego, Thato and Tshepo these factors do not concern them. Tshepo values being able to talk to his girlfriend every second or third day, because it is the only way that he feels close to her and it also reassures him about the state of their relationship. He told me, over lunch at his place, that he doubts that his relationship would have lasted if there was no way of communicating with his girlfriend and that he probably would have been the first one to give up on their relationship. Realising that Tshepo was showing appreciation for the presence of the cell phone in their relationship, I asked him what role the cell phone played in their relationship and he replied “Obviously talking on the phone is not enough, but it makes a big difference because although I would love to see her as often as I can, I get to hear her voice almost every day.”

Though Tshepo explains that the cell phone makes a difference in his relationship, he also acknowledges the capability of his cell phone to be able to capture and send pictures, adding more value to its worth. Masego, on the other hand, sees a phone as a necessity, yet criticizing the amount of money people spend on cell phones because of the technical features the cell possesses. For her, the fact that she owns a cell phone that has Internet access is reason enough for her not to upgrade to a more advanced phone.

I went to meet Masego in Bellville, which is a mutual place for the both of us, since she lives in Brackenfell and I live in the University residence. She had a driving lesson at 1pm and asked that I meet her at 2pm. When we met we could not decide on where to go from there since every store and places where we could sit and order drinks were closing at that time, except for the ones that we both thought looked dirty and dangerous. After 45minutes of walking around trying to find a place where we can sit and talk, we decided to sit in the street right in front of the Sanlam building. We caught up on home gossip first and then started talking about cell phones and the impact they have on their relationship. She seemed to be bothered that video calling was not part of the features on cheaper phones because her

boyfriend had been pestering her about buying a phone that has video calling since he had bought a new phone that has video calling. She said she found no fault in the cell phone that she has and was not willing to spend money on an expensive phone. She also felt that video calling was expensive, saying that the fact that she can keep in contact with my family, friends and my boyfriend was what is important. Masego made sure that I understand that even though she does not see the need to own an expensive cell phone, she cannot go on without a cell phone.

Masego is more concerned with staying in contact with her boyfriend and family rather than about what the cell phone can do. She says that some of the internet-based resources on her phone, like Facebook and Whatsapp she stopped using because she prefers calls, SMSes and Emails. She has explored Internet-based resources like Facebook and Whatsapp, but she found them to be time consuming and deactivated both her accounts. Neo, who does not go to Taung as often as Masego goes to Kimberley, explains that the use of a cell phone has contributed enormously to the maintenance of his relationship.

“I am a working class man (meaning he is able to afford his lifestyle), and my phone should be able to show that I am working class. I am not materialistic, but I am picky when it comes to cell phone because you evaluate the quality of a cell phone by the features it has and the how much it costs. Having Internet access on my phone has allowed my girlfriend and me to communicate on a daily basis for close to nothing. We both have Whatsapp and we usually chat at night when I am working night shift and I can tell that she is more expressive when we chat than when we talk on the phone. It is sometimes frustrating to a point where talking on the phone doesn't really help much, but even in those circumstances the accessibility of a cell phone can make things easier. The only consolation is that we can still call each other.”

Since the invention of cell phones, technology has increasingly come up with advanced and cheaper ways in which cell phones can be used. Some studies emphasize *productivity*- the ability to the same or similar things faster, more frequently, or at a lower cost thanks to the introduction of ICTs (James 2002; Norton 1992 cf. Donner, 2006: 5). They further elaborate that the substitution of phone calls for costly and time consuming trips is one example of this (James 2002; Norton 1992 cf. Donner, 2006). Donner (2006: 5) argues that phone calls are expensive to some extent, stating that ‘although calls remain expensive, mobile use is

becoming a fixture of daily life for an increasingly wide range of urban users, not just the elites'. With technology constantly trying to make communication easy and affordable, calls are being charged at a peak-rate to make it cheaper. Sending an SMS is also a cheaper way of getting the message across, and so are Facebook and Whatsapp. Thompson (2009: 372) argues that the everyday practices related to telecommunication by handphone- strategies for maximizing access, controlling costs and desires, and establishing and maintaining intimate relationships- are the stuff of which handphone-mediated social networks are made. Even so, cell phones having many different characters, adapting and adjust to what the context demands.

4.4 The changing faces of a cell phone

Sometimes cell phones may be viewed as helpful, while at other times, they may be seen as destructive and deceiving. De Bruijn et al (2009: 12) argue that even if regarded as evil, the mobile phone is perceived as a necessary evil- something that has become and should stay as part and parcel of the communication landscape of Africa and Africans rural and urban, at home and in the diasporas. Urry (2007: 228) shares similar views, demonstrating that they are naturally interwoven with the human body and always at-hand so making a mobile, communicating life (just) possible. Moreover, Donner (2006: 14) explicates that cell phones are necessary, in spite of the negativities; the mobile is an incredibly powerful tool for exchanging ideas at a distance, and for managing daily life. They not only make life manageable, but also manageable in a cheaper way. For example, when delivering a message one can rather SMS (send a text message) than make the actual call. An informant of this research has shared their thoughts on the advantages and disadvantages of the cell phone, like Masego's statement that "Life is so much easier with a cell phone, I don't have to remember anybody's number from the top of my head. I make my grocery list and save it on my phone and also calculate prices when I am shopping. I use the alarm on my phone to wake me up in the morning."

Masego was holding back, only focusing on the good of the cell phone. Ofentse on the other hand, mentioned both the positive and the negative effects of the cell phone. Trying to understand his attachment to his phone, he explains his perceptions about cell phones.

Ofentse: Well it creates a whole new world for me, where I can become whoever I wish to become. I mean people lie all the time on Facebook, creating new identities that only apply to Facebook. The thing about a cell phone is that though people call or text you, they cannot tell where you are or who you are with, so I sometimes lie about that.

Ofentse: About my whereabouts when I know that she will not approve. Sometimes when she calls and I am with the girl that I am dating in Cape Town, I step outside to talk to her, but I normally cut her short or I do not answer her call at all.

Researcher: So how do you explain to her why you did not answer your phone?

Ofentse: I tell her it was on silent, or I send her an SMS saying that I cannot talk, so I will call her later and think of a good excuse for not being able to answer the phone.

He gets interrupted by an incoming call from one of his friends and he keeps the conversation short, telling his friend that he has a visitor. After hanging up the phone, he apologizes for the interruption and I accept his apology, eager to get to the next question.

Researcher: So what is really good about your cell phone that you cannot go anywhere without it?

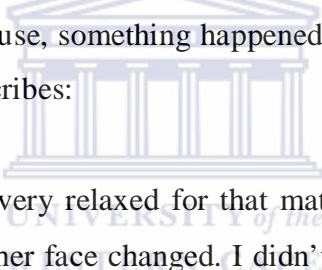
Ofentse: Because I am always online, it makes time seem to pass quicker; and I own a cell phone so that my family and my girlfriend should be able to reach me. Besides, my friends and I always discuss our weekend plans during the week on Whatsapp. Another not have to cool thing is that I do not have to write things down, my phone saves everything, but a person can get into trouble because of that as well, like my girlfriend finding out.²²

We continue to have a discussion about the influences that the cell phone has on determining the context in which interaction takes place and how Ofentse handles such situations. He highly regards his cell phone as a part of himself, saying that a lot can be told about him by the cell phone he owns and the contents of his cell phone. Pfaffenberger (1988: 249) explicates that every technology is a human world, a form of humanised nature that unifies virtually every aspect of human endeavour. Furthermore, he states that the construction of technology is not merely to deploy materials and techniques; it is also to construct social and economic alliances, to invent new legal principles for social relations, and to provide powerful new vehicles for culturally-provided myths (ibid).

²² Interview took place on 22 April 2012.

4.5 Not so private

The problem with a cell phone is that it does not always serve in the best interest of the user. In as much as it is often relied upon to keep information that no person is given the privilege to, it does not promise to remain loyal. Pfaffenberger (1988: 238) argues that technology is morally and ethically 'neutral'; neither is it good nor bad, and its 'impact' depends on how it is used. It responds to what is asked of it, not only by its user, but by anybody who communicates with it. A cell phone is an object formulated to be controlled, therefore just like any other object, the cell phone is not bounded the person who owns it. In an interview with Thato on his relationship with his girlfriend he talks about how he found out the truth about his girlfriend's unfaithfulness. His girlfriend had broken up with him in November 2011 without giving any reasons. Refusing to accept the break-up, Thato went to Kimberley a month after the incident to speak to his girlfriend and find out what had led to the break-up. After days of trying to sort their differences out, they finally got back together and one day while 'chilling' at her parents' house, something happened and unravelled what Thato found so puzzling to begin with. He describes:



We were sitting side by side, very relaxed for that matter and then her phone rang. She looked at the phone, and then her face changed. I didn't suspect anything, but she looked so shocked. I became shocked as well, what shocked me was the expression on her face. I could not understand why she was so frightened. She left the phone to ring until the caller hung up, then she left the room to go to the kitchen. The phone rang again, and because I was already suspicious, I answered the phone and a man was on the other end of the phone, asking to speak to her, so I told him that she does not want to speak to him and his reply was "Really?" I asked him who he was; he refused to answer the question so I explained to him who I was. He asked that I give her the phone, so I went to the kitchen put the phone on loudspeaker and told her there's someone who wants to talk to her. She became so furious that I answered her phone and started yelling at me saying that she never gave me permission to answer her phone. That confirmed that she was cheating.

Miller-Ott et al (2012: 18) argue that problems may arise when the cell phone is used inappropriately—for instance, as a way to "keep tabs" on partners. Since Archambault (2009: 6) argues that one of the problems with mobile phones is that they leave traces and

therefore provide material proofs of infidelity that cannot as easily be dismissed as rumours, even if sometimes they might really be wrong numbers or from people who are “only friends,” he says that his girlfriend admitted to being unfaithful.

The example with Thato shows that it is not only in looking for evidence that a cell phone reveals the truth, but also in how a person relates to his/her cell phone. The cell phone's contribution to this revelation was responding to a request- that is, Thato answering the phone. Thato's girlfriend's reaction was the confirmation to the suspicion that Thato already had after observing the facial expression of his girlfriend when she looked at the information that her phone was presenting, and the phone conversation that he had with the man on the other end of the line that added more to the suspicion.

People store any kind of information in their cell phones under the impression that nobody will go through their cell phones, but too often people want to view other people's phones to get a glimpse of the other person's lifestyle. This is mostly done through the viewing of pictures, while for others, especially intimate partners, it goes beyond the viewing of pictures to checking text messages, and received and dialled calls; hence the often creation of personal passwords to access whatever information stored on cell phones. Archambault (2009: 6) describe phones as often providing only a false sense of privacy, subsequently arguing that they might help conceal secrets, but they can as easily reveal them by providing proofs of unfaithfulness, through intercepted phone calls or text messages. But, Tshepo does not see the need to keep things private. He said that he does not understand why someone who is in a steady relationship would want to restrict his/her partner from his/her phone, because that is not how a relationship should be. He believes that intimate partners should be able to leave their phone lying around because they should not have anything to hide. With regard to her relationship he said, “I believe that if you give your partner reason to believe that you are not hiding something, then there will be no reason for him to go through your phone.” He says that it is an unspoken rule in their relationship that they do not “go through” each other's cell phones, but they do use each other's phones to make calls or send messages.”

The interpretations of the use of a cell phone can only be understood by the way in which people relate to their cell phones. Cell phones possess different functions they appear to determine the value of the cell phone and the meanings attach to owning cell phone. In

relation to the constantly changing of the cell phone, it can, hence be perceived as private in one context and not private in another context. Where there is surety in the nature of the relationship, like in Tshepo's relationship, the need for privacy need to occur; but because of their unfaithfulness Thato and Ofentse perceive their cell phone to be a personal tool that only they should have access to.

4.6 Other relevant studies

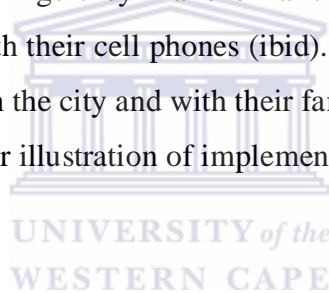
The impacts of the cell phone on different populations and in different contexts highlight the different meaning-making of the role of the cell phone in the social contexts of these populations. Genevieve Bell (2006), Myrna van Pinxteren (2012) and Romie Vonkie Nghiulikwa (2008) document how their study populations navigate their cell phones, socially, in their lives.

Genevieve Bell (2006) conducted research in Asia to critically interrogate the ways in which cultural practices are shaping people's relationships to new information and communication technologies (ICTs) in urban Asia. Bell (2006: 43) explains that she is particularly interested in the ways in which cell phones are being deployed, consumed, regulated, rejected, and naturalized in urban Asia. She found that though in some countries like China cell phones were exceedingly in demand, it appeared that in the other countries like Indonesia cell phones were not considered a necessity. She argues that for as much as cell phones are pieces of technology, they are also constellations of social and cultural practice (2006: 54). Bell's study illustrates that the cell phone is perceived in different in Asia, indicating that the value the cell phone is granted on the basis of whether it serve a crucial purpose in their lives. The study by van Pinxteren (2012) is a South African study on the social use of the cell phone among deaf people in Cape Town.

Myrna van Pinxteren's study was conducted for her Masters degree in Social Anthropology. The study was conducted specifically to explore the social uses deaf people make of cell phones. She conducted fieldwork in different townships of Cape Town. Her study shows that cell phones assimilate deaf people into the wider society and how its function as a "hearing baby" can be implemented in their lives to facilitate their need. Van Pinxteren explains that deaf people use texting as a communication strategy. She also documents deaf people as a

marginalised and victimised population who use their agency and status to move between different social, political, linguistic, sensory and religious communities. Van Pinxteren (2012: 42) says that the deaf embrace the cell phone creatively and thereby negotiate their feelings of belonging and identity in the dominant hearing world, but without completely breaking hierarchical boundaries. This study show how those cell phones are neither socially, nor culturally bounded.

In Romie Vonkie Nghiulikwa's Masters thesis, "*Re-situating and shifting cultural identity in contemporary Namibia: The experience of rural-urban migrants in Katutura (Windhoek)*" (2008), has a chapter dedicated to *Namibian Youth Culture* where she explores the use of cell phone among the youth in Namibia. She found that everyone (or almost everyone) in Babilon owned a cell phone, which many regarded as their most prized possession. Nghiulikwa (2008: 87) say that cell phones play a major role in the lives of my friends in Babilon. They all spend much of the little earnings they make on airtime and you regularly see in the settlement young people busy with their cell phones (ibid). They send SMSes and make calls to stay in touch with their peers in the city and with their family and friends back home (ibid). This section of the thesis is a clear illustration of implementation and navigation of the cell in the social lives of young people.



My reason for looking at these specific studies at this point where I am engaging in an analysis of the social uses of cell phones by my informants is because each of them contributes to an aspect of my research population. My research study is on the use of cell phones as a mediator in the love relationships, but these studies tap into the aspect of the cell phone as a social object, which is the focus of this chapter. All these studies contribute to the growing literature on the social use of cell phones, interestingly showing how the different implementation of the cell phone brings different results.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter explored the various ways in which the cell phone as social object influences social identity of the marginal migrants residing in Cape Town. In also explored how the status of the cell phone shapes the perceptions of its user, by looking at the meanings that are formed through what the cell phone is capable of doing for its users. With regard to the

analysis of this on the perceptions of migrants on cell phone, Bell (2006: 51) argues that cell phones are carried close to our bodies, are embedded into our daily lives, become an extension of ourselves and our personalities, our social relationships and larger cultural contexts. In addition to the politics of social identity and relationship maintenance, follows the conflicting functions of the cell phone, where the issue of privacy is questioned.

The chapter highlights that in as much as cell phones help in maintaining relationships; it also needs maintenance of its own. It is through the maintenance of the cell phone that the cell phone can construct these social and cultural circumstances and be able to allow people accessibility to the different spheres of their communication networks, making it possible for migrants in long-distance relationships to communicate. The following chapter explores the intimate characteristic of the cell phone and how it is deployed to facilitate long-distance relationships.



CHAPTER FIVE: Three is not always a crowd: The intimate character of the cell phone in migrant love relationships

..... relationships are consolidated, which might not have been, were it not for mobile phones.

Archambault (2009: 6)

5.1 Introduction

So far, I have focused on the social function of the cell phone and how a cell phone is implemented in a social context by its users. I have also highlighted the different characteristics of the cell phone that contributes to the migrants' perceptions of the role of the cell phone in migrants' love relationships by looking at its aesthetics- its function and value- as a social object and its significant role in the love relationships of migrants.

In this chapter I will discuss the obstacles experienced by migrants in love relationships that are at constant battle with distance, how cell phones mitigate that distance and to what extent they do so. The chapter will investigate the intimate characteristic of the cell phone by questioning the usage of cell phones in communicating with each other and the difference that a cell phone makes in combating the strain that distance puts on love relationships. Observations from the field reveal that migrants in long-distance relationships creatively use the cell phone to maintain and consolidate their relationships and to build broader social networks in the spaces that they inhabit.

Distance is the impediment that restricts communication among migrants and their intimate partners as they do not communicate as frequently as geographically close partners do; hence the use of cell phones. In this study I will show that cell phones take on the role of combating this impediment, allowing for communication to not only take place among distant partners, but also to do so regularly and affordably. The accessibility of cell phones also allow for people to explore other features of the cell phone that may be a convenient approach for communication, be it texting, calling or chatting. The role of the cell phone in love relationships may be observed as helping in maintaining these relationships, particular long-distance love relationships, but what remains an ambiguity is to what extent the cell phone helps maintain these relationships. What approaches are employed by intimate partners to help in supporting the continued existence of their love relationships?

5.2 Contextualising love relationships

Since it is clear that labour migrants' love relationships may be contextualized by the setting of the migrants and that of their intimate partners, the context in which intimate partners communicate is therefore shaped by the cell phones used by both partners. The ways in which labour migrants make use of their cell phones to make communication with their partners accessible determine the uses of the cell phone of labour migrants as a way of mediating distance that can, when taken for granted, impact negatively on their romantic relationships. Thus, as I will show, in presenting ways of communicating the cell phone creates a context in which the maintenance of long-distance romantic relationships can be understood.

5.2.1 Communication through calling

Some of my informants have highlighted the decrease in phone calls in their relationships, due to the introduction of social networks, such as Whatsapp, Facebook and 2go. It appears that the use of social networks has partially discarded verbal communication through calling and has created a space of instant text-based chatting where people texts are immediately relayed, as it appears to be much cheaper than phone calls and text messaging (SMS). Phone calls occur rather occasionally and are shorter than the time they spend chatting, which often lasts for hours or occurs in intervals throughout the day. Though this is the case for most, for others phone calls are still very crucial. Masego and her boyfriend have access to unlimited communication and call each other every day. They previously used Mxit and Facebook to stay connected while calls were also part and of their communication. After he had a car accident he decided that we should stop using social networks, and call and SMS each other instead. Now we talk everyday because I mostly call him using the phone at work.....It doesn't feel like he is that far because we talk every day."

Masego elaborates that though they call each other every day, they do not always talk about things they want to talk about, because the context does not allow for certain conversations, like having an argument with her boyfriend when she is calling him while she is at work. The disadvantage with that, she says, is that she sometimes ends up not saying what she wanted to say, because by the time they get a chance to talk, her mood has changed and she wants to talk about something else. This being the case, a lot of words remains unspoken, and because

Masego and her boyfriend do not use social networks, which might play a crucial role in instances where the context does not allow for verbal communication, these unspoken words may remain unspoken.

It appears from my fieldwork that social networks might be crucial because at times it becomes easier to write feelings down than express them verbally. These feelings may be feelings of affection, frustration, resentment, or uncertainty, and they are sometimes not clearly communicated because during my conducting of fieldwork I observed a certain level of sensitivity towards the way in which partners communicate. I had the privilege of listening in on a phone conversation between Thato and his girlfriend, as he included me in the conversation by putting the phone on loudspeaker. This call was after a disagreement about money they had two weeks ago that led to a breakup; they had not spoken since, until Thato sent her a message on '2go' to which she did not reply. Upon my arrival on that day, he told me that he had sent her a message in the morning and she did not reply. Thato decided to call her, he was sitting on his bed and I was sitting on the couch, like we usually sit. The conversation was short and quite tense. The dialogue was as follows:

Thato: Hello Dineo!

Girlfriend: Hi! (Soft voice)

Thato: Why are you not replying to the message I sent to you on '2go'?

Girlfriend: When?

Thato: In the morning, didn't you see it?

Girlfriend: What were you saying?²³

Thato: I was saying you and the children should move to Cape Town and the children can attend school here.

The girlfriend said something, but we both could barely make out what she was saying.

Thato: Huh?

Girlfriend: Cape Town is not safe.

Thato: What makes it not to be safe?

She sighs.

Girlfriend: Eish! No Thato

Thato: So you are not coming?

²³ Dialogue occurred on 17th May 2012.

Girlfriend: I don't know, I will think about it. (Not sounding keen on the idea)

Thato: Okay then, its fine.

Girlfriend: Bye!

He hung up the phone, looked at me, sighed and said: "you see, this is what I was talking about, she's not coming."

Thato had already concluded, from his girlfriend's responses that she does not intend to move. She might still have been angry at him and did not feel like talking to him; hence the short responses. Or maybe because of his need to prove to me that things are falling apart in his relationship, my presence influenced the approach he took to discuss the matter with his girlfriend.

It is no different with the use of the cell phone that the context influences the interactions between people. My presence in this conversation between Thato and his girlfriend has influenced how Thato expressed himself (or rather not) to his girlfriend and how he inferred his girlfriends response. In this context, the phone call did not help them because it was evident that Thato's girlfriend did not want to have that conversation. From the dialogue, it shows the cell phones conforms to its users demands, but in a relationship, it is not only the demands of one person that are reckoned because in as much as Thato is the one who called, his girlfriend directed the conversation and how long it will last. The cell phone can only serve its purpose when availability is not short lived, and that is what happened when the call was ended before they could resolve the misunderstanding between them.

Although phone calls have more value attached to it than other ways of communicating, they are limiting the conversations as they cost more than chatting on social networks or sending an SMS. SMSing and chatting appear to allow people to be more expressive, but time consuming. Solis (2006: 7) argues that communication through texting has also successfully set meaning, intention, and expressions allowing texters to say what is normally unsayable.

5.2.2 Communicating via SMS and chatting

Texting or chatting can be seen as offering alternative to what romantic partners who cannot communicate verbally. Sometimes feelings are clearly expressed when they are written,

rather than spoken. This is only one of the reasons why people communicate via SMS or chatting, but many, including my informants, share the same view as I do- that the reason for using SMS and social networks is that they are cost effective, as they cost less than a minute's worth phone call. The predicament with using these other alternatives though, is that they are time consuming and though they are immediate, people take their own time to reply these messages. In most cases it is in these paused moments that words are lost and communication breakdown takes place. This was illustrated in Ofentse's case, whereby he sent his girlfriend an SMS, after the first two he sent a couple of hours earlier on the same day, and the SMS read, commonly used in the sms speak "Y r u nt replyin my smses or u dnt wana tlk 2me?"²⁴ This SMS was then followed by her reply, saying: "Im busy, wil tlk l8r".²⁵

Ofentse interpreted his girlfriend's reply as a sign that she does not want to talk to him, refusing to construe it any other way. Ofentse took offence to the SMS, saying that his girlfriend is too busy for him, but it would have made him feel better if his girlfriend told him what she was busy with. He also said that for the mere fact that it took her forever to reply his SMS did not help how he was feeling. Ofentse seemed frustrated and said that he might as well go out with his friends, seeing that his girlfriend does not have time for him. He started calling his friends, but none of them answered and that frustrated Ofentse even more. He decided to open a bottle of Heineken beer he had in the fridge and drink it. From then on Ofentse it was after another and I decided not to keep count of the beers he was took out of the fridge.

When I tried to make him understand that she probably will explain later, his reply was, "I don't want to hear it; she's probably making up some lies anyway". Ofentse was saying this out of frustration that his girlfriend did not reply immediately after he sent the first SMS and was already imagining the worst. This would have been a different scenario for Tshepo, who has an understanding with his girlfriend, whereby they do not let the delay of a response cause problems in their relationship. When talking to him while looking at his photo album, I asked him what usually goes through his mind when his girlfriend does not answer his calls or replies to his SMSes a while after he sent them, he seemed very confident in saying that they do not allow the delay of a replied message or a missed call to bother them, as long as

²⁴ Text and chat language, translated in English as: "Why are you not replying my text messages or do you not want to talk to me?"

²⁵ English translation: "I am busy, I will talk later".

the phone call is returned or the SMS is replied, but Tshepo said that it does frustrate his girlfriend sometimes. He did admit that they argue a lot about the fact that they do not talk every day, but still could not see any problem with them not calling each other every day.

It is clear from Tshepo's statement that even though he uses the cell phone to communicate with his girlfriend, the cell phone does not define their relationship. He slightly acknowledges the impact that the cell phone has on their relationship even though I have found it to be crucial in his relationship. Ofentse, on the hand, reads too much into the functions of the cell phone. It seems that he does not understand that the relationship that he has with his cell phone is not the same as the one his girlfriend has with her cell phone. The cell phone serves as a mediator, not the receiver, so in that case the cell phone might have received the message, but the receiver, who is the person the message is sent to, may not have read the message yet. Ofentse seems to be overestimating the function of the cell phone, forgetting that the cell phone is a third character and has no influence on when a call will be answered or a message be replied.

The way in which lovers interact with each other through their cell phones is crucial as it will determine how their patterns of communication will impact on their intimate lives. Communication about sex or the lack thereof determines whether a lover will remain faithful or become unfaithful.

5.3 Intimacy vs. unfaithfulness

Intimacy is another aspect to be explored so as to understand the role the cell phone plays in the love relationships of labour migrants. The way in which intimacy is expressed also contributes to the way in which a relationship will turn out. By intimacy I refer to what Jamieson (1998: 1) explains as a very specific sort of knowing, loving and 'being close to' another person. The emotional and the physical aspects are what I look at in this paper. We look at how sexual feelings are communicated through the cell phone as a way of combating unfaithfulness. Walsh (2009) conducted research on love and the intimate lives of British migrants in Dubai, where he focuses on the ways in which British migrants negotiate different sorts of love relationships with Britons both in the UK and in Dubai; how such relations in different places are inter-connected; and the way in which they are central to

spatial imaginations of mobility/dwelling, home/away, proximity/distance and absence/presence. He then demonstrates that the idea of closeness- emotional and physical- is central to our understanding of intimacy; therefore intimacy could be regarded as an important aspect of a relationship (Walsh, 2009: 427). Such closeness can be communicated through sexting.

5.3.1 Sexting

Related to intimacy and cell phones, sexting is the act of sending sexually explicit messages or photographs, primarily between mobile phones. The Urban Dictionary (<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=sexting>) refers to sexting as the act of text messaging someone in the hopes of having a sexual encounter with them later; initially casual, transitioning into highly suggestive and even sexually explicit. This, as I comprehend, needs to take place amongst two consensual partners.

Tshepo is one informant who believes that this is an act that works for his relationship. He felt very uncomfortable informing me about his sexual life, but gradually opened up, though not completely, on his sexual adventures with his partner. We do send each other explicit pictures and text messages. We have been together for a long time now and have explored our sexualities together, which is why we are comfortable with having our “bedroom talk”²⁶ and sending pictures, because she knows what turns me on and I know what turns her on. We also share downloaded videos that we both find stimulating. We just have that connection you see.

I then asked what kind of pictures they send to each other, he laughed, and said: “really really explicit pictures, you know what I’m talking about, I can’t go into details.”

Ofentse, on the other hand, does not seem to share the same view as Tshepo, stating that their relationship is not that explicit. He said that the closest he has been to explicit is getting a picture of my girlfriend’s bare breasts since she refuses to go any further than that. He explained that he is a very sexual guy and loves experimenting, but his girlfriend restricts him. I picked up from him shaking his heads and smiling that he could not believe that he

²⁶ Sexually explicit conversation.

had let me in on intimate details of his relationship, and he was not about to let me in any further. I asked him what he meant by restrictive and he said, “I once sent her a picture of me naked and she deleted it, saying that she does not feel comfortable having that kind of picture on her phone. She also does not keep a record of our sexual conversations, which I find strange, but she tries to accommodate me by at least talking about sex.”

Sexting does not seem to be a common act among my informants, since most of my informants refused to talk about it, saying that they do not explore the sexual aspect of their relationships through the use of cell phones in detail. This practice is seen as a way of strengthening a sexual bond between partners, because lack of intimacy is what mainly constitutes to unfaithfulness in a relationship, but some of the informants of this research argue against sexting, saying that physical sexual encounter cannot be substituted with ‘sex talk’. This indicates that even though cell phone communication has its strength in certain aspects of love relationships, it does not do much to enhance the sexual relationship of intimate partners, especially when they show little interest in communicating about sex; therefore showing that the cell phone allows for intimate communication only when its users accommodate intimate conversations. It could generally be assumed that by my informants not talking about sex with their partners, it may easily lead them to building other relationships and having sexual encounters with the partners that they have in Cape Town. One needs to bear in mind that even though lack of intimacy may play an important role in love relationships, there are other factors that also constitute to how a relationship may ‘work out’.

5.3.2 Being unfaithful: when things go wrong.

It is the 25th of July on a Wednesday afternoon, two months after Thato had broken up with his girlfriend, I walk towards Thato’s door which is slightly open, yet open enough for him to hear and see whoever is standing at the door. Thato is lying on his couch, listening to a playlist of songs while the television is playing on mute. The song playing in the background is a song that I personally like, hence it caught my attention. Walking into his room, I greeted him and he stood up to give me a hug, looking like someone who is carrying a heavy weight on his shoulders. The song playing in the background is called ‘Matswale’, meaning ‘Mother-in-law, by Caiphus Semenya, who is a South African Jazz artist. In essence, the song is

about a man who is asking for help from his in-laws to save his family from falling apart, explaining to them that he loves their daughter, but she is not the same person he fell in love with. He then directs the words to the woman herself, declaring his love for her and asking her to think about their children.

Listening to the song, I felt a relation between the words in the song and Thato's situation. I asked him how he is doing, he smiles and said to me: "*Haai, ntho di sharp*" meaning "things are ok", saying that his girlfriend apologised for her behaviour, and so did he. We fell into a dialogue that revealed his thoughts and feelings about his rekindled relationship.

"We've been doing this breaking up and making up for a long time now and it got to me this time around. I am tired of going back and forth with her; I don't have the strength to fight anymore. I used to think that this was the woman I was going to spend the rest of my life with, but I am not so sure anymore."

Feeling the need to explore where this is going, I continued to probe,

Researcher: So what do you think is going to happen now?

Thato: I think I need to let her go and find myself someone else.

Researcher: Do you still love her?

Thato: Yes I love her....but it's not the same you know.

Researcher: Okay.

Thato: I think I should move on.

He looks at me and smiles, looking very suspicious.

Thato: I'm actually seeing someone.

My urge to react on a personal level arised, but I managed to reserve my judgement.

Researcher: Okay..... Is she from around here?

Thato: Yes, she lives a couple of minutes away.

Researcher: And how long have you been seeing each other?

Thato: About a month.....he clears his throat.....but I am not really into her.

Researcher: So why are you even doing this?

Thato: Pressure. My intention was to move on, but she is not the person that I want to move on with and I don't know how to tell her because she has already fallen for me and I don't want to break her heart.

Researcher: Does she know about your girlfriend at home?

Thato: Yes she does, but she does not care. She sometimes sleeps over and even cooks and brings me supper from her home.

He gets a “Please call me” text from his girlfriend in Kimberley, and a few minutes later he gets another from the girlfriend in Gugulethu; so he lets me on it, finding it quite amusing. He suggests we go buy food, so we left conversation in the room, to pick up on it later.

Thato and his girlfriend who is living Kimberley have both been unfaithful to each other and that has affected their relationship in such a way that they barely trust one another. Though they have resolved these issues, trust still remains a question in their relationship. The vignette describing Thato’s dilemma shows that Thato’s heart is not set on breaking up with his girlfriend and it breaks his heart to think it. Listening to the song, I got a sense that Thato is seeking for advice and help to save his relationship, and in the dialogue I had with Thato I came to realise that he went into a relationship with the woman in Gugulethu, seeking comfort for the situation described in the dialogue. Neo on the other hand, admits to his unfaithfulness to his partner, saying that upon his arrival in Cape Town, he “*was full of naughtiness*”.

I love partying, and when I came to Cape Town the people that I knew were in Langa, so that is where I had my fun. I would “hook up” with a ‘girl’ wherever we are and “hang out” with her just for that night, with no strings attached. I got a fright when I hooked up with this one ‘girl’ and we were about to go out and then there was drama. We got into the car and before I could drive off, this ‘girl’ from the previous weekend comes rushing, causing a scene and asking me who the ‘girl’ in my car is. The one in the car felt the need to reply, so I kicked her out of my car and told both of them where to get off and drove away. It was an experience I don’t wish on any guy.

Neo objects though, to his girlfriend’s intentions to move to Cape Town. He says that he does not want to share his space and that he can cook, clean and do his own laundry, so he does not see the need to live with a woman. He also admits that he is not ready to get married as yet.

Studies on the history of labour migration in South Africa have shown similar traits of masculinity as those shown in Neo’s statement. Neo is asserting his masculinity in contemporary South Africa, where men and women are said to have “equal rights” showing that men no longer need women for what was in the past said to be “wifely duties” (Moody

& Mdatshe, 1994). Robert Morrell (2001: 7), an author and researcher interested in men, masculinity and general gender studies, argues that masculinities are fluid and should not be considered as belonging in a fixed way to any one group of men. They are socially and historically constructed in a process which involves contestations between rival understandings of what being a man should involve (ibid). Morrell's argument can be interpreted in an example of a migrant man who insists that he does not need a woman, because he can take on the duties which were previously allocated to women. Neo, though, asserts his "manhood" by showing that he is the one who will decide whether his girlfriend can move to Cape Town, clearly highlighting the former notion of masculinity which held the ideology that "men made decisions, earned the money and held the power" (Morrell, 18).

Neo's objection to his girlfriend's intended move to Cape Town could be more than just his wanting to live alone. His "naughtiness" (which is also an assertion of masculinity) is also one of the key factors that contribute to his decision. Older studies have documented how labour migrants who have settled in the urban areas have taken on new households, building relationships with town women while their wives are responsible for the households in the country. They build sexual relationships with town women as "an alternative for abstention" (Moodie & Mdatshe, 1994: 141). Campbell (2001: 282) argues that two things to being a man in the labour migrant's life were going underground and chasing after women. The latter is no different in contemporary migrant life, as Neo has shown. Campbell (2001: 276) argues that the way in which men understand their masculine identities play a key role in shaping how they seek sexual satisfaction and intimacy.

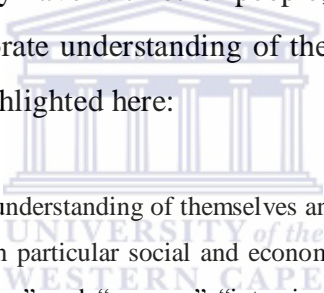
Masego, not being the only migrant in the relationship had suddenly started suspecting that her boyfriend was being unfaithful to her. This suspicion developed after her boyfriend moved to Mpumalanga. She said that her boyfriend had suddenly started becoming unavailable for their once-in-two-months weekend visits. When I arrived at her place, she came to open the gate for me, looking like someone who was planning to go out. Since it was on a Saturday, I feared that she was going to cut my visit short, so I asked her if she was going somewhere, just so that I can prepare myself for a short visit. She asked me why I was asking her that and I told her that she looked dressed up in her pair of jeans, a waist jacket, a scarf around her neck and a pair of boots. She smiled and said, "If only you knew what is going on". I could see that she was not in a good mood, so we walked in silence until we arrived at her flat.

When we finally sat on the couch I asked what had happened and she told me that she went to Johannesburg as she and her boyfriend had planned to spend the weekend there and upon her arrival, her boyfriend called and said he could not come because his family needed him. Shortly after that weekend her boyfriend started questioning the state of their relationship and that is when Masego started suspecting that he was seeing another women. I asked her if she thinks her boyfriend was unfaithful to her because of the deprivation of sex, she said, “I don’t know, maybe. But I am also alone this side and I am not cheating because of that, so if that is the case why can’t he keep at it like I am. We spoke about this and we had concluded that we will not let sex be an issue in our relationship.” She also said that if that was the case, she could not understand why he did not speak to her about it because they have promised to speak openly and honestly about everything that posed a threat to their relationship. Masego looked calm about it, but her shaky voice sounded like that of someone who is hurting. She told me that loved her boyfriend, but she doubts that they would continue having a relationship if she found out that he was being unfaithful.

Whether Masego would have liked to admit it or not, sex plays a crucial role in intimate relationships, more importantly to men, because men and women assert different meanings to sex. Literature on the sexual activities of migrant women is documented in studies on the migration of women to the urban cities, either as to save their marriages or to settle as town women themselves (Walker (1990); Moodie and Ndatshe (1994); Mayer (1963); Morrell, 2001). These studies document the sexual activities of women in prostitution. Masego’s view that they both (Masego and her boyfriend) can go for longer periods (which is 2-3months in their case) without having sex may not be shared by her boyfriend. Campbell (2001: 282) found that there was a strong link made by male migrants between sex and masculinity in relations to general physical and health and well-being. She suggested that lengthy celibacy might lead a man to other alternatives (ibid: 283). These alternatives included that of a “small home” in urban areas while there is a “family home” in the migrants’ homelands (see discussion on ‘town women and country wives (Moodie & Mdatshe, 1994), the impact and responses of labour migration (Walker, 1990) or changing family structures (Murray, 1981). For Ofentse, it is not being unfaithful; it is a way to strengthen a relationship where sex is lacking. He reckons that as long as his partner does not know that he is sleeping with someone else, and the partner in Cape Town knows that he has a girlfriend at home, nobody will get hurt; thus it is harmless. He explained that his intention was not to break up with his girlfriend for another woman, but to fulfil the “needs of a man” because men get easily

tempted. Seeing no expression on my face, Ofentse felt the need to elaborate on his point of view by saying, “I am aware of what I am doing and what it will do to our relationship if she was to find out, but I can’t help it. We have those ‘dirty talks’²⁷, but sometimes a person needs the real thing.” Ofentse looked at me as if expecting me to have an opinion on what he had said, but there was none. He said that I came across as someone who is opinionated and was wondering what I was thinking. I reminded him that as a researcher, my aim is to listen, observe and make sense of the lives of my informants, but not to make them feel good or bad about the choices they make in their lives. I could see that my reluctance to comment on his statement about his needs as a man made him feel uncomfortable. He then stood up from the chair he was sitting on and offered to refill my glass with the juice that he insisted I should finish because he had bought it for me.

Moodie and Mdatshe (1994) have documented how labour migrants assert their masculinities through the sexual encounters they have with other people, be it the boys on the mine or the town women. They give an elaborate understanding of the relationship between gender and sexuality. Their relationship is highlighted here:



Sexual activity reinforces people’s understanding of themselves and each other in terms of gender and power but always as defined within particular social and economic contexts. Sexual activity, which confirms our self-formation as “men” and “women,” “intrusive” and “seductive,” “powerful” and “weak,” cuts across more general structure of power and meaning, sometimes affirming and sometimes contradicting them (Moodie & Mdatshe, 1994:143).

Tanya Batson-Savage’s paper explores the cellular phone’s incorporation into the discourse of masculinity and femininity. Batson-Savage (2007: 240) argues that one is not identified as feminine or masculine until one performs the traits that are associated with the gender. This is reflected in Ofentse’s perception of how men have needs and the idea that for as long as his girlfriend does not know what will not hurt her. The perception that Ofentse has on the role that the cell phone plays in this respect illustrates the traits that are associated with gender. Not that woman don’t also have the perception that Ofentse has, Masego (the young woman in my study) does not give any indication of such perceptions. This performance is relative to

²⁷ Another word for sexually explicit conversations.

the phone's use as a status symbol as well as the economic imperatives that underlie cellular phone usage (Batson-Savage, 2007: 240).

Thomas and Lim (2010) wrote a paper on the exploration of ICT use by Indian and Filipino female migrant workers who are employed as live-in maids in Singapore. Their study found that while ICTs help to mediate a sense of togetherness, it paradoxically intensified the feeling of distance because the intimacy of long-distance contact made the lack of face-to-face contact more obvious. I argue, though, that even if that is the case, even in the study that I have conducted, it is imperative for one to understand that these ICTs can only help to a certain extent, and should not be relied on completely for the survival of a relationship.

5.4 The convenience of a cell phone: but is it really?

The cell phone is supposedly embraced for its convenience to reach across boundaries of time and space, whereby the inability to speak to a person face-to-face is substituted by the use of a cell phone. My research shows that the convenience of the cell phone as a mediator in love relationships creates expectations that when not lived up to by intimate partners, may cause solemn damage to the relationships. It appears that the idea built around being able to reach a person at any time because they own a cell phone does nothing but complicate love relationships. Masego, for instance, told me about the problems "caused" by her habit of switching off her cell phone when she left work because she used the local train to travel home and was anxious that she may get robbed, as it had happened to her before. Her boyfriend was not very pleased with getting her voicemail every time he called her after work, since he had discovered that her cell phone is always off after work. When she told me about this incident, we were sitting in her lounge watching a soccer game while she was preparing rice and mince for lunch. She found her boyfriend's reaction to that quite amusing, she said that she never cheated on her boyfriend, but that incident made her boyfriend doubt her because he kept on saying to her that if she does not want to be with him, she should tell him. She laughed about it because she said that they had sorted out the misunderstanding and have learned to communicate more and have less expectations on one's availability for cell phone communication.

What is highlighted here is the issue of trust and how lack of communication can lead people to interpret a situation in a misled way. It also shows that Masego and her boyfriend were not communicating extensively, seeing that her boyfriend was unaware that she switches off her cell phone when leaving work. It is clear from the interpretation of Masego's statement that communication between lovers who are not in the same geographical space need constant update from both parties about the everyday events of their lives, and also reassurance that the relationship is not under any threat. Trust is also one of the elements in a relationship that when lacking can cause serious damage to the relationship. This study shows that the cell phone is perceived as always available rather than as an object that responds to the orders of its user. Cell phones can be attended to at any given time, because they leave traces of any activity that takes place in their users' presence or absence.

In addition to the ability to attend to the cell phone at any given time, another way convenience can be measured is by the features a cell phone possesses. Features include camera, music, Internet, and the network used. What is also crucial to the convenience of the cell phone is how these features are being used to the advantage of the relationship, as I have explained in chapter 4 that in as much as the cell phone plays a certain role in a relationship, it plays a role that a person who uses it wants it to play.

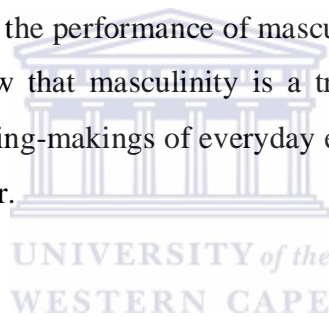
This study documents that different conversations from different people occur through cell phones mainly because they are of personal use and everything that goes on in them is supposedly private. Levinson (2004: 93) writes that cell phones probably make infidelity more difficult, as they certainly make being plausibly out of touch with a spouse more difficult, but they also can facilitate communication between parties of indiscretions, so maybe it's a draw. I argue that if people concentrated more on communicating with their spouses in order to make their relationships work, they would be too occupied with their relationships to even consider infidelity; thus evicting Levinson's idea of looking at this as a contest.

Love relationships can be maintained with the help of the cell phone; hence every informant of this study owns a cell phone. Solis (2006: 4) argues that maintenance is the structure in the communication of a romantic relationship when the individuals in the relationship establish contact more through texting rather than face-to-face encounter in their effort to sustain their romantic intimacy. I agree with Solis's argument, but I argue that not only can the sustenance

of their romantic intimacy be established through texting, but also through calling and chatting. The ways of communicating with the cell phone are complimentary to each other, therefore contributing largely to the ability of the cell phone to help in the maintenance of long-distance romantic relationships.

5.5 Conclusion

Cell phones have proven to play different roles in different relationships, as they are not used for the same reasons. This chapter shows that cell phones are a need in long distance relationships, and though they do not always serve in the best interest of these relationships, they still contribute tremendously to the survival of relationships as they are the only tool that accommodates different attributes that help sustain relationships at remoteness. The chapter also brings into play the politics of gender that demonstrate that the incorporation of cell phones and gender may bring out the performance of masculinity and femininity traits. It also draws on older studies that show that masculinity is a trait that has long existed, and its fluidity allows for different meaning-makings of everyday events depending on the context in which these masculine traits occur.



CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion

This thesis explored the different ways in which labour migrants in contemporary South Africa make use of cell phones in their daily lives to maintain their love relationships. I started by tracing the history of labour migration and showed how the gradual change of migration has played a role in the assertion of labour migrants in their communities in Cape Town. I look specifically into the use of cell phone by Setswana and Sesotho speaking migrants in Delft, Thornton, Brackenfell and Gugulethu. While the focus of the research is on the role of cell phones in maintaining love relationships between migrants and the partners they left behind 'at home', I also show how the negotiation of the cell phone in the social lives of migrants helps build wider social networks. The value of the functions of the cell phone through employed communication patterns that encourage social relations and interactions are also the focus of this thesis.

Labour migration is not a trend of the past. While the heavily regulated migrant labour system came to an end, labour migration continues to be a trend in contemporary South Africa, with young people moving from rural areas and small towns to the big cities with the hope that they will get employed and be exposed to the 'city life' which promises a better life. Leaving their spouses and sweethearts behind, migrants have found ways in which they can keep communication constant with partners that they have left 'at home. Now that cell phones are also available at prices that make them affordable for marginal sections of the population and have also introduced new technical features, which allow at almost no costs for constant and instant communication through social chat rooms such as Facebook, Whatsapp and other chat rooms they find to be cost effective, labour migrants are at an advantage of communicating with their intimate partners in as many ways as possible, and this is what sets them apart from the lives of the migrants in the classic studies conducted by Mayer (1963), Wilson & Mafeje (1963), Ramphele (1993) and Murray (1981).

This thesis looked into the rapid changes that migrants are experiencing in South Africa and discussed the connection of the study of ICT/cell phone use among migrant workers to studies of the rarely investigated topic of love in Africa. Information and Communication

Technologies have made a vast contribution by creating ways in which people maintain relationships that are destitute of face-to-face interaction. The introduction of ICTs has also contributed to the developments of technology of South Africa, introducing affordable ways in which people can communicate across boundaries of space and time. The thesis also shows that the role of the cell phone in the lives of migrants studied for this research goes beyond communication with long-distance partners, therefore helping them create new networks in the social and geographic spaces that they occupy.

How have the long-distance intimate relationships of labour migrants, as a mobile marginal population, been affected by the introduction and common availability of cell phones? How do labour migrants and their distant lovers make use of cell phones in order to stay in touch? What kind of language (verbal and/ or visual – images?). Do they use cell phones to make ICT technology work for their intimate relationships? Have cell phones perhaps also put additional strains on intimate relationships where the lovers involved are separated for long periods of time? What kind of strains would those be? What meaning do they attach to the use of cell phones as a mode of communication in their relationships and as a social object?

It also highlights that in as much as cell phones help in maintaining relationships, it also needs maintenance of its own. It is through the maintenance of the cell phone that the cell phone can construct these social and cultural circumstances and be able to allow people accessibility to the different spheres of their communication networks, making it possible for migrants in long-distance relationships to communicate.

This study has proven that cell phones play different roles in different relationships, as they are not used for the same reasons, showing that cell phones are a need in long distance relationships, and though they do not always serve in the best interest of these relationships, they still contribute tremendously to the survival of relationships as they are the only tool that accommodates different attributes that help sustain relationships at a distance. The thesis also highlights the issues and contestations of gender through masculine explanations that are given by the participants in this study.

For further recommendations, the study of labour migrants should be looked at from a different perspective than those of the classic studies mentioned throughout this thesis.

Migration in contemporary South Africa does not only occur because people are seeking labour employment, but also professional employment, therefore I suggest that another term be used to accommodate all migrants seeking for either labour or professional employment.

With regards to the cell phone use of migrants, it would be viable to conduct a comparative study, as I had initially attempted. This would help understand how the use of cell phone is perceived by those who are in long-distance relationships and 'at home'. The study of ICTs and love relationships could open a new arena for anthropology.



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