INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION
IOM International Organization for Migration

doi:10.1111/j.1468-2435.2011.00713.x

Nigerians in China: A Second State of Immobility

Heidi Østbø Haugen*

ABSTRACT

China's rapid economic development has been accompanied by new forms of immigration. Investors and professionals from developed countries are increasingly joined by a diverse group of immigrants from around the world. While there is a large body of academic literature on Chinese emigration, China's new role as a country of immigration has received less scholarly attention. This paper addresses the dynamics of South–South migration to China through a study of Nigerians in Guangzhou, a major international trading hub. The analysis is based on qualitative interviews and participant observation among African traders and migrants in Guangzhou. The paper contends that Nigerian immigration to China epitomizes global migration trends towards a diversification of migration flows, commercialization of the migration process and increased policing of foreigners within national borders. China was rarely the preferred destination of this study's Nigerian informants but, rather, a palatable alternative, as their aspirations to enter Europe and North America were curtailed by restrictive immigration regimes. They escaped a situation of involuntary immobility in Nigeria through short-term visas obtained with the help of migration brokers. However, opportunities for visa renewals are scant under the current Chinese immigration policy. Undocumented migrants find their mobility severely inhibited: They must carefully assess how, when and with whom they move about in order to avoid police interception. This is a business impediment, as well as a source of personal distress for migrants who engage in trade and the provision of trade-related services. The situation can be described as a "second state of immobility": the migrants have succeeded in the difficult project of emigration, but find themselves spatially entrapped in new ways in their destination country.

INTRODUCTION

The fast economic growth and sweeping social changes in China over the past decades have been accompanied by new forms of immigration. Migration to China is remarkably diverse in terms of the migrants' countries of origin, social backgrounds and purposes of migration: China attracts refugees from unstable neighbouring regions, overseas Chinese investors, foreign students, members of the global professional elite and traders from its borderlands and beyond. For the first time in history, Africans constitute a sizable group of immigrants in China. The fast-growing city of Guangzhou in Southern China has emerged as a centre for immigration from sub-Saharan Africa, in particular Nigeria.

* Department of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway.

Published by Blackwell Publishing Ltd.,
9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK,
and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148, USA.

International Migration Vol. 50 (2) 2012
ISSN 0020-7985

The rise in African migration to China takes place in the context of strengthening relations between China and Africa. Migrants play a crucial role in Sino-African trade, which more than doubled in volume between 2005 and 2009 (UN Comtrade, 2010). Chinese migration to various African countries is increasingly well documented as part of the extensive body of research on the Chinese overseas. In contrast, the academic literature concerning African migrants in mainland China is so far limited to a handful of publications (Bertoncello and Bredeloup, 2009; Bodomo, 2010; Li et al., 2009; Lyons et al., 2008; Rennie, 2009; Zhang Li, 2008).

The migration from Nigeria to China epitomizes the general trends in international migration. Developing-country migrants wishing to enter Europe and the United States (U.S.) are increasingly prevented from doing so by restrictive immigration regimes. Some respond by undertaking high-risk migration to their preferred destinations, while others head for countries that are more open to immigration and/or less capable of enforcing immigration regulations. In China, as in many other parts of the world, localized forms of control within national borders force immigrants to constantly assess how, where, when and with whom they move about.

This paper introduces the concept of a ''second state of immobility'' to describe the situation of people who have managed to emigrate, but end up becoming spatially entrapped in new ways in the destination countries. The structure of the analysis follows the sequence of the migration process: it examines the ways in which Nigerians enter China, their experiences of immobility within China and, finally, the possible avenues out of a second state of immobility. First, however, I will discuss the concepts of mobility and immobility in migration with reference to research from other parts of the world, and outline the methodological approach applied in this study.

MOBILITY AND IMMOBILITY

The past decades have been marked by an unprecedented number of people moving across national borders. However, the impression projected by migration statistics must be balanced by descriptions of the mounting obstacles to international mobility (Smart and Smart, 2008). Immigration policies increasingly favour skilled migrants and female care and service workers (Misra et al., 2006), and are informed by discourses that frame migrants as a security threat (Obi, 2010). Men without higher education thus encounter particularly high barriers against migration.

The term ''culture of migration'' has been coined to describe places in which migration plays an important role in people's everyday experience and is a highly desired means for social advancement (Massey et al., 1993). In societies where migration is a customary strategy for economic and social advancement, impediments to international movement challenge identities and alter social relations (Elmhirst, 2007). The project of migration takes on added urgency for young men who lack the necessary resources for making the transformation into social adulthood, especially the material means to establish a family of their own (Lubkemann, 2008). Restrictive immigration regimes in traditional destination countries have resulted in a pervasive ''involuntary immobility'' among prospective migrants (Carling, 2002).

One response to the rising barriers to entry to Europe and North America is migration towards more accessible, but less attractive, countries within the developing world. This is one of the reasons why almost half of the world's registered international migrants now reside in the global South (Ratha and Shaw, 2007). Migration destinations in the South are often middle-income countries that attract migrants from nearby low-income economies

(Hujo and Piper, 2007). In addition, common transit countries for migrants heading to the Global North, such as Senegal, Morocco, Turkey and Mexico, have become *de facto* destinations for migrants who fail to complete their intended journey. The ways in which emerging migration destinations respond to the political, legal and social challenges brought about by immigration is crucial to the well-being of the foreigners who are there, whether by choice or by chance.

The national spaces that the international migrants enter are often marked by new inequalities in mobility. While control at the national borders is a centralized task, the internal regulations of migrant mobility may vary across space due to locally improvised forms of intensified immigration enforcement (Chishti and Bergeron, 2010; De Genova, 2009). In a study of undocumented immigrants in the U.S., Núñez and Heyman (2007) demonstrate how people respond to policing by restricting their own movements and devising ways to covertly defy movement controls. The general condition of "deportability" constitutes a disciplining force in the migrants' lives, and influences how they use and experience urban space (De Genova, 2005). The risk of interception by law enforcement officers – and thus the degree of spatial entrapment – varies depending on the migrants' perceived trustworthiness (Heyman, 2009).

Immobility in the destination country has also been explored within refugee studies. Many refugees live clandestinely in urban areas, instead of in official settlements. These migrants enjoy little legal protection, and are vulnerable to arbitrary police arrest and expressions of xenophobia from the local population (Campbell, 2007). Several studies explore how refugees restrict their movements for fear that they will be identified. Research from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, for example, documents the particular effects of urban immobility for children, the added efforts required by young men to remain unnoticed and the ways in which the constraints imposed upon them by the host environment are compounded by ethnic tensions between refugees (Mann, 2002; Sommers, 2001).

There is ample documentation on how movement across international borders is influenced by personal resources and attributes. The research on undocumented migrants in the U.S. and urban refugees in Africa demonstrates that gender, ethnicity, age, skills, migration status, social networks and a range of other characteristics also influence the migrants' mobility in their destination environment. The similarities in the experiences of immobility between divergent migration contexts demonstrate the importance of bridging the gap between refugee studies and broader social scientific studies of human mobility (cf. Bakewell, 2008). This paper contributes to the existing literature by exploring the phenomenon of immobility in an emerging migration destination, and discussing connections between the circumstances of emigration and immobility at the point of destination.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on four months of fieldwork in Guangzhou between May 2009 and May 2010, carried out in conjunction with a larger study on African migration to China. The high visibility of Nigerians compared to other Africans in the city prompted me to pay particular attention to this group during the fieldwork and informed my decision to focus solely on Nigerians in this paper.

I collected data through participant observation and semi-structured interviews. The resulting field notes and interview transcripts were analysed using the NVivo software package for qualitative analysis. Participant observation allowed me to obtain firsthand information about how migrants related to one another, non-migrants and government officials, and their travelling patterns and behaviour in public spaces. These events often became the topics of

everyday conversation in the field, while the interviews allowed for in-depth discussions of some of them. During the interviews, informants were also asked to recount their migration histories, discuss experiences of immobility in China and comment on their risk management strategies. The semi-structured nature of the interviews made comparisons between informants possible.

I took a site-based approach to recruit informants. I stayed in an apartment in a complex that hosted many Africans. Other fieldwork sites included trade centres and recreational spaces frequented by Africans, as well as one of the underground Pentecostal churches in Guangzhou. The latter site was especially important for recruiting informants among the affluent Africans who run businesses from offices in Guangzhou's business district. Wealthy immigrants formed part of the congregations of the church that I attended, which was headed by a Nigerian pastor who consented to let me use the church as a fieldwork site. I occasionally recruited new informants through existing research participants, but snowball recruitment often proved ineffective due to widespread mistrust between migrants.

My main fieldwork languages were English and French. However, speaking Chinese was crucial for my rapport with African and Chinese informants alike: migrants asked me to interpret for them in encounters with the Chinese police, immigration authorities, landlords and migration agents. (They were made aware that these events would contribute data for my research.)

When recruiting informants, I aimed to capture a range of experiences and engage with people who differed with respect to immigration status, length of stay in China, gender, religious affiliation, economic success and family situation. The gender balance in all of my fieldwork sites was heavily skewed towards men. The degree of imbalance varied between groups: for example, I encountered women more frequently among itinerant traders and students than among undocumented migrants, and more commonly among Cameroonians than among Nigerians.

Some of my Nigerian informants had stayed in China for almost a decade, possessed residence permits, lived together with a Chinese or Nigerian spouse, and managed trading businesses with a high turnover. Others were fresh off the plane from Lagos, still deliberating whether to return before their visas expired or stay in China and try their luck as traders. However, the majority of the Nigerians I encountered during my fieldwork were undocumented male migrants without close family in China. All of my Nigerian informants engaged in trading or the provision of trade-related services, with various degrees of economic success. Informants who had arrived in China with aspirations to find salaried manual work quickly realized that, unlike in Europe, this was virtually impossible, although some were taken in as apprentices by established Nigerian traders. Both apprentices and employers are represented in my group of informants.

The semi-structured interviews were carried out with 70 informants, of whom 34 were Nigerian. The other Africans I interviewed were of 14 different nationalities. I interviewed 12 female African migrants, and four Chinese girlfriends or fiancées of Nigerian migrants. Although I interacted with a few Nigerian women during participant observation, I did not interview any of them. I interviewed 17 of my informants from the Pentecostal church; all but four of them Nigerians.

Conducting research among undocumented migrants entails methodological and ethical challenges (van Liempt and Bilger, 2009). My Nigerian informants commonly described their own demeanour as "quiet" and "honest", and contrasted this with the disruptive behaviour of some immigrants. Undocumented migrants are especially careful not to attract attention; however, jealous lovers, rowdy friends, criminal acquaintances and discontented landlords can easily get them into trouble. Residence permits provide no guarantee against demands for bribes or forced repatriation. Nigerian migrants manage risks by limiting social

interaction and adopting a cautious attitude towards others. The general atmosphere of mistrust was a challenge during the fieldwork, but could be turned into an advantage once trust had been established: informants with few close friends in China appreciated the opportunity to discuss their lives and problems.

NIGERIANS IN GUANGZHOU

Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong Province, on the south-eastern coast of China, has played a key role in China's relationship with Africa since pre-modern times. A small number of people of African origin were already living in Guangzhou in the eleventh century (Wyatt, 2010). In Communist China, the economic and social reforms that started in 1978 were initiated by the Special Economic Zones in Guangdong Province. Guangzhou's international character and extensive export-orientated production form the foundation for African settlement in the city today.

There are no official statistics on the size of the African immigrant population in Guangzhou. A commonly quoted estimate is 20,000 people (Li et al., 2009: 709), but this cannot be traced back to a reliable source. The Chinese state media, which has access to classified government information, has reported that as many as 130,000 African immigrants were registered as residents in Guangzhou in 2008 (*Economic Information Daily*, 2009). In addition, the number of Africans staying in the city's hotels exceeded 60,000 in 2007 (Guangzhou Municipal Statistics Bureau, 2008). A valid visa or residence permit is required to file a residence registration or stay in a hotel. The figures therefore exclude undocumented immigrants and itinerant traders lodging in informal guesthouses.

Within Guangzhou, two areas are particularly influenced by African migration and trade (Lyons et al., 2008). Based on my fieldwork in these two areas, I contend that they differ with respect to ethnic composition and residential structure. Nigerians are concentrated in the trading centres around Guangyuan West Road. Some African itinerant traders stay in the area at night, but most Nigerians prefer to live in areas outside the city boundaries with less police control.

The second African neighbourhood is found in Yuexiu District. It is not dominated by any single nationality, but has a strong presence of Muslim and francophone Africans. Many of the district's apartments and offices are occupied by Africans, and several hotels cater mainly to itinerant traders. The local police frequently check visas and local tenancy registrations, which has pushed undocumented migrants out of the district and forced some informal African guesthouses to shut down.

Information obtained through fieldwork indicates that Nigerians constitute by far the most numerous group of African migrants in Guangzhou. This is also the impression given by Chinese media reports (*Huanqiu*, 2010). Nigerians in Guangzhou can be divided into three main categories: (a) travellers on short business trips; (b) people who reside in China legally; and (c) migrants who stay in China without valid visas or residence permits. People may move between these groups: Most Nigerians enter China with a valid visa, a number of them overstay and become undocumented migrants, while some undocumented immigrants raise sufficient resources to apply for a residence permit. Residence permits are subject to annual renewal, and migrants who fail to renew them become undocumented migrants if they remain in China.

Demographically, the Nigerian population in Guangzhou appears to be dominated by men in their twenties and thirties. Many are unmarried, and aim to earn enough money to form a family. Some eventually settle with a family in China, either marrying a Chinese woman or

bringing a spouse from Nigeria. Migrants with legal residence described raising small children in China as relatively unproblematic. However, the fees charged by international schools are beyond the means of most Nigerians, who may end up sending their school-age children to their home country rather than enrolling them in Chinese schools. Guangzhou receives few unmarried female Nigerian migrants. My exchanges with female shop-owners in Guangyuan West Road suggest that most of them, unlike their male counterparts, are Cameroonian. Few of the African sex-workers who circulate quite openly in parts of Guangzhou are Nigerian, according to accounts by sex-workers and other informants.

Finding regular employment in Guangzhou is virtually impossible for Nigerian migrants, both due to their visa conditions and the high domestic labour supply. In addition to exporting goods for sale abroad, Nigerians provide support services for trade, such as logistics, money transfer or delivery of home-cooked food. Nigerian itinerant traders often employ migrants as guides and agents.

Criminal activities and prostitution have given Nigerian migrants a poor reputation across the world (Carling, 2006). Crimes in Guangzhou involving Nigerians – especially drug-related offences – have received local and national media attention (see, e.g., You Chunliang, 2007). Nigerians have a negative image both among migrants from other parts of Africa and the Chinese. My informants describe the drug trade as a readily available option for those who are unable to succeed through other activities. Nigerians in Guangzhou are painfully aware of their reputation, and leaders of Nigerian immigrant associations have publicly declared that they will combat the drug problem through their own networks and vigilante justice (Coloma, 2010).

Regardless of their own ethnic identification, my Nigerian informants shared the impression that the majority of Nigerian migrants in Guangzhou are Igbos. Nigerians of Hausa origin distinguish themselves from Nigerians of other ethnicities by operating among Muslim Africans in Yuexiu District. Because few Hausa Nigerians stay in Guangzhou for longer periods, they need to employ agents. Three such agents, all from Niger, were interviewed for this project. They mainly attributed their clients' preference for hiring non-Nigerian agents to mistrust across religious and ethnic divides in Nigeria. Moreover, the agents from Niger spoke Hausa and had useful contacts within logistics. They ship goods from China to the port of Cotonou in Benin, where they are loaded on to trucks and driven into the Hausa-dominated northern Nigeria via Niger. Igbo traders who transport goods through Cotonou use other routes, most commonly the road to Lagos (Uzcátegui, 2009). Knowledge of smuggling procedures is crucial, because the Nigerian government has banned the import of a wide range of manufactured products commonly brought from China (Taylor, 2007).

Nigerians in China supply goods to the rest of the Nigerian diaspora, as well as to their home country. Family and kin in other parts of the world thus constitute an important business resource. Clothes, electronics and counterfeit brand-name goods are shipped from China to Nigerians in Europe, the U.S. and elsewhere. The economic links with the diaspora can involve intricate sets of intercontinental transactions: some successful Nigerian migrants in China diversify their businesses by commissioning Nigerian migrants in other parts of the world to buy and ship goods to Nigeria for resale.

IMMOBILITY IN NIGERIA AND ENTRY TO CHINA

The desire to emigrate is pervasive in Nigeria, as documented through a number of studies (cf. IOM, 2009). In a recent survey, 48 per cent of Nigerian adults reported that they would like to move permanently to another country if given the opportunity (Esipova et al., 2010). The strong emigration pressure is reflected in a high prevalence of trafficking and human

smuggling, as well as regularized migration, from Nigeria (Carling, 2006). Although Nigerian migrants tend to prefer the U.S. and Europe, the majority are absorbed by more accessible African destination countries (IOM (International Organization for Migration), 2009: 56). China's emergence as a new migration destination begs the question: How is China ranked in a hierarchy of potential immigration countries?

Traders from across the Africa are attracted to China by its supply of cheap manufactured goods (Lyons et al., 2008). With some exceptions, my non-Nigerian African informants had chosen to migrate to China in order to run trading businesses. Some had extensive trading networks, considerable economic capital and previous experience from Lomé, Dubai and other trading hubs. Even the less experienced migrants were well informed about the economic opportunities in China prior to arrival.

While three of my Nigerian informants described their migration to China as motivated by trading opportunities, their positive evaluation of China represented an exception. The vast majority were attracted to China first and foremost by the relative ease of entry. China was sometimes seen as a springboard towards more desirable destinations, including Japan, Australia and Europe. ''I'm just here on my way to Ireland'', a Nigerian informant explained, while admitting that onward migration proved harder than expected. The perception that my Nigerian informants held of China as a second-tier migration destination set them apart from other Africans (cf. Lyons et al., 2008).

The retrospective accounts given by my Nigerian informants of their migration to China typically started with statements about a long-standing desire to leave Africa. Some had lost money to fraudulent migration agents, or were repatriated in previous migration attempts to Europe and the Middle East. Others never made a concrete effort to emigrate prior to their trip to China; the opportunity to move abroad seemed as unobtainable as it was attractive. Despite involuntary immobility, high-risk unauthorized migration was not necessarily a personally or socially acceptable choice. The dream was to undertake what one informant referred to as ''genuine migration'': leaving Africa on an aeroplane with a visa stamped in their passports, as opposed to crossing into Europe illegally via a hazardous journey by road and sea.

Dissatisfaction with the opportunities for economic and social advancement in Nigeria played a central role in my informants' decision to migrate, as is the case with most migrants around the world. However, they also emphasized the high value attached to the migration experience itself, beyond its expected benefits: Migrants were, for example, viewed as more independent and better able to stomach hardship than non-migrants. For some of my informants, the frustrations over immobility and the desire to leave Nigeria had been intensified by personal problems, such as coercion into an undesired marriage, conflicts with senior family members or frustrated professional ambitions. Such idiosyncratic events can intensify the search for migration opportunities and make potential migrants more inclined to head for less desirable destinations.

Entry into China is relatively easy, but by no means accessible to all; contacts and money are necessary to obtain a visa. My Nigerian informants typically recalled entering China on a 30-day tourist or business visa, sometimes obtained through migration brokers who charged between US$1,000 and US$2,000. Travel agents and hotels in Guangzhou supply brokers with supporting documents for the visa applications, such as hotel reservations and invitation letters, against fairly standardized fees amounting to about US$100. The remaining part of the brokerage charge covers rewards for the middlemen who recruit clients, official visa fees levied by the Chinese embassy, any informal payments to individual embassy officials and the broker's profit.

Commercial migration agents are redundant for Nigerians with acquaintances who can help them in the visa application process. The distinction between operating commercially

and extending favours to friends is blurred. Some do not charge money up front to help fellow Nigerians obtain a visa, but use it as a way to repay a social debt, or regard it as a transaction in an ongoing exchange of favours. The same ambiguous division between commercial migration business and favours has been observed in the case of Chinese migration both to Africa and other parts of the world (Haugen and Carling, 2005; Zhang, 2008). There is also a fuzzy line between regular and irregular entry into China: passage through authorized border crossing points with an authentic visa is technically irregular if the visa is issued on the basis of false premises, such as spurious invitation letters.

Agents who facilitate migration to China have little interest in imparting accurate information about the country of destination. The commodification of migration through brokering services also encourages hasty migration decisions, because establishing contact with an ostensibly reliable migration broker can be a rare opportunity. Under these conditions, many of my informants failed to seek out basic information about their destination. Some arrived in Beijing without knowing that Guangzhou was far away, grossly misinformed about the opportunities for landing a job and renewing visas, and surprised that English is not a common language of communication in China.

Information about the situation for Nigerian migrants in China is increasingly available through media reports, Internet discussion fora and popular culture. In the music album *Things that Happen in China*, the Igbo vocalist describes police harassment, imprisonment, forced repatriation, casual sexual relations with Chinese girls, economic difficulties and betrayal by family in Nigeria (Okeke, 2009). He concludes:

> China is hard!
> Only hard people will stay here.
> And if it is too hard for you
> *zou ba* [Chinese: "go!"] to the country you came from!
> (Translated from Igbo)

An informant who produced songs with a similar message doubted that they would discourage new people from arriving. For the same reason, many of my informants said that they would refrain from discussing their experiences in China after returning home. Economically successful migrants could be suspected of painting a bleak picture in order to prevent others from copying their achievement. The misfortune of those returning empty-handed might be attributed to laziness, lack of faith and perseverance, or worse: a façade put up to escape from the social obligations to share wealth that they had, in fact, acquired.

Widespread adherence to Pentecostal Christianity adds to the reluctance to focus on the risks associated with migration. Nigerian Pentecostal churches tend to preach that good fortune and wealth will come to the true believer (Marshall, 2009). By extension, lack of belief in success through migration can be interpreted as weak faith in God.

Three points summarize my argument in this section: involuntary immobility is pervasive in Nigeria; there is widespread brokering of Chinese visas; and access to reliable information about China as a migration destination is limited. The general thrust of these factors is to drive up the number of migrants who leave Nigeria unprepared for the situation awaiting them, which makes them vulnerable to new forms of immobility once they reach China.

A SECOND STATE OF IMMOBILITY

Travelling to China resolves the initial problem of immobility for Nigerian migrants. They can move around freely for as long as their visas are valid: "A honeymoon!" one of my

informants exclaimed, describing how he travelled to various factories and explored Guangzhou's nightlife during his first 30 days in China. Others are too overwhelmed by the new environment to take advantage of the mobility provided by a valid visa. As the visa is about to expire, they must decide whether to return home or stay clandestinely in China. Many opt for the latter, inspired by hopes of economic advancement or simply because they lack the money to return.

Expectations from family and friends in Nigeria can make migrants more reluctant to return while their visas are still valid. Family and friends who have funded the migration expect remittances in return for their assistance. Even when the primary motivation for leaving Nigeria is not economic, lack of business success can eventually keep migrants from returning because of the social expectations to accumulate wealth abroad: ''When you go back to Nigeria, you are expected to ride a car, buy a house, set up a business. If you don't do that quickly, you are recognized as a loser'', one informant explained.

The mobility of migrants in China is affected by national laws and their local implementation. The backbone of Chinese immigration legislation is the Law of the People's Republic of China on Control of the Entry and Exit of Aliens, adopted in 1985. The Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs share responsibility for implementation of the law, which is enforced locally by several government bodies.

The 1985 Immigration Law and the institutions implementing it were not designed for a situation of high immigration pressure. According to the Chinese media, this has resulted in plans to reform the current regulatory framework (*Xinhua*, 2010). The Chinese People's Consultative Conference (2008) has presented a discussion paper on immigrants in Guangzhou that outlines weaknesses in the current system in unusually stark terms. The report points to unreliable statistics, weak enforcement of tenancy registration, lack of control over the housing market for foreigners, insufficient cooperation between government bodies and shortage of resources for law enforcement. It also describes how foreigners with uncultured manners and low ''quality'' (*suzhi*) cause anxiety among urban Chinese, characterizations that resemble discourses about internal migrants from rural China (cf. Yan Hairong, 2003).

Compulsory registration of tenancy is a central instrument in the monitoring of foreigners in China. Foreigners who stay in private accommodations must report their address to the local police station within 24 hours. Controls of tenancy registrations were frequent during my fieldwork, sometimes at the request of Chinese neighbours who were annoyed that Africans ran informal boarding houses out of their apartments. Foreigners with unregistered tenancy are brought to the local police station and released after paying a fine of ''50 RMB at least'', provided that they have valid visas (Dengfeng Police Station, 2009).

The right to stay in China is regulated by visas and residence permits. Foreigners caught without a valid visa are imprisoned, presented with a fine of more than RMB5,000 (US$750) and required to pay the costs of repatriation. Financial support is necessary not only to be released and repatriated, but also to endure detention. Detainees can receive money from the outside to buy extra food at inflated prices in prison. A Chinese informant whose Nigerian fiancé was detained estimated that a monthly contribution of RMB2,000 (US$300) would be needed for a satisfactory diet. Those with insufficient funds to be released may stay imprisoned for months and years. According to the BBC, more than 30 Nigerians have died in Chinese prisons (BBC News, 2009). The harsh treatment during arrest and in prison is infamous among Africans of all nationalities. My informants consequently went to great lengths to minimize the risk of being arrested.

The willingness to run the risk of intra-city travel depends on the purpose of the movement, and travel choices are grounded in certain ''moralities of risk'' (cf. Núñez and Heyman, 2007). The moral significance of attending church and the economic necessity of doing business justifies the risk of travelling for most of my informants, some of whom are quick

to criticize people they perceive as reckless: ''It must be something important before you go out. You should not just roam around like some people do. This place is not for sightseeing!'' an economically successful migrant exclaimed. However, what might look like loitering can help less-established migrants acquire information, solicit a free meal or money, or even land an apprenticeship.

Movement to other parts of China is also severely constrained for undocumented migrants. Nigerian traders who operate in markets for highly specialized goods purchase at factories far from Guangzhou. Long-distance travel is also necessary to reach the international wholesale market in Yiwu, from where much of the Chinese exports to Africa are sourced. Transaction costs increase as migrants without valid visas are forced to spend a long time travelling by bus instead of train or plane, or ride a costly taxi, rather than a public bus to evade police checks. Sometimes the travel is foregone altogether, incurring losses of business opportunities.

International travel is important to people engaged in intercontinental trade. Undocumented migrants cannot go to Nigeria and sell the goods that they purchase in China themselves: they rely on family, friends and acquaintances to do it for them. My informants commonly complained that their business partners returned less money than anticipated or failed to pay altogether. There may be good reasons why a batch of goods does not generate the expected profit, including volatile prices in Nigeria, high customs expenses, loss of goods in transportation, currency fluctuations and delays in sales due to political unrest. However, the migrants have few opportunities to check the validity of such explanations, which gives rise to mistrust. In addition, some migrants have skills and personal networks that their partners at home lack, and may have obtained a higher turnover or better prices if they were able to market the goods themselves.

Migrants adopt a range of strategies to defy movement controls. They can increase their mobility by taking advantage of the fact that the Chinese legislation is unevenly implemented in time and space. For instance, the risk of being intercepted by the police varies with the time of the day: Travelling is perceived to be safest in the early morning, late at night and during lunchtime, because fewer police are on duty during these hours. The police are thought to be especially active on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and the Nigerian trading centres are markedly less busy on those days. However, remaining in an partment is not necessarily safe; the local police may come knocking at the door. Some prefer to leave their homes every morning and come back at night, to demonstrate to neighbours that they are hard-working and law-abiding people.

The authorities in Guangzhou are perceived to be particularly hostile towards undocumented migrants. Most of my Nigerian informants without visas or residence permits therefore opted to live outside the city's jurisdictional boundaries. The neighbouring district of Foshan was particularly popular. One informant commended the behaviour of the Foshan police who raided his apartment in search of narcotics. His visa had expired, but the police refrained from arresting him, asking him instead to move out of their district. However, areas known for their leniency attract more migrants, which may provoke tougher law enforcement. By May 2010, many Nigerians had been forced to leave their apartments in Foshan, and there was a trend towards moving even further away from Guangzhou. Nigerians with residence permits, as well as undocumented migrants, prefer to live away from other migrants so as not to attract attention and to avoid requests for favours from compatriots.

An uneven and arbitrarily implemented legal framework concerning immigrants in China opens up opportunities for corruption. Informants referred to solicitations for money from police, on or off duty, who checked passports and visas as a common nuisance. Valid visas or residence permits make migrants less vulnerable to, but not completely shielded from,

rent-seeking practices and arbitrary demands. When applying for the renewal of his residence permit, one of my informants was requested by government officials to pay the repatriation expenses of an imprisoned Nigerian. For a period, all Nigerian applicants for renewal of residence permits were asked by the Public Security Bureau to provide proof of adherence to an officially registered church, which became a problem for secular Nigerians, as well as members of underground churches.

The lack of coordination between different government bodies facilitates international mobility in some ways. Photographs and fingerprints from undocumented migrants who are repatriated have been collected for several years. Yet some people were able to re-enter China with new passports under different identities at the time of my fieldwork. In 2010, however, the immigration checkpoint at the airport in Guangzhou introduced biometric screening. Depending on how data is stored and cross-checked, re-entry under new identities may become impossible. This was a cause for concern among some of my economically successful informants who had stayed clandestinely in China: they wanted to repatriate to Nigeria, stay there for some time and return to China on a different passport, but were worried about being denied re-entry to China due to biometric screening.

The monitoring of migrants in Guangzhou appears to be intensifying. My informants related the initiations of stricter controls during the preparations for the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, the sixtieth anniversary of the People's Republic of China in 2009 and the Asian Games hosted by Guangzhou in November 2010. They had low confidence in the Nigerian Embassy's capacity to intervene on their behalf and ameliorate the situation. The Nigerian ambassador has publicly defended tough policies towards Nigerian migrants by calling attention to the problems they create: "Of all the crimes committed by Africans in China, Nigerians occupy about 90 per cent", he claimed in 2009 (*The Nation*, 2009).

ESCAPE FROM A SECOND STATE OF IMMOBILITY

There are several ways to escape a second state of immobility, each requiring different sets of resources. The most accessible option is voluntary repatriation. Undocumented migrants in Guangzhou who wish to leave China must, as noted above, pay a fine of more than RMB5,000 (US$750) before they can apply for an exit visa. In addition, they must purchase a plane ticket home. The migrants need a passport in which an exit visa can be stamped. Some of my informants had lost, sold or pawned their passports, and had to work through personal connections to obtain a temporary travel document from the Nigerian Embassy in Beijing. A strong deterrent against voluntary repatriation is the risk of imprisonment for immigration offences when one reports to the authorities to pay the fine and apply for an exit visa.

Second, annually renewable residence permits offer a way out of immobility that is more attractive, but less accessible. Applicants are required to rent an office, have Chinese employees and pay taxes in China. This option is available only to economically successful migrants who have Chinese contacts to assist them in the application process. Residence permits allow for greater international mobility than visas because they do not carry restrictions on the number of entries. Informants who held residence permits cited the uncertainty associated with the annual renewal as a major source of distress.

Third, immobility can be reduced through new visas obtained on the black market in China. During my fieldwork, a commonly quoted fee for a six-month visa for Nigerians was RMB15,000 (US$2,200), while other Africans typically paid around RMB10,000 (US$1,500). Some of my Nigerian informants believed that black market visa renewals had become impossible altogether by the end of 2009. Offering black market services to Nigerians may

carry a greater risk for Chinese civil servants because of the poor reputation that Nigerians have acquired in China. Black market visas are brokered by Chinese agents, who may bring their African clients to distant parts of China where civil servants are less likely to get caught and thus are more easily bribed. However, the risk of fraud is high, as migrants have few sanctions to apply against visa agents who fail to deliver.

A fourth way of escaping from immobility is to become a student at a Chinese university. Some Africans enrol at universities in Guangzhou primarily to be eligible for student visas. They attend classes and sit examinations to maintain their status as students, but they focus on trade. The school fees are around US$2,000 per year, but the time and money spent on maintaining a student visa eliminates the risk of fraud associated with acquiring visas on the black market. However, universities in Guangzhou now routinely turn down applications from Nigerians, who are perceived to be implausible genuine students.

Circular migration between Nigeria and China, rather than permanent settlement in China, is the ideal for many migrants. Traders who can move back and forth between the point of purchase and the markets have an advantage over immobile competitors. Biometric screening and more restrictive visa practices at Chinese embassies may make circular migration less viable in the future. However, stricter entry procedures will not necessarily reduce the number of illegal immigrants in China. Research from the U.S. suggests that migrants' duration of stay increases when circular migration is made more difficult (Reyes et al., 2002). Once the opportunities for re-entering China are curtailed, itinerant traders may instead opt to remain abroad. Nigeria's imports from China are currently the second highest in Africa, according to official trade statistics, despite underreporting due to import bans (UN Comtrade, 2010). Shoes, clothes and handbags may need to be smuggled in, but computers, solar panels, motorcycle spare parts, agricultural machinery and countless other Chinese products enter Nigeria freely. Nigerian migrants in Guangzhou become better positioned to profit from the high demand for Chinese goods when traders are prevented from travelling back and forth between Nigeria and China.

In December 2009, the Municipal Public Security Bureau took an unprecedented step to encourage migrants to repatriate voluntarily. For two months, undocumented migrants could apply for exit visas without risk of imprisonment and against a reduced fine of RMB2,100 (US$300). Upon obtaining the exit visa, they were given a few days to leave and would be banned from re-entering China in the future. Three of my informants took advantage of the scheme to leave China during my fieldwork. The primary attraction of the scheme was the guarantee of personal safety; the reduction of the fine was offset by expensive holiday season plane tickets.

The management of the temporary scheme highlighted the coordination problems in Chinese immigration policy. The Public Security Bureau failed to pass on information about the scheme to the government service centre set up in Yuexiu District, which mainly serves Africans. Instead, the Bureau worked through Nigerian associations and underground Pentecostal churches to convey information to undocumented migrants. Applicants for exit visas were initially required to show proof that they were lodging in a hotel – for which bribes were necessary, because hotels are obliged by the government to verify the visas of their guests.

The voluntary repatriation initiative failed to impress my Nigerian informants. They compared China to European countries, in which undocumented immigrants are deported without fines, often at the expense of the host nation, and sometimes with a resettling grant (for a discusssion of different deportation regimes, see De Genova and Peutz, 2010).

Although the notion of exit visas distinguishes China from the U.S. and most of Europe, it is far from unique. For example, various form of exit visa policies are found in the Middle East, where some countries also punish undocumented migrants with fines and prison sentences (Cholewinski and Touzenis, 2009). In Singapore, undocumented migrants face caning

in addition to prison terms (Immigration and Checkpoints Authority, 2010). The practice of commercial migration brokering is widespread in these countries, and migrants may solicit the help of migration agents for exiting, as well as for immigration.

CONCLUSION

As an emerging destination for intercontinental migration, China does not have an effective legal framework and enforcement capacity in place to manage high immigration pressure. The policing of migrants and other forms of control measures have been intensified as an *ad hoc* response in places where the immigrant population is perceived to have grown too large. This impairs the migrants' mobilities and economic prospects. The uneven law enforcement presents individual migrants with both opportunities and liabilities: undocumented immigrants can exploit the ''pockets'' of time and space in which movement is relatively safe, while all migrants find that long-term planning is difficult under a volatile immigration regime.

China's improvised and rapidly shifting policies towards migrants set the country apart from Europe and North America. However, the Arizona Immigration Law passed in 2010, allowing police to stop and question suspected illegal immigrants, illustrates that improvised and localized forms of control are not an exclusive feature of new immigration destinations. Unlike most other developing countries, China has a highly organized state apparatus that can be applied to monitor immigration and foreign migrants if the country develops a more comprehensive immigration policy. Yet the approaches taken by China so far have left a domestic impression of a lack of government control, generated negative international publicity and strained bilateral relations with a number of African countries. This accentuates the need for the Chinese government to exert greater control over local enforcement agencies, and confront the legal, political and humanitarian challenges presented by new immigration flows.

This paper has demonstrated that the circumstances of emigration influence how vulnerable migrants are to ending up in a second state of immobility at the point of destination. My Nigerian informants were often willing to move to any country outside Africa, and arrived in China on a visa obtained through brokers. Guangzhou offers good prospects for Africans who engage in trade. However, Nigerian migrants who never intended to become traders may lack the necessary networks, financial resources and skills to take advantage of these opportunities. As the size of the Nigerian population grows through brokered migration, the competition between exporters of Chinese goods to Nigeria intensifies, the ties of solidarity between migrants are strained and the public image of Nigerians in Guangzhou deteriorates. The problems of immobility among Nigerians in China have, therefore, deepened over time.

REFERENCES

Bakewell, O.
2008 ''Research beyond the categories: the importance of policy irrelevant research into forced migration'', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 23(2): 432–453.

BBC News
2009 ''Nigerian anger over China deaths'', http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8274755.stm (accessed 5 February 2010).

Bertoncello, B., and S. Bredeloup
2009 ''Chine–Afrique ou la valse des entrepreneurs-migrants'', *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*, 25(1): 45–70.

Bodomo, A.
2010 "The African trading community in Guangzhou: an emerging bridge for Africa–China relations", *The China Quarterly*, 203(4): 693–707.
Campbell, E.H.
2007 "Urban refugees in Nairobi: problems of protection, mechanisms of survival, and possibilities for integration", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 19(3): 396–413.
Carling, J.
2002 "Migration in the age of involuntary immobility: theoretical reflections and Cape Verdean experiences", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 28(1): 5–42.
2006 *Migration, Human Smuggling and Trafficking from Nigeria to Europe*, International Organization for Migration, Geneva.
Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
2008 "Cong chuzuwu guanli rushou jiaqiang dui zai Sui juliu waiguoren de guanli (Strengthening the management of foreigners living in rented houses in Guangzhou)", Guangzhou, http://www.gzzx.gov.cn/lunzheng/content.aspx?id=633391252806005078442 (accessed 1 February 2010).
Chishti, M., and C. Bergeron
2010 "New Arizona law engulfs immigration debate", Migration Information Source, Migration Policy Institute, Washington, DC, http://www.migrationinformation.org/USFocus/display.cfm?ID=782 (accessed 24 August 2010).
Cholewinski, R., and K. Touzenis
2009 *Irregular Migration into and through Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Countries: Legal Perspectives*, CARIM Analytic and Synthetic Notes 2009/01, Geneva.
Coloma, T.
2010 "L'improbable saga des Africains en Chine", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 1 May: 12–13.
De Genova, N.
2005 *Working the Boundaries: Race, Space, and "Illegality" in Mexican Chicago*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC.
2009 "Conflicts of mobility, and the mobility of conflict: rightlessness, presence, subjectivity, freedom", *Subjectivity*, 29: 445–466.
De Genova, N., and N. Peutz (Eds)
2010 *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC.
Dengfeng Police Station
2009 *Important Notice for Foreign Nationals*, Information sheet, Dengfeng Police Station, Guangzhou.
Economic Information Daily
2009 "Guangzhou Feizhou yi juji qu jianwen (Information about African immigrants in Guangzhou)", Jingji Cankao Bao, Xinhua, http://jjckb.xinhuanet.com/whsh/2009-10/14/content_185139.htm (accessed 28 April 2010).
Elmhirst, R.
2007 "Tigers and gangsters: masculinities and feminised migration in Indonesia", *Population, Space and Place*, 13(3): 225–238.
Esipova, N., R. Srinivasan, and T. Gravelle
2010 "Most desired migration destinations and antecedents of migration intent across the world", paper presented at "Migration: A World in Motion", University of Maastricht, Maastricht, 18–20 February.
Guangzhou Municipal Statistics Bureau
2008 *Guangzhou Statistical Yearbook*, China Statistics Press, Beijing.
Haugen, H.Ø., and J. Carling
2005 "On the edge of the Chinese diaspora: the surge of *baihuo* business in an African city", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28(4): 639–662.
Heyman, J.M.
2009 "Risque et confiance dans le contrôle des frontières américaines", *Politix*, 3(87): 21–46.

Huanqiu
2010 "Shi wan Feizhouren xun meng Guangzhou (A hundred thousand Africans chase Guangzhou dream)", Beijing, http://world.huanqiu.com/roll/2010-08/1011938.html (accessed 16 November 2010).
Hujo, K., and N. Piper
2007 "South migration: challenges for development and social policy", *Development*, 50(4): 1–7.
Immigration and Checkpoints Authority
2010 "Immigration offenders travel 'business class' out of Singapore", Singapore, http://www.ica.gov.sg/news_details.aspx?nid=2849 (accessed 22 November 2010).
IOM (International Organization for Migration)
2009 *Migration in Nigeria: A Country Profile 2009*, International Organization for Migration, Geneva.
Li, Z., L.J.C. Ma, and D. Xue
2009 "An African enclave in China: the making of a new transnational urban space", *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 50(6): 699–719.
Lubkemann, S.C.
2008 "Involuntary immobility: on a theoretical invisibility in forced migration studies", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 21(4): 454–475.
Lyons, M., A. Brown, and Li Zhigang
2008 "The "third tier" of globalization: African traders in Guangzhou", *City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action*, 12(2): 196–206.
Mann, G.
2002 ""'Wakimbizi, wakimbizi": Congolese refugee boys' and girls' perspectives on life in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania", *Environment and Urbanization*, 14(2): 115–122.
Marshall, R.
2009 *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
Massey, D.S., J. Arango, G. Hugo, A. Kouaouci, A. Pellegrino, and J.E. Taylor
1993 "Theories of international migration: a review and appraisal", *Population and Development Review*, 19(3): 431–466.
Misra, J., J. Woodring, and S.N. Merz
2006 "The globalization of care work: neoliberal economic restructuring and migration policy", *Globalizations*, 3(3): 317–332.
Núñez, G.G., and J.M. Heyman
2007 "Entrapment processes and immigrant communities in a time of heightened border vigilance", *Human Organization*, 66(4): 354–365.
Obi, C.I.
2010 "African migration as the search for a wonderful world: an emerging trans-global security threat?" *African and Asian Studies*, 9: 128–148.
Okeke, B.
2009 *Ife n'eme na Chinco (Things that Happen in China)*, Shalom Music Ltd, Guangzhou.
Ratha, D., and W. Shaw
2007 *South–South Migration and Remittances*, The World Bank, Washington, DC.
Rennie, N.
2009 "The lion and the dragon: African experiences in China", *Journal of African Media Studies*, 1(3): 379–414.
Reyes, B.I., H.P. Johnson, and R.V. Swearingen
2002 "Holding the line? The effect of recent border build-up on unauthorized immigration", Report, Public Policy Institute of California, San Francisco.
Smart, A., and J. Smart
2008 "Time–Space Punctuation: Hong Kong's Border Regime and Limits on Mobility", *Pacific Affairs*, 81: 175–193.
Sommers, M.
2001 *Fear in Bongoland: Burundi Refugees in Urban Tanzania*, Berghahn Books, New York.

Taylor, I.
2007 "China's relations with Nigeria", *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 96(392): 631–645.
The Nation
2009 "Nigerians: crime beyond the border", Lagos, http://thenationonlineng.net/web2/articles/31880/1/Nigerians-Crime-beyond-the-borders/Page1.html (accessed 15 July 2010).
UN Comtrade
2010 "United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database", United Nations Statistics Division, New York, http://comtrade.un.org/db/ (accessed 25 August 2010).
Uzcátegui, J.A.R.
2009 "The Igbo apprenticeship system and Hong Kong's role in informal education", paper presented at "The 108th American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting", Philadelphia, 2–6 December.
van Liempt, I., and V. Bilger (Eds)
2009 *The Ethics of Migration Research Methodology*, Sussex Academic Press, Brighton.
Wyatt, D.J.
2010 *The Blacks of Premodern China*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, PA.
Xinhua
2010 "China plans draft immigration law", *China Daily*, Beijing, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-05/22/content_9881622.htm (accessed 3 August 2010).
Yan Hairong
2003 "Neoliberal governmentality and neohumanism: organizing *suzhi*/value flow through labor recruitment networks", *Cultural Anthropology*, 18(4): 493–523.
You Chunliang
2007 "Guangzhou jingnei waiguoren she du fanzui jizeng (Sharp increase in foreigners committing drug-related offenses in Guangzhou)", *Fazhi Ribao*, Beijing, http://www.dsb.gd.gov.cn/ruizheng/Article/ShowArticle.asp?ArticleID=6531 (accessed 20 August 2010).
Zhang, Li
2008a "Ethnic congregation in a globalizing city: the case of Guangzhou, China", *Cities*, 25(6): 383–395.
Zhang, S.X.
2008b *Chinese Human Smuggling Organizations. Families, Social Networks, and Cultural Imperatives*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA.