MANAGING UNCERTAINTY THROUGH MOBILE TELEPHONY IN AN AFRICAN TOWN: Tracing the social implications of the mobile phone in Buea

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This thesis examines ways in which mobile telephony is influencing daily life in the small Anglophone Cameroonian town of Buea. It argues that current scholarly and media attention to economic parameters in interpreting mobile telephony’s implication for Africa (see Jonathan Donner, 2005) is fundamentally flawed – not merely because this approach to the phone’s presence in Africa creates an artificial uniformity in mobile telephony’s effect on the continent, but because it circumscribes the implication of the phone for African societies. The paper further argues that to grasp any technology’s meaning for society, a thorough understanding of that technology’s comprehensive influence on people’s daily lives and people’s interpretation of it is imperative. Such understanding is only possible when not only the context into which the phone was introduced, but the historical basis of that context is investigated, because that which drives motivation for mobile phone uptake is not a desire for communication but a desire for access to opportunities or a means to meet established needs. And those needs are defined by people’s circumstances, circumstances that derive from both the society’s past and its present. As such, it is not universal, but local considerations that ultimately drive uptake and use of mobile telephony. The paper also postulates that because of mobile telephony’s ability to reflect what people need by how they use it, the mobile phone can be seen as an expressive medium – a technology that directly expresses the needs of people and thereby one whose use ultimately reflects the hopes and desires of individuals and societies.

It is within this conceptual framework that mobile telephony in Buea is studied in this work through which the influence of mobile telephony on people’s daily lives as well as people’s interpretation of it is read.
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines ways in which mobile telephony is influencing daily life in the small Anglophone Cameroonian town of Buea. It argues that current scholarly and media attention to economic parameters in interpreting mobile telephony’s implication for Africa (see Jonathan Donner, 2005) is fundamentally flawed – not merely because this approach to the phone’s presence in Africa creates an artificial uniformity in mobile telephony’s effect on the continent, but because it circumscribes the implication of the phone for African societies. The paper further argues that to grasp any technology’s meaning for society, a thorough understanding of that technology’s comprehensive influence on people’s daily lives and people’s interpretation of it is imperative. Such understanding is only possible when not only the context into which the phone was introduced, but the historical basis of that context is investigated, because that which drives motivation for mobile phone uptake is not a desire for communication but a desire for access to opportunities or a means to meet established needs. And those needs are defined by people’s circumstances, circumstances that derive from both the society’s past and its present. As such, it is not universal, but local considerations that ultimately drive uptake and use of mobile telephony. The paper also postulates that because of mobile telephony's ability to reflect what people need by how they use it, the mobile phone can be seen as an expressive medium – a technology that directly expresses the needs of people and thereby one whose use ultimately reflects the hopes and desires of individuals and societies.

It is within this conceptual framework that mobile telephony in Buea is studied in this work... through which the influence of mobile telephony on people’s daily lives as well as people’s interpretation of it is read.
CHAPTER ONE

1:1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines ways in which mobile telephony is influencing and interacting with social life in the small Anglophone Cameroonian town of Buea - taking as its units of analysis (and observation) persons from four different social groups and sub-groups (namely youths; professionals; members of family-households; and visually impaired (blind) persons). Using a combination of non-probability sampling techniques and methods of observation, the research focuses on the mobile phone's influence on people's daily (social) life and on how the technology is being shaped by users.

While the mobile phone is an ubiquitous technology (Goggin, G, 2006) that has so interlaced with everyday activities as to demand an all-encompassing examination of its implication for people's lives, much of the literature on its emergence in Africa has been confined to a marked preoccupation with economic parameters. Jonathan Donner has pointed out, for instance, that "the study of mobile telephony in Africa in general has been superficial and largely concerned with determinants of mobile phone adoption in Africa or impact of mobile phone use on macro economies (GDP and mobile penetration) and on small businesses." (Donner, J, 2005) Such preoccupation with economic explanations... such wholesale adoption of economic parameters as measurement of the phone’s significance for Africa by media analysts, policy makers and scholars is that which has contributed to the urgent necessity for a concerted examination of the technology’s meaning for Africa. On the other hand, given the relevance of technology in contemporary 'modernist' development think and considering technology’s demonstrable impact on the fortunes of peoples and societies, this embrace of economic parameters in explaining the technology's implication for the continent may well be conditioned. Indeed, one need not search too deeply to find examples of the pivotal role technology plays in development. Take the UN’s 2001 Human Development Report for instance. The report states that,
"the 20th century's unprecedented gains in advancing human development and eradicating poverty came largely from technological breakthroughs. In the late 1930s, mortality rates began to decline rapidly in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and by the 1970s life expectancy at birth had increased to more than 60 years. In Europe that same gain took more than a century and a half starting in the early 1800s. The rapid gains of the 20th century were propelled by medical technology—antibiotics and vaccines—while progress in the 19th century depended on slower social and economic changes, such as better sanitation and diets. The reduction in undernutrition in South Asia from around 40% in the 1970s to 23% in 1997—and the end of chronic famine—was made possible by technological breakthroughs in plant breeding, fertilizers and pesticides in the 1960s that doubled world cereal yields in just 40 years. That is an astonishingly short period relative to the 1,000 years it took for English wheat yields to quadruple from 0.5 to 2.0 tones per hectare. These examples show how technology can cause discontinuous change" (UNHDR, 2001)

There is thence good reason for any technological innovation, whether in Africa or elsewhere - but especially in Africa - to be embraced and touted. Since knowledge-producing technologies such as new ICTs are taking centre stage in current development discourses, the popularity of the neo-liberal take on the rise of mobile telephony in Africa makes good sense. Knowledge-producing technologies are much in vogue today because knowledge is perceived by scholars and paradigm-shaping institutions as the current driver of development. Yunkap Kwankam and Ntomambang Ningo of the University of Yaounde have submitted that knowledge is the present bona fide phase of development. They state in their paper 'Information Technology in Africa: A Proactive Approach and the Prospects of Leapfrogging Decades in the Development Process' that "in the continuum of human development five overlapping phases can be identified: the nomadic/agrarian, agrarian, industrial, service, and knowledge" (Kwankam, S. Yunkap and Ningo, N. Ntomambang , 1997, pg 1), setting knowledge thus in the centre of the development debate. The World Bank adds to this perspective, asserting in its 1998/99 World Development Report, that "Forty years ago, Ghana and the Republic of Korea had virtually the same income per capita. By the early 1990s Korea's income per capita was six times higher than
Ghana’s. Some reckon that half of the difference is due to Korea’s greater success in acquiring and using knowledge.” Charles Okigbe, on his part, argues that “the primary factor in development is the creation and management of knowledge,” for “poor and rich countries differ not so much in their wealth of physical capital or natural resources as in their ability to create and manage knowledge.” Since, like Okigbe, other influential voices (amongst them Lauritz B. Holm-Nielsen (2002), Waverman and Mershi (2005), Villet and Frazer (2004), Opoku and Deane (1997) to name a few) propose that knowledge is obtainable only through communication, and that “virtually all major global organizations, including the United Nations through some of its major agencies, bilateral and even national governments, notably the group of 8 most industrialized countries… are extolling the virtues of new information and communication technologies as ‘harbingers of prosperity’ (Ebam Etta, 2005), the mobile phone’s association with economic development has been inevitable. Considering too that until the advent of the mobile phone no technological innovation, not even the internet had shown signs of closing the digital divide between Africa and the industrialized world, the optimistic and enthusiastic reception of the mobile phone’s reach within Africa has had credence indeed. Yet, it is this speedy reach of the mobile phone within Africa… this sudden proliferation of the technology in a continent not accustomed to such innovations, that has showcased the limitations of the preoccupation with economic parameters and underscored the need for a comprehensive study of the social implications (if not ramifications) of the emergence of the technology in the continent. Then again, understanding the social implication of mobile telephony for African societies was not the initial motivation for this study. If anything, the initial motivation for considering the topic was totally in line with current mainstream thinking.

1:2 BACKGROUND

Not to adulterate the truth, it is fair to say that neither the novelty of a new technological innovation in Africa, nor the unexpected speed of uptake of that technology in the continent initially prodded my
interest in mobile telephony in Africa. What drew my attention was the paradox of the phone’s uptake in Africa at a time when the continent's nation-states were experiencing continuous economic stagnation (see Rhett Butler www.mongabay.com; Nigel Scot and Tim Kelly www.commissionforafrica.org; Vodafone report, 2005). The question for me was: Does this speedy adoption and appropriation of the mobile phone signify the beginnings of an exodus from economic insecurity and poverty for the African masses?

As can be seen, my thinking was in line with the prevailing school of thought. Yet, it was this general preoccupation with economic parameters and the superficially positive reports on the device's presence in Africa that first caused a rethink on my part of my initial motivation. A final shift in focus occurred when scientific figures and the actual extent of the reach of the phone in Africa - especially against the backdrop of the dearth of literature on mobile telephony in Africa - dawned on me. To take only two such reports, the ITU (International Telecommunication Union) 2001 Year Report stated that the year 2001 saw Africa become "the first region where the number of mobile subscribers exceeded those using fixed lines."(ITU, 2001), while details released by the London Business School (as part of a larger March 2005 study conducted by telecom company Vodafone) showed that not only did "Sub-Saharan Africa [grow] 67% last year compared with 10% in W. Europe", or that "there were more new mobile phone customers in Africa than in North America"( Vodafone Report, 2005), but that Africa was the fastest growing region in the world for mobile phones in that year. A record which still remain today.

These are staggering facts and figures for a continent where only five years prior to the emergence of the mobile phone the majority of its population "had never made a phone call before in their lives"... a continent where even older more mainstream communication technologies such as the TV and the radio had remained the province of urban, mostly elite Africans(Eribo, F, 2004). With incontestable facts such as the above, circumscribing the implication of the mobile phone's speedy reach in Africa or consigning its implication for the 'man on the street'(for his daily routine, his social life, his way of doing things, way of thinking, acting, etc) to a neatly packaged theoretical
compartment was clearly untenable. Evidently there were... had to be complex dynamics unfolding within societies and in people's lives that demanded thorough analysis. Already advanced countries such as Australia, whose populace had moved comparatively seamlessly from one technology to the other, were taking such dynamics seriously. For example, the Australian Mobile Telecommunication Association (AMTA) as recently as 2004 requested that the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia facilitate the development of a research agenda "to assess the impact of the mobile phone on Australian society and institutions", stating that "too little is known about the impact of the mobile telephone on the people and institutions of Australia.'(AMTA, 2004)

Australia has not been the only country whose institutions and scholars have been acknowledging the value of understanding the social implication of the mobile phone for their societies. From James Katz to Sadie Plant, from Horst and Miller to Gerard Goggin, scholars across Asia, the Americas, Europe and Australia have been taking up studies on the mobile phone's impact on their societies. Africa has hardly been mentioned, let alone given extensive treatment in these works. Where it has, the same preoccupation with economic development has been the case, aside from the fact that the continent has routinely been mentioned within the framework of the larger 'developing' world(Donner, J 2004).

Not until recently did there appear some light in the tunnel for scholarly work on the implications of the phone for Africa. Recently, I came in contact with some of these works. One of them, by Daniel Jordan Smith(Jordan Smith, D, 2006), turned out of particular interest to me not merely because of its focus on "Cell phones, social inequality and contemporary culture in Nigeria," but because the extent to which the social landscape of much of Southern Nigeria which it explores mirrors the social landscape of Anglophone Cameroon - location of this study - is inescapable. Unlike my work, however, Jordan-Smith's work does not propose a customized approach to the study of mobile telephony in society, and as such may or may not engender debate beyond its core argument. It is therefore the hope here that this thesis will not only serve as an addition to the small but growing crop of literature on mobile telephony's implication for social life in Africa or a useful
1:3 BUEA: CONTEXTUALISING FIELDWORK LOCATION

The choice for Anglophone Cameroon 's Buea as research location for the present study was at first circumscribed - the initial preference having been for Bamenda, capital of Anglophone Cameroon 's North West province. The option for Bamenda stemmed from two sets of motivations - one personal, the other analytical. Personally, it was the fact that Bamenda represented the capital of my ancestral province in Cameroon, and analytically the fact that mobile telephony appeared to have heavily penetrated the town, as well as because of the nature of society in Bamenda: Agrarian, hierarchical, and culturally dynamic, its social make up promised much exciting data for the study. The choice for Bamenda, however, changed due to non-academic reasons, and the location became Buea - a decision which later proved propitious.

Buea is the headquarters of the South West province of Cameroon. A former administrative capital of the then West Cameroon, it has remained a largely civil servant's town. This administrative characteristic of the town has, over the decades (since the German colonial period(Ngoh V,J, 1987 ), drawn into its orbit peoples from different ethnic groups and background - mainly professionals and political executives(Ngoh V,J, 1987, Mbuagbaw, 1987). Home to the only fully accredited university in English-speaking Cameroon, it has a huge student body, yet the influx of hawkers, petty businesses and other activities that the student presence has brought to Buea has not completely shaken off the town's elitist aura, nor doffed its reputation as home to high-brow professionals and intellectuals. The indigenes of the town are the Bakweris. While most of the Bakweris in Buea live in surrounding villages, many urban Bakweris have family homes in the town. And though the energy and aura of the town has rubbed on them, the Bakweris still remain distinguishable, especially through their language (Mokpwe) and their culture, from the non-indigenes who began coming into the town for government or other employment reasons during the 19th century German colonial period.
A once quiet little town at the foot of Mount Cameroon (West Africa's highest mountain), boasting possibly no more than 30,000 people, Buea has grown since the advent of the university into a vibrant metropolis of 64,372 people. Yet this growth is no measure for the speed with which the mobile phone has taken up residence in the town. A 2007 ITU report submits that 0.2% of Cameroonians subscribed to a mobile phone in 1998. By 2005 this percentage had risen to 12%. In 2006 over 14% percent of Cameroonians were subscribers (Business Wire, 2007; Research and Markets.com, 2007). In less than 10 years, thus, over 200,000 of Cameroon's 16.9 million people had become mobile phone subscribers, compared to the 0.8 percent of the population that had access to landline connection in the country - fifty or more years after the introduction of landline technology into the country. In light of these facts and figures, and of the insistent dearth of information on what this proliferation of mobile telephony means for social life and social interaction in Buea, this thesis will investigate the following question:

How is mobile telephony influencing people daily (social) life in Buea and how are people in Buea shaping and interpreting the phone?

In its effort to provide answers to this question, the thesis will take a step by step approach, whereby it will examine different sub questions designed to address various angles of the central. The sub questions are:

1 What are the deeper socio-cultural considerations that inform mobile phone adoption or uptake in Buea?... How can the phone's proliferation in the town be explained?

2 What meaning are people putting to the mobile phone, and what is the motivation and drive behind their interpretation and use of it?

3 Is the phone influencing people's attitude, views, ways of doing things, relationships... life? If so, how? If not, how can that be explained?

There may be overlaps in the tackling of these questions, but they work still to steer the thesis to its final conclusion. Furthermore, the
questions are examined within the overarching analytical framework defined in the abstract of the thesis. To reiterate, therefore, the research problematic is guided by the hypothesis that the manner in which mobile telephony influences and is shaped by society is subject to both the context into which it was introduced and the historical basis of that context, the case being so because that which drives motivation for mobile phone uptake and use is desire for access to opportunities; and this desire is a reflection of people’s circumstances, which conversely are the product of society’s past(history) and present. It is also read from the understanding that mobile telephony must be understood as an expressive medium that exposes the state of a society’s needs and hopes.

Though there are ample bibliographical references and quotations to provide for opportunities to test, refer, compare and analyse assertions and assumptions made in this text, there is still need for sampling the state of the debate in the field. This both positions the work within the context of literature already in the field and makes for a more convincing case for the perspective of the work. Secondly it is useful in:

1) - allowing a glimpse into the dominant wisdom regarding mobile telephony in Africa, and as such exposing the limitations of that wisdom; 2) - revealing the urgency and relevance of investigating the social implication of mobile telephony for a people, 3) making for an appreciation of the emerging perspectives of the technology’s presence in the continent, and 4) underscoring the dearth, if not lack, of theoretical propositions regarding the study of mobile telephony in Africa.

I have selected some literature in the field (mainly scholarly, but with some exceptions) which are by no means exhaustive, but do represent three different approaches or perspectives to the study of mobile telephony in Africa and beyond. They have been presented here in categories that identify their schools of thought. The first category represents the majority of works on mobile telephony in Africa today. It is titled: The Economic Approach. The second category is The Social Approach. This category presents works on the social impact of mobile
telephony in societies worldwide. The third category, christened here The new African Scholarship discusses the beginning phase of works on the social consequences of mobile telephony in Africa. For each category, I discuss a maximum of two articles or books, thought there may be some exceptions as in the case of the third category. The works I look at include: The Vodafone commissioned Report of 2005; Online’s Business Week (issue 24/09/07); volumes by James Katz, Daniel Miller and Heather Horst, and publications by Daniel Jordan Smith and Francis Nyamnjoh. There is some mention of Ebenezer Obadare’s "Playing Politics with the Mobile Phone in Nigeria "

1:4 SECTION TWO: EXISTING LITERATURE

1:4a CATEGORY 1: THE ECONOMIC APPROACH

A1- VODAFONE COMISSIONED REPORT: IMPACT OF Mobile phone in Africa

In 2004, Vodafone commissioned seven researchers to carry out a study on the social and economic impact of mobile telephones in Africa. The result became the 2005 'IMPACT OF Mobile phone in Africa' report, made up of four different documents: namely 1) Impact of Telecoms on Economic Growth in Developing Countries, and 2) Africa & The Impact of Mobile Phones (March 2005); 3) the Relationship between Mobile Telecommunications Infrastructure and FDI in Africa (February 2005), 4) Mobile Communications in South Africa, Tanzania and Egypt. The first two were carried out by Leonard Waverman, Meloria Mershi, and Melvin Fuss; the third report by Mark Williams; and the fourth report by Jonathan Samuel, Niraj Shah, and Wenona Hadingham.

The aim of the research, as stated above, was to source the social and economic impact of the phone in Africa. What, however, resulted was a seventy-one page volume on the economic significance of the phone in Africa. There is some justification to the tone of the report considering that the report was commissioned by the mobile phone giant Vodafone- a fact which leaves room to expect an absence of the necessary academic strictures such as complete objectivity. Then again
the report is the work of scholars and, regarding its usefulness for this thesis, one of the few extensive analysis of the implication of mobile telephony for Africa. Let us now take the reports of the study one at a time.

In the first two reports of the study by Waverman, Meschi and Fuss: **The Impact of Telecoms on Economic Growth in Developing Countries, Africa and The Impact of Mobile Phones**, the writers tell us that data taken between the years 1996 to 2003 reveal that in this period developing countries that boasted an average of 10 more mobile phones per 100 enjoyed per capita GDP growth that was 0.59 percent higher than an otherwise identical country. They describe the increased value of the mobile phone vis-a-vis the poor performance of other forms of communication such as postal systems, roads and fixed-line phones. Furthermore, they argue that mobile telephony provides a point of contact and enables users to participate in the economic system, especially since many people who cannot afford to own a mobile themselves can access mobile services through informal sharing with family and friends or through community phone shops.

In the third report - **The Relationship between Mobile Telecommunications Infrastructure and FDI in Africa**, Mark William illustrates how fixed and mobile communications networks, in addition to the openness of the economy, the level of GDP and other infrastructure, are positively linked with Foreign Direct Investment (FDI); while the fourth report by Samuel, Shah and Hadingham - **Mobile Communications in South Africa, Tanzania and Egypt: Results from Community and Business Surveys**, report that mobiles spare people who are living in rural communities the financial costs and time involved with travel, and that "85 percent of people in Tanzania and 79 percent in South Africa" have had their relationship and contact with family and friends improved. And as for business persons, the study states that business people detail even more stark contrasts in their before-and-after-the-mobile-phone stories. For instance over 85 percent of small businesses run by black individuals in South Africa rely solely on a mobile phone for telecommunications, while 62 percent of small businesses in South Africa and 59 percent in Egypt say they increased their profits as a result of the mobile phone. Additionally, the study
show the potentiality of the phone to assist in job search, business
and training opportunities.

These points in a nutshell describe the thrust of the findings. While
this is not an attempt to review these reports, they are for the
purpose of this thesis particularly significant in exposing the
limitations of the study’s preoccupation with economic parameters in
attempting to explain the implication of the mobile phone for African
societies. Let’s start, for instance, with determinants of mobile phone
uptake as proposed by Diane Coyle, the study’s introducer. Coyle
explains that the rapid diffusion of mobile telephony in Africa is the
result of ‘shorter payback period on investment compared to fixed line;
lower installation costs and faster build than fixed line; lower levels
of skills than needed for computers or the internet especially
important for providing technological access to the poorest people, who
are much more likely to be illiterate and speakers of minority…’ She
goes on to explain that the difference in penetration rate between
African countries and developing states in other continents is due
to ‘economic fundamentals such as income per capita, or relative prices
of handsets and calls; macroeconomic stability and urbanization;
policy differences such as regulatory structure and the competition
regime; tariff and non-tariff barriers to imports which raise the price
of handsets; the structure of universal access obligations; government
attitude; social and cultural factors such as urbanisation, trends in
rural urban or overseas migration; women’s security, women’s
empowerment, cultural attitude to communication; natural differences
such as geography, population density.’ She notes that ‘Although the
economics of mobile make this less of a problem than for fixed lines,
thin population density rapidly escalates the average cost of extending
rollout in rural or remote areas.’

For a study proposed to be a report on the social and economic
impact of the mobile phone in Africa, Coyle’s determinants of adoption
are remarkably economic in character. The result of this is that the
different socio-cultural considerations that go into the purchase of a
mobile phone, or those subtle indicators that explain why people living
under 1 dollar a day would buy and maintain a phone rather than save
for food or other basic needs do not figure. Turning to Waverman,
Meschi and Fuss, we see that they link per capita GDP growth to higher
mobile phone adoption. The threesome point to the economic value of mobile phone vis a vis other forms of communication systems – yet leaving out questions pertaining to the types of inroads that the mobile phone has made as a result of the poor condition of other communication systems. We are not told how this new ease of communication is impacting on or interacting with people's relationships, sense of self, or on long standing customs, hierarchy, gender relations, generational relationships, etc. Rather, they go on to correlate GDP growth and mobile telephony. GDP is a national phenomenon that says little if anything about what is happening in the nooks and crannies of society. It may well be an indication of what is happening to the richer portion of society - the effect of which may not be trickling to the most disadvantaged or the most marginalized or simply to those who are neither any of these but are physically or geographically or culturally beyond the tentacles of government benefits. Hence GDP growth alongside mobile phone penetration levels says little if anything about what a technology that literally rocketed into the lives of technology-starved persons is doing to these people and what thereby is happening beyond the curtain of economic indicators. It says nothing about the inevitable effect of such a novel technology on hierarchies, statuses, norms, traditions, etc. How then can a report really tell us what is going on in a society if it fails to present a complete picture of what is happening within that society?

Clearly, the impact of a technology on a society is subject to far more than economic development. Yet even in the third and fourth reports of the study this fact is lost. While Mark William’s report on the one hand deals with large issues such as Foreign direct Investment (again on economic parameters), Samuel, Shah and Hadinghan’s report addresses a number of smaller factors including what has been a magnate for many analysts of mobile telephony in Africa: the impact of the phone on small businesses and business people. This focus on small businesses in this fourth report is a representation of the extensive attention that has been given the fortunes of this group in society – attention that suggests that mobile telephony may well have nothing to do with other groups in Africa but the lives of business persons.

If these observations suggest a rejection of the importance of economic parameters in explaining the impact of mobile telephony in Africa, they
suggest wrongly. The point of this thesis is that economic growth or economic changes are only part of a whole, part of a complex of dynamics within a society. Scholars across the world apparently agree with this argument. Gerard Goggin (2006), Sadie Plant (2001), M Ito (2006), Amagaza Kunikaze (2005), Castells et al (2006), and Katz (2005) are only a few of those who have pointed out that a study of the implications of the phone for social life is crucial for understanding how the technology is affecting society or what it means for society. On the other hand, perhaps the credentials of the Vodafone researchers vindicate their economic approach. These researchers are all economists, working for a commercial giant whose interest it is that mobile telephony be associated with economic development and profit in Africa. At the same time, the fact that economists have been amongst the first, if not the very first, to carry out major studies on the significance of mobile telephony in Africa (regardless of who commissioned them) suggests who has considered the technology's presence in the continent of relevance. What this may well mean is that Africanist social scientists are implicitly agreeing with the notion that the phone's presence in Africa is fundamentally of economic value and therefore of little use for the social scientist. Fortunately, as will later be seen, there may not be course to consider this a valid point. Still, the emphasis on economic parameters and business persons has long dominated the discourse on mobile telephony in Africa. This following article illustrates that attention.

A2: Upwardly Mobile In Africa - How basic cell phones are sparking economic hope and growth in emerging—and even non-emerging—nations.

BUSINESSWEEK: [http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/07_39/b4051054.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/07_39/b4051054.htm)

I choose this article over other more substantial works such as the joint report for The Commission For Africa (entitled The Impact of Mobile Phones in Africa) by Nigel Scott, Simon Batchelor, Jonathon Ridley, and Britt Jorgensen in which they discuss the potential of the phone for poor Africans and seek to show areas "where support from high level institutions could help African countries exploit the potential that mobile technology offers to the vulnerable" (Scott et al, 2004)
for two reasons. First, it is a veritable mirror of much of the reports, articles and discussions on mobile telephony in Africa and as such a good representation of what has been forming opinion around the world with regards to the mobile phone in Africa. Secondly, because the foregoing report has already embodied the more extensive study in the category. Additionally, the article starts off by doing exactly what many others do - zero in on the economic relevance of the phone. However, the most important aspect of the article in view of my argument is its tunnel view or concentration on one cadre of users: business people.

The article sets off by describing changes brought into a small Kenyan town by the mobile phone. These changes are prominent, but apparently prominent only in the lives of the business people described in article. Grace Wachira, who runs a small business knitting cardigan sweaters in the village (Muruguru), once lived on a diet of long hours of trekking or rides in a communal taxi to the nearest town to buy yarn or meet customers whose availability was never guaranteed. But after the mobile phone, all she need do now is use "her Motorola (MOT)handset to arrange for delivery of yarn and to communicate with buyers." Like other tradespersons, shopkeepers, and farmers in the town, Grace's life is light years away from where it was before her Motorola. As for Willson Maragua, a transporter, life has translated into a refurbished house that now has a concrete floor and roof with solar panel that powers a radio, a light bulb, as well as recharges his family's two handsets: All these goodies the handiwork of the mobile phone. And of course there is the fact that the technology has seen to a more efficient organization of Maragua's business.

Maragua is a success, Grace is a success and so are other small business people in Muruguru. But how about those outside the business establishment? What about those for whom the phone’s worth is not measured by how many wasted trips it saves or by the fact that it provides information on crop prices or serves as a conduit for banking services? What about those who, as the article itself points out, are living on a few dollars a day yet are avid users of the technology? What does the phone mean for their lives? How are they interacting with it? What about those for whom, as the article also shows, the phone
has become a defacto currency? What is happening to their relationship with others and with the phone... to their behaviour, manners, personal values, etc?

Granted, the article does talk about people who do not own or have access to mobile telephony; but these non-owners are not merely examined in view of the tension that builds from not having a phone or access to it in a seemingly phone-crazed continent or community but largely in relation to some very extreme consequences based on probabilities - consequences such as armed conflict or the employment of mobile telephony in organizing guerilla warfare. Yet, such reading of the situation leaves out the real subtleties of what is happening on a day to day basis. The non-ownership of a mobile phone cannot be wont to set people on a war path. Yet even if it were to be the case, would there not be some sort of process or development of events to build up to that point? And would not such buildup be easily perceived in an investigation that places emphasis on understanding the social implications of the phone?

As this article shows in its description of the fortunes of the business owners and the (mis)fortunes of the poorer people who cannot afford the mobile phone, the technology is creating a crop of “have” and “have-nots”. Yet the dynamics of these developments are glossed over in that sweeping reference to a diabolical (though quite feasible) outcome. The reader can only guess at what is actually going on, on a day to day basis... only guess at whether crime has increased in Muruguru as a result, what these may all mean. Such socially oriented questions are those that require a more careful examination of what is happening as a whole in society and to people of every walks of life. Looking at the implication of any innovation on social life automatically involves a holistic examination of society, and thereby a better perspective of what is happening in a society. Writers of the works in the next categories have shown their appreciation of that fact.

As I already mentioned above, in regions beyond Africa such wealth of material for study have been seen for what they are: important opportunities to watch snippets of technological or social history unfold... to watch changes, changes that could be big or small take
shape. I now turn to works dedicated to such examination of the social implication of mobile telephony for societies. We now move to Category Two.

1:4b CATEGORY TWO: THE SOCIAL APPROACH

B1 Magic in the Air: Mobile Communication and the Transformation of Social Life By James Katz


As inferred to above, when it comes down to it, what requires careful attention in the attempt to understand mobile telephony’s influence on a society is how people use it, why they do so, when they do so, and how they relate to it. It is, furthermore, knowledge of how the technology is making people behave, act, relate to each other and to the technology that forms a picture of what is really going on and what that means. Grand theories on the relationship between man and machine may require long winded explications and definitions or some high-minded rationalization, but it takes observation to glean the everyday reality of people’s interrelationship with the phone. Much as theories are appropriate, even necessary for making sense of phenomena, it is the simple empirical observation, the talking to people, the interacting with people and practical dissecting of the subject matter that produces the seeds of unadulterated understanding. That is what Africa needs and that is what Katz has done in his work Magic in the Air: Mobile Communication and the Transformation of Social Life. In Magic in the Air, Katz analyses ways in which new mobile telecommunications are affecting daily life and society in the US and around the world, and how society and social forces are affecting the "use, display and reconfiguration of the phone". Each of the eleven chapters of the book discusses ways in which daily living interacts with the phone and how the technology is shaped not merely by people’s interpretation of it or relationship with it, but by events. As such not only users influence and are influenced by the phone, but also events and unforeseen developments. We see, for example, how the
September 11 2001 attacks on the twin towers in New York turned out instrumental in setting the agenda for certain mobile phone behaviour in the US, as school authorities found themselves obliged to bend to the pressure of parents who wanted their children to take mobile phones to class (in case of emergency). We see also how this, while calming nervous parents, lent the phone to abuse and misuse in class and even the educational system; for even teachers would begin “increasingly taking calls in the middle of classes, even interrupting their own lectures to answer what they claim are important calls”. In essence, the mobile phone was transforming the micro-culture of classrooms, its use “altering social norms in classroom micro-climates and in public spaces” all to be traced as much to human activities and the nature of the technology as to events.

In other chapters, Katz discusses several different areas of interrelationship between mobile telephony and daily life, from mobile phones as a fashion statement to the co-creation of mobile communication's public meaning. But it is chapter one that touches off one of those discourses that one would be hard-pressed finding in any other but an examination that takes aim at the social implications of the phone within society. In this chapter, Katz provides a link between the mobile phone and spirituality, sourcing examples from the Philippines where the catholic church is using the phone to reach out to faithfuls and potential converts. This chapter parallels what I discovered in Buea regarding the extent to which the mobile phone has found its way to the centre of religious life in the town. The same connection between spirituality and mobile telephony occurs in Daniel Miller and Heather Horst’s Cell Phone: An anthropology of Communication – to which I now turn.

Daniel Miller and Heather Horst’s volume differ markedly from Katz’ work in topic and scenario, but does exactly the same thing in terms of approach. Both volumes are concerned with what is happening on the ground, so to speak, in the daily lives of people. Katz writes on the way new telecommunications are affecting daily life and society in the
US and around the world, and how society and social forces are affecting the “use, display and reconfiguration of the phone”, while Miller and Horst explore the role that the cell phone plays in the everyday lives of low-income Jamaicans.

Miller and Horst take to task three clear issues: the rapid spread of mobile telephony amongst low income Jamaicans since 2001; consequences of that spread; and the present status of that relationship. In investigating these questions, Miller and Horst do engage economic factors, much more so than Katz (which, however, is expected taking the context into which the phone was introduced in Jamaica and the socio-economic status of the target group). However, they do so only within the context of the social significance of the phone. We see, for instance, how low income Jamaicans who are in some form of employment or business use mobiles to make more money while unemployed Jamaicans use it to get money through linking up (or using the link-up facility to hook up) with their wider social networks. Using mobiles for ‘Link-up’ is in other words using it to make short (generally 19 seconds) calls to extended social networks. These calls which allow individuals with hardly any credit to tell a large number of people to contact them, are crucial in strengthening and sustaining relationships, and maintaining contact with large networks of people. So, while economic factors are brought to the fore in the work, they are done so to establish a wider social reality, for the phone is a different type of instrument in the hands of different low income Jamaicans – its use a product of their needs… a reflection of the opportunity they seek and the possibilities it offers them to reach those opportunities. We see thus that while on the one hand the phone fulfils a survival need, on the other it shapes relationships in a culture that, in and of itself, values contact. Thence, as much as the link-up facility is a powerful tool in the hands of the poor, it is an exposition of what people with low or no income at all can do given the choice – the choice being, in this case, evidently the mobile phone. Horst and Miller, show us, hence, the crucial place the mobile phone fulfils in a network society or at least its ability to help develop the possibility of a thriving and extending network society.

Horst and Miller do not only discuss the phone’s ability to extend the tentacles of a poor society. They demonstrate the phone’s ability to strengthen relationships within the home. We see, for
instance, that individual responsibility for personal phone bills place the burden of payment on the individual rather than the family head, and how that alleys tension in the home, promoting a better atmosphere, and enriching connectivity.

Miller and Horst’s extensive ethnographic work in Jamaica go a long way to display Jamaican culture and way of life, and to allow readers see into a relationship between man and machine that can sometimes be as intimate as it can be unexpected. Take for instance Heather Horst’s reflection on the discoveries of the present research. She writes that

“The tie between media, new communication technologies and spirituality surfaced as one of the most surprising elements of our research. For example, an elderly man living alone in rural Jamaica described the experience of seeing his cell phone light up in the night, the warm glow of the small screen providing a sense of comfort and ‘a company’. Over the course of our conversation, he proceeded to make allusions between the light of the cell phone and the presence, clarity and comfort the light of God also provides. Others used their phones to reach out to friends and family, near and far, for crisis management and counseling which in Jamaica is often tied to spiritual well being and getting one’s life on ‘the right path’. Groups of women in urban Jamaica who attended a local mega church (over 2,000 members) convened together and used their cell phones to pray with their church sisters who could not be physically present. Still others used the texting function of their cell phones to send out ‘positivity messages’ which included proverbs and scriptures they felt would inspire their friends and family who received them. Like Raul Pertierra, et. al’s (2002) study of Filipino’s use of the cell phone for texting God, it is clear that technology not only mediates relationships between individuals in the mundane world but also the spiritual domain.”
(Horst, H, 2006)

As in Katz’ work, this picture evokes not just one image of the phone in Jamaican society, but a complex tapestry. Ultimately, only such attention to the social implication of the phone for the lives of a people can reveal how the value of a phone may be seen beyond its monetary terms - especially as Miller and Horst succeed to put the worth of the phone in Jamaica beyond its monetary value... Also,
ultimately, only knowledge derived from such investigation into social realities can give a holistic picture of what the phone is doing in society... what it means for society. Unfortunately, all of these detailed look at mobile telephony in social life are carried out outside Africa - in spite of the fact that there is demonstrated need for such careful study of the phone in Africa. Then again, as the following authors show, it is not all bad news. There is change coming, slowly but surely. We now turn to what I like to call ‘The New African Scholarship’ - works that have transcended the economic fixation on mobile telephony in Africa.

1:4c CATEGORY 3: THE NEW AFRICAN SCHOLARSHIP

The next two authors, Francis Nyamnjoh and Daniel Jordan Smith, demonstrate that change, though slow in manifestation, may be coming to the absence of concerted work on the influence of mobile telephony in African societies. A few other scholars deserve mention here too, namely Ebenzer Obadare (2006) and Jonathan Donner (2005). But in view of the scope of the material, I shall only take a quick extra look at Obadare’s Playing Politics with the Mobile Phone: Civil Society, Big Business and the State in Nigeria.

C1 EBENEZER OBADARE

Obadare’s Playing Politics with the Mobile Phone presents a picture that contrasts with anything that mainstream discourses on mobile telephony has had to present. The article shows what the mobile phone can become in the hands of people disenfranchised by historical and current socio-political and socio-cultural processes. It describes how in protest over high credit cost and inadequate provider services, Nigerian mobile phone subscribers boycotted GSM usage for one full day (on September 19 2003). This use of mobile phones, Obadare argues, ‘in the Nigerian context appear to presage the emergence of a new social space of politics and agitation,’ for the boycott was not so much anger at telephone companies as ‘a wider and more significant popular discontent regarding frustrations that ordinary citizens felt regarding the injustices perpetrated by the alliance of big business and a corrupt state.” It was, I submit here, a reaction born of frustrations that clearly had its roots in the historical processes that had led to
the vexatious status quo. The protest was the manifestation of opportunity... opportunity to voice grievances given by the phone. As Obadare points out, the boycott was not so much anger at telephone companies as a wider and more significant popular discontent... it was the grabbing of the opportunity to voice discontents.

While Obadare’s work describes a wide-reaching organized action, it reveals the potentials of the mobile phone and shows patterns of usage and influence that cannot emerge in a study devoid of any attempt to understand social (or socio-cultural and socio-political) dynamics.

Daniel Jordan Smith and Francis Njamnjoh, in the same cadre as Obadare, have been able to take a 360 degrees spin from the economic preoccupation of most mainstream writers in discussing mobile telephony in Africa. Though there is an inevitable reference to economic factors as in Jordan-Smith’s work, the men seek to bring out social implications of the mobile phone in Africa.

C2 DANIEL JORDAN SMITH: Cell Phones, Social Inequality, and Contemporary Culture in Southeastern Nigeria

"Cell Phones, Social Inequality, and contemporary culture in Southern Nigeria ", examines the effects of mobile telephony on Southern Nigerian culture and society; and how economic, social and cultural factors intertwine to produce a mosaic of interrelationships. It illustrates how on the one hand, the mobile phone is bringing changes, and at the same time, highlighting longstanding features within society.

As Jordan-Smith peals layer after layer off the relationship between man and machine in Southern Nigeria, a picture of usage pattern on gender lines begin forming, and a rather curious blurring of socio-economic status appears as both the rich and the poor seek, when convenient, to maintain the status of the victim – victim of the money-eating technology. Or, again when convenient, to turn it into a tool for advancing one’s illusions of the self. So the phone assumes different functions at different times – at times becoming a
sophisticated and very effective tool for the manipulation of one’s socio-economic status (either to wade off the expectations or contempt of others); or becoming a commodity in the eyes of others – often those in need.

Jordan-Smith invites us not only to observe activities around the phone, but to relive intentions. For instance, placing the technology upon the cog of the spinning wheel of Southern Nigeria’s sexual culture, he shows us how, in cases where the phone is used for clandestine reasons the parties to the act come with very well defined intentions. For, while for the older married men who go out with young girls the phone is a ready sexual currency, for the girls who engage in this relationships the phone is a currency to buy off peer pressure – as not owning a phone is often a let-down in the presence of one’s friends.

Jordan-Smith also draws the reader into the political arena of Nigeria, showing how the phone is perceived both as an agent of equality and at the same time as a part of the corruption machinery in Nigeria that assists big corporations and corrupt politicians to further drain money through backdoor deals from the average Nigerian. Again, in these analysis we see how the drive for access to opportunities and people (i.e phone as sexual currency or pressure-lifter) underwrites the attraction for the phone and the way it is being appropriated.

A different approach to the phone’s implications for society in Africa or for social relationship amongst Africans is two of Francis Nyamnjoh’s works on mobile telephony and the African. Though, unlike Jordan-Smith, Njamnjoh’s research is not bound by geography, Nyamnjoh does also define the relationship between users and technology in terms loaded with historical and cultural significance. A look at these works illustrate the point.


I have chosen to simultaneously look at two of Nyamjoh’s works because they both do not deal with mobile telephony and social relations in
Africa as a topic in and of itself, but within the framework of larger themes. They serve more as illustrations, yet cogently reveal agency in the use of the technology. With regards to agency, the works succeed in demonstrating how mobile telephony can easily translate into a mechanism for negotiating vulnerability. The central thesis of both treatment of the mobile phone is the phone’s long range effect. In *Africa’s Media: Democracy & the Politics of Belonging* (pgs 208 –209), Nyamnjoh shows how the mobile phone is revolutionising and changing means of political activism for Anglophone Cameroonians who have historically been locked out of the political process by state machinery, while at the same time lending itself to manipulations by ingenious economically-off home-based Cameroonians who seek to keep diaspora Cameroonians abreast of ‘needs’ and activities in the home community. This keeping of Diaspora Cameroonians abreast of ‘needs’ and activities at home is taken to lengths in *Images of Nyongo amongst Bamenda Grassfielders in Whiteman Kontri* that now engender resentment and feelings of victim-hood amongst Cameroonians abroad – a rather upside down situation. Upside down in the sense that economic stature, access to resources, financial might, etc are supposed to place benefactors at a better negotiating position vis a vis less well-off families and friends. This financially stronger position normally should disburse power and determine hierarchy. However, Cameroonians in the home community are able to place cultural pressures on Cameroonians abroad, pressures that undermine the financial power positioning. This ability to hold some kind of sway over the purse strings or feelings of diaspora Cameroonians through such phone threats as “call me back” or “kontri fashion go catch you” reveals the muscle of tradition, culture and beliefs, and the extent to which poorer Cameroonians can still use the phone to retain positions of power over financially better-placed relations.

Looked at from a purely economic angle, one may see only the dynamics of remittances at play, but observed through the lenses of Nyamnjoh’s social prism, a spectrum of culture, hierarchy, tradition and kinship results. The image becomes richer, more varied, less predictable. We see Cameroonians at home using the phone to appropriate the private spaces of Cameroonians abroad. We see Cameroonians abroad beginning to develop a sense of victim-hood – victims of the manipulation and greed of those they cannot physically see. Nyamnjoh’s
work here is a brushstroke of mobile telephony’s influence on lives across a wide geographic area.

In *Africa’s Media: Democracy & the Politics of Belonging* (pgs 208 -209), Nyamnjoh removes the phone from its realm of communication or its functionality as a communication device to one of expression. The suffocating silence imposed upon Anglophone Cameroonians by a repressive regime is tamed by the phone’s ability to lend itself to manipulation. No more does it become a mere medium of contact, it becomes a subtle weapon in a society of historically stifled people. Through it, along with the power of the internet, Anglophone Cameroonians can fearlessly voice their concerns, disseminating information and news that otherwise would be impossible to pass along. The implications of this for society can only be guessed at, and above all, can only be addressed in a work that approaches the phone’s presence in Africa in terms of its social significance. Ultimately, therefore, the significance of the mobile phone in a society is inherently a social investigation.

**1:4d LITERATURE – FINAL WORD:**

*THE IMPLICATION OF THE MOBILE PHONE FOR A SOCIETY IS INHERENTLY A SOCIAL INVESTIGATION.*

To close this discussion, perhaps it is incumbent upon me to add one of the most important reasons for avoiding economic parameters in measuring mobile telephony’s general relevance for Africa. In the economic explanation of mobile telephony in Africa, Africa is presented as one large identical whole, its countries and regions grouped into one cultural entity, and its national boundaries blurred. The economic explanation is then typically given as a product of the universal African reality.

Consider, in contrast, an investigation into the social implications of the mobile phone. The investigator must explain why people in one society might be more open to certain usage of the phone than people in another society. Why men in some Zambian communities would beat and bar their wives from owning the phone (Wakunuma, KJ 2006) while men in Cameroonian towns like Buea would buy phones for their wives (Present fieldwork in Buea) even though both societies are
suffering economic difficulties becomes an issue to investigate. No longer would it be enough to look at identical penetration levels in two regions and make broad GDP conclusion when in fact most of the adopters in one part are girls and sons of cattle farmers and those on the other side are largely boys and wives of cattle farmers. The researcher would have to go into the whys and wherefores.

In Buea it became clear to me that much of the explanation for what I was observing with regards to phone usage could be found in the recent history of Cameroon or Anglophone Cameroon - or more specifically the historical processes that had lead to the current living conditions. I discovered that people’s use of the phone and how the phone affected people was a product of people’s needs... their desire for access to what their circumstances would not allow them. Usage and interaction, thus, were the consequences of people’s feelings, perception, ideas, and hopes - all of these products of present and past circumstances. Seeing how none of the materials I had read on Africa, including the three works in the last category above, presented me with any guidelines for analysing data on the implication of mobile telephony in Africa, I realized that these emerging theoretical framework could well be a necessary development in the study of mobile telephony in African and other societies.

At a more empirical level none of the materials in the last category above or the others before, nor anything I had read on mobile telephony in Africa anywhere looked specifically on the technology’s influence on the daily life of people. None showed the nitty-gritty of what was happening and that, I again realized early in the research-design stage, was an area that this thesis’s focus was going to prove useful in. On the other hand, this was a five month M-Phil research underscored by human resource and financial constraints in a town of over 64000 people(). How was I going to conduct it? Who would be the unit of analysis? Was it not perhaps better to adjust the focus or research question? Yet such adjustments would defeat the purpose of what I wanted to find out. So the question remained. How was it going to be done?

As will be seen, the issue of ‘unit of analysis’ became the most problematic in the mental negotiation of the methodology; and as also will be seen later, I initially chose the family as unit of analysis on the grounds that the family is a microcosm of society... or a social unit
that reflects society. That choice was later discarded. Section three now further elaborates on the ensuing field techniques I employed and the choices I eventually made to make the research feasible.

1:5 SECTION THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY ON THE FIELD

1:5a RESEARCH DESIGN AND ASSISTANTS

For this research a combination of (qualitative) empirical research techniques were used. Field work involved observation, survey, interviews and diary-keeping. The first phase of field work was a pilot study, involving a general survey of the town. The pilot study was intended to offer a snapshot view of the phone’s usage in Buea and thereby to help in the making of informed decisions concerning which families (the initial unit of analysis) to work with; and to allow for developments that could be utilized. The second phase involved designing a questionnaire based on what I had observed and handing this to people whom the pilot survey had offered me a better understanding of. The third phase involved the ethnographic study proper, requiring extensive observation, interviewing and diary keeping. Each phase took a minimum of one month.

Field work was conducted by myself and four part time research assistants whose duration of work was informed by resource constraints.

A ASSISTANTS

Ewang Essembesson, male, a graduate of the university of Buea, commissioned for one month (November). Ewang assisted in locating families for observation, in administering questionnaires, and in carrying out intensive participant-observation in two of the households. He also recorded notes on himself and his experience and interaction with the mobile phone. He had no mobile phone when I met him, and after I provided him one, he wrote a detailed report on his experience and relationship with the device.
Rita Ngole, female, graduate of the University of Buea. Rita assisted in the cadre of a diary keeper. For one month, the month of November, she recorded activities in her household. She assisted more on a help basis, though she was offered a token ‘gratitude’ fee.

Patrick Fombon Fokum, 3rd year anthropology student, University of Buea. He assisted periodically from November to February – his assignment consisting mainly of observing the general public, interviewing members of the School of the Deaf (which he did in collaboration with a friend) and later interviewing and observing four blind persons living independently of the Bulu Blind centre. He also worked in help capacity and was paid later on a daily basis – as well as on grounds of material gathered.

Joannes Paulus Yimbesalu, 4th year medical sciences student, University of Buea, was on internship at the time at the Buea general hospital. Paulus was instrumental in introducing me in October and November to the Bulu Blind Centre.. He assisted in disseminating questionnaires and bringing back answered questionnaires. He also took part in interviewing some of the Bulu Blind trainees on our first visit there.

All of my assistants worked within the framework of the research guidelines. Below are the techniques we used in the field.

However, before these methods became fully developed I had arrived at my units of analysis as I will later explain. They included Students, Professionals, Family-households and the Blind. As for the techniques on the field, consider the following:

B   OBSERVATION:
We used both the observer-participant and total observation techniques. Participants knew they were being observed, and in the cases of Ewang and Rita’s work, they themselves became part of the observed. I worked exclusively as a non-participating observer. Methodology, however, differed with each social group, for whereas family-households and blind participants were largely observed, students and professionals took part more in the questionnaires.
C  Survey

Perhaps the term survey is an overkill here, but for the purpose of explaining the process of getting people’s opinion through questionnaires and later following up through ad hoc, unstructured interviews in some cases and semi-structured interviews in others, I shall use the term. We began with self-administered questionnaires that (using non-probability sampling techniques of (initially) the ‘purposive’ and (later) ‘convenience’ or ‘accidental’ strain), were handed out in different areas of Buea proper. Of all 100 questionnaires given to the general public, 71 were answered and returned. Of the 50 given to phone box operators, 23 were answered and returned.

Aside from the blind and family-household participants, our other groups were chosen from the results gleaned from the self-administered questionnaires.

The questions in the main questionnaire numbered 97. They were grouped under four different headings: 1] You and Your Mobile – which was made up of 63 questions; 2] Other People and Your Mobile – which was made up of 24 questions; 3] The Mobile and Your Family – which was made up of 7 questions; and 4] General – which was made up of 3 questions. Apart from two respondents, all questionnaires that were returned came fully answered.

Questions handed to phone box operators numbered 28. Respondents who returned their questionnaires answered all questions without exception. The questions for call box operators were also grouped under four headings: 1] About the Call box business – which was made up of 11 questions; 2] Your Customers – which was made up of 13 questions; 3] Call box operators – which was made up of 2 questions; and 4] Future – which was made up of 1 question.

As has already been alluded to, those targeted for the questionnaires were already predetermined, such as students and professionals, and it was only during the handing out of the questionnaires that the
'convenience'/'accidental' technique was applied. Further insight into this process will be given below.

D  **Interview Survey**

Interviews, largely unstructured and ad hoc took place alongside observations. For groups such as the blind and the deaf (though I will not be dealing with the deaf in this thesis) interview surveys were conducted. Again, I use the term ‘survey’ loosely here.

E  **DIARY-KEEPING**

I asked my assistants to keep some form of diary. However, the one person who took this up as the main course of action was Rita, whose family-household was the subject of her observation.

F  **SOME ETHICAL ISSUES**

Participants knew they were part of a research, but not all of them condoned the use of their names or identities. As a result, I have indicated where substitute names have been used. Fortunately, these instances have been few and far between, mainly because I tried to minimize references to such persons.

G  **LANGUAGE**

Buea is an Anglophone Cameroonian town, so all participants were English speaking, though many were also bilingual. However, some of the blind persons I met at the Bulu Blind Centre were mainly French speaking.

H  **Educational level**

Participants in the study were all literate – to varying degrees. This was not a deliberate choice, but one that was inevitable given the fact that self-administered questionnaires were handed out to participants. Our blind respondents also turned out to be educated people – again to varying degrees, as did members of family-households.
STAGES OF FIELD WORK

The research was divided in two stages.

STAGE ONE: Observation and sampling: Already mentioned above, this period was allotted to the initial survey of the town and to a general getting-acquainted process. It spanned two months for two reasons. First, I was pressured to take care of basic physical issues such as accommodation, schooling for my two children who, as already noted above, had traveled with me to Cameroon, and some health matters as both children got sick in the weeks following my arrival and later before my departure. I too took ill at some point. A second reason was that I set about rewriting my research proposal and formulating the research questionnaires. Two different questionnaires were designed.

STAGE TWO: Stage two ran from November to February. It included the core of the field work.

UNITS OF ANALYSIS: SELECTION PROCEDURE

The methodology and research techniques were determined by as much the purpose of the research (mainly exploratory) as the disciplinary approach (more in the anthropological tradition). As already inferred to in the opening section of this chapter, the exploratory character of the research derived from the uncharted nature of the subject matter - specifically the fact that so little literature existed on it. This uncharted nature of the subject made it even more urgent for me to take a general look at what the mobile phone was doing for people’s daily (social) life as opposed to picking out some aspect of daily life and concentrating on it. The problem with this approach, however, was the question of who to study. Everyone in the town? One group of people? Families? People in one section of town?

I chose families - arguing that this was a small social group with tentacles that could reach everywhere both within the immediate group and beyond it… a microcosm of society. The rationale was that by understanding the family’s relationship with the family I would be
glimpsing the larger society’s relationship with the phone. I was wrong.

Not to belabour the point or go into a lengthy explanation of the process of realizing and admitting the shortcomings of my choice of unit of analysis, I came to acknowledge that to actually form a true image of how mobile telephony was influencing people’s daily lives in Buea, I was going to have to look beyond the family. I concluded that attention to one area or social group would not allow for the inclusiveness, comparisons or evaluation required to back any claims or conclusions made about mobile telephony in Buea. On the other hand, the time frame and the resources available to me made any broad-based study impossible. So after much ado, the decision to look for representatives within the population was reached. I would choose small numbers of people from the largest and most prominent social groups in town, study their different usage patterns and how they were interacting with the phone, compare these findings to see if there were comparable patterns or absence of it, and reach conclusions from those findings as to how the phone was influencing life and being influenced by users in Buea.

The social groups I eventually chose were Students (youths); Professionals; The blind (or visually impaired); and the Family-household.

A STUDENTS AND PROFESSIONALS

Earlier in this chapter, I presented Buea as a civil service own that, with the establishment of the university in the early 1990s, became a bonafide student town, attracting hawkers, petty businessmen and women and others divorced from the heretofore traditional highbrow professional tone of the town—though a town that never managed to completely shake off its elitist persona. This fact conclusively made these two groups (students and professionals) the most visible social groups in Buea, and as such ready choices for my study. In more concrete terms, with a population of over 64000, Buea has several different educational institutions, with the university alone boasting a population of over 15,000 students. Administrators and other professionals who were amongst the first non-indigenes to populate the town, a trend that never abated since then, also made the choice of professionals inevitable. The fact that students are generally youths
and as such a representation of the younger generation, and professionals often considered of the older generation also added another dimension to the choices – that is, generational.

B THE BLIND

The blind were chosen for their uniqueness and the fact that they remain an almost invisible group in the global study of mobile telephone usage. Coming in contact with them was in and of itself fascinating, but also discovering that they occupied a noteworthy place in the population landscape of Buea, if not by sheer population, but by their very presence in a town that hosted the only government owned rehabilitation centre for the blind in Cameroon, made a study of them imperative for me. Most of the blind studied were trainees of the government rehabilitation centre for the blind ‘Bulu Blind centre’. The blind were also important in that their physical (and probably thereby life) circumstance was so different from that of the students and the professionals that any similarities in their use of the mobile phone and its influence on them was bound to stay whatever argument was there against the phone’s influence on people’s lives in Buea as a whole.

Call Box operators were initially made part of the research due to their prominence in Buea. However, the scope of the thesis dictated that this group, as well as the deaf who were also studied – though less intensively, be left out of the study. Additionally, much as call box operators were impossible to ignore, I had already resolved to avoid concentrating on business owners per se for fear of running the risk of making economic issues the mainstay of the work. While this resistance may again seem to point to an adoption of a narrow, less inclusive approach, it must be pointed out here that the groups chosen as units of analysis represent the larger percentages of Buea’s residents and as such are more inclusive and relatively better representational of the demographics of the town. If anything, family households are relatively inclusive, by virtue of the fact that the family represent 99% of living arrangements in Buea. In other words, Buea is a house-hold kind of town.
The family was my initial unit of analysis, and one that I had already begun studying long before I would begin work on the other social groups. As such, there was already data on the family before there was one for any of the other groups. Therefore, making the family one of the units of analysis was thus inevitable. However, the term ‘family’ had to be abandoned in favour of the term ‘households’ as it became clear that studying households, whether of single families or multiple families, or whether of extended families or spiritual brothers and sisters made for better understanding of who was being studied. As the UN has emphasized, the term ‘family’ is conceptualised differently in different parts of the world. Today the Western family has shrunken to its nuclear component (Nam, 2004), while in many other areas the extended family takes various forms. The 1994 UN Chronicle even acknowledges that there are areas in which families are not based on blood ties, that “extended families, involving several generations, include polygamous marriages, which are culturally accepted in most African countries and tribal groups, where families are built upon a social rather than a biological basis” (UN Chronicle, 1994). Such diversities in the definition and understanding of the family makes a discussion of households easier and more straightforward. The US Bureau of Census 2000, for instance, simply defines the household as including all persons who occupy a housing unit. Such generic conceptualization allows for enough definition leverage to describe the relationship of members within a household unit. It is because of this leeway, and the fact that the households in the study are made up of families of different formations, that the social unit under study here is conceptualized as ‘family-households’.

The significance of the household in studying society is best gleaned from the ESRC-funded research “Understanding Society” where the study of society is carried out by examining households dynamics and household members. Turning specifically to the family-household in Africa, Annette Fleischer has noted that “The extended family systems and strong kin and lineage relations remain important in most regions of Cameroon since they provide a sense of belonging, solidarity, and protection. They play a crucial role in social control (Fleischer, A, 2007).” Many other examples abound, but space has already been exhausted for this section. In any event, what these references to the
family and households seek to illustrate is the fact that any study of society needs to make the family-household part, if not a huge part, of the effort.

OUTLINE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

That the afore-mentioned units of analysis represent such different demographic and social groups that the cohesion of the thesis’s end result could be threatened is conceivable; for indeed the possibility remains that any analysis of such diverse groups in a study as this one could yield results so divorced from each other that no linking thread would exist between them – whereby the thesis results would be rendered disjointed. Yet, it is this disparate nature of the social units in discussion that makes them appropriate for the goal of the thesis. For, any pattern found (or not found) to link the different groups in their usage of and relationship with the phone would make the case for whatever assumptions are eventually presented. Ultimately, hence, what the study is looking for in order to draw conclusions as to the influence of mobile telephony in Buea is patterns – patterns of usage, of interrelationship... patterns whose implications are impossible to contradict and as such suggestive of how the phone is influencing daily life at large. Should there be no clear patterns found, a completely different explanation from the one upon which this thesis rests will have to be considered. But based on the theoretical assumptions proposed here, this is unlikely; for if personal or group circumstances are subject to a society’s macro context, then be it a blind person, a student, a professional or a household member, as long as they have a common national or regional history and are subject to the same national or regional circumstances, the meaning they put to the phone and the way the phone will influence their lives will be similar – simply because what they will be looking to the phone to give them access to would be comparable regardless of the content or essence of their personal or group rationale. This brings us back to the premise of the thesis – which is that it is not a desire for communication but a desire for access to as much people as to opportunities that drive motivation for uptake and use of mobile phone, and which help define how the phone influences a society.
Chapter Two sets the stage for understanding this connection between desire for access to opportunities and motivation for mobile phone uptake. It does so by showing the relationship between adoption patterns in Buea and people’s needs and desires – needs and desires engendered by existing conditions and historical processes. The chapter is ultimately an examination of the deeper social and cultural considerations that has informed adoption in Buea – an overview chapter. Chapter Three, like Chapter Two, is an overview chapter, but unlike Chapter two, it does not concentrate on uptake, it discusses usage pattern. The chapter is predicated upon the argument that technology’s influence on society is subject to the meaning people put to it and the manner in which people translate its use (Servaes J, Malikhao P 2004); and that without knowledge of how people are interpreting it, any discussions of the technology’s influence on the lives of people would be speculative at best. The chapter is thus a brushstroke of the interpretation to which the mobile phone is being put in Buea; and an expose of the impact of current and historical processes on usage pattern. From Chapter Four to Chapter Seven, the premise of the theoretical framework for this thesis is placed under the microscope, as participants (in case study format) are studied. Chapter Four investigates Students, Chapter Five looks at Professionals, Chapter Six studies the Blind, while Chapter Seven deals with family-households. In these case-study chapters, we examine the extent to which individual and group conditions are subject to the macro context and relevant history of the town. By the close of Chapter Seven, a clear pattern of use across the different groups and the effect of the phone in the different groups would have emerged.

Chapter Eight finalizes discussion on mobile telephony’s influence on the lives of study participants, and takes the thesis to its final conclusion. In this final chapter, we reassess the central question of the thesis and how well it has been answered. We revisit each of the follow-up or sub questions to see how well they have assisted in providing an answer or answers for the central question. Lastly, Section Two of Chapter Eight reassesses the contributions that the thesis has made to the debate on mobile telephony in Africa and possible areas for further research.
A quick look at what has been discussed so far and what remains to be examined will show that Chapter One introduced the research problematic of the study, the background to the question, the existing literature in the field, and some information about research design and field work. It also laid out the theoretical framework for the work, setting out the premise upon which its assumptions rest. Chapter two - the first of six chapters examining the issues raised in Chapter One and testing the assumptions made therein - now continues.
CHAPTER TWO

2:1 INTRODUCTION: UNDERSTANDING MOBILE PENETRATION IN BUEA

It is a testimony to the pivotal role 'uptake' plays in an understanding of mobile telephony's presence in a society that, as Jonathan Donner points out, much of the literature on mobile telephony in Africa has been on determinants of mobile phone uptake (Donner, J, 2005). Uptake is the first point of reference in understanding or explaining the implications of a technology for a society, for it is by grasping the deeper social and cultural considerations informing uptake that one begins to understand the interrelationship between mobile telephony and social life. Bar, Pisani and Weber have argued that, "insight into the adoption and diffusion of innovation provides a background for understanding the decision to purchase a technology" (Bar et al, 2007: pg 1). Manthe (1995/6) and Lianne Yu (2002, ed Santiago Lorente) show too that a society’s adoption pattern brings to the fore dynamics about the essential nature of that society. Hence the first order of business for any work aiming to look at mobile telephony in society must of necessity be the examination of adoption patterns. Besides, without the action of actually going out and purchasing a technology, there will never be talk of its implication, impact or influence on any one. This chapter thus provides an insight into the motivation for mobile phone uptake in Buea. Divided in two parts, the first part argues that motivation for mobile phone uptake in Buea is a manifestation of Anglophone Cameroon's political and economic heritage. And that this is so because what drives motivation for mobile phone uptake is desire for access to opportunities, which is a reflection of people’s circumstances - circumstances which are the product of society’s past and present. Thus, rather than 'Africanize' motivation for uptake and use - as most of the economic-oriented literature on mobile telephony in Africa do - the chapter localizes motivation for uptake. It asserts, for instance, that when Santiago Lorente noted that ultimately it is local considerations that define adoption and usage pattern, that "Communication contents have to do mostly with local affairs, daily lives, mundane and non transcendental issues..." (Lorente, S, 2002) he was speaking in a context that illustrated the extent to
which local needs reflect a universality of motivation for uptake and usage of mobile telephony; but what he was inadvertently demonstrating, was the significance of local circumstances in informing people's adoption and usage of the phone. This part of the chapter is thus arguing for three things: First that people adopt mobile telephony because the technology allows them access to opportunities that they do not have and otherwise would never have. Second, that the urge to communicate is secondary and subject to people's needs because mobile phone communication only becomes essential to the extent that it is a means to fulfilling a need. Thirdly, the chapter's argument is also based on the premise that those opportunities and needs that people seek to fulfill through mobile telephony are signs of lack in the society. So the way people use the phone, or what motivates people to take up the phone exposes people's social, economic and political fortunes.

Taking from this argument of needs-based motivation for uptake, the second part of the chapter gives a run down of factors that have influenced mobile phone uptake and usage in Buea.

2:2 PART ONE: THE RELEVANCE OF CONTEXT AND HISTORY TO UPTAKE

James Katz and Mark Aakhus have submitted that the way people think about and use mobile phones is informed by a need for perpetual contact, and that this need for perpetual contact is driven by a universal desire for pure communication. It is this need for perpetual contact driven by a desire for pure communication, they argue, that explains and predicts patterns of mobile phone adoption and use, which, according to the theory of Apparatgeist upon which the assertion rests, would be inherently uniform.

Apparatgeist theory posits that mobile phones and other PCTs (personal communications technologies) have a spirit that cuts through demographic, national, and cultural differences. This spirit, the theory submits, contributes to universal movements towards consistencies in the way PCTs are used in various nations and cultural settings. "Universal features," Katz and Aakhus explain, "exist among all cultures regarding PCTs; technology itself tends to assume certain
standard features independent of place or time" (Katz and Aakhus, 2002, pg 310). But Katz and Aakhus are not submitting to technological determinism, for the theoretical framework upon which their theory rests involves recognition of both explicit and implicit factors pertaining to social processes and technology (Katz and Aakhus, 2002, pg 310), and as Shenwei Zhao of Rutgers University notes, "Apparatgeist theory also posits that decisions human beings make on technology development, social adaptations, everyday applications, as well as limitations of technology create the boundary of human behaviors in societies full of PCT. (Zhao, 2005)" Hence, Katz and Aakhus’s work is divorced from technological determinism. Indeed, further unpacking their theory and turning from technology to user, they tender that ‘there’s a certain logic or nascent philosophy to PCTs that both informs the judgments people make about the utility or value of the technologies in their environment and the predictions scientists and technology-producers might make about personal technologies’ (Katz and Aakhus, 2002, pg 305). This logic, they argue, “is the logic of perpetual contact - 'a socio-logic of communication technology, which is located in the "socially developed sense of practical reasoning" that results from communities of people "thinking and acting together over time" (Katz and Aakhus, 2002, pg 307)’. In other words, or in other definitions, perpetual contact is “the constant connection that people have to their social networks through an ecology of face-to-face and mediated communication technologies including the mobile phone.” It is used "as a cover term that combines the multiple meanings of "absent presence" (Gergen, 2002), "connected presence" (Licoppe, 2004), and "perpetual contact" (Katz & Aakhus, 2002) which speak to ready access to social networks, occupation of a shared "inside space" in a mobile call, and closeness to others regardless of physical distance (Katz and Aakhus, 2002, pg 305)).” Perpetual contact, therefore, is a state of permanent connectedness. And the reason for this need for permanent connectedness is people’s desire for pure communication. Katz and Aakhus state that “the compelling image of perpetual contact is the image of pure communication (Katz and Aakhus, 2002)”, "an idealization of communication committed to the prospect of sharing one's mind with another (Peters, 1999 (in Katz and Aakhus 2002))’. This universality of desire for pure communication... for perpetual contact envisages,
therefore, the similitude in global adoption and usage pattern, as well as in patterns of interaction between man and machine.

Following this rationale, therefore, the blind, the students, the professionals & members of family-households in the study will record the same motivation and drive to adopt and use mobile telephony - not because they live in Buea or Anglophone Cameroon or Cameroon at large, but because that which they desire is universally lodged, and locked in the logic of perpetual contact.

On two counts, I found this (with regards to mobile telephony) to be true of Buea and beyond, but on one important count, I found it not to be the case. Now, regarding what I found to be true. First, like people in Mumbai, New York, Djamena or elsewhere, Buea's residents use the phone because they have certain judgments and expectations about its utility or value, and designers and producers of the technology have shown themselves to have made predictions and taken decisions suitable for such context-blending facilities as prepaid cards, call box possibilities, and loose SIM cards, etc. In Buea as elsewhere in the world, people have modified and are modifying the phone to their needs. Social norms are imposing on the way the technology is being used; and social values are reflecting on the phone's application. Secondly, people in Buea value their contacts and seek to constantly keep these relationships alive through the mobile phone. To this extent, can there be talk of a universality of mobile phone use in Buea - one that cuts across demographic, national and cultural differences, or more specific to the framework of the study, a spirit that cuts through socio-economic and socio-cultural status. But that universality, as I found in Buea, is not the result of a longing for pure communication or a need for perpetual contact. Rather it is the manifestation of a desire for accessibility. And this is what I observed as deviating from the apparatgeist argument where mobile telephony is concerned. I saw that in Buea the spirit of the apparat, so to speak, is the apparat's ability to bend to the desires of its users - through its size, speed, ease of use, and responsiveness to explicit and implicit social factors. In their April 2007 paper (Mobile technology appropriation in a distant mirror: Baroque infiltration, creolization and cannibalism) Bar, Pisani and Weber stated that "we believe that users adopt
technology because it makes a difference to their lives. If mobile telephony has reached such levels of penetration, it is fundamentally because its use opens up new socio-economic opportunities..." (Bar et al, 2007) Much earlier in 2004, the Panos Institute stated in one of its ICT for development papers that "New media and new technologies are most readily adopted within populations when they meet established needs or offer substantial added value – and ease of access -in comparison with existing media and technologies (Panos Institute, 2004)". Research in Buea showed that whatever lie beneath the choices people make, however much they seem to act universally, their motives for adopting mobile telephony and their usage of it are guided, not by a desire for contact or communication per se but by their circumstances and need, and their circumstances are shaped by their current and historical realities. Hence, while their actions would seem to be or actually be universal, their motivations would be localized, and the logic of their actions would not be the result of a need for perpetual contact per se or a desire for communication in an of itself, but a need to reach that which is beyond their present ability or scope, or as the Panos paper states “that which meets established needs or offer substantial added value” (Panos, 2004). Perpetual contact and pure communication, therefore, become elements of that opportunity. Or put differently, perpetual contact becomes a need only because it represents the attainment or process of attaining what is desired to be achieved (be that the shunning of loneliness, or maintaining of social capital, or something else.)

It must be stressed here that this break with Katz and Aakhus's reference to pure communication is not a negation of the theory of Apparatgeist in relation to PCTs in general or, for that matter, a disparaging of the significance of pure communication in mobile phone communication. What I am proposing, rather, is that the theory of Apparatgeist with regards to mobile telephony stand incontestable only to the extent that perpetual contact or pure communication are the overriding motivation for uptake and use; but that when data shows that desire for access to opportunities to established needs rather than for contact per se drives adoption, the theory (specifically with regards to mobile telephony) lends itself to reinterpretation. For, not only are users motivated more by local circumstances to adopt the technology
when accessibility rather than contact drives uptake, communication for
its purest reasons becomes only part of the need for adoption and use.
Hence, the spirit of the machine retains its universal oomph for no
other reasons than the fact that it offers people who need access to
specific opportunities the required (real or imagined) access. Pure
accessibility in this work, therefore, refers to access to as much
people as to everything else that a person requires for his/her well
being, but which his/her macro (and with it micro) social circumstances
deny any access to. Pure accessibility is possible with the mobile
phone because of the technology's design, size and interactivity, and
its ability to reach beyond the present; as well as to respond to
explicit and implicit social factors.

In arguing for pure accessibility, I am therefore arguing for
1) localized rather than universal motivations for uptake and use; and
2) for the fact that even if two or more countries appear to have the
same existing conditions, the differences in their respective
historical processes would shape the needs of their various citizens
and with that their respective motivation for uptake and use. In their
paper for the 2004 Annenberg Research Network on International
Communication (a predecessor of their book - The Mobile Communication
Society), Castells, Fernandez-Ardevol, Qiu, and Sey examine a number of
factors affecting mobile phone adoption. At the outset these factors -
i.e., Economic factors, Geographic factors, Industry and government
policies, and socio-cultural factors - seem to explain adoption
patterns, but closer examination of the histories of different
countries and regions show these factors to be informed by local
historical processes. Take economic factors for instance. According to
Castels et al, a country’s GDP is an important factor in defining that
country’s ability to adopt mobile telephony (Castels et al, 2004, p 35).
This makes for the argument that countries with similar GDP levels will
have comparable rates of mobile phone uptake and diffusion. All the
more noteworthy then that in spite of their geographic, cultural and
economic similarities, Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium, at the
introduction of mobile telephony in all three countries (which happened
about the same time), showed “three very different adoption
curves” (Mante et al, 1995, chap 2). Enid Mante, Sandor Bakalis and
Muriel Abeln note that, "Germany started one year later than The
Netherlands, but accelerated at a faster rate. Belgium started two
years later, but does not seem to have been very successful in expanding the mobile telephony market to date.” Their explanation for this (with Germany and the Netherlands as examples) lie in a number of possibilities which they offer, one of which is the comparatively deep penetration of pagers in the Netherlands which could well have seen to the low initial adoption rate of the phone in the country as the pagers were likely fulfilling the Dutch’s need for reachability. Yet, Norway, with a higher pager penetrability had in the same period recorded very high mobile phone adoption rate, indicating that the pager argument was weak. “Another possibility,” the researchers forwarded, could be “that a pager just serves the need of the Dutch, so that they don’t want more. “Behave normally, that’s mad enough” is the impossible translation of a Dutch phrase, which indicates that the Dutch don’t like others to distinguish themselves from the average Dutchman. A mobile telephone might be considered as an ‘unnecessary’, and expensive tool to distinguish. This hypothesis is supported by the low level of expenditure on jewellery in The Netherlands compared to the European average.” While Germans do not see a problem with spending their money, the Dutch consider spending money a 'vice'. “This might account for a part of the difference between Dutch and German adoption levels. Maybe the high adoption level of pagers is because they are worthwhile whereas a mobile telephone costs a little too much” (Mante et al, 1995/6).

What the researchers are saying here is that at the emergence of the mobile phone in the Netherlands, the Dutch did not see the point in buying it since the pager was fulfilling their need for reachability. The mobile phone was no more than a waste of money. Clearly its communication utility was not as important as what they craved access to, which the pager was already giving them access to. But this apparently was not the case for the Germans whose adoption rate was higher. Like the Norwegians, the Germans clearly saw nothing averse to spending money on the technology. Yet the Dutch, with the same national economic and social status as the Germans, similar cultures, and in close geographic proximity posted such difference. Why? According to literature, the answer seems to lie in history - in the Dutch Calvinist heritage. As Loraine Boettner has recounted, within the Calvinist tenets were doctrines that exalted hard work, thriftiness, and the rejection of enjoyment. Calvinism in Germany never developed in the
same way that it did in the Netherlands, and while along the centuries there may have been variation to the teachings in the Netherlands, those Calvinist tenets never really faded entirely. They survived the modern World Wars, manifesting in the 60s religious compartmentalization of Dutch society. Hence, even with globalization and an enduring and fast developing youth culture, those tenets of frugality still caught up with the introduction of mobile telephony in the Netherlands. Germany’s dissimilar historical process informed also its people’s ideas and attitude and thereby adoption level and rate. Germany also had another historical factor that was foreign to the Dutch experience. “In 1990, the Eastern and Western part of Germany were reunited. Before that moment Eastern Germany was a country comparable to other Eastern European countries in many respects. In 1989, the penetration of fixed main telephone line was 11% in Eastern Germany (Berlage & Schnöring, 1995, p.29). This could mean that patterns like those we have seen in Hungary and the Czech republic could be found there too.” (Mante et al, chap 2) Low fixed line penetration in a former Eastern European block of the country prompted high uptake. We see thus that in spite of their current physical and socio-cultural / socio-economics similarities, the histories of the two countries have still imposed on their citizens’ motivation for uptake, localizing desire for uptake and use and highlighting the needs-based argument.

Another explanation for uptake, this time given by Castels and his colleagues, submit that the European standard normative, GSM standard, which European countries had adopted and whose different features had proved significant in diffusing the phone, explains why mobile phone technology was created in the U.S., yet by 2004, Europe was leading in mobile phone diffusion - the US trailing a third place behind it(Castels et al, 2004, pg 13). At the face of it, the policy was propitious in regularizing payment systems and other technical and market features. A closer look at the two regions of the world, however, shows that it is not the GSM standard as much as Europe’s historical drive towards collaboration that ultimately drove adoption in Europe vis a vis the US. For instance, much of Europe’s wars were stayed by agreements and treaties. Collaborative efforts, whether as entents or some other form of alliance, proved the means whereby peace and prosperity (creeds reaching back to neo-classical Europe) could be
preserved, and with it the survival and fortune of many European countries and civilizations. In spite of the fact that the US became part of alliances and unions formed in concert with European countries, still from 1945, the habit of collaboration would develop faster in Europe. For instance, by the 21st century, Europe had gone from the European Union to the Maastricht treaty, to Schengen and of course the GSM. All of these aimed at improving commerce and living conditions in the continent.

The US on the other hand continued with its "traditional tendency towards small government." The market was not seen as necessary for government involvement. This thus "induced it to leave the development and promotion of the mobile phone 'largely to market forces' while its regulatory bodies 'actively inhibited growth of the market'. As a result the US remained "slow to adopt digital cellular technology, while European countries", by unifying their political and industrial policies, were swift to switch to digital and a common standard (Castells et al, 2004, p 37 )." And this standard affected opportunity for uptake and use in Europe. In this way, we see how historical groundings have been instrumental in influencing adoption and uptake.

Geography is another factor that has been variously presented as explanation for uptake. Castels and some of his colleagues, for instance, have submitted that "Countries with small land mass (E.g European and Nordic countries specifically) and more densely populated settlements such as Japan are able to speed up adoption of wireless communications because it is easier to set up the wireless infrastructure", easier than wide areas like the US, where "more effort, expense and collaboration is needed to establish such systems." (Castels et al, 2004). Yet, we see in University of Hawai’s alumni Michael Dziesinski’s write up, that "before examining the behaviors and social phenomenon surrounding keitai culture today in the year 2003, it would be instructional to retrace the development of the enabling apparatus for this 'culture', namely the evolution of the mobile telephone industry in Japan. Unless the technologies and capabilities of mobile telephony in Japan are first understood, the whole picture of consumer adoption and utilization in the daily lives of Japanese will only present partial picture of the consequent
development of keitai culture. Primarily, this is to establish an important case for the socio-historical factors of government intervention, corporate markets, and technological developments as the foundation for the societal outgrowth of keitai culture. These segments of Japanese society have played an important yet overlooked role in the keitai culture phenomenon in Japan thus far.” That which has shaped Keita culture in Japan thus leans heavily on the country’s industrial, national and corporate history rather than in its geography. History, therefore, is an important point of departure for understanding the context within which adoption and usage haven taken place in Japan. To understand mobile phone uptake in Buea, thence, a return to the history of Anglophone Cameroon was inevitable. Why, for instance, was it that people’s need for economic security and certainty so evidently informed their relationship with the phone? How could usage pattern as seen in Chapter three be explained? To answer this, a return to Anglophone Cameroon’s history was necessary. I found that just as mobile telephony was a novel technology in Cameroon, the point at which its uptake pattern in the country began forming was in the country’s recent history – not long before the 1980s economic meltdown in the country. Before this period, Cameroonians, both Francophones and Anglophones, were living lives underscored by economic stability and the benefits that go with it. Many were complacent and took their state of peace and comfort for granted¹⁵ – which, on the other hand, could have well had some justification. For instance, between 1970 and 1982, the gross national product (GDP) moved from 300 billion to 2000 billion. It grew at 4.8% annually in real terms between 1960 and 1978, and at a record rate of 8.2% per year between 1978 and 1986. Until 1978, the contribution of agriculture to GDP and exports were 30% and 74% respectively(Ntangsi, 1991), resulting from president Ahidjo’s ‘Green Revolution’ which encouraged agricultural development(Ngoh, 1987; Mbuagbaw et al, 1987). Indeed, Cameroon’s credit worthiness grew amongst Western nations and they, France in particular, invested heavily in the country(Jua, 1991; Konings, 1996; Takougang and Krieger 1998; Akoko, 2007 ). The job market expanded and the civil service swelled as the government (which was the main employer) employed large numbers of people(Jua, Konings 2004). Because both Francophones and Anglophones benefited, though unequally, from the economic climate and the employment rate, Buea’s civil service population swelled. Issues of
joblessness, especially amongst the growing body of young persons were hardly a point of contention as ‘the social integration of youths into society was unproblematic’ (Jua, 2003). Then, from about 1986 things changed, and by 1994, the situation for even the employed, had become precarious. Yet trouble did not come in 1986, or rather, did not come out of the blue in 1986. There were foreshadows, echoes as early as the late 1970s, echoes which the government disparaged and presumed to handle on its own. Between 1978 and 1986 agriculture’s share declined to 22% of GDP and 51% of exports (Ntangsi, 1991). During the fiscal year 1986/87 Cameroon recorded a drop of 27.8% in its exports revenues - the reasons were both external (fall in prices for oil and agricultural products) and internal structural causes. The internal causes included the ‘blow-out of public expenditures and a crisis of public finance, a high-cost domestic economy, a stagnant and non-competitive industry in both international and domestic markets’ (Eba’a Atyi, 1998), and the poor management and misuse of national resources by a careless bureaucratic public administration (Jua, 1991; Mbuagbaw and Akoko, 2004; Nkwi, 2006; Akoko, 2007). In all these developments, nothing crossed the radar of the unsuspecting Cameroonians masses who then did not see the crisis coming.

Finally, after failing to independently manage the growing crisis, the Cameroonian government signed a stand-by agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in September 1988 and a structural adjustment (SAP) loan in June 1989. The SAP would prove a bitter pill for unsuspecting Cameroonians. Jua writes:

“Intrinsic to [the SAP] program was a commitment to reducing the budget deficit and downsizing the state. Practically, this meant the freezing of employment opportunities in an economy in which the state was the main employer. Generally, the SAP has been a macroeconomic catastrophe, engendering high unemployment and limited growth (Stiglitz 2000). It also has marginalized youths or reduced their chances for a sustainable livelihood’ (Jua, 2003, p 2). But the SAP was only the onset of the troubles of Cameroonians. While it took off in the late 1980s, the early 1990s would add upon the sorrow of recipients. In 1993/4, for instance, the French government devalued the CFA, sparking unrest across countries in the CFA zone as salaries slashed into half or more at the same time that commodities on the market retained their prices. Describing the situation as a salary tsunami (in the February
2008 monthly debates on topical issues organised by the Fredrich Ebert Foundation Press Club in Yaounde), a mathematics teacher, Jean Kandem, argued that “a public service worker on indice 1140 was on a gross monthly salary of FCFA 420,425 but by November of the same year the sum was cut to FCFA 154,287 representing a slash of FCFA 266,138 giving a percentage of 63.3.” Government ambiguity in economic policies, noted the economist Dr. Francis Menjo Baye in the same debate, and the “speculative attitudes of economic agents,” only left the inflationary tendencies in motion(The Post Online, 25/2/ 2008).

For Anglophone Cameroonians who had traditionally borne a ‘secondary status’ in a Francophone dominated and directed administration(Jua, Konings, 2004), it was an untenable situation. Jua and Konning illustrates: “In February 2003 it was announced that there were only 57 Anglophone youths among the more than five thousand new recruits joining the police academies. The next month records show that there were only 12 Anglophones among the 172 new recruits into the Customs Department. And, even more significantly, these Anglophones were only given junior staff positions while all the senior staff positions went to Francophones. ( Jua and Konings, 2004, p 6 ) For Anglophone Cameroonians especially, there was total loss of trust in the government’s ability to protect and provide, and a resultant sense of uncertainty and fear for the future. People were no longer sure when salaries would be slashed, when inflation might draw them, when the president might decree something or the other to everyone’s discomfort. Omar Cardona has submitted that “Vulnerability represents the physical, economic, political or social susceptibility or predisposition of a community to damage in the case of a distabilising phenomenon of natural or anthropogenic origin…” – Cameroonians, specifically Anglophone Cameroonians, were now living in fear and uncertainty, such that some people in Buea with whom I spoke actually hinted at the possibility of certain persons suffering ‘silent starvation’. Writing on the conditions that became the norm in Cameroon from the mid 1980s, Robert Akoko states, “The crisis’ gave rise to ‘compounding poverty, misery and unemployment’ fermenting ‘fear, doubt, and uncertainty right down to increase in social insecurity. Armed banditry became common place, with bandits operating in open daylight and often with impunity. More and more young people and whole families even,“ began “dreaming of
or migrating to the West to seek greener pastures.’ (Akoko, 2007) Anglophone Cameroonians had grown distrustful. Mobile telephony thus made its inroad into an environment undermined by tension, insecurity, distrust, fear… an environment where people were now wont to use whatever was at their disposal to reduce and negotiate their sense of vulnerability. And as has already been alluded to, the mobile phone’s very nature made it an important tool to reduce that sense of uncertainty and vulnerability.

Processes in Anglophone Cameroon’s past thus helped create conditions that engendered needs such as would influence, and in some cases, outright drive motivation for uptake and use of the mobile phone in Buea. This historical influence was very present in the different factors I found as shaping mobile phone uptake and use in Buea – making it ever more convincing to me that rather than a universal urge to communicate, it was people’s immediate and localized needs that condition uptake and usage of the mobile phone. We will now look at those elements I found as driving motivation for mobile phone uptake and use in Buea. As will be seen, these elements are local harvests. However, this does not negate the fact that other more universal factors such as government policies and market liberalization, competition, indigenization, failure of fixed-line telephony, infrastructure etc have been important in influencing uptake and even use in Buea. They have, but in the capacity of facilitators rather than ultimate determinants – facilitators that made possible adoption to happen in the first place. Taking government policy or market liberalization for instance, until the 1990s, telecommunication was the monopoly of the government. It was during this period that low penetration of landline was a national staple. The privatization of the mobile subsidiary of Cameroon’s PTO, the award of a second mobile and fixed-line license in the end of the 90s to MTN and the partial liberalization in 1998 turned that low penetration into the intensification of mobile phone penetration in Cameroon from 0.02% in 1999 to over 12% in 2005. Consumers were now given several options, and efficiency born of competition got better, along with the intensification of promotional activities. In 1999 MTN, in consortium with a local partner, purchased Camtel’s mobile network, while Orange, the oldest network company in Cameroon, grew out of Societe Camerounaise de Mobiles (SCM – Mobilis). This change of policy
therefore made adoption both possible and easy, allowing for competition, as already mentioned above, to open up more options for people. So ital, in fact, is competition itself in facilitating uptake that it has hardly been absent in any literature on mobile telephony in Africa. A 2004 ITU report noted that “a glance across Africa's mobile landscape illustrates the benefits of competition. The only countries with less mobile than fixed telephone subscribers in Sub-Saharan Africa at the end of 2003 were either those without mobile networks or without mobile competition. Mobile competition has benefited even the poorest countries. The Democratic Republic of Congo and Ethiopia both have per capita incomes of around US$100, yet the Democratic Republic of Congo has a mobile penetration of around 2% - some 15 times greater than Ethiopia's, which stood at 0.13% at the end of 2003. The difference? Whilst Ethiopia has only 1 GSM operator, the Democratic Republic of Congo has 3 GSM networks, in addition to non GSM cellular networks.” (ITU, 2004) Correspondingly, seeking in a 1996 report to explain the different adoption rates (at introduction of mobile telephony) in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands where culture, economic status, etc have been similar but adoption patterns markedly different, Enid Mante and her colleagues rationalized that “a first possible explanation for the differences might be the level of competition in the mobile telephony business... Germany shows the highest level of competition, with two providers of GSM active from the start in 1991. A third provider of mobile telephony, which is licensed to offer DCS 1800, has already been introduced. The Dutch have only introduced competition into the mobile market this year. In September 1995 the second Dutch GSM operator, Libertel, started its service. In Belgium however, mobile telephony is still offered by only one operator. Although the early introduction of competition in Germany has not lead to lower prices than in Belgium and the Netherlands, it might still have had some positive effects on the adoption rate. Competition between two providers might not necessarily lead to lower prices, but it will probably result in increasing promotion efforts. Maybe it will also lead to a situation in which operators offer (more) extra services to their subscribers. In this way it will still be more attractive to subscribe to GSM, even though prices are not lower than before competition was introduced, or lower than elsewhere.” (Mante et al,
1995/6, chap 1) Competition, thus, could help explain the higher adoption rate in Germany.

In Cameroon, three network companies operate: MTN, ORANGE and CAMTEL. All three use a plethora of methods to attract customers: Pricing, promotions, adverts, image management, services, and other less obvious means. Prices range from Camtel’s 70frs per minute to MTN’s 180frs a minute. Incentives such as MTN’s all night free hour (where for 180frs users can talk non-stop from 11pm to 5am), Orange’s favourable international call rates and weekend price cuts, and Camtel’s low per minute CT phone cost continue to pitch company against company. The logistics of these companies in Buea demonstrate even more how deep their activities are. All three national companies have regional offices in Buea. **MTN** has one service centre, two super dealer supply centres and about 15 frontline retailers. The Service Centre is answerable to the head office in Douala, it supplies the Supper Dealers and takes care of a number of administrative matters. It does not normally deal with the public or with call box operators – that is the job of the Supper Dealers who sell credit to the public, to people on the frontline offices and to call box operators. Frontline offices who sell and distribute are spread all over Buea to cater to the needs of customers and call box operators – selling and distributing cards, and transferring EVD SIM cards (EVD cards allow call box operators to calculate call costs to call box operators). Prepaid credit transfers are done mostly by call box operators. In this way, MTN reaches all over Buea. **Orange** has three agencies in Buea which cater to the call box operators and middle men who answer customer queries and sell cards to call box operators. Through these agencies, middle men, and call box operators, Orange reaches all over Buea. **Camtel** has its head office in an area of town dominated by government administrative offices – a fact that reflects its affiliation to the government. Partly owned by the government (after part of it was liberalized), Camtel only entered the mobile market in 2005. In addition to its head office which is managed by a regional manager, it has three commercial service centres and several agencies in Buea. The head office takes care of administrative matters and provides the Service Centres with products. The Service Centres deal directly with the population and small dealers. It’s trademark blue makes it less catchy than MTN’s yellow and
Orange’s orange make the other two, but like MTN’s yellow and Orange’s orange its colour and trademark too are everywhere in Buea. To access the services of these companies, a customer must purchase either one’s SIM card. A SIM card or Subscriber Identity Module is a portable memory chip that is installed in the spine or back of a phone to connect it to the network provider. Since it can be slid in and out of the phone, the SIM card can be switched from phone to phone. The SIM is like a mini hard disk that automatically activates the phone into which it is inserted. It holds personal identity information, mobile phone number, phone book, text messages and other data. Once it is bought, directions are given by the company to activate it. But “Competition alone is not the key,” states the 2004 ITU report, “The emergence over the last 3-4 years of African based, pan-regional mobile operators, is another significant reason behind mobile's growth. The spheres of mobile influence of these strategic investors now reach across the continent. It is these operators, such as Vodacom, Orascom Telecom and MTN who have been able to apply uniquely African approaches onto the markets on which they operate. (ITU Report, 2004)” These uniquely African approaches include prepaid phone cards and credit transfer facilities – though the prepaid concept is not a Cameroonian or African monopoly.

Prepaid mobile phone cards (pay-as-you-go) are cards that a buyer purchases in advance of use, which them helps him or her to avoid billing. The credit embedded in the card determines how long a user may use the services of the company who is the phone access provider. The card is then used until 1) the credit runs out or 2) the network’s expiry date for the SIM card arrives. Expiry of SIM card contract is one of the things that also distinguishes phone providers. Claudine, a computer trainee, single mother and former call box operator, expressed her preference for MTN by explaining that “Orange is very stingy with time. Before you know it, it is already expired.” Orange SIM cards have an expiry period that corresponds with the cost of the prepaid card. The shortest of this is two weeks. If the card is left unloaded, the SIM expires and a new SIM card must be bought or some money paid for the card to be reactivated. MTN on the other hand has an expiry period that comes into effect after about two months of purchase. Camtel’s CTPhone has three prepaid card types. The easy recharge which enables the user to top up his CTPhone or wireless fixed telephone (Camtel has
also begun installing wireless fixed home phones), the easy call prepaid airtime card which enables its holder to make calls from any Camtel terminal or set, and finally, the a-puce card which enables users to make calls from any pay phone booth. These also have expiry periods. Except for Camtel, the two other providers (MTN and Orange) also have Credit Transfer facilities. Credit transfer is simple. A phone or sim card owner goes to a call box operator or any provider’s service centres or agencies of the different providers, depending on the person’s provider, state his or her phone number, the amount they want filled in the number’s account, and pay. The service provider then does the job.

These systems make real sense for African countries, including Cameroon and Buea. The 2004 ITU report explains it best: “In a region where per-capita incomes are low, and payment upfront in cash is generally the preferred means of payment, prepaid services are ideally suited. They reduce the risk of bad credit to operators while exposing a whole new consumer group to telecommunications services; those who would not normally have qualified for postpaid mobile services or fixed lines. A growing number of African networks operate only as prepaid, and four out of every five African subscribers – almost twice the global average – use prepaid services. Prepaid services have been further adapted to offer mobile 'payphone' services. It is tapping into these regional specific approaches, and accessing new sectors of the population who have not previously been exposed to telecommunications, which have helped to drive up mobile usage in recent years, and will continue to do so.” (ITU 2004) Prepaid cards and the credit transfer system are almost fraud-proof, and credit transfers only see disputes when “sometimes the customers argue about amount of phone minutes they have used” (Present research, 2008).

Another uniquely African approach has been the call box system itself. Call boxes are tables or square boxlike structures (sometimes colourful, sometimes plain) set at road sides with large colorful umbrellas or awning over them, a chair or bench occupied by an operator, phone ready to service passersby. There are also some indoor call boxes which are just phones configured to serve as a call box phone. When a phone is configured to serve as a call-box phone, its SIM card is traded for an EVD SIM card which shows on the screen how many minutes a person has called. To make a call, a person approaches the
call box operator, asks its use for a call. In some cases the person gives the number of the recipient to the operator and the operator dials. When the caller finishes speaking, the operator sees the minutes used and the amount to be paid on the screen. He/she shows the customer what need be paid. Except for one journalist who told me he could not use the call box for his numerous business calls, there was not one person I met in Buea (or Cameroon) who said he or she had not used the call box service at one point or another. And this was regardless of whether they had personal phones or not. A number of things differentiates the call box from the private phone. These include: the times of call, how the box is used and duration of use. People use the call box for daytime calls, for long calls, weekend calls and when they do not have enough air time or access to a personal phone. Personal phones, on the other hand are used for short calls, night calls, and private, intimate calls. The call box EVD SIM card is configured to make calls cheaper than the private phone SIM card.

Ordinarily, the call box should discourage the need to own a phone – especially considering its proliferation in Buea. But what the call box has actually been, is an encouragement to uptake. As already noted above, people use their private phones for short calls; during the night time when there are no call boxes; when they have enough phone credit, to beep and prompt for ‘call me backs’; and for intimate calls. They use the call box to make long calls; when they do not have enough air time; at week ends; and in the daytime. By thus giving people the option to make long calls at a cheaper rate, the Call box makes owning and maintaining a phone/SIM less expensive and as such more attractive to purchase. Secondly, in helping people economise on credit for important private calls by giving them the option to use its services for general calls, the call box promotes efficient use of the phone and thereby enhanced the phone’s value. Thirdly, by making it possible for people to reach others or be reached even when the other party may not own a personal phone, the call box acts as buffer – buffer in breaking the fall of not having access to mobile telephony. It also acts as a buffer by making owning a private phone logical, for what use would the phone be if access to those whom one needs were not possible? Fourth, logistics of the call boxes have made owning a phone convenient. Call boxes are every where in Buea – literally, even in the most unexpected corners. At the MTN Service Centre at Fotabe House, I
was told by a worker that there could well be over 1000 of these call boxes in Buea - perhaps an exaggeration but indicative of the call box population and the demand for their services. The presence of Call boxes everywhere means that people have at their disposal call cards, credit transfer facilities, and all the credit saving benefits of a call box, as well quick and easy access to a SIM card.

Perhaps none of the above would have really mattered had people had other means of phone communication such as fixed landline. Indeed the lack of access to fixed land line has accounted for one of the most enduring reasons for the speedy mobile phone penetration in Africa. In Cameroon, fifty years after the introduction of the fixed phone line, only 0.8% of Cameroonians has access to the phone, with the majority of this is French speaking Cameroon\textsuperscript{16}. The arrival of the mobile phone was the arrival of an unprecedented opportunity for all Cameroonians to have access to a phone. With it came choices. Cameroonians now had the luxury to choose to adopt or not to adopt... a choice made even more real by the absence of inefficiency, corruption and institutionalized greed. Or at least seemingly so.

One other facilitator of mobile phone uptake in Buea has been the infrastructure, design and size of the phone. Setting up a mobile phone base station requires no more than a tower, or pole, or building. These towers can be set up in any high area where base station may be mounted on them, and from where the base stations can send or receive radio signals that make connection possible. Where a provider has set up a tower, all phones using that provider’s SIM can use it. The phone owner thus need do no more than charge his/her rechargeable battery and be in the coverage area of the base station to make contact.

As already stated above, these have been facilitators to uptake, rather than drivers of deep-seated motivation. But without them and others like them, access to the phone in the first place would never have been possible. The operating word here is ‘facilitators’; ‘facilitators’ because the aforementioned factors do not necessarily represent a deep need to buy. All the opportunities could be there for uptake, but uptake would never occur if people are not compelled to claim it: The market in Cameroon would have liberalized all it wanted, government set up all the best policies for adoption all it wished, competition gone raging wild all it cared, and still less than 1% of Cameroonians would have availed themselves of the phone. So something
more than availability had to be at play to get people to avail themselves of the phone. We now turn to these deeper social and cultural considerations that have influenced mobile phone uptake in Buea and Anglophone Cameroon.

PART TWO

2:3 UNDERSTANDING MOBILE PHONE UPTAKE IN BUEA:

UNCERTAINTY IN A GEOGRAPHY OF CRISIS

The first observation I made about uptake pattern in Buea was the result of a discovery I made about purchasing pattern. Almost all the students I spoke to said their phones had been bought for them by parents, sisters, aunts, brothers or cousins. Many of the professionals I spoke to, specifically the teachers, said they had given phones to their children. Their reasons ranged from security for their children to keeping tab of their children and having contact with their children. In most literature, this is referred to as ‘gifting’, but in Buea what I observed went further than gifting, it was the givers’ stress-release. A teacher at the technical Grammar school in Molyko said buying a phone for her daughter was a necessity, not a luxury. All who said they had purchased a phone for someone else, be it an offspring, a sibling, a spouse or other said they did so for one of the following reasons, “to know what is happening to them, especially when they are traveling from Buea to Bamenda”, “if she has enough food”, “her health, to know what is happening”, “to be able to organize things from my work. We arrange simple home things before I get home”. “He can always reach me when there is problem.” “Can always look for help when there is an emergency. I feel better, especially as we are so far apart”… These remarks reveal therefore that it is not so much a need to contact these others for the sake of keeping contact that prompts purchase but a need to keep tab of the health, living conditions, etc.

Also, the tendency of people to get up in the morning and call others just to say ‘good morning’ while those physically around them where yet to be given a ‘good morning’ hallo; or offer other forms of greetings on a consistent basis to the invisible others over the phone would quickly show itself as more than a longing to contact and be civil. I first observed this over the phone fineries in the entry of my
assistant Ewang Essembesson. In his entry for the home of Pastor George (whose household we find in Chapter Seven), multiple references to morning ‘greeting-calls’ are entered. For instance, such entries as “Divine:8:55- called friend to say “good morning”. Several students I spoke to, both those in the study and those outside said they regularly call others to greet, especially on special occasions. According to Femi Akindele and Os Elegbeleye, greeting is a social act of affirmation, of respect and of camaraderie(Elegbeleye, 2005; Akindele 2007). The simple act of greeting, therefore, has the potential to bring about validation and to strengthen and maintain vital relationships. As Miller and Horst explain, the Link-up phone facility in Jamaica maintains relationships until such time as a more substantial need arises(Horst & Miller, 2006), in this way acting as a social currency, a tool to keep and strengthen the social network necessary for survival. During research, I observed that family and friends are people’s social security. The type of daily contacts that I observed people making therefore was an instinctive strategy to maintain and keep the relationship with these lifeboats alive and healthy.

In a country where people live in a ‘geography of crisis’(Mbembe and Roitman, 1995), with unbearable traffic, horrendous roads, death-defying automobiles and driving practices, entrenched light outages, poor health facilities… where “no one [seems] to care; [where] everybody [is] busy trying to fend for themselves, amidst growing chaos and violence, [where] previous rules of the game – of civility and responsibility – no longer [seem] to apply(Mbembe and Roitman, 1995)” the phone has become therapeutic, as people call each other for encouragements – sending bible passages, even preaching over the phone. Pastor George routinely calls parishioners for encouragement, with prayer sessions conducted over the phone. No longer merely a technology, owning the phone then becomes owning a peace of mind, health and hope… all of which seems absent under present conditions.

The ability to reach loved ones in a geography of crisis… to maintain valuable contacts that would yield future if not immediate dividends clearly explains mobile phone uptake in Buea than would a wish to communicate. However, one thing I had not expected was that the internet would also prove a key factor in mobile uptake in Buea.
Like the call boxes earlier discussed, one would expect the internet to be the 'competition' rather than a collaborator. But in Buea I found that the internet is enhancing mobile phone uptake. More and more as I watched people interact with the internet in internet cafes on the one hand, and the way they interacted with the phone on the other hand, I realized that the internet had to have set the grounds for mobile phone uptake especially for young people... that it had exposed them to the possibilities that the phone was capable of making possible. The phone, like the internet, according to the young student respondents in the study, was a place of opportunities, new things, information, new ideas, modernity, hope, etc... all of which the Cameroon they were living in was not allowing them room to easily imagine. In essence, to students in the study, the phone was a step up in life. As one student told me, not having a phone meant that you were 'limited to the flow of information”, since its ownership indicated that you were 'part of the information highway”, part of that which takes you to better possibilities’, such as the internet was making visual. In addition to this internet paradox, and the call box paradox before it, I met with another contradiction. I found that the simple act of sharing the phone, was an inspiration to those without phones to want to own one.

The fact that phone sharing instead inspired sharers to want to own their own phone was, like the internet’s influence on people’s attitude towards the phone, very contradictory. I expected that residents’ proclivity to share phones and credit would make void the need for personal phones. Francis Nyamnjoh has told us that “most cell-phone owners in West Africa tend to serve as points of presence for their community, with others paying or simply passing through them to make calls to relatives, friends and contacts within or outside the country (Nyamnjoh,2005)”. Considering this, one would think that with money hard to come by, the need to own a phone would be secondary for many. On the contrary, I was being told by students that access to their older siblings’ or friends’ phones had served to make the need to own their own phone and have full control of time and usage even stronger. Time and location restriction when using the phone were clearly incentives to want to personally own the phone.
A lot has been written about the sharing of mobile telephony in African communities and households, but what is being left to the imagination is the fact that sharing is a product of lack, engendered by existing circumstances and historical realities. I identified four types of sharing in Buea: Allowing handsets to be used for SIM cards; allowing others to use phone credit (proximity); allowing phone to serve as a communication centre for more than one person; sharing by teaching others or being prepared to assist in instructing others in the use of the phone. The particularity of each of these methods is that they served different types of people and as such allowed for the hunger for a personal phone to reach deep into society’s various crevices.

Sharing, perhaps, is one of the more unusual explanations for uptake anywhere, but its utility as a magnate for purchase helps, along with the other points discussed above, to bring to the attention the extent to which needs drive uptake pattern, and to how the specific situation of a region is instrumental in driving uptake in its society.

2:4 CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter was to give an overview of the factors that have affected uptake in Buea. It was an attempt to introduce the reader to how context, history and a desire for access are important in uptake, and crucial for understanding adoption. It argued that any attempt at understanding how mobile phone affects or influences a people or how people interact with and shape it, must start with knowledge of the motivation behind uptake and the factors affecting that motivation; and that motivation for mobile telephony uptake can only be gauged by recognising desire for access to opportunities as the drive behind mobile phone adoption; and that local factors such as an area’s history affects what people seek opportunities to. This makes local, rather than universal, considerations determinants of mobile phone uptake.

Reasons for uptake of mobile phone in Buea have, therefore, been directly or indirectly tied to the particular circumstances of Anglophone Cameroon, as has reasons for mobile phone use in the town, as Chapter three now reveals.
CHAPTER THREE

3:1 INTRODUCTION

Pisani Bar and his colleagues have argued that "to fully grasp the social, economic and political impact of mobile telephony, we need to understand appropriation: the process through which mobile phone users go beyond mere adoption to make the technology their own and to embed it within their social, economic, and political practices" (Bar et al, 2007). Without something more than mere adoption happening, they argue, a technology cannot evolve and become better adapted to its users’ needs and ever more important to their social and economic development.

Further more, much as technology may bring about new possibilities, challenges, responsibilities and expectations, its real impact on users’ lives is subject to the meaning users put to it and the manner in which they translate its use, for “meaning is not something that is delivered to people, people create/interpret it for themselves (Servaes J, Malikhao P 2004). Chapter three therefore looks at the meaning which people put to mobile phone... At the manner in which it is being used and appropriated in Buea.

While it is fair to question the efficacy of this chapter (or even the previous chapter) when the goal of the thesis is to discover how mobile telephony is shaping and being shaped by daily life in Buea through examining the relationship between persons from four divorced social groups and the mobile phone, the following need be said.

First, a chapter on general usage is necessary to create a general mosaic of the meaning residents are putting to the phone. Secondly, the chapter is important for setting the stage for understanding the relationship between the phone and the different social groups. An inherently descriptive chapter, it offers a sweeping picture of what was observed, and how that corresponds with the context/history/accessibility hypothesis.

In the accessibility hypothesis being forwarded in this study, I argue that what we are to expect from Buea is that the manner in which people use the phone will reflect the specificity of their needs (that is, that which they hope to have access to). This is based on empirical evidence. In their 1999 study of Mobile telephony in Norway, Rick Ling
and Birgitte Yttri outline three types of phone usage by three groups of users: The elderly, working adults, and youngsters. The elderly, they note, generally adopt the phone for safety and security. Working adults put the phone into instrumental (micro-coordination) use, and the young such as teenagers and young adults (Ling, Yttri, 2002, eds Katz & Aakhus) use the phone for hyper-coordination, as well as - to a lesser degree vis a vis adults - micro-coordination.

Looking first at how working adults use the phone, micro-coordination involves using a mobile phone for logistical purposes, such as ‘firming up the place and time for a meeting or asking a family member to stop by the store on their way home. It involves the coordination of daily life and daily family activities, coordination of activities even while traveling and on the go, the coordination of work and life especially for mobile workers. Ling identifies three types of micro-coordination; 1) basic logistics – where one can oversee the redirection of trips that have already started; 2) Softening of time – where one sits in a traffic jam and calls ahead to a meeting to let them know one will be late; 3) progressive arrangement of meetings – where meetings are arranged before hand and further confirmed while on transit (Castels et al, 2004). To understand why working parents (working adults) in Norway and other European countries use the phone for micro-coordination, one needs to consider a number of things about these societies and the needs of its peoples.

In her “Mobile Life” report for Motorola, Sadie Plant reports that mobile phones “allow new levels of micromanagement in an age of fraught and tight deadlines” (Plant, 2003). On its part the UK-based Newswire reports that European societies want information on the go, in a 24/7-fast-paced existence (yellow pages 118 24 7). Living in such speedy, production-oriented conditions – where people carry their work with them on long distances (Castels et al, 2004), efficiency becomes a driving force. Lives become routinized and strung along a tight rope, the need to control space and time, to constantly be able to manage personal and professional life takes the fore in the working adult’s life. The mobile phone, in this situation, then becomes the conduit through which life can be coordinated from anywhere. It becomes the medium by which parenting or care-giving becomes less organizationally taxing. The operating word in all these is efficiency. Castels and his colleagues have noted that mobile telephony “allows increased levels of
efficiency in everyday activities thanks to perpetual contact (Castels et al, 2004).” European society today is a reflection of centuries of development and movements from less efficient modes of production to more efficient ones. Industrialization in Europe is an important latter day point of departure for this efficiency paradigm and the 24/7 lifestyle, though some may argue for Europe’s neo-classical dawn to be the birth of today’s capitalist drive for efficiency. However, whatever has been responsible for this type of efficiency-oriented mentality, it has built into place a Europe in which working adults need the most modern facilities to coordinate and make even more efficient their everyday life.

Moving from working adults to the youths, Ling (2002), Hardon (2002), Castels et al (2004) and other scholars, tell us that young people not only use the phone to micro-coordinate, they use it for hyper-coordination. The term hyper-coordination is used to define the expressive as well as instrumental use of mobile telephony. “In its expressive form, hyper-coordination refers to chatting, sms, joke telling, and other, more, emotive usage.” With relations to self presentation, hyper-coordination refers to appropriate looking mobile phone, handling of mobile phone, looking and appearing a certain way with the mobile phone… in short status symbol (Ling, Yttri, 2002, p9). The expressive use of mobile telephony amongst youths in European countries such as Norway reveal again the importance of local realities, unique historical factors and the desire for access to that which is not readily available, but wanted. Ling and Yttri have written that teenage years fraught with growing and parent/child tension is a time teens turn to their peers (Ling, Yttri, 2002, p10). The teens use various devices, styles, ruses and other social props to demarcate the boundary between them and their parents - with the mobile telephone and the jargon surrounding its use being one of those tools used for marking this boundary. For the youth seeking independence, the phone then becomes a right of passage… a route to needed privacy and self expression (Ling & Ytteri, 2002, Castels et al, 2004). The phone as right of passage is a concept I found also amongst young people in Buea. However, what I observed was that for the youths in Buea, it was not independence, privacy or self-expression that the phone promised
right of passage to, but economic security, job opportunity, basic livelihood, education, etc.

Economic security, job opportunity, basic livelihood, education, etc, are not things Norwegian or other European youths normally have to battle to acquire. For these European youths, what is important is independence, privacy and self-expression. Simply put, the two groups have different needs which drive their requirement of the phone.

Leopoldina Fortunati has written that a virtual brotherhood exists through mobile telephony amongst some youths in Italy - “a particular spaceless and timeless brotherhood that arises from familial loneliness which urges teenagers to break up the household physical constrain and go into other vicarious brothers and sisters” (Fortunati, L, 2002, eds Katz & Aakhus ). Contrast this with large Anglophone Cameroonian households where young people either grow up with many siblings, or an array of neighbourhood kids or school friends living close by. As we will see in Chapter Four, expanding one’s social network is what is important to the youths I spoke to in Buea. Where European youths use the phone for the type of safety that has created a “bedroom culture” in Britain (Haddon, L, 2002)… the kind of fears that ensures that the elderly and those who do not care for the phone make sure to get one (Castels et al, 2004), the youths in Buea see it as a possible spring board. It is not that the dangers that European youths and adults face is foreign to Anglophone Cameroonians, they have them too. But these fears feature more in the European’s reason for phone uptake.

The works of Barry Glassner (2000), Ronald Bailey (2006), and Dario Melossi (2008) on the historical precedence of the culture of fear in European countries and the US are instructive in explaining this drive to possess a phone. Media culture in these societies, recurrent stories in books, films and documentaries about serial killers from Jack the Ripper to the most recent names, etc, have all been responsible for building the roots of much of this safety and security concerns in Europe. In Buea, on the other hand, people do not seem to have the luxury to engage in discourses and analysis that result in fears of certain types of danger - danger that may well be there. The business of dealing with other dangers, dangers of surviving uncertainties, physical attack because of the phone, negotiating release from worries has shown itself far more decisive in how people think of the phone. As these examples show, use of mobile telephony links directly to needs
I identified three patterns of phone usage in Buea: as a household functional tool; as a communicator; and as a communication technology. In each of these patterns of use, I found people’s need to be the central determiner.

As a functional tool, I found that the phone is at once a flashlight (or torch light); an alarm clock, watch, and a calculator – especially for those who are cash-strapped and benefit from such multifunctional technology; as a money-exchange office. I found that use of the phone as multimedia is highest amongst younger persons – particularly the students I spoke to who put the phone’s camera, video, tape recording, internet and especially gaming functions into optimum use.

As a communicator, I found the phone to be in and of itself an expression; not merely a technology through which feelings, thoughts, ideas, hopes, aspirations etc are expressed, but the expression itself. For instance, some young people said they often used the phone to express their rejection of others. A student told me that "when you call and call and call someone and they keep not picking up the phone, you know what they are trying to tell you. So you just 'dismiss' them." By openly avoiding a person, a mobile phone owner gives that person a glimpse into the state of their relationship. Other variations of this behaviour include not answering calls or deliberately and pointedly putting off a ringing phone, or never responding to an informative beep. Another manifestation of the mobile phone as an expression is the visual report of what is going on in people’s lives. I noticed that the way people handle the phone, behave around it, interact with others in relation to it, its positioning, etc, imparts to the observer what is going on in a person’s, family’s or community’s life. In and of itself, therefore, the phone reveals things about users that expose the state of their needs, fears, hopes, living conditions, beliefs, etc.
However, while (as in the case of the phone’s expressive role above) the significance of using the phone as one’s mouthpiece or medium of unspoken expression in a hierarchical, socio-economically challenged society such as Anglophone Cameroon’s is irrefutable, and the significance of the technology’s ability to take over (as in its functional role above) the functionality of some basic household tools for cash strapped Cameroonians incontestable, neither one of these two uses of the phone would showcase the deep connection between usage pattern and needs, as would the third and main usage pattern of the mobile phone in Buea: the mobile phone as a communication medium.

3:3 SOURCING THE DEEPER SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS INFORMING MOBILE PHONE USE IN BUEA

I found that, as in other parts of the world, person to person communication in Buea via the mobile phone is accomplished via three means: calls (synchronous voice to voice contact); texts (asynchronous person to person contact – or written messages from one mobile phone screen to the other); and beeping (calling and then dropping the phone before the call is answered). Calls and texts have a standard format. But beeping comes in four basic categories: Fight Beep; Annoying Beep; Rendezvous Beep; and Greetings. Fight Beep is when people continually beep each other because no one wants to incur the cost of the call. It goes something like this. "You beep me, I beep you back, then you beep me again, then I beep you back, you beep again, and I beep back, until you get tired and if you really want to talk to me, you make the call and we talk." Another version of this is "You beep, I don't beep back. Then you attempt to beep again and I grab my phone before you drop. You waste credit just like you wanted me to waste credit calling you back."

Annoying Beep. Beeping from strangers… or people you discover are strangers and who were calling by mistake or for some sinister reason like beeping for the heck of it. One of the nurses I spoke to told me that when he first got his phone he went on a beeping spree to test the device. Rendezvous Beep (micro-coordination) is where people agree upon alerting each other for one reason or the other through beeping,
or when they arrange a rendezvous or when they want to warn others or call others’ attention to something. Greetings: The greeting beep is often amongst friends and social contacts who beep each other to greet. The recipient knows who has beeped and knows why. This overlaps with the rendezvous beep.

Ordinarily, calls are the most expensive means of mobile phone communication as much in Buea as elsewhere, followed by text messaging and lastly by beeping. As such it is only to be expected that in an environment of economic hardship, people would make calls selectively and rely more on texts and beeping. The discovery, however, that rather than use the cheaper text method to contact people abroad, no less than ninety percent of study respondents instead reported making calls rather than text abroad was a resounding surprise. Respondents, both from amongst participants in the study and from within the public, explained that texts are the preserve of local contacts, while calls are reserved for all others, most especially contacts abroad. The problem with my confusion about this seeming upside down logic was that I was still operating within the school of thought where communication and contact are seen as the driving force behind motivation for uptake and use of mobile telephony. Not until the correlation between desire for access to opportunity (or the opportunity to meet established needs) and uptake / usage patterns dawned on me did it make sense that method of mobile phone communication would not be determined by the availability of a person’s phone credit, but by the expected result of the contact. From respondents, I gathered that on a scale of one to ten in importance, calls abroad were often on the range of nine to ten—with reasons for communication ranging from urgent family requirements back home to maintaining vital connections as in the link-up activities in Jamaica (Miller and Horst, 2006), or simply from soliciting direct help in kind or cash to other ‘mutually’ beneficial purposes. I was told that such long distance exchanges had to be devoid of mistakes, misquotes or miscommunication of any kind. Text messages with their predisposition to allow mistakes undetected in real time were therefore a precarious means of contacting people abroad. The immediacy of calls, on the other hand, made mistakes of any kind less likely, as such faux pas could easily and instantaneously be detected and rectified. I found that the value of text lay mostly in its ability to allow for mutual psychological assistance. An overwhelming number of participants said
they often sent text messages to encourage one another, swap vital information, micro-coordinate, and exchange bible passages. Through these messages of hope, encouragements, and tidbits of opportunities, text messages evidently were breeding solidarity amongst people locked in the same conditions. Ultimately, thence, mobile phone calls and texts are not about communicating for the sake of making contact, but about reaching a desired end - be it gaining financial aid from abroad, or experiencing stress release from within.

Another observation I made about the use of mobile telephony in its capacity as a medium of communication was not how it was being used but who it was being used to contact. I noticed that young people tended to call friends and families most, while more established persons such as professionals mostly called family, followed by business and work acquaintances. I did come to understand why. Several young people in Buea told me that friends are a lifeline of hope, opportunities and job… a font of assistance when things get tough… a source of promise such as cannot be expected from the government or, for some, even from family members. These friends, in essence, are human capital. Nan Lin has surmised that “social capital explains the importance of using social connections and social relations in achieving goals… Embedded resources in social networks” he goes on to write, “enhance the outcome of actions.” (Lin, N, 2005) Francis Fukuyama adds that “social capital is an instantiated informal norm that promotes cooperation between two or more individuals (Fukuyama, 1999).”

Much of Africa’s conflict is said to come from tribalism, regionalism, familial nepotism, and the like. In Buea, much as politicians try to stoke up regional and tribal tension (especially looking at the North-West/ South-West debate surrounding much of the University of Buea strikes), friendship amongst school mates, colleagues etc appear to dwarf all other but family obligations. I found friendship to be an enduring theme, and one so important that friends play key roles in employment, even the ability to travel abroad”. Friendship or the concept of friendship clearly has become so important to Anglophone Cameroonians that making new friends means enhancing one’s opportunities. One of the things my assistant Ewang Essembesson appreciated about the new phone I gave him was the fact that he could now reach his former school friends now scattered across the country and beyond. As some of the students in the study pointed
out, sometimes, people mistakenly dial the wrong number and “you end up
finding a new friend, or being called up by a stranger, or striking
conversation with someone and exchanging numbers”. These social
contacts are so valuable that, even where people resort to all kinds of
selfish activities to overcome their economic lack, they remain careful
to maintain the integrity of their social network. Nathan Jua tells us
that “Emphasizing the goal of self-achievement more than social
commitment, young people in Africa are preoccupied with winning and
success, although interpersonal relationships are not necessarily
sacrificed, if only because of the recognized career value of rich
social networks.” For students and young people still hoping to find a
career, therefore, rising in the morning and calling or texting key
contacts, or staying on the phone for long hours (for instance during
MTN’s night time promotional offer) to discuss new information and
possibilities is no luxury.

As for the working adults in the study, monitoring the wellbeing of
family members – as much out of love as out of duty – was a stress-
releaser. I first observed this connection between family and stress
release in uptake pattern. As already described in chapter two, I
found that the persistent anxiety concerning the health and
circumstances of family members in the ‘geography of crisis’ (Mbembe and
Roitman, 1995) that the socio-economic and socio-political dynamics of
Cameroon had produced, had resulted to parents and established persons
buying phones for those close to them. Respondents who thus admitted to
buying phones for those dear to them, admitted often monitoring
recipients’ wellbeing – especially when the latter were on transit.
Fear for the safety of family members and other close persons in
transit, or when in ill health and far away, was apparently so
pervasive that just about every respondent told me that one of the
greatest value of the mobile phone was its ability to curb traveling.
Respondents told me that rather than travel long distances to solve one
or another family issue, or to meet one or another person, all they had
to do now was make a phone call and get things over with or discussed.
Not only did this save traveling, but it also saved traveling costs.
Where it would have cost “4,500frs to go to Yaounde”, a 100francs call
would take care of the reason for that intended trip.
Another valuable utility of the phone came as a surprise to me. Its utility as a therapeutic medium. Though calls also proved important as a means to bring comfort, the phone’s text feature tended to be widely used by respondents to send messages of hope and encouragement, especially bible passages. Respondents insistently told me that their phone was precious to them because “bible passages can be sent to you by phone, sermons can be texted or partly taped, people can be preached to through the phone, souls can be won through the phone, people can book for appointment to see their spiritual counselor, people can receive teachings through the phone, be prayed for over the phone and follow up on new converts, some phones contain the bible...” Robert Akoko has submitted that “Cameroon’s economic crisis has led to widespread unemployment and poverty since the 1980s. Civil society organizations, including the churches, believe that bad governance is at the heart of the country’s economic problems and are calling for the introduction of democratic institutions. However, a growing number of Pentecostal churches, especially in Anglophone Cameroon, are also offering an attractive message of salvation to the suffering masses” (Akoko, 2007). The number of churches in Anglophone Cameroon (over 25 in Buea alone\(^5\)) is a testimony to the mass turning to God for hope.

More conventional uses of the phone include soliciting for jobs through making calls to employers or simply leaving behind one’s phone numbers at potential job sites, or with friends who might know of job opportunities. On this issue of employment, respondents consistently told me that “you can get a job by just leaving your number somewhere where people are looking for a worker”; “you can be called by an employer”; “someone who has your number who knows about a job can give your number to a job owner.”

In all these, one thing remains constant: the fact that the phone is a conduit of opportunity... of meeting one’s needs. It is this needs-based use of the phone that has made of the mobile phone in Buea not only a communication technology, but a communicator and a functional household gadget.
3:4 CONCLUSION

We can therefore conclude that the mobile phone in Buea is more than the product it was originally designed to be. It is at once a functional household tool, a communication technology, and a communicator. But above all, it is a technology that people in Buea use to or attempt to use to achieve hope, peace, stress-release, employment options, job and professional opportunities, business possibilities, and all that is desired but remains beyond an individual’s reach as a result of Anglophone Cameroon’s particular circumstance. This last point brings to the fore one final conclusion: that uptake and use of mobile telephony is driven by local rather than universal considerations.

Though these conclusions help prepare us for the findings made amongst the different social groups in the study, they only highlight general usage patterns. These generalizations do not give us specifics on usage by the different groups in the study... details that may confirm or negate the assumptions made about the dynamics between man and phone in Buea. On the other hand, such specifics were not the focus of this chapter. The point of the chapter was to give an overview of usage patterns in Buea so as to establish a working knowledge of phone use in Buea that would serve as a basis for understanding mobile phone usage amongst the four groups in the study. To their case studies we now turn.
CASE STUDIES
CS:1  INTRODUCTION TO CASE STUDIES

The next four chapters are chapters on case studies. Each case study begins with an introduction, followed by some statistical information, and thereafter analysis of fieldwork. Any variations to this structure is inconsequential.

In order to shed some light on the different methodologies used for each group, or better still, to explain the different methodologies used for each social group, these case-studies will begin with some general observations and followed with some questions of definition.

CS:2  METHODOLOGY: DATA COLLECTION

As already indicated in chapter one, fieldwork included observation, interviews, diary keeping and questionnaires. These methods were not employed uniformly to all groups. Students and Professionals were chosen from respondents of 150 questionnaires handed out to the general public and to call box operators. The blind became part of the study by accident; and were thereby chosen by virtue of the fact that they were a feature of the Buea human landscape. The family households on their part were methodically selected from a number of options.

Interview questions for the blind were only partly based on the questionnaires. For the family-households, some of the questions in the questionnaires made the rounds in many unscripted discussions we had. However, as much for the blind as for the family-households, the main fieldwork methodology was observation. Below is a tabulated version of the breakdown of methods used on the field for each group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Questionnaires</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Dairy keeping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>80% of the time</td>
<td>30% of the time</td>
<td>30% of the time</td>
<td>0% of the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>80% of the time</td>
<td>30% of the time</td>
<td>30% of the time</td>
<td>0% of the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Blind</td>
<td>Administered 10% of the time</td>
<td>80% of the time</td>
<td>50% of the time</td>
<td>0% of the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family-Households</td>
<td>20% of the time</td>
<td>90% of the time</td>
<td>informal 50% of the time</td>
<td>Some of the houses 90% of the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
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<td>----------------------------------</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**CS3 CONCEPTUALIZATION**

As for the question of definition mentioned above, fieldwork in Buea gave me a new definition of youthfulness. I found that the concept youth is not circumscribed by biological age but by economic circumstance. When I began fieldwork students were, in my view, the representation of youth, while the professionals represented the older generation. But things soon became complicated. In the ranks of the students were people as young as 15 years of age and as old as 35 years old; in the ranks of the professionals were people as young as 21 years old. In its self, this was not anything beyond the realms of imagination. But matters did not end there. In the course of the study, I began noticing something that responses from students who were in their thirties mirrored those of students who were as young as seventeen, while the professionals in their twenties seemed to have the same (in fact near identical) concerns as the professionals in their forties. As I reevaluated responses to questions on people’s hopes, ideas and feelings, I realized that the notion of ‘youth’ amongst respondents was not frozen in time, nor restricted to scientific measurement of age. Rather, it was a social construct. Anyone who was still struggling to ‘stand on their feet’ or to ‘settle down’, was seen as part of the youth population, regardless of their biological age, while those who were settled in the sense that they were earning an income were considered beyond the realms of the youths. Answers from people as young as twenty-three who already had jobs revealed that they saw themselves as settled. Though these young professionals did not say they were the same ages as people in their forties, they kept speaking derogatorily about the ‘youths of today’ and the way ‘these youths’ were using the phone. To all the professionals in the study (young and old), students, the unemployed and everyone else trying to find a living was a youth. My criteria for the young and the not so young had to shift, though I was still careful to keep my students within a certain age bracket (not exceeding 35). We now begin the case studies.
CHAPTER FOUR: STUDENTS (YOUTHS)

4:1 INTRODUCTION

Thirty-four students were chosen from respondents of over one hundred questionnaires. As already explained in Chapter One, the students were an important target group for the research because of their visibility, presence and impact in the town. There was, however, another reason. I chose to add students in the study because they not only represent an important population group in Buea, but because they represent youths in general, in spite of the social conceptualization of youth that I would encounter in the process of fieldwork in Buea. In spite of this, the students still symbolized the youth to me—a population that was crucial to any study on society in Cameroon (or any part of it). A recent UN report stated that in 2003 3% of Cameroonians were over 65 years of age and 43% under 15 years (Encyclopaedia of Nations). That means over 50% of Cameroonians are young people. The Communications Initiative Network website showcased a 2004 report which stated that young people in Cameroon between 10 and 24 make up 32% of the population. This means that any attempt at examining how innovation of any type is affecting all or part of Cameroon that leaves out the youth population will fail to convincingly reach its goal. Fieldwork amongst the students, thus, was a condition to the research achieving its goal; and below is a table of the student body in the study.

4:2 STATISTICAL INFORMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of students in the study:</th>
<th>Thirty-Four</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of students in direct informal interview</td>
<td>Ten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of other students in Buea interviewed at various times</td>
<td>Count not kept - because discussions carried out with people outside the study group were intended to augment data (a sort of validity check), and to allow for a general feel of things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males: Ages:</td>
<td>SIXTEEN 17, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24 (24), 26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Five of the males did not give their ages. Data of two of the students who were taken out of the information pool because they exceeded my criteria for age limits (30 and 32) was later included in the work because, as already explained above, they showed themselves to
have the same concerns, hopes and attitude as the respondents who were 17,18, or 19.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Females: sixteen</th>
<th>SIXTEEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ages:</td>
<td>20, 21 (21,21) 22, 23 (23,23), 25.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seven of the female students did not give their ages; but they too exhibited the same relationship with the phone as did the others. Hence, instead of disqualifying them because of the lack of basic statistics, I included them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Two students in the whole group did not offer their sex or age |

4:3 FIELDWORK AMONGST STUDENTS

My research amongst students began with assumptions. False assumptions. Chief of these was the assumption that to students the mobile phone was above and beyond all else a status symbol. This was a belief born of my own preconceptions about youth behaviour and what appeared from observation and discussions to be student attitude towards mobile telephony. Early in the study I had taken time to exclusively observe students. For about 2 weeks, an hour a day - at different times of the day and different days of the week - I sat on the grass at the UB junction (entrance to the University of Buea), away from the sun and the file of call box operators, hawkers and traders, and watched the students (or the young people whom I presumed were students of the University of Buea). I watched girls giggle, boys give the bump, young people stop to now and then take a call. I observed young men and women walk past with their phones against their ears, or seated at solitary spots engaging their phones. Every so often two or more young people would guffaw over something that seemed to have appeared on the screen of one of their mobile phones. These phone carryings-on were, of course, not an unremitting flow of activities. They were intermittent. Sometimes - barring the continuous visits of young people (phone in hand) to the different call boxes - I would have to wait for minutes before observing one or more phone related activity. Much as nothing about these activities or the way students handled or acted with their phones spelt drama, my preconceptions about students’ relationship with the phone still held. Even the fact that thirty out of the thirty-four students in the study said the phone had no other value for them than its ability to help them gather class and other information, its ability to expand their social network, give them
access to spiritual counseling, act as safety net, emergency aid, instant access to relevant others, etc, my view scarce shifted. And there was nothing to contradict these functional patterns of phone usage. For instance, 34 out of 34 students confirmed that they use the phone for the following: calling to solicit money from parents and better-placed relations (32); using it to meet new acquaintances (34); using it for religious reasons (17); and as newsroom. Many said they use their phones to find out information about class time tables, opportunities for courses, information on lessons they may have missed, and many other school related information. For some students, the phone was a surprisingly wonderful tool to create new friends - by, say, mistakenly dialing a wrong number or being mistakenly called up by a stranger and getting to make a new friend; or meeting someone for the first time, getting into conversation with them and exchanging numbers. The issue of spirituality discussed earlier also came up amongst students. Several students (17 out of 34) said the phone was a bonus now to their Christian lives as it was making possible the ability to receive sermons over the phone, as well as send or receive helpful bible passages. A theme I heard constantly from other groups in the study and observed amongst the students was the importance of the phone in curbing traveling. The fact that the phone could be used in times of emergency to call for help was also a feature that students appreciated, though not to the degree that European users - especially the elderly - apparently appreciated. Many students in the study told me that they sometimes used the phone as their mouthpiece. A female student told me that where she does not wish to talk to someone, she lets the phone do the talking for her. Her explanation: "It has made things easy for me now with all these people who bother me. All I have to do is not answer some people and after a while, they get the message." Another student said, she would pick up the call and then deliberately switch off the phone on the caller. Amongst the many other variations of this use of the phone as mouthpiece was the use of the phone to boldly speak to older persons or people in authority who normally would be out of a student's league. A nineteen year old male student told me that he would not have had access to his principal had he not had the phone. Apparently, he was able, for the first in his life, to talk to his principal directly. He called the older man. Little wonder then that one of the professionals I spoke to lamented
that the phone was overriding authority because “now anyone can call the Fon (King in the North West Province of Cameroon) and just talk to him!” Another unusual utility of the phone was its function as an advisor. Of everything else that I had expected the phone to be, one of them had not been to override the authority of mere mortals in some moral and medical matters. A female student explained that through her MTN’s “HIV/AIDS campaign” – she became keenly conscious of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Asked if she had not been sensitized by all the previous campaigns against the diseases, she said not to the extent nor as insistently as the MTV campaign. Another student said MTN’s birdflu campaign was the campaign that really got her thinking about the epidemic.

Considering all of the above utility of the phone to students, my view of the phone as a symbol of status should have thus ebbed. It did not - at least not that day at the UB junction nor long after that. The sophisticated looks of some of the phones and what seemed like students’ tendency to admire each other’s phones did not do much to discourage this perspective. Neither did complaints by a minority of the students I the study about the predisposition of other students to parade their phones, talk obnoxiously loud on the devices, or let their phones ring in inappropriate places make the necessary change in my way of thinking. In this mode of thinking, I could not see the true symbolism of the phone to the students... did not see that the phone’s real symbolism lay deep in the recesses of the socio-economic/socio-political state of Cameroon and the consequent impact on their aspirations and hopes. The realization of this did not come to me as a result of a shift in awareness. It was in large part due to three sets of views I eventually discerned amongst the students in the study.

The first view, held by about 30% of the students suggested that mobile telephony is a technology that makes the rich richer and the poor poorer since rich people use their sophisticated phones to get to more information and opportunities while poor people, devoid of such advanced phones, have no such access to opportunity-creating possibilities. Not owning a top-of-the-range phone, in this view, was considered a disadvantage; but not owning one at all denoted resigning one’s self to the economic stagnation facing the Cameroonian masses. A second view of the phone held by another 30% of the students posited that the phone is a leveling ground, which has the potential to lead
poor people to what has heretofore been the exclusive preserve of the
wealthy: for instance useful contacts, results-creating information,
and commercial or other types of offers. According to this view,
possessing the phone was capable of providing poor people the means to
remotely access information, to make valuable contacts at any given
time, and, amongst other things, to speedily organize themselves for
life-impacting opportunities. As in the first belief system, advocates
of this stance too saw not owning a mobile phone as relegating one’s
self to the mediocrity that ownership terminates. In the third and
final view, advocates proposed that simply owning the phone qualified a
person into world citizenship. The view held that where the phone does
not immediately make this world citizenship possible it offers
the owner a route to becoming an active participant in the ‘global
village’. Again, like the first two views, in this standpoint too, not
owning the phone suggested a person’s entombment in the hopelessness of
a stagnant socio-political environment.

In all three views, two themes stood central: 1) not owning a
phone relegates a person to the mediocrity that lack of access to
information connotes, and 2) owning a phone offers a window into
hopefulness. The symbolic value of the phone, therefore, according to
these views, rested in its representation of (or promise of) the
future, and in what it suggested about an owner’s personal prospects.
As appeared to be the case with the student’s sentiments about the
internet, the phone to them was light in the dark. The correlation
between the students’ relationship with the internet and their
relationship with the phone only served to testify to their apparent
belief in the phone’s potential to bring hope. During my months in Buea
I observed that in internet cafes the majority of visitors were youths
(mostly students), and that these young people tended to visit sites on
higher education, sites with chat facilities and pen friends, sites
offering access to games and images of football matches, and sites with
celebrities. They visited social communities, Craig lists, matchmaking
sites, porn sites, sites with tourist images, and, amongst others,
sites promising opportunities for travel abroad. These sites, I
noticed, consistently offered promises or images that blotted the
reality of the present. They displayed mental, psychological and
emotional highways to other realities… to better possibilities.
Nyamnjoh(2005), Jua( 2003) and Akoko(2007 ) have argued that the
internet is a magnate for young Anglophone Cameroonians who, in that vast universe, find and assert their voice, and more. The internet, thereby, is a place of beating the odds, of finding and creating possibilities. In a Cameroon where there is little hope for finding employment after university, nothing, I realized, compared to the implications of the images presented on internet sites - nothing, that is, which previous technologies could ever come near to offering. The mobile phone, on the other hand, through its portability, design and facilities, offered the same glimpse into other possibilities that the images and facilities of the internet offered: Their attachment to the internet and their extensive use of the mobile phone therefore confirmed their need to look beyond the boundaries of their present. Perhaps the above statement should be turned around to read "their extensive use of the internet and their attachment to the phone..", for it was what I observed as their intensive relationship with the phone that eventually clarified the connection with the internet. There were many things that showcased this student attachment to the phone. The first and most obvious was their spending habit. Of the thirty-four student in the study, six said they spend between 5% and 12% of their pocket money on credit every month; eight said they spend between 20% to 30%, four said they spend 50% of their pocket money, while one indicated that he spends 60%. One of the young men in the study revealed that he spends 60% more than he earns, whilst another indicated that he generally would dole out on the phone three times more than he normally got. Without indicating what he got monthly, another male student revealed that he generally spent between 5,000frs to 10,000frs a month on his phone. Finally, not indicating how much she was getting a month, a female student said she spends 15,000frs a month on her phone. The best way to gauge what this means is to consider that there are baby-sitters in Buea who earn no more than 10,000frs a month. Another indication of how attached students were to their phones was what they were willing to give up for their phones - or what they had already willingly given up to own it. “Given up drinking beer;” “give up some school stuff, like buying shoes”, “starved for one week just to get my phone”, “sell my shoes to get my phone”, “sell my dress”, and a host of other things. Then there was the question of where students kept their phones and how they were handling it on a daily basis. Out of thirty-four students, thirty said their phones were constantly with
them during the day, either in their pockets, or in their bags, or in their hands. The remaining four said they often kept their phones on their room locker or table. All thirty-four students said that in the nights their phones were generally either under their pillows, or on their bedside cupboards, or on the reading tables beside them, or at the head of their beds, or on the bed itself with them. Above and beyond all these, students in the study said they hardly ever left home without their phones. Out of thirty-four students, twenty said they could not leave home without their phones, and just about all of them said they could not imagine life without the phone. Those who said they could leave home without the phone indicated that they would only do so to preclude having their phones stolen or to avoid becoming a nuisance in class, or during exams, or in church, and to protect it from damage on a rainy day when going to farm, or, again for fear of thieves, when going to a crowded market. Though research amongst the professionals, the blind participants and family-households members did eventually show the same attachment to the phone, students still proved more predisposed to adopt it faster and to put it into more intense and creative use. Then again, this was a global reality. A 2004 report by the market research group MARCO (MARCO, 2004), showed that youths in Mumbai were the fastest adopters of mobile telephony in the city. Castels and his colleagues also have offered that “If we focus on the EU-25, and given similar levels of penetration ten years ago, in 2003, out of every ten persons eight were mobile telephone subscribers (rate: 80.01%). Among these subscribers, young Europeans in the 15 to 25 age bracket and young adults from 25 to 34 years of age have the highest rate of usage (77.2% and 75.8%). The penetration rate drops to 70 percent for those between 35 and 44 and then considerably reduces to lower than 55 percent for older people. Young people in their teens, twenties, and early thirties not only constitute the largest proportion of users. They are also the early adopters, who invented uses that had not been foreseen by the initial designers of the technology. Indeed, in this field of communication the key to success for companies is to identify and follow the innovations of young users.” What Castells and other scholars writing on or referring to youths and the mobile phone are ultimately alluding to is the synergy between young people and technology, which for my student respondents, was clearly one of several explanations for their attachment to the technology.
internet and the mobile phone. However, this student attachment to the mobile phone was, above all, the visual report of the students’ collective views.

My initial notion of the phone as a status symbol to students was therefore wrong, or if anywhere close to the truth, only true to the extent that for students it suggested something powerful their prospects. Indeed, though 10% of students in the study said it was ‘kind of good to be proud of what you have’, or that ‘letting everyone see your phone shows ‘seriousness in business depending on kind of phone and how it’s held’, or that it signified ‘lots of dignity and respect’, ‘makes me feel on top and adds my points (dignity)’, ‘is prestige’, etc, some 90% said making a display of something that was “common place” signified that a person was suffering from ‘inferiority complex’ or as the different expressions below signify, was making of an ant hill a mountain. There were expressions such as ‘they are very happy b/c they have become connected’; ‘They concentrate on it and forget about everything around them’; ‘They always show it out to be proud that they have it’; ‘They are excited b/c it’s not easy to own one’; ‘Some behave as impostors b/c maybe they never knew they will be in possession of one’; ‘Some people are proud and this is b/c of the brand of their phone which is too modern’; ‘Some people want you to see their hand and is because they want to see the type of local phone they have’; ‘They walk and spread their hand for people to see the type of phone they are holding’; ‘Presently very few people could be described as show off, but the few who do such could be said to be very primitive and not well cultured’; ‘proud because phone is expensive’; ‘a few behave extraordinary and I think it is uncultured’; ‘They always hold the phone tightly because they may be snatched away’; ‘Some press it more often than not in order to let it be a cause for concern to know what mark of phone he has’; ‘They pose. Maybe they think it is prestigious’; ‘They feel great’; ‘They are proud to have the phone’; ‘They behave as if to say that is the end of the world’; ‘Because they want to show that they have’; ‘They are too proud of themselves b/c they think they are the only people with mobile phones’; ‘They are proud b/c they think none else can have what they have…’ Additional to this, 100% of respondents noted that the phone’s real significance lay in the fact that it is an information highway, that it introduces one to the world of ideas, and makes of a person
part of the global village. Ultimately, thence, how ever much the phone seemed to pass for show, it was a technology with calculated benefits. The three views above are an indication that for the students, the phone’s ultimate utility is in as much its symbolic potential as in its instrumental functionality.

4:4 FINAL WORD

We can therefore conclude that for the students in the study, the mobile phone is important for its instrumental as well as its symbolic value. And that this symbolic value is directly linked to the mobile phone’s capacity to lower uncertainty.

Amongst the professionals I found attitude towards the phone that at first seemed so divorced… so completely out of sync with the students’ attitude that there scarce seemed room to even consider any corresponding pattern of usage between the two. That was until their identical context and background drew and fitted them together like a glove. We now turn to the professionals.
CHAPTER FIVE: THE PROFESSIONALS

5:1 INTRODUCTION

The history of the professionals in this study mirrors that of the students. As already indicated in Chapter One, the professionals were chosen from amongst respondents of a questionnaire that was handed out to people all over Buea. As such, the choice of these different professionals was not predetermined – the only criteria being that they be individuals belonging to a profession. Since there was no deliberate attempt to pursue one particular profession, professions of respondents became quite diverse. This, incidentally, proved propitious as the nature of their collective pattern of usage gave further credence to the proposition that access to opportunities drives adoption, usage, and inter relationship between man and mobile telephony. For clarity’s sake, the professionals will be studied in groups. They have been divided in three groups: Teachers, nurses and miscellaneous professionals.

5:2 STATISTICAL INFORMATION

As can be seen from the table below, people from seventeen different professions were included in the study. However, only two professions had enough members to constitute a visible group. As a result, reference would be made more readily to these two groups of professionals throughout the case study, though emphasis will still be on the professionals as a whole.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Number of males</th>
<th>Number of females</th>
<th>Age bracket</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TEACHERS</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25, 35, 37, 39 (39), 45</td>
<td>Data on age was not forth coming from four teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NURSES</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26, 27, 28, 41</td>
<td>Data on age was not forth coming from four nurses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAIRDRESSES</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21, 33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 5:3 Fieldwork Amongst the Professionals

Amongst the professionals, I found attitude towards the phone that at first seemed so divorced... so completely out of sync with the students’ that the notion of a corresponding motive for usage seemed void. The teachers, for instance, tended to treat the phone like a necessary evil – a thing of decadence, lies, crimes and financial drain, yet one that at the same time was indispensable for coordinating responsibilities, managing domestic life, opening avenues for career enhancement and residual income, and micro-coordinating. The nurses, on their part as well as other professionals in the group, saw the phone as a career vaccine – a technology that was valuable for its ability to boost job and business opportunities, enhance social and family life, and help

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BUSINESS PERSONS</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26m, 23f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SALES</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADMINISTRATOR</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHARMACIST</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOURNALIST</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BROADCASTER</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASHIER</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BANKER</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CICIL SERVANT</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL WORKER</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECRETARY</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL:</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some data were not given.
organize daily affairs. Neither the nurses, nor the teachers, nor the mix of other professionals in the study, therefore, saw the phone as anything but a useful gizmo necessary for making prevailing circumstances more manageable. Indeed, from the very onset of the study, the participating professionals revealed dispositions that set the tone for understanding their relationship with the phone. And this can best be illustrated by comparison to the students. We have seen in the previous chapter that students in the study generally receive pocket allowances ranging from 5,000frs to 15,000frs or thereabouts. The professionals in the study on the other hand earn an average monthly salary of 130,000frs, with the majority of the teachers earning as much as 250,000frs. Yet teachers spend between 2% and 3% of their salaries on the phone per month compared to students who with 5000frs to 15000 allowance spend sometimes as much as three times more than what they get a month. Nurses in the study who fall within the same age range as students (in their twenties) earn an average of 130,000frs, yet spend between 5% and 13%. The same bode for miscellaneous professionals. Therefore, compared to students who make less money, employed persons spend less on their phones. Notably too, professionals in the study spend less than those who said they were unemployed (and themselves earning nothing whatsoever). The explanation for this, I found, lay not merely in how these different groups in society use the mobile phone, but in why they use it and how their needs are influencing their choices. Take the teachers for instance. They use the mobile phone for micro-coordination. But unlike working adults in Europe who use the phone for micro-coordination of basic logistics and social activities (Ling, 2002, Castells et al 2004), these teachers use the phone to control mobility. For instance, teachers reported that rather than travel from Buea to the village or other parts of the country for some family issue or the other, they would stay home in Buea and coordinate things from there. LyAnne Yu has said that mobile telephony is not about mobility but privacy amongst US youths. To a different degree, the same holds true for the teachers in the study: mobile telephony is not about mobility but about negotiating mobility in a geography of crisis. It is not about coordinating social life or daily interaction with immediate family and co-workers, it is about coordinating responsibilities. One of the things that at first seemed contradictory to me was teachers’ propensity to resist the phone—
sharing practices that I had observed in Buea especially amongst students and within families. Half of the teachers showed a marked dislike for having their phones handled by others, especially to make free calls. Those who said they would allow people use their phones placed clear conditions: "for emergency when there is no credit in hers”; “when they don’t have credit in their phones and they wish to make a short call”; “if he/she has an urgent message and lacks credit”; “when there is need”; “maybe an urgent call and the person is broke”. These were unambiguous guidelines, by men and women who were not in the business of allowing casual calls on their phones. In comparison to what I had noted about the tendency to share in Buea, this was quite unusual, until I realized that it really made perfect sense. To begin with, teachers in the study did not discard of sharing their phones. They only took to sharing conditionally. Secondly, on closer examination, these men and women clearly have no choice but be frugal. Let us consider why this should be so.

In the first instance, teachers are settled professionals who, unlike students who are still looking to change from one state of being to the other, have found their niche in a tight employment arena and must make do with and organize what they have as best they can to stay afloat. Many of them are home makers (incidentally or accidentally the majority of the teachers in the study were women) and parents who must balance life for their families and use everything within their power to make ends meet, these men and women bear considerable responsibilities. The phone therefore is for them only one of the necessities of life, not a technology to rotate amongst friends or to use to go out on a crusade to build and expand existing social networks. I found, for instance, that the most important contacts on the phone lists of the professionals in the study were family members, followed by business acquaintances. The phone’s most important utility to them seemed to be its ability to assist them coordinate family life, remotely monitor the affairs and wellbeing of children in far off towns, have basic supplies delivered, organize home activities remotely, as well as guide their religious life. At the same time most of them considered it evil, though a necessary evil. They saw it as a technology that, in spite of all its advantages, was the facilitator of the ills in society and a creator of even new ones. Through it, lies telling, shameless deceit, criminality, immorality, and all kinds of
shenanigans abounded, many insisted. Above all it was a real financial drain to them. Almost all of the teachers told me that they felt like prisoners to the technology, imprisoned by their growing need of and attachment to it while appalled by its criminal and immoral effect on society – especially on the young and as such the future of the country. The other professionals also had much to say about the ills of the mobile phone in society – especially on how people were behaving with the phone: ‘ignoring others while on the phone,’ ‘telling barefaced lies’, ‘clandestine affaires’, ‘pornography and so much immorality’ etc. Then again it was in this group – the nurses specifically – that people admitted to having watched porn on their phone screens, or used the phone to harass others. But whatever these professionals variously admitted to or did not admit to, they all were unified in one thing: their concern for what the phone was likely to mean for their present careers and alternative business prospects. Like the teachers, however, their families featured high on their contact lists.

5:4  A FINAL WORD

In essence, all three groups of professionals have an almost identical motivation for phone use. Teachers use the phone to manage family (extended family) and domestic life, to coordinate a collage of responsibilities, to organize affairs surrounding them, and attend to financial duties and opportunities. Nurses and the miscellaneous professionals see the utility of the phone in its capacity as a career vaccine and business opportunity enhancer, and also as an enhancer in family and social matters.

In all this, we see one important difference between respondents in the study and European consumers of mobile telephony. At the beginning of this section, Castells and his colleagues discuss the safety and security concerns that drive uptake and use amongst as much the elderly as working adults and young people. But in Buea – a town in a continent considered in every sense a bigger security risk than Western countries, we see security becoming an issue only after purchase, and to do with possession of the phone itself. The phone’s safety and security value becomes most apparent in what it is able to prevent: traveling on dangerous roads, highway robbery, the constant tension surrounding the security and health of children, etc. No one in the
study said they bought the phone for security, but everyone said owning the phone did mean danger of phone theft or robbery and as such had to handle it in certain ways. Concerns of emergency situations arising, concerns of dangers that might demand instant access to the phone have not been foreign to these professionals as I found in discussions across Buea, but these have apparently been secondary to the pressing need of the hour – the need to lower the uncertainties in their lives. We find this same attitude amongst the students, the preoccupation to use the phone to lower existing uncertainties and achieve needed goals than to pay attention to the kinds of worries that Europeans have the occasion to worry about. At the same time this similarity of attitude towards the phone between the two seem to end when actual usage pattern is taken into consideration. The students use the phone symbolically while the professionals put it into functional use, a distinction that seem to make of the professionals realists – men and women who use the phone to make the best of life as it is, rather than as it ought to be, while students’ symbolic use of it ostensibly make of them. Such dichotomy between the two mobile phone usage patterns clearly put the two groups in seeming separate phone-use universes. Students use the phone to expand their social networks, coordinate school matters, gather information, negotiate hope, overturn the seeming hopelessness of the present, get away from the stifling circumstances of the present, and identify more with a better future. Their phones have more symbolic value, as even the instrumental use of it engages their symbolic need of it. Professionals use the phone largely for its instrumental worth – to negotiate responsibilities, coordinate home and work life, enhance professional opportunities, and control and manage existing circumstances. As such, preoccupied with looking inwards, while students are preoccupied with looking outward. Evidently, the existence of two phone use universes as described above are apparently real. But what I eventually found to be truly real was the fact that these differences and dissimilarities were that which made the two group’s respective motivation for uptake and use so alike... so very connected.

It would take appreciation of the circumstances of each group against the backdrop of their mutual history and collective living conditions to clarify this fact to me. I realised, for instance, that regardless of their separate group micro-circumstances, both
professionals and students are living in an environment defined by a historical process that, for the majority of Anglophone Cameroonians was destabilizing. As Berner quotes some sociologists as saying, "the reduction of uncertainty is one of the major preoccupations of social life; the fight against continually produced disorder is imperative" (Berner, 2000, pp. 277-309). For the professionals and the students therefore, the overriding preoccupation has been the struggle to reduce uncertainty and negate all sense of vulnerability. Given their socio-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, this battle has been different for each group, yet the goal has remained the same. The professionals for instance already have jobs in an environment where jobs are scarce. As the history of Cameroon discussed earlier indicates, unemployment - especially amongst Anglophone Cameroonians - was the most immediate and deeply felt consequence of the 1980s economic meltdown; which did not ebb thereafter. By 2001, unemployment amongst Cameroon's youth had grown to 49.9% (The Post Online Cameroon, 14/2/2006), while a 2008 report showed Cameroon’s national unemployment rate to have risen to 20% before 2007 (http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/487ca1fa420.html). Under such conditions, having a job - a permanent job - has meant possessing a gem. For the professionals that gem has already been a reality, and all they require now is for it to maintain the status quo in which they are salaried men and women, and for it to enhance whatever opportunity is there to augment the salaries they are earning as well as cushion the many eventualities that have become features of Cameroon’s geography of crisis. They do not need the phone to open up vistas of opportunities for a livelihood for them. That is the province of the students who see nothing to preserve in the prevailing conditions. If anything, the here and now is their concern. In the economic environment where they are now living (where at least 49% will have no job after graduation), there is little prospect of a job or a career after school; and so, like the internet which has now thrown open a window into a world of opportunities, a world of finding scholarships, jobs, new ideas and new possibilities, the phone is the representative of a reality that promises to take them away from their 'mediocre' present... that promises opportunities in social networking, worldwide contacts, ideas, and coaching. Robert Akoko has written that "With the added advantage of the internet and cellular phones, Cameroonians in the Diaspora daily liaise with relatives and friends at
home, coaching them how to avoid the ever-sophisticated immigration hurdles mounted by Western governments” (Akoko, 2007, p. 12)

We see, therefore, that though the ways in which the students and professionals use the phone show a marked difference, the motivation driving the different patterns of usage is the same. Like the professionals, the students want to better their lives. But unlike the professionals, their peace does not hinge on the status quo. Looking outwards through the phone is what promises to help them reach their goal. ‘Looking outwards’ therefore does not make students’ motivation for uptake and use any different from that of the professionals who ‘look inwards’. It means, rather, that the route to reducing uncertainties, or lowering any sense of vulnerability, or getting to hope and a better life has been different for the two, but the destination been the same. Just as the one group has had little or no trust in the system to better their circumstances, so has the other; just as the one has felt trapped within existing conditions, so has the other, just as the one has been in hot pursuit of that which would reduce any feelings of helplessness, mistrust and historically sewn anxiety, so has the other. Each has sought to use the phone to make things happen for them, and has done so through routes reflective of their backgrounds.

5:5 CONCLUSION: STUDENTS AND PROFESSIONALS

From the above discussion, we see that access to opportunities or a means to fulfill needs is that which has driven motivation for uptake and use of mobile telephony amongst students and professionals in Buea, as well as that which has played into how people interact with and are influenced by the phone. From this we can conclude that just as in Europe, the US, Far Eastern countries socio-cultural dynamics and historical processes have been important in influencing people’s relationships and interaction with the phone20, so have they in Anglophone Cameroon’s Buea; and that this has unified motivation for mobile phone use amongst people of different generations and social standing. The question, however, is, how far is this true of people with not only different backgrounds but with differences that transcend the physical. Would this assumption also apply to the third group in the study: The blind?
CHAPTER SIX: THE BLIND

6:1 INTRODUCTION

It is impossible to grasp the implication of the mobile phone for blind people without appreciating what it means to be blind in a world of the sighted. But what is blindness, and why did I choose to add the blind in the study?

The definition of blindness in this paper has been a subjective one, based on the declaration of the participants themselves. Some said they were totally blind, while others said they were visually impaired and could perceive forms even fragments of light, but still were blind. I have grouped all of them within the definition for legally blind persons espoused by the American Braille Institute, which states that "Formally, a person is legally blind if their central vision acuity is 20/200 or less in the better eye, even with corrective lenses; or if they have central vision acuity of more than 20/200 if the peripheral field is restricted to a diameter of 20 degrees or less. Informally, those who, even with corrective lenses, cannot read the biggest letter on an eye chart are considered to be legally blind." (American Braille Institute)

Unlike the students and the professionals, the blind became part of the research accidentally, spurred by a chance meeting in one of the participating family-households. For two days, I sat in the house of Pastor George with a man of whom I initially wrote "a guest of the house who has constantly been on his phone". It was not until my assistant Ewang told me the man with the phone was blind, that I realized I had been observing a blind man make and receive calls at an almost continuous basis. For the first time, I found myself in the presence of a blind man with a mobile phone. The meeting with the visually impaired (blind) Charles Nyugap - a graduate from University of Jos in Nigeria, and lecturer at the University of Buea’s special education department - was a remarkable encounter. A blind man who could send and receive text messages, who knew who was calling when the phone rang, who could access the address book in his phone, indeed, who could manipulate his phone better than I could negotiate mine was a revelation. Yet these kinds of revelations occur because of what Dr
Kenneth Jernigan has called the disaster concept of blindness by the sighted (Jernigan, K, 1999). A better and more realistic understanding of the potentials and reality of the blind mind would have curbed my amazement at Nyugap’s abilities. Perhaps fortunately for me, the lives of Charles Nyugap, Wirba Amshatu, Peter, Rolland Tiayon, and the other blind persons whom I would eventually meet in Buea would begin retraining my mind and perceptions of the blind. Additionally, this encounter would throw, for me, some light on the reality of living with blindness in a world of the sighted, not just a world of the sighted but a world of the sighted where the sighted themselves felt trapped, uncertain and vulnerable. By becoming privy to the effort which people, organizations and governments in other parts of the world are making to assist and make manageable the circumstances of the blind, I came to appreciate the circumstances of the blind in Cameroon and their relationship with the phone. What, however, was most important to me was to see if there existed a link between motivation for uptake and usage of mobile phone amongst the blind and that of the sighted students, professionals and household members in the study. The blind participants in the study were chosen from trainees and instructors (some of the instructors sighted) of the only government-owned rehabilitation centre for the blind in Cameroon - the Bulu Blind Centre in Buea; as well as from blind persons outside the centre made up of an unemployed university graduate, a university student, a university lecturer and other blind persons holding various positions in professional life. More specifically, the table below shows a map of the participants.

6:2 TABULATED STATISTICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of trainees at Bulu Blind Centre</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>At least three of them had SIM-cards. None had a phone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>No less than 4 had phones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Bulu instructors spoken to</td>
<td>Two of them extensively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of blind people not resident of Bulu Blind centre in the study</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Studying the life stories of six blind persons and interacting with some thirty-one trainees in a rehabilitation centre for the blind, two things became clear. First, that, for blind people around the world, life amongst the sighted compounds to lack of freedom, misunderstanding, prejudice, imposed dependence, and disrespect; and secondly that as a result, the effort to live with dignity, freedom, and independence in a world of the sighted has been the overriding concern of blind people the world over.

It is these two basic discoveries that informed my appreciation of how and why blind persons use the phone the way they do.

Charles Nyugap, Peter, Michael, Rolland Tiayon and all the blind participants in the study shattered all preconception I had had about how the blind use the phone, or more appropriately, what the phone is to the blind. These men and their women counterparts could, variously, text (with Charles Nyugap actually demonstrating his ability), take pictures with their phone cameras (Michael, the Bulu Blind resident demonstrated his skills to do so), play football with the phone on them (I saw blind boys play football at Bulu Blind Centre), play games with their phones. Game playing with the phone was something I observed on different occasions at the Bulu Blind Centre. For instance, one afternoon in January (January 15 2008) I was given the go-ahead to visit the boys dormitory and observe them (and their phones). Walking along the corridor of the dorm and peering inside the dormitories, I saw boys lying on their backs on their beds; others half sitting / half lying – elbows supporting their frames; some in groups; some on their own – all of them working the phones in one way or the other. On one bed, some three boys sat ‘watching’ another boy do ‘stuff’ with the phone – all three of them chatting in the process. In another bed, one of a number of boys held the phone high above the others, talking to them in hushed tones and punching at keys. Then there was the boy with his ear pressed to the phone. So animated were all of them that I felt hard pressed to disturb them with questions. What was conspicuous was everyone’s attention to the phone. There was music coming off some of the phones, and when later in my interview with Rolland Tiayon (visually impaired instructor at Bulu Blind) it was revealed that he
often listened to ring tones to entertain himself, I realized what some of the boys may have been doing with their ears pressed against the phone. As Tiayon along with others told me, ringtones are for most phone owning blind persons a source of entertainment. Amongst the blind I also observed a lot of sharing activities. Joe, one of the phone-owning males in Bulu, not only habitually shared his phone with other trainees such as Felicite who would use the handset to inset her SIM card in, but often took the trouble to go to the girls’ dormitory to call and offer his phone for SIM cards transfer. This, unfortunately, turned out the source of one of the more infamous mobile phone-incidents at Bulu. On one such trips in the night hour, Joe was locked in the dormitory by one of the non-SIM-card-owning girls (or so everyone suspected). As a result of being locked in, Joe spent the entire night sitting upright (refusing to sleep in the girls’ dorm). He was let out from outside by one of the social workers. This was to force administration to ban any such visits. The trainees also used the the call box phone at Bulu’s SOLIDARITY CANTEEN as a money exchange bureau. The Solidarity Canteen (a provisions store) was set up by the Centre’s director and staff to cater for the provisions needs of the blind persons in the centre. The incidence of accidents involving trainees leaving the remote centre (with its dangerous proximity to the motorway) to get basic provisions from Mile 17 some kilometers away, had caused the staff of the centre and their director to set up an in-centre canteen in order to prevent any more of such fatalities. It was the empathy that thus brought the provisions store to life that contributed to its name: Solidarity Canteen. If the Solidarity call-box was ever used for business calls, no one admitted to it; but all the male trainees I spoke to said the phone was vital for business calls, and that they used their personal phones for such calls. Fosung Richard, who got blind at age 32, had to continually be on the phone with the young wife he left behind to manage his businesses and ROSCAS when he came to Bulu Blind to rehabilitate.

At the face of it, the phone’s utility as a blind man’s means to manage business and family life remotely, as entertainment, as camera, as a money exchange bureau, etc, would have remained no more than ways in which blind people use the phone, had I not come to understand what living amongst the sighted meant for blind people. Gleaning what living amongst the sighted meant for the blind was that which gave me a clear
understanding of and appreciation for the blind person’s motivation for uptake and use, and what the phone was doing amongst the blind. For this reason, I shall begin this examination of the relationship between the mobile phone and the blind by looking at what it means to be blind amongst the sighted.

6:4  BLIND AMONGST THE SIGHTED

According to the (blind) HealthMad columnist, M T Bargeman, living with blindness amongst the sighted means having to put up with people placing limits on one, "speaking to me as if the loss of my vision has affected my intellect. I happen to be as intelligent as anyone else. Please don’t speak to me like a child; talking to others about me as if I aren’t sitting right there. There is no need to explain my condition for me. It is rather like stating the obvious; Speaking very preciously to me, or behaving as if you think I may break. I am not made of porcelain, I am a person.” (HealthMMad, June 8, 2008)

Reacting to the film ‘Blindness’ which provoked demonstrating from the Canadian Federation of The Blind, Elizabeth Lalonde, president of the Canadian Federation of the Blind, said that aside from the wrong moral characterization of the blind in the film, the physical depiction of blindness "is simply wrong. Even the newly blind can dress themselves, wash themselves, go to the bathroom by themselves. Why, in the film, are they depicted as being totally helpless? (McMartin, Pete, 2008 )"

In a comment in Australia’s Blind Citizens News, MICHAEL SIMPSON PRESIDENT OF Blind Citizens Australia state that "I genuinely believe that Blind Citizens Australia is making a difference and changing what it means to be blind but sometimes I despair at the task before us. We continue to receive too many calls from people who have been discriminated against because of blindness, too many calls from people who can't find employment suited to them as a blind person, and too many calls from blind people who are concerned about the lack of specialist services. What is particularly frustrating is when organisations which are publicly funded and have a charter to provide services to blind people treat us with disregard and abuse.” (Blind Citizens Australia, 1999)

In his article “Sighted Don’t Want Blind” reprinted in BENT E-zine, Robert Feinstein writes that “Sighted people condescend to us.
They treat us like children or as if we are mentally impaired. They talk louder to us because they think we are deaf as well as sightless. They give directions in a visual way by pointing or saying "over there," or "this way." When we go into a store, sighted clerks try to get out of helping us, and when stuck with the task they do it so badly we seldom get what we need. They often tell us that they don't have a particular item in stock, because they don't want to take the time to look for it. They make it obvious that they are helping us only because they don't have a choice.

"At work, blind are given nothing to do, or we are given unfeasible assignments. Sometimes we are offered pens or pencils because sighted don't even have the common sense to realize blind don't use such things. Sighted don't stop to ask themselves what is involved in doing a particular job without sight, and rarely take the time to learn. It never occurs to them to ask us, the blind, how a specific job can or cannot be done. They make decisions for blind without our consent or participation.

"Socially, blind are stuck in a corner. As a blind guy once put it, "Where you sit is where you stay!" Sighted don't want blind to mingle--you're too awkward, you might ruin the party. Instead, they pile your lap high with food, but never tell you what's on your plate, or ask what you want. It never dawns on them to offer you a table, so you sit and you eat, and then sighted complain that blind are all too fat, or spill food on themselves.

"Sighted stop to say a quick hello, then return to their sighted friends and forget about blind. Most of the time sighted don't even identify themselves, so blind have no idea who spoke. If you ask who is speaking, sighted will say, "a friend." They expect blind to recognize their voice, even though they have hardly interacted with blind, or it has been a long time since blind has talked with them. When blind are with a sighted friend or relative, it is not uncommon for someone to approach and say they know you are such a good teacher, or such a good typist, but blind don't even know who these sighted people are. They are just trying to impress the blind person's sighted friend (Bentvoices.org,2003)"

As lengthy as this article is, Robert Feinstein touches on several of the themes that I came to associate with the lot of blind people in the world of the sighted as a result of
observations, discussions, interviews in Buea, and the literature I had found on the topic.

The (blind) scholar, Kenneth Jernigan, argues that even literature - the most powerful tool in shaping the human mind and the behaviours of a society - has proven just as damaging and prejudicial against the blind. Comparing history which he defines as "the record of what human beings have done" and literature which he states is "the record of what they have thought" Jernigan contends that "With history there is at least a supposed foundation of fact. Whatever the twisting or omission or misinterpretation or downright falsehood, that foundation presumably remains a tether and a touchstone, always subject to reexamination and new proof. Not so with literature. The author is free to cut through facts to the essence, to dream and soar and surmise. Going deeper than history, the myths and feelings of a people are enshrined in its literature. Literary culture in all its forms constitutes possibly the main transmission belt of our society's beliefs and values more important even than the schools, the churches, the news media, or the family. How, then, have we fared in literature? The literary record reveals no single theme or unitary view of the life of the blind. Instead, it displays a bewildering variety of images often conflicting and contradictory, not only as between different ages or cultures, or among the works of various writers, but even within the pages of a single book(Bentvoices.org, 2003)."

From the books and life of Erik Weihenmayer, the blind mountaineer who scaled Mount McKinley and made it to the heights of Aconcagua, Kilimanjaro, and the ultimate challenge - Mount Everest(Weihenmayer, 2001/2 ), to the experiences of INsight Radio talk show host Jill, the narratives of blind novelists Sally Hobart Alexander and Frances Lief Neer and to the hundreds of letters from blind people who send in their reactions and stories to various publications for the blind and sighted, it becomes clear that what blindness translates to in a world of the sighted is misunderstanding, prejudgments, imposed dependence, societal imprisonment and disrespect (even mistreatment in several cases); and that what blind people seek most is independence, equity, respect, equality, empowerment, and above all, freedom - freedom to be, to act, to go about their lives like everyone else. We see personalities such as the above and others like David Blunkett, Helen Keller, David Peterson, etc, who have achieved
the seeming impossible, go to great lengths to inspire other blind people and lift them out of the seeming darkness of their conditions. In fact we not only see these blind people at work, but also see others in the European, North American, Asian, and Australian sighted community joining their ranks.

In his acceptance speech of the 2008 AFB ACCESS AWARD awarded his company CODE FACTORY, CEO Eduard Sánchez said the aim of (jointly - with his brother) setting up ‘Code Factory’ ten years earlier was “to create products which would directly contribute to the improvement of people’s everyday lives” Sanchez continued, “Even early on, I felt that Code Factory could specifically make a positive impact on access technology for the blind and visually impaired”(Sanchez –Access AWARD 2008). Founded in 1998 and headquartered in Terrassa/Barcelona, Spain, Code Factory is “committed to the development of products designed to eliminate barriers to the accessibility of mobile technology for the blind and visually impaired”(Sanchez –Access AWARD 2008).

Edward Sanchez’s Code Factory is only one of several Western companies and organizations that are using their financial, technical and organizational might to address the needs of the blind in their respective countries. Even though the UK-based ACTION FOR BLIND put out a report in 2006 on VERBAL AND PHYSICAL ABUSE TOWARDS BLIND AND PARTIALLY SIGHTED PEOPLE ACROSS THE UK, which revealed the continuous incidence of mistreatment of the blind. Europe, Asia, Australia and North America show growing advocacy by companies, governments and individuals on behalf of the blind. In 2003, the first mobile phone designed specifically for blind and partially sighted people by the Spanish company Owasys went on show in the UK. The design and features of the phone were carved out of the expressed needs of blind people.

Castels and his colleagues have reported that “blind persons have more problems with mobile telephones than they have with traditional wired telephones because interfaces are more complicated. This has led to the design of special devices for blind people with no texting capabilities and with a restricted number of buttons pertinently identified in Braille(Castels et al, 2004)”.

In 2003 Vodafone UK in partnership with Brand & Grober Communications GbR, began offering a new application for its visually impaired customers using technology from SpeechWorks. The speech-enabled application known to its low-vision customers as Vodafone
Speaking Phone provides audible cues to access numerous advanced communications services including SMS, email and phone directories on the Nokia 9200 and 9290 Series Communicator. June 2008 also saw another new product on the market. In that month at the Canadian National Institute for the Blind’s (CNIB) Annual Assistive Technology Exhibition, the KNFB Reading Technology showcased the first cell phone that reads to the learning disabled, vision impaired, and blind. Ray Kurzweil, the brainchild behind the KNFB Reader, turned out also the thirty-year old innovator and pioneer behind the ‘assistive technologies and the inventor of the world's first print-to-speech reading machine’. Turning to the Far East and to Korea, Samsung Electronics, SK Telecom, Intro Mobile and the Korea Blind Union launched the Helper Phone for visually handicapped persons in 2005, declaring that “access to accessible technology and more assimilation into the mainstream society for the blind and visually impared is a right not a privilege (Korea Blind Union)”. Evidently, there is a growing realization by these companies, organizations and governments that being blind in a world of the sighted is an uphill battle for the majority of blind people and could mean a derailment of their rights unless some form of intervention is instituted. Now, what about a society where blind people not only face the same seeming uphill battle as blind persons elsewhere, but have the added burden of living in conditions that even for the sighted is stifling. What does living in a world of the sighted mean for the blind in Cameroon?

6:5 BLIND AMONGST THE SIGHTED IN CAMEROON

The stories of Peter, Felicite, Wirba Amshatu and Rolland Tiayon gave me a sneak peak into the life of the blind in Cameroon. But perhaps the most telling of what it was to be blind in Cameroon were the revelations of Mrs. Adiobo (one of the sighted social workers at Bulu Blind) about life for the young Bulu Blind Center residents.

MRS ADIOBO

In one of a series of conversations with Mrs Adiobo, she told me that, "Blind people depend on African solidarity. Yet that is fading because of the hardship people face. Even when the children (children here refers to the younger trainees) go on holidays, when they come back,
they are thinner because of the strain of interacting with a struggling world. It is not easy even in their own environment. Many of the parents are uninvolved. They have their own lives and do not have time to take care of the children and so the centre becomes a place to keep the children away. And parents are often of the mind that the children are invalid and can’t do anything so they become protective. Some parents even chain the children all day long so that they do not wander off and get hit by a car. So they sit in one place – chained all day. Some of the children are scared to go places on their own when they first come here, but here they come to learn independence and become mobile without assistance.”

In his speech at a National Organization of Parents of Blind Children Seminar, reprinted from Future Reflections, Gary Wunder explain that “I can't overemphasize the importance of independence when it comes to having a positive self-concept. Whether that independence is used to go down to the store to get a loaf of bread or whether it lets you do something as trivial as getting up and walking off in a huff when you're having an argument, the ability to be mobile is terribly important. The difficult thing for blind people is that we learn dependence at a very early age, but we are not likely to grow out of it as other people do. Children at a year and a half or two years old are dependent, whether they are blind or sighted. Parents hold their hands every place they go. The trouble is that at six or eight years of age many of our blind children are still attached to their parents' hands when walking. And while on the one hand blind children resent that and wish for freedom, on the other hand they mostly come to think that this abnormal dependency is a pretty normal thing for blind kids.” The desire for independence and enforced dependence thus play in the lives of many young blind persons, with evidently regretful consequences for the children in Mrs Adiobo’s report. As she leads us to see, for the youngsters in Bulu Blind, it is a matter of cultural imprisonment in a world where even parents and families have no idea what to do with their blind relations or offspring. She adds “Teachers [Bulu Blind employees] realize how hard it is for the parents to cope with the children because for some of the children, a whole term passes by without a parent coming to visit them, even to see what is happening to them. That shows that they do not even have the time to offer their children... to visit them. The children lose their zeal for life by the
The only way, however, to fathom what Mrs Adiobo was saying is to look at the life of one of the blind children: Felicite Deukack.

**FELICITE DJOMDA DEUKACK**

Fourteen year old Felicite met with blindness after an accident at age three. The accident resulted in instant loss of sight; but after three months in hospital, she regained her sight. Her condition, however, began to deteriorate. Nine years later, having not once been taken to hospital during this period and after having had to weather the insistence of her father that she was pretending and making up stories about not being able to see the words on the blackboard in class, she was taken for the second time to hospital. But it was already too late for her. Her sight had so deteriorated that not even spectacles could help her see. She was now only able to perceive shapes. With the help of Rolland Tiayon – the Bulu Blind Instructor, an aunt brought her to Bulu Blind Centre. At Bulu, she began learning to read and write Braille; and there she started gaining the skills to study like any other child. There, amongst others like herself and with trained helpers and instructors she began gaining valuable intellectual and social skills. Then the aunt who had brought her to Bulu got her a SIM card, and Felicite Deukack received her wings. Suddenly, Felicite who had been forced into the reclusive and fearful world of darkness could reach out to the world on her own terms. Behind the anonymity of the phone, she found the boldness to call me one night – a stranger who, as far as she was concerned came from far away Europe – because she needed to talk to me. Felicite called me a number of times thereafter, insisting, albeit shyly, that I come over to the Centre so we have a talk. Faced with the reality of the calls she had already made, the otherwise withdrawn Felicite (at least where non-Bulu residence were concerned) was later compelled to follow up in real life on her calls and tell me what she had been calling me for. Would Felicite have had the courage to approach a seeming stranger without the relative anonymity of her SIM card in Joe’s handset?

As for the university student, Peter, the issue at hand was not a question of a bashful personality finding voice or courage in the
safety of the mobile phone. It was a question of a free, fiercely independent spirit discovering the tools to express that independent spirit.

PETER

I met Peter shortly after my initial meeting with Charles Nyugap. Charles had promised to introduce me to other blind persons in Buea, and as such gave me Peter’s number. However, it was not Charles, but my assistant Paulus who eventually guarded me to Peter’s hostel in one of Buea’s many student mini-cites.

I was impressed by Peter’s easy-going friendliness, and his demeanor. Like many of the blind people in the study, Peter’s story of blindness was one of human mistake. He, like everyone I had previously spoken to, was not born blind. Blindness came when herbs which the doctor in the town had advised against were dropped in his hurting eyes in the village. The lonely darkness and hopelessness that this man-made blindness would eventually cause him was only lifted by his admission into a mission centre for the blind several kilometers away from his village. In 2005, in his twenties, Peter got what he later referred to as his greatest freedom: The mobile phone. It took him several trials and errors, and days of making multiple mistakes, but he eventually mastered the device (meant for the sighted people). From that time on, heavy dependence on others for his mobility or safety was no longer a necessity but an option. He could now find himself lost and simply call a friend for help without having to accost people around him for help. In 2007 Peter got his second phone after having lost the first. During our discussion, Peter admitted to spending no less than 20% of his allowance on his phone. Repairs have also had their toll on his allowance as he has had to take his phone twice to a repairer paying 3000frs and 4000frs respectively. The time between the losing of his first phone and the acquiring of his second phone left him with a SIM card which he generally put in the phones of his friends to make needed calls or receive calls. Much like with the phone, he never went anywhere without his SIM card. The other blind person I met, this time a woman – Wirba Amshatu – appeared to have always had a phone and never a SIM card. Then again, this was my assumption because I never really asked her if she had had a SIM card and had to solicit others for their mobile phone handset.
Wirba Amshatu Verbe was the first blind student to graduate from the University of Buea with a Bachelors degree in Special Education. Like all the other educated people in the study, rather than to have had the kind of help I thought educated blind people were bound to have had, Amshatu instead lived in constant dependence on sighted people’s goodwill to have text books read out to her. Sometimes people helped, sometimes she had to beseech all day long to change busy students’ minds. She, like the other educated blind people in the study, literally went through the educational system in Cameroon without any text books – having to either store information in their heads, take notes in Braille – with limited access to Braille facilities or look for volunteers to read and where possible record texts for her. After her Bachelors degree, Wirba tried to write the Enam exams (a professional exams leading to one of Cameroon’s government-owned institutions from which students are supposed to find jobs within the government apparatus). But in spite of her academic accruements, Wirba was again reduced to lobbying and visiting office after office to convince officials (who said there were no facilities for blind candidates), to allow her write the exams. After a long relentless struggle, she succeeded to gain the right to the exams. Asked to write within the allotted time for all candidates while at the same time having to have the questions first transcribed into Braille and then answered on a typewriter whose printed words she could not read back, Wirba Amshatu failed the exams.

The life of Wirba Amshatu is instructive of what blind persons determined to beat the odds face in Anglophone Cameroon. Communication is an important part of that struggle, and access to facilities that only technology can provide a vital component of the struggle. Wirba’s phone might not have helped her change the minds of the educational authorities, but it did help her to reach others who did assist her in her effort to gain admittance into the exam hall. Even more significantly, it became a crucial part of her search for employment, though two years after graduation she, like most graduates, was yet to find employment. But where the struggle, visits, etc would have been worse, the phone minimised it.
ROLLAND TIAYON

Rolland Tiayon was born in a family with a rare genetic eye disorder which resulted in the partial blindness of two of the family’s seven sons, one of whom was Rolland Tiayon. As the younger of the two afflicted boys, he entered into a family already knowledgeable of the problem of blindness. Even so, and in spite of the fact that his father was a teacher, his education still stagnated. When his older brother discovered the existence of Bulu, Rolland was found a place there, and there Rolland entered the handicraft centre because he was now too old to enter the primary school which, besides, he had already completed. But primary education was not enough for Rolland Tiayon, and refusing his blindness to hold him back, he began applying to secondary schools around Buea for admission – an unheard of thing in the 1990s. None of the schools he wrote to had ever had a blind student before, so Rolland kept receiving letters to the negative. Eventually, he convinced one of the schools to take him in, on a trial basis. It was when Rolland Tiayon finished in four years what takes students a minimum of seven years, that other institutions began considering blind children and that he could enter into agreement with his former secondary school to cater for the education of other blind children. Rolland accomplished his educational feat in the same way Wirba Amshatu accomplished hers: Begging and lobbying others to read for him or help him find a way to master school materials. One of the blind lecturers at the Kumbo School of The Blind in the North West province told me that he even had to pay sighted students at one point to help him. Tiayon’s feat later led to the creation of an organization dedicated to the education of the blind. Tirelessly concerned with the plight of the blind, he became a volunteer transcriber, transcribing exam papers from print (read out to him by whoever was willing to help do so) to Braille and then Braille to print for blind children in sighted secondary schools all over Buea. Clearly indefatigable in his determination to beat any odds, he began inventing affordable Braille frames and Braille exercise books for the blind. This spirit of service and determination, of beating insurmountable odds would be humbled in 2001 when it met with what later became a monumental force in Tiayon’s life: The mobile phone. Though Tiayon would later tell me that “we must never allow anything become so important that we cannot do without it”, his business life clearly became inadvertently interlaced with the technology. Tiayon
would later explain to me that “as a human being I need to think, to develop ideas, to have projects to carry out. These things require communication – calling different people. If I think I should call this or this person, I do. The mobile phone is good for networking, and for business.” For a man who runs a natural honey business which has made him one of the most important suppliers of natural honey in Buea and the surrounding areas, a man who teaches Braille to both the blind and the sighted in schools across Buea, a man who constantly liaises with different persons and organizations to open up opportunities for blind children in the country… a man who is now inventing different Braille technologies for the blind and the sighted… a man aiming to set up other businesses and organizations, Tiayon has indeed had good need of the phone. So central indeed has the phone become to Tiayon’s activities that he spends at least 800FRs a week on his phone. Like Peter, ever since Rolland Tiayon got his phone in 2001, he has not been without access to it. Since 2001 he has had six phones. The first two got bad, the third was stolen by armed robbers, the fourth got lost in a taxi, the fifth he gave to Solidarity Canteen as his share of the business and the sixth now serves as his personal phone.

From Rolland Tiayon, Wirba Amshatu, Peter, Felicite, and Mrs. Adiobo’s accounts, we see that like mountaineer Erik Weihenmayer, novelists Sally Hobart Alexander and Frances Lief Neer, and blind persons in other parts of the world, the blind in Cameroon seek independence, equity, respect, equality, empowerment, and above all, freedom – freedom to be, to act, to go about their business just like the next person. But unlike Eric Weihenmayer and the other blind men and women in the US, Europe, Japan, and other economically advanced countries, the blind of Buea and Cameroon do not have access to the types of technological and institutional assistance that make independence and freedom easier for the Erik Weihenmayers and Sally Hobart Alexanders; they do not have the Owasys, the KNFB readers, the Speechworks technologies, etc. Rather, the lives of blind people in Cameroon are circumscribed by the same local conditions that stifle the aspirations of the students and professionals in the study. While the American Robert Feinstein can write that “…we [the blind] are a thorn in their [the sighted] flesh, an irritation that they cannot rid themselves of because new legislation gives us minimal protection” (Robert Feinstein,
Bent E-Zine, 01/2003) and Blind Citizens Australia’s president, Michael Simpson, would confidently declare that “what is particularly frustrating is when organisations which are publicly funded and have a charter to provide services to blind people treat us with disregard and abuse” (Blind Citizens News, 02/1999), Rolland Tiayon and his compatriots would be hard pressed to find any grounding upon which to stand regarding dependence on any publicly funded organisation to advocate for, or protect their rights. They, as opposed to their counterparts in the West, must do all they can to better their situation without relying on the state. Like the students and professionals in the study, they have an enduring desire to reduce their collective stress and uncertainties, and must, as seen above, fight to achieve this on their own. The mobile phone apparently was playing a central role in that fight. I would eventually come to find that what I thought was blind people’s their use of the phone – for instance texting, beeping, calling, photographing, relaxation, etc, was actually the front office view or window dressing of what the phone actually was doing to them… what its true worth and utility was. From the life of Felicite to Rolland Tiayon’s, to the stories of the various blind persons encountered in the course of the research, it became clear that the mobile phone was four things to blind people: 1) license to pro-activity; 2) a level playing field; 3) a window into the world beyond; and 4) A companion and enabler.

As a means to be proactive, I noticed that mobile telephony had become an opportunity for blind participants in the study to be proactive. Rather than sit back and wait for the sighted to take initiatives, the blind were taking the upper hand – making calls to whomever, whenever and for what ever reason they choose. 14 year old Felicite set the tone for this observation. A girl who, by all standards, was withdrawn – at least in her dealings with sighted strangers, Felicite was able to muster the courage to call me, not once, not twice nor thrice on my phone. For Felicite to have picked up the phone and taken to calling up a seeming stranger in order to express a certain sentiment… in order to take the first step to solicit some form of reaction was pro-activity incarnate. She did not wait for me to discuss what was on her mind, she did not wait to be asked to be heard.
Perhaps partly to be credited to this ability to be proactive was what I secondly observed about the phone – that it was a level playing field for the blind. Rolland Tiayon, in one of our conversations, told me that “the sighted judge by sight”. Wirba Amshatu, on her part, noted that “the sighted see but do not perceive”. Without the gift of sight, the blind have had to perceive all their lives rather than see… they have had to sense, feel, discern… use their intuition to tell about the quality of a person (Amshatu) sometimes just from the voice (Tiayon). The sighted have needed no such effort to judge. The phone, however, has meant that the sighted have had to assume the role of the blind, judging strangers, including potential employees, on the other side of the phone by other senses than sight. Hence if a blind job seeker were to be placed under interview via the phone, the prospective employer would be unable to tell whether or not the person on the other side of the phone were blind. That potential employer must either be told or see for him/herself – possibly after some form of decision may have been taken (thus forestalling any off-hand dismissal of the blind person from further consideration or try out). In that same conversation, the blind person’s natural instincts to sense may get him or her to judge what awaits him or her on the other side of the phone. So, where a blind employer might be able to make some quick decisions about who he or she is talking to, the sighted employer would need some extra effort to sense the type of individual they are talking to, or to gauge whether the person on the other side is as qualified as they let on or not – meaning then that the sighted finds him/herself, through the phone, living in the dark space that the blind have had to live all their lives, and for just that one phone exchange, or two or three they all become equal, functioning on the same level – on the same playing field.

A third observation I made was that the phone has given blind people access into the world. Never again does the blind person need to leave the safety of his or her home in order to reach the four corners of the earth. They can just sit in their rooms and become world citizens, participating in phone conferences with other people without the danger of ever getting lost. Even in getting lost, as I discovered, the phone was now a true companion; for where it might have taken a lost blind person the soliciting of help from strangers, all that person need do is call a friend or loved one for help. Borrowing from
the word of one of the blind participants, the phone was now a sort of life line for the blind – its utility as a means of communicating, clearly secondary to its ability to offer independence, freedom and a means to negotiate the stresses and uncertainties of life in a geography of crisis.

Finally, the sight of blind boys at Bulu Blind Centre quietly engaging with their phones… the sight of trainees walking everywhere with their phones, listening to music (ring tones), taking pictures, calling whenever there was credit and the need to call… being able to tell people where they were without having to be looked-for, being able to turn to the phone and through it reach others when necessary or when in need to do so, being able to act instantly… showed how much of a friend the technology had become to the blind.

What the ability to be proactive, to be on a level playing field, to be in a game changing situation, to have access to people without having to go out in search of them, to go anywhere one wants, knowing the phone will be there if one gets lost… has meant has been freedom and independence, if not in its totality, at the very least in a way arguably unimagined by the blind before the arrival of the phone.

6:6 Final Word

At the outset of this research I argued that uptake and usage of mobile telephony is driven by a desire for access to opportunities and that those opportunities that people need the phone to allow them access to are informed by the person’s current and historical realities. Research amongst the blind of Buea showed that the desire for independence and freedom of action and the ability to be able to operate in an equitable world has driven usage pattern and shaped interaction with the phone. For Fosung Michael, the phone has kept him in control of affairs back home, for Rolland Tiayond its utility has been in its business potentials, for Felicite and her other SIM-card-owning female companions it has been the ability to remain linked to families and friends for social contact as well as other needs, for Peter it has been the freedom of movement without fear of getting irrevocably lost, for Charles Nyugap, it has been a weapon in his effort to set up a viable organization. This motivation to adopt the mobile phone is not divorced from that of the contributors to Blind
Citizens News, or from Erik Weihenmayer’s or that of the millions of blind persons across the globe. All of these people have the same hunger for independence, freedom, honour and opportunities. But, no matter how much this is true, how much the needs of the blind in Cameroon mirror those of the blind in Britain or the US or elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere, the requirements needed to get to those needs remain different for both groups of blind people because they live in different localities, have different historical heritages, and are exposed to different constrains and opportunities and as such burdened by different needs. While Robert Feinstein would say in reference to the sighted “…we are a thorn in their flesh, an irritation that they cannot rid themselves of because new legislation gives us minimal protection(see Feinstein in Bentvoices.org)” and Michael Simpson would confidently declare that “what is particularly frustrating is when organisations which are publicly funded and have a charter to provide services to blind people treat us with disregard and abuse(See Australia’s Blind Citizen’s News)”, the blind persons I met in Buea would not have a leg to stand on to say that about any publicly funded organization actively working to attend to their rights and needs in Cameroon. These people are living in an environment where there is little trust in the system’s ability to work for their good at all levels. Whether the institutions and government apparatuses which Feinstein and Simpson are talking about are actually bearing fruit is besides the point, history has already thought them and other blind people in their countries to trust in those organs and apparatuses. Their expectations and those of the sighted people in these countries are thus different from the expectations of the blind and the sighted in Cameroon. That means it is not with the blind people in the West that the blind in Cameroon have much in common, but the sighted in Cameroon. They face the same dilemma as the students and professionals in the study. Like the students and professionals, the blind in Buea must do what they can to better their situation without relying on the state. Ultimately, thus, in spite of their divorced micro-circumstances, the blind, the students and the professionals in the study are driven by the same need to reduce their collective stress and uncertainties in a difficult socio-economic, socio-political and socio-cultural environment. In the case of the family-households, not only has how people use the phone but how members behave with and around it
highlighted the relationship between man and mobile phone technology in Buea.
CHAPTER SEVEN: THE FAMILY-HOUSEHOLD

7:0 INTRODUCTION

The family was my initial unit of analysis, and one that I had already begun studying long before work on the other social groups would begin. As such, there was already data on the family before there was one for any of the other groups. Making the family one of the units of analysis was thus inevitable. However, the term ‘family’ had to be abandoned in favour of the term ‘family-households’ as it became clear that studying households, whether of single families or multiple families, or whether of extended families or spiritual brothers and sisters made for better understanding of who was being studied. As the UN has emphasized, the term ‘family’ is conceptualised differently in different parts of the world24. Today the Western family has shrunken to its nuclear component (Nam, 2004), while in many other areas the extended family takes various forms. The 1994 UN Chronicle even acknowledges that there are areas in which families are not based on blood ties, that “extended families, involving several generations, include polygamous marriages, which are culturally accepted in most African countries and ‘tribal groups’, where families are built upon a social rather than a biological basis” (UN Chronicle, 1994). Such diversities in the definition and understanding of the family makes a discussion of households easier and more straightforward. The US Bureau of Census 2000, for instance, simply defines the household as including all persons who occupy a housing unit. Such generic conceptualization allows for enough definition leverage to describe the relationship of members within a household unit. It is because of this leeway, and the fact that the households in the study are made up of families of different formations, that the social unit under study here is conceptualized as ‘family-households’.

The significance of the household in studying society can be gleaned from the ERES-funded research “Understanding Society” where the study of society is conducted through examining household dynamics and household members25, indicating that any study on society must of necessity include the household to one degree or the other. The
relevance of the family and the family household in the study of society is further evidenced by the way reference to daily life and society is tied with the family. Eminent scholars on the subject from Ling(2002) to Castells(2004), from Hadon(2002) to Fortunati(2002), from Miller(2006) to Kunikaze(2005) have referred (to different degrees) to family relations or interaction within the family in their works on mobile telephony in society. The family is so fundamental to the understanding of mobile telephony for a society that even works looking at the interrelationship between mobile telephony and various groups of society tend to reference the family household extensively; the reason being that the family home occupies an important place in everyday life for “the family is one of the most important social groups and a social construction affected by many social actors( Kunikaze, A 2006 )”. Adding the family-household in any study of mobile telephony is thus a logical development.

Turning specifically to the family-household in Cameroon, Annette Fleischer has noted that “The extended family systems and strong kin and lineage relations remain important in most regions of Cameroon since they provide a sense of belonging, solidarity, and protection. They play a crucial role in social control(Fleischer, A,2007)”. What all these references to the family and households seek to illustrate is the fact that any study of society needs to make the family-household a part, if not a huge part, of the effort.

There is yet another reason why the family household has been particularly essential for the present study. A cursory look at the participating groups will reveal that so far all the units of analysis discussed have consisted of individuals unrelated to each other outside their socio-economic or socio-cultural background. The family-household, on the other hand, consists of individuals bound to each other by blood or living arrangements. It is a social unit where members are interconnected, have certain levels of responsibilities towards each other, and are generally expected to act in consideration of one another or within the shadows of others. This becomes important for sourcing usage pattern across groups. This social group is thus so different from the others that any similarities in usage pattern would have to be irrevocable. Even within households differences in make up and social conditions that can have potential effects on usage pattern abound. While in some family-households the phone is responsible for
comments such as ‘my mother and father argue sometimes about my father’s behaviour’ ‘sometimes my brothers and sisters quarrel a lot about credit’ ‘there is a lot of argument in the house because of using other people’s credit’ ‘my father wants to know who my mother is talking to’ ‘boys have access to my daughter’s ears and I do not know who bought her the phone’ in others such remarks abound: ‘it is the best thing for our family,’ ‘it makes life easy for our family’ ‘communication is very good now’, ‘we can arrange things from afar’… ‘those who pass their A levels get a phone’, ‘my husband wants me to be connected’ ‘I can contact my family from afar about buying some food.’ “Before the phone, life was very difficult for me and my family…” Thus, even within households, we see dissimilarities that put a question mark on patterns of usage within family-households?

If there are dissimilarities within family-households how can there be any between family-households and other social groups? It is the search for answers to such questions that makes the study of the family-household even more challenging within the context of this study. I choose three different types of family-households: an orthodox family; a family of both Christian brothers and sisters and biological siblings; and a family of relatives headed by a woman. In each family-household, we will be looking at two things: How the phone has been appropriated by household members and how the technology is shaping or informing relationship between household members.

Before we look at each family, a word is required on the research methodology used for each family. While observation was the mainstay of the work in all three homes, in Pastor George’s and Ma Christie’s home diary keeping was also used, though to varying degrees. For Pastor George, my assistant Ewang Essembesson made some diary entries as he occasionally spent nights at the house. For Ma Christie’s house, 99% of the work was based on the entries made by Rita (one of the household members) into her diary. The Ekechea family was placed under extensive observation, along with informal interviews and discussions. We begin with the Ekechea family.
7:1a  INTRODUCTION TO THE EKECHEA FAMILY

The Ekechea family-household was chosen for its conventionality. I wanted an ‘orthodox’ family-household, one that many in Africa and beyond could easily identify with. My assistant Ewang Essembesson led me to the Ekecheas, a young family of three (mother – 28 year old Victorine, father – 32 year old Ernest and 6 month old baby) living in a gated compound, their two bedroom apartment behind a much larger building belonging to the landlord. Though Victorine’s younger sister, Salome, lived with them during field work, there was not much contact with her as she was not often available for observation – being a student at the university and often away at school. I began fieldwork at their home with one foreknowledge: that they were Pentecostal Christians.

There were three phones in the house. One for each of the couple and an extra phone which served as a call box in the small accessory store that they owned. The store was only a few metres away from their home, situated at the student-populated Malingo street; and run by Victorine and her assistant Sister Monica – another Pentecostal Christian. Victorine’s background however was only partly business-oriented, having graduated from the University of Buea where she had met Ernest – an environmental scientist with a scholarship (at the time of research) to study Remote Sensing and geographic Information System at The African Regional Centre for Space Science and Technology Education in English, at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria. Now teaching part time at an environmental school in Buea and in the process of setting up his own NGO (Geology, Environment and Development Organisation (GEADO)), Ernest was not in the position to dedicate time to the store. Victorine, on the other hand, having entered into business while at university, selling jewelries and other accessories to pay for her university tuition and accommodation, and also having just given birth and needing time to recuperate and also to spend with the baby, was the better candidate in the family to run the business. The call box business was therefore her domain. As can be seen in the table below,
the call box phone had the same provider and mark as Victorine’s personal phone.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Type of phone</th>
<th>Provider</th>
<th>Reason for phone choice</th>
<th>Reason for provider choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ernest</td>
<td>Artee (Chinese)</td>
<td>MTN</td>
<td>Not given</td>
<td>MTN preferable because they “understands Cameroon’s culture, and sensitive to the language division between Francophones and Anglophones.” “All of Orange’s correspondences are in French”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victorine</td>
<td>Siemens</td>
<td>MTN</td>
<td>Not given</td>
<td>Orange stingy with credit time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call box</td>
<td>Siemens</td>
<td>MTN</td>
<td>Same as above</td>
<td>Same as above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7:1b  FIELDWORK AT THE EKECHEA HOME

Much of my (and my assistant’s) time was spent at Victorine and Ernest’s store; for the couple used the greater portion of their day at work. On Tuesdays and Thursdays they would head for the evening service at the church. I never visited the house any earlier than 9 a.m. (though my assistant Essembesson sometimes did), and since this was the time about which the couple always left their home for their various places of work and business, I generally headed for the store in the mornings. Sometimes I accompanied victorine and Ernest to their 7 p.m. mid-week church services.

There was a routine to their daily activities. In the mornings, they would pray, talk about the plans for the day and projected activities, then as Victorine would be taking care of Ernest’s breakfast, Ernest would clean up, dress and, after his breakfast, leave for work. This was often followed by Victorine attending to herself and the baby, and heading for the store – where Sister Monica would have set up the wares. Often, Victorine would leave the store at midday, go back home, take care of baby Samuel and his food, and prepare the meal for the day.
Just as there was a routine to the couple’s daily activities, so was there a sequence, unplanned though this was, to the times of calls. Ewang Essembesson and I observed (as Victorine later confirmed) that personal calls came mostly between 1p.m. and 3p.m. Morning calls were sometimes brisk, but the afternoons and evenings often took the fore in the number of incoming or outgoing calls, with some dramatic night calls becoming the topic of our conversation the next day. (These night calls, were no doubt the product of MTN’s promotional free night calls).

As we will later see, details of the couple’s relationship and how they interacted with each other opened up more and more to me as I observed their phone life: i.e. the logistics of the phone in the house, call pattern, phone behaviour, etc. As for the phone logistics, when at home, the couple habitually placed their phones - all three of them including the call box phone - either on the centre table or the dining table, or in the bed room whenever husband and wife were there. Neither one of them carried the phone about on them while at home. Except for when they were just arriving home and still had their phones in their handbag or suitcase, the phone was always in a communal area. But even so... even when a ringing phone was in someone’s bag or suitcase, whoever was closest to it would pick it up, most times talk to whomever was on the line, and then hand over the phone to the recipient of the call. This was often followed by a commentary about the call and, in some cases, protracted discussions about it. I eventually realized that rather than create separate spaces, the phone in the Ekechea home was merging the lives of the inhabitants of the household, welding both lives even tighter together. For instance, whenever one finished talking on the phone, he or she would simple carry on with the conversation that had transpired on the phone as though all three of them (husband, wife and caller) had been party to that conversation, either commenting on the important bits of the call, or discussing it at length. They would talk about whatever had come to pass in the conversation as though the discussion was simply part of a conversation they had already been having. Theirs was the most instinctive interpersonal relationship... the most instinctive reaction to each other.

Just as they discussed personal phone calls, so did they discuss the call box and the activities taking place around it. Indeed, it was
at the store that some remarkable mobile phone moments occurred. Few and far between though they were, and though I had to spend much of my time at the store observing the phone behaviour of people on the streets, those phone-related moments at the store further expanded my understanding of the place of the phone in Buea. One such phone moments was when a Nigerian friend of the family, also a Pentecostal Christian of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) left his nearby business and came to visit. He was not feeling well that afternoon, and announced that his illness was surely exacerbated by his financial situation - as a result of which he was now looking for someone to buy his mobile phone. People sell things in Cameroon, but what struck me about this announcement was the fact that the first thing this gentleman man thought could bring him ready cash was his phone - illustrating the value of the phone and its cashable worth. Secondly, he also talked of the fact that his younger sister in Nigeria had called him from her mobile phone to solicit money from him - again that link between the mobile phone and the phone’s cash value. On another occasion at the store, news came to Victorine that her older brother in Yaounde had “surrendered his life to Christ and become a born-again Christian”. There was great jubilation in the store. Notably, however, the call from the brother was not just to make this announcement, but to state that he wished to give them the number of his new SIM card as he had replaced his old SIM with a new one to prevent having to be contacted by his non-believing friends. Because he needed to grow in his new faith, this was his way of severing contact with all old friends until such time as he would be ready to resume contact with them. Apparently, to avoid his old friends, all he needed to do was cut mobile phone contact with them, an act that clearly spoke of the extent to which the mobile phone had become a goliath in comparison to other methods of communication. It also showed how the phone was being used to gain access to needs - in the brother’s case growth in his new faith. On yet another occasion at the store, little Samuel, a very placid and quiet baby, became agitated. He wanted to sleep and was struggling to get it over and done with. When his mother heaved him over to her back, secured him there with a wrapper as is done in Cameroon, and began gently pacing and rocking him to calm and send him to sleep, Samuel only half got the message. The agitation and crying continued. Suddenly, Victorine reached for her phone, got the ring tone
going, brought the phone to her back to Samuel’s ear by stretching her arm over her shoulder with stunning agility. The crying ceased immediately. When the ring tone ran its course, Samuel burst out crying again. Victorine quickly reset the ring tone and Samuel once again became peaceful. This went on until Samuel fell asleep. In all three cases I saw the phone used in ways that had generally been alluded to in Chapter Three, while the use of the ring tone to calm the child prepared me for what I would later find amongst the blind (as discussed in Chapter Six.) Clearly too, not only were actual calls important in understanding phone use and behaviour, behaviour around the phone and beliefs about the phone were important.

All of the above occurrences and discussions often featured in the couple’s discussion of their day, sometimes verbatim and sometimes as an after thought. Their closeness was such that it did not come to me as a surprise when, on asking who they called most, both partners said they called each other first and foremost. Calls usually involved inquiring after each other’s day; coordinating their daily activities, i.e. when to meet, what to get for the family or the baby, meals, etc; Ernest’s work and activities; the store; Victorine’s time at home and in the store; extended family issues; and their spiritual life. In all they called each other above all others.

7:1c FINAL WORD

In conclusion, I found that the mobile phone in the Ekechea home was an addition to a routine of instinctive exchanges. Rather than create bubbles of virtual individual spaces within the home, the phone was producing continuity that was creating perpetual contact between the two. The seamlessness of their phone behaviour only reflected their seeming real life relationship. I did not see any signs of discord between them, and correspondingly only observed harmony in their relationship to each other around the phone. The mobile phone’s effect of welding the two even closer together seemed to create a clear line between them and the rest of the world. It would take knowledge of what was happening in other households – both those within the study and those outside it to bring me to fully understand the implication of the phone in the Ekechea home.
The second household in the study was the household of Pastor George.

7:2 PASTOR GEORGE’S HOUSEHOLD

Unlike the tight-knit Ekechea family-household, Pastor’s George’s household was unorthodoxy par excellence – at least for the Western world. But it was a family-household that could be found in many parts of Cameroon and Africa. Made up of seven members (four males and three females), Pastor George’s house was an apartment in a four-apartment story building, overlooking the Redeemed Christian Church of God molyko whose almost 200 congregants the 26-year-old Pastor George shepherded.

Five of the household members owned mobile phones, one owned a SIM card, and another, the school-going teenager Brenda, depended on other people’s phones for her phone communication. The household, made up partly of blood relations and partly of Christian brothers and sisters, promised from the outset to allow me a front seat view of Christianity and mobile telephony at play. Already, the interplay of Christianity in the lives and conditions of people in Buea, Christianity’s unexpected connection to the phone and influence on the town had opened up several avenues of questions for me. Like the Ekechea home, I did not know what to expect of Pastor George’s household. Of one thing, however, I was certain when I choose Pastor George’s household, that it would be so different from the Ekechea household that it would be a challenge to find comparable patterns of phone use in the two households, and that it would be a testimony to the groundedness of the accessibility proposition forwarded in this study (see chapter Two) if any similarities of usage and motives were to be found. A look at the table below reveals the configuration of phone and man in the household.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>RELATIONSHIP</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>MARK OF PHONE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pastor George</td>
<td>Head of Household</td>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>MOTOROLA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZACH</td>
<td>Christian brother</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Dorado d601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divine</td>
<td>Christian brother</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>mid 20s</td>
<td>Siemens a70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Relation to Pastor George</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Phone Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivian Maya</td>
<td>Younger sister of Pastor George</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Between late teens and early 20s</td>
<td>Bird</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larissa</td>
<td>Relation of Pastor George</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>LG, Bird, Lion (phone shop employee with access to different brands of phones)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joel</td>
<td>Younger brother of Pastor George</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>mid teens</td>
<td>Sim Card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brenda</td>
<td>Younger sister of Pastor George</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mid teens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**7:2c  FIELDWORK IN PASTOR GEORGE’S HOME**

Like the Ekechea household, a lot would be revealed about relationships in Pastor George’s home by the way household members handled the phone: its logistics, interpersonal relations around the phone, etc. As for the daily schedule in the Pastor George household, there was a three-part day routine: The morning period (from dawn to about 10 a.m.), the afternoon period from 10 a.m. to about 3 p.m. when everyone would have gone off for their various activities; and the evening period which was often crammed with church activities. Though the third part of the day generally began at about 3 p.m. when people commenced returning to the house, this was not always the case, as members would sometimes trickle back to the house only to head out again. The dreaded silence of these periods, however, was never too long as visitors always dropped in unannounced, let in by the constantly open door. In the latter evenings, most of the family members often were home. But on Tuesdays (during bible studies) and Thursdays (during prayer services) from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., as well as on Sundays from 7:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. during church service, no one was ever home. During these times the phones would be off. Also, from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. on Sundays during house fellowships, phones were switched off.

Much as they sometimes ate together, prayed together and literally were together in all activities related to their Christian life, there was a
marked individualism when it came to their professional and work lives. For instance, whenever household members began their 3 p.m. return trips to the house, they would come in singles – an image of such dissociation from each other that islands of space seemed to form around them. At the same time, while such individualism prevailed, members showed marked brotherly togetherness, seen, for instance, in the way they acted towards guests like myself. There was a certain team (say football team) spirit in their behaviour at such moments, as though while dribbling the ball individually the goal could only be made by negotiating the ball with each other. This individual yet team spirit showed most poignantly in their phone behaviour. For instance not once was there talk of any one ever refusing to share his or her handset with another member. Nor did there seem any course for arguments over credit or handset usage. I noticed too that when calls came in while members were in the sitting room with us, they would discreetly take their phones out of the parlour. The pastor appeared to be the only one who always held long conversations on the phone in the parlour while others were there, but even he too occasionally stepped out. Whether leaving the parlour was a way to avoid noise rather than to be considerate, I cannot tell.

Unlike the Ekechea home where phones were kept in communal areas or where anyone could reach it, in Pastor George’s household members lived with and around their phones as though it were a part of their accoutrement. The device was akin to members’ personalities – accepted as part of the effects of the house but belonging to specific individuals. People respected the privacy of other people’s phone moments, and did not inquire after other people’s calls, though members sometimes commented on their phone conversations. On the other hand, it was sometimes obvious what someone’s phone conversation was about, for instance when the pastor embarked on pastoral advices and encouragements. In general, household members exhibited phone habits that were distinct. Who they called, what they called for, etc were very individual. The following breakdown of each member’s phone behaviour allows for a clearer interpretation of their respective relationships with the phone.
Pastor George got his first phone in 2004, but started using phone booths as early as 1997. I observed that relationship with the phone was informed by his pastoral responsibilities and, apparently, his affection for one woman – his fiancé. As much as he made calls or sent texts to his families and friends, the pastor tended to spend most of his time on the phone communicating with parishioners – sending texts of hope, speaking words of encouragement to callers and conducting prayer sessions over the phone – especially with his fiancé. His fiancé, indeed, though living in Buea, was the recipient of the majority of his outgoing calls, according to Ewang Essembesson’s entries. Their calls were often in the night, during MTN’s 11 p.m. to 5a.m. promotional grace hours. Sometimes, they would spend the entire night praying and praising God “for their relationship” (Essembesson’s notes). On a typical day, the pastor would be on the phone more that eleven times – calling or receiving calls. He, however, received more phone calls than made them, and, as well as receiving a lot of beeping communications, beeped others extensively. As already shown above, a great deal of the calls he made were to his fiancé. Other calls were to families – especially family members in the North West province. Incidentally, the pastor was often away from home, either at his office in the church building which was being rebuilt, or traveling out of town. He traveled regularly to Bamenda on family matters such as could not be dealt with over the phone (his wedding arrangements for instance). He also traveled occasionally to Douala and Yaounde. When at home, he had a routine of spending some time in room praying – often from about 5p.m. to 6 p.m. or longer. When not praying or counseling or talking on his phone, he would join me (at such hours I was there) in long conversations about his work at the church, his aspirations in life and about marriage. In all these instances, he always had his phone at his side.

ZACH
Zach, the 26 year old business man in the house, mainly used his phone credit to call business partners: i.e. suppliers of his high end men’s wear, and his customers. Second on his priority list of calls was his fiancé who, also residing in Buea, was on holidays in Bamenda during my fieldwork in the house. Like Pastor George, Zach would spend hours at
night speaking to his fiancé over the phone. Sometimes they would stay up all night, praying and praising God for their relationship. Zach was almost never home whenever I was there as his business demanded much mobility, but both my entries and Ewang Essembesson’s entries show that he generally was on the phone about four times a day (at least when he was in full view of us).

LARISSA
Larissa, a sales employee at a phone shop ("Faith and Hope phones") never used the phone in my presence. Ewang’s entry, however, demonstrated that she mostly beeped rather than call. She had even indicated to Ewang that whenever she was forced to call – say to inquire after some information from her boss, she would use a call box rather than use her phone as the call box was cheaper than using her phone credit. Her call history in our entries showed almost zero numbers of calls per day.

DIVINE
Divine, a piano teacher, had developed a strong phone relationship with his students. In our entry, it was clear that he received more calls than made calls, and the calls he received were from his students. Where he made calls, these were also in the direction of his students rather than family and friends. As for friends, he usually beeped them, or would make very short calls of about seven seconds. His call history showed that on any given day he would be on the phone less than eight times.

BRENDA
One would think that Brenda who had no phone would be out of the phoning circuit; but as we have already seen in previous chapters, not owning a phone or a SIM card is not enough reason to prevent a person from receiving or making calls. That was Brenda’s story, who, without a personal phone received calls from her elder brother in the US and from friends, and also made calls. These were not done through call-boxes, but through the phones of people in the house. Much of this information came from discussions with house members rather than from direct observation. As such we did not record any phone activities by Brenda.
JOEL

Like Brenda, Joel always depended on others such as friends and household members to make use of his SIM card. People never appeared to reject his request to temporarily use their handsets for his SIM card. A record of his phone activities was not kept.

Vivian Maya

It was only after I had traveled back to Holland and sat studying my data that I discovered that there had been no entries on Vivian Maya. I am not yet sure why, as I did put down every phone activity that came to my attention in the pastor’s house, and had also instructed Ewang Essembesson to do the same. The only likely explanation is that she made no calls in our vicinity.

7:2d  FINAL WORD

The expectation that had informed the research at Pastor’s George’s house had been fuelled by the belief that the mobile phone within an intensely Christian environment would be a sort of crusade. The expectation was that there would be some form of intense Christian activity around the phone. The discovery, however, was that each member, including the pastor used the phone in their individual ways to reach goals that had to do more with their personal needs than their collective belief. Prayers and other specifically religious activities took place separate from the phone until such time as there was need to reach others beyond the home. But as much as the phone proved to be an individual thing - i.e. expanding personal spaces, it also proved itself to establish the way each household member treated the other. The tendency to rise and leave the sitting room in times of calls, to speak discretely on the phone most of the time, to share, etc, showed the extent to which they regarded and respected each other and the quasi formality of their relationship. The type of sibling rivalries present in the relationships of some blood relations was completely absent here even though some of the household members were blood relations. If nothing else, the manner in which household members treated each other had a lot to say for the devout Christian, and the way mobile telephony assisted in that. The mobile phone, apparently,
was not imposing any unknown value systems or influencing the
behaviours of household members in any way foreign to their character
and current relationships. Rather, it appeared to highlight how they
related to each other. It clearly was strengthening what was already
existing. The significance of this, I would later find. As for Ma
Christie’s household, I hoped and expected something else… well, I
hoped for drama, for some sort of ‘luscious’ sibling rivalries. I met
with another picture.

7:3  MA CHRISTIE’S HOUSEHOLD

7:3a  INTRODUCTION

Ma Christie’s household was attractive for several reasons. First,
unlike the other two, it was a household headed by a woman. Secondly,
it was a household typical of many households in Anglophone Cameroon
with relatives far and near living under one roof long into young
adulthood. Conscious of the tension, rivalries and intrigues typical of
some of such households, though not nearly as much as with those
consisting of a father and several wives, I expected this household to
produce pure dynamo with regards to phone use and people’s inter
personal relationships. The third reason this was an attractive choice
was the fact that I was not only allowed room to enter into the
household, but was given the option by one of the household members to
look into the lives of the people through her diary on the phone
goings-on in the house. Though I was conscious that even with her best
intentions Rita might not be completely objective, it still was an
excellent opportunity because I was short of funds, time and manpower
to do any better. Even my intention to find a family of several wives
and one husband had to be discarded because of the aforementioned
limitations.

Ma Christie’s was a self-contained, upper middle-class house in the
Great Soppo suburb of Buea – a stone-throw from the main Soppo market.
It had seven members, three of whom were males and the rest, including
Ma Christie, females. While some of the members of the household were
Ma Christie’s own offspring, others were relatives of one degree or the
other. How Ma Christie’s relatives came to live under her patronage may be understood in relation to the general pattern in Anglophone Cameroon, where through various agreements within extended families, relatives far and near take up residence with uncles, aunts, etc, in cities and towns in pursuit of education, or employment, or some other life enhancing activity. In many of these cases, there are varying degrees of familial drama. With this in mind, I expected to find much drama in Ma Christie’s home. My expectations were not met. One expectation that did meet with some success was the supposition on my part that household members would have different phone types, marks and providers – as we now see in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>RELATIONSHIP TO FAMILY HEAD</th>
<th>OWN MOBILE PHONE?</th>
<th>TYPE OF PHONE</th>
<th>SERVICE PROVIDER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MA CHRISTIE</td>
<td>HEAD OF FAMILY (teacher)</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NOKIA</td>
<td>ORANGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GERALDINE</td>
<td>DAUGHTER</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>ZTE</td>
<td>MTN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RITA</td>
<td>NIECE</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NOKIA</td>
<td>MTN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMANGA</td>
<td>FAINLY RELATION</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>ERICSON</td>
<td>MTN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPOME</td>
<td>FAMILY MEMBER</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>MOTOROLA</td>
<td>MTN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELVIS</td>
<td>FAMILY RELATIVE</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>MTN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7:3b FIELDWORK IN MA CHRISTIE’S HOUSEHOLD

The first thing that came through in Rita’s entries about the presence of the phone in Ma Christie’s household was members’ respective sentiments about the device. I found that each person’s relationship with and feelings about it greatly influenced the way they reacted to life around the phone. Let’s look at each member’s sentiments about and relationship with the phone.
MA CHRISTIE – ORANGE
Ma Christie, a teacher in her 50s and head of her household, subscribed to Orange, and had a Nokia handset. Her feelings about her phone were coloured by the device’s unreliability – a condition caused by the phone having once fallen in a container of water. Calls were thereafter problematic – with some outgoing calls getting through and others failing to connect. Then again the device itself was not the only reason for Ma Christie occasional low-level dissatisfaction with it. Her network provider, Orange, had the tendency to fail her in moments that she needed connectivity.

RITA – MTN
Rita wrote in her entry that “Most of the time there is the problem of network, but I realize that some times when I increase the volume of my phone to the highest I can’t receive calls. Most of the time the error comes from the service that is not being able to receive calls even if you have full network and your phone has not been blocked.” Apparently, she too was having problems with her service provider.

EMANGA – MTN
As far as Emanga was concerned, there was nothing to complain about where her phone and provider were concerned. The phone was performing well, and only intermittent network problems occasionally dampened things.

GERALDINE – MTN
Geraldine’s feelings about her phone and provider mirrored Emanga’s.

EPOME – MTN
Not only was Epome’s story similar to the ladies’, he even extolled its entertainment potentials and the fact that there were frequent educative and new information from MTN.

ELVIS – MTN
In Rita’s entries on daily call-habit, Elvis made calls almost every day, sometimes more than other members of the family; yet not once did she refer to him owning a phone. As a result, I was forced to conclude
that he was the one member in the household with a SIM card. Unfortunately I did not confirm this.

Apart from the relationship between man and phone which the various member sentiments suggested about the phone in Ma Christie’s home, like the two previous family-households, logistics, phone behaviour, and how people behaved towards each other in relation to the phone brought to the fore much about the family household and how the phone was influencing and being influenced by life within the household.

One of the notable unambiguous information in Rita’s entry was the fact that members habitually had their phones on them even while at home; only leaving it in communal areas when doing household chores.

Rita also gave a tour of mobile phone usage pattern in the household. Beeping, for instance, was often widely used in all its forms. In her entry, she stated:

"At times beeping is done to greet somebody or to remind somebody of something. Beeping is also done when the person or an owner of the phone has not got money in the cell phone to make a call. Beeping is either a two-way game or a one-way game. When any phone owner beeps, the person who has been beeped also beeps, or at times, when any member of the household beeps, the person to whom the beep was sent calls back to know why the person is beeping. On the other hand, members of this household beep any person be it a family member or not if they want to inform that person of something. This information at times concerns house duties and other outdoor activities. All in all beeping using the mobile phone is a signal for some notice." Then of course the fight beep, where people would beep each other continuously until someone stopped. This was often course for entertainment in Ma Christie’s household.

Of texting, Rita explained that “At times, house members send [text] messages if they don’t have enough money in the phone to make a call. On the other side of it, when the household member receives a message, he/she will normally follow the steps in the message-reading to get what is in the message.”

The most common set of uses, according to Rita’s diary, was the many different functional uses we had seen people put the phone in, in Chapter three. In the entry, Rita wrote that "The mobile phones in this
household are used to set alarm or as a reminder. The members of the household who have camera phones use it on a daily basis to take snapshots of themselves, the people they meet in and out of the house or any beautiful flower or item they see around, to store in the phone or save it as a screen saver. The phones are used to record sound from the television or some other person’s phone into their own cell phone. The cell phones are later on used to play music either makossa or gospel tracks. Another important way in which members use their phones is as torch light during blackouts. This is to say during blackouts all phones are used to show light. Cell phones are also used to set important dates and happenings in one’s life especially birthday dates of friends and relatives."

To my surprise, considering how much people in the study and out of it had spoken of using the phone’s gaming facilities, Rita wrote that “Playing of games using the mobile phone is not common among owners of phone in this household. This habit is rare, but can be done once in a while if one needs to relax his/her self, but it lasts just for a short period not even up to ten minutes and the only person who does not own a phone is the one who mostly play the games in the cell phones.”

The many communication opportunities that the phone offer also had some unpleasant disadvantages for some members of the household. As Rita explained in her diary, the fact that one could be reached at all times sometimes made for intrusion into one’s life, for instance being called at work about some chore or duty at home that had been left undone, or that needed taking care of. Barring this, however, the device was for the household a God-send in coordinating basic activities such as getting supplies or attending to some necessities.

Rita’s diary did make a clear distinction between phone use and phone behaviour in the household. According to the entry, the phone had brought to the household both individual privacy and interconnectedness. A household of seven people, each experiencing his/her own separate external reality is a household of people living physically together yet seemingly cocooned in their own individual virtual worlds, linked to absent others who are as real to the phone-owners as they are non-existent to those other household members in physical proximity to the phone-owner. What Rita’s diary showed was a
type of dual existence in the home: the physical home life with one another and the non-physical phone life - where members were physically present with household members but at the same time absent and in the other world in the phone. The result, occasional unintended dissociation from or even ignoring of other household members. In her entry, Rita explains:

“When there is no network in the house, people keep saying “hallo, hallo” on the phone until other people get tired of it and ask them to go out of the house. The ringing also distracts other people in the house especially when someone is trying to concentrate on something or on the television. Other things that distracts too, are people’s conversations on the phone.” I have called this non-presence in the vicinity of others “neigphonism” - a term I use to describe people’s lack of awareness of others when on the phone - whether when talking on it, or using its multimedia facilities. In Rita’s entry it was clear that this was a source of stress for the person wanting to hold a conversation with the person in possession of the phone. Apparently, other phone behaviours also contributed to this carving of subtle barrier lines. Rita notes that “the begging of another person’s phone to make a phone call is a common phenomenon in this house. Some members of the household put their phones on vibration while others don’t and most often, only one or two persons lock their phones especially for credit loss. Phones in this house are always found beside the owners and at times members refuse others from manipulating their phones. Household members always admire others’ phone and touching of others’ phones is very common. Some of the phones are used as gifts to the house-members”. While Rita’s entry exposes such blurred household dynamics, it also reveals a type of sharing, one totally different from other types of sharing. This is the type of sharing that comes from drawing one another into each other’s world through divulging to other household members interesting private phone episodes in one’s life and thereby drawing these others into one’s virtual phone life. The phone therefore becomes a unifying force, which, according to Rita’s entries, was seemingly the case in Ma Christie’s household. For instance, Rita reports that the phone has been responsible for much camaraderie and relaxation in the home. Occasions when strange calls and beeping become the topic of general conversation, when members watch photographs on someone’s phone screen, when members listen to recorded sounds in
someone’s phone, when everyone fall over each other searching for someone’s ringing phones are only some of the examples. Rita writes, “Phone calls or messages received is fun in this household. When a phone is ringing in the house, the people around the phone will call out for the owner to let him/her run up to pick up the phone… Most of the times, the members of the household forget where they have kept their phones and the most interesting part is when the phone is ringing and they do not know where exactly to locate it.”

If anything, these kinds of remarks reveal a vibrant multifaceted household. More specifically, Rita’s entries showed the phone as doing two things. 1) Getting members to accommodate each other in a manner different from what is culturally expected such as having to accommodate others simply by virtue of the fact that they are one’s relatives. This time members are accommodating others by allowing them room to exist in their own separate (phone) spaces. Additionally, I would come to acknowledge that such accommodation is the product of a household that naturally leans towards harmony. Secondly, and on the same line, Rita’s entry showed the mobile phone to be getting family members to acknowledge the integrity of others, as members who are talking on the phone are constantly reminded by others to lower their voices or leave the vicinity.

7:3c  FINAL WORD

Evidently, the drama I had hoped to find in Ma Christie’s household scarce materialized. The reason simply that Ma Christie’s was a family-household whose members had a natural tendency to look out for each other and as such breed nothing negative into which the phone could feed. The phone could only feed into and expand that which was already in existence… could only underscore that which was there: the occasions moments of sibling irritation, happiness, camaraderie, and fun. Because these qualities were all there mostly was to this family-household, they were all the phone could work with and highlight. Compare this with the household situation of some respondents to my questionnaire, who reported that ‘my mother and father argue sometimes about my father’s behaviour’ ‘sometimes my brothers and sisters quarrel a lot about credit’ “there is a lot of argument in the house because of using other people’s credit’ “my father wants to know who my mother is
talking to ‘boys have access to my daughter’s ears and I do not know who bought her the phone’…

Looking at the above comments and the impact of the phone in Ma Christie’s household, one thing becomes indubitable: the phone is to each household a mirror of what that family-household is. This assessment would eventually help explain what the phone was in the family-household in Buea and what that, ultimately, signified about how the mobile phone was influencing daily life in the town.

7:4 ANALYSING THE THREE HOUSEHOLDS: THE EKECHEA, PASTOR GEORGE’S AND MA CHRISTIE’S HOUSEHOLD.

Leopoldina Fortunati has shown how teenagers in Italy are creating a “spaceless and timeless brotherhood as a result of familial loneliness derived not merely from the shrinking size of the family but also from the so-called "new economy" which forces more and more adults to long working hours and consequently to less and less "being at home"(Fortunati, L, 2002). Castells and his colleagues draw our attention to the potential variations in usage of mobile telephony by working adults in different countries to coordinate care-giving activities for the elderly based on family solidarity within those countries. What these scholars are illustrating is the fact that the way the phone is used amongst household members is synonymous to the situation in the home and the relationship of members – where for instance there is no strong family solidarity that allows for a reasonable level of care for the elderly, usage of the phone to coordinate such care would be less entrenched. Where young people carry on intense phone activities, especially in their bedrooms and in strict privacy, it exposes the loneliness engendered by a cold and distant or disconnected home life. Usage pattern of the phone in a household ultimately exposes the state and needs of members of that household.

In the three households in this chapter we see some very clear traits that reflect the fundamental nature of member relationships and needs. The first household (Ekechea family) illustrates how mobile
telephony further establishes a tradition of affection and synergy. Rather than create bubbles of virtual spaces within the home where one lives in his or her own world, it instead serves to draw the two even deeper into each other’s world. As opposed to reports from other informants in the study, no one in this family shows any signs of entering into argument for whatever reason with the other over the phone. Keeping their phones in each other’s reach, making their phone conversations part of their face to face conversations, seamlessly handling each other’s phone has only contributed to highlight the harmony that was already there in the first place. Their mobile phone behaviour has simply reflected their natural behaviour because that is all the phone has had to feed into. But the phone at the Ekechea home has also made a play of something else about the family: expose the couple’s need for contact with each other, for knowledge of each other’s well being, and their struggles to make a living and keep their heads above financial and career waters.

In Pastor George’s home on the other hand, bubbles of virtual spaces exist within the home, yet accepted because in that household individual and communal spaces coexist flawlessly. Phone use has actually exposed two things about the household. First, that the difficult living conditions in which members, as average Anglophone Cameroonians live, has fastened much of members’ attention onto the matter of living and survival, rather than on full blown evangelical work or relentless Christian activities. Secondly that there is a place given to marriage or love relationships in members’ belief system that might have biblical importance. I realized that this was indeed so, as the issue of marriage seemed of paramount importance to the church leadership.26

In the case of Ma Christie’s household, as already stated above, the phone could only feed into what was there—siblings and relatives living through days or moments of irritation, happiness, camaraderie, and fun.
CONCLUSIONS ON MOBILE TELEPHONY IN THE FAMILY-HOUSEHOLD

From the foregoing analysis, I have drawn three conclusions concerning mobile telephony in the family-household. The first is that 1) mobile telephony highlights the state of the home and the relationship of members to each other by feeding into that which is there; 2) secondly, mobile telephony, by highlighting the state of the household, exacerbates the prevailing condition in the home, and 3) thirdly, mobile telephony, by highlighting and exacerbating the conditions of a household, reveals what the family-household needs (to fix) most or what is precious enough to be maintained.

If we look at the three households in the study for instance, we see how the phone highlights the relationship of members in the way they behave with the phone in relation to each other. We not only see that, we also see how much the phone exacerbates these home dynamics just by feeding into it, revealing at the same time the needs of each household. For instance, where there is love, like in the Ekechea household, we see the phone deepen and showcase it, where there is rancour and suspicion as in the case of some of the informants in the study, we see the phone making argument and anger even more stark—exposing the need for peace in such families. In the case of Ma Christie’s household, we see the phone not only highlighting the stability and camaraderie, we see it exacerbating it, as it forces them into a balancing act. We also see the need for household members to maintain or improve on that balancing act. In Pastor George’s household, what we see is the continuous need to negotiate personal aspirations, home cohesion and evangelical activities. And in the Ekechea household, the need to preserve the home status quo and to see their aspirations fulfilled.

A logical question at this point would be, what is the connection between these conclusions and usage pattern amongst the blind, professionals and students? What influence has the phone in the lives of members of these different social groups? Is there any traceable pattern?

The answer is yes.
CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

PART ONE

8:1 HOW MOBILE TELEPHONY INFLUENCES DAILY LIFE IN BUEA

In this work, I proposed to look at how mobile telephony is influencing life in Buea and how people are shaping it. To do this, I suggested that the best way would be to look for patterns of usage and interaction within and across different groups in the town. Four diverse social groups whose needs could not be more divorced and whose usage pattern could not be more detachedly focused were chosen based on their prominence or presence in the town. Any similarities in how they used the phone, why they did so and how the phone thereby affected their lives would therefore show a pattern that could be argued to be the existing paradigm in the town.

Three things became clear in the findings: 1) that mobile telephony is used by all groups to look for escapes from, and ways to negotiate the boundaries set upon their living conditions by the Anglophone experience (Jua, N, Konning, P, 2004). Secondly, we see that mobile phone highlights the needs that prevailing conditions can not cater to. Examples from data culled from the four groups makes a case for this assertion. For the student, for instance, we see how the stifling conditions of life in Cameroon (both perceived and real) make the need to look beyond the present, beyond the country, beyond hopelessness palpable in their symbolic and instrumental use of the mobile phone. For the professionals the need to lower the existing stress and dearth of expanded opportunities show inexorably in their use of the phone. For the blind the need for freedom and independence becomes clear, while for the family-household the need to correct or build on the existing relationship of household members is exposed by members. Thirdly, we see use of the mobile phone not only exposing people’s needs but exacerbating societal conditions. For example, it has exacerbated both the good and the bad in youth behaviour and youth activities in Buea, in their effort to carve a better future for themselves, resulting as much in unhealthy phone related activities (porn, cyber/phone crime, etc) as in a better knowledge of world affairs, better handling of information technology and knowledge
exchange. This second aspect has, for the youths of Buea, had the
effect of reducing the impact of the digital divide between the West
and Africa as these young people become more and more web and phone
savvy; as much as anyone else in the US or elsewhere. Where the
professionals are concerned, the phone has deepened their sensitivity
to changes in the status quo and their need to negotiate the many
responsibilities in an environment where few have but many need. The
blind’s need for independence, for respect, for freedom has not only
been highlighted, but the conditions denying them these things have
been made more obvious by the opportunities offered by the phone. And
for the family-households, the phone has tended to exacerbate the
existing relationship between members and highlighted what is needed to
change, to fix or to keep intact in those households.

The manner in which the mobile phone has, therefore, influenced
life in Buea, has been to highlight and showcase both what is absent in
people’s daily lives which they need and the challenges they face.
Therefore, in their daily lives people seek to use the mobile phone to
organize responsibilities, to coordinate basic social affairs, to
control stress, and to negotiate opportunities. And as the phone shows
itself to fulfill those needs in varying degrees, even though sometimes
only symbolically, it makes people more and more dependent on it and
less and less able to do without it or to remember what life was
without the technology. The possibility that within ten years many
people in Buea and Anglophone Cameroon would be incapable of managing
without the phone or even fathom its absence in their lives is becoming
more and more feasible.

This raises other questions about the influence of the presence of
mobile telephony in Buea on those without access to a personal phone
and as such without the ability to quickly coordinate activities with
friends, or quickly access opportunities like others. It also raises
questions on whether there is a broader influence of mobile telephony
on society that includes its implications for those without a personal
phone in a society where uptake is at an overwhelming rate and people
are becoming attached to their phones. These are issues that can only
be relegated to another research effort as the scope of this work was
intended to cover only the influence of mobile telephony in the daily
lives of people and how they have shaped the technology. At the same
The aim of this study was to go beyond the current preoccupation with economic parameters in defining mobile telephony’s implication for African societies and to look at the technology’s implication for the social life of the society at large. I argued that current scholarly and media attention to economic parameters in interpreting mobile telephone’s implication for Africa was fundamentally flawed, and that to grasp any technology’s meaning for a society, a thorough understanding of that technology’s influence on people’s daily(social)lives and how people interpreted it was imperative. The aim of this proposition was to show that though it is tempting to view mobile telephony only in terms of its potential to do what technologies have done across centuries in people’s conditions, it is important to be mindful of the fact that for societies suddenly exposed to a technology that was not there only a few years previously, the influence of that technology on those societies would transcend one single aspect of life – in this case economic. That influence would be immediate, micro, comprehensively social, and pervasive. Because of this, I sought to find answers to the following question: How is mobile telephony influencing people’s daily (social) life in Buea and how are people in Buea shaping and interpreting the phone? and to thereby look into average people’s lives so as to see how the phone was influencing these lives and how people were incorporating the phone into their affairs. The need to treat these issues effectively and come to a comprehensive answer prompted me to formulate three further sub questions:

1) What are the deeper socio-cultural considerations that inform mobile phone adoption or uptake in Buea?... How can the phone’s proliferation in the town be explained? 2) What meanings are people putting to the mobile phone, and what is the motivation and drive behind their interpretation and use of it? 3) Is the phone influencing people’s attitude, views, ways of doing things, relationships... life? If so, how? If not, what is the explanation?
To answer these questions, I developed a simple hypothesis: that, rather than the desire for pure communication informing motivation for uptake and use of mobile telephony, it is the desire for access to opportunities (unattainable under existing conditions) that drives motivation for uptake and usage. As such, how the phone will be used and how it will influence people’s lives will be determined by the needs that existing regional or local conditions cannot fulfill. Thence, it is local needs and motivation that drive uptake and use, and which ultimately lend people to the influence of the technology. So, to understand how a people use the phone or how it affects their lives, knowledge of the local context within which the phone was introduced and the historical basis of that context is needed. This means whatever lie beneath the choices people across the world make, however much they seem to act universally, their motives for adopting mobile telephony and their usage of it would be guided by home grown circumstances, and these circumstances would be unique to their specific regions or countries or societies. Therefore, to understand mobile telephony’s influence in the lives of people in Buea, there would be a need to understand what people desire access to and how Cameroon and Anglophone Cameroon’s history has contributed to those needs. Using this argument, we will then expect that the average man/woman on the street of Buea, regardless of his/her background and social standing will use the phone to gain access to that which conditions in Anglophone Cameroon have made (seemingly) unattainable – be it safety, security, peace of mind, perpetual contact, or something else.

To begin the process of proving the testability or verifiability of the above hypothesis and analysis, I took a first step in Chapter one: change the initial unit of analysis for the study from the family to multiple units of analysis – four social groups comparable to each other only by their prominence or visibility in the town: students, professionals, the blind and the family-household. I did this with the knowledge that any similarities in the motivation for mobile phone uptake amongst these very different groups would not only conclusively showcase the manner in which the phone was influencing life in Buea, but support the proposition that local circumstances and histories affect people’s needs and pattern of mobile phone uptake and thereby how the phone will influence their lives. The plan was to compare what
seemed general in the town and what would be found amongst study participants. The result of this approach brought the work to the following conclusions about mobile telephony in Anglophone Cameroon’s Buea:

- That individual and group conditions are subject to the larger context and historical realities of a region and so the way people use the phone is mainly determined by the political, social or economic conditions of their national, regional or local surrounding.

- The mobile phone highlights that which access to is most desired in a society and as such is adopted and used to achieve that opportunity. If that which is hard to obtain under existing conditions (but desired) is contact with others, the phone becomes a technology desired for perpetual contact and pure communication, if that which access to is needed is security, the lowering of uncertainty, a better future or safety, the phone is utilized for that which is required.

- The mobile phone is used by all groups to find escape from the boundaries set upon their living conditions by socio-economic and socio-political conditions whose features were shaped as far back as the sixties and early seventies – from a time when hope and perceived opportunities informed the way people related socio-politically, socio-economically and socio-culturally to each other, to a time when trust was shattered as was peace of mind and people’s belief in institutions or the political apparatus to help… a time when people began depending on themselves to lower the resultant uncertainties.

- The manner in which people use the mobile phone to cater to both their communication and non-communication needs (i.e. as torch light, alarm clock, etc) is making of people increasingly dependent on the technology, a situation that may well be driving a social wedge between the phone ‘haves’ and the phone ‘have-nots’, as coordinating social activities between the two may be becoming more and more difficult. This means the phone may be having a more pervasive effect on life in Buea than is realized… for what happens to those without phones living in a society where people are becoming more and more attached to it? Is there then the possibility that to fully understand how mobile telephony is influencing life in Buea an examination of the status of those without personal phones may be demanded? Could there be a wider aspect to the influence of mobile telephony on society than could possibly be gleaned in my study?
The probable answer to the above is, there could. But then studying the meaning of mobile telephony for those without the technology was not the focus of this study, and as such one that, as already suggested above, may need further investigation. Indeed the question of mobile telephony’s influence on the daily lives of people who do not own mobile phones is only one of several questions and topics for possible further investigation that arose in the course of the research. Below are a few others. They are, however, questions related to further conclusions I came to concerning mobile telephony’s influence on society in Buea.

PART TWO

8:3 INFLUENCE OF MOBILE TELEPHONY IN BUEA & SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

8:3a NEIGHPHONE

In *New tech, new ties: How mobile communication is reshaping social cohesion*, Rich Ling surmises that with a landline telephone we place calls to a location and ask hopefully if someone is there; but that ‘with the mobile phone, we have instant and perpetual access to friends and family regardless of where they are.’ He then proceeds to ask ‘But when we are engaged in these intimate conversations with absent friends, what happens to our relationship with the people who are actually in the same room with us?’ Gergen has called this state of disregarding the presence of others while engaging in other virtual worlds or books ‘absence presence’ (Gergen, K J, 2002). To Ling, this state of excluding those present and drawing closer to absent family and friends creates “bounded solidarity”. What I found in Buea, however, was not a case of bounded solidarity. Indeed, the disregarding of those physically present while drawing closer to those physically afar through mobile telephony was exactly what I discovered during those times when, on general observation exercises around Buea, my assistants and I would notice people talk into their phones along the road, brushing past passers by without as much as lifting a brow to
look at them; or when in some homes, we would observe people rise in the mornings and instead of saying hello to those around them, would call to say good morning to absent others. To me, I was beginning to see the phone commence a process of threatening the erosion of traditional values in Africa... as well as begin to do the direct opposite of what it was supposed to be doing – that is, rather than bring people together, instead distance those physically near. During our observation trips my assistants and I saw people’s mobile phone behaviour make a parody of that which several eminent African scholars have insisted is the African character. Joseph Nyasani (1997) for instance, has argued that sociality, patience, tolerance, sympathy and acceptance are “areas in which the African mind seems to reveal itself in a somewhat dramatic way. It reveals itself through what may rightly be called a congenital trait of sociality or sociability... (1997:57). It further reveals itself as a virtuous natural endowment of patience and tolerance. And lastly it manifests itself as a natural disposition for mutual sympathy and acceptance. These three areas then appear to serve as important landmarks in the general description of the phenomenology of the African mind” (1997:57). M W Makgoba (1997) posits that throughout the African Diaspora peoples of African descent: “are linked by shared values that are fundamental features of African identity and culture. These, for example, include hospitality, friendliness, the consensus and common framework-seeking principle, ubuntu, and the emphasis on community rather than on the individual. These features typically underpin the variations of African culture and identity everywhere. The existence of African identity is not in doubt” (1997:197-198). The same references to Africa’s cultural identity, to its ‘congenital’ values of ‘sociality, negotiation, interconnectedness, interdependence and coexistence’ have been made by contemporary African scholars such as Kimani Gecau (1977) Francis Njyanjjo (2002), and O.S. Elegbeleye(2005), amongst others. But what I saw in Buea was people often so engaged in their phones that they would even enter taxis shouting into their phones. Young people would sometimes not take notice of older people or greet them while on the phone. People would stand in the midst of others and go on a talking spree without realizing they were with others. No wonder one of the main complaints I heard during fieldwork was the deterioration of people’s manners because of mobile telephony. Different observation exercises my
assistants and I carried around Buea showed people so concentrated on
their phones that even when not walking and talking on the phone, they
seemed on the ready to pick it up and talk. As Gergen would quote
Fareek Zakaria, as saying of the internet, “The internet is profoundly
disrespectful of tradition, established order, and hierarchy” (Gergen, K
J, 2002). The question for me during research, therefore, was, might
this be what is happening in Africa? Was the mobile phone really
threatening the social order in Africa through these various
developments in the way people behave with the phone? What was
attachment to the phone really doing to society in Africa? I realized
that to answer this question the issue of *neighphonism* (the making of
the phone one’s neighbour and friend at the expense of those physically
near) would have to be dealt with. It was clearly a key theme to
pursue, but one that showed itself to be so comprehensive that the
subtleties of its impact would never be satisfactorily examined in a
study such as the present one. A thorough investigation of its own was
called for. As such the neighphonism has become one of the key subjects
that I hope will be taken up in future research.

Another topic I hope to see taken up in future research is what I found
to be the relationship between mobile telephony and religion in Buea.

8:3b MOBILE PHONE AND CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA

During fieldwork, one of the surprises I recorded was the manner in
which mobile telephony had become intertwined with Christianity in
Buea. The fact that Christianity was now one of the support upon which
Anglophone Cameroonians were leaning to survive the stress of daily
struggles seemed to explain people’s adherence to Christianity, but the
relationship between Christianity and the mobile phone was that which
was at first unfathomable to me. For one thing, in the opinion of
scholars of the David Hume and Auguste Comte tradition, people take up
religion more fervently in the absence of science and technology, but
as science and technology progress, religiousity recedes (see Katz,
J, 2006); yet in Buea technology was emboldening religiousity. The phone
was being used for prayers, for exchange of religious tracks, for
Christian encouragements, for counseling, and for evangelism by
religious leaders. Faced with this reality, I found myself asking a
number of questions. How far is mobile telephony bolstering the power of clerics? How much of a tool is it becoming in the hands of moralists who may be bent on monitoring other people’s use of the phones? What is the true relationship between religion and mobile telephony in Africa and how is this relationship influencing societies? Again, I realized that these were not questions that could be dealt with in a study such as this. They needed careful examination, and that is what I would like to impress upon any researcher wishing to study mobile telephony in Africa: to consider this religion/mobile telephony connection.

8:3c MOBILE TELEPHONY AMONGST THE DEAF, THE BLIND AND OTHER HANDICAPPED PERSONS OF AFRICA

My research amongst the blind, and briefly amongst the deaf opened a completely unknown world to me. It also revealed other avenues of influence which the phone was having on society in Buea that I would otherwise not have considered. One of the things I noticed on the field amongst the blind was the chasm the mobile phone appeared to be creating between the few educated blind persons and the thousands of uneducated blind persons in Cameroon. I was left with the question of whether a new hierarchy, a new haves and have-nots was beginning to develop between the phone-able blind people and the phone-unable blind persons as some form of education is needed for the blind person to be able to handle the phone. The life of, and challenges faced by, one of the uneducated blind people I met in Buea alerted me to this dichotomy. To her, the very notion of being able to manipulate the phone was unfathomable. Yet we have seen the sense of freedom, enfranchisement and independence that the phone brings to the blind. What then does this mean for the uneducated blind person who do not have the ability to work a phone, and benefit from its opportunities?

Amongst the deaf, I was surprised to hear that the text facility is not as deaf-friendly as I had thought. I was told that text messages, whether in print or electronic form, and the spoken language are not the most desirable form of communication for the deaf person because these are not the deaf person’s mother tongue. Sign language is. At the same time, the mobile phone for the deaf is freedom, independence and privacy. What I came to understand also was that the freedom that the phone was bringing to the deaf was different from what
it was bringing the blind or any other handicapped person I had met. While for the blind the phone is a way to become part of the global family, to assimilate even better in society, for the deaf it means drowning out the visual noise of the world – that is, weeding out the intrusion of the outside world in their lives, discarding of those hearing interpreters who are there even during private moments (during landline telephone communication), and building a wall between themselves and the hearing world. This of course reeks of isolationism. And so the question arises, what is the mobile phone developing between the deaf and all society? What about those deaf who are illiterate and can’t use the mobile phone to send texts? Are they too being cut out of the world of the mobile phone savvy deaf people? What are the dynamics of all this on society? In fact, what does the mobile phone mean for the handicapped in Africa? How is this relationship affecting different societies in Africa in general? Again, like the previous future research-points I have suggested, such questions transcend the scope of this study. I could not deal with them in the study and can now only hope that someone takes them up for further research. One other topic that might prove particularly valuable to the debate on mobile telephony in Africa is the phenomenon of the call boxes in Africa and their operators.

8:3d THE CALL BOX OPERATORS IN AFRICA

One of the things I noticed about the plethora of call box operators in Buea was the number of single mothers and young girls amongst them. This led me to talk to many of them. Many of these single mother operators had found not just economic respite through their call box business, but psychological freedom, dignity and hope; for while the call box business seem simple and unassuming, for some of the single mothers it was a route to freedom and independence of a type different from the experience of the blind, the deaf or some of the other handicapped persons encountered during fieldwork. For the call-box single-mother operators, many of whom only had primary school education, it was an existential change. These girls were suddenly the colleagues of university graduates. And here was another story to pursue – the lives of the university graduates who were now working the phones to earn a living... now colleagues to primary school leavers and
illiterates. What was their story? What was happening to their lives and how was society being affected by all these?

These are all questions that have the potential to bring to the fore discoveries that might prove keenly important for the study of, not only mobile telephony in Africa, but of society in Africa. And for this reason, the call box and its operators is a topic that I hope a researcher will pick up in the future. Last on this list of possible topics for future research is one of my own hypothesis in this study. The correlation between history and mobile phone uptake.

8:3e HISTORY AND MOBILE TELEPHONY

Finally, I hope some researcher might take up the assumptions I have made in this thesis about context, history, and accessibility. More specifically, I hope here will be future examination of the connection I have made between historical processes and uptake and usage pattern of mobile telephony. This might result in some unexpected findings.
NOTES

1 This is in reference to the prevailing liberal economic model propounded by the world bank and the un in spite of the more recent emphasis on human and social development.


3 According several different scholars, including such as Jeffrey James and Mila Versteeg (2007) and recent UN reports (see UNHDR 2001 and beyond), the shortage of landline and connectivity in Africa has limited internet penetration in African countries to urban centres, but mobile telephony has reached the farthest corners of society in Africa and is continuing to do so

5 http://www.fullworld.eu/city-map/cameroon/buea-population-location-town

6 See International Telecommunication Union country report on Cameroon

7 Leonard Waverman is Professor and Chair of The London School of Economics; Meloria Mershi is Associate Professor of Economics at John Cabot University; Melvin Fuss is Professor of Economics at University of Toronto. For the third and fourth report, Mark Williams is consultant with London 's Frontier Economics while Jonathan Samuel, Niraj Shah, and Wenona Hadingham are consultants at Grant Thornton.

8 James E. Katz is professor of communication at New Jersey 's Rutgers State University and director of the Rutgers University Center for Mobile Communication Studies which is the first academic center dedicated to the study of the social aspects of mobile communication. He has written several books on the topic, and has been awarded prestigious international awards for a number of his publications and co-published volumes.

9 Daniel Miller is Professor in Anthropology and Archaeology at University College London. He is internationally known for his work on material culture, objectification mass consumption, shopping, value and political economy, internet and mobile phone use

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10 Ebenezer Obadare Playing Politics with the Mobile Phone: Civil Society, Big Business and the State in Nigeria article accepted for publication in Review of African Political Economy (ROAPE), No. 107: 93-111, 2006

11 Daniel Jordan Smith is an associate Professor at the Department of Anthropology in Brown University. He has produced over thirty works
(from books and monographs to articles and reviews) on contemporary social issues, largely in Nigeria.

12 Francis B. Nyamnjoh (PhD) is an associate Professor, and Head of Publications and Communications at CODESRIA in Dakar Senegal. Nyamnjoh is one of Cameroon and Africa’s most prolific (award-winning) social scientists and social commentators. He has written as much fiction as scholarly works, his scholarly publications (books, reviews, chapters, articles, and studies numbering over 80).

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Families around the world: universal in their diversity – UN emphasis on the importance of the family in social development and change – International Year of the Family, 1994 – Cover Story

14 (see, http://www.understandingsociety.info/)


16 See ITU country report on Cameroon.

17 We see this in Akoko’s (2007) and Nyamnjoh’s (2005) work, amongst others, on the relationship between diaspora Cameroonians and home-based Cameroonians. In the present work, much emphasis was also placed on friendship and the worth of friends.

18 Mushrooming Churches Raise Concern In Buea, The PostNewspaper Online, 2008 By Peter Kum & Clodette Ndanda (UB Journalism Students On Internship)

19 see COMMUNICATIONS INITIATIVE NETWORK

20 See analysis on history in this work.


22 Advised by people from organizations such as England’s RNIB and Spain’s ONCE

23 From the Editor: This article is from a speech the author made at a National Organization of Parents of Blind Children Seminar:

24 See note 13 above

25 See 14 above

26 Pastor George made the subject an important one in all of our conversations. The church gives seminars to help against late marriages.
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