Chapter 5

Mobility and Immobility in the Life of an Amputee

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“Travel to see the elephant, old age is worthless” (Kumona njamba kwenda, kukola chamokomoko)—Luvale proverb

Samuzala lived through colonialism in Angola, the liberation war, the civil war that followed independence, forced displacement to Zambia, and a landmine accident resulting in amputation. At different points in his life, Samuzala was a trader, a migrant, a refugee, and an amputee. In engaging with Samuzala’s life story, a narrative of movement, we learn that mobility and immobility are relative to one another; mobility and immobility are not absolute conditions, with complete immobility being the flip side of pure, unimpeded mobility. In everyday existence, mobile individuals experience stillness, and physically immobilized individuals experience movement. As humans, we exist in a universe created by the possibilities of stasis and mobility, a universe that sets limits to our existence but also opens up new horizons. By adopting an existential stance we are more likely to avoid stereotyping and reification. We are also more likely to privilege the lifeworld over concepts such as migration and forced displacement, and more open to giving voice to new understandings of collective phenomena from the perspective of those individuals whose lives and movements generate them.

Notes for this chapter begin on page 151.
Capturing the sense in the contemporary world that mobility is a never-ending source of excitement and enchantment, Noel Salazar and Alan Smart write, “Mobility is a central metaphor for the contemporary world, both in physical form and its imaginative implications” (2011: v). Mobility suggests a movement forward, an improvement, a conquest. In this narrative of progress, however, little thought is given to those who lag behind, unable to catch up with the fast runners. The world is divided into the highly mobile and the practically immobile. The highly mobile travel in motorized vehicles, bullet trains, and commuter jets. They have daily access to kiwis from New Zealand and coffee beans from Kenya, and, through the media, they are instantly fed news about events as these are happening in the antipodes. The less mobile, in contrast, continue to rely on their own feet and legs for locomotion, walking long distances on their way to work and school. For the highly mobile, progress is as real as mobility. For the less mobile, progress is a mirage. Lagging behind, made obsolete by the high-tech infrastructure of the wealthier nations, the less mobile are of little interest to the highly mobile, including many an academic expert on the topic of mobility in the contemporary world.

Let us slow down momentarily. Let us ponder not the manifold ways in which high speed affects the quality of movement and life (differences of speed are not immaterial), but ask instead whether speed, by itself, affects the significance of movement in human existence. Does one need to be a speeder to speak to the centrality of movement in human life?

The less mobile can be as obsessed with movement as the more mobile. The Inuit of Iglookit perceive the act of traveling as “a way of being,” the Scottish Gypsy Travellers see their journeys as “engaged living,” and Cape Verdeans and Jamaicans take migration to be a way of life. For those who reside in northwest Zambia, where I conducted two years of ethnographic fieldwork, the ability to move in physical space is a fundamental dimension of personhood, and to grow up is to become a traveler, particularly for men. Slow travelers are not the remainders of the mobility formula. They are in movement as much as fast travelers.

In what follows, I recount the life story of Samuzala, a Chokwe middle-age man from Angola whom I met in Chavuma, a rural district of northwest Zambia. Samuzala never traveled by airplane or set foot in an airport. At different points in his life, however, he become a trader, a labor migrant, a refugee, and an amputee, experiences that offered him privileged glimpses into the place of mobility and immobility in human life.

Like all life stories, Samuzala’s story is a tapestry woven with many threads. Some threads speak to his singularity as an individual with a
story to tell, others to his identity as a Chokwe man from Angola who has lived all his life in the Upper Zambezi, a region shared by east Angola and northwest Zambia, and still others to the centrality of movement in human existence. Moderns may be convinced that modernity—*their* time—is the age of mobility. Mobility, however, as both a physical and existential imperative, is not theirs alone.

As will become evident, Samuzala organizes his narrative in temporal terms, moving from his childhood in the outskirts of Luena, the capital city of Moxico province in east Angola, to the time we met in Chavuma. As he moves through time, he refers to historical processes that have deeply impacted the entire Upper Zambezi region; namely, Portuguese colonialism in Angola as well as the armed conflict between the Portuguese military forces and the Angolan liberation movements of MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) and UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola); the transition period from the end of colonialism and the colonial war in April 1974 to the formal granting of independence on 11 November 1975, a violent period in which the competing nationalist movements attempted to gain control over the entire nation; the thirty-year-long postindependence civil war waged between the government forces affiliated with MPLA and UNITA, now redefined as insurgency; and, throughout these violent phases of recent Angolan history, the forced displacement of countless Angolans to the neighboring country of Zambia. Samuzala, however, does not present these processes as historical formations that succeeded one another on a chronological axis, disembodied and free-floating; instead, he describes them as a series of journeys undertaken on the face of the earth. Capturing this relation between movement and human existence, Tim Ingold writes, “The world of our experience is a world . . . that is continually coming into being as we—through our own movement—contribute to its formation” (2000: 242).

Yet scholars are often less interested in this continually emerging formation of collective phenomena through movement than in the resulting patterns. Think of migration and forced displacement. Scholars often refer to these population movements as social facts in the Durkheimian sense of collective phenomena endowed with “a reality existing outside individuals” (Durkheim 1982: 19). But are migration and forced displacement not best described as concepts on which we draw in an attempt to explain what are, necessarily, much fuzzier and multilayered processes? Provided that we never lose sight of fuzziness and complexity, those concepts are valuable tools for scholars and nonscholars alike. The moment we reify those concepts, however, not only do we lose touch with reality, but we turn those individuals who migrate and are forcibly displaced into
a lesser, one-dimensional version of themselves: he or she the “migrant,” he or she the “refugee” (Silva 2013a; 2013b). In a passage on refugees, Michael Jackson asks: “On what grounds can we claim that ‘refugeeness’ is a sui generis cluster of ostensive traits, or a specific field of human experience—as is assumed in almost every essay or monograph on the subject that begins by citing the number of refugees in the world today, both external and internal, and invoking the Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees” (2002: 81). Concepts are not isomorphic with human experience. By drawing on existential ideas we are more likely to avoid the ever-present risk of reification, a risk that all scholars are familiar with and yet continue to incur. We are also more likely to privilege the life-world over scientific concepts, and be more open to giving voice to new understandings of worldwide phenomena from the perspective of those individuals whose lives, as “singular universals,” as Sartre put it, generate the collective phenomena that scholars define as their object of study.

It is from this perspective that we can begin to understand Samuzala’s life story as he told it to me in the shade of an orange tree in August 1999. I was genuinely drawn to this man whose gentle manner and broad smile seemed incommensurate with the tragedy of a life lived in the midst of conflict and disruption. For this reason, I think, I expected him to dwell on the traumatic events that had made of him a refugee and an amputee. But what he offered is not a lesson about the history of Angola and a tale of suffering at the hands of others acting with impunity and no mercy, although it is that, too. Told in a stark, matter-of-fact style, his short life story is first and foremost a narrative of movement, a narrative that speaks of life as movement, and of mobility as an act against immobility, a cry of freedom.

A Life in Movement

SAMUZALA: I spent my childhood (unyike) in Luena-Moxico [then Luso], playing and playing with the other children, collecting firewood and carrying it to the village men’s shelter, learning from my father our village ways. The grown-ups cooked shima [thick porridge], scooped a bit of shima from the serving plate, shaped it into a ball, dipped it in the gravy, and gave it to us to eat. If you didn’t go out to collect firewood, they would punish you. Our job was to bring firewood to the men’s shelter. The men sent you out on small errands, “Bring water! Bring thick porridge!” what have you. In my youth (ukweze), I started cultivating fields and going out to cut poles to make rafters. Soon, I looked for a wife and moved to Luvuei [then Lumai, an Angolan town located in Moxico province].
In Luvuei, I continued cultivating cassava, going out to the fields to cut down trees, and catching fish in the rainy season. In the dry season, I filled a chivulu basket with small fish and carry it on my shoulders all the way to Léua, an Angolan town north of Luena where there is no fish. Those of us who were beekeepers carried honey and wax. In exchange for our merchandise, the Portuguese storekeepers gave us cloth, thread, needles, and other things. Sometimes they gave us money (lishelenge). A large mutonga basket filled with fish sold for 50 or 70. A small mutonga sold for much less, approximately 20. If you preferred, the Portuguese were willing to pay you with cloth. I still remember some of those types of cloth: mahina akayishala [striped cloth], mbololo [blue cloth with white edges], and pandeziya [fantasy cloth]. First they weighed your load. If it came to the price of one or two lengths of cloth, then they paid you with cloth. But they never forgot to add a handful of free small items on top—maybe salt or a razor—which they called pasela. We were trading nicely. There were no disagreements or arguments, no. And we were living well. On the way back home, we stopped in Luena to purchase clothes and other commodities for our wives and children. The wealthier among us were buying cattle. We had no money to open our own stores, but we were purchasing cattle, clothes, blankets, even bags (jipongishi).

Then I joined the Angolan roads company, JAEA [Junta Autónoma de Estradas de Angola]. Our work consisted in opening and clearing main roads in the southern part of Moxico province. We opened roads and covered them with gravel. My job was to clear the ground behind the graters (mazembe) by removing the remaining vegetation. We worked as a team and spent long periods of time on the road. This was our work. Our salaries arrived by plane at the end of each month. At first we were paid 500, then 800, and finally 2000. On the payment day, I always sent some money to my wife, who stayed with my older brothers in Luvuei. Opening and clearing main roads was strenuous work to be sure, but we were living well.

Everything changed when the MPLA took control of Luvuei. Everyone was afraid, even the Portuguese, who soon fled and dispersed. Having lost our jobs, some of us chose to remain in Luvuei, others to go back to the villages where we had come from, and still others to hide in the bush. But we all lived in fear of being caught by UNITA soldiers. We said to ourselves, “One day I will go to my fields to cultivate, and the UNITAs will catch me and take me to their bases (jimbaze) where they, the bush-people, live.” If the UNITAs found you alone in the fields, they would catch you for sure, you knew that. So many of us fled.

My wife and I decided to walk to Zambia, where my mother and other relatives who had fled the colonial war in the late 1960s were already living. We took the Nyakulemba route. First we rested on the bank of the Lungwevungu River. Second, we rested by the Vundu Lagoon. Third, we rested in Nyambingila. It took us four days to reach my mother’s village is Chavuma. In Chavuma, we lived our life as...
we had done in Angola, cultivating fields. That’s all. Now and then Meheba officials [Meheba is one of the official refugee settlements in Zambia, located near Solwezi, the capital city of North-Western province] toured the area of Chavuma, looking for Angolans.

SÓNIA: When exactly did you come to Zambia?
SAMUZALA: When the MPLAs entered Luvuei in 1975. That war . . . It all began during colonialism with the whites saying, “The VATUROIJI are coming!” The term turoji [turras in Portuguese, an abbreviation of terroristas] referred to the bush-people, the liberation fighters who hid in the bush. The whites were telling us that the turras were coming to steal our things. They were urging men to join their military forces and fight the enemy in the bush. This war between the Portuguese and the liberation fighters started in the mid-1960s. Now, the whites have left Angola, colonialism has ended, but we, blacks, are still fighting. We call this war our second war, the war that started in 1975 when MPLA, supported by the Cubans, took over Luvuei. During the first war, the whites relocated people from the villages to their towns, and the liberation fighters took people from those towns to the bush. This war has long ended. The present war is our own war, the war of Neto and Savimbi [Agostinho Neto, one of the top political leaders of MPLA, became the first president of Angola after independence; Jonas Savimbi remained the leader of UNITA, now redefined as insurgency]. Some people liked Neto, other people liked Savimbi. As more and more people died, our hearts saddened. We said to ourselves, “We must flee, they will kill us with their axes and knives.” If you hid in the bush, the UNITAs would catch you and take you to their bases. If you sought refuge in Luvuei, the MPLAs accused you of being a bush-dweller, a UNITA supporter. Some people spent the nights in the bush because they feared being trapped and killed inside their own houses. People lived in fear. So they started to scatter (kulimwanga).

I came to Zambia and settled at my mother’s village, as I was saying. I became a farmer, a fisherman, and a beekeeper all over again. Then, I became injured. You know that, VaSónia. I stepped on a bomb [landmine]. I had gone to Angola hoping to find good-quality bark to make a beehive. Little did I know that I would step on a mine. That mine was planted by MPLA soldiers. Many of us have been maimed and killed by those traps (vijila).

Yes, I thought so many things after the accident. But God gave me wisdom to become a basket maker. My first basket was very rough. It had no decoration, no beauty. I made it for practice (yatusumbi). Then I learned several designs, one after the other. I still remember when I sold my first basket, a winnowing tray (lwalo). I sold it to a local woman for 500 kwacha. I had earned 500 kwacha even though I was immobile like an old man. I felt proud and happy.

Today, I think many, many things in my heart. My wife and five children feel weak but do not complain. I think many things in my heart.

I have nothing else to say. Twasakwililako mwane (thank you).
Mobilities

As I listened to Samuzala, I was struck by the ease with which he interconnected a series of movements in his lifelong journey without ever ignoring their historical specificity. Samuzala speaks of many comings and goings, traced out in the process of performing daily tasks, fulfilling obligations, and seeking the company of others, the endless series of “to and fro movements that define the mundane patterning of all social life” (Jackson 2002: 32). Samuzala also speaks of other movements, often coded as migration and forced displacement in scholarly analysis, that occur when life-as-usual is interrupted and thrown off course by contingent forces and events. But he never allows those movements to crystallize and break away from the fluidity of the lifeworld. As Jackson observes, “In telling stories we testify to the diversity, ambiguity, and interconnectedness of experiences that abstract thought seeks to reduce, tease apart, regulate, and contain” (2002: 253). In retelling the stories that others tell us, we attempt to make whole and bring to life what we often divide and deaden in the process of analysis.

Scholars in refugee studies and forced migration are well aware that the distinction between migration and forced displacement is clearer on paper than on the ground. In dire situations, migration becomes a form of forced displacement, and prolonged forced displacement can amount to full-blown migration. In addition, notwithstanding the shared assumption that forced displacement is more forceful than voluntary migration—because it is more urgent and leaves no room for choice—“there is no clear-cut separation between choice and constraint, between forced and voluntary mobility” (Salazar and Smart 2011: v). Although in his life story Samuzala does not mention the reason why, as a young man, he chose to emigrate to Luvuei, he told me on another occasion that he was forced to seek employment in order to pay the colonial tax and satisfy the new necessities of daily life in colonial Angola. When, years later, he was forcibly displaced from Luvuei, he knew that it would be difficult for him to find employment as an Angolan refugee living in Zambia, but he hoped nevertheless that he would be able to rise above his condition as a refugee and make ends meet. For Samuzala, choice and constraint are the two sides of every act, be it migrating, becoming a refugee, or getting married.

While choice and constraint may become on occasion the topic of conversation (Why did you leave at that particular moment? Was it the right decision? Did you have a choice?), Angolan refugees more typically engage with those existential themes by speaking of movement as an act with particular resonances. They will, for example, refer to so-called
forced displacement not by stressing the Western idea of forcefulness—or the germane Western notions of displacement and uprootedness (Malkki 1992)—but by employing a descriptive, movement-related term, kulimwanga, to become dispersed. War dispersed families and relatives, many of whom crossed the international border into Zambia and resettled on the west bank of the Zambezi River or in the larger towns located on the east bank, such as Chavuma, Zambezi, and Kabompo. Others headed willingly or unwillingly to the official refugee settlements set up by the Zambian government and UNHCR. “Dispersal” brings to mind not only the disruptive events that caused it, but also the collective experience and mental image of physical movement across the landscape as groups of relatives set off in different directions hoping to resettle in safer locations. “Dispersal” is primarily a movement concept.

Equally revealing of the emphasis on movement across the landscape, rather than forceful displacement through uprooting at the point of origin, is the description of dispersal as a form of movement imbued with particular emotional and experiential tonalities. In the Luvale language, these different tonalities are conveyed by means of two verbs: kwenda, to travel at one’s pace, and kuchina, to run. In extreme situations, people had to run for their lives. I heard many stories of people who ran for the forest and hid there for weeks, months, and even years, wearing rags, bathing with mud, and relying on boiled honey, game meat, and wild fruits for survival. My good friend Armando left Luvuei when he was a child. He had been secluded with other boys in the male initiation camp (mukanda) for several months. One night they heard the sound of shooting. “I could not stay there waiting to be slaughtered,” he said. “I left the camp, hid in the forest for three weeks and then ran toward the line [the international border].” Armando and the other neophytes were robbed of a significant part of their mukanda experience, including the final, much-anticipated “coming-out” ceremony, during which large crowds gather to celebrate and welcome the boys back into society as young men. The war had violently interrupted his initiation ceremony as well as his life. Armando told me that he ran to Zambia in the late 1970s. He only saw his mother again after the war ended in 2002.

Unknown numbers of Angolans were forced to make their way through the forests. On this account, Zambians jokingly refer to the Angolan refugees as Tree Log Jumpers (Zomboka Mingowa), Cutters of Minbungo (Vateta Minbungo, a type of vine that blocks movement), and Droppers of Head Pads (Vambila Kata). At times, Zambians employ these names pejoratively. Whereas edifying travel, kwenda, is understood as a poised, smooth, and enjoyable journey, running, kuchina, in fear is often described as hazardous

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and clumsy. Women balancing head pads on their head being a familiar image of verticality and composure, the name Droppers of Head Pads strongly conveys the idea of hasty movement provoked by shock.

But these are stereotypes. Whereas the media disseminates images of African refugees walking in long columns as orderly and obediently as cattle, some Zambians stereotypically describe Angolan refugees as small groups running through the forest in a panic, jumping over logs and fallen trees, and cutting minbongo vines as they go. In reality, though, the Angolan refugees moved in different modes and at different paces, according to the immediate reason that triggered their flight, and the distance between their point of departure and the international border. Many refugees never ran. Some refugees alternated between running and walking at different points in their journey. As for media images of defeated refugees walking in a column, they obscure the reality of forced displacement in different parts of Africa and the world. The numbers of Angolans who walked down the main roads toward the border were relatively small. Most refugees traveled in small groups down paths previously trodden for other purposes, such as trading, visiting relatives, and migrating for work. Apart from the larger influxes of the mid-1960s, mid-1980s, and late 1990s through the early 2000s, the number of refugees in northwest Zambia increased in relatively small but steady increments, adding up to the estimated total of approximately 240,000 by March 2002 (UNHCR 2002: 6).

This leads back to the problem of reification in the study of mobility. Was Samuzala a migrant? Was he a refugee? Did his identity ever shrink to the point that he became one of these labels? Migration and forced displacement always encompass a range of experiences and activities that far exceed the movement of migrating and fleeing proper. In the process of walking toward the border, many Angolans, including Samuzala, yearned to meet relatives who had migrated to Zambia during colonialism or had become refugees in an earlier date. They also hoped that those relatives would welcome them in their villages. Some refugees hoped to find employment at the CMML mission in Chavuma. The so-called refugee might be a refugee, a migrant, and a guest all at once. Movement and mobility are experientially dense. What appears to be a series of discrete, mutually exclusive types of movement is, in effect, a composite of experiences and intentions, a composite that is best translated by such generic movement-related terms as “travel,” “journey,” even “adventure.”

Noting both the similarities between different travels and the experiential density of each type of movement is at least as important as recognizing the irrefutable differences between mundane and extraordinary types.
of movement. This focus on similarities has helped me reduce the risk of reification in my own work (Silva 2013a). It has also helped me come to terms with the fact that Samuzala and other Angolans in Chavuma did not describe their experiences of forced travel as negatively as I had expected. Whereas elsewhere, forced migrants described their movement in the language of displacement and uprooting from their original homeland—the Yaqui Indians’ narratives of forced displacement from their fertile land in northwest Mexico are a case in point (Erikson 2003)—the Angolan refugees often opted to emphasize the similarities between so-called forced displacement and other forms of movement. Notwithstanding the real dangers of traversing war zones and hiding in forests, the Angolan refugees spoke of fleeing as a form of travel and even, in some cases, an adventure. Do not adventures need obstacles to overcome? Ramon Sarró (2007: 4) asked himself this question during his work with African immigrants in Portugal, some of whom described their migration experience as an adventure. At the very least this perspective has the important advantage of presenting migration, as Sarró does, “from the viewpoint of action, initiative and risk, instead of victimage, trauma and economic desperation” (2007: 2).

Let us recall Samuzala’s adventures as a migrant and a trader. In spite of the meager salary received as an employee of the national roads company of Angola, Samuzala greatly enjoyed opening up roads through the vegetation, seeing the machines cut through thick branches without effort, and covering the bare ground with gravel. Together with his coworkers, he said proudly, they built roads from Luvuei all the way to the town of Lumbala N’guimbo in the furthest southeast corner of Moxico province. They slowly traveled long distances in the process of building roads so that others could travel those same roads at motor speeds. The spirit of adventure is also present in Samuzala’s account of his trading ventures to Léua every fishing season. Walking a distance of approximately 155 kilometers on sandy terrain carrying a long cylindrical basket filled with fish on the shoulders is surely strenuous work, and selling fish to the Portuguese storekeepers in Léua may not conform to your usual image of a life adventure. Yet Samuzala nostalgically reminisced about his trips to Léua and the memorable transactions with the Portuguese storekeepers. In exchange for his fish, the Portuguese gave him money or lengths of cloth, always closing the transaction with a small gift known as pasela still used in trading today. Maybe they gave him a bit of salt, a razor, or thread and needles. “They always gave you pasela,” Samuzala said. “Before you departed, they gave you some flour and perhaps some carapaus [the Portuguese word for mackerel], and closed the transaction by saying, ‘Take
this food for your journey.” On his way back home, Samuzala would stop in Luena to buy clothes, blankets, and whatnot for his wife and children. Summarizing his trips to Léua, Samuzala said, “You placed the fish load on your shoulder and set off. You slept on the way. The moon changed. You passed Luena and headed to Léua. You traded your fish for money, and returned back home to tell your relatives about your travels (kutwa mujimbu).”

Life is not sliced up in chunks ready to be gauged and tagged by scholars. Present movements speak of past movements, and movements across regions, international borders, and even oceans speak of shorter movements from here to there. Movements of all kinds also speak of the traveler’s thrill of adventure, from the first trip ever taken to the city to that most special, long forgotten moment when the seasoned traveler, then a toddler, took his or her first steps and, in a moment of courage, let go of the mother’s finger.

**Mobility**

The importance of movement in human existence cannot be overstated. The physical ability to cover long distances at great speed has been critical for the survival of the human species since at least our Plio-Pleistocene hominid ancestors roamed the face of the earth (Jackson 2013: 227). Moving from phylogeny to ontogeny, the physical ability to crawl, stand up on one’s feet, and take the first steps is as critical to the cognitive and psychological development of every child today as it was, I suppose, in the Plio-Pleistocene. In this light, it is hardly surprising that humans everywhere—and quite regardless of their mobility index—similarly see their life course in terms of distances trodden. This physical movement defines a biographical arch: as one grows up and becomes an adult, one’s travels dramatically expand; as one ages and nears death, one’s travels contract. One begins and ends with immobility. In between, one travels.

You do not need to have lived in Ancient Greece to understand the Riddle of the Sphinx. If asked to answer the famous riddle, “What goes on four feet in the morning, two feet at noon, and three feet in the evening?” any person in the Upper Zambezi, including Samuzala, will most likely answer, “Vakemba, vakulwane, and tushinakaji.” Nursing babies (vakemba) only feel secure and protected within reach of their mothers on whose backs they travel day in, day out. Toddlers and children (vanyike) do not venture far. Toddlers do not dare crossing the village perimeter. On realizing that their mothers have left for the fields in the early morning,
leaving them behind, toddlers run down the village path in search of their mothers, crying and screaming with all their might, only to stop at the point in the path where, in their perception, the familiar space of the village meets the unknown. Children aged four or five do not venture much further unless accompanied by an older child or an adult. By the time they turn six or seven, however, children become physically stronger and learn to control their fear. They are now referred to as *tumbululu*. These *tumbululu* are often seen playing and roaming in groups. They venture out to the cultivated fields and surrounding woodlands, where they enjoy hunting for a type of rodent that lives in underground tunnels. Together, they skin, prepare, roast and eat their prey with the pride of hunters and the joy of children. Male and female *tumbululu* also collect small firewood for their mothers and fathers, as Samuzala describes in his life story.

*Ukweze*, or youth, ranges from early teenage years to early adulthood. The younger *vakweze* cycle down the motor road to the town of Zambezi or travel by bus to Solwezi, the provincial capital, but do not cross the plains and forests that separate them from the city of Luena in Angola, for example, unless accompanied by an older man. Traveling long distances within the boundaries of inhabited territory is true for both male and female *vakweze*. There is a gender difference, though. Whereas female travelers remain confined within inhabited territory throughout their lives—women remain *vakweze* in this regard—men travel anywhere in their adult years (*ukulwane*), a stage of life that stretches from young adulthood (*ukweze*) to early old age (*uwalupi*). For as long as the physical ailments of late old age (*ushinakaji*) do not slow them down, men travel far and wide within and beyond inhabited space, visiting relatives, attending rituals, setting up fishing camps on the west bank of the Zambezi River, going on hunting expeditions in Angola, selling and trading with city-dwellers, searching for employment in the cities of the Copperbelt and Lusaka. Traveling in the Upper Zambezi, by foot or motor vehicle, is always a learning experience and a personal challenge. Traveling is also seen as an adventure, and here crossing the vast expanses of the Upper Zambezi is remindful of what is, perhaps, the most emblematic symbol of independence in the United States, the road trip adventure through the desert.

And just as much as men and women love traveling, they enjoy returning home and telling their relatives, friends, and neighbors about their travels, a custom known as *kutwa mujimbu*. After exchanging greetings and sharing the latest news about events and relatives, the traveler gives a detailed account of his or her journey to a rapt audience. During my visit to Chavuma in 2010, I happened to be present when my friend Maria came to greet Sapasa, her paternal relative, on her way back home from...
Lumbala-Caquenge, an Angolan town located near the border. She had cycled down the main road to Lumbala on her own, carrying a load of commodities for trade: bathing soaps, chitenge cloths, small bottles of oil, and salt. Maria sat on a small stool facing a group of four Angolans who had meanwhile gathered to hear the latest news from Lumbala. She spoke of her trading ventures and the relatives and friends she had visited, some of whom had resided in Chavuma during the civil war. She spoke of the lack of services such as schools and health clinics, and of the shortage of basic goods such as soap and salt. She reported that elephants were destroying the cultivated fields in search of food, a clear sign, she said, that the elephants were suffering, just like people. Then Sapasa, a paraplegic middle-aged man who was born in Angola and spent most of his youth in a colonial settlement, or aldeamento, in Lumbala, asked Maria about his old neighborhood. “Did you see my bairro?” he asked. Following a moment of silence, she mustered the courage to answer: “It is no longer there.” “What do you mean?” Sapasa retorted nervously. “The only thing standing are dilapidated walls covered with bullet holes, eh mwane, thank you,” Maria said. Sapasa’s neighborhood as he remembered it had been wiped out from the face of the earth. In its place lay the ruins of a protracted conflict that destroyed both human lives and walls. Maria’s travels displayed a mix of happiness and sadness, the same emotions that her story generated.

In Routes, James Clifford points out that the word “travel” “has an inextinguishable taint of location by class, gender, race, and a certain literariness” (1997: 39). The word “travel” brings to mind the exploration voyages of white, upper-class men of the caliber of Tocqueville, Vasco da Gama, Baron Alexander van Humboldt, and Cabeza de Vaca. It also brings to mind the leisure trips of present-day tourists and the work trips of white-collar professionals, trips in which long distances are traversed in the comfort of motorized vehicles, at least today. But walkers and bicycle riders like Samuzala and Maria are long-distance travelers too, and their “travel stories” speak as eloquently as European “travel literature” to the centrality of movement and adventure in human life. This is equally true of the CEO of a multinational who flies first class around the world, the wealthy Zambian businessman who travels across Zambia in the comfort of his air-conditioned, four-wheel vehicle, and the poorest villager in Chavuma who must rely on his or her legs and calloused feet to go everywhere. As Ingold (2007: 2) puts it, “wayfaring,” no less than “transport,” is a modality of travel.

To this egalitarian assertion, we should add the following: never base your judgment of mobility on appearance. Behind the semblance of
indigence and simplicity in a rural setting of Zambia stand well-traveled individuals who have been to South Africa, England, Portugal, and Romania. A case in point is Mr. Chinoya. When we met in 2002, this middle-aged Luchazi man had just arrived from his fields, a hoe on his right shoulder and rags for clothing—hardly the picture of a seasoned traveler. Yet Mr. Chinoya, in addition to his long distance travels in the Upper Zambezi, had been to Lisbon and Porto, the largest cities of Portugal. The late Mr. Chivundo also comes to mind. In spite of his old age, Mr. Chivundo, a Luvale man, stopped by my house in Chavuma once a week to sell his mafwo (leaf vegetables) and drink a cup of sugar-filled tea. Again, like Mr. Chinoya, Mr. Chivundo was hardly the image of an international traveler, clad as he always was in a faded, several-sizes-too-short dark grey suit, a half-shredded nylon mesh for a hat, and a large basket of vegetables on his right shoulder. Yet Mr. Chivundo had spent several years in Johannesburg, South Africa, working in the mines. He knew all too well that mining is a dangerous and poorly paid job, yet he enjoyed interspersing mining stories with comical machine sounds produced with his mouth, and hilarious imitations of the bossy demeanor and stiff postures of the mine supervisors. And Mr. Chinoya and Mr. Chivundo are not the only well-traveled men hiding behind the appearance of poverty and peasantry. As one Luvale proverb reminds the high-browed: “Ask the peasant where to find the oil container” (Hula watoma akulweze saji yamaji).

Mobility Against Immobility

In the contest for power that followed the end of colonialism and the colonial war in 1974, the MPLA and UNITA nationalist movements turned violently against each other, unleashing what would become one of the deadliest and most disruptive civil wars fought on African soil in the twentieth century. East Angola, once again, became a strategic battleground. As traveling became increasingly dangerous, many east Angolans were forced to remain within the bounds of their townships, now under the control of the MPLA-affiliated national government. Samuzala explained:

We were afraid, so we remained still (kuliswata). If you lived in town and decided to go somewhere, the UNITAs might catch you and ask: “You, town-dweller, where are you going? You, come with us!” They took many of us to the bush. People feared traveling, so they sat still. Traveling became too dangerous. Do you think that we were living in Angola as we are living here in Zambia? Uh-uh. We lived in fear. We always thought, “They might find me and punish me.” Those who ventured out into the bush feared to be asked on their return
to town, “Why did you go to the bush, to the bush-people?” We traveled with fear. We lived in discontent. That is why we fled.

Samuzala chose to flee early on, in retrospective the right decision. By fleeing in 1975, he and his family escaped the protracted civil war waged by UNITA against the government, including, as Angolans in Chavuma always note, the atrocities committed in east Angola in the mid-1980s and the intense armed conflict that preceded the cease-fire in April 2002. By March 2002, as mentioned, approximately 240,000 Angolans had sought refuge in Zambia alone (UNHCR 2002: 6).

Unemployed and disillusioned, Samuzala and his family set off on their long journey to Zambia. They took the same route that countless other travelers had taken before them. On the first day, they crossed the Lungwewbungu River to its southern bank. On the second day, they reached the Vundu Lagoon by the Kashiji River. On the third day, they reached Nyambingila, a small town in Zambia. On the fourth day, they passed through Nyakulemba, near the Kashiji River, then crossed the Zambezi River to its eastern bank. They rested for several days in Chavuma before proceeding to the village of Samuzala’s father in Kabompo, an additional leg of some 250 kilometers that Samuzala omitted in his narrative. In the early 1980s, however, following his father’s death, Samuzala and his wife and children moved again, this time to the village of his classificatory mother in Chavuma, where we met. He chose not to settle in the Meheba Refugee Settlement located south of Solwezi, the provincial capital, because, as he put it, he did not want to be trapped in the refugee settlement as he had been trapped in Luvuei.

In his life story, Samuzala does not paint an image of despondency. He recognizes that the civil war severely impacted the life of all Angolan refugees, but nowhere in his discourse are there signs of hopelessness and defeat. The concept of forced displacement is predicated on the bipolar distinction between those who hold power and those who are at the mercy of that power, having no choice but to flee. Robbed of the right to determine their present as well as their future, refugees become reduced to mere victims who head for the closest border almost by instinct. They become objects whose movement is a reaction to the action of others. Writing in 1973, E. F. Kuntz graphically expressed this view when he compared the movement of refugees to the movement of the billiard ball: “devoid of inner direction, their path is governed by the kinetic factors of inertia, friction and the vectors of outside forces applied on them” (1973: 131). This image of refugees, however, speaks more clearly to the cultural and intellectual predisposition to see necessity and freedom as mutually exclusive.

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than it does to the ways in which refugees see themselves and perceive their act of fleeing. Hannah Arendt puts it thus: “Since action acts upon beings who are capable of their own actions, reaction, apart from being a response, is always a new action that strikes out on its own and affects others” (1958: 190).

We can say that the military conflict forced Samuzala to flee, leaving him no choice, and that his fleeing was therefore his reaction to a threatening situation that he could not possibly ignore or control. But, as Samuzala sees it, he was not forced to flee; he was forced to be still. What if the war continued for a long time? Was he going to condemn himself and his loved ones to a life of misery, fear, and immobility? Was he going to curl up in a corner and wait to be shot? For Samuzala, the experience of being stuck and immobile meant being unable, to use an English expression commonly heard in Zambia, to move freely. From his perspective, therefore, fleeing is not an instinctual response to aggression; it is instead his choice, his cry of freedom.

The existential significance of drawing together different collective phenomena under the umbrella of movement should now be clearer. Regardless of type of movement and degree of constraint, movement is seen as an act of freedom whose existential value can only be fully grasped in opposition to the prison of immobility. Worse than having to flee and become a refugee is to be forcibly immobilized. Consider, in this regard, Emmanuel Mulamila, a Ugandan man that Jackson met in Copenhagen in 2010 and whose life story he recounts in The Wherewithal of Life. In conversation with Jackson, Emmanuel describes the many forms of physical and psychological abuse that he and his younger siblings underwent at the hands of their aunt in Uganda, the reason why he ran away from home. In Emmanuel’s words, “It was from that period that I stopped being immobile, I stopped being home. That’s the time I realized that if life got too hard for me, I had the alternative to leave.” Moved by Emmanuel’s story, Jackson asked himself “whether this was what people do in an impasse, with all passages blocked. Desperate to recover some sense of freedom in mobility, they hit the road” (2013: 32).

**Immobility**

In Chavuma, Samuzala channeled his energies into clearing fields, hunting, and fishing. Life was harder than in Angola, but with determination and hard work he was able to make a living and raise his five children. He sold game meat and smoked fish to other villagers in Chavuma, using
the profit to purchase goods such as salt, soap, and clothing from the local stores, and then selling these goods to the Angolan civilians and UNITA soldiers who came to the weekly market held in the no man’s land past the gate of the Zambian customs.

Then, his life changed. In need of good-quality bark to make cylindrical beehives, he followed the course of the Chivombo stream to its source in Angola. He was walking down a sandy path through the forest, mindful to observe the tree trunks as he walked, when he was blown up in the air in a cloud of smoke. He had stepped on a pressure-operated blast mine.

SAMUZULA: I had gone to the source of the Chivombo stream, looking for bark to cut out a beehive. I had said to myself, “Let me look at the trees on the other side of the ‘line’ [the international border].” And I crossed the “line” and entered Angola. That’s when I stepped on a “bomb” [landmine]. All of a sudden, paa! My leg, my leg. My cousin, who was walking behind me, dragged me to the shade of a tree. I remember noticing dirt all over my body and an intense smell of smoke.

SÓNIA: Nothing happened to your friend?
SAMUZULA: No, nothing. I told him, “Come here, help me, come here!” He came and carried me on his back. I asked him to take me to the stream because I felt very thirsty. He scooped a little water with the lid of his plastic canteen and brought it to my lips. He said, “That’s enough, too much water will kill you.”

It is common knowledge in Chavuma that the border area is heavily mined. Portuguese military forces laid the first landmines in 1970–1971 as a strategy to curtail MPLA infiltration from Zambia, where the MPLA liberation fighters had set up two military bases with the consent of Kenneth Kaunda, then president of Zambia (Pelissier 1974: 99). In the 1980s, FAPLA, the military branch of the Angolan government in independent Angola, planted more landmines in the region in its counterinsurgency operations against UNITA (Samuzala is convinced that he stepped on one of these mines). Beginning in the 1980s, UNITA soldiers too employed “hidden killers,” as landmines are often called, reportedly for a different reason: to channel the movement of civilians across the border and tax them in the form of passes and trading fees. In a country so heavily mined as Angola, the risk of stepping on a landmine is high. Angola has one of the highest rates of landmine injuries per capita in the world. In a population of about twenty million, there are approximately 80,000 landmine amputees (ICRC 2008).

Samuzala became injured on a Monday. His cousin hurried back to Chavuma to seek help, and on Wednesday a small party of men finally arrived. They carried Samuzala to the Chivombo clinic, where he received
first-aid treatment. The following morning a vehicle from the mission hospital came to collect him. Three days had meanwhile passed, too long to avoid amputation.

The irony of his accident is not lost to Samuzala: he had escaped alive from a military conflict that killed hundreds of thousands of people, only to step on a landmine, a residue of that conflict, while leisurely searching for bark to make a beehive. Being from Moxico, one of the most heavily mined districts in Angola (HRW Arms Project 1997: 29), he knew well that narrow paths are a common site of civilian mine injury. He also knew that antipersonnel landmines, like chemical and biological weapons, fail to distinguish between soldiers and civilians. Yet Samuzala had not let that risk dominate his life. He knew where to find superior bark for his beehives, so he went there. Now, Samuzala felt doomed and literally stuck. He had become a chitonji, a disabled person. His days of travel were no more.

In a place where mobility is not only valued and encouraged but constitutes an integral part of the definition of personhood, immobility is tantamount to social death. And in the same way that the experience of mobility transcends the differences among categories of mobility and their underlying causes, the experience of immobility is clearly not reducible to the conditions that caused it—the civil war, aging, or landmines. Samuzala often described himself as an old man. To express his feelings, he sometimes spoke of mbombolyo, a heavy word that conveys the sense of being useless and hopeless. Samuzala felt robbed of a crucial dimension of life as an adult. The landmine that took his leg accelerated his life course, turning the travels of adulthood and middle age into the immobility of very old age.

Only the valuing of movement as life itself begins to explain what, to me, came with the jolt of an existential revelation: that, in order to convey the tragedy of amputation, Samuzala invoked not the injustice of what David Birmingham calls “a war by proxy between the United States and the Soviet Union” (2006: 11), a war in which the insignificance of human life sneaks out through the cracks of political demagogy in the form of that most technocratic and indifferent of expressions, “civilian casualties”; nor the anger at the armed men who having not killed on the spot planted landmines that would kill or maim later; nor the anger at a global system that allows for those landmines to be sold for a modicum—but the absolute misery of being turned into an elderly person before due time. Nothing could possibly convey the experience of physical disability and immobility as clearly and completely as old age.

Needless to say, valuing mobility in contrast with physical immobility framed as old age is not in the least archaic or exotic. Certainly, the highly
mobile are familiar with both the biological reality of aging and the ontological metaphor of old age, even though great numbers of them nurse the illusion that with cars, cruises, technology, and vitamins they will never be brought to a standstill, not even in old age. Is not old age what we do about it? In this world of mirrors, flashing lights, and dreams, it is refreshing to listen to a man like Richard, a 69-year-old from northeast England: “I don’t think I have the energy and I think that some immobility comes with age. You know, I mean I have problems with stairs. I know exactly how to deal with it as far as I can, but in addition to that, you’re just not as strong, you’re not as fit as you used to be, you can’t be, can you?” (Ziegler and Schwanen 2011: 768)

**Immobility as Mobility**

The Luvale word for being injured, *kulemana*, conveys the feeling of heaviness and of a struggle to walk. By the time we met, though, Samuzala walked with notable ease thanks to a carved pair of heavy crutches. If he needed to travel far, a relative or friend carried him on the back rack of their bicycle. What Samuzala could not do was to carry out the more physically demanding activities typically associated with able-bodied adult men in rural Upper Zambezi: clearing the forest for new cassava fields and cultivating vegetable “gardens” in alluvial soils, setting up fishing camps on the west bank of the Zambezi River in the rainy season, trading dried fish and other commodities in the local, regional, and Copperbelt markets, building and maintaining mud-brick houses, keeping beehives on tree crowns. In a region where walking and traveling are signs of physical strength, maturity, autonomy, and social worth, leg amputation amounts to social death. Samuzala had bravely fled from several situations of immobility in his lifetime; from amputation, however, he could not flee. And yet he discovered other ways to be mobile.

SÔNIA: Do you remember what thoughts crossed your mind after the accident?
SAMUZALA: I thought many things. I felt sadness in my heart and I said to myself, “I’ll kill myself.” Thinking of the difficulties ahead saddened me so much that I just wanted to die. Then, a white person came to comfort me at the mission hospital. That person said, “You are a man, do not think too many things, no. You must pray. God will help you in all your thoughts and give you peace.” Later that day, Dr. Burness, the medical doctor who amputated my leg, came to see me. I noticed that he carried a slasher of the type used by the mission workers to cut overgrown vegetation. “Take this slasher and concentrate on
sharpening the blade,” he said. When my leg improved, Dr. Burness would drive me to church in his vehicle and drive me back to the hospital after the readings. He told me about God’s words and showed me the Bible.

When they took me back to my village, I asked myself, “What will I do?” I thought about this over and over again. One day I thought to myself, “Why don’t I become a basket maker like my cousin? I will plait baskets!” So I visited my cousin, the late Saluyambo, who lived nearby. I visited him many times. I sat there and practiced weaving until I learned the skill. I had thought that there was nothing left for me to do, but no, I could still make a living. An older man said to me, “My son, you should make baskets! Difficulties strike without warning. If you have a skill, you and your children will be able to survive.” Saluyambo had already grown old (nazye lyehi), so he used to stay at his village plaiting baskets. I learned by sitting there and observing him. One day I said, “Please, let me try.” I returned home. Another day I sat there chatting and looking. “Please, you need a break,” I told my cousin. I learned basket making by replacing him now and then. Soon I mastered the skill. It took me three months of hard work.

According to Human Rights Watch, the future of amputees in Angola is extremely bleak. As stated in one of their publications on the topic of landmines, the future of most amputees “will consist of being cared for by their families, or attempting to earn a living in one of the few occupations open to them, such as street trading or—for those with education—secretarial or clerical work. The majority, who come from farming backgrounds, are likely to remain a burden on their families for the foreseeable future” (1997: 34). The future of Angolan amputees residing in Chavuma is equally bleak. And yet, much like street trading and secretarial work in urban areas, basket making enabled Samuzala to escape the negative category of “unproductive relative” (HRW Arms Project 1993: 4). Thanks to basket making, Samuzala became a “worker” whose beautifully woven baskets he sells to local clients and exchanges for used clothing with CMML missionaries. He became a “productive relative” who is able to meet the basic needs of his wife and children and earn the respect of others in his community. Samuzala may no longer be able to travel on foot to see the elephants, as the Lu-vale proverb in epigraph says, but he can weave beautiful baskets with his fingers, baskets that others will travel to see, admire, and obtain.

Writing about the elderly in rural southwest England and Wales, Les Todres and Kathleen Galvin show that the elderly achieve some of the purposes of mobility through technology (the Internet, Skype, webcams, mobile phones) as well as connections with friends, relatives, neighbors, and professional care providers. Movement occurs in different types of space in addition to physical space, making it possible for the immobile to
cultivate nonphysical forms of mobility (2012: 61; Ziegler and Schwanen 2011: 760). Although Samuzala has no access to these technologies (I say this at a time when cell phone calls have become as frequent as letter writing in Chavuma), he would certainly not fail to recognize important similarities between Angolan amputees and the elderly abroad (or the elderly in general). Beneath the differences of appearance, cultural outlook, and wealth, both the very old and the amputated strive to devise new forms of mobility through which “the outside world comes in” (Todres and Galvin 2012: 61). From this perspective, modern communication devices and ancient arts such as basket weaving are closer to one another than they appear.

Another powerful way of overcoming one’s physical immobility is the act of reminiscing about the past and telling one’s life story to friends and visitors, including the anthropologist. Samuzala traveled far and wide as he told me his life story, from his childhood in Luena to the present. Like going on a journey and weaving a basket, storytelling, for Samuzala, defined a line, a movement forward.

And thus it is that walking, storytelling, and weaving are subsumed into one single field of inquiry—line tracing (Ingold 2007: 1). Life is a meshwork of lines. These lines, however, do not go out for a walk on their own, as Ingold claims, borrowing from the artist Paul Klee (Klee 1961: 105, cited in Ingold 2007: 73, 81). Samuzala is the one tracing lines in the process of walking, telling stories, and weaving baskets, the one creating the meshwork we call his life. And Samuzala is neither a “rhizome” nor a “nomad.” He is, more simply, and less pretentiously, a Chokwe man who has lived his life as an Angolan citizen and an Angolan refugee at a time of violence and upheaval, a man whose life, like yours and mine, has been lived at the crossroads of mobility and immobility.

I do not think that Samuzala’s new lifeline as a basket maker, which he traces back to his encounter with Saluyambo, a gifted basket maker, ever took away his suffering and troubled thoughts. Unable to undo the injury inflicted on him—unable to reverse the steps taken toward the landmine—he continued to suffer alone and with others. Yet his kindness and vivacity showed the world that he found some degree of acceptance and inner peace, some degree of “letting-be-ness.” He could not physically flee his condition, but he could devise other ways to be mobile.

**Mobility—Immobility**

From the viewpoint of high mobility, it may appear that the less mobile have nothing of import to contribute to current debates about mobility in the contemporary world. I hope that Samuzala’s life story, as well as
my engagement with it from an existential stance, shows that this bipolar view of the world is a figment of positionality, and that, in reality, walkers are in movement as much as flyers (and I do not mean this is in the selective sense that walkers move themselves whereas flyers are moved by airplanes, and all they see are clouds).

That movement is life itself in the Upper Zambezi becomes clear in Samuzala’s life story. Whereas some might emphasize the differences among types of movement, Samuzala stresses what they share as movement. Whereas some might be drawn to the depths of personal and collective suffering at the hands of colonizers and armed guerrillas, Samuzala finds space in his narrative to convey the thrill of adventure and the sweetness of travel encounters. Whereas some might privilege the power of social, political, and economic forces to determine population movements and individual stories, Samuzala highlights those moments when one takes control by acting with one’s feet. Movement is an existential cry against immobility. This, to me, is the central message in Samuzala’s story, a message that builds a bridge between the Upper Zambezi and the entire world. Being alive is to move—across physical space, across a life journey in storytelling, across the distance between one and others in basket making, Skype, and Facebook.

But Samuzala’s story is pregnant with other insights that are directly relevant to current debates about mobility in the contemporary world. In addition to showing that mobility and immobility are relative to one another, Samuzala shows that mobility and immobility are not absolute conditions, with complete immobility being the flip side of pure, unimpeded mobility. We have already seen that, in the case of the elderly and amputees, both of whom are mobile to some degree, it is best to speak of relative immobility. The same can be said of mobility. Dissect mobility down the middle and you will realize that mobility is composed of the same substance as immobility. As a lived reality, mobility includes moments of physical movement and moments of stillness, being best described as relative mobility.

In the Upper Zambezi, all travels, voluntary or involuntary, are perceived and planned as a series of shorter journeys separated by stops to rest and take a breath, savor a hot meal, and chat with friends and relatives. Reflecting this understating of traveling as an alternation between movement and stillness, the Luvale equivalent to the question “Where are you going?” literally translates as “Where will you stop?” To this question, the traveler might answer, “I’ll stop at Mr. Makina’s home.” In long, strenuous journeys through the uninhabited territory of plains and woodlands, travelers will stop at well-known resting camps. In the Luvale
language, these camps are known as *vitulilo* (from *kutulila*, to lower one’s load). They are always conveniently located near a water source, typically a stream or a waterhole, and they provide good shade. Travelers plan their journeys in terms of *vitulilo*. They might plan to reach the first camp by midday, where they will rest for some time, and then proceed toward the next camp located in the outskirts of the forest, where they will spend the night. Signaling the recent presence of other travelers, many of these camps have makeshift buildings made of branches and long grass, firewood, and remainders of food such as animal bones. In the same way that hikers in the United States may rest and camp at lean-tos, long-distance travelers in the Upper Zambezi depend on their *vitulilo*.

But life happens en route, too. As travelers move across the earth in engagement with other travelers and the environment, they observe the ground on which they walk and the vegetation around them; they listen to the wind blowing and the birds singing; they collect tree fruits for the journey and hunt a hare for dinner; and they engage in conversation with their travel companions as well as other travelers met along the way. These chance encounters provide valuable information. “The sands are too thick down this path,” someone might say; “Turn left to avoid a group of soldiers,” a second traveler might say. Life happens on the way in the Upper Zambezi and everywhere. A couple I know met in the subway of New York City. Like other commuters, they are in the habit of avoiding the slightest contact with strangers by blatantly gluing their eyes on a written page or blocking their ears with headphones. On that day, though, their eyes met.

It may be the case that travel is always “a liminal space fraught with uncertainty” (1998: 166), as Rasmussen says of the Tuareg of Niger; yet travel is not deprived of dwelling experiences. Conversely, neither is dwelling free of uncertainty and the thrill of adventure, as Georg Simmel reminds us in his thoughts on passion (1965 [1911]). In his later work, Heidegger too moved in this direction by developing the concept of *Gegnet*, or “abiding expanse” (1966).9 Whereas earlier Heidegger had focused on the germane concepts of dwelling and building as ways of being at peace in a place and caring for one another and one’s environment (1993: 361), the concept of *Gegnet* represents his attempt to bring together the notion of dwelling and mobility, opening up the possibility of homecoming within homelessness.10

Of late, many scholars have urged us to replace fixidity with fluidity, dwelling with mobility, closure with openness. James Clifford (1997) favors routes over roots, Marc Augé diverts our attention from “places” to “non-places”—those sites such as airport lounges, highways, and

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supermarkets marked by “the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral” (1995: 78)—and Tim Ingold says in Being Alive: “To be . . . is not to be in place but to be along paths. The path, and not the place, is the primary condition of being, or rather of becoming” (2011: 12). Borrowing from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987), Ingold speaks of “lines of flight” and “lines of becoming,” and he sees the tracing of those lines and trails as his “project of restoring life to anthropology” (2011: 14, 83). These radical departures from emplacement are indeed revealing of the history of anthropology and Western thought. But they are sustainable only in print. In daily existence, mobile individuals experience dwelling, and physically immobilized individuals experience movement. As humans, we exist in the crossroads created by the inextricable possibilities of stasis and mobility, a space that sets limits to our existence but also opens up new horizons.

In addition to highlighting the importance of movement outside the technologically advanced wealthier nations, Samuzala’s life story also breaks the spell of modernity. It produces this effect not by critically reflecting on modernity in the abstract (Modernity with a capital “M”) but by reminding us of truths that we know well but often forget, a common paradox. The first truth pertains to aging. The highly mobile may move faster in some regards, but they too shall not escape the pains and sorrows of relative immobility, if not in the form of forced displacement or amputation, then in the form of that most inescapable of biological happenings, old age.

The second truth concerns the grimmer side of globalized mobility. The highly mobile may treasure their mobility and the many advantages it brings—among them the sense of their distinctiveness from both their own past (the Middle Ages) and the nameless mass of their premodern contemporaries who live in slow motion in developing countries. They may marvel at the beauty of speed, as Filippo Marinetti noted in his Futurist manifest in 1909. But mobility is not without friction, boundaries, and stasis. Sigurd Bergmann asks: “How can an artifact fall to pieces? How can speed turn into rest? How can the freedom of moving turn into the suffering of standstill? How can mobility turn into gridlock?” (2008: 14). If asked how vindele (Westerners) have impacted their physical movement in the last one hundred years, residents of the Upper Zambezi will not fail to mention some of the following: the delineation of the international border and the opening of border customs in Chavuma; the forceful relocation of entire villages to colonial settlements in Angola during the liberation war; the tight control of mobility by both sides of the military conflict after independence, including the seclusion of men, women, and children in towns and bush camps; the official refugee settlements in independent
Zambia where large numbers of Angolans were detained for decades; and the devastating effects of landmines on travel and daily life, including possible amputation. Tellingly, to convey their experience of immobility in all these different yet similar situations, people draw on the existential metaphor of entrapment. For them, modernity has meant to a large degree forced immobility, an experience that they certainly share with many others throughout the world. Consider the Mozambican women, children, conscripted young men, and the elderly who were forced to remain “in place” within their area of residence throughout the fifteen-year-long Mozambican civil war (Lubkemann 2008); or the case of the growing numbers of illegal immigrants and asylum seekers who find themselves detained in the British Immigration Removal Center (Hall 2012). Following the example of Salazar and Smart (2011: iii), we should seriously ask ourselves what is distinctive about modernity: incessant mobility unimpaired by borders and boundaries, as claimed by modernity enthusiasts, or, to a large degree, the tight control, regulation, and surveillance of mobility in a global system of nation-states.

Not all is negative, though. In the Upper Zambezi, people also associate—indeed welcome—modernity in the form of its commodities, from the soaps and school uniforms introduced during colonialism to more recent goods such as used clothing, cell phones, solar panels, and motorcycles, to name a few. People also value tarred roads, which are now being built by the Chinese. When I visited Chavuma in 2010, eight years after the end of the Angolan civil war and thirteen years after the previous Chavuma subdistrict became a separate district of Zambia, a good-humored Zambian friend told me that now they had a roundabout to funnel the traffic near the market, a clear sign of development. And these are positive developments in the main. I am troubled, however, by the association of modernity with mobile objects on one side and immobile people on the other. Does this not cast a shadow over modernity and the uncritical celebration of mobility?

In a thought-provoking reading of Mia Couto’s novel The Last Flight of the Flamingo (2004), Andrew Mahistedt explains what he means by the concept of the residual: “The residual exemplifies the contradiction inherent in the dominant narrative of globalization as fluidity, migration, and mobility: movement in some places, or from some places to others, leaves an immobile residue in others” (2013: 461). To his list of amputees, landmines, and bullet holes on standing walls, I add the refugees and the official refugee settlements. As I see it, the material residues of immobility share an aspect of invisibility that enables the empire, as Mahistedt calls the powers that be, to divert attention from them. Examples of such
residues are buried landmines, remotely located refugee settlements, and illegal refugees who opt to self-settle in the villages and communities of their host country, blending with the local population, as took place in Chavuma (Silva 2011). Amputees present a problem to the empire because they cannot be hidden away.

But we must not stop here. Critical as it is to acknowledge the place of immobility in the larger project of modernity, we should never reduce the immobilized to their condition of immobility. The process of objectification operates like state violence, by essentializing its target—“effectively extinguishing the person as an individual subject through a process of iconic essentialising that transforms him or her into a mere instance of a more general case: a species, a specimen, a pathology, a class” (Jackson 2002: 78; see also 2005). But the objects of essentializing do not see themselves as objects. In the case of the Angolan refugees, they never saw themselves as helpless refugees (Malkki 1996) who have lost everything: loved ones, material possessions, and political rights. True, they lost too much, too rapidly. They also welcomed the help offered by international organizations, and, in order to receive that help, presented themselves as refugees. But such calamitous situations only make it the more remarkable that many Angolans in Chavuma explained their flight as Samuzala did in his life story: they fled to Zambia because they refused being trapped in between both sides of the military conflict. Their flight was an act of heroism, not victimage. To offer help to refugees in the process of objectifying them as helpless victims and detaining them in camps is another act of violence perpetrated with impunity. Not surprisingly, some Angolans in Chavuma did not fail to notice the similarities between being forcibly immobilized in the settlements set up by the Portuguese in colonial Angola and being forcibly immobilized in the official refugee settlements set up by UNHCR in independent Zambia. In both cases, the detainees felt trapped and demeaned.

It is against the ever-present danger of reification in all arenas of life—including humanitarian discourses about refugees and scholarly discourses about mobility—that Samuzala’s life story, or any life story, becomes a beacon. Whereas others may separate and crystallize, Samuzala, in his narrative of movement, reveals nuance, complexity, overlap, and density. Mobility covers the entire gamut of human action—from the first steps a toddler takes, to visiting relatives, walking to work, hunting, emigrating, and being displaced. In addition to constituting the object of study of the blooming academic field of “mobilities,” as several authors note (see Urry 2007: 8–9; and Cresswell 2006: 1), this entire gamut of activities speaks to universal existential themes: life as movement, immobility
as entrapment, movement as an act of freedom against immobility, life as a never-ending remaking of the conditions that act upon one. No historical event, however cataclysmic, forces one to become a label. When all else fails, as Jackson puts it, one can act with one’s feet; one can hit the road. Existentially speaking, there is much that we share as humans notwithstanding the different social circles that we call our own, and the different paces at which we move.

Notes

2. Conversely, fast travelers continue walking on a daily basis, for work and leisure. In fact, as John Urry observes, walking “is still a component of almost all other modes of movement” (2007: 63).
3. This life story is an abbreviation of what was a much longer conversation recorded in Chavuma in August 1999. I thank Samuzala for allowing me to tape record our conversation. I also thank my friend Sapasa, who was present during the recording session, for his willingness to clarify some of Samuzala’s historical references and technical terminology. All personal names mentioned in this book chapter are pseudonyms.
4. For information on the Angolan wars, from the liberation struggle in the 1960s to the ceasefire in 2002; see for example Birmingham 2006; Brinkman 2007; Chabal and Vidal 2008; and Marcum 1978.
5. The year of 1966 marked the beginning of the armed conflict against the colonial regime in east Angola. In 1983, UNITA launched a major offensive against MPLA strongholds in the area, gaining control of the entire Alto-Zambeze district located just north of Chavuma. In 1985–1986, MPLA retaliated, and UNITA retreated into the bush. Finally, bitter fighting occurred again toward the end of the war (1998 through early 2002) when the government forces wrested control of important towns from UNITA in the eastern region.
6. Most refugees have meanwhile returned to Angola. As of December 2012, Zambia hosted 23,000 Angolans whose refugee status ended that year. Eligible Angolans are encouraged to apply for permanent residence (UNHCR 2012; 2014).
7. Aldeamentos were fortified settlements originally set up by the Portuguese to confine, control, and protect the rural population that they had forcibly relocated. The Portuguese sought in this way to prevent the villagers from supporting the insurgency.
8. Todres and Galvin (2010) similarly draw on Heidegger’s concept of “letting-be-ness” (Gelassenheit) in their study of the elderly in southwest England and Wales.
10. In the same vein, Urry speaks of “[dwelling] through being both at home and away” (2000: 132) and “[dwelling] in various mobilities” (157); James Clifford refers to “dwelling-in-travel” (1997: 2); and Rapport and Dawson address the possibility of being “at home in movement” (1998: 27).
11. Julia Powles reports that the Angolans residing in the official Meheba Refugee Settlement felt “trapped” in the settlement, in part because they were required to seek permission from the Zambian government Refugee Officer to leave the settlement (2005: 5; 2000). See also Hansen 1977: 31–32; and 1990: 31.

References


