

Gallous  
Atabongwoung

G Atabongwoung,  
Department of  
Development Studies,  
University of Pretoria.

E-mail:  
aounggal@gmail.com

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# Negotiating belonging: the case of Francophone Cameroonian migrants in Pretoria

Francophone Cameroonian migrants in Pretoria face challenges such as language barriers. The migrants are not easily accepted by locals and often face discrimination and harassment that influence their sense of belonging in the host society. This is accentuated by negative perceptions that see African migrants in South Africa in general as an economic threat to locals. South African policies on migrant labour are also control-oriented to deter immigration. For example, to employ a migrant, an employer must sufficiently convince the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) that there is no suitable South African available to do the job. In the midst of these challenges African migrants must live in cities like Pretoria where the cost of living is high, as opposed to townships where the cost of living is low, for fear of being attacked by locals. The complex relationship between African migrants in South Africa and locals stretches Francophone Cameroonian migrants to belong 'here' (Pretoria) and 'there' (Cameroon) – “transmigration/transnationalism”. This article therefore seeks to answer the following questions; how do Francophone Cameroonian migrants negotiate belonging in Pretoria? What is the role of indigenous languages in the process of negotiating belonging?

**Keywords:** Francophone Cameroonian migrants, locals, transmigration, transnationalism, belonging, indigenous languages, international migrants

## Introduction

This article presents an understanding of how Francophone Cameroonian migrants who come from a multicultural and multilingual society, and are currently living in an equally multicultural and multilingual society (Pretoria), negotiate belonging through hometown associations (HTAs) as institutions of belonging under precarious migration conditions. The article also looks at the role of indigenous languages in the process of negotiating belonging.

The number of African migrants (including Francophone Cameroonian migrants) in South Africa has increased in the past two decades (Crush and Williams 2018). According to Castelli (2018), 'macro'-, 'meso' - and 'micro' - factors are responsible for the high rate of international migration. In terms of 'macro-factors', Hunter and Simon (2019) find political, demographic, socio-economic and environmental conditions contribute to the high number of international migrants. Sadiddin et al. (2019) claim 'meso-factors' such as communication technology, land grabs and relationships in the diaspora influence the choice of an individual's migration destination. For example, the advent of social media has influenced more people to move out of their country of origin because they have access to information that creates awareness of the living conditions of people in other parts of the world (Castelli 2018), while 'micro-factors' such as education, religion, marriage and an individual's attitude towards migration, play a key role in the final decision of individuals before migration (Nyamnjoh 2021).

In South Africa, previous events like the lifting of restrictions on African urbanisation in the late 1980s, the relatively tranquil political atmosphere post-apartheid, and the growing economy of South Africa attracted a huge influx of African migrants into the country (Posel 2004: 277-292). Currently, events such as "globalisation" facilitate international migration in ever greater numbers by creating easier and more affordable ways to travel (Czaika and De Haas 2014) and increasing transnational networks (Ally 2016). Esien (2022) claims transnational networks highlight the importance of migrants' social capital.

Post-apartheid South Africa does not leverage on migrants' social capital (Pineteh 2017), but rather pursues restrictive immigration policies (Gordon 2016). This makes it difficult for many documented African migrants to regularise their presence or to claim resident status in South Africa (Moyo and Zanker 2020). This is partly because the government of South Africa gives preference to migrants with critical skills, while excluding those without critical skills from opportunities (Moyo 2020). Landau (2010) claims the exclusion of African migrants in particular in South Africa is socially legitimate. The near impossibility of finding formal employment in South Africa makes it difficult for African migrants to "feel at home" in the country, thus posing additional challenges for them, already

struggling to survive in South Africa (Okyere 2018). Consequently, migrants' feeling of belonging in South Africa is stretched in different places (Hartnell 2006).

Notwithstanding the challenges African migrants face in South Africa, thousands of Francophones Cameroonians migrate to Pretoria for economic, education, social and political reasons. The migrants have created Hometown Associations (HTAs) as institutions of belonging around suburbs in Pretoria. Pretoria is similar to Cameroon in terms of its linguistic plurality (Bornman et al. 2018; Anchimbe 2006). The city is the administrative capital of South Africa, and home to many diplomatic missions in South Africa (Mabin 2015). This may be why some Francophone Cameroonian migrants chose Pretoria as their migration destination.

HTAs assist Francophone Cameroonian migrants in South Africa to connect their society of origin to the host society through cultural practices such as "the consumption and preparation of symbolic ethnic foods which foster the creation of transnational food links as a means of remaining attached to home, as much as to project their identity in the host society" (Nyamnjoh 2018: 25). They also serve as platforms where Francophone Cameroonian migrants gather to share experiences and work together on issues of common interest (Nyamnjoh 2018), as well as offering support to new migrants with administrative challenges and socio-economic needs (Nyamnjoh et al. 2021; Moya 2005: 849).

However, HTAs, intended to create symbolic experiences for migrants through cultural events, find it difficult to do so because HTA membership is open to Francophone Cameroonian migrants with different indigenous language backgrounds (Nyamnjoh et al. 2021; Nyamnjoh 2018). This is due to globalisation, that has put different indigenous language speakers into greater contact with each other (Wright 2016). It is easy to find HTAs of Francophone Cameroonian migrants in Pretoria who speak different indigenous languages. This is a reflection of the notion of shifting identities found in migrant population across the globe (Mohan 2006). However, in order to understand how Francophone Cameroonian migrants negotiate belonging through HTAs in Pretoria, it is important to explore their life experiences in Pretoria (Mahler 2017).

## Experience of Francophone Cameroonian migrants in Pretoria

Francophone Cameroonian migrants in Pretoria frequently experience hostility from locals due to stereotypes that they are criminals or undocumented migrants (Dube 2019). The migrants struggle with the need to be integrated into the host society because their success partly depends on how they create networks with

locals and the extent to which locals accept them (Pineteh and Thecla 2020). The migrants face a language barrier in Pretoria (an English-dominant city) (Kogan et al. 2018). It is difficult for Francophone Cameroonian migrants to interact socially, politically and economically with locals who speak different languages (Chiswick and Houseworth 2011).

The strange relationship that exists between South Africans and African migrants (Crush and Williams 2002), means Francophone Cameroonian migrants face frequent hostility. Such social stress has made them stay connected to home and elsewhere (Flahaux and De Haas 2016). They rely on transnational ties to gain the knowledge needed to negotiate belonging in two or more places at the same time (Nagel and Staeheli 2008: 419). Glick Schiller et al. (1992: 1-24) describe people who negotiate belonging in two or more places simultaneously as transmigrants.<sup>1</sup> Mahler (2017) claims transmigrants maintain multiple relations; familial, economic, social, organisational, religious and political across borders (transnationalism),<sup>2</sup> with mobility at the centre of transmigration (Herman and Meki Kombe 2019).

Francophone Cameroonian migrants move back and forth between Pretoria and Cameroon as a way to gain emotional support from home and to affirm their belonging in both spaces (Herman and Meki Kombe 2019). However, Nyamnjoh (2018) argues Francophone Cameroonian migrants were initially transmigrants because they maintain close connections back 'home' or with family members in other places through individual or collective remittances or other economic or social support that is sent home in the context of what is described as "*bushfalling*"<sup>3</sup> among Anglophone Cameroonians (Geschiere 2020; Nyamnjoh 2018), and "*Les Mbengis*" among Francophone Cameroonians (Atekmangoh 2017; Ofeh and Muandzevara 2017).

However, due to the challenges of acquiring documentation in South Africa, some Francophone Cameroonian migrants legitimise their stay in the country by applying for asylum seeker documentation, which offers them temporary legal status to reside in the country (Nyamnjoh 2017). But this bars these migrants from travelling back and forth to Cameroon. They are therefore compelled to develop close networks at home via new technologies (transnationalism) (Nyamnjoh 2017), while leaning on other Francophone Cameroonian migrants with proper

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1 "People who live across borders, developing social, familial, economic and religious networks that incorporate them into two or more states" (Glick Schiller et al. 1992: 1-24).

2 Transnationalism is used most frequently to describe a form of contemporary migration in which migrants form long-standing social ties and allegiances to more than one national community (Mitchell 2016; Mügge and De Jong 2013).

3 A term used to describe travelling abroad in quest of opportunities (Nyamnjoh 2011).

documentation to travel with goods from South Africa to Cameroon and vice-versa on their behalf (Nyamnjoh 2017).

The difficulty of obtaining proper documentation in South Africa makes it hard for Francophone Cameroonian migrants to “feel at home away from home” (Nyamnjoh 2018; Claassen 2017; Nyamnjoh 2010). As a result, HTAs have been established across Pretoria to reinforce migrants’ sense of belonging, while also operating as pillars of moral and financial support and avenues for the exchange of information (Wolf 2006: 1 cited in Pineteh 2011). Although the primary motive of many HTAs is to promote a sense of collective cultural belonging, this has changed over the years because of the huge financial need in precarious migration conditions (Herman and Meki Kombe 2019). A number of Francophone Cameroonian migrants have therefore increased their emotional, family, cultural and transnational connections with people at home (Herman and Meki Kombe 2019).

## HTAs in transnational migration debate

Debates on transnationalism allow for critical examination of various activities that facilitate and solidify the link between migrants’ networks at home and host country (Lamba-Nieves 2018). Empirical evidence demonstrates that transnationalism allows HTAs to be embedded in socio-economic and political activities in the country of origin (Lamba-Nieves 2018), while at the same time assisting in negotiating belonging in a host country (Lamba-Nieves 2018). HTAs are sometimes vehicles of politics of belonging (Hickey 2011).

The debates also present a deeper understanding of how HTAs assist migrants to come together and adjust in precarious migration conditions in a host country, while at the same time exercising their ‘loyalty’ to their home country (Lamba-Nieves 2018). Transnationalism has therefore altered the way migrants negotiate belonging because of the opportunity it creates for dual belonging (Klingenberg et al. 2021). Belonging to multiple locations implies that location no longer limits migrants’ sense of belonging (Relph 1976: 39). Meanwhile, Francophone Cameroonian HTAs in Pretoria, supposed to serve as institutions of cultural practices, have been inundated by socioeconomic challenges.

HTAs have also shaped the sense of belonging of Francophone Cameroonian migrants as a result of the differing social interests of members (Faist and Bilecen 2019). This has shown belonging as a complicated and fragmented issue when negotiated outside the space of original belonging (Yuval-Davis 2006). For example, the quest for financial assistance from HTAs in Pretoria as a strategy

of survival has created new dynamics in how belonging is negotiated among migrants (Lamba-Nieves 2018).

HTAs still do provide a base in order to understand how Francophone Cameroonian migrants promote a sense of togetherness, foster transnational networks and organise themselves to meet their social, cultural and economic needs (Pineteh 2011), while dealing with the reality of dislocation under precarious conditions (Owusu 2000). For example, sometimes Francophone Cameroonian migrants perform cultural practices and frequently visit home to lessen the pressure of dislocation. They do so because transnationalism has a severe impact on the social, economic and political lives of migrants and their sense of belonging in the host country (Tedeschi et al. 2020). In addition, the effects of globalisation in terms of rapid technological advancement and shifting geo-political landscapes have allowed migrants to reimagine the world as one interconnected and interdependent space (Löfbrand et al. 2020). This is made possible because globalisation and transnationalism have compressed the world and intensified the consciousness of the world as 'one global space' (Tedeschi et al. 2020).

However, transnationalism during globalisation also entails 'insensitive economic competition, social transformation and new crises of belonging and citizenship as many migrants seek lives beyond national boundaries' (Gilpin 2018). Globalisation and transnationalism have also rendered ambiguous the notions of 'home and homeland' as symbols of belonging, especially in this digital age (Bier and Amoo-Adare 2016). This is because of the wide range of economic, sociocultural and political activities and practices spread across national borders as a result of transnationalism (Bier and Amoo-Adare 2016). This has definitely changed migrants' sense of belonging to places; affects their citizenship and nationality; changes their aspirations, imagination and decisions of everyday life; and influences their identity (Bier and Amoo-Adare 2016).

## Belonging amid transnationalism

Belonging remains at the centre of human interaction whether in the host or home country (Peter et al. 2015). Issues around belonging are important because they can mobilise individuals, communities and nations emotionally and politically around subjects such as origin, citizenship and ethnicity (Peter et al. 2015). However, belonging amid transnationalism is not static but is a set of processes that underpin the way migrants interact with different spaces of belonging (Tsilimpounidi 2016: 157).

People negotiate belonging nationally and internationally but this does not explain how belonging is negotiated under precarious migration conditions. Such contention renders the notion of negotiating belonging semantically complex (Anthias 2006). For example, Francophone Cameroonian migrants construct and reconstruct belonging in highly diverse manner amid multiple ethnic groups, indigenous languages, political and social orientations (Pineteh 2007). This fractures social relationship among Francophone Cameroonian migrants along ethnic lines, thus shaping the way the migrants frame and limit their belonging to membership in HTAs (Pineteh 2008). However, limiting belonging to membership of HTAs ignores deeper emotions involved in negotiating belonging when migrants experience simultaneity in their attachment to different places as a result of being “here and there” (Wilson and Peter 2005).

In addition, indigenous languages supposed to display ethnic identities of HTAs are downplayed in Cameroon itself because more attention is given to promoting English and French official bilingualism (Anchimbe 2006), and this also prevails in Pretoria, because there are widely differing numbers of Francophone Cameroonian migrants per indigenous language group. As a consequence, HTAs that used to bring Cameroonians together to socialise in their indigenous languages now focus on mutual support in precarious situations (Mohan 2006). Indigenous languages no longer draw speakers to the notion of “self” and “other” (Vigourox 2005), and they have been subverted for one large Francophone Cameroonian community, as there are very few Francophone Cameroonian migrants per indigenous language.

## Methodology

Qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 Francophone Cameroonian migrants in Pretoria from backgrounds and statuses as diverse as possible. The participants were chosen based on nonprobability sampling theory between July and August 2020. Non-probability sampling was used because the objective of the study was to create an in-depth description of the phenomenon rather than generalising the findings (Nieuwenhuis 2016: 111-112). Purposive and convenience non-probability sampling was applied to recruit participants (Palys 2008: 697-698).

The use of qualitative in-depth interviews was based on the fact that this descriptive qualitative case study focused on answering how do Francophone Cameroonian migrants negotiate belonging in Pretoria? What is the role of indigenous language in the process of negotiating belonging? Descriptive qualitative case studies give the researcher the chance to retain holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events (Yin 2009: 6971). They also help to describe a phenomenon in which real-life context occurs (Mayring 2000). This

is because “questions of ‘how’ and ‘what’ provide contextual details of human behaviour (Guba and Lincoln 1989: 300).

The questions also allow participants to tell their stories in their own words (Crabtree and Miller 1999). By telling their stories participants describe their views, which helps the researcher to capture their aspirations, regrets and fears (Lather 1992: 87–92). It broadens the researcher’s understanding of participants’ day-to-day concerns and provides rich data for theoretical and practical use (Boeije 2010: 11). The researcher made appointments with participants and communicated with them on several occasions to follow up on the date, time and place of each interview. The data were collected at participants’ workshops and homes because of confidentiality. The interviews were in-depth with open-ended questions based on an interview guide. The order of questions depended on the responses of the participants.

The 20 participants chose to respond to the interview questions in English because they claim they need to interact more in English, the dominant language in Pretoria. However, in some cases participants used a phrase or two in French when answering the interview questions. The researcher translated the phrase(s) into English since he speaks and writes English and French. To mitigate the possible loss of deep meanings, back-to-back translation was used and the researcher did not allow his opinion to influence the translation or responses of participants. All the interviews took place in two suburbs in Pretoria (Sunnyside and Arcadia). The researcher used a recorder to record each interview. The recorder helped the researcher to listen to the interviews repeatedly, making it possible for the researcher to produce verbatim transcriptions from the interviews and an accurate presentation of the data. The transcriptions were however not fully linguistic but verbatim only. The transcription created a base for the content analysis on negotiating belonging of Francophone Cameroonian migrants in Pretoria. The author, however, does not claim to answer how all Francophone Cameroonian migrants negotiate belonging in Pretoria through HTAs as institutions of belonging, as it would not be agent sensitive.

## Research results

The findings of this study are presented according to the research questions. The analysis and interpretation of the results are done through the instruments and procedures mentioned earlier. The data are presented according to the method, and then the interpretation of the data in order to answer the research questions. The first research question was; how do Francophone Cameroonian migrants negotiate belonging in Pretoria? The second question was; What is the role of indigenous languages in the process of negotiating belonging? Therefore,



to provide a clear understanding of how Francophone Cameroonian migrants negotiate belonging in Pretoria, the results are presented in the subsections below.

### *How do Francophone Cameroonian migrants negotiate belonging in Pretoria*

The findings show that some Francophone Cameroonian migrants with contacts in Pretoria negotiate belonging in HTAs before arriving Pretoria. For example, participant no. 3 said,

*"[...] before I left Cameroon my girlfriend had been living in Pretoria for about 4 years. She told me about the difficulties of having a job in South Africa and the importance of belonging to a hometown association. My girlfriend registered and paid my membership fee in her hometown association 6 months before I arrived. When I arrived, I was not seen as a new member. This helped me to get financial support though it was a small amount. It somehow helped me to extend my Visa."*

Those without contacts can only negotiate belonging after arriving Pretoria, adding complexity in negotiating belonging under precarious migration conditions. For example, migrants who register in HTAs before arrival seem more stable in their respective HTAs than those who did not. Newly arrived non-registered migrants often get confused as to which HTA to choose. As the findings show, this is because Francophone Cameroonian migrants in Pretoria often provide new migrants with contradictory information regarding HTAs. Participant no. 5 for example, said,

*"[...] when I arrived Pretoria, I did not know which hometown association to join, I was confused."*

When the participant was asked why he was confused, he said,

*"[...] When enquiring on which hometown association to join, every one that I spoke to said bad things about the hometown associations which they are not members and good things about the hometown associations which they are members. This really made me confused; I stayed for almost a year without joining any hometown association."*

For the new migrants, the complexity of negotiating belonging under precarious migration condition starts with the conflicting information from established migrants in Pretoria about which HTA to choose. Yuval-Davis (2006) demonstrates the complicated, multiple and fragmented nature of belonging when negotiated outside the space of origin such as is the case of Francophone Cameroonian

migrants in Pretoria. bell hooks (2009), also provides “an intricate and detailed account of how negotiating belonging differs according to circumstances throughout history” due to the ‘precarity’ involved in the process.

Twelve participants say they have deeper relationships with members of their HTAs than with other Francophone Cameroonian migrants who are not members of their HTAs. This is, the data shows, because precarious migration conditions in South Africa makes migrants despair, feeling excluded from employment opportunities due to the contradictory employment laws. Migrants from the same HTAs build long-lasting relationships with each other so as to support each other physically, financially and emotionally. Hence, participant no. 4 said,

*“[...] since there are no jobs in Pretoria, I needed to have true friends that I can trust. I needed friends that I can share a meal with them today knowing if I don't have food tomorrow, they can also do the same. I realised the only place to have such kind of friends is in the hometown association.”*

Moreover, the data shows that under precarious migration conditions there is a shift in terms of the nature of HTAs and the reasons to negotiate belonging in the various HTAs. For example, participant no. 13 said,

*“[...] My hometown association in Pretoria is not like the one in Cameroon. Even though it is still Nde association. The one in Pretoria accepts people who cannot speak Nde.”*

The shift in the nature of HTAs is due to the very variable number of Francophone Cameroonian migrants per village of origin or indigenous language spoken. In addition, HTAs in Pretoria play the role of pragmatic belonging driven by economic motives or the stress of overcoming ‘isolation’. However, not all Francophone Cameroonians in Pretoria are driven by these reasons when negotiating belonging in Pretoria. Migrants with blood relatives or those who are economically successful do not often feel the need to join HTAs.

Furthermore, the findings showed the complex hybrid nature of HTAs in Pretoria. For example, membership of HTAs in Pretoria is semi-inclusive because they are open to Francophone Cameroonians who speak different indigenous languages and sometimes are extended to Anglophone Cameroonian migrants as well. The semi-inclusive nature renders these HTAs void of homogeneity. The semi-inclusive nature of HTAs also affects the way belonging is negotiated. Participant no. 20, for example, said,

*“[...] I have friends in my hometown association who are not from my village. They only speak French to me. So, I cannot see them as family even though we belong to the same hometown association. We all have our reasons for joining the hometown association”.*

For the purpose of logical alignment, HTAs in Pretoria are classified in two categories in terms of their functions. The first category of HTAs operate like a ‘Stokvel’ – “a self-help initiative designed to respond to the problems of income insecurity in communities” (Matuku and Kaseke 2014: 502-504). This category is not a replica of HTAs in Cameroon. It is created as a result of precarious migration conditions, even though it is referred to as an HTA by the majority of Francophone Cameroonian migrants. Actually, they should not be described as HTAs because they lack the characteristics of conventional HTAs replicated from and across Cameroon. Conventional HTAs in Cameroon for example are made up of people who hail from the same village or share an indigenous language that is often the dominant language of the village.

This first category of HTAs in Pretoria deviates completely from negotiating belonging along indigenous language lines, like back in Cameroon. Pineteh (2011) attempts to place this category of HTAs under “national association”. This is partly because the primary purpose of these HTAs is to provide financial assistance to members in distress through a scheme of regular monthly financial contribution where one or two members receive a sum of money to be reimbursed later. The sum of money is described among Francophone Cameroonian migrants as ‘*tontine*’ (a form of “investment scheme through which shareholders derive some form of profit or benefit” (Milevsky 2015: 1)). The ability to provide financial assistance to members of the first category of HTAs is the primary reason a large number of Francophone Cameroonian migrants, in dire financial need, negotiate belonging in this category of HTAs.

In addition, the need for financial assistance in the first category subverts negotiating belonging along indigenous language lines. Sixteen out of 20 participants confirmed that financial assistance was the only reason they joined the first category of HTAs. Participant no. 16, for example, said,

*“[...] the reason why I joined the hometown association is because I was only interested in the financial support that is offered in the hometown association more than anything [...] what do I do with culture while I am suffering in Pretoria?” I need money to start my business and to pay back later. This is what the hometown association does to members”.*

Some examples of this kind of HTAs in Pretoria are Friends of Friends, Foyer Francophone, Centre-Sud and Friends without Borders. These HTAs are registered as not-for-profit organisations (NPO) at the Department of Social Development in Pretoria in order to obtain documentation that allows them to open bank accounts for the associations because of the huge financial transactions involved. Due to the fact that financial assistance is offered in these HTAs, some participants said they felt a strong sense of belonging in them. This has to do with the fact that the financial assistance is offered indiscriminately to members in distress. Participant no. 19, for example, said,

*“[...] I belong to association Centre – Sud. In our association every member is treated the same. Each person has their turn to be helped. There is nothing like this one comes from this village and that one from another village. We are all Cameroonians.”*

Fourteen of the 20 participants also mentioned that monthly contributions in these HTAs is considered more important than the physical presence of members during meeting hours. This is because financial contribution is a reflection of active membership here, which in turn assists members to access financial assistance in times of distress. Also, regular financial contributions in these HTAs determine the depth of belonging. For example, participant no. 11 said,

*“[...] I sent money to the guy who picked me at the airport to register me in his HTA. When my membership fee was paid, he kept updating me after every meeting session [...] and in serious matters that require financial assistance we always made a plan so that my contribution was paid. When I arrived Pretoria, I was not considered as a typical new member except for the fact that I was meeting the other members for the first time when arrival. My regular contribution helped me to have financial support when I needed it though it was a small amount. It somehow helped me to apply for my visa renewal.”*

The friend of participant no. 11 understood that keeping an active membership in these HTAs helps access to financial assistance, so he urged his friend to become a registered member even before arriving in Pretoria.

Furthermore, belonging in these HTAs is less polemic in terms of the way members express their feeling of belonging to the HTA. This can be attributed to the strong role of finance in these HTAs. The second category of HTAs attempt to operate along indigenous language lines, similar to conventional HTAs in Cameroon. But each indigenous language has only a few speakers in Pretoria; it is difficult to find a large number of Francophone Cameroonian migrants who speak the same indigenous language. This was confirmed during the field work

as it was impossible to meet 10 Francophone Cameroonian migrants speaking the same indigenous language and belonging to the same HTA. In many cases, 5 out of 10 migrants may come from the same village of origin, but speak slightly different indigenous languages due to the huge diversity of Cameroon indigenous languages (more than 240 of them) (Anchimbe 2007, 2005; Echu 2004).

As a consequence, this category of HTAs in Pretoria faces serious challenges when looking for migrants speaking the same indigenous language. In the participant testimonies, it was hard to find 10 migrants speaking the same indigenous language. In recruiting members, these HTAs have to consider the indigenous language diversity among Francophone Cameroonian migrants in Pretoria, the result being that it is very difficult to find an HTAs of this sort where all members speak the same indigenous language.

Vis-à-vis the huge indigenous language diversity, these HTAs have taken on a hybrid nature; I accepting migrants who may speak different indigenous languages on condition that they come from the same region in Cameroon. However, the number of these HTAs in Pretoria is diminishing, because they don't offer financial assistance like the other HTAs and therefore attract fewer migrants.

Some participants, members of the second category of HTAs, said they simultaneously belonged to one or two HTAs of the first sort. The fact that some Francophone Cameroonian migrants negotiate belonging in two or more HTAs in Pretoria heightens the “*multiscale*” nature of negotiating belonging in precarious migration conditions. For example, while negotiating belonging in the first category of HTAs is to gain financial assistance, at the same time belonging in the second category is to be close to migrants who speak the same indigenous languages or come from the same region. Participant no. 4 for example mentioned that,

*“[...] I am a Mbouda man, I joined Mbouda hometown association because I don't have blood relatives in Pretoria. The closest relatives I could think of are people from my village that is why I belong to Mbouda association. Then I also belong to association Centre – Sud because of tontine.”*

The contrasts in the motives of negotiating belonging to two or more categories of HTAs in Pretoria add nuance to how belonging is negotiated under precarious migration conditions. Participant no. 16 said,

*“[...] the reason I joined more than one hometown association is because I have to survive in Pretoria. If I don't find help in one, I can find it in the other.”*

It is clear that even though joining the first category of HTAs in Pretoria is due to needing financial assistance, the testimonies confirmed that migrants who

negotiate belonging in these HTAs also feel a deep sense of belonging. At the same time, negotiating belonging in the second category of HTAs as well in order to be close to other migrants who speak their indigenous languages or come from the same region/province, makes them feel a sense of belonging too. This shows the contradictory and multiple strands in migrants' sense of negotiating belonging through HTAs under precarious migration conditions. This is primary because negotiating belonging under precarious migration conditions often creates anxiety for migrants because their success partly depends on how they maintain their transnational networks and network in the host country (Atanda 2011).

The fact that Francophone Cameroonian migrants cannot easily network with locals puts them in an awkward position. This means migrants must rely on HTAs to raise the resources required for success. Participant no. 14, for example, said,

*"[...] My only friends are the members of my hometown association because it is difficult to borrow money from South Africans or people from other African countries here in Pretoria. So, you need to stay close to the people from your country."*

As observed, Francophone Cameroonian migrants cannot properly display their emotional belonging to HTAs under precarious migration conditions. Migrants' sense of belonging to one or more HTAs changes depending on how they are treated in those HTAs. This makes negotiating belonging under precarious migration conditions even more complex, as more often than not, negotiating belonging in Pretoria is dominated by the need for financial assistance. That is why many Francophones Cameroonian migrants who belong to the second category of HTAs are frequently abandoning this category for the first category. Consequently, many HTAs of the second category are transforming into the first category. What then is the role of indigenous languages in the process of negotiating belonging?

### *The role of indigenous language in the process*

The data showed that indigenous language does not play a major role when negotiating belonging under precarious migration conditions. For example, there is no indigenous language dominance in the first category of HTAs. Members in this category frequently switch between French and English in order to communicate because there are always new migrants who arrive in Pretoria and cannot speak English. In addition, the non-dominance of indigenous language in the first category of HTAs mean that there is no dominance of one ethnic group over any other. Myers-Scotton (2006: 120) argues the dominance of an indigenous language in the first category of HTAs would shape the way belonging is

negotiated (Myers–Scotton 2006: 120). This is because Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (2005) claims “language choice in a multilingual society is critical because it shapes the way people think and see the world”. The view is upheld by Léglise and Migge (2008: 1-2) who argue that any language chosen in a multilingual society has the ability to create prejudice that assigns low prestige to other languages. Prejudices can also shape how belonging is negotiated. Moreover, indigenous language that is considered a symbol of belonging is of less significance because of precarious migration conditions in Pretoria. Participant no. 7 for example said,

*“[...] If Afrikaans can give me money in Pretoria, I will drop my indigenous language to learn Afrikaans because I need to survive.”*

The testimony of Participant no. 7 concurs with that of Participant no. 9, who said,

*“[...] I don’t see the importance of indigenous language here in Pretoria that is why in our association nobody cares about it. [...] what is the use of my home language in Pretoria if I cannot eat?”*

One might assume that indigenous languages serve as enablers when negotiating belonging in Pretoria, similarly to Cameroon. On the contrary, they are not. Members of the first category of HTAs for example are more interested in financial assistance than cultural practices. As a result, indigenous languages do not count much. Participant no. 1 for example mentioned that,

*“[...] indigenous language is not important in my association because you might not see anyone to speak with. Well, for me I mostly speak English during meetings because I am trying to perfect my English now that I am in Pretoria. Besides, there is no one who can speak my indigenous language in the association.”*

However, in the second category of HTAs, the presence of multiple indigenous languages presents an opposing role in the process of negotiating belonging. For example, the interviews show that some members of these HTAs often feel excluded from the HTAs because there are sometimes three or four members who speak the same indigenous language. Indigenous languages in this category of HTAs either enable inclusive or exclusive belonging. For example, participant no. 5 said,

*“[...] During meetings you find people speaking in their indigenous language from left to right or across people. And if there is no one who speak your own language you are left alone. I am not from Mbouda so I don’t speak Mbouda. But when those from Mbouda speak their indigenous language during meetings it turn me off. I often feel like taking my stuff and leave.”*

In addition, four participants also said they spoke their indigenous language with each other because they want to maintain some secrecy when they are around people who cannot speak it. Deprez-de Heredia and Varro (1991) argue that the use of indigenous language for 'code-switching' in order to maintain secrecy is a common practice among multilingual or bilingual migrants. Besides maintaining secrecy, two participants mentioned that they speak indigenous languages because it gives them a sense of comfort. Participant no. 18 said,

*"[...] when I speak my indigenous language with a member of my association, I feel comfortable because naturally I relate easily with people who speak my indigenous language."*

Two others mentioned that they speak indigenous languages as a way to preserve their traditions. Participant no. 14 said,

*"[...] I try to speak my indigenous language with members of my hometown association just for the fact that I truly love the phonetics of my indigenous language. I battle not to lose the phonetics. There are expressions in my indigenous language with very deep meaning that cannot be translated into French or English. Any attempt to translate the word or phrase will lose the original meaning."*

## Conclusion

Negotiating belonging in HTAs under precarious migration conditions is changeable, as migrants often belong to more than one HTA. Migrants switch from one HTA to another in search of financial assistance. This implies that HTAs that are supposed to be institutions of belonging are transactional under precarious migration conditions, since migrants are less attracted to HTAs that do not offer financial assistance. As a result, migrants increasingly leave the second category of HTAs to the first, because negotiating belonging under precarious migration conditions is pragmatic. It allows migrants to reaffirm multiple belonging to HTAs thereby multiplying their sense of "in between-ness" when they move from the second to the first category of HTA or vice-versa. In addition, negotiating belonging is highly individualistic.

Francophone Cameroonian migrants in Pretoria negotiate belonging amid complex social forces like discrimination and hostility against African migrants in South Africa. This paper argues that physical re-location associated with transmigration and multiple ties and interactions due to transnationalism changes how belonging is negotiated traditionally. The pragmatic needs of a strategy to survive under precarious migration conditions are primary. This paper therefore



concludes that indigenous languages that are salient symbols of belonging do matter in Pretoria, but because of precarity migrants have to negotiate belonging and navigate different spaces primarily with the intention to survive, thus the rise in the number of migrants leaving HTAs that focus on cultural belonging to those that focus on financial belonging. And the fact that Francophone Cameroonian migrants in Pretoria are willing to integrate/assimilate in the host society opens up new dynamics that may add further complexity to the already fragmented belonging in HTAs in Pretoria.

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