Moving young lives: mobility, immobility and inter-generational tensions in urban Africa

Introduction

Africa's urban youth in the twenty-first century is commonly represented, both inside and outside the continent, as in a state of flux: dislocated, marginalized, open to political manipulation; forever in a state of becoming (yet never arriving). Images of wayward, unruly and potentially destructive youth intersect with frightening statistics for HIV/AIDS, youth unemployment and crime. Common representations of Africa's urban youth in the Western media include child prostitutes, vagrant street children, drug abuse, pregnant teenagers and youth vigilantes. The reality, of course, is much more complex. In the story we present in this paper, mobility - as experience, opportunity, challenge, temptation and performance - plays a key role.

Mobility and immobility, we argue, are key factors shaping young people's urban experience and their future life chances across sub-Saharan Africa. For young people, mobility *achieved* may, on the one hand, be a source of excitement, temptation, thrills, inclusion, opportunity and perceived success; on the other, a cause of exhaustion, danger and fear. Mobility *frustrated*, by contrast, is most often seen purely in negative terms: a source of anger, despair, exclusion and perceived failure. In this paper we focus on mobilities in the everyday – daily journeys to school, work, church, the market and video house, to meet friends, relations, lovers, teachers, business operators. The more extensive mobilities of migration from the distant village or another country are largely outside our

frame. Our principal aim is to chart young people's mobility experiences – how they use and experience the city - developing a comparative perspective across the three urban study sites that links young people's mobility with the power relations which operate to shape their movements in individual locations. In particular, we consider how positive and negative images of young people's mobility play out in terms of the inter-generational frictions and negotiations generated by their mobility performances within local cultural settings. We also reflect on the developmental consequences of mobility achieved and mobility frustrated, in terms of young people's access to services and income and their participation in the social networks and peer culture which may shape their life trajectories. This requires us to consider how factors such as gender and age intersect with specific local conditions (economy, transport provision, and cultural context, including histories of inter-generational relations) in our three city locations to mediate young people's mobility experiences. The paper is shaped around three themes: mobility as challenge, mobility as temptation, and mobility control.

The recent turn to a mobilities paradigm in the social sciences provides an appropriate frame for our discussion. Sheller and Urry's (2006) problematization of sedentarist theories of bounded places as a basis of human identities and experience, and the basic units of social research, accords well with our research approach and experience. We are concerned in this paper with the complex relationality of places and people. African cities and their routeways are landscapes of process which are nearly as much in flux as the young people who inhabit and move through them. Mobile young people - negotiating drainage ditches, running to avoid biting dogs and unsympathetic adults,

perambulating busy markets, calling their friends by cell phone as they scramble for a seat in a crowded minibus in which the music blares - are embedded in an only slightly less mobile material world of roads, schools, drainage ditches, lorry parks, video houses, mobile phone masts, markets and bars. By contrast with Western contexts this material world is frequently transient: temporary kiosks block pedestrian routeways; torrential rain destroys road surfaces; city authorities send bulldozers to demolish illegal markets; school roofs collapse following termite infestation or high winds.

A mobilities paradigm which puts multiple interacting mobilities at the centre of social change, we suggest, is crucial in understanding the shaping of today's African cities and, in particular, the 'youthscapes' which form a critical part of the urban whole. We use the term 'youthscape' here as shorthand for the concept of young people as active participants in the cityscape: that is, not only a category of people experiencing and using the city, but also a category with a visible presence which impacts (not least through its potential and actual physical mobility) on the attitudes and actions of other generational categories and consequently makes a significant contribution to the shaping of the cityscape. This accords with Maira's use of the term which, drawing on Appadurai's (1990) concept of 'scapes', suggests 'a site that is not just geographic or temporal, but social and political as well, a "place" that is bound up with questions of power and materiality' (Maira 2005: 152). Power relations shape the precise patterning of individual mobilities and immobilities: who can travel along which streets, using what form of transport, interacting with whom, stopping where. Since control over mobility reflects and reinforces power it is necessary to track 'the power of discourses and

practices of mobility in creating both movement and statis' (Sheller and Urry 2006: 211, citing Morley 2000 and Skeggs 2004).

In our case studies this tracking of power has brought to the fore a particular focus on the inter-generational relationships within which young people operate. African cultural constructions tend to emphasise the lowly position of young people in family hierarchies and the importance of respect for elders (and obedience to their rules). In the context of limited livelihood opportunities youth as a social category in Africa has, for generations, tended to extend into the late 30s, especially for men (Chant and Jones 2005). In many African societies, young people are expected to play a key (labour) role in the construction of family livelihoods and to perform additional unpaid domestic tasks in the home (Robson 1996; Porter et al. 2007). Inter-generational relations are particularly complicated in the South African context because of the role youth played in the anti-apartheid movement (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999), but across urban Africa, young people have entered into political space in complex ways. In Malawi, for instance, struggles for their control date back many decades (van Dijk 1998). Thus, as Durham (2000) observes, images of youth as unruly and potentially destructive cross-cut with images of political manipulation of youth. These images may be reinforced by young people's mobility performances on the street and elsewhere, of the kind Ferguson (1999: 114) so vividly evokes in his scenes of Copper Belt life: young men who strut down the street with a stance suggest defiance, cockiness, 'attitude', dressed in bright red pants, gold sequined pants, hats worn backwards or at an improbable angle, talking loudly, greeting others rudely as they go; promenading girls with make-up and slits in their

skirts, showing off their legs and displaying disrespect (all as observed by a local informant in Mufulira city centre). Such performances give rise to unease among elders and a tension in inter-generational relations that can impact back on young people through mobility constraints and place-related exclusions. As Ferguson observed in the Copper Belt context, people who 'move around' in Africa are often a source of suspicion: moving around implies not only physical mobility but also sexual promiscuity, both among men and women. For many older people, particularly first generation rural-urban migrants, the African city is perceived as a place of danger and vice: uncontrolled independent mobility within the city will, they believe, expose their young people to temptations and hazard, encourage disrespectful attitudes and corruption.

The literature on African children and youth has expanded enormously, including a recent growth in work with an inter-generational perspective (for example, a special issue of *Africa* on grandparents and grandchildren, Geissler et al. eds., 2004). However, research specifically related to daily mobility of young people in urban settings remains sparse and confined to single city settings (for instance, Schildkraut 1981, Young and Barrett 2001, van Blerk 2005, Benwell 2009). The following studies by Lee, Grieco, Turner and Kwakye, Langevang and Gough are particularly pertinent to our work because they not only have a focus on youth daily mobility but also link this to some degree with inter-generational relations.

Lee's (2004) trans-generational analysis of migrant mobility in Cape Town, South Africa, shows how first generation migrant parents closely restricted their children's movements,

especially girls', but more because of respectability than safety concerns, perceiving the city as a place of moral decay. Parental ability to regulate movements of urban youth declined in the latter days of apartheid, in part due to deregulation of the transport industry, which allowed a massive increase in taxis. She observes how mobility is "'worn with flair' by third generation respondents as a confident assertion of greater opportunity and their increasingly consumerist selves". For Ghana, there is a substantial urban mobility study, undertaken in Accra in the early1990s (Grieco et al.1996; Turner and Kwakye 1996). This emphasises the high level of local mobility among children in low-income households, associated with domestic tasks (refuse removal, water and fuelwood collection) and petty trade. It also shows how the falling off in transport provision associated with structural adjustment measures increased dependence on women and children's work. Young people became increasingly central to the economic organisation of households and were taken in as foster-children to reduce the transport stress of adults faced with transport under-provision: they acted as domestic anchors, compensating for the absence of adult household members delayed in distant markets by transport problems.

More recently, Langevang (2008) has examined young men's meeting places in Accra. She shows how young men on the street are often viewed by older people as potentially dangerous, but their meeting places offer unemployed young men a meaningful space from which to network. Langevang and Gough (2009), also working in Accra, discuss the regulation of young people's movement by parents and other elders. They observe how girls beyond puberty (whose movements are particularly constrained) will employ

cunning tactics to evade surveillance, while young men try to avoid spending too much time sitting around at home in order to avoid being viewed as lazy. Gough's interviews with young people across two contrasting residential areas in Lusaka (2008) draw attention to the distances which young people will walk in urban areas to get to school or to job search, concerns about travel at night and notes that parents regulate the movements of young women, in particular, because of fears of daughters becoming pregnant. Our ongoing mobility research with young people, builds on these studies, by providing detailed comparative research across three countries. We also offer novel perspectives, in particular through our adoption of a methodological approach in which child researchers form a key component.

Methodology

In this paper we draw on inter-disciplinary research from a three-year mobility study of children and young people aged between about 9 and 18 years, conducted between 2006 and 2009[1]. We utilised a two-strand approach, in which an adult academic research study was complemented by a less conventional child researcher strand. Seventy 'child' researchers across the three countries [aged 11-19], following a basic training, selected research tools they preferred and conducted their own studies with peers in places convenient to them: the methods they used included in-depth interviews, focus groups, diaries, life histories, photographic journals of travel and accompanied walks. A full description of the recruitment and methodology in this component is available elsewhere [Porter et al., in press]. While these researchers were happy to be called 'child'

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[1] The sites included urban, peri-urban, rural and remote rural locations in two different agro-ecological zones in each country but only the urban component is reported here.

researchers at the beginning of the study, by the time we held a review workshop in Ghana towards the end of the study, they preferred the term 'young researcher'.

Findings from the young researcher component have fed into and complement the adult research strand. The latter included intensive qualitative research [interviews, life histories, focus groups, ethnographic diaries, accompanied walks (Porter et al. 2010)] with young people, their parents and/or key informants at two urban sites per country, and a quantitative survey of respondents aged approximately 9-18 years in the same sites. The qualitative research – c.50-80 interviews/activities per site, conducted mostly by local research assistants – provides a rich ethnographic dataset. A substantial but varying proportion of the qualitative interviews in each site were with young people of 9 to 19 years of age and included individual and group interviews with in-school and out-of-school children. Individual interviews were also conducted with parents and group interviews with mothers and fathers (separately). Key informants included teachers, health workers, transport operators and settlement leaders. Life histories with people in their mid- to late-twenties, focused at reflecting back on the impact of mobility and immobility on their life to date, provided further perspectives.

The first phase of qualitative research helped shape the questionnaire survey of c. 1000 young people per country (including c. 250 urban respondents; n=2967). This survey sample of approximately 125 young people per settlement was obtained by accessing

households in a transect across the settlement[2], and randomly selecting one per household for interview i.e. by first meeting with all young people aged 9-18[3] present at the time, and using a game with paper strips (one starred to mark the respondent for interview) to select the respondent. The questionnaire was conducted at varying times of day, mostly outside school hours. The parent/carer was asked to give some basic information about the selected child. The subsequent interview with the young person was conducted wherever possible out of hearing (but within sight) of the parent and other family members.

Background to the study sites

Our qualitative and quantitative research took place in low income, high density neighbourhoods of six urban centres: Cape Coast and Sunyani in Ghana; Blantyre and Lilongwe in Malawi; Soshanguve and Mthatha (Umtata) in South Africa, but here we draw principally on detailed qualitative material from just one centre in each country. This is necessary for reasons of brevity, since each case study requires adequate contextualization. The selected neighbourhoods are Abura in Cape Coast, Ghana; Ngangalizwe in Mthatha, Eastern Cape, South Africa, and Ndirande in Blantyre, Malawi.

Case study 1: Abura, a neighbourhood of Cape Coast, Central Region, Ghana

Abura (population over 15,000 in 2000) is a busy, congested neighbourhood within the metropolitan area of Cape Coast (population 82,291 in 2000). This city is the regional

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[2] Transect procedure had to vary according to the size and nature of the settlement. In small settlements it was necessary to undertake a number of transects across the settlement until the total sample size was achieved.

[3] In a few cases (especially where this was the only child present) children of 8 years were included where they were found to be capable of answering the questionnaire accurately.

capital for a zone principally characterized by agriculture and fishing and Abura includes the city's second largest market. It is a mix of Fante indigenes, other Akans and northern ethnic groups. A majority of households in Abura are composed of male-headed nuclear families. The area is well served by local transport [taxis, minibuses] which negotiates not only the main paved roads but also many of the narrow unpaved lanes of the residential areas. It is also well located in terms of access to hospitals, clinics and schools in the city. However, the majority of people here (as in our other study sites) are too poor to pay hospital fees and instead buy medicines in the Abura market and from local kiosks.

Case study 2: Ndirande, a neighbourhood of Blantyre, Malawi

Ndirande (population c. 113,000 in 2008) is a high density, low income urban neighbourhood of Blantyre, Malawi's main commercial city (population 661,444 in 2008). The city and this neighbourhood are characterized by substantial in-migration and diverse ethnic composition, in the Ndirande case dominated by Yao and Ngoni. Female-headed households constitute about 15-25% of the total population in Ndirande and although child-headed households are few, there are some street children living here. The region has been badly affected by HIV/AIDS and there are many single and double orphans. Unlike Abura and Ngangalizwe, which are both located on relatively flat terrain, Ndirande is situated on a hillside (the lower slopes of Ndirande mountain). Road conditions in this neighbourhood are very poor – only the main roads are paved and accessible to vehicular traffic throughout the year. Much of the residential area is characterized by poor pedestrian access along narrow, potholed, boulder-strewn paths. Open streams and drains present a serious hazard, especially after heavy rainfall.

Transport along the main paved routes, however, is plentiful and frequent. Basic health and education services and a government secondary school are available in the neighbourhood; hospital services are located in the town centre.

Case study 3: Ngangalizwe, a neighbourhood of Mthatha [Umtata], Eastern Cape, South Africa

Ngangelizwe (c. 70,000 population, 2001) is a high density, low income neighbourhood, within Mthatha, an urban centre (c. 700,000 population in Greater Mthatha, 2001) servicing a large, poor and underdeveloped rural area of Eastern Cape. The majority of the population in Mthatha and Ngangelizwe are Xhosas. There is a high proportion of female-headed households, associated with the region's former homeland status (when men were recruited to work in the gold mines of 'white' South Africa) and local employment opportunities remain limited. However, by contrast with Abura and Ndirande, many of Ngangelizwe's streets are relatively well engineered: the main roads and even some minor residential roads are paved, there are pedestrian sidewalks and occasional speed ramps. As in Ndirande, HIV/AIDS is a major health issue. Basic health and education services are available in the neighbourhood, while secondary schools and hospital services are located in central Mthatha. Transport is widely available, though the condition of many of the operating vehicles is poor.

I Mobility as challenge

This first section consists principally of a comparative review of the obstacles young people face in city travel. A quite diverse set of mobility challenges were reported

across our three study sites, though these were principally associated with pedestrian travel in all locations.   Long walks are often necessary, because motorized transport tends to be out of reach of young people due to the cost – most in all three sites lack funds to travel by vehicle on a daily basis. We focus in this section on the main daily journeys which young people undertake; day and night travel for purposes other than school and work are considered later.

*Travel to school***:** A majority of the young people we interviewed in all three neighbourhoods are school pupils and pedestrian travel to and from school is commonly one of the key elements of their mobility. In Abura (Ghana) over 98% of 9-18 year-old school pupils in our survey had walked to school the previous day, in Ndirande (Malawi) over 97% and in Ngangelizwe (South Africa) 86%. The urban journey to school is not necessarily far or lengthy, even in the two relatively large southern African study cities (50% of pupils estimated their school journey took 15 minutes or less in Abura, 29% in Ndirande and 40% in Ngangelizwe) but it may still encompass a range of challenges.

In Abura, the biggest fear often reported was negotiating routes used by drivers perceived as aggressive and dangerous. These difficulties are exacerbated by the lack of clearly demarcated pedestrian sidewalks: pedestrians and vehicles must both travel through a shared and often badly potholed routeway. Even on unpaved roads many drivers travel at speed, often using these routes as a means of avoiding traffic congestion along the main streets. Child pedestrians report being showered with dust in the dry season and by dirty water in the rains as vehicles hurtle past in the narrow shared space: this leads to

reprimands when they arrive at school with a dirty uniform. When drivers see children they often startle them by hooting furiously, to warn of their approach. If the children are perceived to have retreated insufficiently quickly, a tirade of insults may follow. At night pedestrian dangers are exacerbated by the lack of street lights. Many of these problems are faced by adult pedestrians too, but younger children's relatively small stature and young people's low status enhances their vulnerability to inconsiderate treatment by drivers. Those few young people who travel to school in motorized transport occasionally reported being cheated on fares: they lack the power to question or complain.

In the hilly terrain of Ndirande, the very limited transport availability away from the paved roads and cost constraints on use of motorized transport mean most travel is on foot. Roaming dogs and snakes are considered serious hazards, especially by younger children (whether on the way to school or on other journeys). Speeding mini-buses present another danger in the locations where they can operate, while speeding bicycles present a more widespread hazard (and one far more common than in either Abura or Ngangalizwe). By contrast with Abura, where this was rarely raised as an issue by young people, there is also the real danger of human attack in Ndirande (though perhaps on a somewhat lesser scale than in Ngangalizwe below). Both boys and girls walking to school in uniform are subject to taunts and harrassment: men call them names as they pass the bottle store and older girls are propositioned as they walk by. Boys reported being attacked by bigger boys on the street who steal their possessions on the way to school or their money on the way to the market: "*we wait for each other so that we can*

walk in groups. This prevents attacks from bad people… sometimes they beat us and tell us not to let anybody know about it …[or] they will skin us to death" [Michael, 16 years]. The graveyard area is reportedly particularly dangerous: "*now in January there is a lot of bush so I don't use this path because I fear the people who smoke [Indian hemp] there"* [Simon, 16 years].

In Ngangalizwe, such security problems and violence are even more prominent themes. Mobility challenges here are principally to do with security considerations: the neighbourhood has a reputation as a base for the city's criminal activity and associated violence. Fear of violence formed a key thread in pupils' reported mobility concerns: girls and boys of all ages consider it unsafe to walk long distances on foot; there are shootings at night and young people reported seeing dead bodies on the way to school. Thugs [known as tsotsis] are a threat for both girls and boys, but many girls are also concerned about being propositioned by boys; there is a very real fear of rape. Taking a route to school which avoids places where thugs, dagga [cannabis] smokers, troublemakers or witches are known to convene is a common strategy but adds to journey length and time. *"Some boys demand money and phones … Rotary is the shortest way to school but there are bandits on the way so we take the long route"* [Susan, 17]. Motorised traffic also presents a danger since the relatively good roads allow vehicles to speed.

Although transport is widely available in Ngangalizwe, cost and lack of funds constrain its use by young people. Moreover, the vehicles are often extremely crowded in morning

and evening peak periods: "*everybody is chasing after the same transport: you have to wake up very early to catch them*" [Noma, 14 year old girl]. Nonetheless, transport passenger experiences figure more strongly in qualitative interviews with school pupils in Ngangelizwe than in Abura or Ndirande. In addition to potential harassment, many of the vehicles are old and potentially unsafe. Some schools are served by contract transport but this imposes a strict time regime on pupils and if the vehicle comes late (as they reportedly do), they may get into trouble at school.

Journeys to support household production and reproduction: Young people in all three cities also make many pedestrian journeys to support household production and reproduction. This is particularly the case in Abura and Ndirande where motorized transport is often inaccessible to poor families because of cost and, in Ndirande, availability. Many of the mobility problems young people reported are associated with movements required of them in this work context. In particular, the lack of water pipes to the majority of individual houses adds to the travel burden on young people, especially in Ghana. Over 71% of girls and 82% of boys in our Abura survey reported carrying water all or most days in the previous week. Respective figures were lower for Ndirande (55% girls and 23% boys), but even in Ngangalizwe, where sanitation is better and there is piped water to most locations, the taps are sometimes dry: here 38% girls and 26% boys reported carrying water most or all days in the previous week.

In Abura, in particular, young people (especially girls) may also have to compensate for traffic congestion problems faced by parents and other family members, staying at home

in charge of the house and younger siblings until their parent arrives home, though there is less evidence for this in our Cape Coast study than in similar poor neighbourhoods of the capital, Accra, as reported some years ago [Grieco et al. 1996], probably because this is a smaller city. Peripatetic hawking is widespread, even by children of only 7 or 8 years old, and in Abura the presence of a thriving market and commercial centre encourages such activity. The best sites for hawking are located along busy routes where traffic holdups allow bored drivers to examine traders' wares and negotiate purchases. If the traffic moves, the child hawker must run to complete the purchase – very often the item being sold is moving along with the driver examining it. Although this is also the case for adult hawkers, the dangers are greater for those of small stature and a less experienced eye for potential hazards. There may be other dangers too, in this context, as a local headmaster observed: *"some of these children hawk for their parents thus exposing them to a lot of dangers… rape, abduction, being knocked down by a vehicle"*. However, interviews with children and young people in Abura made little reference to fear of attack. Younger interviewees, especially those below the age of 16, said they were afraid to travel to distant places alone, but this was simply because of the danger of getting lost[4].

By contast, in Ndirande fear of attack was evident. It has already been noted with respect to school journeys, but was also reported in the context of doing chores. Steven, aged 11, related how he was attacked on his way back from market: *"I was chased by dogs which made me to fall and I lost the flour"*. The perceived threat from hooligans or bandits is especially great in the densely vegetated locations where children go to collect firewood for domestic use, up the nearby mountain side.

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[4] This mirrors findings from an earlier study in Ghana [XXX 2002]

In Ngangalizwe, load carrying is a much less prominent topic than in the other two sites, but young people are often expected to make journeys to the city to collect goods and undertake other errands for their mothers (using motorised transport more frequently than in Abura and Ndirande because of greater transport availability). As in the case of travel to school in this neighbourhood, dangers are perceived to be substantial, whether made on foot or by vehicle. Cecilia, 12 years old, sometimes travels into town by minibus taxi with her mother or a friend, but is nervous about traveling alone: *"I don't like traveling alone when I am sent to town to buy things for the house. … The thing I fear about traveling on a minibus taxi is that the drivers propose love to us… I am scared that they might kidnap me or rape me if I am alone in the taxi. … The taxi conductors are very rude. Just because we are girls they talk trash and vulgar language to us. They don't have respect. One time I was traveling with my friend from town and when we were disembarking from the taxi, the conductor touched my friend's back. When we asked him what was his problem he started talking vulgar language to us and the driver was laughing"*.

The case studies indicate some broad similarities in daily mobility challenges faced by young people across the three sites: a preponderance of pedestrian travel for all journeys (necessitated in particular by lack of funds to pay transport fares), absence of regular cycling and the traffic dangers presented by aggressive drivers. However, in the two southern African sites, fear of attack from people clearly presents a very substantial

additional hazard perceived by both boys and girls (unlike Abura). In Abura and Ndirande, load carrying (especially water carrying) presents a substantially stronger component of the mobility story than it does in Ngangelizwe, where sanitation is better and motorized transport more widely available.

The challenges reported in our study neighbourhoods resonate with and extend findings from other studies. Benwell's (2009) research with 6-13 year-olds (apparently living in rather more privileged circumstances) in suburban Cape Town, for instance, points to dogs, baboon troops, snakes, traffic on the streets and fear of strangers as significant factors shaping their outdoor mobility. Gough (2008) comments on long journeys to school on foot in the context of lack of funds for transport fares in Lusaka, the dangers of night travel, and the important links between livelihood and mobility. Research in Accra by Grieco et al., (1996) and by Langevang and Gough (2009) also draws attention to the significance of household work demands. Grieco et al. (1996) emphasise how the activities of the wider family help shape young people's daily mobilities, with patterns not very dissimilar to those we found in Ghana and Malawi, though the need for domestic anchors (people who must stay at home to attend to necessary activities, notably doorstep trading, while key family members are absent) appears less significant in all of our research sites than in Accra. . Our findings not only bring to the fore the fears of both genders regarding harassment and attack (encouraging group travel for safety) in the southern Africa sites, but also put strong emphasis on the many seemingly minor issues which young people clearly feel affect their lives and well-being substantially: aggressive and dangerous drivers who call insults; the splashed uniforms which lead to punishment

or exclusion from school; girls' concerns about 'love proposals'; etc.   The inclusion of child researchers in our study has, we suggest, been valuable in drawing attention to some of the mobility challenges which young people could think will be considered too unimportant or are too embarrassing to raise with adults (also see Porter and Abane 2008).

II Mobility as temptation: city girls and boys in danger?

So far we have focused on the challenges young people report that they face in their everyday mobile lives. But that very mobility and its perceived implications also evokes strong reaction from the communities, households and families in which they live. In our discussions with adult informants the principal theme which emerged was the negative potential of young people's mobility in contexts which adults often perceive to present substantial temptations, i.e. outside daily travel to school or work. Comparison of the temptations, as perceived by adults and young people, across our three urban case study sites, draws attention not only to similarities but also some significant differences.

In Abura, adults perceive undirected mobility to bring young people within range of serious dangers: the term commonly used for mobility in this respect is 'roaming' (a term also noted by Langevang and Gough, in press, in Accra):   roaming the streets, roaming the town, particularly at night. Three separate conversations, from a parent, from a teacher and from a young man no longer in school illustrate different facets of the 'roaming' phenomenon:

*"One will find children **roaming** the streets at night. I think the worst thing [is] this new entertainment centre called Sahara. They go about in the evenings in vehicles with loud speakers announcing their programmes for the night... I overheard them inviting the children"* [female teacher]

*"A lot of the young people here have given birth. They are always **roaming** about – they do not sleep in the evenings. Because of their behaviour I will not allow my family to come and live here with me"*. [Adamu, parent, 31 years]

*"I use my free times to **roam** town, at times watching football or other games... any time I delay in getting to the house my guardian will rain insults on me... and even ask me to go for water about three times before I could be given some food to eat"*. [John, 18 years, out-of-school boy]

The teacher and parent both specifically refer to night-time wanderings. The teacher is concerned that when (presumably innocent) children roam the streets in the dark they will be wooed by unscrupulous adults into unsuitable entertainments, while the parent is more concerned that his own family could be corrupted were they to be exposed to the (by implication) already corrupted, promiscuous young people who populate the city streets at night. The third quotation, from an 18 year old suggests the impatience and resentment of young people with adult concerns around 'roaming' and suggests the enjoyment this presents, despite the punishments which are likely to ensue should he return home late.

Girls may be less exposed to the dangers and temptations of undirected mobility in Abura, since the heavier work loads they are commonly expected to take on, are likely to substantially reduce the free time available for 'roaming'. Nonetheless, parents are keen to ensure they know where their daughters are going, as Faustina reflects:

"My mother had this philosophy that a girl who visits a lot of friends could never turn out as a good cook nor do well academically. She therefore restricted our movements a good deal and because there were not many telephones as we have now, I could not do much networking.... My mothers' restrictions ... helped me concentrate on my education and become a good cook to my children" [Faustina, 29 years].

The fact that Faustina now has children of her own perhaps encourages her positive view of the mobility restrictions she faced.

In Ndirande, many of the temptations associated with moving around the city in Abura were also perceived to be present, both by parents and their children. The temptations offered by video halls and bars, the associated perceived potential to be lured into theft or prostitution, and the particular dangers associated with movements to such venues at night, were all issues raised by parents and their children. Videos are observed to be a temptation encouraging truancy from school and are commonly out of bounds: *'we are not allowed to go and watch films at video halls'* [Focus Group Discussion, secondary school girls]. Bars, however, appear to be regarded as the most potent temptation for young people here; there was particular comment and a clear frisson of danger associated with one bar, 'Baghdad'. The girls below observe their parents' concern that being seen at Baghdad would impact on their reputation:

"... [parents] refuse to let us go to places like 'Baghdad' ... it's a bar and lots of girls go there for promiscuous acts... a neighbour sent me [there] to buy beer for him... I didn't tell [my parents]". [FGD, secondary school girls]

"Parents have concerns that should their daughter frequent such places then chances are high she can turn into commercial sex work....Baghdad, that is a place which no one in his rightful senses would go to... almost all girls who go there are commercial sex workers so what would you do there if you are not one of them". [FGD girls 13-18 years not in school]

The observation below, however, indicates precisely why bars like this offer such excitement to the groups of young men who move around the city at night:

"Mostly I like hanging out at a popular drinking joint called 'Chief Abiola' [and] I chat till 11 pm.. and at Baghdad. ... [it is not dangerous to be moving at such a late hour] because most of the times we move in [a] group. There is a lot of peer influences [from] the movies and the great mixture of people of different cultures and customs" [Lister, out- of-school boy, 18 years]

Parents appear to be similarly concerned about young people's undirected movements on the streets of Ngangelizwe. As one elderly man observed of his grandchildren, *"[they play] inside the house or compound, not on the streets. I do not want my children to get all the unnecessary influences on the streets"* [grandfather caring for two children]. However, with shops close by in the area, water taps in many yards (though not

necessarily always operating), some parts with electricity and transport available (if costly), there is perhaps less justification for young people to spend long periods 'roaming' the street. In Ngangalizwe, as in Abura, adult perceptions of the temptations of the street for girls commonly focus on unwanted pregnancies: *"There are some girls who are getting pregnant at an early age …. They are allowed to go anywhere they feel like and the end result is pregnancy"*. [father caring for son and niece]. Unconstrained mobility is frequently identified as the route to disaster for girls, whether through walking the streets, where they may be attacked and robbed or raped, in motorised transport, or through encounters with so-called 'sugar daddies' – older men with money (Dunkle et al. 2007). The high incidence of rape is a serious problem in Eastern Cape, not least in the context of HIV risk in the region (Wood et al. 2007). The taxi rank and associated taxis are identified as specific spaces where dangerous encounters may take place, as one taxi driver himself observed: *"Girls are actually dating these drivers. They [drivers] promise them money. It is shocking as you will see a 16-year old girl having an affair with a taxi driver. Some of these girls they dodge school to spend time with their taxi driver boyfriends"*. [Taxi driver, c. 40 years, parent of 3].

For boys, Ngangalizwe's streets offer other temptations: *"The young children might end up accepting sweets and anything from strangers and this is how our children go missing…… It is very tough here. I will praise God if my children do not fall into the temptations of this society. Girls are getting pregnant and boys are stealing and turning into crime"*. [50 year old household head, mother of 2 girls, 1 boy]. Since *"boys don't do much in the house"* [Oyena, 17 year old boy], there is perhaps a substantial potential

boredom factor among young men which encourages them to frequent the streets, despite the high criminality reported by respondents of all ages. A 17 year old boy (who says he dropped out of school because he was hooked on dagga), spends his days with his friends on the street and earns an income operating there: *"[yesterday] I left my home to join my friends, we sat and chat[ted] and we just moved up and down the streets. I then go to deliver the dagga to our customers"* [John, 17 years]. This is the type of activity which concerns so many parents of boys: outright bans on movement without permission are common in Ngangelizwe. Inevitably, however, there are times when boys and young men, especially, are tempted to travel: "*Sometimes I have to lie because if I tell her the truth she will say I must not go*". [David, 12 years]. Night time emerges, as in Abura and Ndirande, as the period perceived to be most likely to present temptations: " *my mother tells me that I shouldn't hang around with the boys who smoke drugs and drink because they do bad things at night…. My mother says that if I start hanging around with the boys who do bad stuff I will go to jail and she will stop me from going to school*"[Thami, boy, 15 years]. Similar fears and associated warnings were repeated in most of the interviews with parents and their children throughout Ngangelizwe.

Comparison of the potential temptations and other dangers identified in interviews in each of the three cities suggests that, in the case of girls, perceptions of promiscuity, damaged reputations and unwanted pregnancy are key concerns and influence the behaviour of both parents and daughters, as they also did in Lusaka (Gough 2008). This fear is heightened by the high incidence of HIV/AIDS, especially in Ngangalizwe and Ndirande. Girls –particularly after puberty- are more likely than boys to experience

sustained surveillance by anxious parents, an issue discussed in more detail below. Boys are generally allowed more freedom of movement than girls in all three city contexts (again, as in Lusaka, Gough ibid.), but appear to be equally open to both temptation and unprovoked dangers of accident and attack. So far as boys are concerned, the dangers raised by parents and their children in discussion in Abura seem to revolve around boys tempted by videos, drinking and promiscuity. In Ndirande and Ngangelizwe, however, there are strong additional fears associated with the incidence of crime and drugs which are perceived to increase the likelihood of unprovoked attack.

One aspect of mobility as temptation which may need further reflection is the impact of mode of transport. In most cases (despite the varying size of the cities concerned), the mobility under discussion is clearly pedestrian, though the role of taxi driver 'sugar daddies' was raised in Ngangelizwe. As noted above, lacking resources, the majority of journeys made by young people in all our study sites are on foot. However, in our survey research, where we asked young people what they liked and disliked about the forms of transport they used, the attractions of motor-mobility were raised by many. The twin thrills of speed and music are apparent, though it is speed and the thrill of speed which is overwhelmingly the most commonly noted attribute of motor vehicles. In Ndirande, for instance, 60% of young people said they liked traveling by minibus if/when they had the opportunity because of speed and its associated thrills.

III Controlling young people's mobility in the city

In all three cities, as we have seen, both adults and young people associate a range of temptations and dangers with young people's mobility. Many adults with young people in their care, perhaps unsurprisingly, feel it necessary to impose careful surveillance, control and constraint, as we discuss in further detail in this section. Nonetheless, adult perceptions of mobility among young people are often ambiguous. On the one hand mobility may be perceived to be positive, where it is about accessing services such as education and health care, or about assisting household production and reproduction. On the other hand mobility is associated with potentially disruptive and destructive behaviour which may bring shame or loss to the family or neighbourhood. Since the freedom to be mobile can be viewed as an expression of power (Sheller and Urry 2006), young people's mobility performances on the street may cause unease among elders, and a tension in inter-generational relations that is likely to impact back on the young in the form of mobility constraints and place-related exclusion zones. Having illustrated individual city contexts in some detail in the preceding sections, we can now draw broad comparisons across the three neighbourhoods with reference to adult responses to specific local dangers.

From the tone of many of our interviews with parents and other adult key informants, across all three sites, it is clear that the adult view of *acceptable mobility* among young people is that which comprises purposeful travel to acceptable destinations in a small group of one gender, in daytime. Where adults have loads which need carrying (as in Abura) young people's mobility is especially acceptable because it is often crucial to household survival. Travel within a small group is perceived to confer protection from

attack and to reduce the likely potential for, and uptake of, temptation. The adult view of *unacceptable mobility* among young people by contrast includes individual loitering 'with intent', and movement in large gangs or in mixed gender groups, especially at night.

Specific urban spaces may be perceived by adults and those in authority to be appropriate or inappropriate places for young people to move to and pass through, in some cases depending on gender. Markets tend to be perceived as appropriate spaces for girls, for instance, but lorry parks (a common venue for prostitutes) are not. There appears to be little variation across the three sites in this respect: appropriate spaces are routes to and locations of productive work or socially approved play and recreation (church, in particular) in daylight hours; inappropriate spaces are locations where drinking, promiscuity, pornographic media and other negative influences may be encountered, especially (but not only) after dark: video houses, bars, disreputable neighbours, houses where the young are 'badly behaved', the house of a friend of the opposite sex, streets at night, night parties such as weddings and dances, discos, [for younger children] playing by tarmac roads or rivers.

Our interview data shows that adults attempt surveillance and control of the mobility of young people in their care through a wide range of strategies, among which the most typical, across all three sites, include eliciting reports from neighbours and siblings, encouraging travel in small groups, specifying out-of-bounds spaces, warning of potential natural and supernatural threats, stipulating threats which will be imposed following late

return, imposing extra household tasks following late return, denying food following late return and, in some cases, giving beatings and even excluding the young person from home. Occasionally, particularly in Ngangelizwe, the ultimate threat seems that of being sent back to the village: "*If I disobey my mother [as to where I go] she will beat me or send me to the rural areas of which I don't want*" [Cecilia, 12 years].   This suggests perceptions of the village as a haven from the city's moral decay, which would accord with Lee's (2004) observations regarding first generation migrants in Cape Town and with comments in our other urban sites. As a father with 10 children in Ndirande observed, "*What is happening here is different from what would happen if we were in the village. Here are many places that he can sneak to instead of going to school and nobody cares. While in the village… a child's misdemeanours are easily reported to parents because people take up the responsibility of raising up each other's child'*".

Fear appears to be a key component utilized by adults to constrain young people's mobility in all sites. We suggest there may be two aspects to this: firstly, the immediate fear of parental disapproval and associated punishments; secondly, fears of supernatural dangers and witchcraft which may be raised or heightened by adult suggestion and/or community rumour. We put forward this latter idea - that adults may sometimes harness the supernatural as a strategy to constrain potentially wayward young people – somewhat tentatively. However, a selection of observations made across the three sites indicates the way young people's mobility can be constrained by fear of supernatural elements. Given adult concerns for their young people it seems feasible that supernatural threats are used

on occasion as a supplement to more concrete dangers in order to constrain mobility to safer spaces:

"Nowadays it's a little scary walking round this neighbourhood in the evenings because there are ritual murderers around. ... I told my mum that I was going for choir practice in the evening and my mum told me not to go since there was a wake-keeping in the area. ... when I got home [she] was very angry" [Emma, 18 years, Abura]

 "We are told some people carry coffins in their cars and when we see the coffins our spirits are taken away and we will die after three days" [Akua, 14 years, Abura]

 "We lost our first born mysteriously and it was later agreed that we [children] should not go home [to Dedza] for fear of being bewitched" [Mary, 18 years, Ndirande]

"You don't want your child taken advantage of by criminals and witches. Children are being abducted these days and the chance of a girl being taken away is more than that of a boy." [Father caring for two children, Ngangelizwe]

As we observed above, girls are more likely than boys to experience sustained surveillance by anxious parents, especially after puberty, despite the fact that boys generally appear to be equally open to temptation and to unprovoked dangers of accident and attack. Fathers, in particular, tended to express strong concerns about the movements of their daughters in the city. The following comment from a father of two in Ngangalizwe focuses on their vulnerability: *"Girls should not just go anywhere unless they have been sent because there are places that are too risky for a girl to be walking alone. About 5 months ago a girl was found raped and her throat slit, which makes you very wary ... at least boys can run away but girls are too scared, they will even be afraid*

to run away". However, the remark made by a father of ten children in Ndirande encapsulates a common attitude among fathers (and some mothers) in all sites that girls' potential promiscuity is also an ever-present threat: *"to raise a girl child properly, you need to have a keen eye on her always".* This leads to more specific constraints on girls' than boys' mobility, especially after dark: *"I do not feel comfortable to be letting girls be mobile and coming home late"* [Father of 2, Ndirande]. Rose, an out-of –school 18 year old in the same city expressed some frustration with the restrictions imposed, but also recognised the reasoning behind them: "*[my parents] need to monitor every step that I make. My movements are strictly monitored at home… perhaps because I am the last born and so dear to them*".   Inevitably, however, sustained surveillance is likely to evoke resentment, especially when male siblings are not subject to the same restrictions:

"Boys can even come home very late at night but not us. .. Parents always doubt our movements. They fear we might get pregnant… [if we are late] parents shout at us, we are not allowed to enter the house, we are whipped by our guardians" [FGD out of school girls, 16-18 years, Ndirande]. In Abura and Ngangelizwe we met less expressed resentment among girls of the differential treatment of boys, by comparison with Ndirande. Perhaps in the Abura case this is because girls have limited opportunity to move undirected around the city, being kept extremely busy with work in the house (since household work loads, as discussed above, are very substantial).   In the Ngangalizwe case, possibly because young people themselves perceive the streets to be so dangerous, many girls lack a strong desire to travel alone or unsupervised.

Conclusion: Africa's urban 'youthscapes' in an increasingly mobile world

Our aim in this paper has been to explore how positive and negative images of mobile young people resident in poor urban neighbourhoods in Africa play out in terms of the inter-generational frictions and negotiations generated by their mobility performances, drawing comparisons across three diverse city contexts. We have also reflected on the developmental consequences of mobility achieved and mobility frustrated, in terms of young people's access to services and income and their participation in the social networks and peer culture which may shape their life trajectories. This has required us to consider how factors such as gender and age intersect with specific conditions (local economy, transport provision, and cultural context, including inter-generational relations) in the three city locations to mediate young people's mobility experiences. Substantial qualitative and quantitative data sets and the comparative component of our research have enabled us to build significantly on the relatively few studies of young people's mobility available to date for urban Africa.

Discussion around three themes has been utilized to explore these issues: mobility as challenge, mobility as temptation, and mobility control. In the discourses around mobility presented by young people in the three poor urban neighbourhoods, two strands have emerged strongly, one which centres around fear and the other which centres around thrill and temptation. Fears of supernatural dangers and witchcraft, traffic, guard/stray dogs, rape, theft, mugging, hijack, all help to constrain movement of both genders (though the precise nature of the threat varies across the three study sites). On the other hand, young people also associate mobility with the thrill and excitement of new places, new people, new experiences, perhaps a transformed personal identity – what Lee (2004)

refers to as mobility 'worn with flair'. This seems to be especially the case with those at or beyond puberty in Ndirande and Ngangelizwe. Mobility becomes conceived as a route to opportunity and freedom, including sexual freedom: a means of opening up interstitial spaces beyond surveillance and possibly outside conventional norms of behaviour (as perceived by parents and authority). Motor-mobility (as opposed to walking) offers particular advantages, the thrills of speed, music and an opportunity to reach places at least less accessible to surveillance by parents and their potential informants. For the majority of our respondents, however, especially in Abura and Ndirande, the cost of fares strictly limits such opportunities.

Adult discourse, by contrast, is mostly negative in all three sites, with a strong focus on the dangers of mobility. Among adults, in particular, as we have seen, city freedoms are contrasted with the benefits of village surveillance and concern. In poorer neighbourhoods, where recent migrants tend to congregate, the opportunity for parents to enlist local community members as informants to keep an eye on their children may be especially restricted, if neighbours are unknown new residents. Inevitably, inter-generational tensions arise in the face of these rather different mobility discourses which young people and their parents present. Carers' fears, shaped not least by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, poverty, and the incidence of rape, violence and transactional sex have combined to create moral panic. Parents who feel disempowered in their efforts to maintain a duty of care in the city, frequently resort to specifying a range of mobility restrictions, place-related exclusions and associated threats. These are often particularly firmly imposed on girls, and commonly presented within a parental discourse around

girls' and women's vulnerability and need of protection. However, this discourse is embedded in gendered power hierarchies which inevitably help shape the narrative of mobility meanings (Cresswell and Uteng 2008, Porter in press). Young people in turn may feel disempowered and resentful of parental constraints. Since direct contestation and conflict over movement and access to forbidden spaces is restrained by the skewed power relations which shape interactions between young people and their elders, young people in all three sites commonly look for ways to circumvent parental and family rules and restrictions rather than displaying overt disobedience to adult authority.

In achieving this aim, a new weapon has recently come to their aid: the cell phone. The virtual mobility offered by the mobile phone [for planning journeys, organizing clandestine meetings, assessing destination potential] presents a particularly potent tool in the repertoire of obfuscation and circumvention and one which is becoming increasingly available to young people in Africa. Our survey data indicates that in Malawi 22% of the urban young people surveyed had used a cell phone in the previous week; in Ghana the respective figure was 36% and in South Africa 67%. The majority of use in all three contexts was social contact with friends and family. The cell phone clearly presents a new factor in the youth mobility nexus: its implication for young people's struggles towards acquisition of autonomy and new identities and its broader impacts are only beginning to emerge (Porter et al., forthcoming).

Shades of the cosmopolitanism described by Ferguson (1999) in Zambia's Copper Belt towns are evident, to varying degrees, among young people in each of our study sites, and

encapsulate adult concerns – young men and women parading down the street in 'flashy' clothes and expensive trainers, dagga smokers lurking in bushes and hanging round street corners, frequenters of dubious video establishments where pornographic or violent films are on show, noisy groups of young people in clusters outside bars where the music is loud and non-traditional, girls touring the streets in their sugar-daddy's car, wielding expensive mobile phones, etc. But while many young people may toy with the possibilities offered by such ideas and identities, and cellphones or motor-mobility may enable them to experiment in places away from adult surveillance, our data suggests the majority of mobility among young people in poor neighbourhoods in all three urban sites takes a very different form, in which walking, 'respectful' comportment on the streets, and (especially in the southern African study sites) diversionary tactics to avoid difficult people and places where encounters with thugs, thieves and other undesirables may occur, are dominant features, especially insofar as girls and younger children are concerned. This accords closely with Langevang's (2008: 240) observations of young men in Accra, who 'do not occupy the street in order to deliberately provoke…. Rather, their acts may be seen as everyday mundane strategies for survival'. In the neighbourhoods which we researched, much movement of young people is directed simply towards getting by in the city: above all, family livelihood maintenance. The cost of motorised transport is one among a complex set of factors which tend to limit schooling beyond primary level, especially for girls, and also helps reduce the potential to make subsequent job searches (and the social contacts so often necessary to secure work) beyond the local neighbourhood (also observed by Gough, 2008, in Lusaka). The realities of life in the everyday are harsh, especially since mobility is often not merely

severely constrained but a source of inter-generational dispute: the broader consequences for young people's livelihood trajectories are inevitably substantial.

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