

Rethinking Language and Literature in a Changing World

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Edited by

Genevoix Nana and Andrew Ngeh

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INTRODUCTION

GENEVOIX NANA

Introduction

This volume is the outcome of a call for chapters placed on the blog of Cambridge Scholars Publishing in June 2017. The call sought papers on a variety of themes and subthemes in language and literature including endogenous and exogenous literatures, literature and aesthetics, literary theory and criticism, English stylistics and usage, language teaching and the internet, theory and practice in English language teaching and learning, language and creativity, teaching English as a second or foreign language, language teaching in the context of teacher training and education, the English medium of instruction, and translation and transliteration. It is now a truism to say that the bloom has become a ripened grape as the collection of papers in this book cuts across most of the themes in the call. The chapters are peer-edited and come from a group of international academics involved in the analysis of language and literature from a variety of perspectives. Most articles focus on textual analysis, while a few are case studies. The scope of literary papers in this collection is limited to Africa and Cameroon, while language articles are from China and Cameroon and centre on pedagogical and technological innovations in language teaching and learning and translation.

Communication is crucial between people of various linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and language becomes essential in intercultural interactions. In a globalised and digitalised world permeated by superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007), communication is vital for cooperation and mobility, and language, even in the case of a lingua franca like English, becomes indexical and an identity marker (Bucholtz, 2009; Bucholtz and Hall, 2005). In the age of intensive mobility and delocalised communication, language as an identity marker becomes not only motional but e-motional through new technologies and social networking. This problematises the notion of spatial language (Anderson, 1991) and lends credence to an intricate community of practice (Morgan, 2004; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2009). Within these connected and disconnected communities where boundaries are seemingly

blurred, writing which crosses borders and the realities of classroom interactions with the integration of technology in teaching (Mishra and Koehler, 2006) echo the dissonance of community membership and participation. The decentring of language and literature becomes manifest in diasporic literature that echoes the home from far afield, in local idealistic narratives that envision a home divested of contextual realities or in students' classroom voices that challenge a predominant teacher's discourse and in translational creativity that questions the word-for-word orthodoxy in translatology. In this diversified planetary village where people are constantly on the move, writing is a description of personal experience with otherness, of individuals' life trajectories and their struggle for equity in a globalised context often beset by overt or covert exclusion. Some of the contributions in this volume focus on inner and outer frontier literature. The frontier is viewed as a border zone where different cultures, nations, ethnicities, and narratives communicate and compete. While the borderline is generally perceived as outer, the inner frontier can be defined as a neuralgic field where the state, through its ideological apparatuses (Althusser, 1970) instantiates a pervasive discourse of power and control that permeates mind and soul and construes subjectivities and collective consciousness (Foucault, 1969, 1972-77).

In the postcolony (Mbembe, 2001), subjectivity and consciousness shaping, beyond kith and kin, is along the lines of the vestiges of a colonial past such as English and French in the context of Cameroon. While these vestigial colonial media are used in that context to relate realities in literary production that are unbeknownst to the communities where these foreign languages originated, they have however become instruments of political clannism and jingoism to the extent that the country now faces the demons of division because of its recent imperial partitioning. Dissensions of coexistence in Cameroon are deep-seated in claims of a legacy of a colonial past mediated by alien languages, despite relative efforts by the state to promote avenues for a harmonious way of living together (official bilingual education, the creation of bilingual centres and ASTI, and recently of the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism). Conversely, frictions at outer borders downplay community membership as being based on a borrowed language and show inner attributes of community affiliation as dictated by localisation, and display hostility to the African Makwerekweres. This points to the fact that language is a harbinger of identity and predicates nationality. Even in superdiversity, the inner and outer circle paradigm (Kachru, 1982, 1985) is stealthily prevalent (Baugh, 2003; Alim, 2005). Language socialisation in such contexts has often proceeded "not as a process of learning to like and live with social and

ethnic difference” (Rampton, 1995: 485) but as one of linguistic stance shifting of out-group members into the in-group code or mode of speaking which has been theorised as linguistic accommodation (Giles et al., 1973, Giles and Ogay, 2007). In Cameroon, identity negotiation in discourse regarding the country’s official languages could be likened to what Woolard (1989) termed, in the context of Catalonia, “double talk”. Like in the Spanish context where the irredentist movement led to a political showdown with the state in 2015, in Cameroon, two years later, the confrontation escalated to armed insurgency. Yosimbom’s contributions in this volume (Chapters Two and Three) uphold Rampton’s idea of “learning to like and live with social and ethnic difference” and advocate translanguaging in interaction that impugns rigid discursive stances such as enculturation and accommodation.

Colonial literature was at best perceived as exotic writing recounting the escapades of imperial powers in their “civilisation mission” in their respective colonies. When such literary production, written in another imperial language (for instance French), was considered entertaining for people in the English metropolis, it was translated into English to satisfy their outlandish curiosity. Such translation, often done by translators with no sojourning experience of the writing context, is likened to a rewriting of the original text (Basnett, 1980; Lantaigne, 2001; Lefevere, 1992, 2000, Wa Goro 2005) whereas the originality of the literary production itself is in question, given the debate in world literature that writers writing in languages other than their mother tongue are creatively translating the ideas that they have in their original language into those languages and, as such, are practising translingualism (Mazrui, 1975; Kachru, 1983, 1986, 1995; Thiong’o, 1986; Bamiro, 1991; Dutton, 2016). Issues of power and representation thus beleaguer literary and translational creativity to the extent that the term has become suspect in translatology, given that translation involves cultural and ideological transposition, and subversive in third space theory (Vygotsky, 1962; Bhabha, 2004) where literary creation is mediated through a foreign language. African European language novels are characterised by the representation of cultures of orality in the written language of modernity (Bandia, 2018), an intersection of the world of the savage mind (Lévi-Strauss, 1962) and that of “civilisation” where the mind of the “savage” is domesticated (Goody, 1977) via the mastery of a European language and literary production in that language. Based on this postulate, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o resolved to start writing in his mother tongue (Thiong’o, 1987a, 1987b, 1993). Nonetheless, Thiong’o’s bid to decolonise the African mind through the rejection of the language of imperial prejudice appears not to be thriving among contemporary African writers. The latter

view writing in European languages as natural and value-laden and argue about the appropriation of these languages by the Africans and, in so doing, echo Achebe's view about his option to write in English in a speech in 1975 that "...for me, there is no other choice. I have been given this language and I intend to use it" (Achebe, 1975: 6). Besides, Thiong'o has been accused of double standards about rejecting writing in English and upholding his tenure as a professor at an American university. It is however worth noting that Thiong'o opened the Pandora's box of the African mind "trapped within the metaphysical empire [of English]" (Ngugi, 2018: 20), as the question of the epistemic servitude of such a mind subjugated to a foreign culture as mediated by its language is still rife. While African writers' awakening to the use of their mother tongue meanders, writing and literature are being reconceptualised in the context of mobility to translate "rooted transnationalism" whereby writing can be contextualised in various locations and become a reflection of their globalised experiences. The concept of rooted transnationalism is coined by Thiong'o's son, Ngugi, as represented in Aminatta Forna's novel, *The Hired Man*. Forna is a Sierra Leonean writer of Scottish descent who lost her father to military execution. Her book is written in English and set in Croatia. According to Ngugi, rooted transnationalism:

... will account for particularities of national cultures and at the same time for a literary arc across two or more nations. That is, novels will be rooted in multiple particularities. In this sense, the novels are not global, they are local in two or more places at once, and yet in conversation across those localities (Ngugi, 2018: 180).

This concept is explored in Francis B. Nyamnjoh's novel *Intimate Strangers* as studied by Yosimbom in this book. In this volume, Ngoran also points to the importance of highlighting the creative intersection of both author and translators as foregrounded by their linguistic and cultural backgrounds in his study of translation creativity in two pre-independence African novels and the Bible.

While a translated work is regarded with suspicion and the translator viewed as an "in-between", a "poor drudge" assigned to a task by the job owner (Dryden, 2006; Bassnett, 2018), translation as a profession and an academic field is under threat of technological innovation and the move to higher education marketisation (Jongbloed, 2003, Molesworth et al., 2011). This move is a revolution brought to higher education funding sources by the 2010 Tory-led coalition government which insisted in cutting government funding to universities, instituting higher fees and advocating a closer relationship between these institutions and the business world in a bid

to make them competitive. It is thus imperative to strategise in translator education by conducting needs analyses and boosting institutional performance as Dongho pinpoints in his chapters in this book.

Technological innovation in education, and especially in language education, has been thriving since the introduction of CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning) in the 1960s (O'Neil et al., 2004). However, many challenges have plagued the application of ICT in education. In the context of foreign language teaching and learning, these issues are related to teachers' expertise, resource development and assessment, and presuppose a pedagogical paradigm shift for a transformative education in a digital age (Fitzpatrick, 2004; Mishra and Koehler, 2006; Koehler and Mishra, 2009; Whittaker, 2014; Sardegna, 2018). Liang and Cai examine these problems in their chapters in this collection.

Contributions

In Chapter One, Hassan Yosimbom argues that in Francis B. Nyamnjoh's *Intimate Strangers* (*IS* hereafter) borders, physical or imaginary, are confrontational, configurational, and transpositional shadow lines, thresholds to other realities, and symbols of shifting Mimbolandian consciousness. He contends that borders are liquid regimes that function as passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning crossing territories and changing perspectives. They span liminal spaces between Mimbolandian worlds and transformations occur in these in-between spaces because they are unstable, unpredictable, and precarious, always-in-transition and lacking clear socio-cultural and political association/belonging. Exploring bordering in *IS* through its characterisation, Yosimbom points out that the characters in this novel attest that living in Mimbolandian socio-cultural and political liminal zones means being in a constant state of displacement and replacement and dismembering and remembering. Though the borders link Mimbolandians to other ideas, people, and worlds, they feel threatened by the confrontations, configurations, and transpositions these new connections engender. He further argues that conceived as membranes, borders and bordering in *IS* is bi-directional and is not just about one set of people crossing to the other side; it is also about those on the other side crossing to this side – it is about doing away with demarcations like “ours” and “theirs”. Although the border has become a site where socio-political and spatial differences are instantiated through the reification of linguistic, cultural and territorial shibboleths of belonging, *IS* is about honouring people's otherness in ways that allow Mimbolandians to be changed by embracing that otherness rather than punishing others for having a different view.

Yosimbom suggests that the novel is a refusal to continue walking contemporary phobia lines and is an attempt to collapse the lines of fundamentalism and create inclusions that challenge conventional identities by promoting more expansive configurations of the latter. In conclusion, the author underscores that a diversity of perspectives expands and alters the dialogue of a Mimbolandian multiplicity and that this is transformational.

Chapter Two is another piece by Hassan Yosimbom on Mathew Takwi's *Messing Manners (MM)* which testifies that cultural divides have afflicted Cameroon and exacted a heavy toll on the country's Francophone and Anglophone societies, politics and identities, robbing them of their developmental potential and democratic possibilities. The article echoes the same problematic co-existential resonances like in Chapter One as Yosimbom relays Takwi's argument that if Cameroon aims to successfully navigate the depredations of its unique colonial heritage, its debilitating colonial legacies and their destructive postcolonial disruptions, these divides must be resolved. He argues that the divides are expressions of panic by the Anglophones and indifference by the Francophones that are spiralling the country to self-destruction. He describes Takwi's poetic vision as advocating that these differences could be turned either into destructive divides or ties that bind and bond so that each Cameroonian will have no sovereign internal territory and portrays this vision as a vernacular cosmopolitanism which measures national progress from an Anglophone minoritarian perspective. However, in its epilogue, the paper upholds that Takwi's visionary claims to freedom and equality are marked by a right to a difference in equality rather than a diversity founded on a Francophone/Anglophone duality. That right to a difference does not require the restoration of a Francophone or an Anglophone original or essentialist cultural or group identity; nor does it consider equality to be the neutralisation of differences in the name of universality. Instead, it takes the view that a proper Cameroonian commitment to a right to a difference in equality should be a process of constituting nascent groups and affiliations that have less to do with the affirmation or authentication of origins and identities, and more to do with Cameroonian political practices and ethical choices. It also entails the creation of new modes of agency, new strategies of recognition and new forms of political and symbolic representation. This symbolic national projection mirrors a nationalistic transfiguration of the Cameroonian "imagined communities" through great-hearted endeavours at nation-building and at the consolidation of national unity and of a sense of living together.

Such endeavours, Hassan Yosimbom argues in Chapter Three, breed an understanding of the Cameroonian linguistic landscape that is neither

Anglophone seclusion nor Francophone seclusion but a context of a melting pot of languages where Cameroonians are translanguaging, proudly communing in their ancestral tongues and interacting in Pidgin English and inherited colonial languages. Nyamnjoh's *A Nose for Money (ANM)* and *The Travail of Dieudonné (TTD)*, which are the novels studied by Yosimbom in Chapter Three, are therefore the Cameroonian linguistic landscape writ large as they are treatises on both the right of language and the right to language in Mimboland. The novels attest that Mimboland is a labyrinth of tongues and languages that results in either tetraglossia or heterolingualism. Both novels capture a Mimboland power of Babel, an archipelagic play of languages that sometimes do not share the same spatiotemporal terrain. English, French and Pidgin English are viewed first as vehicular languages which represent the everywhere, and later on, the language of cities, at once centralising and prospective; and second, as referential languages that convey the over there and the yesterday of national life. Yosimbom's credo in the chapter is that Mimbolandians (Cameroonians) will only achieve a postcolonial "renaissance" of Mimbolandian (Cameroonian) culture if they continuously eschew Gallocentrism (a mania for the French language and culture) and Anglocentrism (an obsession for the English language and culture). They should increasingly become heterolingual or tetraglossic, translanguaging in the many national and foreign languages spoken in the land and constructing an enlightened symbiotic national culture devoid of all forms of essentialism. An analysis of the text from its margins is the focus of Chapter Four where Hassan Yosimbom explores the meaning permeating Francis Nyamnjoh's *Mind Searching (MS)* from the author's presentation and representation of the novel in textual interstices and interludes. According to Yosimbom, in framing *MS* in the paratexts, Nyamnjoh offers a deconstruction of the Cameroonian postcolonial situation which highlights the understanding of paratextuality pragmatic declarations and postulates a carefully calibrated analysis of their illocutionary force. Taken as the setting of the Republic of Letters, which is Cameroon's microcosm, *MS* is, the author of the chapter suggests, with an extraordinary range of historical reference, a fictionalised encyclopaedic survey of the customs and institutions of this illusory state. Yosimbom perceives the borderlands of the text as the borderlands of Cameroonian reality and sees Nyamnjoh's paratextual perspective on aesthetics as an attempt to present these liminal mediations and the logic of their relation to Cameroon's postcolonial condition by ascribing each paratextual element a literary function which is also a socio-economic and politico-cultural function. He thus sees the subjects of Nyamnjoh's peritexts inevitably becoming the arena where his

opinions about postcolonial Cameroon meet those of others either in a conversation or dispute about some events or world views in the Cameroonian sphere of economic-political and socio-cultural communication.

Drawing their theoretical grounding from Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michael Stubbs and Peter Trudgill, Andrew Tata Ngeh, Moses Minang and Salliane Liengu Wolete attempt an exegesis of Bate Bisong's poetry through two of his poems: *Poetry is* and *Camouflage*. Their perusal of these poems highlights Bisong's poetic hermeneutics as hermetic and fraught with imageries, symbols and neologisms. The authors suggest that Bisong's poetry is a blend of African and Euro-modernist poetic traditions and advocate an essential sociological and ideological reading of his work which is thematically and linguistically built to exuberate the poet's social, political, psychological, philosophical, economic, aesthetic and ideological experiences. Li Liang's paper discusses the challenges and paradoxes faced by language educators in the digital age and their efforts to address these issues. Li uses a case study to explore technological application in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in Guangdong from a cultural-historical perspective, given that society evolves and is transformed through the production and use of its artefacts also known as psychological tools. Li's research underscores the fact that technological application in education has failed to achieve the expected transformations and has, at best, helped in the enhancement of people's conventional practices while fundamental global questions about the impact of such applications on policy and practice in education, and especially in language education, are still prevalent. The study winds up with suggestions to tackle these challenges for a smooth transition to the digital age. In Chapter Seven, the use of PowerPoint as a language learning facilitator device appears to be conspicuously obstructive. Guozhi Cai's paper analyses the discourse produced by teacher-student interaction when teachers deliver knowledge from textbooks and use PowerPoint slides as an expansion of textbook knowledge. Cai views this interaction as teacher-centred and links it to the transmission model of teaching and learning as teachers rely heavily on citations from textbooks and, particularly, PowerPoint slides in passing on knowledge in the classroom. She likens this process of citation and recitation to Bakhtin's concept of "voice" whereby voices are imbued with sets of interests and values, derived from prior usage, and speakers align themselves with these or distance themselves from them. Cai draws on these ideas to articulate the relationship between teachers, textbooks and PowerPoint slides, that are seen as a body of knowledge, and students who are treated as knowledge recipients. Analysis of classroom discourse thus reveals that the teaching practice of transmitting knowledge has placed

students in a passive and controlled position, and together with students' muted voices, these elements are very much in conflict with the New Curriculum (2000) that advocated CLT, TBLT and student-centredness.

In Chapter Eight, Jean Richard Dongho investigates Organisational Learning in the fast-growing translator education market in Cameroon. Using systems thinking and complexity theory, he focuses exclusively on the analysis of programmers' archival and documentary realities. From the vantage point of an ASTI's (Advanced School of Translators and Interpreters) translation practitioner, Dongho, in his article, examines the external relations and Public Relations (PR) policies of competing translator education programmes as they all strive to deliver to the employment markets graduates that meet the needs of identified groups and individuals. It stands out that Organisational Learning mixes competition and collaboration, tacit and official. Competition settled in with the opening of higher education to private initiative about a decade ago, then evolved to oligopoly and is now turning to outright competition in the context of multilingualism at a global level and official bilingualism and multiculturalism in Cameroon. Dongho suggests that these educational organisations, institutions and programmes survive in this dynamic environment by observing and drawing inspiration from one another quietly while boasting of partnerships and networks with high-profile foreign partners. He lauds ASTI for meeting many aspects of external relations management but points out that the competitive edge is derived less from "selling the school" than from a three-decade long training experience, State sponsorship, strategic partnerships and networking with significant stakeholders. In his second paper, Chapter Nine, Dongho, however, undertakes a comprehensive needs analysis for translator education of ASTI in the wake of higher education reforms in Cameroon. He contends that reforms of professional training programmes and institutions should chiefly be informed by empirical evidence from real-world research findings, even though there is little knowledge base to inform such reforms in the sub-sector of translator education. Dongho thus postulates that his three-pronged Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) is an attempt to fill the knowledge base gap. This CNA encompasses a logical framework recast in terms of Context, Inputs, Process and Products, a SWOT analysis and a stakeholder identification and salience component identifying the social entities mapping the school's environment and the varying degrees at which they affect or are affected by the ASTI system. He propounds that his CNA model provides a systematic basis for understanding and subsequently readjusting ASTI's programmes and is also adaptable to other contexts.

Ngoran Constantine Tardzenyuy examines stylistic creativity in literary translation in Chapter Ten. Drawing on Cicero's advocacy in his *Libellum de optimo genere oratorum* of translation that is not *verbum pro verbo* (word-for-word), he studies stylistic creativity in the translated versions of *Mission terminée* and *Le vieux nègre et la médaille* and suggests that the practice, rather than being viewed as optional, should be mandatory. Using pre-existing scholarly arguments and a corpus drawn from the English translation of Mongo Beti's *Mission terminée* and Ferdinand Oyono's *Le vieux nègre et la médaille*, he posits that given the Sapir/Whorf Hypothesis about every language expressing a world view and Buffon's assertion that "style is the man", the translator is bound to create in his or her translation and that such creativity is most often only possible at the stylistic level of the text. Still researching translational creativity in Chapter Eleven, Ngoran studies its expansion and explication in the context of the translation of the Bible from English into Lamnso and argues that given linguistic relativity, the moving of a message from one language to another is bound to involve some creative processes. Such creativity, he upholds, is not mistranslation and instead expresses expansion and explication as evidenced in the translation of the Bible from English into Lamnso. By drawing examples from the first ten chapters of the Gospel of Matthew in the New Testament, Ngoran contrastively analyses biblical text extracts from both languages and concludes that translational creativity does not, in any way, destroy the message in the original text but somewhat clarifies and revitalises it. His approach borders on intersemiotic translation and he thus advocates that creativity should be considered as an inherent part and parcel of the translation process.

Reflection

The specificity of this volume is that it draws together papers from language and literature and, as such, many intricate, polemic and timely themes run through it. In literature, contributions focus on language and identity and jump on the bandwagon of Anglophone cultural misrecognition while advocating cultural hybridity (Yosimbom, Chapters Two and Three). Migration and immigration themes are also apparent in Yosimbom's Chapters One and Three while the poetic analysis of Chapters Two (Yosimbom) and Five (Andrew Tata Ngeh; Moses Minang and Salliane Liengu Wolete) thematises the sociological, political, economic and ideological plight of the everyday life of English-speaking Cameroonians. Chapter Four deals with paratextuality and foregrounds postcoloniality and the boundaries of identity in present-day Cameroon. In Language, the

digitalisation of language teaching and learning and the challenge of culturally embedded modes of learning are raised (Liang). Tradition and innovation are also discussed in Chapter Seven (Cai) while institutional learning, planning, development and influence are examined in Chapters Eight and Nine (Dongho) and style and creativity in translatology are thematised in the last two chapters (Ngoran).

The intuitive descriptions presented in this volume for both language and literature enable a different take on these matters within the many contexts studied. For language, in the context of a digitalised world and technologised education and the growing interest in English language learning in China (Liang and Cai), the multiple challenges faced in the application of the technological transformation of education at tertiary level are likely to be of interest to a scholarly readership. The marketisation of higher education now suffuses management approaches and highlights professionalisation in a bid to make institutions competitive and commercialisable (Dongho). Coming from a practitioner based at the Advanced School of Translators and Interpreters, this perspective will undoubtedly be appealing to an academic and professional community of translators and interpreters. The same goes for Ngoran's endeavour at theorising style and creativity as the hallmarks of translators' ingenuity when faced with the dilemma of meaning equivalence and the obsession for message clarity.

As this volume matures to publication, we would like to thank very heartily all those who have contributed to it. Special thanks to my alter ego, Hassan, who mobilised contributors in Cameroon and contributed four chapters to the volume. We are also appreciative of Li Liang's quick response regarding her participation after she was contacted closer to submission time.

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CHAPTER ONE

SHADOW LINES: CONFRONTATIONS, CONFIGURATIONS AND TRANSPOSITIONS IN FRANCIS B. NYAMNJOH'S *INTIMATE STRANGERS*

YOSIMBOM HASSAN MBIYDZENYUY

Introduction

Francis B. Nyamnjoh is the author of both scholarly and fictional books. His primary scholarly works include: *Africa's Media, Democracy and the Politics of Belonging* (2005), *Insiders and Outsiders: Citizenship and Xenophobia in Contemporary Southern Africa* (2006), "*C'est l'homme qui fait l'homme*": *Cul-de-Sac Ubuntu-ism in Côte d'Ivoire* (2015), *Rhodes Must Fall: Nibbling at Resilient Colonialism in South Africa* (2016), and *Drinking from the Cosmic Gourd: How Amos Tutuola Can Change Our Minds* (2017) while his novels are *Mind Searching* (1991), *The Disillusioned African* (1995), *A Nose for Money* (2003), *Souls Forgotten* (2008), *The Travail of Dieudonné* (2008), *Married But Available* (2009), *Intimate Strangers* (2010), and *Homeless Waters* (2011). In these works, he encourages a rigorous rethinking of socio-economic, cultural and political institutions in postcolonial Africa. Most recently, he excavated Amos Tutuola's stories to demonstrate that they illustrate the importance of incompleteness and conviviality by challenging superiority syndromes and zero-sum games of potency and dominance. Talking about *Drinking from the Cosmic Gourd* during his Archie Mafeje Lecture on the 27 March 2017, he affirmed that incompleteness is both exciting and inspiring at personal, collective, and political levels. He suggested that "incompleteness harbours emancipatory ideals" and then concluded that "Africa is incomplete without the rest of the world, and the world is incomplete without Africa."

Incompleteness runs through most of Nyamnjoh's fictional works where he portrays a contemporary Mimboland whose rich variety of ethnic and cultural identities is complicated by the impact of French and British colonialisms and their resultant Francophone and Anglophone cultures. *Intimate Strangers (IS)* thematises incompleteness by challenging the proliferation of borders and border struggles in a contemporary world where multiplicity and heterogeneity are cut and divided by devices of control and hierarchisation. The novel affirms a planetary diversity where multiplicity and heterogeneity are turned from elements of weakness into elements of strength. It asserts that in a Mimbolandian world where identities are inventions, where mutually constitutive existential and epistemic constructions that denaturalise cultural artefacts and practices, stripping them of foundational authenticity and essentialism, the search for completeness necessitates their constant reconstruction and deconstruction through border confrontations, configurations, and transpositions.

In *IS*, border transgression is a motif that Nyamnjoh nets into the warp and woof of the narrative structure. Set in Mimboland, Botswana and Zimbabwe, the novel provides a window on the heterogeneity of global space, the multiplication of labour, differential inclusion, and border struggles by focusing on the production of postcolonial labour power as a commodity across a variety of borders, borderscapes, storyscapes, and border zones. The borders perform connecting and disconnecting, exclusionary and inclusionary, enabling and disabling, localising and globalising roles and are either softening or hardening, or temporary or permanent. *IS* is a bold statement on deterritorialisation, diaspora, travelling, border crossing, nomadology, networks, and flows. What makes *IS* peculiar is that the setting comprises a dynamic system that brings together a set of heterogeneous Botswanan and Mimbolandic characters with functional complementarities; there are stable and unstable patterns of behaviour that are endogenously and exogenously generated by interlocked heterogeneities. The novel captures a meshwork of socio-political and cultural entities that grow in unplanned directions because they are made up of diverse humanity that exists with other meshworks and hierarchies. The vast setting from Mimboland to (Gaborone) Botswana and Zimbabwe articulates heterogeneous elements without imposing uniformity because they are determined by the degree of connectivity that enables them to become self-sustaining. Meshwork dynamics such as processes of destratification, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation of places, territories, regions, and identities function as a counter-narrative of totalising boundaries – both actual and conceptual. The novel presents borders as zones of control or abandonment, of recollection or forgetting, of

force or dependence, or of exclusiveness or sharing. These are zones of cross-cultural consciousness imbued with meetings, interferences, shocks, harmonies, and disharmonies between the cultures of the world, addressing complex flows, diversity, and multi-locality in different ways.

In this essay, I argue that in *IS*, the borders and the identities they include/exclude are exceedingly difficult to define. The idea of physical or imaginary borders in *IS* is a complex one with multiple genealogies and meanings, so that extrapolations of Mimbolandan culture, identity or nationality, in the singular or plural are quite slippery because the borders and the characters that re-/define them swing unsteadily between the poles of essentialism and contingency. Describing and defining borders and all tropes prefixed by their problematic commandments entails engaging the confrontational, configurational, and transpositional thresholds and politics through which the idea of Mimboland has been constructed, celebrated, and condemned. I argue that borders are as much a reality as they are constructs whose boundaries – geographical, historical, cultural, and representational – shift according to the prevailing conceptions and configurations of global identities and power, African nationalism and Pan-Africanism. I further contend that in the world of *IS*, the borders and meanings of Mimboland and Mimbolandness are being reconfigured by both the processes of contemporary globalisation and the projects of African integration. The subject of Mimbolandan identity borders and border identities, therefore, is as complex as Mimboland itself. There are numerous perspectives on these borders: religious, ecological, linguistic, and even ethnic taxonomies but, I have chosen four that seem, to me, to be paramount in *IS*, and thus, capture a wide range of constructions of Mimboland and beyond. These borders include/exclude Mimboland as biology, as image, as space, and as memory. That is, Mimbolandan identities in *IS* are (re)mapped in racial, representational, geographical, or historical terms. The essay thus focuses on the racial, representational, geographical, and historical (re)conceptions of Mimboland identities. Empowering and disempowering borders requires recognising and empowering and disempowering the multiple identities of the dwellers of those borders and breaking the unproductive dichotomies between outsiders and insiders.

Transitioning, crossing territories, and changing perspectives is a reality in the world of *IS* where people are meeting one another from different ethnic, class, and cultural backgrounds, and are seeking to create new identities out of their engagements. Thus, the essay recognises that the world of identities, affiliations, and allegiances is elusive. Mimboland and its peoples continue to form and reform themselves, calling into question older orthodoxies and primordial, constructivist, epiphenomenal, and

instrumental conceptions of political attachment. Given that identities and institutions mutually reinforce one another, I further assert that in *IS*, new socio-political and cultural identities are enabled by novel institutional configurations, confrontations, and transpositions. However, such institutional configurations come under pressure when they can no longer satisfy new Mimbolandian identity needs. In *IS*, identities are held together by values as well as interests. The tensions among them are played out in different sites, both temporal and geographical. In the world of *IS*, the Mimboland-state-centred paradigm of socio-political and cultural identities, with its focus on the primacy of Mimboland citizenship, has begun to make space for local, regional, transnational, cosmopolitan, and even imperial configurations of new interests and identities. I conclude that the confrontations, configurations, and transpositions of Nyamnjoh's "intimate strangers" are themselves in flux and it is impossible to say which, if any, will succeed in solidifying into a paradigm dominant enough to defy future mutation.

The Balibar notion of the border

In *What Is a Border?* Balibar states that "[t]he idea of a simple definition of what constitutes a border is, by definition, absurd: to mark out a border is precisely, to define a territory, to delimit it, and so to register the identity of that territory, or confer one upon it" (76). He explains that "[c]onversely, however, to define or identify in general is nothing other than to trace a border, to assign boundaries or borders" (76) and advises that any "theorist who attempts to define what a border is, is in danger of going round in circles, as the very representation of the border is the precondition for any definition" (76). Balibar further talks of the "polysemy" and "heterogeneity" of borders, asserting that their "multiplicity, their hypothetical and fictive nature" does "not make them any less real" (76). To him, there are many kinds of borders that people belonging to different social groups experience in different ways. The borders perform "several functions of demarcation and territorialisation – between distinct social exchanges or flows, between distinct rights, and so forth" (79) [and] "[w]ithout the world-configuring function they perform, there would be no borders – or no lasting borders" (79). The above postulations show that Balibar views a border as a threshold or liminal space, as a passageway across a boundary, an opening which allows movement from one space to another. To him, borders are zones of exchange and transit which signify entry into and exit from existing structures. He also contends that the porousness, incompleteness, and arbitrariness of borders explains why they are always under construction.

By attempting to discuss the fluctuation of threshold agency between liberation and conservatism, empowerment, and disenfranchisement in *IS*, this essay is a contribution to redefinitions of the border as a space where a dialectical exchange between different discourses and diverse creative acts can occur.

The essay affirms that the notion of the border as a clear-cut geopolitical division of national/international territories is being challenged in multiple disciplines, especially in literature in the field of postcolonial studies. Even though borders prove effective in terms of inclusion and exclusion, they can never be reduced to one single meaning. The transpositions in this essay refer to the fluid flow of persons, commodities, materialities, and imaginaries across borders. That is, transpositions are the connecting, collaborative, and creative aspects of contact zones, trading zones or interstitial spaces. Although the border can be seen as not only the point at which things stop but also where they begin, the confrontations in the essay are us/them, indigene/foreigner, national/migrant, civilised/uncivilised, slave/master, centre/periphery, and local/global clashes that characterise border existence. The configurations comprise the highly complex amalgamations of difference and identity, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion, diachrony and synchrony, and imagination and real effects at the borders. My analysis of border shadows, therefore, requires a plurality that addresses the socio-cultural or political conditions of borderlands, borderscapes, contact zones, liminal spaces, margins and more.

This plurality also contends with the institutions, agents or actants involved, the impact of knowledge transfer, the circulation and flow of persons, objects and information on the transpositioning of borders, whether physical or imaginary, the ways in which border thinking and border knowledge inform Cameroonians, and the consequences of invoking or producing physical or imaginary borders. In Ghosh's novel, *The Shadow Lines*, which grapples with a series of borders during the 1947 Partition of the South Asian subcontinent and the East Pakistan Liberation War that led to the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, the narrator contends that "[a] place does not merely exist, it has to be invented in one's imagination" (185). Just as Ghosh's novel criticises those who took borders for granted during the partitioning of the Asian subcontinent, Nyamnjoh's *IS* is a critique on Mimbolanders who take space, place, and geography too much for granted, forgetting that borders are sites of confrontation, contact, blocking, and passage. These include the borders separating Botswanans from Mimbolanders, the present from the past, memory from reality, identity from image, and the cognitive and generic borders that mark different territories of Mimboland knowledge. These boundaries overlap, connect,

and disconnect in often unpredictable ways, contributing to shaping new forms of domination and exploitation and providing rich insights on the tensions and conflicts that blur the line between Mimboland and Botswana inclusion and exclusion. The essay focuses not only on traditional international borders but also on other lines of social, cultural, political, and economic demarcation. My central thesis, therefore, is that in the world of *IS*, borders, far from serving merely to block or obstruct global passages of people, money, or objects, have become essential devices for their articulation by playing key roles in the production of the heterogeneous time and space of contemporary global and postcolonial Mimboland. The essay is divided into three parts: Part One is titled “Geographical Makwerekweres: Spatio-linguistic Insiders and Outsiders in Botswana”, Part Two deals with “Otherising Africans in Africa: Labour Makwerekweres and the Noway-Phillip Syndrome”, and Part Three grapples with “Makwerekwere Maids: The Burdens of Womanhood and Being an Underling at the Mimbolandian-Botswanan Margins”.

Geographical “Makwerekweres”: Spatio-linguistic insiders and outsiders in Botswana

In this section, I grapple with the linguistic implications of transgressing the physical geographical borders between Botswana and other countries such as Mimboland. I argue that even though one of the fundamental goals of pan-African ideology has been the achievement and consolidation of African unity, *IS* attests that the results obtained have been below expectations. The transborder linguistic experiences of Africans who migrate to other African countries in search of employment and better opportunities have had an important role to play in this respect. Transborder experiences of the characters in *IS* indicate that the underlying cause of xenophobia is the imposition of linguistic boundaries “that are neither congruous nor coterminous with the more natural, older ethnico-cultural groups and nationalities that pre-date the modern nation-states in Africa” (Chumbow, 2005: 183). Following the imposition of boundaries, millions of African people (sometimes of the same ethnic identity as Mimbolanders, Zimbabweans, Zambians, Ghanaians, Nigerians and so on) sharing the same language and governed by deep-seated historical and cultural bonds, have suddenly found themselves partitioned, divided and shared out to different postcolonial powers, and today belong to different nations. I further assert that in *IS*, migrants, such as Immaculate from Mimboland, argue that despite the disruptive effects of linguistic boundaries on the cultural and ethnic unity of partitioned people, Africans should cultivate and reinforce the pre-

partition networks of intra-group or intra-ethnic relations thereby considering boundaries “as binding only on the postcolonial powers or present-day governments and not on their own internal relations with their kith and kin, which they consider ‘inviolable’” (184). Thus, there is at the Botswanan border zones an invisible but discernible ethnico-cultural boundary underneath the visible national boundaries. *IS* advocates a Nyamnjohian border linguistic cooperation that asserts that in dealing with the problems of tension at the Botswanan-Mimboland border, the Botswanan traditional mode of border management of implementing or imposing regulatory mechanisms, leading to excessive policing and militarisation of frontier zones in order to impose Botswanan state authority, has proved to be negative and counter-productive. To Immaculate, an accepted approach to (linguistic) boundary management should emerge through the simplification of the Botswanan-Mimboland linguistic boundary function from a line of demarcation and separation to a line of contact and cooperation (Asiwaju 1984), a meeting point, or a line of inclusion (Phiri 1984). This section does not deny that a geographical entity called “Botswana” exists but argues that in a globalising world, this should be a cartographic reality, not a socio-cultural and politico-economic one, an exercise in mapping devoid of experiential meaning for the peoples that have lived within the country’s porous borders.

IS opens with a series of startling revelations of cross-border confrontations and configurations. The 24-year-old Mimbolander, Immaculate, who has been in Botswana for 13 years, admits that until she migrated to Botswana and had a job with Sun Power, the biggest horticulturalist in Botswana, she “didn’t know that an African could be different from another African [but she] soon was seen and treated as different” (1). We learn that at lunchtime, no Botswanan will sit with Immaculate because according to them, she speaks Makwerekwere (foreigner/outsider-like). The only persons who associate with Immaculate at Sun Power, by conversing and sharing food with her, are two nameless Zimbabwean boys aged 22 and 23, respectively. Also, to make her exclusionary/outsider status complete, her co-workers respond in Setswana whenever she greets them in English: “[w]e had this conflict because of my being a foreigner” (2).

Moreover, Immaculate lives at G-North with Mr Quitdoqu through whom Sun Power recruits hyper-cheap labour directly from Zimbabwe and Zambia. Their house is “like a camp” (2) and at the same time a dumping ground for Sun Power. At Quitdoqu’s, Immaculate is forced to work so hard, that one day she tells him: “I think my home is better than to be in Botswana” (2). When Quitdoqu eventually gets married, the wife becomes too racist towards Immaculate, Quitdoqu’s cousin. She keeps reminding her

that: “[y]ou people from Africa, you are just so dull. You say you have A’ Levels, what is A’ Levels? It’s nothing! In America, from 11th Grade, we go to university, which means we are cleverer than Africans” (2). Immaculate tells us that Quitdoqu’s wife, Kathleen, though the youngest in the house, was like a bitter African slave master. Immaculate attributes the treatment that she gave them to the treatment of the African slaves in America in the olden days. On the other hand, Immaculate concludes that when she thinks of Botswanans having negative attitudes towards other Africans, she believes that no matter where one comes from, what God has created one to be is what one is because even Kathleen, who is not a Botswanan, treats her like the Botswanans of Sun Power do (2).

The first thing that one notices about the above revelations is that even Zimbabweans and Zambians are treated as outsiders in Botswana. From the perspective of the excluded, it is not surprising that the two Zimbabwean boys are nameless. Even though one could argue that their namelessness points to the ever-increasing illegal migration in contemporary society, the most valid hypothesis is that because names, especially in the African context, most often speak a language, their namelessness is a Botswanan valorisation of their “identitylessness” within Botswanan society. By crossing the border between Zimbabwe and Botswana, they have become socio-linguistic pariahs just like Immaculate. The Zimbabwean-Botswanan border, just like the Botswanan-Mimbolandian one, has been made to function as a line of demarcation and separation instead of a line of contact and cooperation, a meeting point, or a line of inclusion. My argument here is that it is exceedingly difficult to define and include any nameless person either by identification or passport. By condemning Mimbolanders, Zimbabweans, Zambians, Ghanaians, Nigerians and so on, as Makwerekweres, Botswanans fail to realise that the maps and meanings of “Botswana” and “Botswananness” are being reconfigured by both the processes of contemporary globalisation and the projects of African integration. For instance, Immaculate merely wanted to use Botswana as a transit zone from where she hoped to reunite with her fiancé, George Tsenchwaka, in the USA but only stayed in Botswana because she never succeeded in getting a visa. Thus, constructions of Botswana as biology, as image, as space, as memory, as language, that is, Botswananness, as mapped in racial, representational, geographical, historical or linguistic terms, are just some of the ever-increasing contemporary conceptualisations because they do not exhaust other possible categorisations.

Furthermore, the Botswanan idea that everyone must speak Setswana as an act of self-definition/inclusion is a bizarre attempt to capture the alterity of Botswananness through a linguistic gauntlet that smacks of grasping at

language straws and ignoring the agency of Africans to appropriate, modify and shape languages to their purposes. The Botswanans' linguistic nationalism is strange coming from a country that relishes the expatriate services of the Chinese over those of Africans: "I [Immaculate] got a job at G-Textiles where I was the only foreigner, apart from the Chinese joint-venture partners in senior management" (7). Behind their assertion of linguistic nationalism lies an ontological demand that Botswana be coded "not-for-other-Africans", confined to a Setswana linguistic zone hemmed by Chinese Walls or Iron Curtains that include insiders and exclude outsiders. From a cynical perspective, Immaculate's declaration that she did not know that there was any place in the world where English was still a strange language, just like Kathleen's uncorroborated boasting about US citizens' intelligence, the superiority reverberates with the rush by some Eurocentric/Anglocentric Africans to romanticise and uni-versalise the English language and US culture respectively. However, the declaration is more that of a multilingual African who relishes her mastery over English and tries to enrich the language and liberate it from its European provenance. The first lesson that Botswanans need to learn would be to enhance Setswana and free it from its Botswanan origin. That way, they would be transforming the Setswana-other languages boundary from a line of demarcation and separation of the linguistic us/them or insiders/outsideers to a line of contact and cooperation, a meeting point for multilinguaging, or a line of multilinguistic inclusion. When this is done, Botswanans such as Yolinda will stop xenophobically identifying multilingual Zimbabweans, Zambians, Ghanaians, Nigerians and Mimbolandans such as Immaculate as outsiders who have come to seize their socio-economic and political opportunities.

Also, when Quitoqu's wife sends Immaculate packing, she is taken in by Angel, a Botswanan immigration officer. She tells Immaculate that "[t]he way [she] look[s] at [their] border with Zimbabwe and other neighbours, there is something [they] can do about that because borders are man-made" (10). She goes on to reveal that the water resources are used to unite Botswana and Zimbabwe but presently, they say that side of the river is Zimbabwe, this side is Botswana, and so they should not even share food and water (10). When Immaculate informs her that her uncle used to tell her that boundaries are our greatest killer, Angel tells her that every June and December of every year, the Botswanan Immigration Police undertakes what they call a "Clean-Up-Campaign", a biannual house-to-house and workplace-to-workplace search meant to identify Zimbabweans whom the Immigration Police consider as litter (10). The Clean-Up-Campaign generally does not involve Botswana's neighbours from South Africa,