Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

# Bridging Mobilities: ICTs appropriation by Cameroonians in South Africa and The Netherlands
Nyamnjoh, H.M.

Cover Page

Universiteit Leiden

Leiden University Repository

**Author**: Henrietta Mambo Nyamnjoh
**Title**: Bridging mobilities : ICTs appropriation by Cameroonians in South Africa and the Netherlands
**Issue Date**: 2013-11-28

## *'Your mami and papa for this country na meeting'*: PIFAM and MACUDA as agency in a transnational world

### Introduction

> The ubiquitous 'home town' associations are another example of the efficacy of ideologies of homes in ordering communal responses to modernization. These associations bind together individuals from across socioeconomic stations and in spaces far away from their ancestral communities. They serve as powerful vehicles for the mobilization of resources, through levies on their members or prying of access to state resources, in order to promote the 'development' of their home villages. (Eyoh 1999: 291)

The Pinyin Family Meeting (PIFAM) and the Mankon Cultural and Development Association (MACUDA) are home-village associations that represent the Pinyin and Mankon migrants in Cape Town. Similarly, the defunct[1] Ngemba[2] association in the Netherlands was created to cater for the Ngemba Grassfielders there. The formation of village associations can be traced back to the period of inter-village weekly trading and they were further developed by bush trade as migrants often travel in clusters. These associations bring together groups of persons who not only share a common place of origin but are also attracted by the aims and objectives of the association. The opening quote by Eyoh forms the backdrop through which I seek to understand the PIFAM and MACUDA home-village associations. The term 'home village' is chosen here instead of the term 'home town' that is used in most studies on associations (Mercer *et al.* 2008). Home village is in line with references made by the members of these associations who

---

[1] Its collapse, according to informants, was due to its admission of non-Ngemba members, which led to financial misappropriation.

[2] Those who hail from Mezam Division and have a common language such as Mankon, Akum Bafut, Chomba, Nsongwa, Mbatu, Mendankwe and Nkwen.

feel that they are representing their village, and home to them is Pinyin and Mankon and not the regional capital Bamenda. However, within this defined locus of Pinyin and Mankon, there are imperceptible demarcations and members emphasize the quarter from which they hail. Apart from face-to-face associational meetings, transnational connections with members of the diaspora and the home-based members are linked in virtual spaces through Internet-mediated spaces, but with a common idea of development at home.

This chapter seeks to explore the emergence of home-village associations and their role in maintaining social cohesion within communities in the host country, and serves as a platform to project their identity. I examine the ways in which the Pinyin and Mankon migrants are 'crafting lives and communities' (Reynolds 2009), how they maintain ties with other associations and the formation of virtual associational ties with diaspora groups and home-based elites as well as with other Internet-mediated associations.

It is posited here that, although being a member of these associations is seen as a logical conclusion to proving one's belonging in the home village, belonging, to migrants, is seen as an insurance policy. In addition, due to the internal rules and regulations of the associations, the latter have taken up a parental-style role towards members through assistance, sanctions and disciplinary measures to curb unruly behaviour. In this regard, I question the role of the home-village association in the sociocultural life of its members. What is the role of ICTs in associational formation and cohesion? Central to the formation of communities is the availability of communication that permeates and creates a 'gel-like character of contemporary communicational settings' (Sheller 2004: 47), thus creating 'coupling and decoupling'. This emphasizes the notion of belonging that acts as a pull factor in both the host and home countries concurrently and connects migrants as well as the spatially dispersed. Despite this dispersal, the common factor that binds them is their sense of place. And in consonance with the findings of Mercer *et al*. (2008: 6; 2009: 143), 'place' is not bounded but is instead fluid with focus on the home village, while meeting venues are momentarily considered as the home village (see also Feldman-Savelsberg & Ndonko 2010). For instance, MACUDA regularly meets in the home of one of its member, a house that has come to be known as '*nda-ah Makoŋ*'. Loosely translated, this means the 'house or seat of the Mankon people' and emphasizes the notion of place with reference to home. What all researchers seem to agree on is the importance of place, as place is fluid and not bounded. Whereas I make a case that although migrants operate within multiple spatialities, place to them in this study is the home village because of their common shared identity and culture as is reiterated by this elite: 'I love Pinyin where my nivel (sic) was buried'.[3] A similar claim is made

---

[3]    Email posted on Pinyin News Forum, 15/02/2012.

by van den Bersselaar (2005). Such firm rootedness could be explained by the fact that most migrants live their lives in the future and procrastinate in anticipation of a better life in the home village, the place where all their development is geared. They see their (often long-term) stay in Cape Town as only 'temporary'. The overt focus on home – Pinyin and Mankon – reflects their efforts to engage with the 'ideology of home' (Eyoh 1999) as well as the notion of belonging through the revitalization of ethnicity. In other words, these migrant communities, besides a continuous regard for the place of origin as home, lend critical financial support to home-based associations as concerns development projects because they need to be a 'place, a home, for oneself, … a place one can come to when necessary … a place to be buried when one dies' (Trager 1998: 373). This ideology of a burial place is firmly rooted in the migrant's repertoire and is at the centre of his/her relationship with the home village. This also underscores the reason why, despite the hurdles encountered in repatriating the bodies of some Pinyin migrants, an elder in the association had to appeal directly to the corpses (Chapter 8) about the importance of going back home. The following section starts by describing the associations, showing them as agentic structures that operate within multiple social arenas as well as in space and time.

## Overview and characteristics of PIFAM and MACUDA

*PIFAM*
The general assembly of PIFAM is the body that represents all registered Pinyins in Cape Town and non-Pinyin who choose to become members of the group. If non-Pinyin belongs to the association, it means temporarily giving up their own ethnic identity in favour of that of Pinyin in order to be accorded full rights like any other Pinyin member. In the same vein, the new member has the same obligations towards the association as other Pinyin members. Members weigh up their options prior to becoming members, which resonates with the claim by Feldman-Savelsberg & Ndongo (2010: 374) that belonging to ethnic associations draws on a combination of primordial, performative, strategic and reactive identities. This is because, as they are relegated to the margins of the host society with less room for integration than tolerance (Nyamnjoh, 2011), village associations are useful in upholding the values of the home country. However, as of 2013, PIFAM's constitution was revised and the admission of non-Pinyin members was restricted to ensure their Pinyin identity, which is fast eroding as the language that gives them the Pinyin identity is dying out, as meeting sessions are now held in Pidgin English. Meetings are now held in the Pinyin dialect and in English for the benefit of non-Pinyin members. In addition, the president, the vice-president and the secretary are now elected on their ability to speak the dialect. These measures will ensure that the language that gives them their Pinyin identity will

be strengthened. By contrast, migrants in the Netherlands, rather than projecting their Pinyin-ness or Mankon-ness like their counterparts in Cape Town, have chosen for Cameroonian identity and see themselves as members of a nation. This leads us to question why there is so much emphasis on an ethnic association in Cape Town and on the 'nation' in the Netherlands.

The aim of these associations is to unite members from the respective villages, provide welfare and economic assistance, and promote the cultural values of their home village. Integration into South African society is less of a concern. This, it seems, has been encouraged by the wave of xenophobic attacks on migrants and the absence of a well-defined government policy on integration. Contrary to Mercer & Page's (2010: 124) notion of multicultural identities with 'Britishness' and 'other cultural identities' upheld by Cameroonians and Tanzanians in their study, the Pinyin and Mankon have, primordially, maintained their cultural identities of Pinyin-ness/Mankon-ness, Grassfielder (*graphi*) and, lastly, Cameroonian.

PIFAM was set up in 1999 by six founding members and celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2009. The group is currently expanding and has 115 registered members due to chain migration and kinship relations. As a result of its growth, sub-associations of members from various quarters in Pinyin have been formed, with PIFAM being the 'mother' association. There are five sub-associations, which means that there is hardly a quarter in the village that is not represented in Cape Town. In addition, there is a weekly rotating savings and credit association (ROSCA) that is commonly referred to as a *njangi* (Rowlands 1995; Niger-Thomas 1995). While the PIFAM (General Assembly – GA) meets bi-monthly, ROSCA meetings are held on Mondays at 19:00 and are open only to registered PIFAM members and not to those only registered in the quarter associations. Weekly *njangi* contributions start from R 250. Meeting sessions are preoccupied with issues relating to the home village as well as the wellbeing of its members and serve as a platform to reinforce the expected moral ethos and to advise on how to go about obtaining legal documentation (Mercer & Page 2010). The binding factor is a sense of belonging and security and is underscored in this statement by an informant: '*your mami or papa for this country na meeting, na the only place wey you fit secure yourself*'.[4] Though used figuratively, this phrase highlights the fact that associations are given parental qualities and this heralds its significance among the mobile community. And true to parental nature, sub-associations organize end-of-year excursions for its members and the members contribute by purchasing a cow that is slaughtered and shared over the festive Christmas season.

---

[4] Interview with Patricia, Cape Town; 26/08/2010.

Although PIFAM is seen as a family group, it has put serious development on the association's agenda as well as on that of the various sub-associations. PIFAM is a subsidiary of the Pinyin Development Association (PDO) and this umbrella organization oversees development activities in the home village.

For their part and in addition to socializing, the sub-associations are taking on functions discarded from the social calendar of the GA due to the increased Pinyin population in South Africa. These include born house (celebrations marking the birth of a child, Chapter 8), birthdays, weddings and developmental projects pertaining to the various quarters. The removal of these social events may not have gone down well with some members, as can be seen from the following excerpt.

> For me ... perhaps (I) am yearning for something lost that can never be recaptured because we were quite small; 6 of us to 10 maybe to 15 to 20 at some stage and these people were like a family ... These things are long lost … because they are too large now anyway ... to recapture the past or to bring back this attitude ... I think it's difficult which is why I think we're trying to transfer those into the quarter meetings because the meeting is too large for people to cooperate and to do things in unity and to live the kind of cordial life that we could in the past.[5]

It has equally provided reasons for sub-associations to be more relevant and work collaboratively with elites and parents in their respective quarters to provide funding for projects that enhance the quality of life of those back home. For instance, each quarter is responsible for the provision of potable water as well as electrifying its quarter after the main high-tension cable was installed. According to Reynolds (2009: 210-11; Evans 2010; Mercer *et al.* 2008), such efforts create new groups and maintain existing networks that allow for these deterritorialized communities to live spatially, yet still connected to the home village. The home village thus becomes the locus of focus and concern despite being in Cape Town

*Photo 7.1* PIFAM meeting in a rented hall

*Photo 7.2* A PIFAM meeting at a member's home





---

[5] Interview with Jake, Cape Town: 11/08/2010.

because they want to continuously internalize basic values and their orientation towards the home village, which continues to be their point of reference (Trager 1998). In summary, PIFAM and MACUDA serve a dual role in their respective communities: they are a safety net and have a parenting role for the newly arrived and older members. Serious disciplinary sanctions are applied whenever the need arises.

*MACUDA*

MACUDA is much smaller than PIFAM and was established on 6 June 2009, ten years after PIFAM and following the death of the spouse of a Mankon migrant. Faced with this event, the few Mankon migrants in the city at the time hurriedly gathered together to assist 'one of theirs'. After bringing the corpse home, the group met formerly, drafted its by-laws and MACUDA was born. Due to the relatively small number of Mankon in Cape Town, the GA decided to hold its meetings fortnightly to gain momentum before the schedule was reduced to monthly sessions. Its aims and objectives remain the same as those of PIFAM. Membership of this association is restricted to Mankon people and the non-native spouses of Mankon men or women. Exceptionally, they also admit members from the neighbouring Ngemba villages who were born and raised in Mankon town and can be vouched for by Mankon friends. This means that the group only admits those from Mezam Division, perpetuating the concept of autochthons and allochthons from home in their host country (Nyamnjoh & Rowlands 1998; Eyoh 1998; Konings 2001, 2008; Konings & Nyamnjoh 2000) as well as placing renewed emphasis on 'autochthony and belonging' (Geschiere & Gugler 1998: 313). They have turned down applications from other Grassfielders who do not hail from Mankon and its Ngemba surroundings because the group wants to avoid bringing in people whose background they cannot trace, as well as those they do not know very well. A recent example is someone who was asked to leave his home-village association and was hoping to join MACUDA but whose application was rejected. MACUDA has adopted Pidgin English as its medium of deliberations although many members are not in favour of this and feel that using the local dialect offers the perfect opportunity for them and their children to learn and preserve their language. This notwithstanding, some members still express their contributions in their local dialect at meetings because everyone understands the language. However, at the end of the formal session when food is served, members entertain themselves with riddles in the local dialect.

The small number of Mankon migrants in Cape Town could be attributed to the near absence of chain migration compared to that among Pinyin migrants. It could also be attributed to the polygamous nature of Pinyin migrants' kinship relations, with each migrant being responsible for the welfare of his immediate

family and earlier migrants encouraging others to join them. About five members have brought in to South Africa relations or their spouses, while most came individually and have gravitated towards the group. However, evidence of kinship support abounds amongst Mankon migrants as some have come thanks to the information they got from relations in South Africa. The ripple effect of this low rate of chain migration is seen in their limited numbers and, on a positive note, they pay attention to all the social events that PIFAM has abandoned, as mentioned above, and this marks a major difference between the groups. It is at such joyous moments that the group's potential is noted by all those present. Nevertheless, the social networks of members of both associations are, first and foremost, among the respective members and are then extended to those with other special ties

*Photo 7.3*   A MACUDA meeting at the 'meeting house'



*Photo 7.4*   A new member introducing himself.



*Language of operationalization*

At the start, PIFAM meetings were held in Pidgin English, which is the *lingua franca* of all Anglophone Cameroonians. When serious decisions are to be taken, anecdotes and proverbial sentences in Pinyin are often used to drive home the importance of the message. The use of proverbs indicates underlying meaning and is a critical aspect of any culture. It is the medium used to transmit messages, attitudes, habits and knowledge but they do not necessarily mean that everyone acts in accordance or that everyone does what is expected of them in the group (Evans 2010). However, through mechanisms of social pressure, including ostracism, PIFAM and MACUDA have proved to be very effective in ensuring compliance. As of 2013, PIFAM has reverted to holding meetings in the local dialect in an effort to maintain their identity, which they feel is fast eroding. The use of Pidgin English before at meetings is contrastive to interpersonal communication

amongst members as one would rarely hear them speaking in Pidgin. The tendency is to speak in the vernacular once they meet (Pinyin), which perpetuates assumptions about their inward-looking nature and affirms their identity. The language, according to most, is their strength and is what binds them together and enhances their belonging.

This is in contrast to their MACUDA counterparts whose Mankon dialect is rarely used at meetings or amongst members. In spite of the role of both associations in uniting their people and giving them a sense of belonging, language seems to be somehow neglected amongst their children as they are not taught or spoken to in the local dialect. Parents have chosen English as the medium of communication with their children.

*By-laws*

Both associations have internal rules and regulations spelled out in their constitutions. Although social cohesion and moral conviviality are the underlying reasons for the formation of associations, they do not hesitate to punish those found guilty of deviant behaviour or of bringing the association's name into disrepute. In extreme cases, members may be expelled from the association. These rules are subject to amendment and change as the need arises, especially in the wake of unforeseen events. The death of Ron and subsequently of three others illustrates how PIFAM amended its constitution to deal with such problems in the future. When Ron was killed in Cape Town in September 2011, he had three children from two relationships with South African partners (two children by the first partner who he had legally married) but neither the children nor Ron had documentation stating his paternity and, when he died, Ron also did not have legal documents that allowed him to live in the country. It was therefore difficult for the association to send the children home with his body, as they would have wished to, due to a lack of documentation. After this incident, PIFAM included an article in its constitution demanding that all members present photocopies of their asylum permits and a member of the association was elected to be in charge of ensuring these were kept on file. Members are now notified when their documents need renewing and have to present updated copies to the group. Admission of new members can only take place upon the presentation of a valid document that permits the person to stay in the country legally. The association also advises members on how to obtain various documents. Again, after the deaths of three members in a car crash, the group put a ceiling on how much members would have to contribute towards repatriating a corpse. Should the contribution amount to less than what the funeral parlour demands, then the difference would be given to the family. Members tend to be overburdened with the financial responsibility

of repatriating a corpse and this relieves the family of some of their financial responsibilities.

As of June 2012, MACUDA reverted to having monthly meetings and included a clause in its constitution to ensure good attendance. Five consecutive absences by members now results in them being expelled. For PIFAM, a member is expelled after two absences. This does however question the whole notion of unity and belonging that both associations uphold. If the idea of forming associations in the host country is to create a home-away-from-home, then expelling members from its fold only highlights the power that these structures can exert over their members.

Major decisions are taken by consensus but when this provokes heated debate in meetings, there is a vote and the outcome is respected. However, the topic may later be put back on the agenda and there is a tendency for it to be rejected the second time around, such as the proposal to provide an ambulance in the district hospital in Pinyin, which was rightly rejected by PIFAM.

Discussions on finances take up a great deal of time in both associations, but more so in PIFAM given its reputation for being a business with members' savings that are given out as loans two days after their meetings. What is innovative here is that most of these transactions are done by mobile phone – calls and SMSs – that leave no trace and the problem of unpaid loans. Members call the financial secretary and provide him with their bank details and the money is transferred into their accounts, excluding the interest. Although they acknowledge the need for a loan form, mobile communication is not ruled out because it is accepted on the basis of trust – which binds the group together – and so members who prefer such methods are strongly urged to keep their promises.

*Conflict resolution*
Conflict resolution is very much an integral part of the associations' means of putting checks on wayward behaviour and unpaid debts, and is organized by a committee of elected members from both groups. The committee, known as the Conflict Resolution Committee (CRC), is comprised of respected associational members (the elite), elders and some women. The idea of a CRC in PIFAM imaginatively reflects the role of the Village Traditional Council (VTC) in Pinyin where members involved in disputes are expected to attend convened sessions with a keg of palm wine (a crate of beer in Cape Town) that the committee enjoys in the course of its deliberations. Most of the cases tabled before this committee by PIFAM members relate to unpaid loans or personal conflicts between individuals. With respect to unpaid loans, those who are seen to be recalcitrant are named in the GA in the hope that bringing them to the attention of the entire group will embarrass them and speed up payments.

The conflict in MACUDA often revolves around leadership. At the end of conflict resolution meetings, sanctions in the form of financial fines and/or drinks for the group may be meted out to defaulters. Other sanctions include providing a stipulated number of chairs for the association (MACUDA) or preparing the meeting venue and cleaning it up at the end when PIFAM hires a hall.

*Gendered associations*

Most home-village associations are male-dominated and provide little space for women. Unlike associations that include a women's wing and/or activities organized by women, PIFAM and MACUDA fall short in this respect. Women have often been given only minor roles and are not entrusted with such challenging tasks as their male counterparts. Instead, marginal decision-making processes, especially those that are considered to be traditionally female-oriented, are given to them. However and as argued by Chilver (1988; see also Awasom 2005), this does not resonate with the critical and historical role women have played in the village and in local development more generally, as well as in the political sphere. Both associations organize regular sports competitions but these comprise only men's football and no activities for the women, although PIFAM has attempted to include women's activities but with little success to date. During such competitions, women are encouraged to come as supporters and cheer on the men, while nursing students are given the responsibility of providing first-aid assistance.

*Differences*

What can be distilled with reference to both associations is that Mankon people are not keen on chain migration as they tend to control who comes, but this has led to their limited numbers in Cape Town. On the other hand, Pinyin people are constantly attracted from the village by settled Pinyin migrants because the latter act as nodal points of contact for would-be migrants. The mobile phone thus becomes an important vehicle in organizing and attracting new migrants from Pinyin thanks to the information sent home. But Mankon are less engaged in such networks and chain migration, which is why the Pinyin are more engaged in development projects back home than the Mankon.

In addition, there are substantial differences with regard to associational rituals, with PIFAM limiting its activities to death and MACUDA participating in elaborate celebrations of activities such as born house and welcoming brides to South Africa. PIFAM pays more attention to deaths than any other ceremony and has relegated other ceremonies to the sub-associations. In this vein, we are confronted with a degree of individualism vs. collectivism. PIFAM could be equated with centrifugal individualism and MACUDA with centripetal sharing. Although both communities are involved in business, Pinyin are more preoccupied in the

rational sense of success and are too busy for additional social activities that are very business driven and profit oriented, whereas the Mankon take pride in indulging in them and are more oriented towards sharing.

This collectivism, as opposed to individualism, is also seen in the treatment of newcomers. Peter explains MACUDA's role:

> Recently we formed a committee to look into the situation of newcomers and initiated a project to raise money to make funds available for them to start their life here. Not like giving the funds to them as a gift but in the form of a loan. When you come, the committee sits with you, discusses with you, looking at what you were doing back home before coming here, to try to understand what you have in mind to do here and make any proposals to you if necessary … we try to initiate them into business. We give them R 500 and we give them a year to pay the money and R 50 as interest. The intention is to get them to be responsible and to assist another new member with that R 50.[6]

Conversely, such assistance for a new PIFAM member is given by relations and friends since the group has no formal structure to assist newcomers. Similarly, because of the nature of their business (Chapter 6), in the event of arrest, PIFAM bails a member out only if s/he is considered not to be at fault but was arrested for selling contraband goods. The member can request help from friends. With MACUDA, irrespective of the crime, the member is bailed out by the association and has to reimburse the group the amount paid as bail.

The actions of the association lead one to conclude that they act as agencies in themselves and are the structures that create social spaces and new social relations informed by status, hierarchy, inequalities and power (Karp 1986: 134; Nyamnjoh 2002, 2005a, 2005b; van Dijk *et al.* 2007: 5). For these individuals to feel at home away from home, this offers the recreation of Cameroonian-ness through the hegemonic powers these associations have taken upon themselves and how their structure affects the production of action. The notion of agency and structure presupposes the relationality between actor (agent) and structure, thus creating an agency space. The agency space is considered as the 'freedom that actors take, in their interaction, to manoeuvre between the stipulations set by structure. Agency then becomes not so much the enactment but the denial (*negotiation*), the compensation, the improvisation beyond structure' (van Binsbergen 2007: 17). The terms actor and agent are used interchangeably here. Following Karp (1986: 137), the actor refers to a 'person engaged in action that is framed, as in all social action' and the agent 'refers to a persons engaged in the exercise of power in its primary sense of the "bringing about effects", that is, engaged in action that is constitutive'. How do they navigate, negotiate and circumvent the circumstances, structures and spaces of their daily lives? And how do we understand the continuous mediation and negation of social relationships within the parameters of agency? This plays out in new power relations (kinship, elite and

---

[6] Interview with Peter, Cape Town: 01/03/2011.

social) within the various associations and transnational relations in which power relations are continually produced and reproduced in context and related to the 'invocation of rules and mobilization of resources' (*Ibid*.: 136). This is because structure is virtual and intangible, and in a perpetual state of being in a plethora of mediated spaces because of some dominant agency over another. In this regard, I propose examining the above associations as agency that is mediated through the appropriation of social space and structures.

## Overview of trends

The study of (elite) associations and the theories developed around them, especially those conceived of in the colonial period and its aftermath (Nkwi 2011; Delancey 1988; Rowlands 1992) and in the late 1990s, are based on the existence of an elite in combination with a group of persons – associations – with social power and a religious, political, ideological or cultural value that is transcendental to the social organization (Naville 1963). The associations were also associated with mobility between regions and the home village. Such associations tend to originate from those outside the village, given its importance to those living in the cities and wanting to reconnect with the village (Gugler 1971, 1997). But a relationship like this is often marked by one of intimacy and inequality at different levels. Associations have thus become the mechanism that those in the cities and the old in the village use to safeguard their hegemonic powers and to get hold of and have control over others, thereby creating an elite class within these associations. The status quo is being challenged today, as can also be seen in the growth of Christianity, which introduced egalitarianism and new elites connected to the modern state and economy thanks to education (Rowlands 1993: 92-93), mobility and easy connectivity. New-found wealth by migrants is challenging traditional elitism and the hierarchy through the 'reinvention of hierarchy' as a result of an entrepreneurial ethos that informs mobility. One thing that marked the literature on associations was more their preoccupation with the formation of the elite class than the development agenda, which was believed to be the reason for their formation. Today, the emergence of transnational studies has put migrants and home associations on a par and at the fore of home-village/rural-urban connections with a focus on development, such as the equipping of the local high school and the roofing of the church and church hall in Pinyin and Mankon respectively. A critical assessment of the literature will confirm the above mentioned narratives.

Dating back to the colonial period, Delancey (1988) noted the formation of the new elite to assist colonial rule and, in turn, sought to replace it with a focus on power. This period was replaced by the formation of alma maters whose focus was more on developmental issues pertaining to their schools than on political

issues. Gugler (1971, 1991) in his (re)study of connections between urbanites in Enugu and those in the village shows that urban-rural connections have intensified, with a new mutually interdependent relationship reinforced by kinship ties being developed. The study by Ferguson (1999) among the Zambian Copperbelt miners reiterates this dualist habit that was well entrenched in society and amongst miners. However, the introduction of multi-partyism and the rise of oppositional politics in most African countries, and especially in Cameroon, altered the role and functions of elite associations. In line with this trend, Geschiere & Gugler (1998) and Nyamnjoh & Rowlands (1998) have shown how the elite leverage support from their home villages to garner political power from the state. They (*Ibid*.: 324-325) note that 'the tendency in recent years for elite associations to reinvent or rework ethnic loyalties as part of the political mobilization of regional support to gain advantage in a less organized and predictable arena of state politics has encouraged more explicit recognition of political ambitions of these social movements'. We should not lose sight of the fact that these elites do not exist in abstraction, as their power base is equally attributed to kinship relations to whom they owe allegiance and visit regularly. In addition, such visits and village development are prompted by the fear of witchcraft that has compelled both the rich and the young to go back to the village, with urbanites seeking to invest in the village and the villagers clamouring for urbanites to share their new-found wealth. Life and death are important rituals and events that necessitate rural connections given that urbanites want to be buried back in the home village (Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 1998). While most of these early studies dwelt on the notion of witchcraft, Trager (1998: 360) opines that 'home-town linkages are central to members of local and national elites, committed not only to their personal ties to the home-towns, but also to assisting in local development'. This begs the question as to why people go abroad and do not forget about home. While the salient themes of mobility, rural-urban linkage, power and elite formation that underscored the studies during the 1990s are still present today amongst migrant communities, the current tendency is an increased focus on development (Mercer *et al*. 2008; Mercer & Page 2010). Better communication technologies and networks have seen the pursuance of a development agenda to its logical conclusion. And connections back home are informed less by the fear of witchcraft than by 'moral conviviality' (Mercer & Page 2010), moral duty and prestige that is associated with village development and also the fear of bad mouthing.

Although this trend has continued, what seems to have altered is information and communication technology and road and air transport that have ushered in increased connectivity with home-village and other associational networks. But these groups of persons are imaginatively Pinyin and Mankon and reflect the

socio-historical structures of the societies they represent (Trager 1998) and the strong sentiments and mental pictures according to which members organize themselves and undertake their cultural practices (although non-natives may be present too). These are, however, 'communities of memory' that reaffirm people's sense of place and attachment to their villages of origin (Barkan *et al.* 1991).

## Associations as agents of development

Development is an integral feature that underlies the viability and credibility of these associations in the place they consider home (Trager 1998; Mercer *et al.* 2008, 2009; Mercer & Page 2010; Riccio 2011). In their view, home associations have the power to re-orientate belonging-based policies by mobilizing collective action and resources to mitigate the struggle for power, gender imbalance and inequalities through new by-laws. Although the projects are not on a massive scale compared to those carried by the government, they are quite significant given the impact they have on the lives of the beneficiaries. A case in point is the electrification project undertaken in Pinyin by the people at home and those in the diaspora coordinated by the Pinyin Development Association and the construction and equipping of the first high school under the supervision of home-based elites. Development projects are, however, not negligible and go a long way towards filling a void and bringing the migrant community alive in the village given the huge amounts they are expected to contribute. The question is about the setting of the development agenda. Unlike Trager (1998) who posits that the agenda for community projects is set by the elite who are not resident in the community, I maintain that development projects are set and supervised by national elites or 'translocal elites' (Comaroff & Comaroff 1993) that are not resident in the village. They make regular visits to the village, while the elites abroad play a key role regarding financial contributions. Nevertheless, a very critical and non-intuitive aspect in the strengthening of home-village associations is the role played by their relationship with home-based associations, as will be seen below.

PIFAM's development activities are initiated by the mother association, namely the Pinyin Development Association (PDO), to which all other associations are affiliated, and a communiqué is sent out via the PNF. Similarly, in an effort to synchronize development, associations often liaise with their mother association to find out what urgent project needs to be carried out or someone travelling home is mandated to meet the translocal elites and study a project's feasibility or suggest alternative ones. This, according to Trager (1998; Mercer *et al.* 2008, 2009), is prompting agency shifts between locally based home associations and Africans and international associations, as the centre of power lies with the for-

mer with respect to financial and managerial capabilities. However, given the differences that permeate most home-town associations, it is not possible to have similar conclusive functions between home-village associations. While the study shown by Mercer *et al.* (2008, 2009) upholds that the 'domestic diaspora' is more influential and has financial and managerial capacity, the same does not hold for Pinyin and Mankon migrants where the diaspora has the financial capacity and the home diaspora has the managerial capacity in terms of the time they invest in meetings and projects. Paying attention to their multiple spatialities, we will zoom in here on some of PIFAM and MACUDA's development projects. Distance is not the problem as communication flows and mechanisms are in place to mitigate it. I argue that distance is bridged by committed individuals – translocal elites who have chosen to be the bridge between home and international associations and can find compromises to avoid anything that could disrupt information flows and connectivity. For example, the following email sent by the translocal elite about pressing infrastructural needs generated a flurry of affirmative responses.

> The Government High School Kwang has grown into a large community with its incessant compelling problems. As at now, one easily identifies three main areas: an acute shortage of teachers, the damage of 34 computers and the pathetic situation of poor and needy students.
>
> 1. Acute shortage of teachers
>
> At least four senior temporary teachers are urgently needed in the following subjects for the examination classes: Geology, Mathematics, Physics and History. …
>
> 2. Damaged computers
>
> On Wednesday 14 December 2011, a total of 34 computers were damaged as a result of an electric surge … You may be willing to offer one all alone or join with someone. You may like to contact Mr X based in Bamenda, a dealer on all kinds of computers. Certainly the best offer is an instrument to prevent future surges.
>
> 3. Poor and needy students
>
> You bless yourself when you bless others. Everyone has something to offer. Never say you cannot help someone in need because you are not rich enough ... The act of giving is cultivated. Cultivate it. Be a blessing to others and see them as opportunities and not adversaries. …[7]

In response to the call, a good number of Pinyin elites supported one of the three projects that were announced. The following responses illustrate how the elites pro,ptly assisted:

> I hereby undertake to pay the salary of one of the four teachers needed for the next five months, ie from February to June this year (2012). Pa, see to it that the teacher is hired to start from the 1st of February. I will cause the sum of 40,000frs to be deposited into the PS 20 account every month for the teacher's salary. Just let me know when is the best time (sic) for the money to be in the account.[8]

---

[7]    Sent to PNF, 1 January 2012 (from Buea).
[8]    Sent to PNF, 17 January 2012 (from Cape Town).

I am particularly touched by the Computer crisis as I visited the site of that damage two days after. I hereby promise 05 PIV with LCD monitors on behalf of my enterprise Xxxx Xxxx.[9]

… I would be donating 10 of these computers (CPUs only) to help in this crisis. My assumption here is that others can join me in getting them ready for use, by providing the other accessories (mouse, keyboards, speakers and monitors) needed.[10]

I will send a widows might (sic) of 25000frs to add to the fund for part time staff.[11]

The exchanges above show how associations are institutions in their own right and are capable of planning their own courses of action. The danger of such a developmental plan is that it obfuscates the government's participation in development in the area and lends little or no credibility to the government. However, such infrastructural projects aim to celebrate migrants and the migration-development nexus as well as providing basic social amenities, enhancing human capital, the corollary to which would be more people contributing towards village development in the future. In the same vein, migrants are preparing their home village for their eventual retirement or voluntary return.

Fund raising is an integral part of both associations and is usually carried out for a village or quarter project. Alternatively, members may decide on a voluntary donation (*cour de Coeur*). MACUDA plans to launch a fund-raising gala night to generate funds to buy medical equipment for the upgraded district hospital in Mankon village and members have been asked to contribute in instalments towards the project. They have also contributed funds for the completion of the church hall in Mankon.
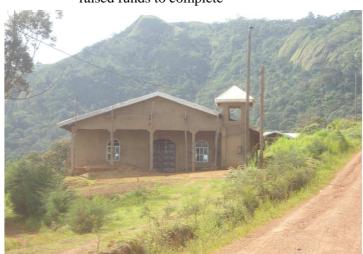
*Photo 7.5*    The church in Mamben, Pinyin that the
MAKON sub-association in Cape Town
raised funds to complete



---

[9]    Sent to PNF, 19 January 2012 (from Bamenda).
[10]   Sent to PNF, 22 January 2012 (from the US).
[11]   Sent to PNF, 10 February 2012 (from Ngoundere).

One of the sub-associations of PIFAM is Mamben/Kongfung Association (MAKON), which organized a twin event with an auction and a gala evening to raise funds for the church in Mamben (see also Trager 1993). Fund-raising activities are often arranged to coincide with times when a member is travelling home so the funds are handed over by a delegated member, who is usually a member of the elite. This confirms the worries of the younger migrants who claim that they are hardly recognized back home even though they contribute equally towards projects.

Researching the above-mentioned groups required attending their meetings, which I did regularly during my fieldwork in Cape Town, in conjunction with interviews with selected informants and (most of) the executives in both groups. I equally participated in various social and cultural events, attended wakes, birthdays and born houses, sporting events and parties, thus marking joyous and more solemn occasions. Of particular significance was the fact that on all these occasions, I met casual informants who always had interesting comments to share and made provocative remarks that whetted my curiosity. Unable to subscribe to the PNF virtual communication network, I relied on other informants to forward circulated emails, but I was able to subscribe to the Mankon Forum. Telephone conversations were inextricably linked to this section as I made frequent calls to negotiate interview sessions, find out more information and/or just to link up to maintain relationships. I also received forwarded SMSs sent to circulate information amongst PIFAM members, and I received all the SMSs from MACUDA when I was in Cape Town as my number was on MACUDA's SMS mailing list. Interviews were conducted with home-based leaders, village elders as well as HRH the paramount ruler of Pinyin.

*'Na njangi be my all':[12] Rotating Savings and Credit Association (ROSCA)*
ROSCAs or *njangis* are an integral part of migrants' daily lives and back up their economic activities. Ardener (1995: 1) defines a ROSCA as 'an association formed upon a core of participants who make regular contributions to a fund which is given, in whole or in part, to each contributor in rotation'. Money raised to contribute to a *njangi* comes from hustling in the informal economy and money raised from a *njangi* goes to boost their business. For the purpose of this study, the term *njangi* (*nchwah* in both dialects) is adopted instead of ROSCA because this is what such a micro-financing credit scheme is called locally in the home country and amongst the migrant population and their respective home villages. Whilst both communities have *njangis*, the various quarter sub-meetings affiliated to PIFAM also run *njangis*, with each group having its own by-laws. The significance of this variation, however, is that it is the articulation and multi-

---

[12]  Max remarked on the importance of the *njangi* for him, Cape Town; 21/07/2011.

plicities between the categories that constitute the social life amongst these migrant communities, as everyone looks forward to the days *njangis* are held when they can meet others, eat Cameroonian food and hear the latest gossip in town and news from home.

The literature on ROSCAs is extensive, with some contending that its obituary will be written when financial/credit institutions become accessible to most people although others hold that they will thrive when credit institutions become unworthy. Cameroon's *njangis* have often triumphed, all the more so because of the 'insecurity of the banking system, but (they) have equally disrupted the banking system' (Niger-Thomas 1995: 96; Ardener 1995) because most people feel safer having their savings in *njangis* or credit unions. And *njangis* have already existed for some time in the villages where those who do not have access to banks get together on weekly market days, '*kontri* Sundays' (observed as rest days in villages in the Grassfields) and at the end of the month. They use them as a way of saving money towards projects and also for social gatherings. However, in relation to the past, the form of today's *njangis* practised by migrants, especially Pinyin, has evolved from physically contributing money in cash at meeting sessions to electronic money transfers using the Internet or cell-phone banking facilities. While it is true that loans can be had from banks, the speed with which *njangis* can raise a loan for a member (sometimes even large amounts) and at minimal interest cannot match that of banks. *Njangis* are fast becoming authentic financial houses for migrants. In this respect, the suggestion that *njangis* will die out when financial institutions are seen as being safe, such as those in South Africa, cannot be supported by the Pinyin and Mankon migrants in Cape Town. To most migrants, joining a *njangi* is the norm and not being a member is seen as unusual, although there are some members who are not part of one. Some members with white-collar jobs do not belong but are not frowned upon whereas a pitcherman who is not a registered member of a *njangi* loses respect amongst his peers. This alone does not account for the high rates of involvement in *njangis* but how can we account for the high rate of involvement in various *njangi* schemes by Pinyin and Mankon migrants?

*Njangi as a way of life*
As mentioned above, the *njangi* is a long-standing tradition in Cameroon (Ardener 1964, 1995; Niger-Thomas 1995; Rowlands 1995) and for most migrants they are a way of continuing with internalized habits. Some have been members of *njangi* groups at home prior to going to Cape Town and others have either continued to be contributing members of their group whilst in Cape Town or have withdrawn and now participate in one in the host country. But over and above this, most migrants are asylum seekers with temporary short-stay (6-12

months) residence permits whose renewability is not guaranteed. For these groups, *njangis* remain the safest way of keeping their money.

Both PIFAM and MACUDA run well-established *njangi* schemes of varying amounts. In addition to these groups, various cohorts of migrants have formed other *njangi* groups that are held either weekly or bi-weekly. For instance, the pitchermen at Epping have a bi-weekly *njangi* and the beneficiary receives the money after a secret ballot, while PIFAM's various sub-associations have their own *njangi*. Similarly, those with stalls in Parow have joined together to form a *njangi* group. As PIFAM is quite a large group, a separate day for *njangi* other than meeting days has been set (every Monday), while the MACUDA *njangi* takes place on meeting days just before the start of the meeting. Most people in both groups contribute more than one share. While MACUDA still contributes actual cash during *njangi* sessions, PIFAM has adopted the new technology to facilitate the process; although this has come as a result of having lost a huge amount of money.[13] All contributions are done via bank transfers into the beneficiary's account. Following each deposit, the recipient receives an SMS from the bank to notify him/her of the transaction and the amount deposited into his/her account. Two SMSs from the beneficiary of the *njangi* shed light on this point: 'FNB R 4000 paid to smart Account xxxxxx @ on line Banking. Ref. Ben + Doris' and 'FNB R 2000 paid to smart Account xxxxxx @ Gugulethu ATM. Ref. Andre 1 and 2'.[14] Except in cases where the beneficiary wants the money in cash, all transactions are done via the bank. Most of the members use their mobile phones for transactions or the nearest ATM at their place of business.

Although most have bank accounts in Cape Town, these are usually used to transfer money to Cameroon so they can be sure to be able to access it in the event of repatriation or it can be handed over to the family in the event of death. Almost all PIFAM members have credit-union accounts with the (Pinyin) Metayen Credit Union (MITACUL) back home so when they receive money from their *njangi*, the money is withdrawn from their bank account and placed in MITACUL by the trustee who has their Visa card. For instance, when Joyce received R 25,000 from the *njangi*, the money was withdrawn by her sister in Cameroon and put into her MITACUL credit-union account. The rapid Internet banking facilities have made it possible for migrants to transfer money to their credit-union accounts with relative ease and they can also monitor transactions from the SMS alerts sent by the bank each time money is withdrawn back home or in Cape Town.

---

[13]  In the course of one of their sessions, thieves made off with all the day's contributions and the members' cell phones.

[14]  SMS forwarded to this researcher, 19/05/2011.

Besides being self-employed in the informal sector where there is a high degree of unpredictability, most migrants have consciously chosen to belong to one or multiple *njangi* groups as a way of diversifying their savings and earnings. Conversely, having earned the name bush-faller by virtue of being in Cape Town, they are compelled to save to meet the demands of kin back home, given that those with Visa cards at home ask the trustee to withdraw a specific amount to respond to the needs of kin.

It is not only by being a member of the *njangi* that one gains respect from peers but the amount of money contributed is also significant. Those who contribute a great deal demonstrate that they are disciplined, hardworking and frugal. As such, a spirit of competition has been instilled amongst members (especially those in the informal sector), with each striving to be among the category of people who contribute the most. The salient fact is that these contributions underline how they are not reckless with their income and this serves as a way of establishing their creditworthiness within the group. *Njangis*, thus, provide an alternative to upward social and economic mobility.

*Mutual benefits*

The social and economic benefits of *njangis* to the migrants and their families in the home and host country cannot be understated. They serve as a measure of economic discipline to members (Ardener 1995: 9) as they compel them to save and avoid any form of lavish lifestyle or conspicuous consumption, which would be frowned upon. Max,[15] for instance, epitomises those who are hardworking and frugal. He is from Mankon and a pitcherman at Epping who left his wife and four children in Cameroon and went to Cape Town to make some money within two years and go back home to invest it. He did just that and he is now back in Cameroon. He belonged to various *njangis* and had more than one share in each. At the bi-weekly meetings in Epping, he contributed to two and a half shares (R 250) as each share costs R 100, and he belonged to another at Parow to which he contributed R 500 each week. In MACUDA, he contributed to a joint share with his cousin. Money received from these *njangis* was sent home via his cousin to his wife to open a credit union account and all the subsequent money he makes is channelled home through his cousin's bank account. The cardholder withdraws the money and gives it to Max's wife who then saves it with the credit union.

In this respect, the benefit of a *njangi* is seen in the self-abnegation of worldly pleasures in order to make a generous contribution to the *njangi* and to belong to different groups. *Njangis* thus define morally suitable goals and objectives concerning spending one's money, as members adhere to the social ethos of sending money home or saving part and investing the rest in their business.

---

[15]   Interview with Max, Cape Town: 16/06 & 21/07/2011.

In the event of death, the family of the deceased benefits from his shares in the *njangi*. All those he contributed to are requested to make a contribution and the money is sent home with whoever is accompanying the deceased, or it is wired. Such was the case when Ron passed away: all his contributions were collected and sent home and some of his asserts were sold. Prior to his posthumous migration, some of his money was sent home to the family so that they could begin making preparations for the funeral. When the corpse goes unaccompanied, the money is transferred to Cameroon to a relation.

Belonging to a *njangi* gives members access to credit that would not have been possible via banks given their asylum status. In the PIFAM *njangi*, each member is entitled to a loan of twice the amount of money s/he contributes and it could exceed that amount if the member is still to benefit from the *njangi* as the loan will be deducted when it is their turn to benefit. Njangis are a means of wealth accumulation that give their members a better chance of social mobility.

## Status and social hierarchies in elite formation

As shown earlier, the notion of elite as it is used here defies the traditional norms of elite as being powerful against the powerless, and it is not about raw power but rather about respect, responsibility, selflessness, knowledge and wisdom. Through such qualities, members gain status and social hierarchy. Elites, as a result of social mobility, use their socioeconomic and cultural capital to create hierarchies deliberately or benefit from those ascribed by junior members to older members. It is such hierarchies that can cause friction.

How can we explain the formation of dominant structures/hierarchies in these groups? As noted by Chase (1980: 906), hierarchies 'emerge from the interaction among group members rather than being generated by differences among those individuals'. This presupposes that hierarchy formation is a developmental process in which outcomes of previous interactions influence the course of successive ones, and he concludes that: 'it indicates how patterns of interaction fit together to form the kinds of dominance hierarchies commonly observed'. In spite of this assertion, we cannot conclude definitively that hierarchies do not emerge from differences because these levels of economic and human capital amongst members breed hierarchies as well, given members' rise as elites are negotiated through their access to social, economic and cultural capital. Within both associations, there are those who have successfully acquired social and cultural capital that has enabled them to move up the social ladder. Others run successful businesses and this has catapulted them onto the higher echelons of the social ladder. Although participation in these associations is voluntary, they are not equal. As such, status and hierarchies tend to be advertently or inadvertently created. However, class here is not strictly subjected to the Marxist notion, in

reference to economy. Instead, I seek to align myself here with the Weberian thinking of class in terms of status and prestige, although economic capital plays a vital role in projecting class. But I also contend that status is a cultural marker, which can be understood in the light of customary value systems in relation to services rendered to the community. In other words, status for the wealthy comes from their capacity to deal with people's needs – the joy of sharing and giving – that is made possible by their claims on goods that in turn derive from money. This highlights the point by MacGaffey (2005: 328; Chapter 6) that 'conversionary transactions have been widely used to transform ephemeral income into more enduring relational assets'. The idea of status in this case is not so much in terms of powerful dominance over others but is more about assuming responsibility for one's society and being willing to make contributions in an egalitarian manner. This then begs the question of what it is that makes one person more respected than others. What is the motivating factor behind making claims to status within the associational and village context? A response to this question would require us to look at both individual motivation and the expectations of the community. With regard to individual motivations, some migrants have laid more claims to the home village than others and, as such, dedicate time and resources towards its wellbeing. But community expectations too demand a sense of obligation and commitment for those who have achieved wealth as wealth brings with it status and prestige when used for the common good of community but could bring shame and scorn if one felt no moral obligation towards the community, especially if the person is considered to be wealthy. Such attention for the home village is in contrast with earlier studies that portrayed the jostling for political hierarchy and were marked by witchcraft, ethnic ambitions, divisions and difference. (Nyamnjoh & Geschiere 1998; Nyamnjoh 1999). Current shifts are being motivated by the prestige that members gain from assisting in village development.

Status and social hierarchy in both associations are thus differentiated along generational, gender and socioeconomic parameters. Often, the younger members feel that those at the top represent their interests and that, back home, they (the younger members) are not acknowledged when contributions to projects are made, as it tends to be the elite that represent the group.[16] This can breed some dissension among group members and, in turn, translates into a lack of interest in the engagement of certain sustainable development projects. Elites are believed to use the association as cultural capital in their quest for fame in the village by proposing projects that require substantial financial contributions (Woods 1994: 467). Younger members are therefore unhappy about the fact that flat rates are levied on contributions, irrespective of members' status and time of arrival. They feel that consideration should be given to new members who are still eking out a

---

[16]  Interview with Desmond & Ben, Cape Town; 08/03/2011.

living. However, the association argues otherwise and claim that members who have met their financial obligations should be treated equally with regard to the association's constitution, and are thus eligible for identical treatment and have the same obligations. Such reasoning is in consonance with Trager (1995, 1998) that successful migrants are considered to have a greater level of obligation to their home-village association. This was the case when PIFAM decided to construct a morgue at the divisional hospital in Pinyin, a project that was championed by the elite. To this effect, a member visiting home was sent to assess the feasibility of the project from the elders and PDO representatives and he received financial remuneration to cover his transport costs. This was much to the disappointment of the group's younger members who see him as an elite and financially secure. They thus question his patriotism and loyalty to the group and the village, regarding the amount of money he was given for this mission.

The proposed morgue was turned down in the village and there were questions about why such huge amounts should be spent to take care of the dead when the living need more attention. An ambulance was then proposed but this was also rejected by the younger members of the association as they saw themselves as financially unstable. If they had money, their priority was to look after their families. The inclination for such huge projects, in the words of some informants, depicts how those who have risen to the ranks of the elite are more interested in carrying out large projects back home for self-aggrandizement than out of consideration for those who have just come or are still struggling financially. Although contributions for projects are often compulsory,[17] junior members feel that a flat rate for everyone is unfair and they expect the elite to contribute more (cf. Trager 1998). This is because contributions sent home are frequently attributed to the elite and so they subsequently receive a warm welcome whenever they go home. These younger migrants may have a point here because during my stay in Pinyin, I was constantly reminded of the development projects by those in South Africa and the names of the same persons were hailed for their selflessness. By the same token, we should not lose sight of the fact that these elites constantly visit home, and while there they participate in development projects. Joe's case is an example of this. Once when he arrived in Pinyin (from South Africa), the villagers were having a fund-raising occasion for the electrification project and he instantly donated FCFA 50,000 (approx. € 80), much to the villagers' delight. The same elite offered to pay the salary of a teacher, who would be hired by the PDO, for five months. Gestures like these from some of the PIFAM elite beg the question about why such scathing remarks are made about them by some

---

[17] The money is deducted from the members' sinking fund and they are expected to repay the amount within a given timeframe. If they do not, when they are faced with bereavement, the group will not come to the person's assistance because his/her finances are not up to date.

members. It could well be understood that the younger members or the newly arrived are still struggling to attain a level of financial stability and thus any call for a significant financial contribution from them is viewed negatively and they blame the elite for being too zealous and for having so little regard for their financial concerns. The sheer increase in numbers in the group, as noted by Jake (above), means that there will often be rifts between the elite and those who have just arrived. Also, as argued by Chase (1980: 922-923), hierarchy formation in larger groups emanates from the web of interactions in which interaction among individuals can be used to explain how macro-level structure and dominance hierarchy is produced. In this respect, we cannot consider the difference of scale among migrants as the cause of hierarchy formation. Nevertheless, it is the spontaneous gestures that leave indelible marks on the minds of those in the village and the elite are often called upon. To many, their contributions are seen as expressions of repayment to the community association for the support they received earlier in their lives. By and large, successful migrants have been looked up to as the elite and their generosity is taken to be the norm. And if they do not conform to cultural expectations of generosity, they will lose the respect of the community (Woods 1994: 471; Barkan *et al.* 1991: 479; Trager 1998: 370-375). Some of the younger migrants have stayed away from the village since they left home and resentment of the elite depicts the divisions among the younger migrants and the elite in PIFAM. This act of resentment is mostly manifested in the form of contestation against development projects and at times derogatory remarks are made of others.

Despite this subtle contention, the elite plays a significant role in fostering debate in PIFAM meetings, often taking the lead in heated debates by calming tempers when faced with a crisis, such as the death of a member in Cape Town or setting an example for the rest. When it comes to school projects, the decision to assist is unanimous and PIFAM (Cape Town and Johannesburg) was ranked as the highest contributor among all the diaspora communities to the village electrification project. Hierarchies are played out in various social fields and this should be understood as relational and situational.

## Social life of PIFAM and MACUDA

Being away from home means that migrants want to be in constant communication with their families back home and to be aware of the social and cultural happenings in the villages. Their cultural and social orientation is not only informed by happenings back home but is also inspired by the re-imagination of the traditional habituation (Hickey 2004). Although home videos of funerals are watched in Cape Town to see whether the funeral was well organized, it is also in the hope of seeing family members and to learn traditional songs and dance patterns

that have emerged back home so they can be re-enacted in Cape Town. It is common to find Pinyin migrants congregating at the home of a member on receiving the news that a video of a funeral from home has arrived. These tend to be watched on Sundays or in the evenings. The videos are often sent with someone travelling back to South Africa or very occasionally via DHL. While viewing them, a running commentary is given on the songs, dance styles and persons that the migrants have not seen or heard about in a long time.

The end of the year is marked by festivities and both groups organize a party to celebrate the results of their hard work over the course of the year. In each association, a committee is assigned to plan the party and report to the GA. PIFAM assumes full financial responsibility for its party, while MACUDA members have to make a contribution to theirs. The committee in charge of organizing PIFAM's party in 2011 opted for a catering service to the dismay of some of the members who would have loved to eat local Pinyin *achu* and other homemade food. As for MACUDA, they keep theirs local with *achu* and the sauce that Cameroonians always serve with it (a yellow and black soup).

On some other occasions, parties are complemented with picnics. Groups of people (sub-associations within PIFAM) or the entire group (MACUDA) organize a picnic at one of the city's tourist attractions (see also Thompson 2009). The date, venue and logistics are all transmitted by mobile phone, usually an SMS.

*Photo 7.6*     Eating achu during one of the festivities

*Photo 7.7*    A cross section of members at PIFAM party



As far as PIFAM is concerned, a party should mark the end of a football tournament between the various sub-associations following the awarding of the trophy and the prize-giving ceremony. Referees and linesmen come from within the Cameroonian community and the teams involved all take the tournament very seriously. Winning the cup will produce a huge sense of pride for the quarter that wins. Conversely, the event abides by strict rules and regulations, which highlights how nothing in this community is taken for granted. The tournament and the teams are essentially organized and coordinated via mobile telephony, as can be seen from these SMSs.

*SMS 1*

'Hi if u around Bellville pls check the jersies (sic) and the price of 15 pieces; top only and top with shorts. Pls let me know.'

*SMS2*

'Hope u have well rested from the 120mins match and now ready for the final on Sunday. We know the cup is ours, pls training is compulsory 2moro.'

*SMS3*
'Makong is threatening us with 2 campings (sic). Compulsory meeting 2night at Xxxx's place at 20h: 15 for game planning.pls do everything to come.'[18]

---

18    SMS forwarded to me by Chris, Cape Town: 14/03/2011.

*Photo 7.8*     Members of the winning team present the trophy to the sub-association elite



PIFAM's ability to organize a league game among members (with five competing teams from different quarters) highlights the size of the group. These events do not only instil a sense of community and belonging but also uphold a celebration of the community that, as Thompson (2009: 374) puts it 'becomes embodied representation of the community within Cape Town'.

The winning team and other outstanding players receive trophies and medals on the night of the gala. When the 2011 champions, KWIANDA, received their trophy, they significantly handed it to their patron (elite) telling him: '*you be send we out for go hunt, na the beef this wey your pekin them don bring am back*'.[19]

*Photo 7.9*     Researcher presents a prize to one of the teams



---

[19]   Field notes, Cape Town: 19/03/2011.

The importance of this statement is twofold: it is connotative and denotative. The strong image of a hunter was used to refer to their win and the trophy was the prized game. So they saw themselves as 'bushfallers' (Nyamnjoh 2011: 703). In this respect, the idea of bush, hunting and coming back with game is the language understood by migrants and their families, and this stresses the meaning of success and what it takes to be a successful bushfaller. By extension, it refers to the way migrants and migration are conceived back home, as hunters with the host country being seen as the 'bush'. Putting this into perspective, winning the trophy and/or whatever migrants set out to do have to be done diligently to produce results. Going away is thus for a purpose and failure is not condoned. Implicitly, this reflects the very essence of their being in Cape Town: they are out to succeed at whatever they set out to do. Goals must be set and met, as can be seen in their text messages. Over and above this, going all out to win the trophy is alluded to by going hunting and one has to come back with the prized trophy (antelope, buffalo or big game) to show prowess and demonstrate that one is a seasoned hunter. Being 'bushfallers', as they are considered back home and even amongst themselves in Cape Town, means they have to live up to the name and status they have achieved as good hunters who do not settle for less (or smaller animals). Presenting the trophy to the patron was a sign of respect and shows the high esteem and status he has earned in the group and in the quarter in particular. It also shows that, as hunters far away, they still abide by the same moral ethos and, as good children who have gone out to hunt, they have brought back booty that they present to the father with pride. Respect in both Pinyin and Mankon is due to elders and if it is lacking, the social values of the community are said to be crumbling, as was alluded to in the case of PIFAM Johannesburg by most informants. Although PIFAM organizes a football competition amongst its fold but they also respond to invitations from other associations for friendly matches and participate in inter-ethnic competitions organized by other associations. In addition to funerals and parties, football is the other main rallying activity among migrants.

## Inter-cultural communication and associational networking

As many authors have affirmed (Evans 2010; Mercer & Page 2010; Mercer *et al.* 2008; Thompson 2009), the need for migrants to be ever more connected is suggested by the fact that, although they may be away from home, they still consider themselves to be part of the community of Cameroonians and/or Grassfielders. This is why newly formed tribal associations see the importance of introducing their association to other existing ones. Although the focus here is on the Pinyin and Mankon, these communities cannot be studied in isolation for they interact with other communities (Evans 2010; Mercer & Page 2010). They reach out to

others or respond to invitations and requests for financial assistance from other groups. Such is the case of the Meta Cultural and Development Association (MECUDA) that sent a letter appealing for financial and material assistance to help the group realize a charity project in Cape Town, to which PIFAM and MACUDA responded positively.

The mobile and flexible nature of these associations and their members is made possible by ICTs that link members and play a role in building and maintaining a sense of community and connection with others. And, in a way, they have reorganized sites of social interaction and formed new collective configurations, and this has invariably presented new opportunities for collective affiliation and mobilization (Thompson 2009: 360). Is it possible to conclude therefore that with regard to associations, ICTs seam members together without any loose stitches? Despite the importance of ICTs to mobile and virtual communities, the absence of social cues (knowing who is talking) and the digital divide still seem to be an impediment that prevents everyone from fully participating in discussions. Nonetheless, in an effort to be connected, the Pinyin and Mankon have made their own telephone directory to ease communication and keep everyone under the radar. SMSs and phone calls have been combined to good effect to achieve effective communication. For instance, when a member is bereaved, the latter calls a member of the executive, preferably the president or the secretary general, to inform them as well as give information about the physical address of the member so that others can convene for a condolence visit. This message is immediately transmitted by SMS and phone calls and members are asked to pass it on to others.

As far as MACUDA is concerned, the group has a phone that was donated by a member and its number is given to all registered members. The phone is with the chief whip who is charged with taking and forwarding all calls and SMSs to the group. In case of absence from meetings, members are expected to call this number prior to the start of the meeting or to send an SMS to excuse themselves, otherwise they will be fined for 'wilful absenteeism'. Messages can also be sent personally via members. Connectivity is not, however, limited only to members of the association, and both associations strive to maintain a cordial relationship with other associations and with sister associations in Johannesburg and beyond.

## Exchange visits between associations

The notion of interconnectedness ignores the perception of bounded and passive identity because flexible identity is part and parcel of migrants' associational life, with the continuous need to draw social and cultural capital from the association for various purposes. Piore (1995 cited in Cerulo 1997: 394) expresses a different opinion, contending that collective movements are rather 'communities of mean-

ing' because they are narrowly focused, formed relative to distinction and are thus unable to have cross-boundary exchanges. While this may well explain the case in American ideology, extending it to a wider community would obliterate the sense of community and bonding that exist within the associations and the inter-associational visits. It is not often that associations exchange visits but, when they do, it demonstrates the cordial relationship that the groups enjoy. These visits can also be informative, for example to announce the creation of a new tribal association. The visit of a three-man delegation from the Cameroon North West Association of Cape Town (CANOWACAT) to PIFAM illustrates this point. Their arrival is acknowledged and later, during the course of the meeting, they are given time to address the house. Accordingly, CANOWACAT's president informed the groups about the envisaged changes to the constitution that would make the group more inclusive. In this respect, he visits all the associations from the Bamenda Grassfields to seek their approval. The most important revision that appeals to members concerns posthumous migration and this revision will make it possible for the deceased to be sent home, with levies being made per association and no longer individually. This point was particularly interesting as it is challenging to transport a corpse back to Cameroon, especially if the deceased did not belong to an association or was only a passive member. The idea of taking the deceased to the home village is a reflection of 'bridging capital' and 'bonding capital', which are the primordial definition of the home association. Such attitudes concerning bridging and bonding capital highlight the Cameroonians' solidarity and their sense of home and belonging. The notion of home is strongly invoked and articulated when faced with the death of a member from the Grassfields as can be seen in the following saying: '*we di bury Bamenda man only for place wey they bury yi nitong*',[20] which means one of theirs/ours cannot be buried away from home. This sentiment is echoed by the Pinyin elite back home who stress the importance of home where the umbilical cord is buried. 'Pinyin is my second home after paradise. I love Pinyin, where my nivel (sic) was buried.'[21]

The importance of posthumous migration was reiterated by MACUDA Johannesburg when they visited their Cape Town counterparts. The Johannesburg branch sent a delegation to Cape Town from 16-18 July 2011, a visit that culminated in a cultural jamboree. Both groups agreed to jointly repatriate the body of one of theirs, whether a Cape Town or Johannesburg member. Another achievement was the synchronization of the sinking fund in the event that members want to relocate to either place. Both groups pledged to cooperate on development pro-

---

[20]   This is a common expression used by informants when faced with the death of a Grassfielder who has to be buried close to where his/her umbilical cord is buried, namely in the home village.

[21]   Sent to PNF, 15 February 2012.

jects back home and the Cape Town branch promised to make a return visit as well.

Such levels of cooperation amongst migrants are not limited to those in the host countries. Operating within multiple spatialities gives 'mobiles' the opportunity to be virtually present but physically absent at multiple loci thanks to the appropriation of ICTs. In this vein, they are able to form transnational bonds with virtual home associations that are made possible by Internet-mediated spaces in most cases, and lately social networking sites, as can be seen below.

## Transnational/trans-virtual associational networks

In the wake of increased transnational migration, home-village associations have become important nodal points within the wider diaspora network (Vertovic 2004), with PIFAM and MACUDA being no exception. Mobile communities are increasingly virtually connected to members of the diaspora and within the country through their respective virtual networks of Pinyin News Forum (PNF) and Mankon Forum (MF). In this respect, they are able to participate in multiple social spaces and within these spaces, migrants express a transnational/transcultural identity and bonding that revives and strengthens old forms of ethnicity and reflects the process of reactive formation (Popkin 1999). As Portes (2003; see also Vertovec 2004) maintains, it is only because of better networks that immigrants have become actively engaged in transnational debates, and their absolute numbers play a more important role than their social ties. Quite often, these are weak ties (Granovetter 1973) but they are glued together by a common goal, namely development in the home village and the safeguarding of their traditional village institutions. This is seen in the PNF's objectives that state that the 'Pinyin News Forum is a global meeting place for Pinyin people; its mission is to educate and inform Pinyin people, and as a team, Pinyin people can make a difference in the homeland'.[22]

All of this has been rendered possible by the new information and communication technologies, especially the Internet (Mercer & Page 2010; Mercer *et al.* 2008). Being connected suggests an awareness of events that happen simultaneously in different places. By the same token, such connectivity and awareness mean members get to be actively and emotionally engaged in events (Prelipceanu 2008). It could perhaps be inferred from this that, contrary to Putnam (2000), community is not so much in decline but rather that ICTs have created new alternative spaces for people to sustain meaningful communities at a distance through membership of associations and organizations such as the ones mentioned above. These public-sphere activities give migrants, miles away from home, the chance

---

[22]   Moderator PNF, 20/10/2010.

to engage in critical discussion and self-expression through which participants (re)define their sense of identity, community and agency, and they can also create their own spaces, which Karim (2003 cited in Parham 2005: 373) refers to as the 'supraterritoriality … of diaspora is created and sustained by transforming a milieu: it is not a physical space but an existential location'. The redefinition of identity also charts multiple-identity affiliations that could implicitly or explicitly qualitatively change the nature of migrants' experiences (Cerulo 1997).

PNF and MF have thus created an online public space and this allows for an on-going dialogue largely unbounded by territory but rather by a common identity and shared values and ideas of a common place, i.e. home. This creates 'new social movements', collective initiatives that are self-reflexive and are sharply focused on the expressive actions of collective members (Melucci 1989: 60). He goes on to explain that such collective initiatives produce 'collective agency' because collectives consciously coordinate action. As shown at the beginning of this chapter, the coordination and assistance needed for the high school back home is done through the collective of PDO and channelled through PNF to attract funds. It is only through such Internet-mediated spaces that these mobile communities can make meaningful contributions to village development. Unlike the face-to-face meetings of PIFAM and MACUDA where actions are bounded by structures that enforce discipline, the same cannot be said of online public space.

While participation in PNF comes from all areas, Mankon Forum's is yet to witness as wide a participation as its Pinyin counterpart. The admission of new members is recommended and they need to be vouched for by existing members in both forums. Pinyin is open only to indigenes so my attempts at subscribing to it proved futile. However, I was duly forwarded emails from PNF by some informants/individuals in South Africa and beyond. Coming from Mankon, I am eligible to subscribe to the Mankon Forum. In each of these forums there are dedicated people in the home country and the various nodal points that keep the network informed about happenings at home and in their respective cities as well as about development projects that need to be carried out, although members in the diaspora may not be well versed in the realities on the ground or may want to pursue a different development agenda. By and large, the activities of the forum still remain linked to home-village development and the fostering of a collective sense of community and ownership, as is reiterated by this message posted on PNF: 'Citizen involvement/participation is a desired and necessary part for that community's development process. It is therefore a process that can meaningfully tie programmes and institutions to people and people to others.'[23]

---

[23] Sent to PNF, 22 January 2012.

In the sections that follow, a selection of emails and my observations are reviewed as a way into the level of virtual communication, transnational connectedness and development strategizing in order to adequately understand how collective identities direct participants to define the parameters and appropriate arenas of collective action. These mobile groupings are networking amongst themselves irrespective of distance and are constantly fed news from home on a daily basis.

Although members of MACUDA Cape Town do not post emails on MF, they are inspired by the development agenda within the forum and set to emulate it. One is the provision of scholarships, such as the MF Scholarship Initiative[24] for underprivileged children back in the home village. Scholarship funds are sent from the US but coordinated via MF and someone at home who identifies those most in need. Connection to this website provides various apps to view all contributions and donations and to make suggestions. News of each donation is reported on MF.

> Greetings,
>
> Once again, thank you for our generous donors. The start of 2012 has been nothing short of exciting for MFSI and the scholarship program. With 2012 version of our website protected pay link verified, MFSI continues to enjoy steady support from members, well wishers and multiple donors.
> We are very excited but before I get carried away, please let us acknowledge. ...
> 1. Dr. XXX today made a 150.00 dollars donation into the coffers of MFSI using our secured website link.
> 2. Dr. XXX at the University of Michigan has made a 200.00 dollars check payable to MFSI that was received in our office today. MFSI is making steady financial strides. Thank you to our wonderful donors.[25]

MACUDA Cape Town assisted financially towards the completion of the church hall of the Ntambeng Catholic mission in Mankon and started a project to assist the newly built divisional hospital with medical equipment. However, this project has stalled because of some non-Mankon members from Ngemba.

Development activities amongst the Pinyin are coordinated by the PDO via PNF, and participants respond very generously when they are informed of an urgent need by the translocal back home, as can be seen from the previous email regarding the supply of damaged infrastructure and the email below:

> Dear forumers,
>
> The buchi community wishes to thank all friends and well-wishers who turned out in their numbers to give them a push yesterday during the launching of GSS buchi project … BUDECA[26] yde (Yaoundé) intends to construct and equip two classrooms worth 5,000 000.

---

[24] www.mankonscholarsh ips.org
[25] Posted on MF, 06/01/2012.
[26] Buchi (a quarter within Pinyin) Development and Cultural Association.

> During the launching yesterday, 800,000frs cash was realized … 1.5million was pledged. But like oliver twist (sic), we continue to ask for more.[27]

Nonetheless, we should be cautious about drawing hasty conclusions and overly praising these forums, and reassess them to understand whether they are as flawlessly seamed as they suggest. In this respect, some emails have caused quite a stir and have threatened groups' unity and focus. The circulation of an email with the subject, 'YOU LAZY (Intellectual) African Scum'! dominated the Mankon Forum for over a month (January/February 2012). In response to the email, Y wrote:

> As they say, If you stand for nothing, you'll fall for everything. Btw, (sic) as a Mankon man, writing to the Mankonforum, what possesses you to make a statement such as "I encourage you to read this piece right to the end before making your usual glib, noxious and self-mythologizing shallow decadent and culturally unpalatable commentaries?" Did I miss some demons on the Mankonforum or you just feel like using so many words to convey nothing?
>
> Anyway, I read (and reread) the article and I can't stand when people like Field Ruwe's Walters use racist undertones (and abusive language)against a race of people and claim they are not racist, irrespective of the good they want to make.[28]

Again Y wrote: 'I ask a basic question and you and X is too lazy to think except to infer censorship!' In response, the initial sender, X, wrote:

> I am totally capable of unleashing a cannonade of shock and awe artillery to defend myself when provoked, but fortunately, Mankonforum is neither the right venue nor the space for equivocation and palapala (*wrestling*)[29]. I sincerely think we are having a miscommunication problem here but let me state for the record what you classify as "Being TOO LAZY TO THINK". This your Mankon-Forum is a "Njoh" (*free*) medium (for now) offered by YA-HOO to Konto peepoo (*crafty people*) like you and myself to "Communicate". It is neither a classroom, amphitheatre nor an editorial enclave. I have no obligation to write long mails, short mails, intelligent mails, Njakri mails (jokish mails) or what have you...infact I owe no one any explanation whether I write or don,t (sic) write BUT I have an obligation not to be insultive or trample on other,s (sic) freedom of speech. This simply means I can write on any topic that pricks my fancy without fearing that the Ys of this world will criticize either my wowo (*bad*) English, my uneducated lazy thinking faculty with their temporaneous cynical injections[30].

The reason for dwelling on this is to show that although studies carried out on transnational and trans-virtual forums are often portrayed as representing a united front with the sole focus being on village development, they sometimes become public spaces for verbal and literary abuse with little regard for readers or the negative publicity it gives the forum. Such feuds often lead to the contestation of identity and belonging. This can reignite age-old divisions between autochthons and allochthons that are inimical to the unity of the association and concomitantly derail it from its development and welfare agenda. The messages are inter-

---

[27] Posted on the forum, 21/11/2011.
[28] Sent to MF, 22 January 2012.
[29] Italics are by this author.
[30] Sent to MF, 24 January 2012.

spersed with Pidgin English and the local dialect, limiting its consumption to the target group. It also underscores the fact that such Internet-mediated spaces provide few social cues as in the above exchange where a male member is addressed as female, as well as suggesting neglect of the moral ethos of respect. Such tantrums shift from the goals of the forum and destabilize the 'moral conviviality' (Mercer & Page 2010: 115-116), leading to some members asking the moderator to unsubscribe them. This also shows how participants in online discussions are sensitive to the use of offensive language. Despite the norms guiding discussions, as seen in the mission statements of both associations, a lack of social clue and distance makes it difficult to reinforce rules of communication.

Similarly, within PNF, some members discredit others concerning postings on the forum and tend to be arrogant as can be seen from this email; 'Your English and your reporting are terrible and unworthy of your public and you'.[31] In reply, another member cautions forgiveness:

> I want to encourage you X, to forgive and forget the reaction of our father, Y to your mail. Though he has an option to write to you, but he sincerely regretted to me when he met me a few minutes after he sent to the comment to the PNF (sic). I realised that he acted on impulse. Please, to err is human and to forgive is divine. Let all of us be more positive and forward looking on the PNF.[32]

There is also interest and research into the ICT debate and how it could be harnessed to benefit the community, with particular attention to cultural dissemination and education.

Contributions are made to PNF from all over the world by Pinyin indigenes who are connected to the Internet, while MF is dominated by those in the US and translocals. But news in both forums is diverse, from concerns about chieftaincy, land disputes, religion, cultural and heritage education, political discussions, death announcements, news back home and, of course, developmental projects.

Technology thus makes it possible for the diaspora migrants to create discursive spaces through which local and silenced identity narratives can be articulated (Mitra 2005). Such in-group discourse, as we have seen, provides the glue that holds the members together in virtual spaces, irrespective of location and physical contact and links them to the home village. Despite these linkages, such discursive spaces have also been spaces for animosity and discord. Although PIFAM Cape Town and Johannesburg enjoy cordial relations, they seem to have some doubts about naming. This stems from the fact that they each assert they were the first to be formed. Cape Town thus wants the Johannesburg branch to be called PIFAM Johannesburg and not South Africa as it suggests that Cape Town

---

[31] Sent to PNF, 9 August 2011.
[32] Sent to PNF, 10 August 2012.

is of less importance, which does not go down well with the Cape Town branch. To this effect, Jake said that:

I think it's more around the name because the people in Johannesburg they call themselves PIFAM SA … And we call ourselves PIFAM Cape Town. And our expectation here was that we would call ourselves PIFAM Cape Town, South Africa and they call themselves PIFAM Johannesburg, South Africa; so that ... it is clearly indicated that we are not national but just regional. But when they call themselves PIFAM SA they are sort of absorbing us.[33]

Despite such differences and discord among members and groups at times, associations and forums are guided by the need to develop the home village and be parents to members, as the title suggests.

## Conclusion

Associations, as has been shown in this chapter, play a major role in the societal fabric and seek to establish a social cohesion amongst members as well as acting as a bridge between the host community and the home-village community. The social and cultural character of the association mimics that of the main associations back home and the activities that form part of their social life, namely sports, cultural activities, *njangis* and visits between groups. Such moments of cultural showcasing enable migrants to create a home-away-from-home, which reinvigorates their Pinyin and Mankon identity as well as their bond with the home village. In this regard, associations should be understood within the framework of agency in the production of structures because 'structure is both the medium and outcome of action' (Karp 1986: 135). Such structures define belonging, identity and exclusion and are a way in which actions can be enabled. For both communities, identification is first and foremost the projection of their Pinyin-ness and Mankon-ness over their Cameroonian-ness by emphasizing the language and re-enacting cultural activities. The projection of their Cameroonian identity is only noticed when they rally behind the national football team (Njubi 2002). As noted by Mohan & Hickey (2004 in Evans 2010: 418), the formation of the state in Africa was primarily based on the collation of ethnic identities where they are linked to a common place, i.e. 'home', through a shared meaning and culture. It could also be explained by the fact that migrants are more driven by the need to develop their village (Pinyin) to prepare a place for their eventual homecoming. As such, migrants and translocals, through these connections, play a role in the lives of those back at home because, as Parham (2005: 349) usefully notes, the creation of such mediated public spheres enables participants to 'move

---

[33]   Interview with Jake, Cape Town; 11/08/2010.

from shared imagination to collective action', thanks to the 'Internet-mediated network public'.

This is in contrast to the situation in the Netherlands where migrants' Cameroonian identity is projected. The preference for nation rather than ethnicity could be tied to their limited numbers and is probably due to the long and odd hours they work to make ends meet and satisfy the incessant demands back home, which leaves them little time to create home associations. It could also be as a result of failed attempts to sustain an association. Nevertheless, urban-rural connections have challenged the modernization theory that forecasts a disconnection between urban migrants and ruralites. Migrants cope with home nostalgia by maintaining multiple-stranded virtual relationships with various associations and home associations, which is consistent with the Manyu case examined by Evans (2010).

Belonging is privileged, and although migrants tend to operate within multiple and virtual spatiality, their 'homeland' remains Pinyin and Mankon. In this respect, they have intensified their links with home by participating in rituals and development projects and requests, and also through the replication and redefinition of cultural activities in their host countries. Such multiple-stranded relationships and connections have been made possible by the omnipresence of communication technology and this has given rise to the convergence of virtual communities with a common focus: home.

While belonging is stressed and associations' Internet-mediated forums appear to be an umbrella that unites members, social cohesion is not a given as there are simmering tensions that threaten the unity and moral conviviality that bind members. Debates on autochthones and allocthtons, and identity and belonging that are part of the discourse in most associations back in Cameroon re-echo within the migrant community.

Although these associations aim to foster unity and promote their own society's cultural values, development at home is primordial. However when deciding on a project, the underlying problems of social hierarchy may re-emerge and associations can develop hierarchies, either advertently and inadvertently.

The advent of ICTs has increased migrants' virtual mobility and transnational/trans-virtual social ties with migrant associations that share a common 'place', meaning and identity. Through their respective forums, they have harnessed the Internet and, more recently, the new social media that have made a nonsense out of borders and rendered them porous, thus bringing the home village closer to migrants. Thanks to this, mobile communities are able to contribute to the development of the home village.