# MAKING FAMILIES AMONG CAMEROONIAN 'BUSH FALLERS' IN GERMANY: MARRIAGE, MIGRATION, AND THE LAW

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| AsylbLG | German law on welfare benefits to asylum seekers (*Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz*) |
| BAMF | Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (*Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge*) |
| BICEC | Banking Network in Cameroon (*La Banque Internationale du Cameroun pour l'Epargne et le Crédit*) |
| BMI | Federal Ministry of the Interior (*Bundesministerium des Inneren*) |
| CAMRAIL | Cameroon National Railway |
| CDHS | Cameroon Demographic and Health Survey |
| CDU | Christian Democratic Union (political party, Germany) |
| CSU | Christian Social Union (political party, Germany) |
| CFA | *Communauté Financière Africaine* (the franc CFA is the currency used in Western Africa) |
| CPDM | Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (political party, Cameroon) |
| CPI | Corruption Perception Index |
| DAAD | German Academic Exchange Service (*Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst*) |
| Destatis | German Federal Statistical Office |
| DED | German Development Service (*Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst*) |
| DELSA | Directorate for Employment Labour and Social Affairs, OECD |
| DNA | Deoxyribonucleic acid |
| DVD | Digital Versatile Disc |
| EESI | Survey on Employment and the Informal Sector conducted by the National Institute of Statistics (IMS) |
| EU | European Union |
| EUROSTAT | Statistical Office of the European Communities |
| FRG | Federal Republic of Germany (Bundesrepublik Deutschland) |
| FRONTEX | *Frontières extérieures* for 'external borders', legally: European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union |

ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| GDR | German Democratic Republic (Deutsche Demokratische Republik) |
| GNI | gross national income (per capita) |
| GTZ | German Technical Cooperation (*Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit*) |
| HRW | Human Rights Watch |
| IAF | Association for Binational Marriage and Family (Verband binationaler Familien und Partnerschaften) |
| IFORD | Institute for Demographic Education and Research (*Institut de Formation et de Recherche Démographiques, Yaoundé*) |
| ILO | International Labor Organisation |
| IMIS | Institute for Migration and Integration Studies, Osnabrück |
| IMS | National Institute of Statistics, Cameroon |
| IOM | International Organization for Migration |
| MPIDR | Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, Rostock |
| NGO | non-governmental organisation |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| PRB | Population Reference Bureau |
| SDF | Social Democratic Front (political party, Cameroon) |
| SONEL | Energy Company (*Société Nationale d'Electricité du Cameroun*) |
| TV | television |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNFPA | United Nations Population Fund |
| UNHCR | United Nations Refugee Agency |
| US(A) | United States (of America) |

# I  INTRODUCTION

> "Even if the Europeans build the wall until the sky,
>
> Africans will still find a way to enter."
>
> (male Cameroonian shop owner, 33 years old)

## *Simon's story*

Simon had just started university in the Southwest province of Cameroon when his father died, leaving him some land and money.[1] At age 24, he decided he could best realize his potential if he pursued his career in Europe. His two older brothers and uncle collectively had 'pushed' him saying that it would be the best both for Simon and the entire family if he left to Germany. They had heard that in Germany, opportunities "to make it" were good. Simon's future perspectives in Cameroon did not look bright. Even a university degree would hardly enable him to find an adequate position and make a living. Simon and his relatives believed he would easily find work in Germany and return with enough money to set up his own business and build a house on the father's land.

The tourist visa which brought Simon to Germany in December 2001 was only valid for three months; after that he had to look for alternatives. In February 2002, Simon claimed asylum in Eisenhüttenstadt, the center for newly arrived asylum seekers in Germany, as a person persecuted for his political opinions. Coming from the Anglophone part of Cameroon, he told the authorities, he would be seen as a member of the political opposition. Simon was sent to an asylum home outside of Berlin. Privately, he never expected to be granted asylum. But being an asylum seeker at least gave him the temporary right to stay in Germany.

The first year in Germany passed without any success. Instead, Simon stayed in the asylum home, dependent on social benefits, and forbidden to earn money or enroll in school. In the second year and still with no decision on his asylum case, Simon ventured out, working on construction sites, either undocumented and without a work contract or with borrowed papers

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[1] To prevent the reader from drawing conclusions about individuals, all names are fictitious. Biographical information and the life-course descriptions are also modified, and some individual characteristics of respondents have been combined to prevent the identification of persons or locations. These changes were necessary to protect my interlocutors. Anonymizations increase the chances that neither the persons nor the places will be identified. These changes do not, however, have any influence on the content and context of statements, descriptions, and results.

of a friend. In his third year in the asylum home, Simon realized that as an asylum seeker, he had hardly any chance to work toward his life goals. Friends and relatives back home, and other asylum seekers in Germany advised him to find a German woman to marry in order to qualify for long-term residency in Germany, and hence a work permit.

I met Simon for the first time in Berlin in autumn 2005 when he had been dating a 20 year old German woman named Marlene for half a year. She was still enrolled in education, and was living with her parents in the North of Germany. They had gotten to know each other via chat on the Internet. During her vacation, Simon was permitted to visit Marlene. He explained his situation to her: how he got to Germany, his life in the asylum home, the difficulties of finding work, and his desire to study. Fearing that Simon's asylum claim would be denied and lead to his deportation, they decided to get married.

After obtaining all necessary documents and undergoing several grueling interviews at the civil registry office, Simon and Marlene were allowed to marry in August 2006. They moved together and Simon received his temporary right to reside in Germany. His father-in-law got him a part-time job in his company. Finally after five years in Germany, he was able to send some money to his relatives in Cameroon who had been asking for remittances ever since he arrived.

In December 2008, Simon explained that his relationship to Marlene was troubled and he was thinking about moving out, but worried that this separation would have consequences for his legal status since he had not yet received permanent residency. Simon was dependent on his wife at least until he had received permanent residency in Germany. He dreamt about starting his own life. In the long-term perspective, Simon planned to return to Cameroon, open a small business, build a house, and eventually marry a Cameroonian woman and have two or three children.

Simon's story, extremely quite common among Cameroonian men in Germany, brings to light a number of key aspects of my study: the linkages between transnational migration, family formation, and immigration policy. It also sheds light on structural constraints in both sending and receiving societies that shape the lives of immigrants, be they familial obligation or immigration policies. Yet, at the same time it is equally about the agency of an individual migrant seeking to work out ways of managing Germany's often discriminatory structures by claiming asylum, working undocumented, and marrying a German woman. Simon's story illustrates motives for migration, difficulties of border crossing, and the struggle to find ways

to legality. But against this 'aberration' theme, it also points to what is increasingly becoming a norm, among Germany's African immigrants: migration as a temporary phase in a life course that begins and ends in Africa.

## *Transnational migration, family formation, and legality*

My study on migration of Cameroonians to Germany describes the interplay of transnational mobility, marriage, family and kinship among migrants, and the overarching legal framework of immigration that so strongly shapes their lives. My research emphasizes the extent to which changes in the national and European Union (EU) immigration laws shape marital and reproductive practices of Cameroonian migrants.

I have entitled my book "Making families among Cameroonian 'bush fallers' in Germany: marriage, migration, and the law", which points to the interrelationship between family formation patterns of Cameroonian migrants and immigration policy. The Pidgin-English term *bush faller*, which is widely used throughout Cameroon, especially in the Anglophone part of the country, describes a person who is leaving the country to search for a better life. The Pidgin phrase is derived from the verb *to fall bush*, and means to go to the 'bush' to hunt, gather or harvest and to return successfully with food to nourish the family (see also Jua 2003). Interview partners commonly used the term to describe Cameroonians in Europe or the US who were looking for 'greener pastures' to achieve individual and family goals. The term also conveys a sense of danger and risk: breaking new ground in a distant place.

My study explores how increasingly restrictive immigration and integration policies in Germany force Cameroonian migrants to develop family-related practices for acquiring legal residence and obtaining an essential work permit.[2] In doing so, the example of Cameroonians in Germany illustrates the limitations of transnational movements for third-country nationals. I am interested in three overlapping research areas: transnational migration, marriage and

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[2] There are various definitions of the term 'migrant'. Distinctions are made between immigrant, settled person, person with migration background, transmigrant, and so on. In addition, studies often differ between economic migrant, asylum-seeker, foreign worker, travelling businessman, student, and highly skilled professional. It is, however, not possible to clearly distinguish between these categories. In this study, I consider Cameroonian migrants to be persons with Cameroonian nationality living in Germany at the time of the interview. Persons traveling on vacation, on a short business trip, or for medical treatment are not considered migrants (IOM 2009; www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/migration-management-foundations/terminology/migration-typologies, last accessed 10 July 2009).

childbearing, and legality. In the following, I will briefly discuss each of these thematic fields, and explain how they are intertwined.

Since its inception, the EU has been concerned with protecting its territory against the arrival of 'undesired migrants', while, at the same time, ensuring the free movement of persons within internal borders. Thus, on the one hand, movements of goods, capital, services, and people between EU member states are highly welcomed. The character of movement within the EU borders has been affirmed in a number of intergovernmental agreements, such as the Schengen Agreement of 1985 and the Schengen Convention of 1990. On the other hand, EU governments have increasingly restricted immigration of third-country nationals, such as Africans.[3] Non-EU nationals, and especially non-OECD nationals, face strict immigration laws which make entry to and remaining in Europe increasingly difficult. In recent years, the EU and its member states have come to favor the idea of effectively controlling their external borders ('Fortress Europe'[4]), thereby limiting immigration to a highly educated and/or financially strong elite. Despite these efforts, the EU has failed to significantly curb immigration from Africa and other regions. Instead, these policies have led to greater reliance on increasingly dangerous undocumented migration.[5] Furthermore, stricter immigration laws have paradoxically encouraged permanent settlement of those who succeed in entering the EU (de Haas 2008).

Migration is an issue that on the one hand, raises the hopes of many, not just of the migrants themselves, but also of ageing and shrinking countries like Germany. On the other hand, migration, particularly from developing countries, is frequently seen with ambivalence among members of the receiving society fearing the loss of culture or rivalry over resources. The immigration of third-country nationals into the EU is often associated not only with a threat to economic growth and the welfare state, but also with security considerations. Politicians of EU

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[3] The external border management system of the EU Member States 'FRONTEX' is just one example for the common efforts of the EU to secure and control external borders. The name 'FRONTEX' comes originally from French: *Frontière extérieures*. This European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union is based in Warsaw and was created as an independent body to provide added value to the national border management system of the Member States (www.frontex.europa.eu, last accessed 13 May 2008).

[4] The term 'Fortress Europe' points to the rising efforts of the EU and its member states to build up 'walls' of protection against immigration. In this regard, asylum and immigration rights become more restrictive.

[5] The human tragedy of African migrants arriving (or dying) in boats or underneath trucks is almost daily documented in European media. According to a press review posted by Gabriele del Grande over 14,000 people have died since 1988 along the European frontiers (http://fortresseurope.blogspot.com, last accessed 20 April 2009).

member states repeatedly state that the migration dilemma is caused by a lack of control (Castles & Miller 2009).

These restrictive immigration and integration policies in Europe increasingly force African migrants to develop strategies and practices to acquire legal residence, and thus to obtain an essential work permit. My account of Cameroonian migrants to Germany contributes to the current debate on the relevance of EU and national policy for transnational migrants. Despite EU efforts to control and 'manage' immigration of third-country nationals, national policies of EU member states remain decisive for most regulations concerning entry, residence, and work permits. German immigration and integration policy determine the right to settle and the risk of expulsion. Hence, the German nation state plays a critical role for African migrants.

This study aims to analyze how German immigration and integration policies affect practices of migrants, notably the impact on migrants' marital and reproductive behaviors; or, as Coutin (2000) puts it, "how immigration law produces its subjects". My work helps us to understand why migrants are induced to distribute temporalized vital events, especially marriage and birth, over international boundaries in response to restrictions imposed on their rights to live and work. The case of Cameroonians in Germany illustrates the limitations of transnational movements for some migrants, and provides an example of the interdependencies between migration, marriage, childbearing, and the law.

Germany has steadily tightened its criteria for entry and residency down to the moral and ethical cores of German society: asylum, marriage, and family.[6] Unwanted migrants are thus forced to develop strategies and practices based on these values to become legally included. My research describes some highly gender-specific patterns by which Cameroonians move across national borders to obtain a necessary legal residency and work permit in Germany: diminishing options for legalizing their status in Germany by other means make Cameroonian men increasingly dependent on sustaining a marriage to a German wife for at least three years.[7]

Marriage to a German partner is one way to realize migration goals, and to fulfill the dream of a better life; or, as Beck-Gernsheim (2006: 119) puts it, "marriage as migration strategy…as

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[6] According to Kofman (2004), a combination of asylum, 'illegality', and family formation represent the last remaining ways for non-EU nationals to enter and temporarily remain within the EU.
[7] Family formation patterns of Cameroonians elsewhere in Europe are not something I can discuss authoritatively because I did not study them. However, in the subsequent chapters I highlight some comparisons with other European countries or with other African nationalities drawing on literature, numbers or conversations. This contributes to the more general discussion on how practices of African migrants are shaped by national and EU immigration laws and policies.

ticket to a better world". While Cameroonian men increasingly dependent on contracting and sustaining a three-year marriage to a German woman, Cameroonian women try to obtain residency permits, and thus access to the social welfare system, by bearing a German child. The distribution of marriage and parenthood over space and time becomes a means of securing the right to stay and work in Germany.

The only way for some migrants to gain legitimacy is to merge their family lives directly with those of the people in the destination country. So great is the need to join a European family in order to stay, that there have been only very few registered marriages or births between Cameroonian partners in the German context. The nuptial and reproductive practices of Cameroonian men and women have to be seen in relation to the degree to which Germany has narrowed modes of entry to the country.

My study contributes to the existing literature on the transnational migration with perspectives on marriage strategies of male migrants and reproductive practices of female migrants. There are only a few studies which discuss the interplay of transnational migration, marriage, and childbearing. Existing studies on the marriage strategies of migrants concentrate on foreign-born women entering a country of destination by relying on marriage to a native-born man.[8] The marriage strategies of male migrants are highly under-researched. Likewise, the investigation of the reproductive practices of female migrants is rather new.

Using the concept of transnationalism, which refers to various kinds of movements, settlements, and interactions between two or more geographical places (Faist 2000, Glick Schiller et al. 1992, Smith & Guarnizo 1998, Portes 1997), my study encompasses motives of emigration, processes of actually moving between places, descriptions of arrival in the country of destination, efforts to secure legal integration, and the incentives to return. The aim is to draw a holistic picture, rather than to tell a story with one starting and one end point. All these processes and dynamics related to migration are influenced by politics, economics, culture, and the social context. Forms of mobility are always embedded in a wider socioeconomic context. In my study, migration is viewed as a dynamic process which has implications not only for those who move (migrants), but also for those who stay behind (non-migrants: family, kin, and

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[8] Lauser (2004) provides an excellent study of a transnational perspective on marriage migration using the example of Philippine women in Germany. Another analysis on Philippines-German marriages was conducted by Beer (1996), who presented the results of an ethnographic study on Philippine marriage migrants in Hamburg.

community in both sending and receiving countries). I show that migrants often remain connected in both places of residence. There are a wide range of social networks connecting the country of origin and the country of destination; remittances are one example.[9] Dynamics of African mobility and the networks which connect several places are, so far, poorly explored. There are, however, some exceptions such as Bryceson and Vuorela (2002), Glick Schiller et al. (2005), and Mazzucato (2008).

To explain the practices of Cameroonian migrants, one needs to concentrate on the context of origin, and to explore meanings of marriage, childbearing/parenthood, and migration in the Cameroonian setting. African migrants often plan to migrate long before the actual move, and therefore adjust the timing and spacing of vital events, such as marriage and birth. Hence, changes within the national and the EU context have an enormous influence on Africans' efforts to leave their countries of origin to move to Europe. My research offers new insights into the contexts of both the sending and receiving countries. This makes it possible to extend and deepen the transnational concept, and to highlight some specific aspects of the migration process, such as the concepts of exclusion and marginalization.

Using the example of Cameroonian migrants to Germany, this study discusses the interplay between transnational migration, family formation processes, such as marriage and childbearing, and the legal framework. However, there are some limitations to the scope of this study. First, the study does not aim to be representative of all Cameroonians in Germany. I am aware that Cameroonian migrants in Germany are a heterogeneous group. Therefore, I can only highlight the situation of my informants, and offer some comparisons with migrants from Ghana and Nigeria, by, for example, analyzing the numbers and kinds of binational marriages in Germany. Second, I focus on male Cameroonians, and only secondarily discuss the life trajectories of Cameroonian women. In doing so, I primarily analyze Cameroonian migrants' marital behavior, and examine their reproductive practices only secondarily. Third, this study does not intend to provide advice to lawmakers or offer suggestions for immigration and integration policies.

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[9] However, not all all migrants maintain such ties. For further studies, it would be interesting to further examine situations where migrants break with their kin.

## *Specifics of Cameroonian migration to Germany*

The relationships between transnational migration, family formation, and legality have not yet been extensively explored. But why choose the example of African migration to Europe, or, more precisely, of Cameroonians coming to Germany? So far, studies on immigration to and integration in Germany have concentrated on former 'guest worker groups' and following generations. Few studies have emphasized newer migrants groups, such as sub-Saharan Africans.[10] African migration to Germany becomes increasingly relevant, not only because of the increasing number of migrants who are arriving and attempting to stay, but also because of the very different pathways and contextual settings compared to the guest worker generation. There are four main factors why studying Cameroonian migration to Germany is of interest.

First, sub-Saharan African migrants in Germany are a recent phenomenon.[11] They started arriving in larger numbers in the mid-1980s, when an economic crisis hit many African countries. Migration from Cameroon migration is relatively large compared with streams into Germany from other sub-Saharan African countries. With an official estimate of 14,414 in 2006 (Federal Statistical Office), Cameroonian migrants constitute the third-largest group from sub-Saharan Africa; they are thus just behind Ghanaians (20,587) and Nigerians (16,189).[12] Furthermore, the stream of migrants from Cameroon has increased steadily in the past 10 years, whereas the number of other sub-Saharan migrants in Germany has declined.[13]

Second, in sharp contrast to the aging German population, Cameroonian migrants are predominantly young.[14] A large percentage of them are registered as students. In 2006, there

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[10] One exception is Glick Schiller et al. (2005). The article is based on the ethnography of Ghanaians in Berlin (B. Nieswand), Nigerians and Congolese in Halle/ Saale (N. Glick Schiller) and Somalis in Germany (G. Schlee), among others.

[11] In general, African migration is not a new phenomenon. People have long moved from one place to the other for diverse reasons: war, famine, civil or religious conflicts, discovery of new settlements, etc. Africa has been described "as the continent with the most mobile population in the world" (IOM. World Migration 2005: 33). Particularly West and Central Africa are known for their extensive movements between regions (Trager 2005). However, African migration to Germany does not have a long tradition.

[12] Other major destinations of Cameroonian migrants are France (1999: 20,436), Italy (2003: 3,313), Belgium (2004: 2,432), Netherlands (2003: 1,593), Spain, the UK, and the US (www.migrationpolicy.org, last accessed 1 July 2009).

[13] Official statistics on Cameroonian migrants in Germany do not include unregistered migrants living and working in Germany. Furthermore, people of African origin but with German citizenship or a passport from another European country (e.g., Africans from the 'second generation') are not officially registered as immigrants in Germany. Overall, it is estimated that the 'real number' of African immigrants in Germany is about 50% higher than statistical reports suggest (Lentz 2002). This would mean that around 20,000 Cameroonian migrants in Germany are living both registered and undocumented in the country.

[14] Africa is a continent of young people, and population growth is the highest of the world (Adepoju 1991: 206). According to the World Population Data Sheet (2008) provided by the Population Reference Bureau (PRB 2008)

were 5,503 Cameroonian students enrolled in German universities, and the number is increasing (DAAD 2006). Around 1,000 Cameroonian students enroll each year in a German university (ibid.). Though this is a relatively small number, Cameroonians represent the largest sub-Saharan African group of students studying at German universities.[15] Because of their young age and educational profile, their forms of adaptation and economic contributions to Cameroonian, as well as to German society are likely to be different from those that would be expected from, for example, less-educated migrants. The second largest group of Cameroonians in Germany are asylum seekers, who often lack any realistic chance of being granted asylum. Without changing their legal status, neither asylum seekers nor students have the long-term right to stay and work in Germany.

Third, compared with former guest worker generations, Cameroonian migrants take quite different pathways of entry and different strategies for remaining in the country of destination. Whereas guest workers were at least temporarily welcomed as workers in Germany, African migrants are confronted with quite different legal and political conditions concerning access to the labor market, right to residency, and family reunification regulations. Germany has a hierarchical system of classification and regulation, and distinguishes not only between EU and non-EU citizens, but also between the different legal statuses of migrants (Morris 2000).

From this follows a fourth point: because Germany increasingly erects barriers intended to discourage assumed 'economic migrants' from Africa, which overwhelmingly is what Cameroonians are, migrants are forced to develop new strategies in order to be legally included and obtain the right to work. By default, then, binational marriages and parenthood are often the only means of acquiring rights to live and work in Germany.

## *Structure, networks, and agency*

The exploration of Cameroonian migrants' practices regarding moving, becoming legally included, working and earning money – and, thus, to achieving their personal and family migration goals – in the light of shifting immigration policy requires different levels of analysis. In my study, I consider three levels of analysis: macro level (structure), meso

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42% of Cameroon's population is younger than 15 years. The population growth is estimated at 2,2% in 2008. In contrast to Cameroon, Germany's population is old: only 14% are under the age of 15, but 19% are older than 65 years. Germany's population is shrinking (PRB 2008).

[15] The migration of highly educated Cameroonians might also be contributed to the fact that skill-based immigration is increasingly emphasized, especially in highly industrial Europe.

(networks), and micro (agency) to understand the encompassing picture of transnational migration.

First, structure describes the context, or the political, economic, social, and cultural factors that influence migration. Migrants' behavior is shaped by these contextual factors. In the Cameroonian setting, both the economic and political situation (e.g., financial crisis, labor markets, or corruption) and the social and cultural forces (e.g., social norms and cultural images) affect not just emigration, but also return migration. In Germany, EU and national policies determine immigration and integration, and thus the life courses of migrants. In this context, I will examine how mobility from Cameroon to Germany (and also back to Cameroon) is affected by economic circumstances, political and social institutions, and legal constraints.

A second level of analysis involves networks. In the context of my study, relations and fields compass the intermediate level of social organization, i.e., family, kin, and community in Cameroon; as well as spouses, fellow Cameroonians, and friends in Germany. The recognition of these relational structures within migration research has so far been too little established. Individual migrants operate within these networks, and their behavior is shaped by relationships, both in the sending as well as in the receiving contexts.

Third, agency describes migrants' strategies and decision-making. Being an anthropologist, I am interested in the experience of being a migrant, but also in the meaning of migration. In my study, I see the individual migrant as an agent whose behavior is shaped by a combination of political, economic, social, and cultural forces and networks. Or, as Brettell (2003: 4) puts it: "migrants themselves are agents in their behavior, interpreting and constructing within the constraints of structure". In sum, migrants both actively shape, and are shaped by, the structural context within which they take their actions, whether in Cameroon or in Germany.

This study emphasizes Cameroonian migrants' experiences, but takes also voices of their families and German partners as well as judicial argumentation and legislative activity of the German state into account. This multi-dimensional analysis helps to understand the complex and dynamic processes of migration and family formation.

## *Main research questions*

As follows from the context provided above, these main research questions will be investigated in this study:

– How do Cameroonian migrants arrange their vital events, like marriage and childbearing, in order to facilitate the acquisition of rights to work and live in Germany?

– How are key life events – i.e., migration, marriage, and birth – related to each other?

– How is the entry into vital events, like marriage and secondary childbearing, transformed by migration from Cameroon to Germany?

– How do the meanings and values of marriage, children, and family change over space and time?

For the Cameroonian context:

– Why do people decide to move? What are the preconditions of migration? What role does the family play in sending relatives abroad?

For the German context:

– What role does marriage to a German play in the life course of a Cameroonian migrant?

– What does a binational marriage mean for the partners involved? What is the perspective of a German woman married to a Cameroonian man?

– How do Cameroonian women (and men) constitute their reproductive lives in Germany?

## *Structure of the study*

My book consists of an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction opens with a description of the objectives of the study by briefly examining the three substantive areas of interest: transnational migration, marriage and childbearing, and legality.

The second chapter introduces my methodological approach, and focuses how I conducted my research. A description of my interview partners and a section on how I analyzed my data, are vital for understanding the specific context in which my research is embedded, and how my results were produced. In addition, the specific circumstances of my fieldwork, both in Cameroon and in Germany, are described, and the challenges and limitations of the work are analyzed.

This study uses ethnography and demography, in combination with an exploration of current German immigration law, to examine the dynamics of Cameroonian migration to Germany. The topic demands a multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary research approach. The thematic areas of my study, i.e., migration and family formation, are generally studied by both socio-cultural anthropologists and demographers. Thus, this study applies methods and theories from both disciplines. However, since I am an anthropologist, my main research tool has been ethnographic fieldwork.[16]

My study is based on ethnographic fieldwork in Cameroon and in Germany. This multi-sited ethnography allows for the exploration of movements across international borders, and adjusts to the mobility of migrants. In addition, it enables the researcher to follow some people not just over time, but also over space. The methods applied during my field research included a number of standard methods, such as participant observation, semi-structured and life history interviews, focus groups, a survey on international migration, and media analysis, as well as the intensive use of weblogs on binational marriages in Germany.[17] Moreover, statistical data, mainly from the German Federal Statistical Office, were analyzed in order to provide

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[16] Unless specified otherwise, the events, context, and rules as well as the statistical data from Germany refer to 2006.

[17] This study draws on interviews conducted with both Cameroonian migrants and their German partners. In doing so, it gives a broad understanding on the two – often dissonant – sides of the story. In addition, perceptions of migrants' family and kin are also taken into account as well as judicial reasoning and legislative activity of the German state. This multi-layered analysis helps to understand the complex and dynamic processes of migration and family formation.

information about the quantity of legal migration flows from Cameroon to Germany, as well as some basic characteristics of migrants (age, duration of stay, type of legal status, etc.). These statistical data also offer some insights into the marital and reproductive behaviors of Cameroonian migrants, even though only a limited analysis is possible due to a number of restrictions.[18]

The combination of ethnography and an analysis of statistical data allows me to capture the complexity and dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in an adequate way, and to highlight inconsistencies. My methodological toolkit enabled me to conceive of the individual life course of Cameroonian migrants to Germany within its social, cultural, political, and economic context. Numerical particulars and their explanatory power can only be understood in the light of ethnographic insights into the lives of the actors (*agents*) and their circumstances (*structure*).

Chapter 3 of my study examines the context of emigration in Cameroon, including the political, economic, social, and cultural factors that influence emigration. The first part of the chapter introduces the research area by 'setting the scene'. It places political, social, and economic developments in historical perspective, thus creating the foundation in which I embed my empirical findings. This chapter has two aims: first, to familiarize the reader with the research area of Cameroon, mainly the two cities of Douala and Yaoundé; and, second, to identify the motives for emigration.

Following an introduction of some geographic and demographic details, as well as a brief history of political developments in Cameroon; issues regarding the value of education, the importance of internal mobility, the consequences of the economic crisis, and the human rights situation are discussed. This information provides the framework for understanding who is migrating and why.

The last part of this chapter examines some cultural terms relevant to emigration. Cameroon, like many other West or Central African countries, has a long migration history and largely positive social values are attached to migration. A number of meanings are associated to the phenomenon of migration. Local terms such as *bush faller* or *mbenguist* refer to people traveling to the land of the whites and return successful, i.e., with enough money to support the

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[18] Statistical information on binational marriages in Germany allow for only a limited analysis and interpretation, since weddings conducted outside of Germany are not registered in the German marriage statistics. Migrants marrying in their country of origin, in the consulate of their country of origin in Germany, or in a third country are not recorded (Straßburger 2003).

family, build a house, and set up a business. Understanding these and other cultural terms and phrases helps to analyze the symbolic meaning of migration.

Chapter 4 discusses elements of the meaning of marriage and reproduction, thereby enabling us to analyze how Cameroonian migrants draft strategies for entering, remaining, and working in Germany by marrying or becoming a parent. This chapter explores the role of familial, marital, and intergenerational relationships in the sending context. Relationships are important in the entire migration process: both for emigration and immigration, but also for the process of returning to Cameroon. The concept of 'wealth in people' enables us to examine social relationships, organization, and networks; regardless of whether they take the form of familial bonds, marital arrangements, or parent-child interactions. The idea of wealth in people – particularly the aspects of sponsorship, support, and dependence – is essential for my study. It allows us to understand the decision-making processes regarding migration, marriage, and childbearing, but also points to the importance of transnational social networks.

This chapter has three main parts. First, the role of family and kin in the migration process is explored. I address the issue of what constitutes a family, what kind of social networks are important, how migrants are selected, and what role reciprocity plays in the migration process. Family and kin play a crucial role in the migration process of an individual. In many cases, the process begins when senior family members select subordinates for migration to Europe. Subsequently, sponsors and related family members expect to benefit both materially and symbolically from these transnational linkages. Migrants are admonished to never forget their place of origin and of those people who sponsored their journey. These alleged obligations are often sources of debate and conflict between migrants and their family/kin. However, migrants rarely break with their relatives. Second, I explore marital behavior and practices in the West and Central African context (with reference to the Cameroonian setting). Here, the aim is to examine different forms of marriage and the meanings attached to them by the people involved (i.e., family, kin, men, and women). I show that, in the migration context, the marriage process is often instrumentalist by men, women, and their kin, as it is closely connected to advancements in career and improvements in political and economic alliances. Third, the central role of children in the African context is studied. Children could be seen as a strategic means of establishing relationships, and thus of gaining access to resources. Each of these sub-themes includes a discussion on how socioeconomic changes affect the formation and the meaning of these relationships.

Chapter 5 addresses the structural framework of transnational migration between Cameroon and Germany. I emphasize the legal restrictions which make migration to Germany difficult, particularly for non-EU nationals. While citizens of EU member states and nationals of OECD countries can easily cross the internal and external national borders of, what is called, the Schengen territory countries, and face few problems in entering other countries worldwide, Cameroonians and other Africans face severe challenges in moving transnationally. They face not only the problem of entering the Schengen space or Germany, but also of obtaining rights to move freely within countries, and to gain access to education, employment, and the health care system.

I use the concept of transnational migration to understand two main processes of my theme. On the one hand, the approach of transnational migration makes it possible to analyze international mobility between two or more nation states, in this case between Cameroon and Germany. Scholars of transnational migration take the individual, the institutional, and the global perspectives into account, i.e., micro (motives and incentives), meso (transnational social ties and relations) and macro (migration determinants) levels of analysis are combined. On the other hand, the transnational framework allows us to examine the scope and intensity of ties and activities between the country of origin and the country of reception.

In this chapter, I argue that the legal restrictions imposed by the nation state on some migrants are not emphasized enough in transnational migration research. My study demonstrates the ongoing importance of national policies and legislation for marginalized migrants like Cameroonians. For them, national policies regulating permission to enter, live, and work continue to be decisive. The German nation state creates a transnational space for Cameroonian migrants. The exploration of Germany's legal framework regarding immigration and integration establishes a foundation for understanding the different categories of migrants: students, family members, asylum seekers, tourists, business people, and undocumented migrants. I bring forward the argument that most Cameroonian migrants are confronted with fluid transitions between 'legality' and 'illegality'. The case of Cameroonian migrants traveling to and within Germany illustrates the restrictions and barriers imposed on transnational migration, and the few options that remain for those migrants who wish to live and work in the country.

Chapter 6 shows that for Cameroonians who seek to settle in Germany, exclusionary efforts have become so extreme that long-term legal residence has become next to impossible, unless they marry a German citizen or give birth to a German child. This chapter discusses some gender-specific pathways by which Cameroonians must move across national borders to obtain a settlement and work permit in Germany. I argue that diminishing options for legalizing their status in Germany by other means make Cameroonian men increasingly dependent on contracting and sustaining a three-year marriage to a German woman. In contrast, Cameroonian women increasingly try to obtain residency permits, and thus access to the social welfare system, by bearing a German child. The distribution of marriage and parenthood over space and time becomes a means of securing the right to stay and work in Germany. While marriage and childbearing are life events that are losing their legal and social relevance for many German citizens, they ironically become essential – often the last resort – for immigrants who have no other way of staying.

In this chapter, I analyze the marital and reproductive behaviors of Cameroonian migrants in Germany, elucidating the hardships and contradictions experienced by people caught up in the impossible demands that German regulations impose. The emphasis is on the following question: How do Cameroonian migrants distribute life events – and here I focus on marriage and childbearing over space and time as rights – to enter, stay, and work in Germany? To answer this main research question, in the first part of the chapter I provide the reader with the essential legal framework on (binational) marriage, family reunification, and parenthood. In doing so, I highlight the decisive role of authorities as 'gatekeepers of immigration'. Bureaucrats in civil registry, youth welfare, and immigration offices have the discretion to forbid binational couples the rights to marry in Germany, to rejoin their spouse, or to claim paternity. In effect, the state grants individual civil servants the authority to give or withhold permission to marry or form a family, and hence to exclude immigrants not primarily because their marriage or their paternity is considered to be fictitious, but because they are people with nationalities considered to be undesirable; as potential exploiters of the last remaining concessions (Wray 2006).

The second part of the chapter focuses on binational marriages between Cameroonian migrants and German nationals. After illustrating some puzzling statistical findings on the number and kind of Cameroonian-German marriages, the perspectives of German women and Cameroonian

men are investigated. In doing so, my study paints a broad picture of the two, often dissonant sides of the story. It becomes clear that (binational) marriage is linked to multiple meanings, and can be interpreted from different positions. In this context, I also examine the phenomenon of transnational polgygyny. During my fieldwork both in Cameroon and in Germany, I encountered some cases in which male Cameroonian migrants were married both in Cameroon and in Germany. Finally, I make the argument that binational marriages can not per se be seen as an indicator of the degree of migrants' social and cultural integration into the host society, as several authors have argued.

The third section analyzes the reproductive behavior of migrants from Cameroon in Germany. Here I focus on how female Cameroonian migrants in particular find ways to circumvent increasingly restrictive immigration policies by giving birth to children of German nationality. As a consequence, unique paternity practices, such as that of *Imbissväter*, a term, which is used by bureaucrats to describe German men who 'sell' their paternity to foreign mothers, have developed.

In the course of investigating the marital and reproductive behaviors of Cameroonian migrants in Germany, it becomes evident that Cameroonian immigrants in Germany now orient their marital and reproductive lives more toward Germans than toward their compatriots. The main reason for this is the fact that a migrant can gain residency when marrying a German partner; similarly, non-German individuals may obtain legal status by becoming the parent of a child whose other parent is a German.

The conclusion summarizes and discusses the findings. I recapitulate the main features of Cameroonian migration to Germany including leaving the country of origin, the actual process of migration, and the restrictions migrants' face upon their immigration. My study provides deeper insights into the complex reality of transnational migration than was previously available. Taking into account the perspectives of the state, families, migrants, and their German partners, I find that migrants' nuptial and reproductive practices in both the sending and the receiving contexts are largely shaped by immigration policies. My findings provide evidence for the proposition that family networks are becoming increasingly important as rights to immigration, residency, and access to the labor market are restricted.

# II RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Exploring the complex and dynamic relationships between migration, family formation, and legality requires an interdisciplinary and multi-dimensional analysis. Therefore, my study combines ethnography and demography, searching for ways to bring together analyses usually termed 'qualitative' and 'quantitative'.[19] In-depth interviews and anthropological fieldwork, both in the emigration as well as in the immigration country, together with analyses of sample surveys, allow me to take a contextual and holistic approach. The incorporation of statistical data from both Cameroon and Germany into an ethnographic explorative study enables me to gain an understanding of the individual life courses of Cameroonians over transnational borders within the various cultural, social, political, and economic contexts. Numerical particulars and their explanatory power can only be understood in the light of ethnographic insights into the lives of the actors and their surrounding circumstances. However, for three main reasons, explorative ethnography remains my main research methodology.

First, the exploration of meanings, perspectives, and multiple realities of migration, marriage, and reproduction, calls for ethnographic research approaches like (participant) observation, informal conversations, and in-depth interviews. These ethnographic methods allow me to capture the complexity and dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in an adequate way, and to highlight inconsistencies. I emphasize Cameroonians and their families who orient their lives towards Europe, and particularly Germany. In addition, this study draws on interviews conducted with both Cameroonian migrants and their German partners. In doing so, the study gives a broad understanding on the – often dissonant – sides of the story.

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[19] My work could be seen as an example of 'anthropological demography' that links both disciplines regarding methods and theory. Anthropological demography investigates the relationships between population processes and socio-cultural practices. Socio-cultural anthropology and demography study similar events: migration, marriage/union formation, birth, and death. My doctoral thesis interrelates two of these research fields namely, transnational migration and family formation. In addition, this study uses a methodological toolkit applying methods from both disciplines.

For further discussions of anthropological demography, see Greenhalgh (1995), Kertzer & Fricke (1997), Basu & Aaby (1998) and the Special Collection on Anthropological Demography (2007) edited by Bernardi and Hutter at Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, Rostock.

Second, an open and explorative research approach allows me not only to examine migration patterns and processes, as well as to investigate the practices and strategies of migrants and their families. This procedure enables me also to generate hypotheses derived from my observations and findings. Thus, the entire study consists of a continuous process of producing hypotheses, testing them, and posing additional questions for further research. The strength of ethnography is its explorative methodology.

Third, migration, especially undocumented migration, is a highly sensitive topic that calls for corresponding methods. It is essential to build up trust and rapport in order to learn about migrants' behaviors and activities. Accordingly, qualitative methods are more useful than questionnaires or formal interview situations.

In addition to ethnographic methods and analyses, more quantitative research techniques, such as descriptive statistics using data from the Cameroon Demographic and Health Survey (2004), offer insights into the determinants of reproduction in Cameroon. In Cameroon, I also conducted a survey on "International migration", in which I questioned 62 respondents about their motives for migration, their expectations, and the influence of others on the decision to leave. Data from the German Federal Statistical Office (different years) enable me to describe the quantity of legal migration flows from Cameroon to Germany as well as some basic characteristics of migrants (age, duration of stay, kind of legal status etc.). Moreover, German marriage statistics and data about children born to Cameroonian women or men in Germany provide some insights into the quantitative dimension of marital and reproductive behavior of Cameroonians in Germany.

The mixed methods approach of combining ethnographic methods with statistical analysis is, in conjunction with the legal framework, particularly useful for examining complex concepts and practices, such as the interplay between migration, family formation, and the law.

In this chapter, I first discuss my research methodology and the particularity of applied multi-sited ethnography. Second, I describe the criteria used for the selection of my informants in both research locations. Next, I explain the analysis of my data, including the difficulties and challenges I encountered during my fieldwork. In doing so, the limitations of my study become clear. In this context, I also discuss crucial ethical aspects of my highly sensitive research.

## 2.1 Multi-sited ethnography

Exploring movements across international borders requires a research method which adjusts to the mobility of networks and subjects. Multi-sited ethnography allows anthropologists to move beyond one single research location and extend their ethnographics to several places. This approach makes it possible to study not only the different sites, but also flows and circulations of people, money, information, and ideas. In my project, I narrowed my focus to the two countries of Cameroon and Germany, which enabled me not only to understand the meanings of social networks and transnational experiences of migrants, but also to analyze where people come from, how they move, and where they are going, and why.

Marcus (1995) argues that the complexity of many ethnographic studies demands multiple sites of observations, rather than the analysis of a single location. He explains that multi-sited ethnography is essential "to examine circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space" (ibid.: 96). This approach makes it possible to follow people (as well as things, capital, metaphors, stories, conflicts, etc.) across space, but also to grasp developments over time.[20] In this sense, realities in different locations can be included in the research, life histories can be followed over space and time, and connections can be established (Marcus 1998). Multi-sited ethnography enables the ethnographer to capture the political and economic contexts without ignoring global movements of people, goods, and information (Lauser 2005).

Migration research requires not only fieldwork in the sending and receiving contexts, but also in the place to which migrants may possibly return (Wimmer & Glick-Schiller 2003). For my study, I conducted fieldwork at both ends of the transnational space in Cameroon as the sending, and, at the same time, as the receiving context of return migrants; and in Germany as the place of immigration. Moving between these different locations enabled me to better understand processes and dynamics of emigration, immigration, and remigration.

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[20] The Internet has become an indispensable source of information for and on migrants around the world. Websites provide information and contacts, and facilitate the exchange of goods and services. Emails, chat rooms, and interactive simultaneous conversations are made possible through the Internet, and constitute an important source of communication and cross-border relations. The Internet is also beginning to be recognized as a legitimate research instrument, as shown in books by, for example, Constable (2003), on pen pals, virtual ethnography, and 'mail order marriages'.

The first, mainly explorative period of fieldwork involved a stay of one month in Cameroon (mainly in Douala and Yaoundé) from April to May 2005. In the second period of fieldwork, I remained in Cameroon for four months (January to May 2006). In Germany, I limited my field research mainly to Berlin, where I spent five months altogether: two months in autumn 2005 and three months from September to November 2006. Most interviews were conducted in the Berlin districts Wedding, Neukölln, and Charlottenburg, where the majority of African migrants live and work. The division of field episodes into two major Cameroon trips and two German phases had several advantages. The different intervals of fieldwork gave me the opportunity to analyze preliminary results, to reframe and adjust my research questions, and to further develop my theoretical considerations between each stay in the field.

This 'grounded theory approach'[21] (Strauss & Corbin 1998) enabled me to ask more precise questions and to select informants and research locations based on more detailed information after the exploratory phase. The collection of data was a continuous process in which I remained in contact with most of my interview partners from Cameroon and Germany via the Internet, by phone, and on-site visits that took place at times even after the field research phase was completed. As a consequence, I was able to continuously include quotes, descriptions, or parts of biographies in my study. This research approach permits me to follow people's life stories, not only across spatial boundaries, but also across time. I recorded the experiences of migrants and their families over a period of more than four years.

## 2.2 Applied methods in research locations

In this section, I explain my choice of applied methods for the respective research context. Each of the research locations, Cameroon and Germany, required specific methods and approaches depending on the research questions, the interlocutors, and, most importantly, on the fieldwork situation.

In general, informal conversations both in Cameroon and in Germany were often much more enlightening and insightful than formal interviews. This is mainly because these highly

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[21] The idea behind grounded theory is to develop a theory from the data, rather than the other way around. In this sense, it is a hypothesis-generating rather than a hypothesis-testing approach (Glaser & Strauss 1967, Strauss & Corbin 1998).

sensitive topics, such as the financing of migration and the acquisition of a visa or residency permit, could not have been addressed in a structured conversation in which one research question after the other was asked. Hence, informal discussions became the main basis of data collection in both research settings. The following excerpt from my diary from the 10th of February 2006 provides an example of some informal conversations that took place while taking public transportation in Cameroon:

> While working in Cameroon, the paved road from Douala to Yaoundé became quite familiar to me. During both of my fieldwork stays in the country, I rode the approximately 300 kilometers several times in a local bus. Most of the time, people around me started talking to me, asking questions about where I was from and where I was going. They offered me food and explained things to me along the way. It was not uncommon that, in the course of these informal conversations with Cameroonians of different ages, genders, ethnicities, and professional backgrounds that the issue of emigration came up – not because I focused it, but rather because many Cameroonians were thinking about leaving the country. Upon meeting me in the public bus, they took the opportunity to share with me, as a person who came from one of the desired countries of destination, their worries and concerns about the current economic, political, and social situation in Cameroon, as well as their questions and expectations about Europe. Discussion topics ranged from the subject of why it is hardly possible to remain in Cameroon and make a living, to what they are looking for once they are in Europe. They were interested in learning about options for entry and for obtaining a Schengen visa, job opportunities, and living conditions, like estimated salaries and costs of living. Some people were well-informed about the difficulties of immigration and legal integration. Particularly men were keen to know whether it is possible to acquire residency in Germany by marrying a German woman. They have heard rumors that, in some countries, marriage may enable them to acquire legal residency, and thus a work permit. In some cases, I was asked whether I would like to marry them so that they could come to Germany and work there.

Informal conversations were a good way to meet people, talk informally, ask questions, and learn about their opinions on various subjects. The topic of emigration to Europe is widely discussed in the daily life of Cameroonians. Discussions about migration interested almost

everybody, usually because the interlocutors wanted to migrate themselves, they had relatives abroad, or they knew somebody who is living in Europe. In addition, marriage and motherhood or fatherhood were common conversation topics, which frequently began with the questions about my marital status or my desire to become mother.

## *Cameroon*

In Cameroon, I mainly applied ethnographic methods, such as informal conversations, in-depth interviews or (participant) observations as well as focus groups discussions, to explore the intentions and desires of potential migrants, the involvement of extended families in the decision-making process, the realization of migration plans, and the experiences of return migrants. Hence, main groups of informants in Cameroon were potential migrants, families of migrants, and return migrants.

Initial contacts were established through 'snowball sampling'[22]: while I was a social anthropology student at Freie Universität Berlin, I got to know some West and Central African students. Even before starting my PhD project, I had established networks of male and female Cameroonian students at all three universities in Berlin. Using these first contacts, I was able to meet other Cameroonians in Berlin. Further contacts were generated through existing networks. Connections to families in Cameroon were also established through my friends and interlocutors in Berlin. I asked them whether I could visit their families, relatives, and friends in Cameroon. Most of them told me that they were very happy about this idea, since they had not been home for a long time. Jean, a 31-year-old friend, expressed his feelings:

> It is a pleasure for me to know that you will visit my country, get to know my family, and eat real Cameroonian food. I will do my best to make your stay a wonderful experience…Of course I would like to go myself, particularly since I have not been in Cameroon for more than six years, but one day I will return.

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[22] Snowball sampling is a research technique in which existing interlocutors recruit further interview partners from among their acquaintances. The researcher asks individuals to name others who would be relevant for the study. Snowball sampling is particularly useful for studying populations that are difficult for researchers to access (Bernhard 2002). In my case, this sampling technique helped to get in contact with undocumented migrants, which would have been difficult without using social networks.

Some interlocutors gave me letters, pictures, gifts, mobile phones, jewelry or clothes to take to their family members. I delivered presents from Germany to Cameroon, and vice versa. At this stage of my research, my role in the field was one of a bearer or intermediator. I was able to travel between Cameroon and Germany, in contrast to many of my interview partners, who could not visit their families because they lacked the financial means or had legal problems. For this reason, my task often included delivering gifts and material goods, but also transferring news and information across continents. I was the link between people left behind in Cameroon and migrants living in Germany. This position enabled me to easily develop conversations and discussions with family members and friends of migrants. Relatives in Cameroon were keen to know, for example, how their brother, sister, son or daughter was doing in Germany; whether she or he had a partner; or what life was like for their relative in Germany. My data collection in Cameroon was mainly based on informal conversations that helped me understand local people's views, as well as in-depth interviews with key informants and observations in different locations and settings.

In addition to my ethnographic fieldwork, during my second stay in Cameroon (January to May 2006) I surveyed 62 people, asking them for their views on migration motives, expectations, and the influence of others on the decision to migrate. The questionnaires were administered to women and men aged 18-45 and living in different regions of the country: mainly Douala, Yaoundé, and the western provinces. The survey on "International migration" included Cameroonians with varying educational levels (from no primary school degree to university level), as well as people with different occupations, like students (who were often also part-time workers), traders, artists, teachers, car sellers, but also potential emigrants waiting in front of the embassy. Most respondents were younger than 30 years old, many were students, and most lived in urban centers. My rationale behind the choice of young interlocutors was, first that there were more of them, but second that young adults are most often engaged in the effort to go to Germany and get work there. However, the results show the complexity of incentives for migration, and give some insights into the dynamic picture of international migration.

*Germany*

In Cameroon, I mainly relied on informal conversations, in-depth interviews with key informants, and (participant) observations in families or households, or at the embassy or airport; in contrast, in Germany I concentrated on more time-wise scheduled meetings with interlocutors, in which we discussed central questions of my research.

Snowball sampling as a recruitment method also allowed me to get into contact with a variety of Cameroonians living in Germany. This method was particularly useful in approaching sensitive topics, such as matters of legality, especially in contacting asylum seekers or undocumented immigrants. However, this technique has also its limitations: only particular groups of individuals are included in the sample, while others who do not belong to the social network of respondents remain excluded. Thus, the result may be an over-sampling of Cameroonians with similar characteristics. However, directed selection was hardly possible given that my goal was to include documented and undocumented migrants in the sample.

I considered informal conversations for the investigation of my research questions in Germany as the most appropriate method, mainly for two reasons. First, informal conversations and discussion are more flexible than formal interview situations, and make it possible to address issues other than the actual research topic. This was particularly relevant for the German setting, in which hardly any information regarding, for example, means of entry or paths to legality, would have been provided if direct questions had been asked in a formal interview. Second, I had the impression that my interlocutors felt more relaxed in 'simply talking to me' than in answering a fixed set of questions. Informal conversations allow for the involvement of additional persons, and are not limited to one interview partner, which is particularly relevant in the Cameroonian setting, where a private interview is hardly possible, and would create an artificial situation.

## 2.3 Selection criteria for interview partners

Ethnographic fieldwork requires a series of decisions to be made throughout the research process (Sanjek 1990): e.g., which locations to choose, which people to approach for interviews and discussions, or with whom the researcher should remain in contact for further

explanations and to clarify issues. This part explains some of these choices and the reasons behind them in order to provide the reader with enough background information to clearly understand and contextualize my results.

My fieldwork, in Cameroon as well as in Germany was divided in an exploratory phase at the beginning and in a more focused period during the second time in the field. The mainly exploratory research phase included informal conversations and group discussions with various types of people in Cameroon and in Germany, participant and non-participant observations mainly made in Cameroon at the German embassy and the consulate, as well as at the airport or among families. The main aim was to contact interlocutors, explore the field, and gain some first impressions about the research area. The second phase of my fieldwork was characterized by a more selective process of deliberately choosing informants according to certain demographic and socioeconomic criteria, such as gender, age, place of residence, mother tongue, marital status, number of children, educational background, and occupation. This more systematic search for interlocutors for more in-depth interviews was not always easy, particularly in the German setting where Africans were often suspicious of me and anxious about my intentions. Conversations and discussions in the German context required an extensive explanation of who I was, why I was doing this particular kind of research, and what the objectives of the research project were. This helped to gain trust and confidence and enabled me to ask questions about sensitive topics, such as the role of sponsors for migration preparations and the demands of family members for remittances, but also about migrants' practices and strategies in Germany for dealing with the legal requirements.

In each research location, I was able to identify key informants who were willing to discuss migration and family issues, and who seemed reliable. I conducted in-depth discussions, semi-structured interviews, and more formal conversations with them. In Cameroon, as well as in Germany, I met most of my main interlocutors repeatedly, and spoke with them at length. In addition, I carried out a survey on "International migration" involving 62 interview partners (see questionnaires in appendix).

The selection of informants was based on my personal judgment, my own experiences, and the purpose of the study, but also depended in large part on fieldwork conditions and circumstances. In Cameroon, for example, I included in my sample mainly interlocutors who were thinking about going abroad, as well as their families and friends, but also those Cameroonians who returned from Europe. I was explicitly searching for them while in the

country. In Germany, snowball sampling restricted the group of interview partners mainly to students, asylum seekers, and migrants who obtained temporary residency permits through family-related means, like marriage or childbearing. In order to receive a comprehensive picture of the migration process, my study includes people before, during, and after migration as well as their families and kin.

Due to my multi-sited research approach, I was actually able to follow particular individuals across national borders, but also over time. For example, I interviewed two of my respondents in Berlin and met them again while doing field research in Cameroon. Meanwhile, I also interviewed three informants in Yaoundé and Douala and had the chance to talk to them again in Germany. These examples demonstrate the usefulness of multi-sited fieldwork in conducting an analysis that traverses space and time.

To prevent the reader from drawing conclusions about individuals or groups, all names are fictitious. Biographical information and the life-course descriptions are also modified, and some individual characteristics of respondents have been combined to prevent the identification of persons or locations. These changes were necessary to protect my interlocutors. Anonymizations increase the chances that neither the persons nor the places will be identified. These changes do not, however, have any influence on the content and context of statements, descriptions, and results. As for language, all interviews, quotes, and conversations are translated into English. In Cameroon as well as in Germany, most interviews, conversations, and talks were not recorded to avoid breaks in the flow of discussions. In addition, most informants were uncomfortable when using audiotapes. Instead, the contents of interviews and conversations, but also the descriptions of observations were written in a field book, either shortly after the meetings and events – or at the latest – at the end of the day by using memory notes. In addition, personal evaluations of situations, events, and happenings were noted, as were reflections on research situations and on my influence as a researcher in the field.

## 2.3.1 Context of origin and return: Cameroon

My fieldwork in Cameroon focused on the two largest cities of the country, Douala and Yaoundé, for several reasons. First, most potential emigrants live in one of the two cities mainly for education, training, employment, or in order to arrange travel and visa issues for an international migration plan. Second, the German embassy is situated in Yaoundé; there, potential emigrants from all over the country apply for visa. Third, Douala is the center of national and international commerce and trade. Most emigrants leave from the airport in Douala to international destinations and most re-migrants arrive here. Aside from that, I conducted fieldwork in the highly populated western regions of the country, mainly in the larger cities of Bamenda, Bafoussam, Foumban, Limbe, and Buea. Ethnic groups, like the Bamiléké, who inhabit these regions are known for their intensive migration patterns, mainly due to trading activities and business interests (Eckert 1999). The concentration of my fieldwork on urban centers has consequences for my results, which will be taken into account in the interpretation.

Informal conversation, interviews, and discussions were mainly conducted in French and English, but in some cases also in a mixture of these languages, with Pidgin or local languages (mainly Bamoun or Bamiléké dialects). My research assistant, who was working with me for two months during my stay in 2006, was able to translate some interviews and assist me with language difficulties. He studied linguistics at the University of Yaoundé. This contact was provided by a professor with whom I am acquainted. My research assistant facilitated the establishment of contacts to families, introduced me to interview partners, or explained to me the meanings of local terms. I also had a chance to meet and talk to his family. During the time when I was working with my research assistant, he was a potential migrant himself, and during the course of my field work, he received a scholarship to participate in a PhD program in the United States.

## *Potential migrants*

Establishing contact with potential emigrants was fairly easy. On a daily basis, I got to know people who wished to migrate or had been thinking about living abroad for some years. I got to know them on the streets, in restaurants, at the universities, in schools, in markets, in public transport or in front of the embassy or at the registry office where passport were issued. Many informal conversations with potential migrants were conducted in front of the German embassy, at the airport of Douala, or in Internet cafes. These are the places where people who intend to leave the country meet for different purposes.

In front of the German embassy in Yaoundé a long queue of mostly young Cameroonians gathers every day to wait for their appointments with an official of the embassy. Often they have scheduled interview dates to apply for a student, tourist, or business visa. In front of the embassy it was easy to get in contact with potential migrants, mainly for two reasons. First, they often had to wait for several hours until they could enter, and, second, people who planned to leave for Germany were keen to talk to a German citizen. They asked me a lot of questions concerning education, employment opportunities, living conditions, etc.

Another good place to contact potential migrants and their families, but also return migrants, was the airport in Douala, where entire extended families often gathered to say good-bye or to welcome returnees. At the airport, several cafes and restaurants offer food and drinks. These places were ideal settings in which to ask people about incentives for emigrating and motives of potential migrants, or to talk about expectations of family members.

A third important location in this context were Internet cafes, which are frequently visited by young Cameroonian women and men who use the Internet to inform themselves about migration opportunities, or who are trying to get in contact with people already living abroad. Chat rooms were the most common way to communicate transnationally. While waiting for a computer, I spoke with customers about their reasons for using the Internet, particularly as a means of getting in touch with Europeans or Cameroonians in Europe or the United States via e-mail or chat. Moreover, interlocutors explained to me efficient ways to search for information on visas to different European countries, or on conditions within each of these desired destinations.

Conducting ethnographic fieldwork in public places has some advantages compared to private spheres like households or family gatherings. Research sites like the waiting area in front of the embassy or Internet cafes offer opportunities to talk to young potential migrants without their family or kin. In these situations, I had the impression that young adults often spoke more frankly among each other than in discussions that took place in the presence of their relatives. I gathered a great deal of interesting information from these stimulating conversations. However, for the Cameroonian context I believe that both public and private research sites were essential to develop an overall picture.

Below I have listed my key informants who sought to leave the country. This list provides an overview of the gender, age, occupation, residency, marital status, and children of my interlocutors. These information help to contextualize my findings. The list also shows the limitations of my research, as it clearly demonstrates that most of my interview partners were male, under the age of 30, university students, unmarried, and had no children.

**Table 1: Interview list of potential migrants (n = 22)**

| Gender | Age | Occupation | Residency | Marital status | Children |
|--------|-----|------------|-----------|----------------|----------|
| Female | 19 | Assisting her brother selling products at the local market | Kribi | non-married | one |
| Female | 27 | Employed in an electricity company | Limbe | non-married | None |
| Female | 24 | University student | Bamenda | non-married | None |
| Female | 25 | University student | Yaoundé | non-married | none |
| Female | 19 | Vocational training as bookkeeper | Douala | non-married | none |
| Female | 20 | Vocational training as manager | Bafoussam | non-married | none |
| Female | 21 | University student | Dschang | non-married | none |
| Male | 24 | University student | Douala | non-married | none |
| Male | 18 | High school student | Bafoussam | non-married | none |
| Male | ~40 | Tailor | Limbe | married | four |
| Male | 35 | Copy shop owner | Douala | married | two |
| Male | 22 | University student | Douala | non-married | none |
| Male | 36 | PhD student | Douala | married | three |
| Male | 24 | University student | Yaoundé | non-married | none |
| Male | 26 | University student | Yaoundé | non-married | none |
| Male | 31 | University student | Yaoundé | non-married | one |
| Male | 28 | Shop manager | Yaoundé | married | none |
| Male | 27 | Car seller, works part-time | Yaoundé | non-married | none |
| Male | 34 | Unemployed | Limbe | married | four |
| Male | 27 | Artist | Foumban | non-married | none |
| Male | 22 | Tour guide, often unemployed | Ngaoundéré | non-married | none |
| Male | 25 | Football player | Yaoundé | non-married | one |

## *Families and kin*

In order to understand the opinions, attitudes, and perspectives of family members, kin, and community members on international migration, I stayed with six families for different time periods, lasting from two days to several weeks. To understand family dynamics, networks, and strategies behind migration, it was essential to actively participate in the daily family life. This included visits of relatives, buying food at the market and preparing meals, accompanying family members to the hospital, attending meetings of youth hometown associations, watching soccer, or going to church. Additionally, I had the chance to follow the preparation for the wedding of a close friend of mine, and I attended a baptism in Yaoundé, a housewarming in a village in the western province, and a university graduation celebration. These special events gave me the opportunity to observe hierarchical structures within extended families, and explore family decision-making processes. A king's ceremony in a small village in the Bamiléké region was a remarkable occasion that enabled me to learn about the cultural and social background of some of my informants who originated from this area. I observed how closely young adults are linked to their home communities, and the important role their homeland plays in their future planning, including their migration plans. Participating in the lives of families allowed me to create an intimate and relaxed atmosphere in which casual chats and informal conversations were possible. I told all of the families about my research project. I explained to them my research goals, motivations, and asked about the intentions, which may have influenced their decisions to talk about some issues, while avoiding others. Nonetheless, I had the impression that many family members were interested in the topic of international migration, since almost everybody knew someone living abroad. Through living with different families, it was possible to include the household level (meso-level) in the analysis of migration movements. Table 2 lists key informants from the household level, mainly close relatives of migrants such as spouses, parents, or siblings.

**Table 2: Interview list of family members, kin, community members and close friends (n=16)**

| Relation to potential Migrant | Age | Occupation | Residency | Marital status | Children |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wife | 26 | Housewife | Ngaoundéré | married | three |
| Wife | unknown | Unemployed | Limbe | married | four |
| Wife | 22 | Occasionally market woman | Douala | married | pregnant |
| Mother | 52 | Retired | Yaoundé | widowed | eight |
| Mother | 48 | Market woman | Douala | married | four |
| Father | 52 | Self-employed | Douala | married | seven |
| Father | 51 | Administration official | Village in western province | married with two wives | five |
| Sister | 29 | Student | Douala | married | two |
| Brother | 27 | Trainee | Bafoussam | non-married | none |
| Brother | 18 | Pupil | Bafoussam | non-married | none |
| Brother | 27 | Employee in hotel | Douala | non-married | one |
| Cousin | 32 | Unemployed, part-time in informal sector | Douala | engaged | none |
| Cousin | 33 | Employee in water supply company | Douala | engaged | none |
| Sister-in-law | 27 | Teacher | Douala | married | two |
| Cousin | 36 | Roadman | Bamenda | married | one |
| 'Brother' – close friend | 28 | Businessman | Yaoundé | non-married | none |

## *Return migrants*

Meeting and interviewing successful return migrants was no problem. I had the chance to talk to three men who had returned permanently. Two of them had come back from France, and one from Germany. They were happy to talk about their time in Europe. In addition, I interviewed two men who were visiting their home country for some weeks. Both of them were living in Germany on a temporary residence permit. One said he owned a business in Berlin, and the other told me he was married to a German woman and played football in a local team in Cologne. They described their feelings about being back in Cameroon, and outlined their views on their obligations towards family and friends. Both of them were ambivalent about both remaining in Cameroon and returning to Germany. While it was easy to find these interview partners, it was much more difficult to contact and interview people who were deported or who had to leave Europe for other reasons before achieving their migration goals. Returnees who arrive in Cameroon without a huge amount of money to support their family and friends and set up a business are considered losers. I was told that they often stay away from public life to avoid reproach and accusations. Several interlocutors explained to me that they can hardly remain in Cameroon because of their negative social reputation. Thus, unsuccessful returnees attempt to migrate again, and until they have enough financial means, they hide from public. This illustrates the pressure on migrants to succeed, and the shame experienced by those who 'fail'. In the course of my entire fieldwork, I encountered only two men who had been deported: one from Germany and another from Belgium. I spoke informally to both of them about their experiences abroad and their future plans.

## *Other interview partners*

In addition to potential migrants, their families, and return migrants, I conducted interviews with Internet café owners, teachers, or university employees. These discussions helped to obtain background information on, for example, the role of the Internet the migration process, the gender-specific migration strategies of men and women, and the importance of higher education for young Cameroonians and their families.[23]

**Table 3: List of other key interview partners (n=11)**

| Gender | Occupation | Residency | Topic |
|---|---|---|---|
| Male | Internet café owner | Ngaoundéré | Purpose of Internet use |
| Male | Internet café owner | Douala | Differences of Internet use by men and women |
| Male | Internet café owner | Yaoundé | Strategies of women to enter Europe, contacts to European men by email and chat |
| Male | Internet café owner | Kribi | The use of chat rooms in order to get in contact with 'whites' |
| Male | Teacher | Limbe | Education in Cameroon |
| Male | Professor | Douala | International migration to Europe |
| Male | Professor | Douala | Transnational migration processes, corruption, political and economic situation as reasons for international migration |
| Male | Local minister of education | Yaoundé | Education problems in Cameroon |
| Male | Chairman of an association | Yaoundé | Perspectives of young villagers in the capital |
| Female | University lecturer | Yaoundé | Higher education in Cameroon |
| Female | Restaurant owner | Kribi | Tourists in Kribi |

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[23] During my first explorative research stay in Cameroon in 2005, I realized the importance of the Internet for migration. The Internet is used as a means of obtaining information about migration procedure or legal matters in the country of destination, or to get to know people from Europe or other parts of the world. In addition, emails and chat conversations enable people to maintain or even improve social networks across transnational boundaries.

Furthermore, I received much input from expert interviews with researchers at the Institut de Formation et de Recherche Démographiques (IFORD) in Yaoundé, with professors from several universities; with representatives in the Ministry of Education; with staff from the German Development Service (DED), the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), and the Goethe Institute in Yaoundé; as well as with members of several local non-governmental organizations. These discussions enabled me to understand the contextual setting of emigration.

## *Focus groups*

In addition, I conducted two focus groups discussions with young adults aged 15 to 25 who came from different villages in the western provinces. In both groups, girls and boys were about equally distributed. The majority of these participants were either pupils or students at training schools or in one of the two universities in Yaoundé. All focus group participants were part of youth associations representing their villages in Yaoundé. These group discussions were very lively: I asked them questions about their intentions and wishes to migrate, and in return, they asked me about Europe, especially the working and living conditions there.

## *Questionnaires*

During my second stay in Cameroon, I conducted a survey called "International Migration" of 62 young adults, in which I asked them about their desires and motivations for migration. In addition, I posed questions concerning their connections abroad, as well as about their migration expectations for themselves and their families, their aspirations, and their future plans. Questionnaires were distributed to individuals who had already expressed the intention to migrate internationally. A total of 18 women and 44 men filled out the questionnaire. Respondents were between the ages of 18 and 45, but most were between 20 and 30 years old. The majority of respondents, or 38 individuals, were students at the universities in Yaoundé or Douala. Ten informants claimed to be self-employed, identifying themselves as artists, traders, market sellers, or store owners. The remaining 14 individuals were, at the time of the interview, unemployed, looking for a job, working in the informal sector (i.e., they had no regular income), playing sports (football) professionally, or did not report their occupation. The questionnaires were distributed in Yaoundé (mainly at the university, the embassy, the

consulate, and the market), in Douala (at the university, the market, shops, and in the bus to Bafoussam), and in Foumban (mainly at the market). All respondents were living in an urban setting at the time of the interview. Respondents' levels of education varied between no education and a university degree, but most individuals had completed secondary school. The majority of male and female respondents was unmarried and had no children at the time of the interview. Respondents could choose between English and French questionnaires. A total of 50 persons chose French, and the remaining 12 respondents completed the English form.[24]

## 2.3.2 Context of destination: Germany

In Germany, my fieldwork was mainly restricted to Berlin and the surrounding areas, including Potsdam, and few villages in Brandenburg. In addition, I conducted interviews in Heidelberg, Hamburg, and Munich. Berlin was chosen as the primary research site for two main reasons. First, it is among the German cities with the most African immigrants. Second, I had established contacts to Cameroonians in Berlin long before my PhD project started, and I knew the city quite well from living there for more than seven years.

### *Cameroonian migrants in Germany*

Table 37 shows a list of key informants of Cameroonian migrants in Germany. The table provides information on gender, age at time of the interview, legal status in Germany, marital status, and children. This information about my interview partners help to contextualize my findings. This list of Cameroonian interview partners in Germany demonstrates that I covered a wide range of topics with interlocutors of different types of legal status; ranging from undocumented to 'tolerated' migrants, to asylum seekers, and to students and migrants with temporary or permanent residency.

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[24] The choice of English or French questionnaires provides important information about the background of the respondents, whether they were from Anglo- or Francophone Cameroon.

**Table 4: Main interview list of Cameroonians in Germany (n=25)**

| Gender | Age at interview | Legal status in Germany | Marital status | Children |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male | 24 | Asylum seeker25 | married in Cameroon | Two children in Cameroon |
| Male | 28 | Asylum seeker | non-married | none |
| Male | 31 | Asylum seeker | non-married | none |
| Male | 28 | Asylum seeker | non-married | One child in Cameroon |
| Female | 25 | Asylum seeker | non-married | none |
| Male | Unknown | On toleration | non-married | none |
| Male | 34 | On toleration26 | non-married | none |
| Male | 27 | On toleration | non-married | none |
| Male | 24 | On toleration | non-married | none |
| Female | 21 | Undocumented27 (arrived with tourist visa) | non-married | none |
| Female | 26 | Undocumented (arrived with tourist visa) | non-married | One daughter in Cameroon |
| Male | 29 | University student | non-married | none |
| Male | 34 | University student | non-married | none |
| Female | 26 | University student | non-married | none |

[25] Asylum seekers are foreigners seeking protection under Article 16a of the Basic Law from political persecution or from deportation to a country where their life or liberty is threatened as a result of race, religion, nationality, political convictions or membership of a particular social group (www.zuwanderung.de, last accessed 12 July 2009).

[26] Refused asylum seekers are often granted a temporary suspension of deportation, also referred to as 'toleration' (*Duldung*) or as 'exceptional leave to remain'. A tolerated residence does not constitute a legal residence status. It does not remove the foreigner's obligation to leave the country, but merely postpones its enforcement (Cyrus & Vogel 2005: 14).

[27] According to the Residence Act (Section 14) it is unlawful to enter Germany or reside in the country without the necessary passport or residence permit. People without a residence permit are considered as undocumented migrants (www.zuwanderung.de, last accessed 12 July 2009).

| Female | 29 | Asylum seeker – now university student | non-married | none |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male | 32 | Asylum seeker – student – PhD Student | Married to German woman, but about to divorce | none |
| Male | 34 | Self-employed (former asylum seeker) | Married to German woman, but living separate | none |
| Male | 28 | Self-employed (former asylum seeker) | Married to German woman | none |
| Male | 31 | Temporary residency28, business man | Married in Cameroon | three |
| Male | 32 | Employed (former student, did not complete university) | Married to German woman | One child with German wife |
| Male | 27 | Temporary residency, unemployed | Married to German woman | none |
| Male | 27 | Temporary working contract, attempts to create business in Germany | German girlfriend | One child with German woman |
| Female | 34 | Temporary residency, Employed | Married with German man | One child with German man |
| Female | 32 | Permanent residency29, Employed | Divorced from German man | Two children with German man |
| Female | 31 | Permanent residency self-employed, own business | Married to German man | One child with German man |

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[28] Temporary residence permit is a residence title which is, as a matter of principle, granted for a limited period of time and for the purposes listed in the Residence Act. These include, for example, education and training (Section 16-17), employment or self-employment (Sections 18-21), humanitarian or political reasons, or reasons based on international law (Sections 22-26) or for family reasons (Sections 27-36) (www.zuwanderung.de, last accessed 12 July 2009).

[29] According to Section 9 of the Residence Act, a permanent residency, also called settlement permit (*Niederlassungserlaubnis*), is an unlimited residence title. It authorizes the holder to take up employment or self-employment (www.zuwanderung.de, last accessed 12 July 2009).

Most of my interlocutors were men between the ages of 25 and 35 years old. Some were married in Cameroon, many were not married, and some were married to a German spouse. Most interviewees had no children.

In addition to interviews and informal conversations in Berlin, I repeatedly visited two 'asylum homes' (*Asylbewerberheime*)[30] in Brandenburg to talk to asylum seekers and get to know their living conditions. Fieldwork interviews were carried out in English, French, or German.

Compared to my fieldwork in Cameroon, research in Germany was more complicated for several reasons. First, intensive contacts to my interview partners like in Cameroon were not possible. In addition, except for most of the students and some of the asylum seekers I interviewed, it was difficult to build up trust and confidence with my interlocutors. During the initial meetings I introduced myself, my project and the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research. I answered questions like "Why are you doing this?" or "What do I get out of participating in the study?".

Particularly immigrants with a 'weak' legal status, like asylum seekers or undocumented migrants, were distrustful and suspected me of working for the foreign office, of being a police officer, or of being some sort of undercover agent or journalist. Naturally, many were not keen to talk to me about their experiences, strategies, and practices. Like Mahler (1995: 26) said regarding her fieldwork with undocumented Salvadoran and South American immigrants in a Long Island suburb of Manhattan: "…to study them requires finding them; to find them requires patient, exhaustive networking; to understand them requires entering their communities and earning their trust". A randomized selection of Cameroonians in Germany was not possible. First and foremost, my initial contacts were men, and they knew mainly other Cameroonian men. Additionally, women did not attend as many community events and were less active in associations and clubs than men. In addition to the challenges I faced in making initial contacts with undocumented migrants in Berlin, the main difficulties were in finding out about their strategies and practices for entering Germany, remaining in the country, and legalizing their status. Not all of the people I contacted were willing to talk to me. However, frequent and lengthy meetings, and my participation in informal events, such as dinner parties or watching football games, enabled me to gain the trust of a number of informants, and collect information from them. Repeated meetings were also needed both to reassure people and to

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[30] Most asylum seekers in Germany are accommodated in so called 'asylum homes' which are often located outside of towns.

double check my notes or clarify answers. Some informants preferred to talk about other migrants, rather than about their own personal experiences. It was not in all cases clear whether they were telling their own story or the stories of others. I simply had the impression that, for some interlocutors, it was much easier to talk about others than it was to talk about their own case, particularly when discussing such sensitive topics such as the means of legalization or marrying a German partner.

## German spouses

Crucial for my research were interviews with German partners of Cameroonian migrants, which enabled me to understand and analyze their perspectives, aspirations, and motivations. Unfortunately, I was only able to talk to six German women cohabiting or married to Cameroonian men, or separated or divorced form them. Women who were already separated or divorced from their former Cameroonian partner were particularly willing to reflect on their often negative experiences. I also included them in the sample because some Cameroonians reported being separated from their German wives after only three or four years of marriage, but had not yet divorced in order to avoid trouble with the authorities. I was not able to interview German men who are or were in relationships with Cameroonian women.

**Table 5: Main interview list of German women (n=6)**

| Age at interview | Occupation | Marital status | Children |
|---|---|---|---|
| 39 | Teacher | Married to Cameroonian husband | none |
| 35 | Saleswoman | Separated from Cameroonian husband | none |
| 37 | Unemployed | Divorced from Cameroonian husband | none |
| 29 | Student | Married to Cameroonian husband | none |
| 27 | Student | Married to Cameroonian, but living separately and about to divorce | none |
| 34 | Instructor | Married to Cameroonian husband | one child from a former marriage with a German partner |

Although I was not able to interview many Germans who are or have been married to Cameroonian partners, I gathered considerable information about binational relationships from other sources. I used contributions of German partners, also mainly from women, published on diverse web pages such as 'Fast Africa Forum' (www.fastafrica.net/forum) or 'Binational-In' (www.binational-in.de) to understand their perspectives and attitudes. These contributions made to online communication groups, such as forums and communities, were treated as ethnographic material. I also got personally involved by asking forum participants for interviews, but only once did a German woman agree to meet and discuss my research questions with me.

These forums helped me to understand the perceptions of German women involved in relationships with a Cameroonian or African man. The procedures were often quite similar: one participant would pose a question, and the others would respond by sharing their experiences and offering advice. For example, one woman who describes herself as having been married to a Cameroonian man for more than two years expressed her concern that her husband may have only married her to acquire residency. Other women in similar situations responded by sharing their experiences.

Forum contributions were also a useful source of information on legal matters. There, strategies and practices for avoiding bureaucratic troubles were exchanged, without having to reveal personal information or face the threat of penalties.

## *Expert interviews*

In Berlin, a number of expert interviews were conducted with, for example:

- the head of an asylum home,
- two women working in the civil registry office,
- one woman working in the municipal immigration office,
- members of an NGO, an African association, a refugee organization, and a church organization,
- two lawyers responsible for immigration and family law, and
- two brothers of the 'Afrika-Center', who established a consulting and mentoring center for Africans in Berlin.

These interviews contributed tremendously to my understanding of the legal framework that is relevant for Cameroonian migrants to Germany. In particular, interviews with lawyers were crucial to understanding German immigration and integration policies, but also to comprehending how laws play out in reality, and what exceptions to the rule are possible ('particular cases'). Furthermore, meetings with German authorities in which we discussed issues like the immigration practices of migrants, as well as binational marriages and parenthood, were essential in helping me to at least partly understand their perspectives and the decision-making process.

My four fieldwork stays, two in Cameroon and two in Germany, provided me with plenty of research data. I used the intervals between periods spent in the field to start analyzing data, reformulate research questions, and reframe the direction of my study. The next section explains the process of data analysis, including the challenges related to my research and ethical issues.

## 2.4 Analysis

In analyzing and interpreting my collected data, I mainly relied on the grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin 1998). This 'iterative' research model starts with an exploratory phase with broad, general questions. These general research questions are reframed during the procedure of data collection, and more specified questions are asked. The continuous reframing of research questions enables me to refocus the discussions on more specific topics. This research principle combines data collection, analysis, and theoretical considerations. These are different steps within the research process which are constantly repeated until it is possible to explain and describe the stated problem, and to answer research questions 'sufficiently'. Interview quotes, case studies, and life histories are coded according to content in order to make a comparison possible. I found this hypothesis-generating research methodology useful in analyzing my data and in subsequently combining and discussing theoretical considerations in relation to my empirical findings.

Ethnographic notes are never pure descriptions, instead they are already first interpretations. Therefore, it is necessary to reflect on the role of the researcher in the procedure of data collection and interpretation. Personal circumstances are often very relevant. To give an example, the fact that I am an unmarried German woman might have triggered some to ask me

why I am not married, which gave me the opportunity to ask about their marriage plans and intentions. The fact that I spent some months in Cameroon facilitated contacts. My stories about the places I visited in the country, the food I ate and the music I was dancing to, were often an initial point of contact and help to loosen some tense interview situations in Germany. I am aware of the fact that personal characteristics – such as gender, age, marital status, education, etc. – influence the interview situation and have consequences for the results. A strict distinction between perception and interpretation is not possible. Hence a descriptive analysis must always be combined with an appraisal of the interview situation and the fieldwork conditions, how were the data collected?

## 2.4.1 Challenges of my research

There are a number of problems, challenges, and difficulties connected to my research approach. The four most important problems:

First, it was not always easy to clearly distinguish between my position as a researcher and my personal relationships to the respondents. Some interview partners became personal friends and still are. Hence, to keep the required 'emotional' and 'scientific' distance between the researcher and the informants was challenging for me. In Cameroon, I was a stranger, new in the country, and unknown to most respondents. Nevertheless, living with the people concerned helped me to become well acquainted with different family members and get to know their ideas, attitudes, and future perspectives. Meanwhile, during intensive fieldwork I was not simply seen as a researcher, but also as a friend or even as a family member of whom certain duties and responsibilities were expected, especially in those cases in which I stayed for a longer period of time with families.

The second problem was associated with my impact as a researcher in the field. The fact that I am a citizen, of a country to which many Cameroonians sought to migrate, might have influenced responses. Family members kept telling me about the glorious German colonial period, and how many wonderful and useful improvements the Germans colonists brought to Cameroon, such as streets, railways, and the port in Douala. Yet in contrast to quantitative surveys, I was able to react to and interact with respondents, to ask further questions, and to explore intentions and meanings of assertions.

Third, since it was difficult in Germany to locate and gain access to interviewees, particularly to undocumented Cameroonians, 'initial contacts' were often established through interview partners with temporary or long-term residency, but who had once themselves an insecure legal status. Generally, contacting undocumented migrants was a stepwise procedure. Already existing contact persons had to be convinced to help with the study. They had to communicate my position and the aim of the research project to the members of their networks. Subsequently, I was introduced to Cameroonians living in Berlin who had no legal status. A clear explanation of the nature and objectives of my research project, as well as the guarantee of anonymity, helped to build rapport. In addition, the fact that I was familiar with their place of origin facilitated informal conversation. However, in some cases, despite having been introduced by Cameroonians, it was not possible to build confidence with informants. Even after several meetings and long conversations, some interlocutors continued to suspect me of working for the authorities.

Fourth, conducting fieldwork in two places and moving between two contexts helped me to understand processes and dynamics, but, because the length of stay in each individual site was limited, I was unable to conduct the type of in-depth research at a single site that many anthropologists require. However, considering that the aim of my research project is to understand transnational migration between Cameroon and Germany and to capture the complexities of social processes and events, a multi-sited ethnography approach was seen as the best solution. Moreover, during my fieldwork, I was able to follow migrating individuals across international borders, either by meeting them in Cameroon and later on in Germany, or vice versa. In many cases, I was additionally able to 'follow' interlocutors online, as they kept me up-to-date via email or chat about their current situation.

## 2.4.2 Ethical issues

Finally, I encountered a number of crucial ethical issues connected to a research concerned with understanding the interplay between migration, marriage, reproduction, and legality.
First and foremost, it should be mentioned that respondents were informed about the aim and the purpose of my research project, and agreed to be interviewed. Anonymity and confidentiality was guaranteed to all interview partners. Hence, results are presented in such a way that people and places cannot be identified by others. This also means that certain

information, like quotes and descriptions given by my interlocutors, were deliberately left out of the analysis to reduce possible risks for the participants.

Second, throughout my fieldwork I attempted to treat respondents as partners, and not purely as sources information. I had to accept a number of compromises. The security and the well-being of my interview partners was always the priority. In this sense, I tried to develop a relaxed and comfortable interview situation. When I had the feeling the topic was too sensitive or problematic, I skipped questions and continued to talk about less difficult themes. To further reduce pressure and stress on my interlocutors, I preferred to take notes rather than to record the conversations.

The third dilemma I faced during fieldwork, and particularly while writing my book, is also the most critical one. My research setting is a highly political and sensitive one. The main question in this regard is how to treat results on migration strategies of Cameroonian migrants, which could have negative consequences for them or for generations of immigrants that follow. For example, my findings on the practices used by migrants for obtaining residency could be over generalized, and used as a basis for further restricting immigration and integration policy that could have a dramatic impact on the future of migrants. However, the aim of my research was to understand and to increase knowledge on transnational migration between Cameroon and Germany. This includes not only the migrants' situation in Germany, but also the social and cultural contexts of their country of origin, and, possibly, of return. Only by taking the whole range of marriage and family dynamics in several transnational settings into account can a realistic picture of the situation of Cameroonian migrants to Germany begin to emerge. It does not make much sense to take one part of the whole story without considering the pre-migratorial and the post-migratorial contexts. This study attempts to enable the reader to comprehend the holistic and complex phenomena of the interrelatedness of migration, marriage, reproduction, and legality. This is accomplished by making the voices of migrants and their families, but also of the other actors involved, like German wives or authorities, heard. The aim was to understand the actions of the different people and institutions involved.

# III   CREATING A MIGRATION POPULATION: POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND CULTURAL ASPECTS OF MIGRATION

Migration processes are strongly related to political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions. In order to understand migration dynamics between Cameroon and Germany, I now turn to a description of the emigration context in the sending area. Therefore, I rely mainly on secondary literature to provide the reader with a political-historical framework, and on results of my fieldwork in Cameroon to identify motives and incentives for international migration. This chapter concentrates on the impact of political and socio-economic conditions, the circumstances surrounding international migration, as well as cultural aspects of mobility across national borders.

A description of the political, economic, and social developments in a historical perspective creates a foundation in which to embed my empirical findings. After illustrating the diversity of the country providing some geographic and demographic details, a historical sketch of political developments allows for the contextualization of political and economic processes.[31] Subsequently, the educational system in the country is described in relationship to internal mobility and the economic developments, thus enabling me to understand who is migrating and why. Education plays a significant role in international migration, since many Cameroonian migrants in Germany are enrolled as students. An investigation of Cameroon's human rights situation is not just relevant as background information, but also as a rationale for particular kinds of migration, especially asylum. An examination of the local Cameroonian term *bush fallers,* the music style *Coupé Décalé*, and the social phenomenon of *feymania* in relation to processes of international migration complete this chapter. Understanding these and other cultural terms and phrases helps me to analyze the symbolic meaning of migration. Describing and analysing the sending context sets the framework for understanding who is migrating and why.

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[31] Issues of ethnic identity play a subordinated role in my study. Cameroonian migrants in Germany have diverse ethnic backgrounds. As I will explain, internal migration within Cameroon is often the first step for an international move. In Douala and Yaoundé live people from all over the country.

## 3.1 Cameroon – *'Afrique en miniature'*

The country that is now called Cameroon is one of the most diverse regions in sub-Saharan Africa in terms of geography, language, ethnicity, culture, and religious affiliation. Because of its diversity, Cameroon is often referred to as 'Afrique en miniature'. The country is one and a half times larger than Germany, with an estimated population of around 18 million in 2006, compared to 82 million in Germany (PRB 2006). The country's annual population growth rate is estimated at around 2% (ibid.). Due to the continuing high fertility rate (4.6 children born per woman in year 2006), Cameroon's population grew especially quickly in the last 20 years. Cameroon's population is, as is the case in many other African countries, young: 43% of the population is under 15 years of age, and only 3% is over age 65. The median age is estimated at around 18 years (ibid.).[32] To a large extent, Cameroon's population consists of adolescents who often look for opportunities abroad if local prospects are limited.

The Republic of Cameroon is situated in West-Central Africa, and is surrounded by Nigeria, Chad, Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and the Republic of the Congo. In Cameroon live more than 200 different ethnic groups. The various groups speak over 247 indigenous languages, apart from English and French, the two official languages, and Cameroon Pidgin English, the main lingua franca (Echu 2004).[33]

Unlike many anthropological studies which deal with one ethnic group or one region, my study involves different ethnic groups in different regions of the country. However, the majority of internal migrants in Cameroon and international migrants in Europe originates from the Anglo- and Francophone western regions (Grassfields of Cameroon).[34] The Grassfields population consists of different ethnic groups, including the Bamiléké and the Bamoun. People from the Grassfields, but especially the Bamiléké, are known for having a strong business sense. They control most of the transportation in the West and South of the country (Koenig 1977: 65), and they also work as traders, artisans, and skilled professionals in the towns. The Bamiléké, who are mainly Christian, play an important role in the economic development of Cameroon, but

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[32] In comparison, the median age in Germany has been estimated with over 40 years (Rostocker Zentrum für Demographischen Wandel, www.zdwa.de/zdwa/artikel/index_dateien/index_04W3DnavidW2664.php, last accessed 10 May 2009).

[33] Out of ten provinces, two are English speaking (the Northwest and the Southwest) all other provinces are Francophone.

[34] Diverse internal migration processes are prevalent among different ethnic groups in various regions of the country, and are not specific to one group or region (see Section on internal mobility).

are also active in building business relationships abroad. All of my interview partners lived at least temporarily in Douala or Yaoundé before their departure to Europe.

The following brief outline of the political history of Cameroon is intended to provide the reader with the necessary framework for understanding and contextualizing the subsequent emphasis on educational development, economic changes, and urbanization.

## 3.2 Political history of Cameroon

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to reach the coast of Cameroon in the 15th century. Inspired by the crabs in the river Wouri, they referred to the region as *Rio dos Camarões*, meaning 'river of prawns'. This gave the country its current name (Ardener 1962: 341). With the arrival of the Portuguese, the slave trade started to concentrate along the coastal areas. Other Europeans from England, Netherlands, France, and Germany became involved in trading slaves and ivory for clothes and metal products. While the Dutch took over the slave trade in the 16th century, the British missionaries protested against the trade of people and created a Christian colony in Victoria (today Limbe), where freed slaves from Jamaica, Ghana, and Liberia settled. In the mid-19th century, an English missionary named Alfred Saker started to build schools and churches, and founded the first European settlement in Victoria. However, the British were too occupied with exploring other places in Africa, like in Nigeria or East Africa, and were therefore reluctant to make the area now known as Cameroon a British protectorate (ibid.).

Deeply in need of colonies, the Germans took advantage of the British hesitation, and declared the region a German protectorate in 1884. Starting along the coast, mainly in the area around Douala, they signed trading contracts with the local chiefs (Eyongetah & Brain 1974: 61). The chiefs – Bell, Akwa, and Deido – are still remembered today, and quarters of Douala bear their names. One of the German traders, Adolph Woermann, played an important role in the development of the German colonies. Shortly after declaring the regions as protectorate *Kamerun*, Germans moved into Africa and occupied various regions, including *Togoland* (Togo), *Deutsch-Südwestafrika* (Namibia), and *Deutsch-Ostafrika* (Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi). Their "sphere of influence" (ibid.: 61) slowly reached into other areas in the country. The exploration started from the North of the country, mainly because the Duala kings opposed the German discovery effort and blocked the access from the South. The Duala were not the

only group that resisted the German expansion. Throughout the German colonial period, there were frequent rebellions and fights between different ethnic groups and the Germans. The Bamiléké in the western regions strongly insisted on their independence, whereas the Bali, despite living in the same area, cooperated with the German conquerors (ibid.: 73). The Germans started to set up huge plantations, mainly in the southwestern regions of Cameroon. Rubber and palm oil were cultivated, and coffee, cocoa, banana, and tobacco plantations were established (ibid.: 79). Shipping lines ran between West and Central Africa and Germany, delivering not only agriculture products, but also ivory, which was used in Europe for billiard balls, carvings, piano keys, and furniture (ibid.: 83). In 1880s, Douala and Victoria (later named Limbe) in the South became the first administrative areas. Yaoundé, mainly a military station, was founded by the German explorer Georg Zenker in 1888. It became an important place of trade and an essential connection point with the North (Guyer 1987: 118). Buea, in the Southwest, became the capital of the German protectorate from 1895 to 1919. The second German governor, Jesko von Puttkamer, started to construct railways, roads, schools, and hospitals. During the German colonial time, education and labor opportunities were the main drivers of migration to the South, particularly to the cities of Douala, Victoria, Buea, and Yaoundé.

The German occupation came to an end when English troops entered Cameroon from Nigeria and French troops from Chad and Gabon (Eyongetah & Brain 1974: 95). The Germans capitulated in 1916, and this year marked the end of the *German Kamerun Protectorate*.

Germany's image in Cameroon is obviously strongly affected by the German colonial time in the country. Cameroonians often describe the German colonial past as a period of development and growth. However, rough conditions and cruel recruiting methods are also mentioned as memories of this period. Eyongetah and Brain (1974: 92) explain that, particularly the later generations of Cameroonians see Cameroon's past as a German colony often in an all-too-pleasant light. They cite a memorandum of 1949 presented to a visiting United Nations mission saying that:

…the attitude of a later generation of Cameroonians to the Germans: Cameroonians regarded the Germans as harsh to the point of brutality on occasion, but always just. Their brutalities have mostly been forgotten. People remember the Germans in Cameroon for the plantations, the buildings, the railways, the roads and other adjuncts of white civilization (ibid.: 92).

This quote, which stems from the time before independence, may still hold true today. Most of my interview partners mentioned above all the achievements of the Germans in the country, particularly in comparison to the British and French. The tendency to see the German colonization of Cameroon in a positive light could be one possible explanation for why Cameroonians choose Germany as a country of destination. But many Cameroonians may also romanticize the German colonial period, for example, because its events were less recent.

Following the First World War, Cameroon was divided between Britain and France. The division was disproportional: five-sixths came under French occupation, and the remaining part became British. The diverse ethnic groups had no right to object to the agreement, even though borders were not based on linguistic or ethnic divisions, but merely along geographical lines. Some ethnic groups, like the Bamiléké, were divided by the boundary (Eyongetah & Brain 1974: 95-6). This administrative, political, and linguistic separation of the country has been a source of tensions, conflicts, and problems until today.

The British ruled the region together with their colony in Nigeria via an indirect government, which meant that local chiefs still ruled their territories, and the British officials 'advised' them (Eyongetah & Brain 1974: 107). The French mandate, by contrast, was strongly linked to France. The French colonies were regarded as France Overseas (*La France d'outre-mer*) which caused major changes in this part of the country. The aim was to make the French colonies part of France by making Cameroonians learn French at a French school, think in French, and live the French way – "to turn into a Frenchman" (ibid.: 109). For 'well-assimilated' Cameroonians, it was even possible to become French citizens. So, in contrast to the British indirect system, in which the local chiefs were of great importance and were accorded great respect, the French system created its own rulers for purely administrative purposes. "If they [the French] trusted somebody, they made him a chief; they disregarded the local chiefs and local rulers" (ibid.: 111-2). After the Second World War, both British and French mandates to the colonies in Cameroon were renewed by the United Nations.

French Cameroon was the first part of the country to gain independence: in 1960, President Ahmadou Ahidjo, who originates from Garoua in the North, came to power with the strong support of France. The British part followed in 1961, when the United Nations gave the population the option of choosing between joining Nigeria and reunifying with Cameroon. Northern British Cameroon opted to belong to Nigeria, while the southern part of British Cameroon voted to rejoin Cameroon. In 1971, the resistance of the northern regions was suppressed by the French military and the country was turned into a Federal Republic with different administrative and legal systems in the Anglophone and Francophone parts (Ardener 1962, Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003).

The years under Ahidjo were characterized by developments in agriculture and industry, but also by the discovery of oil, which led to temporary period of economic stability in the country. Due to its richness in natural resources (oil, cocoa, coffee, timber, etc.), Cameroon became one of the few African success stories in the 1970s. However, the political situation remained tense, particularly between the former British and the former French regions. Political arrests were common, and human rights were mostly ignored. Ahidjo ruled Cameroon until 1982, when he passed on his power to his designated successor, former Prime Minister Paul Biya, a Beti from the Southeast. Biya, who was educated in France and Cameroon, also received strong support from the French. Important socioeconomic and political links with the former colonial power remained, and still exist today. Despite the continuously stable economic situation that lasted until the mid-1980s, Cameroon's political atmosphere was marked by the increasing power of Biya accompanied by the suppression of all forms of opposition or criticism. Paul Biya, the only candidate in the presidential elections, was reelected in 1984 and in 1988 with almost 100% of the votes. Despite a few democratic achievements, such as the formation of new political parties in the country, the political situation remained difficult. In the 1990s, several opposition parties were banned and their leaders were arrested. In 1992, Biya again won the presidential elections, even though the opposition leader, John Fru Ndi from Bamenda in the Northwest province, received almost an equal percentage of the votes. As a consequence of these disputed election results, a state emergency was declared. Political activists and journalists were arrested, and several people died. In 1995, despite ongoing concerns about the human rights situation in Cameroon, the country was accepted into the Commonwealth. With the political opposition in Cameroon was split, Biya was reelected in 1997 (Mehler 1993, Takougang & Krieger 1998, Mbaku & Takougang 2004). In 2007, Biya was still in power.

Cameroon's political situation remained precarious[35], and the struggle between the Anglophone and the Francophone parts of the country continued.


## 3.3 The value of formal education

The political developments from colonial times to the early 2000s have set the scene to understand the economic and social events and dynamics related to migration. One specific facet does, however, deserve special emphasis. One of the main characteristics of Cameroonians in Germany is their high educational level. The majority of my conversational partners obtained at least a high school degree; many studied a couple of semesters at university before their emigration. This is part of the reason why many Cameroonians in Germany are enrolled as students. In order to understand why highly educated Cameroonians migrate to Germany, this section analyses educational developments in Cameroon. Thus, the following section describes the value placed on education in the Cameroonian context over time. Subsequently, I give some examples from my fieldwork that help to explain why young Cameroonians seek to study abroad.

The development of the formal educational system in Cameroon is strongly connected to the colonial past. The provision of schools and the expansion of education in Cameroon is mainly linked to the work of missionary agencies and colonial governments. Formal education in Cameroon, like in many other African countries, can be traced back to evangelization, which had a great influence on the development and the structure of schools and other institutions of education (Fonkeng & Amin 2007). The Protestant missionaries started their work in 1841 in Victoria and Douala, and in 1918 the Catholics arrived. In 1913, the missions had 631 schools in the area today referred to as Cameron, and more than 40,000 pupils were enrolled (Eyongetah & Brain 1974: 91). At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, missionary schools were the main educators, and their goal was evangelization (Amin 1999: xviii). Christian missions strongly influenced the socio-political and economic

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[35] In February 2008, Cameroonian taxi drivers protested against high fuel prices. They were later joined by unemployed youths who complained that the government missed opportunities to create avenues for employment and economic progress. After president Biya declared that he might amend the constitution to try to extend his 25 years in power and accused the opposition of orchestrating the unrest to depose him, people in Yaoundé, in Douala, and in the Anglophone Southwest and Northwest provinces protested against those in power ("Dark days in Cameroon", www.postnewsline.com/2008/03/dark-days-in-ca.html, last accessed 8 March 2008).

transformation of the country, and were often associated with high levels of prestige (Nkwi & Warnier 1982: 218). The Westernization of Africans by means of religious activities was widespread throughout Cameroon. Religious leaders became important public figures, and, particularly in terms of educational development, churches and missionary schools became crucial conduits for the transmission of Western ideology and ideals.

At the end of the 19th century, the Germans built the first public schools in Douala, Victoria, Garoua, and founded an agricultural college in Yaoundé (Eyongetah & Brain 1974: 91). German became the official language in these schools, and teaching the German language and culture was the main focus of schooling (Amin 1999). By the end of the German occupation, there were 531 primary schools and some middle schools in Cameroon (ibid.). Some Cameroonians were sent off for further studies to Germany, and returned home well after the First World War (Derrick 1980). In this way, the German influence on education continued even after the British and French took over. Due to the German occupation, some Cameroonians today still learn German as a foreign language in school, although only the two official languages, French and English, are obligatory. Western education, which was first provided by missionaries and later by public schools, was highly valued by the various ethnic groups. Most of the Duala had been educated by 1914, and were literate both in Duala and German (ibid.). Their educational achievements allowed them to work as clerks for the German government and firms.

> The centers of early Western education in West Africa, from whom came the junior staff of the Europeans in the early and middle colonial periods, included Douala, whose people provided most of such staff in German Kamerun and then in French Mandated Cameroun (ibid.: 267).

Like the Duala, the Beti highly valued Western education both for moral and economic reasons (Johnson-Hanks 2006). According to Johnson-Hanks (2006), attending a Catholic school was seen by the Beti as a first step in gaining access to power and wealth, and, therefore, achieving honor.[36] Even after its official end in 1918, the German colonial period strongly influenced generations of Cameroonians in their educational goals. It becomes clear that having an

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[36] Educated Beti women perceive themselves to be more honorable than their less-educated counterparts (Johnson-Hanks 2006: 88).

education represented for Cameroonians the chance to access to the formal labor market, and, presumably, better job opportunities; while also offering the opportunity to enter elite social circles.

During the French and British administration, more public schools were founded, mainly primary and some secondary schools. The French educational policy emphasized assimilation (Ngoh 1987). The aim was to replace the African culture with the French culture and language. Education was highly centralized under the French regime. The educational system was controlled and regulated from France. In 1924, French language became the only language of instruction, while local languages were forbidden. In contrast to the French educational system, the British model aimed at training civil servants for colonial exploitation under various circumstances (ibid.). The British administration was more decentralized and was influenced by British policy for Nigeria.

After independence, the government under Ahidjo improved the quality of education and the rates of enrollment of primary schools, but many schools were still run by missionaries (Amin 1999: xviii). Additionally, the first university was established in 1962 in the capital Yaoundé, and the city became the center for education and training. It remained the only university in the country for more than 20 years, and attracted students from all over the country. Today, Cameroon has six state universities in different provinces.[37]

In 1972, the state guaranteed, at least theoretically, the right to education for all, and affirmed free and compulsory basic education (Amin 1999: 6). According to Nelson et al. (1974: 115), "in 1973 the Cameroonian education system was one of the most developed in Black Africa". Cameroon's educational standards were considered high, especially in the French part, when compared to other French West African countries (Eyongetah & Brain 1974: 117). According to Clignet (1976) Cameroon's commitment to education was higher than that of other West and Central African countries. In his view, the population shared the state's belief in education as the main means of social mobility. The people trusted in the value of education, and were willing to invest heavily in the educational system. It was widely believed that well-educated children could expect to get a good job, and would then be able to support the family.

The educational system in Cameroon still differs slightly between the Franco- and the Anglophone areas. Whereas the French system focused on principles such as equality,

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[37] Of these six universities, the University of Buea is the only Anglophone university.

centralization, and uniformity of curricula programs; the British school model emphasized individual differences, liberty, and private initiative in investing in education (Clignet 1970b). But even greater than the difference between Francophone and Anglophone is the North-South divide. In the northern provinces of Cameroon, rates of enrollment are lower, especially for girls, and there are fewer secondary schools than in the southern and western regions of the country (Amin 1999: xxvi). According to the Cameroon Demographic and Health Survey (2004), primary and secondary education attendance rate have been as low as 10% to 35% in the North, but up to 95% in the Southwest. These regional differences are one major reason for internal migration and urbanization. Young people are sent from villages to towns and cities or from the North to the South. Especially when they wish to attend secondary school or university, pupils must often leave their villages and live with relatives in the towns.

As shown by Merabet (1999: 74), 80% of men and women leave their place of birth before age 15. Consequently, first-time migrants are young and unmarried. The majority of migrants receive financial support for education from their families or communities. Merabet's study distinguishes between the levels of education at the time of migration. He concludes that people with secondary or higher education change their place of residence far more often than Cameroonians with primary or no education (1999: 102). Merabet's (1999) and Timnou's (1993) studies identified education as one of the main reasons for internal migration in Cameroon. Education may be a driving force for both internal migration – especially, but not exclusively, rural-urban migration – and international migration to destinations with better schools, universities, or training centers.

The economic crisis, which started at the end of the 1980s and will be discussed in detail in Section "*La crise* – consequences of the economic decline", had a powerful effect on the quality of education and on the enrollment rates of pupils. As a consequence of the economic decline, the financial means for primary, secondary, and further education were reduced (Amin 1999: xxvi). With the state cutting funding for education, parents and other relatives had to invest more money for the education and training of their children, even though they themselves were strongly affected by the economic decline. People earned less money or even lost their jobs, even as education became more expensive. For example, schools fees for secondary or higher education, books, transportation, and uniforms all rose price. Moreover, Amin (1999: 37-51) states that most educational institutions, especially higher education, were and still are found in the cities, where life is supposed to be more expensive than living in rural

areas. Due to the reduced spending on education by the state and the economic difficulties of individuals and families, access to and the quality of education suffered. "Higher schooling costs, lower family incomes – meant that educating all children became an epic struggle for many families" (Eloundou-Enyegue & Davanzo 2003: 185). Especially higher education became more expensive, and hence less affordable for many Cameroonians. Registration fees for universities were introduced under great public protest in 1993. At the same time, the quality of education dropped. Teachers were not paid for months, and consequently some did not come to work at all. In 1996, another wave of protests and demonstrations at the universities hit the country. It appeared that protests generally failed. Students were arrested without achieving their aims of better working conditions and an end to the newly imposed fees. However, the number of students enrolled in the universities continuously increased. This might have been due to the policy of unlimited admission to the universities, which, however, also meant that there were never enough teachers for the number of students enrolled. The quality of higher education suffered significantly due to the economic crisis and the mismanagement under the Biya regime. Education became devalued socially as well as economically in the time after the economic breakdown (ibid.: 185). The governmental investment in education stopped shortly after the crisis. Due to the economic downturn, job opportunities, especially for highly educated Cameroonians, diminished.[38] For this reason, highly educated Cameroonians increasingly experienced unemployment, or were only able to find blue-collar jobs. As a consequence, not just students, but also qualified teachers left for better pay and improved working conditions for Europe.

Despite the ongoing economic difficulties, the literacy rate has increased in recent years: around 65% of all Cameroonian women and 81% of all men were able to read and write in 2004 (CDHS 2004), possibly because primary schools are free of charge and attendance is almost universal. Formal education is still highly valued in many regions of Cameroon. Parents accept great financial hardship to send their children to school (Eloundou-Enyegue & Davanzo 2003: 185). Many Cameroonian parents and relatives believe that highly educated children have more career options. Hence, parents strive to enable their children to continue their education after completing compulsory primary school (from around ages five to twelve),

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[38] Very few African universities have the capacity for post-graduate studies, especially in science, technology and engineering. As a result, thousands of African students annually pursue post-graduate studies in OECD countries (Adepoju 1991: 208).

sending them to secondary/grammar schools, technical/vocational schools, or apprenticeships/institutes. Subsequently, some also attend one of the six public universities.

This review of educational developments in Cameroon allows us to understand the situation of young Cameroonians today. Education continues to play a crucial role in the life courses of many, even though labor opportunities for highly educated youths have become scarce. But even while the situation in Cameroon would appear to encourage many educated people to go to Germany, the fact that skilled-based immigration is increasingly emphasized in Europe is also relevant. For many Cameroonians, having a high level of education – often a couple of semesters at university – is essential to obtaining a student visa to go to Germany or other countries in Europe. There, they believe, they have the chance to upgrade their educational qualifications, and, subsequently, to find a well-paid job.

## *Studying abroad*

To substantiate my above description of the role of education in Cameroonian society, I use examples of my fieldwork to illustrate why particular young educated Cameroonians seek to come to Germany.

Many interviewed students seek migration to Europe to complete or enhance their studies.[39] Studying abroad is assumed to offer better job opportunities and is also a part of any scientific career. In some cases, there is also some frustration among students regarding the quality of education in Cameroon, as the story of an interview partner illustrates. This Cameroonian student told me that he witnessed how one of the local ministers of higher education proudly told another person that his son managed to enroll at a university in France, and that the minister was so happy that his son would study abroad. My interview partner asked me: "How bad must the situation for Cameroonian university students be, when even government ministers are happy and proud that their children study abroad rather than in their own country?" Several interview partners regarded the fact that ministers and government employees send their children to Europe to complete their education as evidence of the poor quality of the Cameroonian education system. Hence, they also attempt to leave in order to get a better education and improve their career opportunities.

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[39] Scholarships given a European university to Cameroonian students are the exception. During my field work I met only one student: my research assistant, who had received a scholarship to study in the United States. Respondents told me that stipends were more common in the 1980s, e.g., from the German Democratic Republic.

On the occasion of Youth Day, February 11, 2006, Paul Biya, president of Cameroon, promised to expand the educational system and ensure access to all children and youth, to improve the quality of teaching, and to ameliorate conditions for university students.[40] Moreover, he acknowledged that the youth unemployment rate is too high, particularly in the urban centers, like Yaoundé and Douala. Biya promised to foster youth entrepreneurship, and thus to help young people support themselves through self-employment initiatives. Finally, he appealed for more enthusiasm and patriotism. He said (Ministry of Youth Affairs, Cameroon, www.minjeun.gov.cm/english.htm, last accessed 7 January 2008):

> Dear young compatriots, I told you last year, on this same occasion that I was counting on you to invent a new form of patriotism, based on commitment to solidarity and attachment to the general interest. I am renewing this appeal to you, as I believe that we can achieve the New Deal which I am proposing only through a radical change in behavior. I expect you to be pioneers of this change. This is therefore not the time to give up. I am indeed convinced that the conditions are now met for us to look to the future with confidence. This future will mostly be yours; therefore, I entreat you to help me give it a chance through your work, through your commitment, through your enthusiasm and, once again, through your patriotism.

Many interlocutors told me during a focus group discussion (after watching the speech in the TV) that Biya makes the same speech every year, but nothing has changed so far. They do not trust him anymore; his words are seen as empty. Many youths prefer to be proactive, and believe that the only solution is to try their luck abroad.

My interview partners considered the conditions for higher education in the country to be bad. In their view, there are too many university students for not enough teachers and professors. The libraries and laboratories are badly equipped, and teaching materials and classroom facilities are insufficient. In addition, once a student has completed his/her studies it is hardly possible to find an adequate position in the country with a regular and sufficient salary. Respondents who intend to study abroad hope that, after receiving their degree in Europe, they

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[40] I watched his speech on TV together with a group of young Cameroonian women and men.

will be able to work overseas for some years, gain work experience, earn some money to return, and set up a business in Cameroon.

As already mentioned above, the desire to attend school, particularly institutions of higher education, leads many Cameroonians to move from rural areas to the towns and cities. In addition to seeking access to better educational institutions, people move from their villages mainly to the two largest cities of Cameroon Douala and Yaoundé in hopes of finding employment opportunities, a better infrastructure, or simply a better future.

## 3.4 Internal mobility

Internal migration, mostly rural-urban mobility, is also often the first step towards international migration. Potential international migrants often move from rural areas to towns and cities in order to prepare their migration process to faraway destinations. Cameroon has one of the highest rates of internal migration, mainly from rural to urban areas, in Central Africa (Schrieder & Knerr 2000).

Internal movements in the region today referred to as Cameroon began long before colonization. Regional mobility in different directions during pre-colonial times was mainly driven by the desire to found new settlements, or to escape warfare, invasions, Islamization, or enslavement (Adepoju 1995).

During the colonial period, internal migration was mainly characterized by labor migration and urbanization. For the establishment of plantations, the Germans were in need of labor. Local workers in the Southwest, where most plantations were established, were soon insufficient, and a new labor supply had to be organized. The *Westafrikanische Pflanzungsgesellschaft Victoria* ('the West African Society for Plantation Victoria') started to draw its labor force from the western Grassfields (Nkwi & Warnier 1982: 214). Some people from the Grassfields worked voluntarily on the plantations, while others were forced to work through contracts with local chiefs. They were often persuaded with liquor or arms. Working for the Germans was often the only way to earn the cash needed to pay taxes and buy goods (Eyongetah & Brain 1974: 88). In 1913, the plantations employed up to 18,000 local laborers. Workers were needed not only for the plantations, but also for building roads, railways, bridges, and settlements (ibid.: 87).[41]

Educated Cameroonians, particularly people from the ethnic group Duala, who had a good

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[41] The road between Kribi and Yaoundé alone required 85,000 carriers (Eyongetah & Brain 1974: 87).

access to schools, were employed for administrative jobs. They worked as clerks, secretaries, couriers or interpreters for the German government or firms. Due to their education in missionary schools, these employees spoke some German (ibid.: 91).

By the time when Cameroon was divided into British and French Cameroon, most plantations were located on British territory. However, the British were not much interested in these plantations, and sold them back to their German owners in 1924. Although the British officially ruled the region, there were three times as many Germans as British expatriates living in the country (Eyongetah & Brain 1974: 102). The departure of the Germans did not end the recruitment of labor (Nkwi & Warnier 1982: 215). Working on the plantations in the British territory were Francophone Cameroonians who played an important role in the political changes in the country after independence, as well as people from the northwestern areas.

## 3.4.1 Urbanization

During colonial times, people from different ethnic groups moved to economic and administrative centers like Douala and Yaoundé to seek work in the labor market, but also to trade, go into business, or get an education. Historically, processes of urbanization have been closely connected with industrialization. Emerging factories attracted workers. Hence, an increasing proportion of the entire population started to live in towns and cities. The following description of the processes of urbanization concentrates on the two most important cities of the country: Douala and Yaoundé.

Under the three colonial regimes, the processes of urbanization and migration, mainly oriented towards the south, gradually accelerated. Administrative areas and colonial settlements, like Douala and Yaoundé, offered education and employment opportunities for people from different parts of the country. The two cities received most immigrants, and the number of inhabitants increased rapidly. In 1931, there were only 30,000 people living in Yaoundé and 28,000 in Douala. In the late 1950s, the number of inhabitants had increased to 58,000 in Yaoundé and 124,000 in Douala (Timnou 1993: 28). The Bamiléké, who come from the Grassfields in the western provinces, constituted the biggest immigrant group in both cities. They were working in commerce, trade, and transport. In Douala, the number of Bamiléké immigrants rose from 8,000 in 1947 to 30,000 in 1956 (Eyongetah & Brain 1974: 117).

Migration towards the urban areas continued after independence. Infrastructure, education, and employment opportunities as well as better health facilities made the towns and cities especially attractive for young Cameroonians from rural areas. Whereas Douala attracted mainly people from the western provinces and the Littoral region, Yaoundé took in people from a much larger area, especially the Center, the East, and the southern parts of the North (Marguerat 1973: 8).

Beginning in the late 1970s, Cameroon experienced a period of economic growth, and, consequently, high rates of urbanization, which affected mainly Douala and Yaoundé. While Douala developed as the commercial capital, Yaoundé attracted people searching for a better education and training opportunities. In the 1970s and 1980s, rural-urban migration was high, and some scholars talked about the phenomenon of 'rural exoduses' in this context (e.g., Barbier et al. 1981). Although West Africa remains one of the least urbanized regions of the world, Francophone West Africa experienced one of the highest urban growth rates during the second half of the 20th century: the urban population grew 7.8% per year between 1950 and 1990 (Beauchemin & Bocquier 2004: 2250). A similar development holds true for Cameroon. The main migration areas were, and still are, Yaoundé and Douala in the South, Bamenda and Bafoussam in the West, and Maroua and Garoua in the Northern provinces (Calvès 1996: 49). Here, I concentrate on Douala and Yaoundé, since these two cities are the main points of departure and arrival for international migration, especially to and from Europe.

## *Douala*

In the mid-17th century, the area today known as Douala was formed by immigrants coming from the interior who belonged to the ethnic group of Duala. The settlement, located along the banks of the Wouri River and linked by the Bonaberi Bridge, was an important location for the slave trade in the 18th century. Under the German protectorate, Douala became an administrative center and developed its economic importance for the country. As early as in 1884, the Duala chief of Akwa, after whom a district of the city of Douala was named, signed a treaty with the German government which made Douala a protectorate of Germany (Austen 1996). Shortly thereafter, the Germans settled in Douala and the city became an important

center of trade.[42] Due to their place of settlement, the Duala had good access to education, mainly provided by Protestant and later Catholic missions. Schools, access to formal education, and commerce attracted people from different ethnic groups. The city is an excellent example of the rapid urbanization in the 19th and 20th centuries. Douala grew from 115,000 inhabitants in 1954 to more than 450,000 in 1976 (Timnou 1993: 56).

The rural-urban migration as well as the North-South movements changed the ethnic structure of the city. Due to the great expansion of Douala in recent decades, new quarters have developed. Immigrants founded and settled new districts of the city. While the 'Nordist' and the Bamoun, who are largely Muslims, live mainly in New Bell and Akwa, the Bamiléké can be found primarily in Bonaberi, Bassa, and Bonajo (see Map 1). The majority of immigrants in Douala are Bamiléké, who migrated from the western Grassfields to Douala (Eckert 1999). The Wouri, the original inhabitants of the area around Douala, still live along the river Wouri in quarters like Deido and New Deido. Europeans living in Douala settle largely in districts Bonajo, Bonapriso, or Akwa, which were administrative quarters during colonial times, and still are in part. Bonamoussadi and Denver, named after the US city, are districts where migrants returning from Europe build huge houses.

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[42] The Duala were the first group in contact with the Europeans, which resulted in high levels of commercial involvement and education in the region around the city Douala (Koenig 1977).

**Map 1: Districts of Douala**
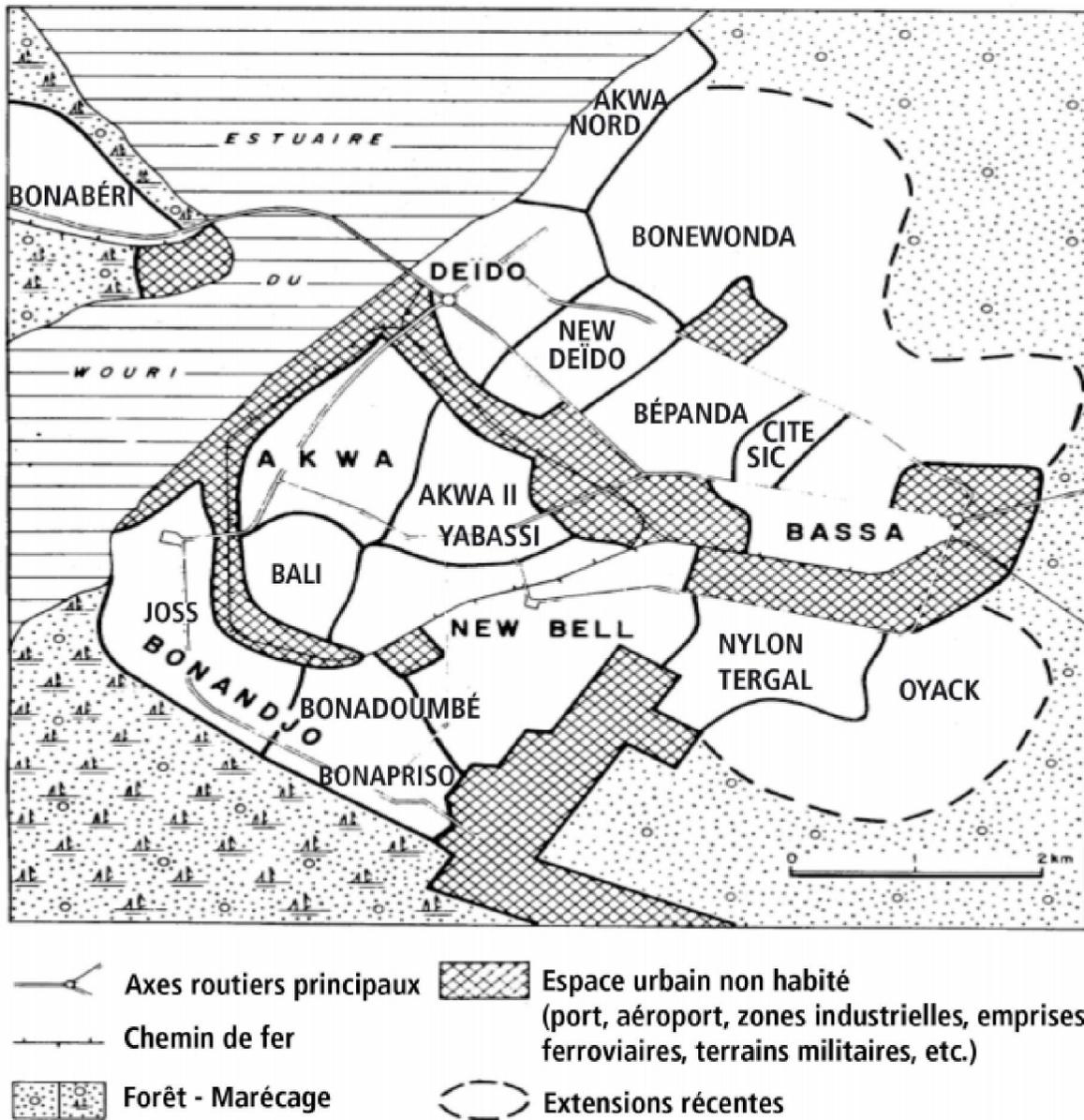


*Source: Haeringer (1970)*

In 2006, it was estimated that the economic capital Douala had a population of more than two million, making it the largest city in the country. Cameroon's major international airport is in Douala, as is its largest port. Most exports, like oil, cocoa, and coffee, leave Cameroon via Douala. Moreover, the country's largest market can be found in Douala, the Eko Market. Educationally, the city has less to offer than Yaoundé. However, a variety of commercial, agricultural, and industrial schools, as well as some research institutes, can be found in Douala. Because of its facilities (Cameroon's largest port and its major international airport), its central location, and the opportunities it offers to earn money (factories, companies, firms, markets, etc.), Douala remains attractive for many Cameroonians, but also for people who plan to leave the country and who are in need of financial means to pay for their travels.

## *Yaoundé*

Many Cameroonians who plan to leave for Europe live in Yaoundé prior to their departure. Some are still enrolled in one of the two universities of Yaoundé, while others attend language courses at, for example, the Goethe Institute. Furthermore, in the capital, potential migrants have access to the public authorities responsible for issuing passports and notarizing documents. Finally, most foreign embassies, at which prospective emigrants must apply for visas, are situated in Yaoundé.

The Ewondo, a Beti sub-group who inhabit the area around Yaoundé, gave the city its name (Guyer 1987). Founded in 1888 by the Germans Yaoundé was declared the capital of French Cameroun in 1922. From 1940 to 1946, however, the capital was moved from Yaoundé to Douala. Following independence, Yaoundé again became the capital of the reunited Republic of Cameroon.

Like Douala, Yaoundé has experienced continuous growth in recent decades. The population was estimated at 5,500 Cameroonians and 365 foreigners in 1926 (Franqueville 1979: 323). By 1953, there were around 37,000 people – a tripling of the population within a 15-year period. During the French mandate, the city developed even more rapidly, and by the mid-1970s, more than 300,000 people lived there, including members of more than 180 ethnic groups, and about 10,000 foreigners (Guyer 1987: 112). In 2005, it was estimated that there were around 1.5 million people living in Yaoundé. The Bulu-Beti-Fang group, who were originally from this

area, still constitutes the majority of the population. They work largely in the administration (ibid.). However, because of its central location and its trade with the North, many different ethnic groups have migrated to the city. The Bamiléké and the Bassa constitute a huge proportion of the inhabitants. The Bamiléké in Yaoundé, like those in Douala, are strongly involved in commerce, trade, and transport. A song by the Cameroonian singer André-Marie Talla describes the movement of Bamiléké to Yaoundé, mainly because they are 'searching a better life' in the city:

### Je vais à Yaoundé…

Où vas-tu paysan, loin de ton beau village
Où tu vivais en paix près de tes cafiers ?
Je vais à Yaoundé, Yaoundé le Capitale…
Où vas-tu étudiant, tout neuf habille,
Ton blaze a la mode, ton pantalon plisse ?
Où vas-tu étudiant, d'un regard conquérant,
Délaissant ton pays, ton beau Bamiléké ?
Je vais à Yaoundé, le Capitale…
Je vais chercher là-bas une vie meilleure…[43]

*Source: Barbier et al. (1981)*

Here, André-Marie Talla sings about farmers, students, drivers, and unmarried young women who are leaving their villages in the Bamiléké region to live in Yaoundé in hopes of finding better living and working conditions. In this sense, rural-urban migration is driven by the same motives and incentives as international migration: the search for opportunities to build a new life and to prosper. Talla recounts in his songs how many different kinds of people can leave their quiet, peaceful, and beautiful home villages to enjoy modern life in the city of Yaoundé.

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[43] Own translation:
Farmer, where are you going, far away from your beautiful village,
Where you lived in peace close to your coffee bushes?
I am going to Yaoundé, Yaoundé, the capital…
Student, where are you going, in your new dresses,
Your fashionable jacket, your folded trousers?
Where are you going student, with a conquering glaze?
Leaving your land, your beautiful Bamiléké?
I am going to Yaoundé, the capital…
There I am looking for a better life…

In the city, they hope to find 'modernity', like fashionable, western clothes. According to Talla, those who migrate to the urban centers feel like conquerors. It is said that they run after their dreams and hope to find a better life in Yaoundé.

## 3.4.2 Urban-rural migration

Although Douala and Yaoundé continue to attract many people from all over the country, there is also urban to rural migration, particularly after the drastic economy decline in the late 1980s (Franqueville 1987). There are several potential 'factors' for return migration dynamics. One of the often-mentioned motives is that urban life is more expensive than life in the village. Therefore, people who cannot find work in the cities are obliged to return. Gubry et al. (1996) have found that, whereas urban-rural migration was seen mainly among older, retired Cameroonians, today these emigrants are mostly young people. In Cameroon, three-quarters of return emigrants are between 15 and 45 years old (ibid.). Eloundou-Enyegue (1997) showed that children are not always sent from the villages to the towns and cities for education or training; instead, in an increasing number of cases, children are sent to villages to attend school and live with relatives. Schooling in the cities has become more costly than in the rural areas, and is therefore less affordable for many families. In addition, students who were unsuccessful in school might be sent back or return voluntarily. Particularly for girls, marriage is a reason to return to their villages.

Another important reason why people migrate back to their villages is inheritance. Older sons are usually the ones who are obliged to return and take over the house, the land, and the fields. Therefore, women are more likely to remain in the cities than men (Beauchemin & Bocquier 2004: 2254). Processes of urban-rural migration could be also seen as evidence of an economic crisis, which is particularly evident in the cities, where many Cameroonians are unemployed.[44]

However, rural to urban migration continues, and Douala and Yaoundé remain attractive, particularly for young people, for educational, employment and business reasons. Strongly connected with the ongoing urbanization are the beliefs among Cameroonians, especially the young, that opportunities and sources of income are more plentiful in the city than in rural areas. The economic development in the country is crucial to understand internal and

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[44] Life in the countryside is less expensive than in the city. In times of economic hardship, people might move back to their villages and live from their fields rather than being unemployed in the city.

international migration processes. In the following, I present first an overview of the economic development in the country, emphasizing the economic crisis of the country in the late 1980s and its consequences, and argue that the economic situation in Cameroon is one of the main reasons for emigration. 'To look for greener pastures' is a common expression to refer to the search for jobs and money abroad.

## 3.5 *'La crise'* – consequences of the economic decline

Cameroon's economy had been stable and even successful over many years. The country was a model country for the African continent. Next to the export of agricultural products, like coffee, cocoa, bananas, cotton, Cameroon's economy relied on the timber and aluminum industries. The main export countries were and still are France, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, and Germany.

Looking at the economic development of Cameroon, it becomes clear why the number of Cameroonians in Germany has increased, particularly after the mid-1990s. The onset of the economic crisis, which began in Cameroon at the end of the 1980s, was delayed due to the country's oil wealth, but was similar to the economic downturns seen in other West and Central African countries since the late 1970s and early 1980s. Ghana's economic decline, for example, began as early as the late 1960s. The reasons for the abrupt economic crisis, often referred to as *la crise*, were the decline in commodity prices for coffee, cocoa, and timber on the world market. Thus, in the mid-1980s, the value of Cameroon's exports fell over 60% (Eloundou-Enyegue et al. 2000).

The economic crisis in Cameroon led to a drop in salaries, the dismissal of many employees, and high rates of unemployment, especially in the formal sector. Educated Cameroonians were having severe problems finding a job in their national labor market, and sought alternatives outside the country. Many of them had completed high school and some of them had already started their studies at the university or received a degree. For people seeking to enhance their education, Europe seemed to be a good solution. Germany, in particular, was known for offering the opportunity to continue studying (without fees) and the chance to find adequate employment.

At the end of the 1980s, the government reacted and cut the salaries of state employees: "…[W]ages were cut twice in 1993, first by 25 per cent and by 75 per cent later" (Adepoju 1995: 327). Despite having high levels of education, many urban workers lost their employment (Eloundou-Enyegue & Davanzo 2003: 185). Alongside the reduction in exports, the national currency in Cameroon, the CFA, was devaluated over 50%. State factories and companies, such as BICEC (a financial institution), CAMRAIL (a railway company), and SONEL (an electricity company) were privatized. In 2000, Eloundou-Enyegue et al. stated that Cameroon is only slowly recovering from the economic crisis of the mid-1980s to 1990s. However, economic growth continued to decline at about 3.8% per year between 2001 and 2005 (African Economic Outlook 2005). One reason for this was the decline in oil production. The construction of an oil pipeline from Chad to Kribi, in the South of Cameroon, was completed in 2002. In the absence of new discoveries, oil and gas production fell. However, the government revenue from the sector remained at the same level in 2004 due to the oil price increase (ibid.).

It was generally assumed in Cameroon that higher education provided access to a professional career and to a means of earning a living. Many migrants expected to find work in the formal sector once they finished university. However, due to the economic collapse, the formal sector in which most higher educated Cameroonians were working was reduced, while salaries were not paid or were cut down to almost nothing.[45] Adequate job opportunities were no longer available. Workers turned to self-employment, or tried to make their living in the 'informal sector' (Beauchemin & Bocquier 2004: 2247). During this time, unemployment rates in the formal sector reached levels never before seen, and the standard of living deteriorated. Many educated Cameroonians with university degrees found themselves in precarious situations. The unemployment rate among young people with an upper secondary education and above was twice that of those with less education (Antoine et al. 2001).[46] Eloundou-Enyegue and Davanzo (2003: 185) noted that, in 1991, about one-third of university graduates in Cameroon were unemployed: "Even more remarkably, urban unemployment rates were higher among

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[45] To give an example, before 1993 university professors earned 527,000 CFA, while after 1993 their salary was reduced by 42.3% to 304,000 CFA. Teachers lost between 35% and 42% of their salaries in nominal terms. However, considering that the CFA was devalued by 50% in 1993, the loss in these salaries could be as high as 60% or more in some cases (Edokat 2004: 48).

[46] The unemployment rate is inversely proportional to the number of years of education completed. It is 3.1% for those who have reached the end of primary education, 10.7% for these leaving secondary education, and 13.4% for university graduates (Walther 2006: 9, using data from the Cameroon National Institute of Statistics (IMS)).

university graduates (over 30%) than among high school or primary school graduates (25% and 23%, respectively)" (ibid.: 185). The reasons for the higher unemployment rates among well-educated Cameroonians could be decreasing opportunities for entering the formal sector, insufficient salaries, and inadequate working conditions.

The consequences of the economic crisis, especially for higher educated Cameroonians could be one explanation for the increased number of Cameroonians trying to come to Germany starting in the 1990s. Because educated young people in the cities were not able to find work in the formal sector, and because they were not eager to work in the risky and low-paid informal sector, they were looking for alternatives outside the country. Germany was seen as a country that offered good opportunities for completing their studies, getting a higher quality of education, and, subsequently, finding employment.

## *'Looking for greener pastures'*

Many migration experts attribute the massive movement out of Africa to the poor economic conditions and prospects in Africa. Hatton and Williamson (2003), for example, argue that one of the main reasons for migration out of Africa is the large wage gap between sending and receiving countries. Low salaries, low saving rates, and slow economic growth cause people to leave their places of birth. According to the neoclassical economic theory, differentials in wage rates are often mentioned as one of the main causes of labor migration (Todaro 1976).

An illustration of the microeconomic approach for African-European migration is provided by Van Dalen and his colleagues (2003), who analyzed micro-level data from a survey on seven different countries.[47] They focused on structural 'push and pull factors' that trigger migration. Based on their migration surveys, the authors argue that the "typical African migrant is young, male, and someone who has modern values" (van Dalen et al. 2003: 29). This person is mainly driven by his or her expectations about Europe, i.e., a mix of economic motivations and optimism about the chances of finding a job and of improving his or her financial situation.

Like other studies in the sub-Saharan African context, my research suggests that the main motivations for international migration are, for many Cameroonians, economic. Thus, the unstable and insecure economic situation in the country, particularly since the late 1980s, was mentioned as central reasons for migration. A Survey on Employment and the Informal Sector

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[47] The investigated countries include: Spain, Italy, Turkey, Egypt, Morocco, Senegal, and Ghana.

conducted by the National Institute of Statistics (EESI 2005) estimated the unemployment rate to be 17.9% in the city of Yaoundé and 16% in Douala. The 'hiring freeze', particularly in the public sector in the early 1990s, has increased the levels of unemployment among university graduates. Therefore, the lack of labor opportunities has caused many Cameroonians to think about leaving the country. Jobs in the formal employment sector are difficult to obtain. Consequently, even highly educated women and men are forced to rely on work in the informal sector, which is often connected to an unreliable and insecure source of income. However, it is not just the unemployed who think about migration, but also teachers, nurses, doctors, or administrators who were employed in the formal sector, but who are unsatisfied with their low – or, in some cases, even nonexistent – salaries and/or their working conditions. The Cameroon Tribune from August 2, 2006 had the following headline: "Cameroon Arbitrates Teacher Recruitment". The article confirms that a sizeable number of teachers are leaving Cameroon for 'greener pastures'. Arguments for migration are better pay packages, modest working conditions, and professional pride. Informants reported that secondary school teachers receive a monthly salary of about 60,000 CFA (90€), which is insufficient to live on and to support a family financially. The example of Francois, 39 years old, married, three children and working as a government secondary school teacher shows the precarious situation of many state employees:

Despite the fact that he is working full-time, he did not receive any salary for more than two years. When I met him in 2005, he told me that he was living on saved money, but soon his savings would be used up. He was worried about how to provide financially for his children and his wife, who was unemployed. Francois was deeply concerned about the disastrous economic situation in Cameroon, which in his judgment was mainly caused by enormous mismanagement on the part of the government. Many state employees live with meager, irregular, or even nonexistent salaries, simply because they are happy to hold a position in the formal sector. In addition, he criticized working conditions for teachers. There were often more than 100 pupils per class and teacher. Adequate equipment, such as blackboards, books, or teaching materials, was generally missing. Despite the fact that Francois is employed in Cameroon and that he is almost 40 years old, he admitted that he would take any opportunity to leave the country and to

work abroad temporarily. From his perspective, emigration is seen as a strategy for creating a better life for himself and his family by earning money abroad.

The lack of employment opportunities, as well as low and unstable salaries, are the main reasons why many Cameroonians think about leaving the country and finding work abroad. The quote of a male 35-year-old Cameroonian craftsman exemplifies the situation:

If you had a bus here where it is written in front that it leaves for Germany, everybody would try to get in there, even people who have a job. Many workers in the public sector have not been paid in more than two years. How are we supposed to live like that?

Many of the Cameroonians I met wanted to travel to Europe. They hoped to find work abroad and make some money, and then return to Cameroon in order to build a large house and set up a business. As described in the above quote, migration was seen as solution for many, whether they were unemployed or working in the informal or in the public sector.

Referring to the disastrous economic situation in Cameroon, particularly after the economic crisis in the late 1980s, the majority of respondents regarded emigration for at least some family members as the best means of achieving individual, family, and community goals.

In addition to the difficult economic situation, political circumstances and human rights violations caused interlocutors to consider seeking refugee abroad (asylum). Under the leadership of Paul Biya, political opposition, mainly located in the Anglophone West, has been strongly suppressed and critics have been restrained.[48] According to human rights organizations and interviewees, opponents have been arrested, tortured, and even killed. However, a political change is unlikely in the coming years, which is one motivation for emigration.

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[48] Anglophones largely living in the Southwest and Northwest provinces often complain about the corrupt authoritarian regime under Paul Biya and his party. They feel dominated, suppressed, marginalized, and exploited by the Francophone-dominated state, and fear for their cultural and economic heritage. The 'Anglophone problem', the roots of which can be traced back to the time of different colonial legacies – the French and the British – also persists because the political opposition is strongly divided. For a detailed analysis of the historical causes of the 'Anglophone problem' and its consequences see Konings and Nyamnjoh (1997).

## 3.6 Human rights situation

Information on the human rights situation in Cameroon are not only relevant as a background, but as a rationale for particular kinds of migration, namely asylum. Violations of human rights may cause some Cameroonians to leave their country and claim refugee status abroad.[49]

As shown in the brief outline of the political development of Cameroon, the country is dominated by a strong presidency. Paul Biya is only the second president of the country since independence and has been in office since 1982. Despite a multiparty system of government, the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) has been in charge since the 1960s. In all presidential elections there have been widespread irregularities. Biya used his legislative control to change the constitution and extend term lengths of the presidency. According to the report "Human Rights Practices" (2004), released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Cameroon's human rights record remains poor, despite a relatively stable political situation. Amnesty International (2006) has criticized mainly torture and political arrests. The following are some of the human rights violations that have been reported:

– severe limits on citizens' ability to change their government;
– numerous unlawful killings by security forces;
– regular torture, beatings, and other abuses of persons, particularly detainees and prisoners, by security forces;
– life-threatening prison conditions;
– arbitrary arrest and detention of Anglophone citizens advocating secession, local human rights monitors/activists, and other citizens;
– prolonged – and sometimes incommunicado – pretrial detention;
– restrictions on freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and association;
– abuse and harassment of journalists;
– limits on freedom of movement;
– widespread corruption;
– violence, including rape, and discrimination against women;
– trafficking in persons, primarily children;
– discrimination against homosexuals; and
– forced child labor.[50]

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[49] However, chances for being granted asylum in Germany or in other EU countries are increasingly low.

Throughout my stay in the country in 2005 and 2006, I witnessed the constant presence of military, police, and security forces in various parts of Cameroon. Controls within towns and cities, but also on rural roads, were common. Armed police officers checked buses and cars, demanded the identification cards of each passenger, and did not hesitate to stop people from continuing their travels. As in many other West- and Central African countries, the payment of bribes is a common means of placating police officers and avoiding trouble.

During my first fieldwork in the country in 2005, the local newspapers were full of reports on suspected homosexuals. Homosexual activities are illegal in Cameroon and can be penalized with a prison sentence of six months to five years. Human Rights Watch has repeatedly documented the application and impact of the practice of forced forensic physical examinations of men which are designed to 'prove' they have engaged in homosexual conduct. It is nearly impossible to live peacefully in the country as an open homosexual.

University students and professors told me about numerous human rights violations that occurred particularly during the strikes in the 1990s, but also thereafter. In 1996, there was a second wave of protests and demonstrations at the universities. Students demanded that the tuition increase be stopped, asked for the construction of toilets in the universities, and requested new books for libraries. The government responded with violent repression. Students were arrested and some were sent to prison (Konings 2002).

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[50] A country report on the human rights practices in Cameroon was released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor: Human Rights Watch (http://hrw.org, last accessed 3 November 2008).

Interview partners explained that the practice of paying bribes is another driving force for emigration to Europe. As I witnessed myself on several occasions, bribery is widespread across Cameroon, and can be found in every social class, from farmers to teachers to Cameroon's administration and government.[51] The phenomenon of corruption has many names; the most common terms are *kola nut*, *cadeaux*, *gombo*, *bière*, or *tchoko*.[52]

My interview partners claim that bribery plays also a significant role for the migration process itself, such as in issuing legal documents and fulfilling the requirements for emigration and immigration. According to the stories of interlocutors, there was also corruption in the process of applying for visa. I was told that guards at the gate in front of the German embassy required bribes from some persons to access the building for an interview appointment, while others who knew the guard could pass for free.[53]

Corruption is a continuous cycle: without money, it is almost impossible to get a good education or medical treatment, or to find an adequate job. Insufficient financial means imply worse conditions for the future in most areas of Cameroonian society. Widespread corruption makes it necessary to permanently accumulate money. Therefore, finding work and earning an income are important, though this is increasing difficult in Cameroon. Earning money abroad in order to build a better future back in Cameroon is often the main motive for migration.

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[51] Out of 163 countries investigated in the Transparency International's 2006 Corruption Perception Index (CPI), Cameroon was ranked 25 (www.transparency.org, last accessed 13 October 2006).

[52] Everybody living in the country is affected, and escape is hardly possible when living within the system. Here are three simple examples provided by my interlocutors:

- On the way from Douala to Limbe, which is hardly more than 60 kilometers, there are five and sometimes even six police control points. Police officers, gendarmes, and other uniformed men stop cars, buses, taxis, and check documents. Generally, they always find something wrong either with the car documents, with the ID of one of the passengers, or with the vehicle itself. By paying bribes, it is possible to continue the journey. Otherwise long periods of waiting have to be expected.
- Offering bribes to teachers, school directors, or other administrative staff is also a common way for many parents not only to enroll their children in a certain school, but also to buy grades or pass exams. The same holds true for job applications. By offering something to the secretary, it is possible to receive an appointment with the responsible person, who might also ask for favors when offering a position.
- Health care in Cameroon is another area of widespread corruption. Beyond the regular fees for consultation or treatment, patients must often pay bribes to nurses and doctors.

[53] Newell (2005: 174-5) describes the role of corruption in the application for a visa in Ivory Coast.

## 3.7 Social and cultural aspects of the 'migration-hype'

In addition to relevant economic and political aspects of emigration, social and cultural components play an important role in creating incentives for emigration, but also for the migration process itself. Migration is not just associated with economic causes and consequences, but also with social and cultural motivations and outcomes. Understanding the forces that determine emigration as well as the complexity and variety of migration decisions requires the inclusion of cultural influences and other motives that cannot be defined in economic or political terms. Experiences in everyday life influence reflections about migration: people react to stories told by (successful) former migrants or images produced by media like music, TV programs, or newspapers. Migration is embedded in a series of socio-cultural patterns, and might be one response among others to achieving personal and communal goals. Cameroon, like many other West or Central African countries, has a long migration history. The idea of 'traveling' or 'going on adventure' is nothing new (Trager 2005: 11). Migration is largely attached to positive social values. Mobility is considered essential to the ability to mature, at least for men.[54] Koenig (2005: 78) quotes an Ashante from Ghana: "Come let's travel because you lose when you stay in one place…you don't get civilized when you do not travel". In addition to contributing to the maturation of young men, mobility served as a strategy for increasing access to resources. Because of its long history and its social significance, a number of meanings were attached to the phenomenon of migration. Local terms such as *bush faller* or *mbenguist* refer to people traveling to the land of the whites for several years and return successful, i.e., with enough money to support the family, build a house, and set up a business. The music style *Coupé Décalé* arouses expectations, especially among young Africans, about the glorious life in the West. Finally, the social phenomenon *feymania* points to ways out of the misery which play also a central role in the migration process itself. Understanding these and other cultural terms and phrases helps to analyze the symbolic meaning of migration.

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[54] Men were expected to go 'on adventure' for at least some time between late adolescence and their first marriage. Migration had a social and an economic dimension. On the one hand, these movements served as proof of youths' independence and maturity. On the other hand, men were expected to work and earn money, perhaps to pay the bridewealth for their first wife (Koenig 2005: 80).

## *Bush fallers*

The Pidgin-English term *bush faller*, which is widely used throughout Cameroon, but mainly in the Anglophone part of the country, characterizes a person who is leaving the country to search for a better life. The phrase is derived from the verb 'to fall bush', and means to go to the 'bush' to hunt, gather or harvest and to return successfully, i.e., "one goes to the bush so as to return with food or game to nourish the family" (Jua 2003: 6). Interview partners commonly used the term to describe Cameroonians in Europe or the United States who were looking for 'greener pastures' to achieve individual and family goals. One of my respondents explained: "*Bush fallers* are hunters of money, because here [in Cameroon] they think that Europe is a kind of El Dorado, going there means looking for money and a good life". People refer to Europe as an El Doardo, literally translated 'the golden land', a mystical paradise where it is possible to make an easy living.

In some areas of Cameroon, mainly in the western regions and along the coast, people who go abroad are also referred to as *mbenguistes*. The term *mbeng* means, literally translated, *white people's country*. It stems from a mixture of different dialects with French and English (*Pigging* or *Cam-Fran-Glais*). Similar to perception of Europe as an El Dorado, *mbeng,* as the white man's country, is associated with an imagined space where paradise-like conditions exist. As Nyamnjoh and Page (2002) argue, the term whiteness refers to both a place (described in Pidgin-English as *whiteman kontri*) and to people (the general term *whiteman* includes both men and women from a wide range of ethnic groups). Countries where white people live are considered places of material bounty.

Another common expression used to describe migration to the West is 'il est parti au front' ('he left for the front, i.e. he goes to war'), which is reminiscent of Kopytoff's (1987) application of the term *frontier* as exploring a new land and settling in newly discovered regions. Here migration is seen as an adventure which is also connected to certain risks and dangerous forces. Similar to the phrase *bush falling*, the saying 'il est parti au front' is linked to the process of discovering a new land, exploring new terrain, or migrating to another space which is often associated to possible risks, dangers, and threat. In both expressions, migration is seen as a chance for improvement and betterment and at the same time regarded as a dangerous and risky endeavor.

Especially young people are lured by the presumed paradise-like conditions in the 'industrialized West'. They are leaving their country with the idea of making fast money and being able to enjoy material comforts. Technical advances, opportunities to be economically independent, and much better developed educational facilities are factors influencing their attempts to migrate. The fact that diplomas and certificates obtained abroad are said to be more valued than those attained in Cameroon is fuelling a large migration wave of young people. Most potential Cameroonian migrants and their kin share a common perception: the desirable 'West'. Young migrants see their movement as a window of opportunity for seeking a better education or employment, while their relatives and kin are expecting remittances or Western consumer goods. The belief in the Western paradise persists, despite the difficulties reported by some former migrants in finding accommodation or employment, legalizing their status, and sending money and consumer goods back home.

My results on who is migrating confirm the findings of other studies on Cameroonian emigration, such as those of Séraphin (2000: 200)[55] and de Rosny (2002: 623). They argue that potential international emigrants from Cameroon are generally young, still in education, work part-time, and are, for the most part, not yet responsible for a spouse or children. Referring to the fact that many young Cameroonians are trying to emigrate, de Rosny (2002: 623) describes the situation in Cameroon as "a virus of emigration". In some cases, migration was simply an idea and might stay only that way, while in other cases, respondents were very concrete in their migration ideas.

Quite a few informants told me that, to finance their trip abroad, they currently work in the informal sector, for example as street vendors, construction or repair technicians, or bag carriers. They already have concrete plans for what they will spend their money on: issuing documents, visa application, flight tickets, etc. In extreme cases, migration becomes an obsession – leaving the country at "any price and at any risk", like a mother of one potential migrant was saying. The price for going abroad can be extremely high. In addition to the financial costs, migrants often do not see their families and friends for many years and have to deal with loneliness in the new environment. Some migrants even risk their lives to cross international borders as examples of African migrants at the Spanish border show. While being

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[55] In "Vivre à Douala", Séraphin (2000: 200) explains that more than half of all Cameroonian youths between 22 and 25 years of age would like to migrate. Even 45% of Cameroonians ages 26 to 31 would like to leave their country.

in Cameroon, the national newspaper "Mutations" headlined on the 12th February 2006, "Les Jeunes: Partir ou mourir" ("The Youth: Leaving or dying"). The article explains that many young people see no future in the country and are willing to take the risk of migrating rather than staying in the country without being able to work and earn a living.[56]

According to the article, young Cameroonians have only two options: migrating to live or staying to die.[57] Just few months later, the local newspaper "Bonaberi" published in Douala titled "Faire ses études en Europe ou mourir" ("Studying in Europe or dying").[58] The article told the story of a 22-year-old student from the University of Douala who committed suicide, presumably because his visa to study in France was denied by the embassy. One of his friends explained: "He wanted to migrate at all costs".

In some cases, the obsession with leaving Cameroon becomes so strong that potential migrants are also willing to resort to 'illegal means' to achieve their goals.[59] Some attempt to migrate without legal documents and enter Europe undocumented. Thus, they are at constant risk of arrest and deportation. Furthermore, the risk of failing is generally high, i.e., a number of migrants arrive in Europe, but have difficulties achieving their migration goals of earning sufficient money to return or to support their family and kin. The pressure of relatives on migrants to send remittances is often enormous, and returning without an adequate amount of money often has negative consequences.

The media play an essential role in producing desires to migrate and to generating positive perceptions of the West (see also Mac Gaffey & Bazenguisaganga 2000). The media, including television, radio, newspapers, music, and the Internet, have led many to believe that life in Europe and North America is a true fairy tale (Appadurai 1996). But how do media influence particularly young Cameroonians and produce images of Europe as a paradise?

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[56] I was told that in Senegal, there is a slogan "Barca ou Barsakh" meaning "Barcelona or Death".

[57] Buea's local newspaper "The Post" published the headline "I will die a bushfaller" (January 17, 2006).

[58] Duala's local newspaper "Bonberi" published the headline "Faire ses études en Europe ou mourir" (14th June 2006).

[59] To cite Newell (2005: 171) "the dream of travel is an obsession for many".

## *Coupé Décalé*

The music style *Coupé Décalé* speaks directly to youth and has apparently great influence on their dreams, wishes, and hopes. *Coupé Décalé* originates not from Africa, but was created by some African migrants in Paris, and has spread across many African countries (Kohlhagen 2006). Artists of *Coupé Décalé* achieved some success while in Europe. In their songs, they show off their affluence, wealth, and opulence. Music videos and DVDs show singers in expensive cars surrounded by young, beautiful women. Vocalists often dress in European styles, wear golden necklaces, throw money around, and drink champagne in nightclubs and bars. In Cameroon, fancy mobile phones, big cars, and luxurious houses have become symbols of prestige and status. These objects are often financed by money earned abroad, either by oneself or by relatives or friends who send remittances and material goods.

The terms *couper* and *decaler* have various meanings. *Couper* can literally be translated as 'to cut' and *decaler* means 'to disarrange': i.e., to dislocate or to displace. Kohlhagen (2006) states that *couper* actually means to cheat somebody or to steal, and *décaler* means to run away. In some of the songs like "Pepo" by DJ Jacob, Arafat & Caloudi, "Magic Ambiance" by Magic System or "On sait pa ou va?" by DJ Jacab featuring Kaysha, it becomes clear that one way to achieve wealth and to make it in Europe is to cheat the whites. Similar to references to El Dorado or the white man's country, here *Coupe Décalé* means leaving the place of origin and going to Europe. Europe is an imaginary realm of possibilities – 'the land of *cockaigne*'. Once arriving in the wonderland, it is possible to become rich by fooling Europeans (ibid.). Money is made by criminal activities ('to cut'). The second step is *decaler* meaning to escape back to the home country. Back home, the misgotten money is spent on showing off. Some people, who have lived abroad, drive limousines, wear Western clothes and luxury watches, drink champagne, smoke cigars, and eat gourmet food in expensive restaurants. In addition, they enjoy the night life at home. Videos of *Coupé Décalé* songs often show returnees throwing their money around in bars and discothèques (see, for example, www.youtube.com/watch?v=TwBJ8_V0_TE, last accessed 7 July 2009). These music videos animate and encourage youths to become equally successful by migrating to the glorified West. *Coupé Décalé* has been popular since early 2000 in many West and Central African countries, and clearly expresses the feelings of many youths who are insecure about their future and think about going to Europe to make 'big money'. Kohlhagen (2006) explains the success of *Coupé*

*Décalé* as having the power to give hope to young people, and to show them that another world is possible. Many video clips are filmed in cities in Europe, and in glamorous settings. For example, one of the founders of *Coupé Décalé*, Douk Saga, is said to have arrived in Europe with almost nothing, and to have achieved within a short period of time. Nobody really knows how, but he changed his life by making money in Europe. It is unclear whether he created this story about himself or whether this truly happened. His name alone, Douk Saga, suggests a saga, a fictitious story in which most of the events are based more in fantasy than in fact. Douk Saga also created his own style of dancing, *sagacité,* which may refer to a city or town which does not actually exists, but which is described by him in his songs. *Sagacité* flows from Douk Saga's imagination, fuelling the fantasies of many others who believe that a better and more luxurious life is possible.

Many Cameroonian youths see their future overseas, and the music style *Coupé Décalé* encourages them in their hopes; singers of *Coupé Décalé* are their heroes. In songs, these singers ask their fellow country men to follow them in their style of living (*affaire à suivre*).[60] They tell them a better life is possible by taking the risk and going to Europe. And, one day, they will also return with enough money in their pockets to impress their family, kin, and friends and to live a successful life.

## *Feymania*

*Coupé Décalé* artists also make reference in their songs to a social phenomenon called *feymania,* which manifested itself during the economic crisis in the country and can also be seen in relationship to processes of international migration.

According to Malaquais (2001: 101), the word *feymania* first appears first during the 1990s in the region of Douala. *Feyman* refers to a 'social bandit', a trickster, or a money-doubler, a practice widespread particularly among urban youths in Cameroon (Ndjio 2006). *Feymen* use also use fraud to emigrate to Europe and make money abroad. If successful, they return rich, in expensive cars and flashy clothes. Thus, they become role models for the new generation (ibid.), and create incentives for a new wave of migration.

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[60] Singers of *Coupé Décalé* suggest their country men to migrate to Europe to become rich. In doing so, they communicate positive cultural images of migration. In contrast to terms like *bush falling* or *coupé décalé*, the phenomenon *nyongo* describes rather negative consequences of leaving Cameroon for the migrants themselves (Nyamnjoh 2005).

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A *feyman* is characterized by his great affluence and his luxurious Western lifestyle, which may include, for example, driving an SUV or living in American-style houses in districts of Douala called Santa Barbara or Denver. According to my informants, those who live in these quarters have been successful and lucky: "There, people come together who have been lucky". Denver in Douala symbolizes the American lifestyle, and is home of the newly rich. The district was named after a large American city Denver in Colorado, but also after the American television series "Dynasty", which plays in Denver and displays the lives of rich characters. For many, the United States symbolize freedom, success, and virtually boundless opportunities.[61] The imaginary space seen in TV series is reproduced in these quarters: huge houses surrounded by enormous amounts of land, garages that open automatically, and two or three cars in front of each house. Everything is surrounded by fences and closely guarded.[62] The virtual space and life of the TV actually becomes reality in these quarters of Douala. The great affluence of people living in Denver is often associated with financial fraud, the manufacturing of money, or the creation of counterfeits – all activities attributed to *feymen*.

*Feymen* generally do business with Western countries (*affaires à l'étranger*). Often it is unclear what exactly they do to earn huge amounts of money, but for the majority of the youth, these people are their heroes (Malaquais 2001: 109). One respondent explained to me: "A *feyman* is someone who snatches something from you in a professional way without physically hurting you". *Feymen* also exploit migration aspirations by promising to provide contacts, networks, travel documents, or visas, but once the money is paid, the *feyman* is never seen again. Thomas, age 24, explained to me that a friend of his planned his journey to Belgium, but he was not lucky enough to get a tourist visa at the embassy, so he tried to buy a visa. He gave all his savings to a nicely dressed man who promised him to provide him with valid documents to travel to Europe. Thomas's friend believed him, only to discover that the man was a *feyman* who ran away with all his money.[63]

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[61] Having grown up in East Germany, I could partly understand their glorified dreams and hopes of a better life. As a child in the former GDR, I had images in my mind of the US as a 'land of freedom and opportunities'.

[62] My walks through the districts Santa Barbara or Denver truly reminded me of some rich areas like Beverly Hills in the United States.

[63] Another example of feymania is the story of Patrick, a 32-year-old shop owner, who was about to marry when I met him, told me how he was betrayed by a *feyman*. For 10 million CFA (around 15,000€), he bought a piece of land in the outskirts of Yaoundé, where he planned to build a house for his future wife and children. A few weeks after the deal, when he was about to start with the construction of the house, he was shocked to see that another person had the same idea of building a house on his property. What happened? A *feyman* sold the land to several

Victims are often left with huge amounts of debt. In an article in the Cameroonian newspaper "The Post" from April 26, 2005, a Swiss diplomat warned Cameroonians to be aware of conmen who claim to be senior staff of the nonexistent Embassy of Switzerland in Cameroon, demanding and receiving 3,000 Euros each from people with the false promise of providing them with student visas. Once the money was paid to an address through Western Union, the conmen disappeared.

Some interview partners admitted that *feymania* has become almost the only way to earn money and make a living in the corrupt and fragile economic and political environment of Cameroon, and also to achieve their goal of emigration. For this reason, some young Cameroonians told me that, when they are adults, they will become *feymen* and get rich. *Feymania* is similar to the *419 scheme*, named after a relevant article of the Nigerian penal code which makes obtaining money under false pretences a criminal offence (Apter 1999, Smith 2001a).[64] Respondents told me about *419 men* or newly rich Cameroonians who have swindled foreigners either in Cameroon or abroad to acquire their wealth. Hence, *feymania* is often described as a "white collar crime" (Malaquais 2001: 109). The strategies are pretty much the same: a trickster asks for money in advance and never delivers on his promises. Various spam mails operate similarly, promising huge amounts of money, real estate or property in exchange for payments in advance. The German embassy in Yaoundé cautions on their webpage against so-called *feymen* (www.jaunde.diplo.de) who take advantage of the low cost of the Internet to offer large orders to German enterprises by email. The German company is supposed to send samples of their work to a contact person in Cameroon, or transfer payments for goods or legal fees to an account. As soon as the products or the money is transferred, the contact person disappears.

Another case of a 419 scheme was discussed in the Cameroon online newspaper postwatch.com.[65] According to the report, fake editions of "Today" and the "Times", in which accounts of fictional human rights violations episodes appeared, were printed and presented to foreign immigration officials. The newspaper writes that asylum seekers, particularly in

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persons at the same time, and when they discovered the con, the trickster was already abroad or had already spent all his money. "He has eaten the money and he will take his belly into the grave".

[64] The website www.419legal.org is also of interest as an information exchange on which people share their experiences with Internet-related spam or fraud.

[65] Disclaimer and Warning to Scamster Using UMI Newspapers in Asylum Rackets. Publisher-Delegate; Ntemfac Aloysius Nkong Ofege, www.postwatch.com, last accessed 28 November 2008.

Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States, were hoping to improve their chances of claiming asylum by presenting these faked newspaper articles to German officials.

Feymania-related activities provide a means of accessing financial and material resources, especially in times of unemployment and a lack of opportunities. *Feymen* also use swindling and criminal practices to emigrate to Europe and make money there. Hence, many young Cameroonians adopt *feymen* as role models for a better future, be it in Cameroon or abroad (Ndjio 2006).

## 3.8 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the political, economic, social, and cultural factors that affect emigration in Cameroon. By outlining Cameroon's political, social, and economic development in a historical perspective, I provide a foundation in which to embed my empirical findings. I show that emigration is influenced by various factors, ranging from the search for better education and opportunities for employment, but also caused by the insecure political situation in Cameroon including human rights violations.

Historical events, especially the colonial past of the country, strongly influence the levels and directions of contemporary migration to Europe. Certainly, the German occupation in Cameroon, with its major shifts in the areas of labor opportunities and the value of education, has influenced Cameroonians' attempts to migrate and their choices regarding the country of destination. For example, because of the German colonial past some Cameroonians learn German in school even today, and may therefore seek to continue their studies in Germany or seek employment abroad.

Cameroon's severe economic crisis in the late 1980s and early 1990s had an impact on the entire population, but it primarily affected highly educated Cameroonians, who were not longer able to find an appropriate position in the formal labor market. Thus, university students and graduates were looking for alternatives outside the country. For students or graduates, the current economic situation, as well as the educational structure, quality, and opportunities for advanced training, may be crucial factors as they make decisions about their future careers, and consider the option of international migration. This may be one important explanation for the large number of Cameroonian students in Germany.

In addition to the relevant economic and political aspects of emigration, cultural components play an important role in creating incentives for emigration. Images of the paradise-like West transmitted by various media created incentives for international migration. The discussion of local terms such as *bush falling*, *mbenguiste* or *feyman* contributed to an understanding of the meaning of migration for the different actors involved, including migrants, family and community members, and sponsors.

The case of Cameroon demonstrates that it is not possible to determine one single reason for movement. Incentives for migration always consist of an interplay of various factors. A combination of high levels of education, but, at the same time, high rates of unemployment and urbanization, severe human rights violations, and a large number of young people, together with largely positive perceptions of the West, created motives for international migration.

# IV   FAMILY, MARRIAGE, AND REPRODUCTION IN THE SENDING CONTEXT

As outlined in the previous chapter, migration out of Cameroon is influenced by the structural context, including political, economic, social, and cultural factors. Taking the analysis a step further, the following chapter looks at the role of marriage and parenthood in migration. In doing so, I analyze relationships between family members, between men and women, and between children and their parents or other relatives. The concept of 'wealth in people' from the field of African studies allows us to examine social organization and networks, including familial bonds, marital arrangements, and parents-children interactions. The idea of wealth in people – particularly the aspects of sponsorship, support, and dependence – are crucial for my theme. This concept enables us to better understand the decision-making processes regarding migration, marriage, and childbearing, but also points to the importance of transnational social networks. Additionally, this chapter discusses how the socioeconomic situation in Cameroon relates to cultural changes in marital behavior and reproduction. How do aspirations for education and the economic crisis affect marriage and childbearing? The secondary literature I rely on in the following sections is not based exclusively on the Cameroonian context. Still, the main insights I pick out can be applied for the purposes of my study, and for Cameroonian men, women, and their respective families and kin.

This chapter has three main parts. First, the role of family and kin in the migration process is investigated. I look at who is considered family, what kind of social networks are important, how migrants are selected, and which role reciprocity plays in the migration process. Second, I explore marital behavior and practices in the West and Central African contexts (with reference to the Cameroonian setting). Here, the aim is to examine different forms of marriage and the meanings attached to these unions by the people involved (family, kin, men, and women). Third, I analyze the central role of children in the African context as strategic means of establishing relationships, and, hence, of gaining access to resources. Understanding the importance and the meaning of relationships – regardless of whether they are familial, intergenerational or marital – helps to analyze how Cameroonian migrants work out ways to enter, remain, and work in Germany by marrying or becoming parent.

## 4.1 Wealth in people

The concept of wealth in people has been used by anthropologists and scholars of African studies to describe the relationship between a person's social status and the number and kind of people s/he is related to. The system, which is often based on kinship and mutual dependence, is common to many African societies and hence also to most ethnic groups in Cameroon.[66] In this system, a person's social status and recognition are strongly linked to the number and kind of people who depend on her/him. For men, for example, having many wives and children is a sign of power and prestige. To have power over people and the ability to control social, political, and economic relationships creates wealth in people.

The valorization of wealth in people has a long history in many parts of Africa. Guyer (1984) describes the wealth in people framework as a social dynamic in which status and security are achieved by controlling dependents. People in many African societies are involved in what Miers and Kopytoff (1977) call "networks of dependencies and obligations".[67] Social relationships are based on mutual commitments and responsibilities as well as on emotional attachments. Comaroff and Roberts go in a similar direction and explain the system of gaining wealth as the "social management of relations" (1981: 64). A man, for example, tries to manage his career by negotiating the relationships around him:

> Despite the fact that a person begins adulthood by being located in a set of linkages previously negotiated by others, the very nature of social existence is such that he must act upon them, whether or not he does so actively or deliberately. For, as soon as he is drawn into the marriage process and the devolution of property and status, ambiguities are introduced into his network of relationships, and he thereby becomes involved in their construction and definition (ibid.: 64).

Systems of reciprocity and mutual obligations, which vary according to levels of social status, enable certain adults or groups of people to control others with lower social status, and thus to

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[66] For a discussion on Cameroon, see among others Laburthe-Tolra (1977), Guyer (1984), Feldman-Savelsberg (1999), Notermans (2004), and Johnson-Hanks (2006).
[67] Kopytoff and Miers (1977) applied the wealth in people scheme to slavery and other dependency relationships.

gain wealth through them. These people – often, but not always, senior men – gain the support of dependents – such as women, children, daughters and sons-in-law, and others of lower social status – by having rights over their productivity and reproductivity. Social relationships and alliances are a crucial means to personhood and to achieving life goals, such as gaining high social status, social recognition, and social acceptance. The ability to create relationships with the 'right persons' and to build up dependencies is essential for the life careers of both men and women. The following discussion will use three examples to illustrate and discuss the wealth in people paradigm, which is important to understand transnational migration trajectories from the perspectives of the people directly or indirectly involved.

First, internal and international mobility will be examined in light of the continuing importance and power of the extended family and kin.[68] Despite increasing urbanization, rural-urban connections are often maintained, enabling individuals to continue to rely on a widespread social network that extends to the current place of residence. The same might hold true for international mobility, which often creates transnational networks based on dependencies and obligations. Senior family members send subordinates abroad and oblige them to work and fulfill their social and familial obligations by sending remittances and supplying relatives with modern consumer goods. Given that families and kin continue to play a fundamental role for individuals and their life trajectories, the interesting question is who is selecting potential migrants. Here, I examine the decision-making processes regarding which member of the family leaves the country, what conditions need to be met, and what the people, who sponsor the journey, expect in return.

Second, the ability to choose marriage partners and/or to control reproductive behavior becomes a powerful instrument for accessing political spheres, asserting rights over the labor of others, and creating allegiances.[69] For various family members, such as the parents or older siblings of a future husband and wife, and the spouses themselves, marital arrangements involve opportunities to acquire rights of productivity and reproductivity. Marriage in the African context is often regarded as a process in which rights, duties, and obligations are transferred and defined over a sometimes unlimited period of time. The status of the people

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[68] A detailed analysis of the influence of family and kin networks on the individual decision to migrate can be found in Fleischer (2007a). This article shows the considerable impact of the extended family on the migrant's decision to leave Cameroon for Germany.

[69] Bledsoe (1980) uses the wealth in people concept to examine Kpelle marriage and social networks in Sierra Leone.

involved is open for interpretation, and thus multiple forms of marital arrangements are possible. My review examines the motivations of people who construct diverse forms of unions. Understanding the incentives for marriage in the Cameroonian context enables me to analyze the marital practices of Cameroonians in Germany.

Third, and maybe the most powerful example of what it means to have wealth in people, centers on children. Given that the concept of wealth in people relies on the idea that prestige and power are generated by the number of people depending on a person, it becomes clear that children play a central role in African societies. Children depend in a particularly intense way on their parents, but also on other relatives and kin, and thus rights over children are constantly negotiated. Child fosterage, i.e., transferring children from their biological home to relatives where they are raised by foster parents, plays an essential role in establishing ties between individuals and families, and is often used as a strategy to gain access to resources. Allowing children to be fostered could be seen as a strategic means of establishing or eliminating relationships to kin. Again, only by comprehending the reproductive behaviors of women and men, and their motives concerning children in the place of departure, is it possible to examine concepts and practices of childbearing among Cameroonians in Germany.

## 4.2 The role of family and kin in migration processes

Several studies on migration have confirmed the importance of family and kin in migration processes (Hugo 1981, Stark & Lucas 1988). Senior family members are particularly influential in the selection of family members for migration. These decision-makers often sponsor the preparations for migration and the journey, as well as the first few months of the stay abroad. In return, they expect certain benefits, often in form of remittances for themselves and other family members. Social networks between migrants and their families are often based on mutual dependence, and play a crucial role for both the individual abroad, as well as for the family remaining in the country of origin (Boyd 1989).

Classical migration theories, like the 'new economics of migration theory' and the 'social capital approach' investigate the impact and involvement of the extended family and kin on international migration decisions. The 'new economics of migration' considers the importance of family and household as "relevant decision-making unit" (Massey et al. 2005: 53). The family and the migrant often enter a mutually beneficial "contractual arrangement" (Stark &

Lucas 1988: 466). This approach views migration as a strategy that shifts the focus away from individual independence to mutual dependence. The family supports migrants before and shortly after leaving home, and expects remittances as compensation. Migration decisions are explained by an "intrafamilial implicit contract" (ibid.: 478), based on an unwritten understanding about the obligations and benefits of the two parties. Decisions are not taken by an isolated actor, but rather by families and households in order to maximize the expected income and minimize risks for the entire family. For the African context, Adepoju (1995: 329) emphasizes the role of senior members (aged 60 and above) in the household, who often decide which members of the family should try to migrate, and which should not. According to Adepoju, the person with the greatest potential for supporting the entire household in terms of remittances is chosen. Gerontocracy strongly influences the migration attempts of young people in order to guarantee the family's living.

Similar to the 'new economics of migration' theory, the 'social capital approach' emphasizes the 'meso-level', including family, household, and community members in the migration process. In addition to economic and human capital, social capital may play an important role in the decision-making processes of potential migrants. Social ties are crucial for determining migration processes, but also for the direction of migration. It is assumed that social capital is generated by networks involving family members, relatives, and friends in the sending and receiving contexts. In this regard, the concept of reciprocity becomes relevant.

## 4.2.1 Who is considered a family in the migration process?

Both the 'new economics of migration theory' as well as the 'social capital approach' suggest that family plays a major role in the migration process. When questioning interlocutors in Cameroon about their understanding of family, who belongs to their family, and who may be involved in the migration decision-making process, the answers were quite uniform. According to my informants, family in the Cameroonian setting involves not only biological and social parents[70] and siblings, but also uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, nephews, the family members of spouses, and, in many cases, "people with whom you can identify" as a 23-year-

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[70] Social parenthood means that children do not grow up with their biological parents, but instead with their social parents, also called foster parents.

old student from Yaoundé explained. People who are close to you such as friends, business colleagues, and other non-relatives are often also considered as family.

Belonging to a group defined as a family constitutes what Bourdieu (1996: 22) calls a "family feeling". Emotions and love between different family members, such as between parents and their children (parental love), or between siblings (brotherly and sisterly love), but also between non-biological relatives, might be seen as the basis for cohesion of the group. A common family name is one indicator for group identity, but there are others, such as growing up together in the same village. Being a family member, and, therefore, strongly connected to the other members of the group, generates feelings of belonging, but is also connected to responsibilities and obligations. According to Bourdieu, the role of each family member within the group is dependent on power relations and the hierarchical structure between family members.

The family is tied by "solidarity of interests – both by capital and for capital" (Bourdieu 1996: 24). For Bourdieu, the family is one of the main sources of accumulation of capital in its different forms. Economic transfer between generations – inheritance – is just one form of capital. The exchange of cultural capital – e.g., knowledge or skills between family members – is another form of capital. Social networks of family members, kin, friends, and acquaintances might generate social capital (Bourdieu 1986).

## 4.2.2 Social networks and migration

Bourdieu (1986) emphasizes two main characteristics of social capital: group membership and social networks. In order to have access to social capital, it is necessary to belong to a group; this can be the family, an association, or another form of group. An individual can only achieve certain goals by being part of a group. Group membership and involvement in social networks are necessary for social capital stemming from social relations. Benefits from social capital can improve the social position of actors within the society. Social capital can also affect other forms of capital, and hence have a 'multiplication effect' on the influence of other forms of capital (ibid.).

Membership forms the basis for solidarity between individuals of a group. Group members share a sense of common identification. They hold similar values and norms. Hence, social networks are based on mutual relations. "The volume of social capital possessed by a given

agent depends on the size of the network of connections that he can effectively mobilize" (Bourdieu 1986: 249). Being a member of a group can be an investment strategy. Social relations "…consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term" (ibid.: 249). According to Bourdieu, the creation of permanent networks is one option for achieving social capital both for the individual and the collective group. Investment strategies are closely connected to the assumption of reciprocal relations. Social capital includes obligations and responsibilities on the one hand, but also network benefits and accumulation of support and trust on the other. Social networks must be continuously maintained over time for individuals to be able to rely on them when needed. However, obligations are always theoretical, and there is no guarantee that the concept of reciprocity actually works.

In my analysis of Cameroonian migration to Germany, both characteristics of social capital described by Bourdieu (1986) are crucial: membership and social networks. Cameroonian migrants in Germany belong to a group of people (often family and kin) who enabled them to migrate, but who are also in the position to demand support, financial help, and assistance. Belonging to a group of related or, in some cases, non-biologically related people might create opportunities for the individual, as well as for the collective group. One family member can aggregate social capital, and may therefore generate other forms of capital, such as material, cultural or symbolic capital.

Social capital is, according to Bourdieu (1986), a resource grounded in the durable exchange-based networks of persons. These kinds of networks can be also found between migrants and non-migrants, for purposes of both internal mobility and migration across national borders. In many cases, migrants remain in close contact with the people left behind. They continue to identify as a member of the group – often referred to as extended family. In Cameroon, rural-urban migration is widespread, particularly among young Cameroonians who move for educational or employment purposes in the towns and cities. Some of them continue their migration to Europe or the United States.

## *Rural-urban connections*

Over 50% of all Cameroonians lived in urban areas in 2006 (World Population Prospects 2006). Nevertheless, the majority of people living in towns and cities remained in close contact

with their home villages. Regular visits home, sending money or goods, or investing in houses or social activities are just some characteristics of the intense contacts between these family members. Migrants often build houses in their villages of origin which non-emigrants can rarely afford. Their investment has two main motivations: economic and/or familial. In the economic sense, there is the hope that their engagement may be efficient in the near future, e.g., that they can rent the newly built house to others, or that their re-established ties may be beneficial to them, either for business alliances or political strategies. Widely spread social networks are a sign of high social status. Their familial networks may provide them with access to land, help them secure their inheritance, or provide assistance and support in marital arrangements, like assembling bride wealth (Johnson-Hanks 2006: 30). In both cases, the investment is part of emigrants' retirement plans. The birth place or the place called 'home' is still the preferable place of retirement (Franqueville 1987). Finally, a village funeral is still considered as the ultimate test of 'belonging' (Geschiere 2005). In most parts of Cameroon, it is considered a moral necessity to be buried at home. A funeral in the city where a person lived for most of his life is still regarded as a sign of social failure (Geschiere & Gugler 1998: 311).

The maintenance of social ties between rural and urban regions is also expressed in numerous 'hometown' associations in the cities, which unify members from the place of origin and provide material, but also moral support. Little (1973: 117) explains that, in urban Africa, voluntary associations have taken over the role of kin and substitute for social functions of the extended family. Their main source of social control is the distribution of financial means to its members, which is used by some individuals for future investments, such as for international migration plans. Rural-urban connections commonly expressed in a membership in 'hometown' associations in the city reach beyond kinship ties (Gugler 2002). They involve non-kin groups such as political entities or business people. In addition, religious groups such as Pentecostal churches or Islamic organizations play an important role for migrants in the urban areas. In these groups, migrants integrate in new networks which often substitute for kinship ties.[71]

The continuing interest in the village of origin is not just an individual choice or decision; rather, the rural-urban connection resumes a strong normative character (Gugler 2002). An individual's place in society often depends strongly on his or her relationships with others, and

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[71] The book "Religion in the Context of African Migration" (2005) edited by Adogame and Weißköppel examines the relationships between religion, African migration, and globalization.

particularly with 'home people'. It is expected that individuals will remain in contact with and express loyalty to the village of origin, which involves mutual obligations, solidarity, or the exchange of goods and people, such as by marriage or fosterage. As Dilger (2005) elaborates for the Tanzanian context, family members from the urban areas are beholden to participate in funerals in their hometowns. The discussions on who of the extended family is going to make the (often expensive) journey 'back home' reveals, often conflictual, questions of belonging and social relationships. Both men and women are motivated by expected benefits – such as material prosperity, political prospects, and social status – to maintain their commitment to rural settings (Geschiere & Gugler 1998: 312). Personal choices are clearly one motivation for remaining in contact with one's village of origin, but structural constraints, moral obligations, and social pretensions are often more powerful. Social relationships expressed through kinship ties, hometown associations, or religious groups play an important role in the struggle to achieve personal and community advancements and access resources (ibid.: 315).

Social networks maintained through rural-urban connections offer opportunities to generate social capital for individuals and/or the group. The volume of social capital depends on the size of the network of connections, but also on the volume of economic, cultural, or symbolic capital. An investment in sociability is necessarily long-term, as transnational networks between migrants and non-migrants demonstrate.

## *National and transnational networks*

Migrants are linked within and across national borders to former migrants and non-migrants through kinship, friendship ties, or simply because they share a place of origin. Family ties remain important for both migrants and non-migrants in constituting and generating social capital (Massey et al. 1993). Social networks often provide the most decisive motivation for selecting the country of destination. Boyd (1989: 641) summarizes the importance of transnational networks:

Networks connect migrants across time and space. Once begun, migration flows often become self-sustaining, reflecting the establishment of networks of information, assistance and obligations which develop between migrants in the host society and friends and relatives in the sending area. These networks link populations in origin and

receiving countries and ensure that movements are not necessarily limited in time, unidirectional or permanent.

In this sense, the migration of some family members might generate the subsequent movement of other relatives or friends. Social networks across national borders expand over time, and are maintained by responsibilities, mutual obligations, and duties (Hugo 1981).[72]
For the migration process itself, both contacts across national borders and within the country of origin are crucial. Potential migrants rely on existing networks that provide pathways for the migration process.

> It is always good and helpful to have a brother in the administration or in one of the ministries. This makes things much easier, less expensive and often faster (Cameroonian man, 30 years old).

For a migration attempt to proceed, relationships to the 'right people' and national as well as transnational networks are sometimes more important than money. Knowing somebody who holds a position in the administration or in a ministry, or who holds a public office, can sometimes be a decisive factor. Hence, connections and networks within Cameroon and transnational are important for international migration to succeed.
On the one hand, social capital influences migration decisions and might cause chain migration effects. On the other hand, rural-urban and transnational migration provide not only migrants themselves with opportunities to generate social capital – and hence economic, cultural, and symbolic capital – but also creates chances for non-migrants. An interesting example of the influential power of relatives on migration-decisions can be seen in the phenomenon *nyongo*.

### 4.2.3 *Nyongo*

The phenomenon of *nyongo* could be interpreted as one form of wealth in people in which juniors and subordinates depend on certain related adults and groups of kin. *Nyongo* is a relatively new form of witchcraft closely linked to jealousy, fear, and uncertainty (Geschiere

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[72] In Chapter 5, I show which important role transnational networks play in the decision about where to migrate. Existing contacts to family members, friends, and acquaintances abroad facilitate the choice. Potential migrants are likely to follow people they know.

2001, Jua 2003, Nyamnjoh 2005a).[73] It is believed that people possessing *nyongo* are able to destroy and even kill others, and use their bodies to work for them in a foreign country. The dimension of supernatural and magic powers among relatives and social groups is added in this context of wealth in people. Success and failure in vital events like marriage, childbearing, or migration are often interpreted as forms of witchcraft like *nyongo*. International migration in the context of globalization, modernity, and new forms of wealth are in some cases strongly connected to new forms of witchcraft (Geschiere 2001). Geschiere (2001) describes the 'obsession' of Cameroonians with imported things which symbolize modern life. People crave everything that comes from abroad, rather than buying products which are produced locally. To possess Western items is seen as a sign of status, "even if this is achieved at the expense of harmony with kin…." (Nyamnjoh 2005a: 243).

These new forms of witchcraft can be used in a metaphorical sense when describing situations in which young Cameroonians are forced by relatives to leave their country, seek employment abroad, and send remittances. Migrants from the Grassfields (western Cameroon) increasingly perceive themselves as being victims of *nyongo*; they experience enormous pressure from their relatives to leave the country and to fulfill the demands of sending remittances: "…families and communities sacrifice sons and daughters to forage for opportunities both for accountability and opportunism" (ibid.: 243). Or, as a 22-year-old female interview partner explains:

> I have to go abroad and be successful. This is my only chance to prove that I was worth being invested in. My obligation is to send enough money to my family, so that they can live in peace…

Junior family members are employed to enhance wealth, power, and prestige, particularly when sending children to Europe. 'Using' certain children for the purposes of international migration is expected to generate access to modern consumer goods, and, ultimately, to modernity and material prosperity. Witchcraft, or (metaphorically) social pressure, remains in many ways the long arm of family and kin seeking to acquire modern conveniences through their children (Nyamnjoh 2005a: 244). People's fears, their uncertainties, but also their

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[73] Different kinds of *nyonko* are known in Cameroon, e.g. *nyonko* or *kong* among the Bakweri, the Duala or the Beti, *famla* or *kupe* among the Bamiléké.

fascinations are expressed in these forms of witchcraft. Berry (1993: 17) argues that uncertain situations like economic crises force people to rely even more on social networks and relationships. They provide access to resources and economic opportunities. Geschiere (2001) argues that changes and transitions in many African societies are strongly linked to beliefs in witchcraft and sorcery. Dimensions of witchcraft play into politics and kinship, but are especially visible when examining the new elites of the country,  and the methods they use to acquire wealth and power:

> …there is a new type of witches who no longer eat their victims, but transform them into kind of zombie and put them to work in 'invisible plantations'. The new riches are supposed to be accumulated by the exploitation of these zombies' labor. People insist on the novelty of this form of witchcraft, and they often relate it to the arrival of the Europeans and the introduction of new luxury items (ibid.: 47).

In this sense, an extreme form of the wealth in people paradigm can be applied to new kinds of witchcraft. Family members and kin claim power and authority even over international boundaries to attempt to control and manipulate their kinsmen, particularly when they are young and of lower social status. Therefore, they are said to be able to send their offspring abroad and force them to work hard and to fulfill their obligations by sending remittances and Western consumer goods. In this regard, access to labor force and resources, and hence power and wealth, is organized by relying on related subordinates who have no real alternative, and for whom these kinship ties often represent their only chance to achieve their life goals (Johnson-Hanks 2006).

In this context, it is interesting to take a look at how individuals are chosen for the process of international migration. What are the criteria used in selecting a family member for migration? Who decides who is leaving? Which are the preconditions for migration, and what are the demands and expectations placed on the (potential) migrant?

## 4.2.4 Selecting migrants

Family and kin play a crucial role in deciding whether a younger family member will migrate. Long before the actual migration process, relatives decide whom to sponsor. In selecting a

family member and in investing in this person, sponsors expect that once the person is living abroad, he or she will send money back home to support the family. The process of selecting family members for a certain path of life and investing in them is not restricted to financial sponsorship. It is, rather, the socialization and cultivation that shapes family members for different career pathways. Senior family members may finance education or training for some children, while investing in marriage ceremonies for others.

According to Bourdieu (1984), the family provides children with cultural experiences, values, norms, and beliefs that form their life course and career. Hence, cultural capital, which consists of different forms of knowledge and skills, as well as social and symbolic capital, has the potential to create economic capital. Parents 'cultivate' children in certain ways, and family members are educated and socialized in different ways depending on their respective skills, abilities, and their expected life course. Some children may be recruited for specific tasks, like migrating to Europe, while others are filtered out and selected for other tasks, such becoming the head of the household and continuing the family business, work in agriculture, or finding a job in the local economy. For some children, higher education may not be a goal, while for others, studying at university is a requisite.

Guyer and Belinga (1995) describe the cultivation of family members for different career pathways in a similar manner. Parents and elderly constantly test younger family members in order to find out their personal abilities and skills. In these socialization processes, "through which singular capacities in children were recognized and fostered" (ibid.: 115), some people were selected for certain tasks based on their respective skills and qualities, such as intelligence, beauty, and giftedness. In this regard, family members who were selected for international migration are assumed to be skilled and experienced enough to manage the process of entering Germany, and to 'integrate' there. The selection process starts in Cameroon within the family, and is necessary to make the migration process as beneficial as possible for the entire family. Migration becomes a family strategy for generating economic capital and reducing risks for all members, thereby diversifying household resources.

Referring to the concepts of Bourdieu (1984) and Guyer and Belinga (1995), I explore how families identify some of their members for the process of migration, while insisting that others are staying. The decision-makers are in usually the people who are 'investing' in the migration project of the family member. Sponsorship includes not only financial means, but also investing time in the raising of children, and putting energy into the development of the

prospective contacts and relationships necessary for a successful future. Parents and/or older siblings exert the primary influence on the child, but cousins (often declared to be older brothers), uncles, aunts, or non-relatives who are strongly connected to the family can also be involved.

Based on my survey "International migration" on migration motives, expectations, and the influence of others on the decision to migrate, conducted with 62 potential migrants in Cameroon, the results show that migration decisions are mainly influenced by biological and social parents, relatives, friends (who may be business partners or fellow students), teachers or professors, or association members who support potential migrants with financial means, contacts, information, and established networks.[74] Often the decision to migrate involves several people, and is rarely reached independently by the migrant.

My survey results illustrate that parents, who could be both biological and social parents, are most influential for the decision to migrate. The decision-making to leave Cameroon is also affected by the academic environment including professors, teachers, colleagues, and fellow students. Interlocutors stated that some professors and teachers encourage certain students to migrate which causes in some cases tensions and conflicts with the extended family. Friends, who could also be business partners, also play an important role in the decision to leave Cameroon. While only a few respondents in my survey mentioned 'hometown' associations as crucial for the decision, informal conversations and in-depth interviews with potential migrants revealed the importance of associations, particularly in sponsoring the migration process. These associations are often kind of *tontines*, i.e., informal savings and loan associations which have financial as well as social functions (Berghman et al. 2005: 122). These family and community banks are often used when expenses for traveling abroad need to be covered.

To further illustrate who in the family is influencing the decision to migrate, as well as the source and nature of family impact in the migration process, I summarize the answers of eight interview partners in Table 6. The table displays the kind of kin relationship to the most influential persons of the family, the type of contribution made, the estimated costs of contributions, and the expectations placed on migrants.

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[74] I was asking potential migrants who was or will be most influential in the decision to leave Cameroon.

**Table 6: Source and nature of family influences in the migration process**

| MIGRANT | Kin relation to | Contribution (type) | Contribution (costs) | Expectations |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| High school student, 19, male | Mother, older brother[75] | Air ticket, passport, visa, money for the first half a year of stay (rent, food, fees) | 3.110.000CFA=4.741 € | Good education in Germany, finding an adequate position in Cameroon |
| University student, 22, male | Mother, two fathers (biological and social), but also older brother | German classes plus exams | First course: 52.000CFA=79 € Second course: 78.000 CFA=118 € Exams: 100.000CFA= 152 € | Good degree and well paid temporary job in Germany |
| University student, 28, male, | Aunt, uncle and older brother | Paying for education until university degree completion (books, internet, etc.) | Additionally around 800.000 CFA=1.219€, sold part of the family land | Financial support from abroad and future contacts for further migration of relatives |
| University student, 19, female | Mother and father | Financing education, so as to enable the student to concentrate on the studies | Monthly payment for books, transport, internet | Remittances for school fees of younger siblings and health care |
| Self-employed, 27, male | Father and uncle | Money for visa, documents[76] and flight ticket | Around 600.000 CFA=914 € | Investment in business |
| Employee, 29, female | Older brother | Good networks to Germany, financial support | Flight ticket | No concrete expectations |
| Teacher, 26, male | Father and male cousin, own decision | Good relations to administration at embassy, finance for visa and necessary documents | 200.000 CFA=304 € | Improvement of personal situation and living conditions of the family |
| Artist, 30, male | Older brothers, home association (*tontine*) | Providing information about visa, travel practicalities, customs in Germany | No financial aid, but information, contacts and relations in Cameroon and Germany | Formation of a business, future contacts |

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[75] An older brother does not necessarily mean a biological brother. The term is expanded in the sense that the 'older brother' and the potential migrant are very close and that they are bound with similar ties e.g., kinship or friendship ties.

[76] Visa documents include: the birth certificate, the passport, the personal identification card, the curriculum vitae, proof of accommodation, parental admission for minors, four photos, 65.000CFA=100€ fee.

Fathers, mothers, older siblings[77], and cousins who are authority figures are often the most influential decision-makers. They are often able to raise enough money to finance the trip and the documents necessary, but they are also the ones who provide potential migrants with information about travel practicalities and who build essential networks. The estimated costs vary strongly, pending on whether the entire migration process is financed, or whether only part of it (e.g., German classes or visa) is paid. Family members contribute from several hundred Euros, up to almost 5,000 Euros. In exchange, the family places various demands on the migrant, and expects improvements to their own socioeconomic situation. The migrant is placed under strong pressure once s/he arrives in Germany. She/he is supposed to complete his or her degree with high marks, and to look for a good job afterward. In exchange for being provided with a good education and a career, remittances are demanded that are to be used for different purposes: payment of school fees and health care, investment in land or business, or simply improvement in the family's living standard.

As implied above and as the story of Simon indicated at the outset, it is often a group of people who decide rather than an individual. A single person can hardly be expected to make a decision on a major issue like migration by himself or herself.

> The decision for someone to go to Europe is often taken by the entire immediate family. One can hardly decide for himself what to do in the future. There are always others involved, and you depend on them (Cameroonian man, 30 years old).

Obviously, there is often a discrepancy between individual choice and the decision-making of the family and older relatives. In some cases, older family members have been preparing their children since their early childhood for a certain pathway in life which leaves little space for the individual to choose. Some of my informants explained that their life course was predetermined, and it was not until they arrived in Germany that they recognized the enormous power of their relatives. Spatial distance enabled some migrants to reflect on their relationships with their family, but did not stop many of them from worrying about how to fulfill high expectations of their relatives in Cameroon. In other cases, potential migrants were more

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[77] When siblings are much older, they regard their younger sister or brother as their own children and treat them as such.

individualistic, and pushed their migration attempt by themselves or were encouraged by teachers, colleagues or friends. They started to look independently for sponsors who would finance their education and journey, and avoided relying only on their family. These inconsistencies between the individual migrant and his or her family appeared to a lesser or greater extent, but discrepancies occurred in all interviewed families.[78]

In few other cases, migrants made the decision themselves, and informed only few relatives about their migration plans because they feared a stronger involvement of relatives. Pelican et al. (2008) have argued that, with regard to intra-African migration of Cameroonians, the preparatory migration phase is characterized by secrecy and caution. Migrants keep details of their migration plans secret to avoid enviousness and distrust, which may lead to a failure of the migration enterprise. Only when the visa is issued, the flight booked, and the all preparations are completed, migrants talk about their upcoming emigration. In contrast to Pelican's findings, my interview partners stated that most of their close relatives were, right from the start, involved in the preparation of the journey.

The methods for deciding which family member is going abroad seem to be complex and strategic. According to sponsoring family members, there are key characteristics a person should have in order to migrate to Germany. Potential migrants should be smart, mature, self-sufficient, talented (this may mean being an excellent football player), good in languages, diligent, and "good in handling white people", as one older brother of a potential migrant explained. Potential migrants should be able to deal with foreigners in a polite and inoffensive manner. They need to know how to treat "those white people", how to communicate with them and how to approach them in order to make contacts and develop relationships with the target society. In addition, potential migrants should be "tied to their roots", i.e., they should be aware of their origins. Once they are established abroad, they are supposed to support family members left behind. Moreover, they are expected to work hard and concentrate on their goals of successfully completing their education and find adequate work.

The following case of a Cameroonian family demonstrates the complexity of the migration decision-making process. Different relatives are involved in the preparatory migration phase: in selecting an adequate person and in financing education and travel expenses. In return, the

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[78] My study contributes to the discussion on the role of the individual in the social world. In contrast to Beck's (1992) 'individualization theory' which argues that the individual is becoming the central unit of social life, my findings suggest that the extended family continues to play a major role in life course decisions of younger relatives such as migration or marriage.

migrant is confronted with several expectations, including demands to provide remittances and support of those back home:

> Part of the family I focused on is living in Douala, and the other part is residing in the northwestern province. The parents divorced 10 years ago and both of them remarried. The father, 62 years of age, has a small business, allowing him to support his new wife, their common children and the children of the previous union. The mother, 52 years of age, lives with her new husband in Douala and is selling vegetables at the central market.
>
> Despite their divorce, both parents pay proportionally for the education of their first child, a son. He is 24 years old, unmarried and studies electrical engineering at the university of Douala. The mother wants her son to complete his studies in Germany. Therefore, she wants him to take German classes in a private school and do final German examinations at the Goethe Institute. The father is not willing to finance the additional expenses involved in such examination. The older brother of the mother (the uncle) agrees to pay part of the classes instead, and brings his influence to bear. He knows some ministers in the education department who may have useful connections. The funds will be raised via business, and with the help of a regional association in the western province.
>
> The mother and her older brother observed the son over many years to ensure that he is the 'right choice'. They said that, of the family, he should be the one to leave for Europe, since he is the most diligent, reliable, and ambitious. The evidence is provided by his role as a leader in a youth group (supporting the youngsters from the original village), his engagement in the extended family (e.g., taking care of younger siblings, being responsible in performing household chores, etc.), and his additional occupation as a teacher. All of these activities, plus his appropriate behavior (e.g., not drinking, not hanging around with girls) convinced his sponsors. The family agreed to pay for extra expenses, such as the visa, the flight, and money for the first few months.
>
> The mother expects her son to enroll in a German university within the next year, but the pressure of the family on him as the 'chosen one' already is very high. Succeeding in Germany is mandatory, as is fulfilling the expectations of the family, including sending remittances and providing support for the younger siblings. The family

calculates a five-year stay in Germany (including completing his education and working to earn money), and an immediate return afterward.

There are specific hopes and expectations connected with the possible migration of a family member. Some family members want to improve the educational status of their relatives, and hence provide them with more employment and career opportunities, but they also hope and wish to benefit from the migrant finding a good job following completion of his or her education in the West. The idea is to send family members to Germany for educational purposes, and to hope that they will find temporary work there and earn some money to support the family back home. Some people have precise plans to achieve their goals. Starting in early childhood, they invest a large amount of money in the education and training of the future migrant. There is a common agreement that secondary education, or even some years at university, are completed in Cameroon before advanced studies are started in Germany. The decision to sponsor a family member is often well thought out, as the following quote of an older brother of a potential migrant reveals:

> I want him to go. I know it will not be easy in Germany, but I want him to go. He is mature enough to handle this big step and he has already finished part of his education. He is willing to work hard (Cameroonian man, 32 years old).

It is often mentioned that families try to send their older children abroad so that these children can take care of the education of the younger ones.

As the section on selecting migrants illustrates, some children get sent to school or to relatives in order to receive education and training. They are encouraged to use these opportunities to develop further. These 'launching points' are starting positions and opportunities, rather than ultimate destinations. An intelligent young person is prepared by his or her family, but it is ultimately up to the initiative of the person being sent to seize opportunities and capitalize on them. People who have received investments from family, patrons, or sponsors are expected to help others from whatever position they have achieved, even if they have not made it to the top. Many families provide their children with a foundation, a starting point from which individuals are expected to move forward. Throughout the course of their education and

migration process, they are constantly reminded by their investors of who made it possible for them to take advantage of opportunities.

## 4.2.5 Reciprocity

The whole process of decision-making on migration involves a complex and reciprocal social system. Biological and/or social parents and siblings are responsible when it comes to financing the migration procedure, including the collection of money for the purposes of obtaining a visa, covering the costs associated with obtaining travel documents, and covering the first few months of stay in the country of destination. Other relatives are involved, too. In many cases, the extended family is responsible for raising money and paying for these expenses, since it is primarily they who want their children to migrate. Families either have the money themselves, or they 'go around' and ask other relatives and community members for money. In some cases, property or houses were sold (in part) to pay for the costs. This investment, which involves many different people, is made only for family members who have proved to be responsible and reliable persons. In return, the parents expect that the migrants will later take care of them and other family members, such as their younger siblings, financially. Families have high expectations of a migrating close relative and expect a flow of transfer in return:[79]

> The entire family joins in to finance the trip, because if the person going to Europe eventually succeeds, he will in turn help other members of the family, irrespective of whether they are close or distant relatives. While it is often considered obligatory for well-to-do members of the immediate family to participate in sponsoring the trip, distant family members are not obliged to do so. Distant relatives participate in sponsoring if they think that the person going is hard working and loves the family. If he succeeds in Europe, he can in turn help other children and members of the family (Cameroonian woman, 29 years old).

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[79] In many cases, remittances form a large portion of the household's income, and entire families live on the money sent from Europe. Interview partners, be they asylum seekers, students or employees, stated that they try to send monthly remittances between 20€ and 200€.

In return, extended families, kin, and communities who invest in potential migrants and sponsor migration processes expect university degrees, further transnational contacts, remittances, and/or improvements in their living situation. The expectations of family and kin are strongly linked to age, family status, and the social position of future migrants, but also to how much money, energy, and time was 'pre-invested' in the person. My survey results illustrate the expectations of family members towards the migrants, i.e., what the migrant should achieve in return for the sponsorship and investment. Family members who sponsored migration processes expect the following in return from the migrant: successful graduation and subsequent acquisition of a job in the foreign labor market, an improvement of their living situation, future contacts, and earnings. They demand remittances and support to, for example, improve their living situation. Often mentioned was financial aid for health care, the education of younger siblings, and seed capital to set up a business. In addition, migrants are required to provide future transnational contacts for other family members, and may be asked for example, to organize a university place for a younger sibling or to help with the application for a tourist visa.

Many families want the migrant to complete his or her education abroad so that he or she can find an adequate position for helping out others and supporting relatives in Cameroon. This informal system of exchange is based on trust and has social consequences. If a person disappoints the sponsor(s), there will not only be consequences for the individual itself, but also for the entire family:

> If I make it to Europe, I do not intend to come back with empty pockets. I cannot. It is impossible. My family expects me to return as a success; otherwise they would say I am a loser and spent their money for nothing. That would be a painful encounter for both of us (Cameroonian man, 26 years old).

Returning to Cameroon without money is considered as shameful. The migrant will be deemed a loser. But also his/her family would be sneered at since the family obviously selected an unsuitable and inappropriate family member. A failed migration has negative consequences for both the migrant and the family and kin.

Some potential migrants, who are in the process of being invested in, feel under pressure from their relatives, but also impose obligations upon themselves:

Once in Germany, I will send money to finance the education for my three younger sisters and my two younger brothers. I am the only one who is able to take care of them. Everybody expects this from me (Cameroonian female, 19 years old).

Reciprocity is one of the main characteristics in the financing of migration. A migrant should never forget where he or she comes from and who made the journey to Europe possible. As it becomes clear, both material and symbolic aspects of these linkages between Cameroon and Germany are important. The Yoruba proverb cited by Trager (2001: 37): "A river does not flow so far that it forgets its source", reflects that it is crucial to remember the place where one is from, and to remain in connection with the place of origin.[80]

Most of the people who are chosen to migrate to Germany are happy to do so. Nevertheless, in some cases the family makes the decision and the child in question has little choice other than to follow the parental decision. Some children are 'pushed' from different corners: they are expected to learn German in a private school, or they are forced to enroll in boarding schools far away from their parental home in order to get used to the distance and to living alone. Children and students talked to me about feeling powerful pressure from their parents and family to learn and to develop contacts with 'white people' on the streets or on the Internet. Sometimes I had the impression that the extended family wanted the individual to migrate more than the individual himself or herself. Asking students about their migration plans, some of them told me that they are afraid of going, and that, if they were able to decide for themselves, they would prefer to stay with their families and friends in Cameroon. Especially younger migrants may feel obliged by their relatives to migrate to Europe, which reminds one of the phenomenon of *nyongo* and illustrates the influential power of relatives on migration-decisions:

I do not really want to go. I am afraid of Germany. I do not know anybody there except for my brother, but he is already married. My parents want me to go in order to get a good education and make future contacts, but I would like to stay with my friends. Here

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[80] A proverb from the Igbo makes a similar point: "The son of a hawk does not remain abroad" (cited by Gugler 2002: 24).

I do know the language and I have my people. In Germany I do not know anything and I am totally alone (Cameroonian girl, 19 years old).

For some migrants, migration remains an obligation they are expected to meet. In most cases, however, neither an individual nor a family decision, but rather a continuum between family pressure and individual preferences can be identified. Everyone in the family tries to balance the advantages and disadvantages of migrating alone or with the support of the family. An individual migration appears to be risky, expensive and dangerous, but is a sign that the individual is trying to break free from the enormous social pressure to send remittances and obey family decisions. Meanwhile, a migration with family support provides the funding to cover the departure and arrival, and it offers transnational networks and contacts, but it also obliges the migrant to serve the family interests, and renders her or him strongly vulnerable to the arbitrariness of relatives and kin.

Thus, it can be concluded that the decision to migrate is often made by senior family members or kin, rather than the individual migrant. Migrants do not solely move to pursue their own goals, but must instead take into account the wishes of their extended family. Therefore they – the 'chosen ones' – have the chance to achieve better conditions in their personal lives, but also are expected to fulfill certain duties and responsibilities towards their relatives who enabled them to migrate. Family networks and individual behavior are influenced by cultural and social norms and beliefs; but also by the practical considerations of different family members, each of whom wants to see her or his individual needs met. A household who has a family member in Europe or elsewhere expects to enhance its productive potential and material resources by claiming rights in the migrant's labor and gains. This is an example of the specific role of migrating family members and the interdependencies among people across international boundaries in the 'wealth in people' model.

The investigation of reciprocal social systems between family members revealed another relevant fact of my study: migration to Germany is regarded as a temporary event. Sponsored migrants are expected to return to the country of origin after having achieved the assigned goals. None of the interviewees talked about intending to stay permanently in Germany. The aim is to remain abroad until migration goals, such as completing education and earning money, are achieved. Families insist on the return of their relatives since they fear losing human capital that could be used at home. The finding that migration is intended to be

temporary is also relevant for understanding marital and reproductive practices and strategies of Cameroonian men and women in Germany. It could be assumed that marriage and maybe even parenthood are also intended to be only temporary, i.e., for the duration of the stay in Germany. As argued in the beginning, wealth in people is accumulated by means of marriage or reproduction both in Cameroon and in Germany. My study provides evidence that the idea of wealth in people can also be applied to transnational relations. Even though people live temporary in Germany, they still serve – in many cases – the interest of the family, and hence contribute to the well-being and the wealth of their relatives. Transnational connections maintained by moral obligations and emotional attachments become increasingly important to access opportunities and resources for both migrants and non-migrants (see also Smith 2006).

## 4.3 Marital constellations

The ability to choose marriage partners and/or to control reproductive behavior becomes a powerful instrument for accessing political spheres, asserting rights over the labor of others, and creating allegiances. For various family members, such as the parents or older siblings of a future husband and wife, and the spouses themselves, marital arrangements involve opportunities to acquire rights of productivity and reproductivity. My review examines the motivations of people who construct diverse forms of unions. Understanding the incentives for marriage in the Cameroonian context enables me to analyze the marital practices of Cameroonians in Germany. I concentrate on four main aspects of marriage. First, marital arrangements provide opportunities for the various family members involved to acquire rights of productivity and reproductivity, and hence allow for the generation of wealth. Second, marriage in the African context is often regarded as a process in which rights, duties, and obligations are transferred over a sometimes undefined period of time. In this context, the motivations of people who construct diverse forms of unions become relevant. Third, during the process of arranging a marriage, the status of the people involved is open for interpretation. Hence a variety of forms of marital arrangements are possible, and marriage can have different meanings. Fourth, I explore changes in marriage practices and ideas during the last decade. In doing so, I take into account the influence of employment, education, and urbanization on marital practices. In examining the last point, I mainly rely on results of my fieldwork in Cameroon. It is crucial to keep in mind that an analysis of marital practices in Cameroon

provides the basis for understanding the marital behavior of Cameroonians in Germany. Therefore, I examine the importance of relationships between men and women in Cameroon. The aim is to explore what marriage in the Cameroonian context means for the various actors involved. How is marriage constructed and arranged in the Cameroonian setting? Answering this question requires me to investigate normative characteristics, structures, and the functions of marital arrangements and constellation. Thus, the following sections explore meanings, potentials, and obligations of relationships between men and women, particularly in marital constellations. At the same time, however, it is also necessary to discuss marital practices and pattern in the context of social changes and transformation. How, for example, does the socioeconomic situation in Cameroon relate to cultural changes in marriage? How do aspirations for education and the economic crisis affect marital patterns? Finally, this section investigates the relationship between marital behavior and migration plans. Do migration intentions and plans have an impact on marital arrangements, and vice versa?

## 4.3.1 Generating wealth through marriage

The importance of the marital arrangement can be partly explained by the concept of wealth in people. The ability to choose marriage partners becomes a powerful instrument for accessing political spheres, rights to control labor, and allegiance (see also Bledsoe 1980). Marital behaviors and patterns can be used to illustrate how people gain power through their relationships to others. For various family members, including the spouses themselves, marital arrangements offer opportunities to acquire rights of productivity and reproductivity. First I explore the potentials of marital patterns for family members and kin. Second, I investigate the advantages and incentives for men of marital arrangements, and, third, I explore the opportunities and gains for women.

First, families and kin expand their social networks through the marriages of children. A marriage creates a new resource of familiar networks that may therefore generate social capital. Particularly family members who have strongly invested in a child and helped to support his/her career for a long period of time have an interest in the outcome of a marriage. They expect to enjoy personal and community advantages. Various family members, such as the husband's kin, may gain access to the labor of newly subordinate relatives (wives and children)

or political advantages through a strategically arranged marriage. The extended family of the newly married women receives bride wealth in exchange for giving up her labor.

In line with the advantages for extended families, both men and women may profit from marital relationships. Through a marriage, the husband obtains rights over the productivity of his wife; e.g. she is responsible for supplying food and providing the household with agricultural products, which, in case of surplus, could be sold at the markets to provide extra income. In addition to her productivity, in patrilineal societies the husband gains rights over her reproduction. Wives bear children, and rights over the children are transferred to the husband. Moreover, marrying a woman lays the basis for political and economic alliances between lineages, from which not only the husband, but entire groups (community, family etc.) may profit (for Cameroon, see Guyer 1984).[81]

As Guyer (1984) explains for the Cameroonian context, women, by contrast, gain social status and a position in society when getting married. Their families receive financial means (bride wealth) in exchange for losing labor. Husbands are supposed to provide their wives with economic advantages and community respect. In addition, husbands assure the inheritance for their children. Women depend on their marital unions to gain most of their access to land, labor, and capital (ibid.).

The obligation to marry characterizes all ethnic groups. Even today, marriage remains one of the most important events in the life course of Cameroonian men and women. Bangha's demographic analysis (2003), which used data from the CDHS, found that less than 3% of Cameroonian women aged 25 years and above are unmarried. In the past, there have been almost no women in Cameroon or in many other African societies who were never married, although divorce and separation were frequent.[82] Women did not remain single for a long time. They changed husbands, moved back to their families, or those women whose husband died were inherited by his brother.[83] For a man, the main reason for divorce was the infertility of his

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[81] In many African societies, the number of social relationships is crucial, and therefore it is not surprising that more wives and therefore more children mean more prestige and more affluence. For the agricultural Ivorian context, Clignet (1970a) picks up this theme in his book "Many Wives, Many Powers". Men sought to maximize their wealth and their community respect by taking more than one wife and/or by choosing young women who had their reproductive career still ahead of them. For a man, marriage was the starting point of his personal career and of building up his own wealth in people. Marriage and fatherhood were and still are measurements of a man's status.

[82] Ardener (1962: 72) confirms that, among the Bakweri, an ethnic group closely related to the Duala and living along the coast, marriages are unstable and conjugal instability is very common.

[83] According to the CDHS 1991, 27% of the women had at least two unions (Bangha 2003).

wife. In such cases, he was allowed to divorce his wife or take a second wife (Laburthe-Tolra 1981, Guyer 1984).

In this context, it should be mentioned that African marriage, or, in particular, Cameroonian marriage, is not a uniform phenomenon. Three main domestic arrangements today referred to as marriage can be distinguished: customary marriage, religious marriage, and civil marriage. Indeed, families and kin continue to play an important role in the process of getting married, and a couple is only considered married when 'traditional' marriage ceremonies are carried out. Therefore, a church or civil marriage is commonly accompanied by an indispensable and obligatory customary marriage ceremony (Smith 2001b). In this regard, the process of defining who is married and who is not yet is a complex one. There are different conceptions of what a marriage is, when a couple is considered to be married, or when the persons involved define themselves as husband and wife. Changes in motivations and values of the different actors, as well as the evolution of marriage practices and patterns, can be best explored from a historical perspective.[84]

## 4.3.2 Marriage as a process

One fundamental issue that deserves attention in studying marital behavior and practices in the Cameroonian setting is the idea that marriage is seen as a process over time, rather than as an unequivocal event. This understanding of marriage as a process is relevant for my theme mainly for two reasons. First, marriage and migration could compete in the life course of a person who is both willing to marry and likely to migrate. Decisions have to be taken about how financial means are primarily invested. Second, the idea of marriage as a process over time is important in understanding the perspectives of Cameroonian spouses in Germany. On the one hand, Cameroonians could consider their marriage in Germany as process rather than a single event, which would have consequences for the meaning of their marital arrangement. On

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[84] Criticizing the structural and functionalistic approaches of the 1940s and 1950s, more recent anthropologists tend to view African societies and cultures as fluid and ambiguous (Comaroff & Roberts 1981, Kopytoff 1987, Comaroff & Comaroff 1991). Evans-Pritchard (1951) and Radcliffe-Brown and Forde (1950) viewed kinship as the basic form of organization that regulates social relationships between people, and saw no discrepancy between daily praxis and social structure; the Comaroff and Comaroff (1991) and Guyer (1995) focused on transformations and changes of social practices and values. Most important is to note that, in contrast to the structural and functional approaches, which understood marital patterns and practices primarily within the framework of laws, norms, and regulations, more recent ethnographic studies include the context of social changes and transformations in their analysis of social organization (Alber & Bochow 2006).

the other hand, a marriage in Germany might temporarily interrupt the process of getting married in Cameroon. For these reasons, I examine marriage as a process in the Cameroonian setting.

In the ethnographic literature on sub-Saharan Africa, marriage as a process is described as continuing over undefined periods of time in which gifts, goods, and money are exchanged, and specific ceremonies are performed (Comaroff & Roberts 1977, 1981; Bledsoe 1980, 1990; Parkin & Nymawaya 1987). An important role in this procedure is played by the negotiations between families in which the exchange of bride wealth is discussed, and the regulation of rights and duties for the future wife and children are debated. The exchange of bride wealth provides an excellent example of these negotiations, but also offers an impression of what marriage as a process means.[85] Laburthe-Tolra (1981) explains the importance and the meaning of bride wealth in the course of marrying using his fieldwork data from 1966 until 1972 among the Beti in Cameroon. Marriage as such was only valid when the bride wealth was exchanged, or when the process of exchanging had started. Bride wealth compensated the bride's kin for the loss of her productive and reproductive power. The exchange of bride wealth could be goods or money, and was paid by the groom's family to that of the bride, usually over a period of time (see also Guyer 1984 on the Beti). Laburthe-Tolra (1981: 247) describes the marriage process as starting with visits of the often very young girls to the villages of their future husbands before moving there. During this time, palm oil and other payments were exchanged, and rights over the girl and her potential children were transferred.

Comaroff (1980) explains that social and cultural studies came to the understanding that a clear-cut definition of marriage is not possible in the African context. As Comaroff and Roberts (1981: 171) put it, "marriage represents a jural potential rather than a jural state". The process of marriage offers opportunities for the persons involved, not only for the future husband and wife, but also for family members and kin. For this reason, negotiations are crucial. Persons involved attempt to avoid many obligations, but aim to build up social and political ties which provide them with potential dependents (Bledsoe 1980: 12). Marriage processes may take as long as several years or may never end in some cases, because obligations are not fulfilled, the exchange of bride wealth has been delayed, payments have not yet been transferred, or ceremonies have not yet been performed. In this sense, "marriage may

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[85] For an example of bridewealth exchange in the Bamiléké area, see Feldman-Savelsberg (1999: 53-4).

profitably be seen as a state of becoming rather than as a state of being" (Bledsoe 1990: 114). Demographers, in contrast, work with an unambiguous and unchanging classification of marriage, which has a defined beginning and definite end.

The status of persons involved in the marriage process is subject to changes, but is also open for negotiation and interpretation. Comaroff and Roberts (1981) argue that involved persons tend to view their position differently depending on their own interests. They may variously state they are already married, not yet married, in the process of marriage, or unmarried, according to the respective context and situation. The status of a person involved in a marriage process is conditioned by the duration, the kind, and the public knowledge of this relationship as the example of Emmanuel, a 34-year-old doctoral student from the Western province, illustrates:

> In 2002, Emmanuel married a woman from his area in a registry office in Yaoundé. A traditional marriage ceremony in the village has not yet been conducted, because financial means are lacking. In addition, Emmanuel has not yet paid the dowry, which is quite expensive for his educated wife. Thus, in the village Emmanuel and his wife are not considered as married and his two children are 'officially' born out of wedlock. Nevertheless, in Yaoundé, the couple claims to be married and is also considered by others as married.

Men and women pass through several different forms of unions during their life courses (Mann 1985: 41). A young man or a young woman may engage in a relationship with the intention of improving his or her own status, or of gaining advantages for his or her kin. Several unions are tried out before one is defined as a marriage (Comaroff & Roberts 1977). Having relationships with different persons simultaneously and to "… explore the prospects and implications of the various attachments and affinal relationships" (Comaroff & Roberts 1981: 169) is a means of achieving power and wealth. Throughout the life course, different unions are regarded as having the potential for a marriage, a phenomenon that Comaroff and Roberts (1977) call '(serial) monogamous marriage arrangements'.[86]

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[86] A description of forms of '(serial) monogamous marriage arrangements' can be found in Comaroff & Roberts (1977) on southern Africa.

It can be stated that marital behavior tends to be strategically motivated. Societies usually combine individualistic actions with lineage-based interests (Bowie 2004: 8). The marriage process is used by men, women, and their kin, and is closely connected to advancements in career and improvements in political and economical alliances. Hence, marriage decisions might affect migration plans, and vice versa. In addition, the idea of marriage as a process in Cameroon might have consequences for marital practices and behaviors in Germany.

## 4.3.3 Multiple forms of marriage

As we have seen, marriage can hardly be defined as a static and fixed category. It is, rather, a continuous process in which women, men, and their kin attempt to enhance their social status, gain advantages, and create economic as well as political ties.

Different forms of unions can be also found in the Cameroonian context. Some of these might have the potential for marriage, while others are parallel to a more official marriage. Various types of practices exist: more informal plural unions (Burnham 1987), 'outside marriages'[87] (for Cameroon, see Meekers & Calvès 1997), and 'sugar daddies' (for Cameroon, see Kuate-Defo 2004) which refers mainly to relationships between older wealthy men and young girls, but also more '(serial) monogamous marriage arrangements' (Comaroff & Roberts 1977) to enduring marriages (Little 1973).

Little's (1973: 107) research among women in different African towns concludes that casual unions are widespread, and may range from men's relationships with mistresses, concubines, 'outside wives', friends, or casual lovers. Here, I illuminate polygynous practices and more informal union formations in order to understand the differences in the meanings of these relationships and motivations of the actors who construct them. First, I turn to an analysis of polygynous unions in the Cameroonian setting. I explore potentials for the persons involved and examine changes in polygamous practices. In the second part of this section, a specific form of less formal union formation between youths and older individuals, so-called 'sugar daddies' or 'sugar mamas', is discussed. Understanding these cross-generational relationships in Cameroon will help us to analyze German-Cameroonian unions in Germany.

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[87] Harrell-Bond (1975: 98) defines an "outside wife as a woman who has a more or less permanent relationship with a married man". In this case, the Western notion of marriage is used to define one relationship as a marriage, and the other as informal union or liaison.

## *Polygynous practices*

Among many ethnic groups in Cameroon, polygyny was for a long time seen as the ideal form of marriage (Tessmann 1913, Laburthe-Tolra 1981, Guyer 1984). In many parts of Cameroon, polygyny was a source of wealth for men. Many wives meant prestige. The social status and position of a man was defined by the number of wives and children. The greater the number of wives and children, the more people depended on the man in the household, which created not only power, but also provided the man with labor he could rely on and enabled him to extend his political alliances (Mann 1985: 40). Kaberry (1952) described the logic behind polgynous relationships for a man in the Grassfields of Cameroon:

> Even when he has obtained one wife, he will probably cast his eye about for another since prestige depends to a great extent on the possession of a large compound filled with wives and children…Men with regular wages are tempted to secure more wives, even though they may be Christians (ibid.: 24).

Men gained wealth, power, and prestige by marrying more than one woman. And even if a man was personally satisfied with one wife, he was socially obliged to look for another one in order to expand his social networks, and create new alliances or reconfirm already established ones. A large number of dependents secured him material prosperity through intense production. For men, engaging in diverse forms of polygynous and extramarital relationships, and thus gaining prestige and social rewards through many wives, is widely accepted. Smith (2001b: 141) elaborates:

> There is a certain pride in taking lovers. Being able to have lovers is sign of continuing masculine prowess and of economic success because increasingly women expect their lovers to perform economically as well as sexually.

Or as a 52-year-old man from a small village in the West Province explained:

> When you have money you can have more than one wife and you are the king. This holds true for Christians and for Muslims…because there are more women than men in Cameroon especially in the West. That's why it is also good for the women. They can help and support each other and the children grow up together…Polygamy is better than having affaires, because your wife knows where you are and they know the other women with whom you sleep.

As long as a husband does not put his wife and her children at risk financially or socially, his affairs and outside relationships may 'only' provoke a marriage crisis between the spouses, which often has no consequences for the continuation of the marriage. As discussed previously, a man seeks power and prestige by calling many women his wives and lovers. The more women he has, the more power he accumulates. As his wealth in people increases, his social, political, and economic status is enhanced, and he is asked more by others for support and assistance in exchange for labor.

In contrast, some women prefer to marry polygynous men because they hope that junior wives, i.e., a second or a third wife of her husband, would help with domestic duties, share agricultural work, other household chores, and offer companionship. However, living in a polygynous household was often linked to tensions and conflicts between the wives of one husband. The first wife is the head wife, and all the other women in the compound are to subordinate her. Therefore, marrying a man as the first wife has many advantages, and enabling her to control others and arrange duties, and, more importantly, to build up her own status in the community. The first wife of a man who had several other wives is widely recognized. Through her advantageous position, she creates wealth in people by claiming the productivity of her co-wives. In some cases, she is even able to influence her husband in his choice of second or third wife (Bledsoe 1980).

According to the CDHS (1991, 1998, 2004), polygynous marriages have been declining continuously in Cameroon.[88] Whereas in 1991, more than 38% of women between the ages of

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[88] According to the Cameroonian legislation, Section 49 of the 1981 Ordinance, the type of marriage may still either be polygamy or monogamy. Hence, polygamous marriages are not forbidden by law. A man can add to his number of wives at will, with or without the consent of his wife or wives.

15 and 49 were married polygynously, in 1998 the number had fallen to 32%, and in 2004, to 30% (CDHS 2004). The reasons for the decrease in polygynous unions in Cameroon include, like in many other African countries, the higher value attributed to education, increased urbanization, and economic difficulties. Mainly due to economic constraints, men today often cannot afford to marry two or more wives. The introduction of Christian marriage and the influence of Western values and ideas about monogamous relationships may also have affected the decline of official polygyny. However, it remains crucial for both men and women to establish alliances and ties by means of conjugal union formation (Guyer 1990). So if a man cannot financially afford to take a second or a third woman as his 'official wife', he may rely on so-called "outside unions" (Mann 1985: 44) to develop his role in the society and gain prestige. Notermans (2004: 53) states that today monogamous marriages in Cameroon are often polygamous in practice. Both men and women gain advantages from marrying one partner and then engaging in other less formal relationships. Outside unions are considered to be more negotiable in terms of responsibilities and obligations, not only towards the partner, but also towards the children from these unions.

Less is known about extramarital unions among women, although they exist. It is generally assumed, at least as reported by my male and female interview partners, that affairs and liaisons are not as common among women as among men. It could also be the case that women are more likely to keep their affairs secret out of fear of negative consequences. Smith (2001b: 144) explains that a woman who has extramarital sexual relationships may face heavy sanctions, both from her husband and his and her family. According to Smith, people would understand a husband beating his wife after finding out that she cheated on him, or even leaving her. "A philandering woman receives much less sympathy than a philandering man" (ibid.: 144).

Talking about fidelity with men and women revealed quite different views. While men openly admitted that they were having extramarital relationships, they were, at the same time, convinced that their wives were faithful. Women knew in many cases about the infidelity of their husbands. Regarding their own affairs and liaisons, one 36-year-old married woman living in Douala said: "Of course, women also enjoy life outside of their marriages, but they keep things more secret…after all, women who engage in affairs must come from somewhere".

## *Sugar daddies and sugar mamas*

One specific form of less formal union formation are sexual relationships between young people and older individuals called *sugar daddies* or *sugar mamas* (Kuate-Defo 2004: 21). Young people in many parts around the world are exploited, or attempt to enjoy the benefits of sexual relationships with older persons. Young people seek to fulfill basic needs, increase their standard of living, show off among peer groups, and/or receive money, clothes, gifts or other favors in exchange for sexual relationships (ibid.: 14). These cross-generational sexual relationships are common in many African regions, including Cameroon. In Cameroon, *sugar daddies* and *sugar mamas* are often called 'sponsors'. Here, the idea of sponsorship is strongly linked to the concept of wealth in people. Similar to decision-makers within the migration process, who select migrants, sponsor them, and thereby create a network of dependencies, *sugar daddies* or *sugar mamas* increase their social power and prestige by establishing relationships with people who are of lower social status.

Calvès (1996: 170-2) explains that, in Cameroon, *sugar daddies* are also called '*les cous plies*', which literally means 'the folded necks' referring to the fact that they are often old, and sometimes obese as a reflection of their wealth. In some areas, they are also called *V.V.V.* meaning *voiture, villa*, and *virement* (car, villa, and money transfer), which symbolize wealth and prosperity (Nyamnjoh 2005b). These older, often well-off married *sugar daddies* are able to rent expensive hotel rooms and have the resources to take care of the financial needs of their "outside wives" (Smith 2001b). In addition to material goods, like clothes, shows, jewelry, or electronics, young female lovers may ask their older partner for support in setting up their own businesses, or to assist their families in paying the rent, the school fees of younger siblings, or medical bills.

*Sugar daddies* are also asked to provide useful contacts for future careers, relationships, and necessary networks. In many cases, older men make the continuation of studies possible, or their social influence provides access to a secure job. In exchange, they expect sexually attractive relationships and a good-looking partner to show off. Married men gain social prestige, at least among their peer groups, for having a young appealing girlfriend (see also Orobaton 2000).

Young girls who are often still in education involve in sexual relationships with older wealthy men. They also often have several relationships with men simultaneously (Dinan 1983: 357). Calvès (1996: 172) calls this multiple partner strategy "portfolio management". The girls use these men not only as sources of financial income, but also as means of securing their standard of living and improving their personal careers. Girls and women view their relationships as an exchange of services, and pragmatically adapt to the situation (Guyer 1990). As Dinan (1983: 346) describes on the basis of interviews with school girls in Accra, "girls are not emotional involved in these relationships". Instead, they are rather calculating in the sense that they see these unions as instrumental – exchanging sexuality against financial caretaking. "Their sexual roles are their economic potential" (ibid.: 354). For single women, especially in the cities, their sexuality provides them with a valuable opportunity to develop their career and achieve their life goals. Little (1973: 105) argues that many women in sub-Saharan Africa "treat their love relationships as convenient, temporary and rewarding unions". Like the *sugar daddies,* girls will move into another more attractive and more rewarding relationship when necessary. Smith (2001b: 142) explains these unmarried young girls "are clearly used by men, yet they clearly also use men".

The existing literature suggests that more girls get involved with *sugar daddies* than young men with *sugar mamas* (Kuate-Defo 2004: 22). However, boys also engage in sexual affairs with older women, often for economic reasons.[89] According to my interview partners, in many cases young Cameroonian men cannot afford to have a long-term girlfriend or they are not ready for such a commitment. In other cases, I was told that young boys have male lovers who pay for clothes, education or provide useful contacts for employment. However, these relationships need to be kept secret since homosexuality is punishable, according to Article 347 of the penal code, with a prison sentence of several months up to five years.[90]

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[89] The theme of *sugar mamas* becomes relevant in the German context when young Cameroonian men often marry older German women. These marriages often create a network of dependencies, as I will explain in Chapter 6.

[90] As described in Chapter 3 on the human rights situation in Cameroon, homosexual activities are illegal and can be penalized with prison sentence of six months to five years and a fine.

## 4.3.4 Love and affection

Relationships between Cameroonian men and women are subject to social and cultural change and transformation. In the following section, I illustrate the increasing importance of personal partner choice particularly in urban settings of Cameroon, even as parents and kin remain relevant. As a result, conflicts and tensions within the extended family may increase. Discussion and disputes about marital arrangements between individuals and their families continue even when a family member has moved away either to a city or abroad. For that reason, discussions between migrants and their families about marital decisions need to be examined when analyzing the strategies and practices of Cameroonian individuals in Germany. In this section, I will use the notions of love and affection to illustrate the changing importance of individual choice in marriage in the recent urban setting of Cameroon.[91] How can personal desires and needs be expressed within a strong family network? How are personal decisions embedded in the respective political and economic contexts, and within social relationships?

During Cameroon's pre-colonial and colonial times, kin groups played the most significant role in the process of marrying. The choice of the partner was almost entirely left to the families, at least for the first marriage (Laburthe-Tolra 1981). Typically second marriages would be for love. Strategically, determinations were decisive while love and affection played a subordinate or no role. However, as Mann (1985: 38) states, love, and affection were not direct requirements for a relationship, but the Yoruba in Nigeria believed that "love might grow out of marriage".[92]

Despite the fact that family and kin continue to play a crucial role in the marriage arrangement and process, their importance and influence has diminished over time. Particularly in the selection of marriage partners, emotional intimacy and personal relationships between husband and wife have gained significance with the social changes in Cameroon, as well as in many sub-Saharan parts of Africa. Perceptions and patterns of love, marriage, and intimacy are changing in many African societies, including Cameroon.[93] More individualistic criteria and

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[91] For an overview on changes in family structures in Africa see Alber & Bochow (2006).

[92] Interestingly, similar statements were made by some Cameroonians married to German women in Germany when talking about their relationship. As detailed in Chapter 6, some respondents argued that emotional closeness and love develops over time (see also Englert (1993) who refers in her work on Ghanaian-German couples to a proverb of the Ashanti in Ghana "Love will develop in the course of time").

[93] "Love in Africa" edited by Cole and Thomas (2009) explores the many different cultural and historical strands that reshape local ideas about love and marriage in Africa.

notions of romantic love and emotional intimacy have become relevant. In the anthropological literature of the 1990s and early 2000s, aspects of love and affection within the marriage process, which were so far only marginally emphasized, became increasingly significant and were frequently discussed (e.g., Hirsch & Wardlow 2006). Scholars like Smith (2001b) state that marriages in urban African centers are increasingly conducted on the basis of romance and love as a result of societal changes and transformation. Indicators for these changes could be, among others the influence of Western ideas about marriage for both men and women. American soap operas and other forms of media which transmit the Western ideal of romantic love have an impact on the desire for more individual choices of marriage partners. "…a man who expects to woo a woman into marriage must be ready to perform as a romantic lover. He must win her heart, not just pay her bride price" (ibid.: 145). Fair (2004) gives an example of these changing patterns by examining the creation of Valentine's Day in Accra, Ghana. A precondition for the rise of the media-generated holiday of Valentine's Day is, like in many other urban settings of Africa, the fact that romantic love is increasingly regarded as the main basis for choosing marital partners (see also Bochow 2007). As a 36-year-old carpenter from Bafoussam revealed on the eve of Valentine's Day, "I will give my financée some money, so that she can go to the market and buy herself something special".

The expectations of both women and men of their future spouse have changed, as have the structures and meanings of marriage in contemporary Cameroon (Johnson-Hanks 2007). For the urban Cameroonian context, Johnson-Hanks (2007: 1) observes that "marriage rates have fallen, rituals marking the transition to marriage have been altered and reordered, women's expectations of their husbands and the marriage bargain have changed". One important criterion for the selection of a husband is that he should truly love his partner without hesitation. Future husbands are supposed to be affectionate, trustworthy as partners, as close to faithful as possible, but at the same time prosperous and generous. Financial benefits are still expected from a relationship with a man (ibid.). Thus, unmarried young women often seek relationships with multiple men, in which they are able to secure the provision of material support and emotional satisfaction (Cole & Thomas 2009).[94] In some cases, as described by Cole (2009: 124), young women pursue relationships with men, ideally European men, to gain

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[94] Nyamnjoh (2005b) explains that these forms of polyandry are known among female university students as *le chic* (well-dressed boyfriend with whom one impresses at parties), *le chèque* (is the wallet on legs), et *le choc* (who provides emotional satisfaction).

money. The ability to obtain financial resources from these men enables them to support other men, with whom they are more emotionally involved, thereby reversing gender norms.[95] Contrary, many young men feel themselves caught between their desire to marry and support a family and the lack of financial resources. Some see international migration and earning money abroad as the only solution to fulfill the role as providers. Not surprisingly, economic conditions and increasing expectations cause tensions and conflicts between men and women, and also conflict with kin-based marital systems, obligations, and sexual mores.

Even if the role of family and kin in selecting a spouse diminishes, marriage continues to be embedded in kinship networks – a social endeavor. Several young female and male interview partners explained that their parents strongly advised them to marry among their own ethnic group. As one female 23-year-old university student explained: "I keep listening to my parents' suggestions. I would always try to find a balance between their advice and my own desire". On the one hand, there is the increasingly personal relationship between a man and a woman, while, on the other hand, there is the continuing construction of marriage within networks of ties and mutual obligations to the extended family and kin (Smith 2001b). Negotiations between individuals and their families are supposed to find solutions.

As illustrated above, the meanings and perceptions of marriage have changed, most notably in the light of globalization. Individual choices become increasingly relevant when it comes to decisions about whom to marry or when to start a union formation. In the following section, I illustrate indicators for these changes, which are not only important for marriage decisions, but also increasing significant for migration decisions. In many respects, marriage and migration decisions are situated between the individual and the family, and may therefore cause conflicts. In addition, both areas are strongly influenced by political, economic, and social transformations which I describe in the following section. The increasing importance of (formal) employment and higher education for men and women as well as the enduring urbanization trends, might intensify individual decisions, but may also lead to processes of postponement of official marriage ceremonies.

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[95] The conceptualization of marriage choices in more individualistic terms, particularly among educated Africans in urban regions, has consequences for the gender roles of men and women. These roles need to be renegotiated when norms and structures become less important than affection and sympathy (Smith 2001b: 129).

## 4.3.5 Influence of employment, education, and urbanization on marital practices

As the previous section has suggested, marriage remains an important vital event for Cameroonians today, but its meaning has changed for both men and women. In Cameroon, marriage as an institution has been strongly influenced by developments such as economic changes, particularly the economic crisis of the 1980/90s, the widespread access to education, the increasing value placed on schooling, and increasing urbanization.[96]

Recent anthropological studies confirm the statement that African marriage is in the state of flux as a result of economic, political, and social changes (Bledsoe 1990, Smith 2001b, Cole & Thomas 2009). From a more demographical perspective, Calvès (1996) argues in her dissertation on changing patterns of family formation that younger generations of Cameroonians, especially educated youths in urban areas, increasingly postpone marriage ceremonies. Using the CDHS (1991) and the results of focus groups, she attributes the delay in marriage mainly to economic constraints and the longer duration of education and training. According to the CDHS (2004), early marriage is still common throughout Cameroon, but particularly in rural areas. The median age at first marriage for women aged 25 to 49 was 17.6 years, and that age has increased only slightly over the past ten years. Over half of Cameroonian women are married before their 18th birthdays. Men are usually substantially older when marrying for the first time, and therefore wide age gaps between spouses are common. Marriages have become more expensive, especially after the introduction of the civil and church marriage in the post-colonial period (Nelson et al. 1974).[97] Today, couples and their families often need to raise money for at least two ceremonies particularly when living in urban settings: the expensive 'traditional' wedding ceremony for the customary marriage, which usually takes place in the home village of the groom; and a subsequent Christian ceremony following a Western model, which is mainly celebrated in towns. Financial constraints, particularly as a consequence of the economic crisis and the lack of labor opportunities, are

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[96] Social transformations and the Western influence are strongly related to upheavals of African marriages, such as changes in the selection of marriage partners, in marriage payments, transformation in polygynous practices, and divorce (Parkin & Nyamwaya 1987).

[97] With the introduction of civil marriage in Cameroon, the payment of bride wealth as one condition for the marriage process was abolished. In 1981, a new marriage law was issued, the "Civil Status Registration Ordinance". It became possible to form a legal union without the recognition of bride wealth. Moreover, it became essential that a man accepts the fatherhood, so that the child has inheritance rights (Guyer 1984).

often the main cause of a delay in wedding ceremonies (Eloundou-Enyegue & Davanzo 2003, Johnson-Hanks 2007). A 26-year-old Bamiléké who studied in Douala, but had been engaged in his village in the West, explained his difficult situation:

> I really would like to marry my girlfriend, but I do not have the money. My education is expensive, and living in a city is also costly, and then there are not enough jobs to earn some extra. I just pray that she waits for me until I am financially able to marry her.

Another reason for the prolongation of wedding ceremonies may be the increasing importance of education. Secondary or higher education is desired and much admired, but remains expensive and time-consuming. Attendance at secondary school or university, and hence the impact of Western values and ideas, influence marriage and family practices. Many women have relationships with men, but most try to avoid marrying while at school. In their opinion, trying out several unions rather than marrying leaves them more freedom to decide (Johnson-Hanks 2007). Particularly educated girls in urban areas choose to progress in their personal careers, i.e., having a good education, finding formal employment, or setting up a business before marrying. They often secure their economic resources by having relationships with older and wealthy men from whom they receive financial support, as well as essential contacts (*sugar daddies*). For them it makes more sense to remain independent as long as possible and use their youth to establish themselves, than to enter into an early marriage commitment (Dinan 1983: 355). Goheen's (1996: 186) explanation is based on her observations in western Cameroon:

> Once you get married and set the foot in your husband's compound 'that's all for you', meaning your life will be circumscribed by childbearing, cooking and farm work…Most of these single women and have children, for having children remains the mark of adults' status for both men and women. But they do not want to marry men who will not combine incomes and visions to create a lifestyle in which both men and women contribute equally to the welfare of the household…Marriage has become a strategy of accumulation for women as well as for men, particularly for those from middle-class or elite-households (ibid.: 186).

Interviews with university students revealed that educated women and men postpone their first marriage (see also Calvès 1999, Johnson-Hanks 2003). Many young women and men would like to complete their education and start working before marrying. A young woman who is having a boyfriend since two years argues: "First comes my education, then I would like to work, and then I am going to think about marrying". For men, high formal qualifications such as degrees have become almost essential in order to marry successfully. The common belief is still that a high level education and degrees guarantee labor opportunities. However, higher qualifications require additional financial resources and prolong the time until education is completed. Both individuals and families might prefer to spend money on higher education or training than on marriage at young ages.

Expensive and long periods of education as well as economic constraints make it difficult for many Cameroonians to proceed in the marriage process. Even today, the process of marriage often includes the exchange of gifts and money between the future husband and the bride's family.

In order to fulfill their life goals and secure social status in the society, especially educated Cameroonians women and men are forced to look for alternatives. In many cases, young men and women move to the cities for education or employment, but often even an internal migration may not be sufficient to realize their personal careers and fulfill the requirements of family and kin. International migration is seen as one possible pathway to gain wealth, power, and prestige.

## 4.3.6 Gender specific pre-migrational marital behavior

The marital behavior of both Cameroonian men and women is strongly influenced by migration intentions and plans. The desire to migrate may lead to a delay of an official marriage ceremony, since financial means and personal as well as familial efforts are invested in the preparation of the migration process, rather than in marital arrangements. However, there is a difference between pre-migrational marital behavior of women and men. Whereas Cameroonian men are able to migrate alone once they are married, married women face more difficulties in leaving the country without their husband.

For male migrants, it is possible to leave their wife and children behind and migrate to Europe for some years and then return. In some cases, their parents and kin even prefer a marriage

before migration. It is believed that the wife and children constitute a kind of insurance that the migrant will definitely return and that he/she will send remittances during his absence (see also Jiemin 2003). Out of necessity, wives left behind often agree with the decision of the husband and the extended family that he should migrate. Some wives accept and even support the migration of their husbands, since they expect to receive remittances and hope that the migration will improve their socioeconomic situation in Cameroon in the long run. Others move back to their family of origin:

[While he does this] …there is nothing that I can do. I do not have another choice. I will move back to my parents' place together with my children. There is no other option (Cameroonian woman, 26 years old).

Examining the case of male Chinese migrants in Thailand, Jiemin (2003: 128) speaks of "widows of living ones" referring to the Chinese wives of labor migrants left behind. They often move to her husband's family place and work there for the family in law while her husband is abroad earning money.

In some cases, married men are afraid to leave their wives behind. They fear that while they are being away, their wives engage in sexual affairs with other men and may even become pregnant.

By contrast, married women are less likely to find sponsors and support for their migration plans from their families and kin. A mother of a potential female migrant explains: "Once a woman is married, her husband is responsible for her. Her chances of going abroad without him are almost zero". By the time, a woman is married, it is hard to find sponsors who will pay for the preparation of the trip abroad. It is widely assumed that it is better to invest in unmarried female family members, most probably because the expected remittances will then go directly to the family members and not to the husband and his kin. For this reason, potential female migrants are supposed to concentrate on their migration plans:

My daughter should finish her basic studies before doing her masters in Germany. I told her not to get involved in any love affairs or anything like that since it is better for her if she is not married before going abroad. If she is married, her husband has the

responsibility and he can decide that she is staying in Cameroon and she is not finishing her education. Then all the effort was for nothing (Cameroonian woman, 48 years old).

However, recently even married women attempt to migrate. In December 2006, the journal "Jeune Afrique l'Intelligent" published an article which stated that four out of five married women from Yaoundé, Douala, and the southern province of Cameroon were looking for a white husband abroad. The article comments that these married women are willing to separate from their husbands in order to leave to Europe. Unfortunately, I cannot directly comment on these statements since during my field research, I was only in contact with unmarried women who were planning to leave the country. I am skeptical about the indicated large number of married women seeking to go abroad; however, I assume there is a tendency for married Cameroonian women to consider migration as means of fulfilling personal life goals and satisfying family and kin. The following section analyzes how Cameroonian women get in contact with potential husbands abroad.

Women often use the Internet as a means of searching for potential husbands (see also Johnson-Hanks 2007). The following advertisement in the magazine "Entre Nous Jeunes" (02/2005) provides an example of how Cameroonian women present themselves in newspapers, web pages or online forums:

> Young, female Cameroonian, 22 years, 58 kg, 1.61 m, single, serious, is looking for a 25-45-year-old European man for a serious and durable relationship, possibly marriage, Yaoundé, Cameroon.

Many of these women are looking explicitly for marriage with a white husband.[98] Johnson-Hanks (2007) argues that young urban Cameroonian women hope to find love and economic support in these internet-mediated marriages. My interviews revealed that marriage may be seen as a strategy for leaving Cameroon and entering the Schengen space via an invitation by a European man. Advertisements by Cameroonian men looking for European women were almost not existent. I suppose that men rely on different migration strategies than women.

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[98] Constable (2009) discusses how the performance of love and the commodification of intimacy facilitate transnational mobility and migration.

Women and men who were thinking about migration often mention the advantages of marrying a white partner from Europe: having a white spouse is said to facilitate entering and staying in the country of destination. As Samuel reveals: "I will choose a white abroad so that my stay there will be secure". In a similar vein, Jeremi states: "I am going to choose a white woman in order to facilitate the difficult tasks in Europe". In Pidgin English, white people are referred to as *oyibo* which means "white man" or "white woman", but the term is also used for expatriates and returning Cameroonians. *Oyibo* is originally a Yoruba term, and means literally translated "man without skin". The man or the woman without skin symbolizes access to Europe. Sometimes white spouses are referred to as *papiers* to express the possibility of legitimization through marriage. Others pointed to the positive characteristics of white partners. In their view, they are serious, orderly, and reliable, and that would help them to arrange their *affaires* like business or studies abroad. Nyamnjoh and Page (2002: 620) quote one interview partner: "They [the whites] can open doors, which the Black man can not open". Relationships with white people may offer the chance to enter and stay in Europe. Nyamnjoh and Page (ibid.: 612) explain that the white man is often seen as "a ticket to good life".

The targets of Cameroonian women are, however, not only white men, but also Cameroonians abroad. A Cameroonian graduate student in the UK whom I interviewed by email reported that he received more than 30 marriage proposals from young Cameroonian women shortly after he arrived at his destination. As he said: "It is not because they love me; it is just because they want to cross the border. After entering the UK, they will abandon me".

Interview partners also told me that Cameroonians who live abroad and who come to visit their families in Cameroon are highly desirable. Usually, these emigrants come for special occasions, like weddings, baptisms, funerals or Christmas and they stay around one month.[99] The local newspaper "Cameroon Tribune" (29/11/2006) published the headline "Bracing up for Bush Fallers" acquainting that particular in December each year many bush fallers visit their families and friends. According to the report they come for various reasons: family reunions, to escape the European winter climate, for business, and above all for weddings. Cameroonian residents abroad come during this time of the year and "tie the knots". They either come for

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[99] A number of interlocutors mentioned marriage to a Cameroonian partner as motive for the returning to Cameroon. Some families start to arrange contacts with potential spouses for the time when bush fallers return temporarily or permanent. Like one informant reported that he was overwhelmed by the number of girls he got introduced to while visiting his family. His parents already pre-selected feasible partners for him, likely from the same ethnic origin.

their own weddings or for attending other persons' weddings. As the newspaper suggests events like bush fallers' weddings are "good hunting grounds" for young girls:

> Little wonder, such spinsters, generally desperate to travel abroad, have already started bracing up for the weddings. They will just do anything to have invitations for these events. And smart guys are already making quick cash from selling invitations. The other day, a group of girls were scrambling to buy the invitation for a certain "bush faller wedding" which is expected to be attended by "big catches". Some paid as much as CFA 10,000 just to have tickets for the bachelor's eve and wedding reception. Hope these investments would yield fruits. Good luck, sisters!

I was told that some Cameroonian girls and women leave 'no stone unturned' in getting in contact with the *been-to's* hoping to get invited to Europe.[100] For some women, these 'temporary returnees' embody success and prosperity. Getting to know them offers an opportunity to share in these achievements.

Cameroonian families I talked to, however, do not always appreciate or support the migratory efforts of their daughters. In contrast to men, who are often supported by their parents and other relatives, not all women receive assistance and encouragement for their migration plans by kin. Families may fear that the emigration of their female family members and the subsequent marriage to a white man could result in a permanent stay abroad and few remittances.

Those women who finally marry a white man are viewed ambivalently. On the one hand, families value migration attempts and hope to receive money, goods, and support once their daughter has established herself abroad. On the other hand, some regard such a relationship as a "kind of prostitution", as one father commented on the behavior of his daughter. He claimed that a relationship with a European man is often entirely based on economic interests (see also Nyamnjoh & Page 2002). Parents might fear that their daughters will become too individualistic in their search for money and personal benefits, forgetting the importance of familiar networks and relationships when marrying a person from abroad.

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[100] The term *been-to's* refers to those Cameroonians outside of their country who represent the West (Nyamnjoh & Page 2002: 631).

During two focus group discussions at the University Dschang and at the University Yaoundé II, , it became clear that for both female and male migrants, parents and other relatives are not always satisfied with the partner choice of their children, particularly when they wish to marry somebody from Europe. Joseph, a student of geography at the University of Yaoundé II, explains:

> My parents don't want me to marry a white woman. They prefer a black one for me. White women they say will not accept the African lifestyle and this will cause problems. African families are usually quite big and white woman cannot deal with this. White women will divide the family.

Parents fear losing a family member. It is assumed that non-Africans do not share the solidarity and close relationships of family members in Africa, and thus might not be willing to support the relatives of their spouses. In several interviews, family members expressed their worries of losing their children through a marriage to a white person, and thereby losing human and social capital and essential resources. The final aim of both parents and the majority of migrants is to marry a Cameroonian partner in Cameroon.

In short, it can be stated that there are certain gender-specific pre-migratorial marital behaviors among Cameroonians. For men, engaging in marital arrangements before leaving the country is, according to the views of the families, unproblematic, and even desired by some family members. Some relatives expect more regular remittances and a quicker return when a wife is waiting in Cameroon. In contrast, women are not supposed to be married before the migration process. Once they are married, they often have difficulties in finding sponsors for their journey, although there seems to be an increasing tendency for married women to search for ways to leave the country. I did not encounter any Cameroonian couples migrating together to Germany. Male and female migrants left the country without their partners. Europeans, but also Cameroonian migrants living abroad, were in some cases considered as potential marriage partners by willing migrants. They offered a number of advantages, such as access to the country of destination, legal residency or help in organizing personal and business matters in the new environment.

My analysis of the meaning and value of marital arrangements in Cameroon for different actors point to the relevance of marriage as a means of generating wealth. Marital arrangements offer

opportunities, for example, to create social networks, to access labor forces, to gain economic advantages, or to establish a social reputation in Cameroon and abroad. In addition, a strategic marriage or union formation might enable or facilitate migration. Familial and social networks, as well as marital constellations, are powerful instruments for creating power and prestige for an individual, but also for family and kin. However, as Cole and Thomas (2009) state, in contemporary African marriages and relationships, material exchange, provision of wealth and power, and love and affection are intertwined rather than opposed.

## 4.4 The importance of children

The third, and maybe the most powerful example of the importance of wealth in people, are children. Children depend in a particularly intense way on their parents and other relatives. Hence, rights over children are constantly negotiated. Understanding the role of children in the Cameroonian context offers insights into the reproductive behavior of Cameroonian migrants in Germany. Cameroonian migrants in Germany might work out ways to circumvent immigration and integration regulations and legalize their status by becoming mother or father. Like marriage, parenthood is regarded as highly important in Cameroonian society for both women and men and their respective family and kin (Feldman-Savelsberg 1999). Like most marital arrangements, "having children is not only a means to individual personhood, but also a fulfillment of one's obligations to kin and community" (Smith 2001b: 139). Both the parents' and the community's identities are sustained by childbearing and –rearing.[101] Children are generally thought of as not only belonging to their biological parents, but also to common property of the lineage or community (Alber 2003).[102] Parents and kin claim rights over children, often in expectation of advantages like labor supply or support and security in old age (Boserup 1985). In patrilineal societies, men receive legal rights over children through marriage, and thus enhance their wealth in people. Women instead achieve honor and social recognition by childbearing (Johnson-Hanks 2006). The role of children in adult relationships is essential to understanding the social organization of African societies (Smith 2001b), and,

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[101] In her research among the Bangangté in the Grassfields of Cameroon, Feldman-Savelsberg (1999) examines the cultural meanings and social dilemmas associated with fertility. Although areas in the Cameroon Grassfields are characterized by high fertility, women strongly fear infertility.

[102] As Fortes (1978: 121) claims "parenthood… is the primary value associated with the idea of family in West Africa".

hence, to comprehending the childbearing and –rearing practices of Cameroonian parents in Germany.

## 4.4.1 The idea of fosterage

Fosterage refers to the idea of sending children away to be raised by relatives, and, in some cases, also by non-relatives, but also of taking care of children from other families (Isiugo-Abanihe 1984). It plays an essential role in establishing ties between individuals and families or between groups of people. The system of fosterage is an example that illustrates the concept of wealth in people based on reciprocity and mutual obligations. Children, particularly when fostered outside the family, provide opportunities for building alliances with other individuals or groups (Bledsoe 1990). In this sense, children might be seen as a strategic means of generating or eliminating relationships to kin. Child fosterage might be practiced as a strategy for gaining access to resources (Fleischer 2003).

The practice of fosterage is widespread in West and Central Africa. According to Isiugo-Abanihe (1984), the rate of fostering was found to be very high (over 20%) in parts of southern Cameroon, but the practice is also common in other parts of the country. In the description of fostering children out of their natal home, researchers emphasize motives for fosterage. In addition to establishing new social relationships and extending networks, children might act as a source of labor or allegiance. For fathers, sending children away enables them to receive material prosperity in exchange for the labor of the child, e.g., when girls work as domestic servants in a household. For mothers, fostering children out leaves them with more time for themselves and may enhance their labor opportunities. In their free time, they could sell food or products at the market and earn some extra money. Notermans (2004: 48) gives an example from the Batouri in East Cameroon, where women use fosterage to empower themselves. Women use children to defend their positions in relationship their husbands and their co-wives, "to counterbalance the loss of biological children given to the husband's lineage with children from their own matrilineage" (ibid.: 56). Children provide women with power and "women themselves call it calculation" (ibid.: 59). In addition, it is often presumed that children receive a better education when growing up in a different household than in their biological one.[103]

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[103] The economic and function-oriented explanations dominate the debate. It is often argued that the lack of financial means forces parents to send their children away, either to earn extra money or to have their education

Studying the Baatombu in Northern Benin, Alber (2003) argues that biological parenthood is in some societies even denied. It is believed that it is better for the child's well-being to grow up with paternal or maternal relatives then with the biological mother.

## 4.4.2 Being a single mother

The practice of sending children from their biological home to foster or social parents is practiced by both married and single mothers in various parts of Cameroon, and in other regions throughout West and Central Africa. Even so, the situation of single mothers looks often different than the circumstances of married women. This fact is particularly interesting for my theme, since a number of Cameroonian mothers in Germany are single.

Single mothers are not uncommon among many ethnic groups in Cameroon, as data of the CDHS (2004) confirms.[104] Unmarried women bear children, as Franqueville (1984: 169) explains: "being single in Yaoundé does not exclude being a mother, since motherhood remains, for single women, like for the others, an essential element of their lives". Premarital births seem to be increasingly common, particularly among schoolgirls in urban areas (Calvès 1996: 56). Goheen (1996: 180) observes a growing trend among Cameroonian women to stay single when young, but nevertheless have children. In some cases, to have children without being married may be a strategy for achieving financial benefits and networking advantages (see also Guyer 1984). Bledsoe (1980) describes the strategies and practices of women in establishing power, achieving economic and political advantages, and gaining support and assistance from men, whether husbands or lovers:

> Mothers may manipulate the social identity of their children's fathers in order to leave
> men they do not like or to get support from wealthy men. Women may also manipulate
> their own social identity to keep possibilities open for support from lovers. Married

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paid for by others (Goody 1982, Isiugo-Abanihe 1984). The focus on functions of fosterage practices disregards the individual perspective. Notermans (2004) criticizes that often close and emotional relationship between mothers and children is not brought up as a central theme.

[104] Anthropologists made different observations concerning the premarital sexual behavior of women in the area today referred to as Cameroon. Laburthe-Tolra (1981: 234) explains that it was common among the Beti that unmarried girls proved their fertility by having a child before marriage. Young Beti girls and boys had a lot of sexual freedom before marriage: "The Beti used to leave, and still do, a total sexual freedom to female adolescents aged 15 to 20 years old and young men aged 18 to 25 before marriage" (ibid.: 238). But there were other ethnic groups in Cameroon that strictly forbade sexual activities for girls before marriage, but not for boys. Kaberry (1952: 12) noted that unmarried mothers were rare among the Nso in the western Grassfields.

women may present themselves as single to acquire extra support or to help their husbands gain wealth by suing their lovers for adultery. Single women may present themselves as married to keep different lovers from getting jealous of each other. Single women may also use different names with each of their lovers to keep them ignorant of each other (Bledsoe 1980: 8).

Here again, as in the case of marital constellations, the fluidity and ambiguity of status and identity become visible. Unmarried mothers may claim that their wealthy lover is the father of their child in order to assure his support. Single women in particular have to ask themselves who the best legitimate father would be for their children. In contrast, men may try to recognize a particular child as their legitimate successor.

These manipulations do not always work out in reality, and in Cameroon as well as in many other African societies, children born out of wedlock often have a different legal status than children born to a married couple. In almost all ethnic groups in Cameroon, children born out of wedlock have fewer legal rights and rank socially below 'legitimate children' (Nelson et al. 1974, Laburthe-Tolra 1981, Guyer 1984, Johnson-Hanks 2004).

Many children of single mothers are fathered by married men (Harrell-Bond 1975: 130). The Cameroonian law (Section 43(1)) of the 1982 Ordinance allows for the possibility of a child born out of wedlock being recognized by its 'natural father'. Despite the decline of polygynous marriages, men continue to aim for many children as a sign for prestige and status. One opportunity is provided by children born in extramarital relationships. In some cases, men consider children born to 'outside women' as additional to those produced within their formal marriage, but not always. According to the law, their wives are obliged to accept the recognition of these children. There are considerations, strategies, and sometimes even obligations regarding with whom one has a sexual relationship and may produce children, and with whom one avoids any kind of sexual affairs and reproduction. A young man may have sexual relationships with different women and might produce children, but he may not engage sexually with the girl he intends to marry.

Rights to children, whether they are born within a marriage or out of wedlock, remain valuable for both women and men (Johnson-Hanks 2006). The important questions are who claims rights over children, who pays for their education, or who gains support once the children are

able to work and earn money. All these issues are highly negotiable, and are often sources of tensions and conflicts between individuals and kin.

Patterns of childbearing and –rearing are influenced by social and economic transformation and changes in cultural norms. In particular, the increasing value placed on education and employment by both women and men affect the reproductive practices of women in Cameroon.[105] However, not only social transformations have major influences on reproductive behavior, but also migration, or, more precisely, pre-migrational preparations.

## 4.4.3 Childbearing and migration planning

As chapter 4.3.6 clarified, there are certain gender-specific pre-migratorial marital behaviors among Cameroonians. Interviews with potential migrants in Cameroon pointed to the fact that it is more difficult for married women to migrate alone than for men in marital unions. In contrast, reproductive behavior seems to be less influenced by migration plans. Being a mother or a father appears to be less problematic than being married, at least for women. The practice of fostering children out makes it also for mothers possible to migrate. Particularly young mothers leave their children with relatives when moving within Cameroon or outside the country. The example of Stéphanie, 19 years old, illustrates the system of fosterage in relation to migration.

> Stéphanie, who is unmarried and living with her mother and other relatives in Yaoundé, intended to study in France. In the last year of high school, she became pregnant. Stéphanie's mother cared for the child so that the daughter was able to complete high school and prepare her stay abroad. Her mother assured her that studying abroad is more important for her daughter than staying at home and caring for her child. In the meantime, Stéphanie is studying in France and her mother is still taking care of the

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[105] Johnson-Hanks (2004) examines the relationship between educational level and timing of births in Cameroon. She concludes that the second birth interval of educated women is longer and more variable than among uneducated women. She points particularly to the aspect of uncertainty in relationship to the contemporary education system in Cameroon. Many young Cameroonians are unsure whether their investment in education will be pay off one day, or whether they should rather start working in the informal sector to earn some money. The majority of Cameroonian men and women are insecure about their future, and this affects both marital and fertility behavior.

child. The father of the child works in construction in the western province. He cares "only" financially for his child.

For unmarried men, having children before their intended migration also seems in the majority of cases to be unproblematic, as reported by my interview partners.

As outlined above, children play a major role in Cameroonian society, and becoming mother or father counts as one of the most important vital events. Children depend not only on their parents (biological and social), but also on several other family members involved in their education and training. As explained by reviewing the system of fosterage, children might be seen as strategic means to create relationships and networks or gain access to resources (wealth in people). Therefore, rights over children are constantly negotiated. The system of fosterage allows particularly young people to send their children to relatives when considering a migration out of the country.

## 4.5 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to set the framework for understanding the role and meaning of relationships (familial, marital, and intergenerational) in the Cameroonian setting. This information helps me to explore marital and reproductive behaviors of Cameroonian migrants in Germany.

Social relationships between family members, spouses, or parents and their children play a central role in the social organization of the Cameroonian society. Therefore, I analyzed the different perspectives of people who construct diverse forms of unions. Concerning migration, this chapter has shown that extended families are often the main decision-making unit. Senior family members generally decide who is attempting to migrate. In addition, they often support and sponsor potential migrants. At the same time, potential migrants rely on national and transnational kinship networks that guarantee access, assurance, and safety; but also involve sanctions, high levels of dependency, and often are very hierarchical in nature. In most cases, families see migration as an investment strategy in human capital that involves specific obligations in return. Migration is an attempt to augment the chances of ensuring the successful and sustainable livelihoods of all parties involved.

We have also seen that there are different meanings attached to social relationships depending on the respective viewpoints. The meaning of, for example, marriage depends on the perspectives of the persons involved. Women might have quite different views of their marital arrangements than men or the various family members involved. However, the formation of a marriage (just like other social relationships) remains one of the most important institutions for both genders in acquiring benefits and advantages for themselves, as well as for their respective kin. Marital arrangements provide access to a "circle of political and economic alliances" (Diduk & Maynard 2000: 342). These generated networks are essential for a individual's personal career and the well-being of his/her family. Hence, different kinds of unions are viewed as instrumental from the perspective of men, women, and their respective kin.[106]

The discussion about the meanings of relationships and social networks in the Cameroonian context provides the basis for understanding the opportunities and incentives of Cameroonian men and women in the German setting. As I will show in my analysis of German-Cameroonian couples, partners view marriage and reproduction from different angles, and attach diverse meanings to these union formations.

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[106] This point becomes relevant when analyzing marital patterns of Cameroonians with German partners.

# V THE STRUCTURAL FRAMEWORK OF TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION

This chapter describes the actual migration from Cameroon to Germany, including departure, border crossing, and arrival. In doing so, the focus is on the structural constraints that restrict transnational migration between these two countries. It will show that Cameroonian migrants are confronted with discriminatory regulations and barriers when attempting to enter, stay, and work in Germany.

The following chapter is organized in three main parts. First, I discuss the concept of transnational migration, which provides a basis for understanding two main processes of my theme. On the one hand, the transnational concept enables us to analyze international mobility between two or more nation states, in this case between Cameroon and Germany. Scholars of transnational migration take the individual, the institutional, and the global perspectives into account, i.e., the micro (motives and incentives), meso (transnational social ties and relation), – and macro levels (migration determinants) of analysis are combined. On the other hand, the transnational framework allows us to examine the scope and intensity of ties and activities between the country of origin and the country of reception.

In the second part of this chapter, I seek to understand the role of the nation-state as an institution that shapes transnational migration. Because Cameroonian migrants' mobility is restricted and constrained by national (and EU) immigration policies, I examine the role of the German nation-state for transnational migration processes. However, it is not just the ability to enter Germany that is regulated by national laws, also migrants' options for staying and working in the country. Comprehending Germany's current migration policy requires a brief historical overview on migration to the country, and the related processes of migration policy-making. The processes of inclusion of some migrants and the exclusion of others become particularly apparent when exploring the differences between the German welfare state and the nation state.

Third, the exploration of Germany's legal framework regarding immigration and integration provides a basis for understanding the different categories of migration: students, family members, asylum seekers, tourists, business people, and undocumented migrants. I advance the argument that most Cameroonian migrants experience fluid transitions between 'legality' and 'illegality'. They alternate between legal and undocumented status and situations, and hence developed practices to work out ways of managing discriminatory structures set up by the state.

## 5.1 Transnational migration

In the early 1990s, discussions on international migration started to recognize that some migrants maintain strong links to their home communities, despite being 'incorporated' into countries of destination. Based on the growing awareness that the processes of globalization were accelerating due to new communication technologies and affordable means of transportation, conventional assumptions about the direction and effects of international migration were questioned. These debates can be summarized as the transnational migration approach (cf. Appadurai 1991, Faist 2000, Glick Schiller et al. 1992, Pries 1997, Portes 1997, Smith & Guarnizo 1998).

Much of the economic literature on migration viewed international movements as permanent changes from one fixed point to another, while transnational migration theories refer rather to ongoing flows between places, in which returning is not necessarily seen as definitive return (Glick Schiller et al. 1995). Cohen (1998: 21) questions the idea of 'home' and 'host':

> …unidirectional – 'migration to' or 'return from' – forms of movement are being replaced by asynchronous, transversal flows that involve visiting, studying, seasonal work, tourism and sojourning, rather than whole family migration, permanent settlement and the adoption of exclusive citizenship.

Migration is, therefore, no longer regarded as a unidirectional process (Pries 1997), but rather as a moving back and forth between the country of origin and the country of destination, or third, fourth countries even.

It has often been argued that the processes and dynamics associated with the transnational migration approach are nothing entirely new. Particularly internal migration, such as the movements see within African societies, has long been discussed in a manner similar the current debates on transnational migration: strong connectedness between migrants and remaining relatives across distances, simultaneous embeddedness in various settings, and a non-definitive decision to move. For the transnational context, Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2004) argue that it has been recognized that migrants have often maintained close links to their countries of origin, and that, therefore, the concept of transnationalism lacks new innovations and ideas. Others criticize the often unclear and ambiguous terminology and definition. For example, the distinctions made between global, transnational, and international are sometimes fuzzy (Ong 1999). In my analysis, I follow Levitt's argument that there is a need to understand transnational migration in the context of globalization. "Changes prompted by migration and globalization mutually reinforce one another" (Levitt 2001: 14). Both processes are intertwined and connected.

Transnational migration processes occur in a globalized world. Hence, these activities cannot be understood without examining global developments, such as changes in labor markets or in legislation. In my study, I use the term transnationalism to describe processes and dynamics of migration across national and continental boundaries. In the following, I briefly discuss some major differences between theories steaming from international migration and transnational migration approaches. Literature on transnational migration does not aim to replace existing migration theories; rather, it complements important insights regarding relations and social networks across national boundaries.

## 5.1.1 Theories of migration

Early migration theories focused mainly on 'push factors' (e.g., unemployment and poverty), which force people to leave their country of origin, and 'pull factors' (e.g., job opportunities and higher living standards), which attract people to a new country.[107] Transnational migration

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[107] The 'dual labor market theory' (also referred to as 'segmented labor market theory') emphasizes the demand side (the receiving context) of migration, and argues that international migration is mainly caused by specific labor needs in modern industrial societies (Piore 1979). Migrants move for higher wages and more secure jobs which are particularly attractive for them, but not necessarily for the local population. This approach explains international migration by focusing on 'pull factors' in receiving countries rather than using 'push factors' as explanatory variables (Massey et al. 1993).

theories also consider the motives for migration, as well as the consequences of international movements, both in the place origin and in the country of destination.

Whereas a number of migration theories, such as the 'neoclassical economic concept of migration'[108] or the 'new economics of migration approach'[109], were almost entirely concerned with the economic aspects of migration, transnational migration scholars concentrate not only on the economic factors, but also take into account the political, social, and cultural aspects of migration. This explains the often interdisciplinary approach of transnational theories.

The 'neoclassical economic approach' argued that the individual migrant is a rational actor who makes his or her own decisions on cost-benefits calculations independent of, for example, family or kin. The 'world system theory', mainly developed by Wallerstein (1974), recognized the structural dependencies between the emigration and immigration contexts, and connected international migration to globalization by focusing on global economic and political inequalities as the main motives for migration.[110] In this theoretical approach, the individual migrant is not regarded as an active agent. In contrast to this concept, the 'new economics of migration theory' argues that the decision to migrate is a collective decision, rather than an individual one. Migration is seen as a strategy employed by a larger unit of people to overcome market failures in their home countries, to gain access to capital, and to reduce risks (Stark & Bloom 1985). According to this view, the emigrants' remittances serve as a family strategy for providing support for non-migrating household and community members (e.g., Stark 1991). This model includes both individual and household characteristics, as well as the structure and source of economic production and earnings. Similarly, the transnational migration approach

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[108] The aim of these theories was to explain causes of international migration. In this regard, it is argued that wage differences and inequality in living conditions are key reasons for international migration. According to the neoclassical approach, the goal of moving between different countries is to maximize benefits and utility (e.g., Lewis 1954, Todaro 1976, Todaro & Maruszko 1987).

[109] Both the 'neoclassical economic migration theory' and the 'new economic theory' conceptualize migration decision as the result of rational economic calculations (Stark & Bloom 1985). If wages and opportunities abroad are higher, international migration offers an attractive strategy for minimizing risks and overcoming capital constraints (Stark 1991). However, in contrast to 'neoclassical economic theory', the 'new economics of migration' focuses on the household or family, rather than the individual, as the relevant decision-making unit.

[110] The 'word system theory' is strongly related to the classic Marxist theory which argues that emigration is the result of capitalist developments, unequal exchange, and dependencies. "…imperialist expansion can provide an outlet for surplus populations, as well as a source of labor during periods of growth in capitalist economies" (Hollifield 1992: 571). Thereby, capitalist developments are linked with social and political changes, i.e., expansions of global markets influence not only economic structures like wages, but have also an impact on social norms and values as well as political developments. Capitalist firms from richer countries are interested in land, raw material, and labor within peripheral regions, which results in migration flows mainly from the less developed south to northern countries (Massey et al. 1993).

argues that a number of people are involved in the decision to migrate, and in the process of migration. Scholars of transnational migration consider the macro, meso, and micro levels of analysis. That is to say, global dynamics, such as international laws (e.g., EU immigration laws) are given equal emphasis in the analysis, as are institutions, such as community, kin or family, and the individual migrant. However, the focus in this approach is on the values, perspectives, and expectations of the people moving, as well as of the individuals left behind. Individuals are regarded as active actors who think and feel, struggle, negotiate and behave in certain ways to achieve life goals, but in response to their surroundings (Boyd 1989, Faist 2000, Glick Schiller et al. 1992, Levitt 2001, Mahler 1999, Portes 1997, Smith & Guarnizo 1998).

The essay collection, "Anthropology and Migration", by Caroline Brettell (2003), offers an excellent example how the macro-, meso-, and micro-level approaches can be combined. Her analysis includes the role of states and institutions, as well as of individuals, households, and communities. The aim of her anthropological research is…

> …to emphasize both structure and agency; it should look at macro-social contextual issues, micro-level strategies and decision-making, and the meso-level relational structure within which individuals operate. It needs to articulate both people and process (ibid.: 7).

As Brettell shows in her work, the transnational migration approach seeks to combine the micro, meso, and macro levels of analysis, while also regarding migration as a phenomenon that is as much cultural as it is economic. Faist (1995: 18) sees the meso level – i.e., in his understanding, transnational social ties and relations – as linking the micro-level theories of migration motives and incentives with the macro-level analysis of migration determinants.

Having briefly situated the broad concept of transnational migration in relation to other migration theories, I will now focus on the individual engaged in the process of migration. In exploring migration from the perspective of the individual, I ask who is considered a 'transmigrant', and what consequences taking on this role has for the individuals themselves, and for the family members left behind.

## 5.1.2 Being a transmigrant

I follow Basch et al.'s (1994: 7) use of the term 'transmigrants' to describe persons who "develop and maintain multiple relationships – familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political – that span (these) border[s]". This includes persons who appear to be 'settled' and would normally be termed 'immigrants'.[111] Thus, transmigrants remain in contact with their countries of origin in various ways, such as by transferring information, passing on contacts, or sending remittances. Of central interest is the social, cultural, political, and economic embeddedness of migrants in more than one society. In "Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places", Hannerz (1996: 8) stresses the increasing interconnectedness in space "as people move with their meanings, and as meanings find their ways of traveling even when people stay put". The migrant is viewed as simultaneously integrated into the society of the host country, as well as in the context of origin (Glick-Schiller et al. 1992, Glick-Schiller et al. 2006, Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004, Pries 2005, Smith 2005).[112]

Based on the criteria described above, the majority of my interview partners might be considered transmigrants. Many Cameroonians living in Germany for several years remain in close contact with their home communities, including their families, their friends, and their business partners.[113] This interconnectness can, for example, be observed in the remittances which Cameroonians living in Germany send home to their relatives. Almost all the interview partners – regardless of whether they were students, asylum seekers, or employees – reported sending remittances to their family members in Cameroon.[114] The reasons given for the financial transfers included: supporting the education or training of younger siblings (e.g.,

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[111] Throughout my study, I use the term migrant in most cases but occasionally refer to transmigrant to highlight the transnationality of certain practices or relations.

[112] Scholarship on transnational migration involves different disciplinary and methodological perspectives, and reacts to the 'new migration patterns' at the end of the 20th century (e.g. Levitt & Jaworsky 2007, Pries 2001, Mahler 1999, Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila 1997). Transnational migration research combines an analysis of migrants' strategies and behaviors in the sending and receiving countries, as well as in other sites.

[113] Transnational migration scholarship has identified social networks that cross borders as crucial for understanding international migration. The importance of long-distance networks for both migrants and non-migrants has been widely documented (Faist 2000, Glick Schiller et al. 1995, Goldring 1997, Pries 2001). Faist (2000: 202) distinguishes three types of transnational social places: transnational familiar connections (reciprocity), transnational circulation (exchange of goods, human capital, information, ideas), and transnational communities (solidarity, collective identity, common symbols), while Vertovec (2001: 575) emphasizes remittances, marriage alliances, religious activities, media and commodity consumption, and home land politics as forms of transnational contacts.

[114] In many African countries, remittances far surpass what the state receives in foreign aid (Nyamnjoh 2005a: 248).

paying for school fees), helping with health care costs, providing assistance in cases of emergency (e.g., funerals or financial difficulties) and/or contribute to special occasions, like weddings or baptism. A 32-year-old male student who has been living for six years in Germany explains:

> I send money as regularly as I can. My younger brothers and sisters depend on my contributions. If I don't pay, they cannot go to school. I want them to receive an appropriate education, so they can achieve something in life. Often I also send small amounts to my mother, so that she has some extra cash when needed.

This statement reflects the interlocutor's integral participation in the family life back home. Despite studying in Germany and being absent for years, he maintains close links with his family in Cameroon by transferring financial means and taking care of particular his younger siblings.

Besides financial transfers, information, practices, and norms are exchanged across national boundaries (Vertovec 2001). Interlocutors told me that they communicate on a regular basis with close relatives in Cameroon. In this way, ideas and experiences are exchanged, and values and social practices are communicated. To remain in close contact with their family members in Cameroon, migrants often rely on modern communication technologies, such as mobiles phones, call centers, or the Internet. In the virtual space of the Internet, the latest news is exchanged: who got married, who became parent, and who dropped out of school. In addition, not only words, but also pictures and videos are shared. The development and advancement of communication technologies – and the simultaneous development of improved access to long-distance transportation – have led to increasing interconnectedness and a greater intensity of exchange between societies of origin and settlement (Itzigsohn et al. 1999).

Thus, it becomes clear that social relations across national boundaries allow Cameroonian migrants to maintain multiple relationships with the context of origin. They transfer financial means and communicate information and ideas. In doing so, transmigrants are – at least partly – embedded into the society of the host country and in the context of origin.

The term transnational migration encompasses not only the maintenance of contacts and networks across national borders, but also the ability to actually move from one country to the other, and, thus, to cross of national boundaries. I will now turn to analyze the role of the

nation-state as an institution that shapes transnational migration. Because Cameroonian migrants' mobility is restricted and constrained by national (and EU) immigration policies, I examine the role of the German nation-state for transnational migration processes.

## 5.2 The significance of nation-states for transnational migration

While some scholars (Appadurai 1996, Sassen 1996) predicted a diminishing importance of nation states, national territories, and national identities; others (Bommes 2003, Levitt & Jaworsky 2007) have found evidence for the increasing relevance of nation states for international migration flows. The latter argued that processes of international migration may even promote nation building, since one main function of nation states is to control and regulate migration. As Gabaccia (2005: 55) argues, modern nations…

…were not built in the absence of human mobility, or on national territories occupied by sedentary persons; instead, the intensity of the mass migrations of the nineteenth century may actually help to explain the intensity of nationalist movements and the focus of national states on ideological nation-building in the years prior to World War I.

Or as Glick Schiller et al. (1995: 59) point out, the age of transnationalism is, paradoxically, a time of continuing and even heightened nation-state-building processes. National boundaries remain important, despite the fact that social life is extended across national borders (Bommes 1999, 2003; Levitt & Jaworsky 2007). Nation-states attempt to protect their citizens and put up barriers against "outsiders" (Smith & Guarnizo 1998: 10). Hence, the nation state remains crucial for an analysis of transnational mobility. Therefore, what follows is a discussion of the significance of the nation-state for transnational mobility.

The significance of the nation-state for transnational mobility has been widely discussed in the literature (Appadurai 1996, Sassen 1996, Bommes 2003). It is often claimed that the nation-state remains crucial or becomes even more significant for some transmigrants. In the case of the EU, citizens of the EU member states are permitted to travel, work, and live within Schengen space, but non-EU citizens increasingly face tighter restrictions on entering and stay

in the EU.[115] Hence, for non-EU citizens, transnational processes are sustained by legal and practical developments. National immigration and integration policy remain crucial for third-country nationals. Non-EU migrants' ability to move is restricted by national borders. The nation-state continues to be important in shaping transnational practices for some migrants through for example, national family migration policy, which differs between EU states. In this sense, Hannerz (1996: 6) talks about an irony "in the tendency of the term transnational to draw attention to what it negates – that is, to the continued significance of the national".

Using the example of Cameroonian migrants to Germany, I demonstrate that the German nation-state remains significant for some transnational migration processes, namely, for migrants from outside the EU and for non-OECD nationals.[116] There is a loosening of borders within the EU, and in this sense national borders within the Schengen space become less relevant or even irrelevant. But, at the same time, more attention is paid to external borders controls, and national state boundaries continue to be decisive for non-EU citizens. In this regard, nation states continue to function as a regulatory instrument particularly for third-country nationals.

For my study on Cameroonian migrants to Germany, I examine the role of the German nation state for international migration. Despite the fact the Germany has a long history of immigration; the country hardly sees itself as 'a country of immigration'. After providing a short historical review of how the German state has dealt with foreigners in the past, special attention is given to the 'Immigration Act', which went into effect in 2005.[117] The investigation of the country's understanding of immigration and integration leads us to an examination of the processes of inclusion of some migrants, and exclusion of others, within the German context.

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[115] For EU-citizens, national borders within the EU have become less important since the European states signed the Schengen Agreement in 1985, which allowed free border crossing between participating countries. The fluidity of borders, however, does not hold true for everyone.

[116] When referring to non-EU citizens, it is necessary to distinguish between those from countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, and those who are not. Non-OECD nationals face stricter controls and regulations than members of the OECD (Miles & Thränhardt 1996: 3). When I talk about non-EU citizens, I refer to non-OECD nationals. I use the terms non-EU nationals and third-country nationals interchangeably.

[117] I started my fieldwork in Cameroon and in Germany in 2005. Therefore, changes in legislation from 2005 onwards are crucial for my study.

## 5.2.1 Germany – a country of immigration?

The title of this section 'Germany – a country of immigration?' is deliberately posed as a question. For several decades, German politicians claimed repeatedly that Germany is "not a country of immigration" even during and after the 'guest worker period'.[118] The government expected the temporary stay of migrants to fill the labor supply gap, and assumed that guest workers would return to their countries of origin when asked (Seifert 1996). Migrants were not supposed to integrate into Germany society. They were thought of as temporary workers who return to their countries of origin after short periods of stay. The idea of the so-called 'rotation principle' (*Rotationsprinzip*), that implies limited settlement of immigrants and their return, had consequences for immigration and integration politics, and for the position of migrants in German society (Hollifield 1992). The very fact that Germany refused to accept the term 'country of immigration' (*Einwanderungsland*), resulted in the absence of a comprehensive national immigration and integration policy that clarified the country's understanding of immigration, and the role of migrants within the German society (Joppke 1999).[119] Although it is now widely accepted that the country needs immigration, a common understanding and recognition of immigration and integration are still lacking.

In order to understand Cameroonian migrants' practices in Germany, the following sections analyze past and current immigration and integration policies in the country. Particular attention is given to Germany's principles and understanding towards foreigners. I explore immigration and integration policies from a historical perspective, focusing on immigration laws in the period after the World War II, including developments in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Subsequently, I examine the Immigration Act (*Zuwanderungsgesetz*) which came into force in 2005 – a time when many of my interview partners arrived in Germany or already lived in the country. The Immigration Act

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[118] Until the introduction of the German Immigration Law in January 2005, some German politicians, mainly from the CDU/CSU, claimed that Germany is not a country of immigration. For example, Günther Beckstein, Minister of Interior of Bavaria, argued that Germany is not a country of immigration and should not become one (Tagesspiegel: 23/07/2000). In a position paper in 2001, the political party CDU/CSU stated "Germany is no classic country of immigration and cannot become one, because of its historical, geographical, and social circumstances". The slogan has become widely known in public debates.

[119] Cohen (2006) calls Germany a 'reluctant country of immigration' compared to, for example, the US, Canada, and Australia which are 'classic countries of immigration'. In his view, immigration in Germany has not historically been a fundamental part of the national identity. Until recently, the country has denied the necessity of immigration. Public perceptions of immigrants have been and still are largely negative.

provides the framework for entry, residence, and integration of third-country nationals (Cyrus & Vogel 2005).

## 5.2.2 Germany's immigration history

Throughout German history, periods of emigration from Germany and immigration into the country alternated. As in other parts of the world, people immigrated to Germany for different reasons. Some expected economic advantages, and were looking for work or business opportunities. Others fled from ecological hardship, political oppression, or persecution, hoping to find security in Germany. However, economic, ecological, political, social, and cultural conditions often interact and provide incentives for migration. For this reason, clear distinctions between various types of migration to Germany can hardly be made.

The 19th and early 20th centuries in Germany were mainly characterized by waves of emigration. In this period, many Germans left for the United States. Of the 45 million immigrants who arrived in the United States between 1820 and 1960, about seven million were from Germany (Martin 1994: 196). The reasons for emigration were primarily of an economic and/or political nature. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, when Germany transformed from an agricultural to an industrial nation, regions like the Ruhr area in the western parts of the country, attracted workers. The so-called 'Ruhr Poles' – ethnically Polish Prussian/German citizens came to work in the coal mines (Bade & Oltmer 2005: 20). In theory, these workers were required to depart when their jobs ended, many of these workers, however, settled permanently in Germany (Martin 1994). The period between 1933 and 1945 was characterized by forced migration, displacement, and expulsion. During the World War II, Germany relied mainly on prisoners of war and forced labor in its factories (ibid.).

Germany's postwar immigration can be divided into three periods: first, the labor immigration of 'guest workers' until 1973 and a subsequent the influx of family members to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), and the recruitment of foreign workers in the German Democratic Republic (GDR);[120] second, the arrival of asylum seekers and 'ethnic Germans' in the early 1990s; and, third, proactive management of migration in the form of the Immigration Act in 2005 (Cyrus & Vogel 2005: 2-4, Sainsbury 2006: 234).

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[120] The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) were founded in 1949. The Wall between those two states was built in 1961. Both German states had different immigration policies.

After the World War II, but particularly since the late 1950s, the FRG attracted immigrants from different countries of origin. West Germany experienced an economic boom and was in need of labor. Therefore, recruitment agreements (*Anwerbeabkommen*[121]) were signed with Italy, Spain, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Morocco, and others. From the late 1950s until 1973, more than 14 million foreign workers, so-called 'guest workers', came mainly from Mediterranean countries to the FRG (Bade & Oltmer 2005: 40). At first, only the workers came. Eventually, they brought their wives and families. The term 'guest worker' (*Gastarbeiter*) expressed Germany's understanding of immigration. Germany viewed itself not as a country of immigration, but rather as a country with a temporarily labor shortage, which therefore needed to recruit foreign workers. These guest workers were expected to return to their countries of origin after several years of working in the German car industry, or in other enterprises of the export industry. In 1973, recruitment was stopped due to the economic recession and the oil crisis (Cyrus & Vogel 2005: 3). Many of the guest workers stayed permanently in Germany, also because by 1973, it was impossible to return to one's home country temporarily and then come back to Germany to work.

Between 1978 and 1985, the GDR recruited foreign workers, mainly from socialistic developing countries. Formal agreements and contracts were signed with Cuba, Vietnam, Mozambique, Angola, and others (Frerich & Frey 1996: 184). Until the mid 1980s, around 30,000 contract workers *(Vertragsarbeiter)* were yearly employed in GDR factories; but after 1986 the number increased significantly, to about 90,000 at the end of 1989 (ibid.: 185). Formally, the basis of these agreements was to stabilize and improve solidarity and cooperation between socialist countries. The reason for the presence of these workers was officially declared to be training in a socialist environment. Temporary work contracts were issued, and averaged between two and five years. Contract workers received the minimum wage of 400 marks per month, on average one third less than East Germans (Müggenburg 1996). They were allowed to transfer part of their salary to their home country. Generally, it can be stated that the residency of foreigners in the GDR was strongly regulated. The GDR government restricted contacts between foreign workers and the native population. The contract workers, mostly Vietnamese, were housed in separate community accommodations (Beier-de Haan 2005: 43), and were thereby kept apart from the general public. They were submitted to a strict rotation

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[121] As a result of these bilateral agreements, foreign laborers were recruited by German state institutions to work in the factories.

system, i.e., they had to leave the country latest after five years. The reunion with family members or the foundation of a family was forbidden. Married men or women had to come alone and leave their spouses and children behind (Bade & Oltmer 2005: 43). Moreover, the creation of a second generation of foreigners was not the intention of the GDR government. For that reason, if a foreign woman became pregnant during her stay in the country, she was either forced to return or had to abort her baby (Feige 1999). Most women preferred an abortion, since to return with a child would have serious financial and social consequences; forced returnees were often ostracized by their families (Baumann 2000).[122]

In 1989, when the Berlin Wall came down, many 'ethnic Germans' (*Aussiedler*) from the former Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc countries moved to both East- and West Germany.[123] According to the German Federal Statistical Office more than two million 'ethnic Germans' came to Germany between 1990 and 2000 (Bommes 2003, Schuck & Münz 1998, Faist 1996).

In addition, large immigrant groups entered the country as refugees and asylum seekers. One of the major reasons why Germany ranked so high as an asylum destination was because the German Constitution provided a subjective right for political refugees. The Article 16a of the Basic Law stipulates: "Persons persecuted on political grounds shall have the right of asylum". It is argued that the "negative reference to the Nazi past is the origin of Germany's unique asylum law…[T]he fathers of the Basic Law, many of them exiled during the Nazi regime, conceived of an asylum law that went far beyond existing international law as a conscious act of redemption and atonement" (Joppke 1997: 274). Because of Germany's generous asylum law and the fall of the Berlin Wall, the country became one of the major asylum destinations worldwide. "In the early 1990s Germany was a major country of immigration, second only to the US in the number of newcomers" (Sainsbury 2006: 234).

During the 1990s, Germany received the largest absolute number of asylum applications, mainly from Asia and Africa (Morris 2000). In 1992, nearly 440,000 asylum seekers, the highest number on record, was registered. Among these only 4.25% actually qualified for

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[122] In addition to contract workers, the GDR allowed foreign students, mainly from socialist developing countries, to come to East Germany to complete their studies. Moreover, refugees who fled fascist or military dictatorships, for example Chileans were permitted to enter (Frerich & Frey 1996: 185).

[123] *Aussiedler* are repatriates of German origin from the countries of the former Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact who have been allowed to settle in Germany under a special program. They receive their citizenship on the basis of ethnicity. Hence, ethnic German repatriates are German in the legal sense of the Basic Law (www.zuwanderung.de, last accessed 8 June 2009).

asylum (German Federal Statistical Office). In 1993, the constitutional right to asylum was severely restricted, and a number of legislative and administrative measures made access to the asylum procedure more difficult and reduced social and juridical rights during the procedure.[124] Consequently, the number of asylum applicants decreased from a total of 438,191 in 1992, to around 112,700 in 1994 (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees).[125] Moreover, as the number asylum applications declined, fewer asylum seekers were granted recognition as refugees. The 'recognition rates', or the proportion of asylum seekers actually recognized as refugees, declined continuously. While in 1995 around 9% of asylum applicants were recognized as refugees, in 2007 less than 1% of applicants were determined to be eligible for asylum (www.efms.de, Federal Ministry of the Interior).

In 1993, when the limitations on the right to asylum were inscribed in article 16a of the Basic Law, Germany also introduced the so-called 'third safe country regulation' (*Drittstaatenregelung*). The 'third safe country regulation' made applying for political asylum in Germany considerably more difficult. Since then, those asylum seekers entering Germany from a so-called 'safe third country', i.e., a country that also offers asylum, can no longer invoke the basic right of asylum. As a result of this, asylum seekers are now required to travel to Germany directly. This regulation often means people must take advantage of 'illegal opportunities' to enter Germany, since the country is surrounded by safe third countries (Morris 2000). The creation of a common asylum system – the Dublin Convention – is regarded as an integral part of the so-called harmonization process of asylum policies in the EU. Cross border police cooperation and the enforcement of the Schengen information system allows participating countries to prevent multiple asylum applications by the same person. That is, they can each check whether an immigrant has already applied for asylum in another state (what was sometimes called 'asylum shopping'[126]), and if so, they can send the applicant back without a hearing and deny the asylum claim. The intention was to conjointly control and manage non-EU immigration to the Schengen area.

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[124] During the procedure of asylum seeking and later, if they have only a toleration of stay, applicants receive social welfare according to the Law on Welfare for Asylum Seekers.

[125] In 2006, only 30,100 asylum applicants were registered (German Federal Statistical Office).

[126] The term 'asylum shopping' is used to describe the phenomenon where an asylum seeker applies for asylum in more than one EU member state.

In line with the harmonization process with European standards, Germany introduced a new citizenship and nationality law in 2000.[127] This 'Nationality Law' (*Gesetz zur Reform des Staatsangehörigkeitsrechts)* initiated reforms concerning immigration, residence, and citizenship in Germany. In addition to the principle of descent (*jus sanguinis*), the principle of birthplace (*jus soli*) was introduced for the acquisition of citizenship. These changes brought German immigration law into line with the policies of most other European countries.

Five years later in 2005, the New German Immigration Act (*Zuwanderungsgesetz*), which is essentially made up of the Residence Act (*Aufenthaltsgesetz*) and the Act on the General Freedom of Movement for EU Citizens (*Freizügigkeitsgesetz*), came into force. The Residence Act provides a framework for the entry, residence, return, and integration of third-country nationals. The Freedom of Movement/EU Act (*Freizügigkeitsgesetz*) has transposed the provisions on the freedom of movement of EU citizens and their family members. It is argued that, with the introduction of the Immigration Act, Germany finally acknowledged that it is a country of immigration. Germany changed from being an "informal immigration country to a formal immigration country" (Beier-de Haan 2005: 48). However, most changes occurred in the area of integration of long-term legal migrants in Germany, but there were only a few changes relating to the immigration of third-country nationals to Germany (Cyrus & Vogel 2005).

In the following, I discuss the Immigration Act, with a focus on the regulations pertaining to entry into the country and residence for non-EU citizens in Germany. This information will help us to understand the immigration regulations and restrictions relevant for Cameroonian migrants entering and living in Germany.

## 5.2.3 The Immigration Act (*Zuwanderungsgesetz*)

The Immigration Act translated EU migration directives into German law. In concordance with broader EU harmonization efforts, the most important change of the Immigration Act of 2005 was the reduction of the number of residence permit status from five to two: the (temporary) residence permit (*Aufenthaltserlaubnis*) and the (permanent) settlement permit (*Niederlassungserlaubnis*). Decisive in the new legislation is now the purpose of residence

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[127] The introduction of a new citizenship and nationality law in 2000 supports my argument that the nation state continues to play a significant role for regulating immigration and integration.

such as education or training, employment or self-employment, subsequent immigration of dependents or humanitarian grounds or political reasons, or reasons based on international law (Beier-de Haan 2005: 47). Holders of a temporary residence permit have the right to apply for a permanent settlement permit if certain requirements have been met, such as living legally for more than five years in Germany, obtaining employment, having sufficient income, and knowledge of German. Following, I explore immigration and integration policies regarding entry, stay, and work allowance for workers, students, asylum seekers, and family members from non EU countries.

According to the new regulations, immigration has been made easier for highly skilled workers and self-employed immigrants. Highly qualified persons are granted permission to work and reside permanently in Germany if they can prove they have a concrete job offer.[128] In 2000, Germany introduced a 'Green Card' program for information technology, which facilitated the entry and residency of IT specialists. However, the new provision of the Immigration Act is not limited to IT specialists; self-employed persons who invest at least one million Euros in the German economy and create at least 10 new full-time jobs receive permanent residency (§ 21 Immigration Act).

The recruitment stop of 1973, however, continued to apply to unskilled or low-skilled immigrants (Beier-de Haan 2005: 48). For them, access to the German labor market and the issuing of work permits depend on the kind of residence status. Hence, regulations for employment do not apply equally to all migrants. This fact has created a hierarchical "system of inequalities" (Morris 2000: 226). The nationality of an immigrant and the reason for coming to Germany are crucial for any job application. In contrast to EU nationals, who are subject to European law, non-EU nationals must adhere to strict national regulations when applying for a job, even when holding a residence permit. Migrants from outside the EU are only approved to take up employment in Germany when no German citizen, no EU citizen, and no other employee with preferential treatment (e.g., third-country nationals with longer permission to stay in Germany) can be found (Morris 2000, Sainsbury 2006). The system is referred to as the 'Priority Principle' (*Vorrangsprinzip*) (Federal Employment Agency). These regulations, which came into force with the introduction of the Immigration Act in 2005, make labor

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[128] As highly qualified professionals count specialists and executives earning a yearly minimum salary of 84,000€ in Germany. Bauer (1998: 9) argues that immigration policies in Germany allow the selection of immigrants according to economic criteria, but as a result of manifold special regulations, the actual selection of migrants is nationality, rather than by economic criteria.

migration to Germany and the issuing of work permits for unskilled and low skilled non-EU citizens almost impossible.

Foreigners may be granted residence permits for the purposes of studying or applying for a place at university.[129] This includes preparatory measures for a course of study. If the student is admitted to a German university, the residence permit is issued for two years, and is normally extended until the end of the study, up to a maximum of 10 years. Foreign students are entitled to work up to 90 days or 180 half-days per year. They are also allowed to engage in part-time student employment without approval from the Federal Employment Agency (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit*). According to the Immigration Act, foreign graduates of German universities are entitled to remain one additional year in Germany to look for a job. In this year, they are obliged to seek a job commensurate with their academic degree. If they fail to obtain a work contract within the given year, they are obliged to leave the country (Section 16 § 4 Immigration Act).

The new legislation stipulated in the Immigration Act offers only limited options for non-EU citizens to legally enter and stay in Germany. Not only are the possibilities for coming restricted, but even for those who do come, few can actually work. Of the few remaining pathways that are open, entry on the basis of humanitarian grounds continues to be one of the most important (Cyrus & Vogel 2005: 8). According to the Immigration Act, non-state persecution (e.g., membership in a particular social group) and gender-related persecution in line with the Geneva Convention are now recognized as reasons for granting asylum (Beier-de Haan 2005: 48). However, the consequences of the restrictions in the early 1990s (e.g., Asylum Compromise) had a powerful effect on the number of asylum applications in Germany. While more than 150,000 people applied for asylum in Germany in 1996, just 30,000 applied in 2005 (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees). In the years 2005 and 2006, less than 1% of all asylum seekers were recognized as refugees (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees). Even so, for some asylum seekers a deportation to their country of origin is impossible. This may be because they lack documents of identification or because they refuse to disclose their country of origin. In other cases, the country of origin denies the admission (Morris 2000: 235). These refused asylum seekers are generally granted a temporary suspension of deportation, also referred to as 'toleration' (*Duldung*) or as 'exceptional leave to remain'. A tolerated residence

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[129] Germany has been attractive for foreign students, mainly due to its high academic standards and the lack of university fees.

does not constitute a legal residence status. It does not remove the foreigner's obligation to leave the country, but merely postpones its enforcement (Cyrus & Vogel 2005: 14). The status of toleration is generally extended for short periods, but can last up to several years: so-called 'chain toleration' (*Kettenduldung*). At the end of 2005, more than 200,000 foreigners on toleration were in Germany; some of them for longer than 10 years (ibid.: 17). Migrants who have been granted a temporary suspension of deportation live with the constant fear of being deported, which could happen any day. Access to the labor market is also as restricted as for asylum seekers. Cyrus and Vogel (2005: 17) explain that formal employment and a work contract are almost impossible to obtain for 'tolerated immigrants'.[130] The state provides a minimum of support for 'tolerated migrants' equal to that of asylum seekers (§ 1 Abs. 1, 4 AsylbLG). That means that mandatory requirements, like nutrition, accommodation, heating, and clothing are covered by vouchers and payment in kind. In addition, people on toleration receive 40.90€ per month to cover their additional expenses.

The Immigration Act has been widely criticized, mainly by human rights organizations and refugee and religious associations, for its restricted immigration policy, which provides declining options for legally entering, staying, and working in Germany particularly for non-EU citizens (Cyrus & Vogel 2005: 14). For third-country nationals, entry on the basis of humanitarian grounds and family reunification, i.e., reunification with spouses and children under the age of 16, remain the two most important gateways to immigration to Germany (ibid.: 8).[131]

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[130] In November 2006, the Minister of Interior in Germany approved the 'New Right of Residence' (*Neues Bleiberecht*) which sets new regulations for long-term 'tolerated migrants'. According to the new law 'tolerated foreigners' are permitted a residence permit if (to the date of the 17th November 2006):
  – they have been officially living in Germany for at least eight years without interruption (families for at least six years),
  – they are officially employed and can provide a work contract, and
  – the living costs are secured without support of social benefits programs.
If all requirements are fulfilled, the residence permit will be issued for two years. The New Right of Residence for 'tolerated migrants' has been criticized for being insufficient. In addition, the interaction between the residence permit and the requirement of a work contract has been judged as unfair, especially in times of high unemployment rates in Germany. It is paradoxical to ask the most excluded group of foreigners to provide a work contract when, at the same time, their access to the labor market has been highly restricted. Many employers are not able or willing to employ a person on 'toleration' when they cannot be sure whether he or she will be deported in a short future. Hence, requirements are too restrictive for many 'tolerated foreigners' to fulfill, and they remain excluded.

[131] The Immigration Act brought no changes concerning the regulations regarding family reunification. The opposition parties of 2005 CDU/CSU aimed at limiting the entry of children to those under 12 years, but the proposal did not make it into the legislation (Schmid-Drüner 2005: 199).

The descriptions of German past and current immigration and integration policies demonstrate that transnational migration to Germany is shaped and constrained by both international (mostly EU-law) and national laws. Migration processes "do not just happen; they are produced. And migrations do not involve just any possible combination of countries, they are patterned" (Sassen 1998: 56). The Immigration Act has been conceptualized in accordance with EU regulations that intend to close or at least control all external borders, while easing travel and trade inside the EU for those with legal residence. The 'Fortress Europe' (*Festung Europa*) policy is intended to facilitate the exclusion of undesired immigrants, especially unqualified or low-qualified persons; and the inclusion of needed and wanted foreigners, such as highly qualified migrants (Cyrus & Vogel 2005: 30-1). In the following section, I further examine processes of inclusion and exclusion of migrants within the German context by taking into account the distinctions between the nation and welfare state. In doing so, I examine the consequences of inclusion and exclusion on migrant's social rights and benefits. This part of the study is crucial to understand why particularly third-country nationals aim to obtain permanent residency in Germany.

## 5.2.4 Processes of inclusion and exclusion in Germany

"The immigrant as 'atopos' without a place,
displaced bastard between citizen and real outsider."
(Bourdieu 1991: 9)

In analyzing the processes of inclusion and exclusion of migrants in Germany, it is particularly interesting to consider the differences between the welfare state and the nation state. While some migrants, such as asylum seekers, are at least partly included into the German welfare regime, they are not legally recognized by the German nation state. Sainsbury (2006) examines immigrants "formal incorporation into the welfare systems" in order to understand the interplay between welfare regimes, forms of immigration, and immigration policy regimes in shaping immigrants' social rights. For the German case, Sainsbury concludes that Germany's conservative welfare regime, which is mainly based on work, contradicts the exclusionary

immigration regime, which is largely founded on lineage (ibid.: 231).[132] The rights and limitations of the nation state and the welfare state overlap, and even contradict each other in some cases.[133]

The inclusion or exclusion of persons in or from the welfare regime depends not only on the distinction between citizens and non-citizens or EU and non EU-nationals, but is, in practice, much more complex.[134] Germany's legislation hierarchically differentiates between various levels of legal status. Asylum seekers and 'tolerated migrants', for example, are partially included into the German welfare system, despite lacking legal integration in and recognition by the nation-state. On the one hand, they receive social benefits from the welfare regime. On the other hand, they are not legally recognized by the German nation.

In line with other scholars like Bommes (2003), I argue that the type of legal status is crucial for inclusion in both systems: the welfare regime and the nation-state. Rights and access to work, education, health care, and social benefits depend strongly on the status of an immigrant in Germany; i.e., the question of whether a person seeks asylum, obtains a temporary suspension of deportation, acquires a student visa, is granted a temporary residence permit, or has arrived in Germany with a family reunion visa is pivotal in determining the benefits and rights the individual will enjoy.

Transnational movements cause tensions between the nation-state and the welfare state, because some migrants are included in the social system, but in many cases excluded from the nation-state.[135] Bommes (2003: 49) emphasizes this point:

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[132] The case of Germany is especially interesting since there is a strong relationship between social rights, employment rights, and residence permits, compared to other European countries, like Spain and Italy. In Germany, it is extremely difficult or almost impossible to work without a long-term residence permit (Seifert 1996: 86).

[133] Processes of inclusion and exclusion of migrants within the German welfare state, as opposed to the nation-state, are described in detail by Hammar (1990), Morris (2000), Soysal (1994), Sainsbury (2006), and Bommes (2003).

[134] The German legislation grants non EU-nationals different rights according to the purpose of stay and hence, to the type of legal status (e.g. temporary suspension of deportation, asylum seekers, temporary residency, settlement permit etc.). Therefore, the main difference is no longer between citizen and non-citizen, but is rather a continuum with degrees of membership distinguishing citizens, legal residents, and 'illegal migrants'. The result is, as Morris (2002: 6) explains, "a hierarchy of statuses with varying attendant rights, not easily captured by any single political dynamic".

[135] Guest workers in the 1960s and 1970s were included within the social insurance system of the welfare state (Bommes 2003, Hollifield 1992), but they were never included in the nation-state as full members of the German population. That is to say, beginning with the guest worker period, immigrants were partially included into the welfare state and social policy system, i.e., they received pension funds or were entitled to accident insurance, but they were not recognized as citizens by the nation-state, and were therefore not legally integrated.

…the tendency to copy the distinction between inclusion and exclusion into the distinction between the nation (people) on the one hand and the immigrants (foreigners) on the other hand is structurally based on the historical claim of national welfare states to regulate access to the social realms of the economy, law, education and health.

Bommes (2003: 48) argues that inclusion in or exclusion from the economic, educational, legal, or health systems did not necessarily correspond to the political distinction of belonging and non-belonging to the nation.[136] The welfare state system to some extent counteracted the idea of the nation state and its implications of belonging and legal integration (Heckmann & Schnapper 2003: 74).

The case of Nelson, a 31-year-old Cameroonian asylum seeker, illustrates the difficult situation of being partly included in the German welfare system, but of having no rights to, for example, education or employment:

> I arrived two years ago from Cameroon where I used to study biology at the University of Yaoundé. I came to Germany because there were no chances for me in my country. I was a member of a minor opposition party who protested against the leadership of Biya. Because of my political affiliation, life was difficult for me. That's why I decided to leave my country and complete my education abroad. In Germany, they put me in this asylum home. I receive a minimum of social benefits from the government to buy food and clothes. But the major problem is that they do not allow me to study or to work. As long as there is no decision on the asylum claim, they keep me locked away and give me no rights at all. It may take up to four or five years until the authorities decide on my case. What do they expect me to do until then?

Asylum seekers and 'tolerated migrants' obtain the lowest legal status in Germany, and, hence, receive only the absolute minimum of social services and rights. Overbeek (1995: 15) explains

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[136] Calavita's book "Immigrants at the Margin" (2005), explores the dynamics of exclusion of immigrants in Italy and Spain. The author describes how many non-EU immigrants in Southern Europe are welcomed as workers ('economic citizenship'), but rejected as community members ('social and political citizenship'). Calavita discusses the different forms of exclusion: economic marginality, inadequate housing, lack of access to health care, etc. Sassen (1999: 85-87) makes a similar point, describing 'unauthorized yet recognized' migrants who have no formal status or rights, but who practice the duties associated with citizenship, such as raising a family, schooling children, holding a job.

that "asylum seekers find themselves trapped in a whirlpool of inclusion and exclusion". Only once a migrant gains long-term legal residency can he or she be included in both systems – the welfare regime and the nation-state – since migrants with a settlement permit are allowed to receive equal social benefits as German citizens. Hence, the aim is to obtain a settlement permit in Germany.

In addition to the law, cultural differences play an essential role in the exclusion and inclusion of migrants in Europe. In Germany, as in many other European countries, legal and economic considerations are not the only reasons for excluding some immigrants and including others, but also racist conceptions of otherness marginalize and discriminate against immigrants (especially those originating from Africa and the Indian subcontinent) (Miles & Thränhardt 1995: 4).[137] In addition to the restrictions placed on non-EU nationals seeking to obtain legal status in Germany, sub-Saharan Africans are all too often viewed and treated as "undesired immigrants" (ibid.: 3).

Stolcke (1995) emphasizes the exclusion of 'Third World immigrants' in Europe. In her view, these migrants are regarded as a "threat to the national unity of the host countries because they are culturally different" (ibid.: 1). Especially migrants from the South are viewed in the public opinion as "undesirable, threatening strangers" (ibid.: 2). Seabrook (2000: 22) explains that "the overwhelming black poor are being the most discriminated against by Western politicians keen on ensuring that the advantages gained by their peoples are maintained". The notion of migrants as strangers, who are physically present but not part of the society, has been also described by Brubaker (1992). Media and stakeholders ask for protection from the 'others'. Currently the 'others' attempt to enter the 'Fortress Europe' from the South – African immigrants are increasingly feared, discriminated against, and rejected. Bhabha (1998) argues that "it is rather the protection from than the protection of refugees and asylum seekers, no amount of integration appears enough to qualify immigrants for citizenship". Thomas and Lee (1998: 2) cite an immigrant in Germany: "it doesn't matter if you have read Goethe, wear *Lederhosen* and do a Bavarian dance; they will still treat you as an immigrant".

As it became clear, the distinction between EU and non-EU citizens, as well as between non-EU nationals with a different legal status, has created a hierarchical system of rights to

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[137] For a historical discussion of racism towards Africans in Germany, see Bechhaus-Gerst and Klein-Arendt (ed. 2003). A critical debate of German racism can be found in the collection "AfrikaBilder", edited by Susan Arndt (2001).

mobility, employment, education, health care, housing, family reunion, and social security (Morris 2002). Bhabha (1998: 713-4) speaks in this context of the "Kafkaesque restrictions" for third-country nationals in Europe.

As outlined in previous sections, the nation-state continues to play an important role for transnational migration of non-EU nationals into the Schengen space. In the case of Cameroonian migration to Germany, migrants are increasingly confronted with discriminatory structures designed to prevent them from entering, remaining, and working in Germany. Exclusionary regulations, both on the EU as well as on the national level, aim to restrict the immigration and integration of poor African migrants, who are often perceived as a threat (Vasta 2008). Having more theoretically explained the importance of German and EU laws and policies for immigration and integration of third-country nationals, I turn now to the process of transnational mobility between Cameroon and Germany. I will analyze how these regulations play out migrants' lives. To do so, I have to take a step backward to the start of the migration process in Cameroon. I ask potential migrants about their preferred country of destination and I explore the paths of emigration from Cameroon to Germany, before analyzing the processes of immigration of Cameroonians to Germany.

## 5.3 Choice of the country of destination

When asking aspiring migrants in Cameroon about their choice of the country of destination, many simply said "Europe", or they told me that they would like to go abroad, but did not specify the country. Terms like *Europe*, *abroad*, *overseas*, or *the West* are often used interchangeably. Those who specified the desired country of migration most frequently named France, Germany, United States, United Kingdom, Belgium, and Luxembourg. These responses correspond to the few statistical data available on international migration of Cameroonians. For them, France has been and still is the most frequent migration destination. According to statistical information of DELSA and the OECD database (2004), 36,000 Cameroonians were registered in France in the year 2000. The second most favored destination is the United States, with 12,400 Cameroonians living in the country in 2000. Germany comes in third, with 9,311 Cameroonians registered in 2000. In the United Kingdom in 2000, there were 3,200 Cameroonians registered. Other countries of destination for Cameroonians in the year 2000 were Switzerland (2,500), Belgium (2,400), Canada (2,400), and Italy (2,300)

(DELSA/OECD database 2004). However, these statistics have to be treated with care, since people born in Cameroon are likely citizens of other countries now. Some Cameroonians who left their country are no longer observable in the OECD numbers on immigrants because they have become citizens elsewhere.

Generally, Anglophone Cameroonians preferred countries like UK, the US, and Germany, but not solely, since many of them also speak French fluent, and might therefore consider a French-speaking country of destination. French-speaking Cameroonians often wished to live (temporarily) in France, Belgium, or Luxembourg. These results confirm the assumption of Adepoju (1991: 209), who explains that the direction of migration has always been to countries that have historical or political links to the country of origin, e.g., African Francophone countries to France.

Further, my interview results document a close connection between the choice of destination and the places where family members and acquaintances are living. The migration of friends and relatives creates incentives for migration, and determines the direction of movements ('chain migration'). Hence, existing transnational social networks are decisive for the choice of country of destination. If a potential migrant already knows somebody in Europe, he or she is likely to follow this person. Indeed, the country itself is not the crucial factor, but rather the fact that previous contacts and relations exist in a certain country. Out of the 62 respondents in the survey "International migration", which I conducted in Cameroon, almost 50 answered that, in case of an international migration, they would follow the pathways of their relatives, friends, acquaintances or business partners living abroad. A 21-year-old Cameroonian artist living and working in Foumban explained: "My aunt is living in Spain. For this reason, Spain seems to be the right place for me. She will help and support me in the beginning". Of those who knew already somebody in their country of destination, many spoke of aunts, uncles, siblings, friends, business partners, and cousins; and, in one case, even a father who was living abroad. For most of my interview partners, the country of destination is a secondary question. The desire to leave Cameroon ranks first, and then comes the question of where to go.

In cases, where informants replied that Germany would be their preferred country of destination, I asked why they chose Germany.[138] The following motives were emphasized:

- the high quality of Germany's tertiary education, which is also still free of charge and relatively easy to access,
- the opportunity to learn German in school in Cameroon as a precondition for university enrollment in Germany,
- the strength of the German economy and technology, which was connected with hopes of finding work and earning money in their country of destination,[139]
- historical ties with Germany,
- and antipathy against the former colonial power France,[140] and
- the existing private transnational networks between Germany and Cameroon.

In sum, different factors are decisive for the choice of the country of destination. My interviews revealed that transnational networks play a crucial role in the decision about where to migrate. Existing contacts to family members, friends, and acquaintances abroad facilitate the choice. Potential migrants are likely to follow people they know. A second criterion for the choice of destination is language and historical ties. Cameroonians are likely to migrate to a French- or English-speaking country. Some Cameroonians still learn German in school, and thus consider Germany as a country of destination. Special links still remain to the former colonial powers of France, Great Britain, and Germany. In addition to considerations of language and historical ties, Germany was regarded a favorable place for migration due to its good educational system, strong economy, and advanced technology.

Many Cameroonians want to migrate to Europe. However, the paths for emigration are increasingly restricted. The few remaining options are difficult to access, and visa application procedures are both time- and money-consuming.

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[138] It might be that many respondents mentioned Germany as their choice of the country of destination because I am German citizen. However, according to other research, such as the study by Séraphin (2000: 200), Germany is among the most desired countries of migration for many Cameroonian citizens.

[139] The national newspaper, "Cameroon Tribune" reported on August 4, 2006: that "Cameroonians are among the most respected foreigners in Germany". The article talks also about images of Germany: "Say the word German in Cameroon and what immediately comes to the minds of most people is endurance and hard work".

[140] Many interlocutors considered France to be too influential on Cameroon's economy and politics. Moreover, it was conjectured that too many Francophone Africans migrate to France, so the chances of obtaining an adequate job position are shrinking. Better chances are assumed in Germany, particularly for academics, technicians, and other professionals.

## 5.4 Paths of immigration

Understanding transnational migration flows must start with a description of pathways of immigration. In addressing this issue, I posed the following questions: What are the possibilities for Cameroonians to leave their country and enter Germany? What are the preconditions for an international movement?

Basically, there are only three main ways to emigrate from Cameroon to Germany:

- – with a tourist visa,
- – with a residence permit, i.e., a long-term visa, such as student visa, business visa, or family reunification visa, or
- – through undocumented entry.

An application for a *tourist visa*, which is valid for a three-month stay in Germany, requires that the applicant can prove to have sufficient funds for the intended period of stay, and will not claim any public funds in Germany. In addition, the applicant's willingness to return to Cameroon is considered when deciding whether the tourist visa will be issued. As I was told, being married, having children, and having a job contract facilitate the process. In addition, informants reported that, without an invitation from a person living in Germany, either a German citizen or a migrant with residency, it is nearly impossible to get a tourist visa.

For *long-term visas* of more than three months, and involving a temporary residence permit in Germany, the application process is even more difficult than to filing an application for a tourist visa, as reported by my interviewees. Or as Ofoji (2005: 34), explains "getting a visa to Europe or America is like a camel passing through the eye of a needle". In cases involving an application for a long-term visa, the German embassy and consulate work closely with respective authorities in Germany, such as the Federal Employment Agency, the Civil Registry Office, or the Immigration Office. Final approvals are only given once the Immigration Office in Germany has agreed. The final decision on whether the visa will be issued or not may take up to several months.

Most potential migrants I talked to applied for a *student visa* at the embassy in Yaoundé. Persons who wish to study in Germany are required to apply personally for the visa. The

following documents are needed for the visa: a passport, a national identity card, a birth certificate, a photocopy of the registration in a German university, a photocopy of a registration in a language class in Germany, a photocopy of a university entrance diploma (*baccalaureate*), and any proof of higher education studies. In addition, they need to prove that they will have at least 610€ per month at their disposal once they are in Germany (*prise en charge*). Thus, for the first year in Germany alone, they need to provide a blocked savings account in Germany with 7,320€ in credit to pay the monthly costs.[141] Therefore, it is necessary to open an account at a German bank, which, according to informants, is not always easy, mainly because of administrative difficulties and problems of coordination between Cameroon and Germany. In addition, two sponsors need to state their affidavit of support by submitting pay slips, account statements, and business licenses. Several Cameroonian students reported that they had a hard time finding sponsors and convincing them to provide financial support. Besides the means of subsistence, the language certificate *Zertifikat Deutsch*, which is provided exclusively by the Goethe Institute in Yaoundé, has to be presented at the embassy. Bruno, a 24-year-old student, who is now studying economics in Munich, took two years of German at a private school in Yaoundé in order to apply for the student visa. For each level, his uncle paid 110,000 CFA (170€). Moreover, applicants need to be enrolled in a German university and pay visa fees of 20,000 CFA (30€). In addition to these costs for opening a bank account in Germany, financing a language course, and taking an exam, and the visa fee, interview partners reported that they often had to pay bribes to finally achieve their goal of receiving a student visa. I was told that some people had to pay bribes to the police officer at the entrance of the consulate. Many students complained about the complicated application procedure, the dilatoriness of the authorities, and the long queues in front of the embassy. The procedure for applying for a student visa to Germany – including taking German classes, finding sponsors, enrolling in a German university, and opening a bank account in Germany – can take up to several years. Meanwhile, applicants have to fear that their visa request will be rejected without any explanation. For many, this means the end of their migration plans, since they will not find new sponsors who invest in them.

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[141] Accumulating more than 7,000 € just for the deposit for the German bank seem to be a lot of money, considering that the gross national income (GNI) per capita in Cameroon was 1,080 $ in 2006 (http://devdata.worldbank.org/AAG/cmr_aag.pdf, last accessed 07 May 2009).

According to my interview partners, the application for a *family reunification visa* is even more complicated and time-consuming than the procedure for a student visa. In order to apply for a family reunification visa, the applicant has to appear personally at the embassy. The German embassy in Cameroon works closely with the foreign office of immigration in Germany in handling applications and verifying the authenticity of documents. Family reunification visas grant a residence permit for up to three months in Germany. Subsequently, the foreign office of immigration in Germany has to extend the visa.

Several interlocutors living and working as artists in Foumban (West Province of Cameroon) reported that, in order to make a request for a *business visa*, it is essential to have business partners in Germany with whom they maintain business contacts. The German business partner must write an official invitation to his counterpart in Cameroon. In addition to having an invitation letter, the applicant needs to provide a confirmed hotel reservation, proof of funds (e.g., travellers cheques covering a minimum amount of 100€ per day of the intended stay, plus receipts or credit card and bank statements), three original business licenses, and bank account statements. A business visa is valid for an uninterrupted stay of a maximum of 90 days in Germany.

Visa procedures in many African countries have become increasingly complex and laborious. James Song writes in an article on "Visa Denial Diplomacy" in The PostNewsLine.com (http://www.postnewsline.com/2006/08/visa_denial_dip_1.html#more, last accessed 3 September 2008):

> Obtaining a visa today in Cameroon has become a Herculean task due to the traumatic process one has to undergo. When you visit one of the major embassies like that of the United States and United Kingdom and see the distasteful manner Cameroonians are treated, you ask yourself if this is happening in their own land or elsewhere.

The article documents and criticizes the rules that apply to those seeking a visa to go abroad, and particularly denounces the arbitrariness of authorities, who have discretion to decide each case. Several interview partners in Cameroon told me that they themselves or their relatives had applied for a visa to Germany (often student or tourist visa), but the visa request was denied without any reason given. One dialogue partner, whose friend had just had his student

visa application denied, told me that the arbitrariness of the authorities caused irritation and frustration. He said that, even if two people apply under the same conditions and with the same documents, it does not mean that both of them will receive a visa. One could argue that visa restrictions 'exclude' Africans before even leaving the African continent.

Due to these highly restrictive visa application procedures and the arbitrariness of the authorities, some potential migrants were thinking about alternative ways of entering Europe. Interlocutors told me that the complicated visa application procedure, together with the widespread corruption, can sometimes make the provision of correct documents impossible. Some Cameroonians are willing to do anything that it takes to migrate. Some would even resort to presenting falsified documents and using 'illegal means' to achieve their migration goals.

Clearly, leaving Cameroon to migrate to Germany is becoming increasingly difficult, and, in many cases, impossible. After leaving Cameroon and traveling, often by plane, to Germany, migrants are confronted with Germany's immigration and integration policies. In the following, I provide some statistical background information on the numbers, ages, genders, and durations of stay of Cameroonian migrants in Germany, and in Berlin. In a second step, I outline categories of Cameroonian migrants in Germany based on their reasons for staying and their type of legal status. This categorization helps us to understand how Cameroonians manage to enter and stay in Germany. In addition, it provides a basis for a further analysis of the strategies and practices used by Cameroonian migrants in Germany to acquire long-term residency.

## 5.5 Cameroonian migrants in Germany

According to the German Federal Statistical Office, around 150,000 sub-Saharan African migrants lived in Germany in 2006.[142] The country receives most sub-Saharan African migrants from Ghana, Nigeria, and Cameroon. With an official estimate of 14,414 Cameroonian men and women in 2006 (Federal Statistical Office 2006), Cameroonian immigrants are thus just behind Ghanaians (20,587) and Nigerians (16,189). Interestingly, this figure has increased in the last five years, albeit slightly, whereas the number of other sub-Saharan immigrants has declined. In 1992, almost 26,000 Ghanaians and 20,000 Nigerians

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[142] I use throughout the statistics of the year 2006, my main period of research.

were registered in Germany, compared to only 4,000 Cameroonians. The number of Cameroonians has more than tripled within the last 10 years, while figures of Ghanaians and Nigerians in Germany have remained stable or even decreased. One explanation might be that Cameroon experienced a delayed economic crisis in the mid-1980s, while in other West and Central African countries, the economic decline began in the 1960s. In addition, Cameroonians in Germany are largely students, whereas the great majority of Ghanaians and Nigerians came between the late 1970s and the early 1990s as asylum seekers, when Germany still had relatively liberal procedures.

**Table 7: Registered Cameroonians in Germany in comparison with migrants from Ghana and Nigeria**

|          | **2002** | **2003** | **2004** | **2005** | **2006** | **2007** |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Cameroon | 12242    | 13514    | 13834    | 14100    | 14414    | 14650    |
| Ghana    | 23451    | 23963    | 20636    | 20609    | 20587    | 20392    |
| Nigeria  | 16183    | 16956    | 15280    | 15544    | 16189    | 16747    |

*Source: German Federal Statistical Office 2007*

Official statistics on Cameroonian migrants in Germany do not contain any information on undocumented migrants living and working in the country. It is estimated, however, that the 'real number' of African migrants in Germany is about 50% higher than statistical reports suggest (Lentz 2002). This would mean that around 20,000 Cameroonian migrants are living documented or undocumented in Germany.

The gender distribution among Cameroonians in Germany is about one-third women (5,500) and two-thirds men (8,900) (Federal Statistical Office 2006). Cameroonian migrants in Germany, as well as in other European migration destinations – like France, Belgium, and the UK – are predominantly young (between 25 and 35 years old, according to official statistics). Concerning the age structure, the comparison of Cameroonians with migrants from Ghana and Nigeria is particularly interesting. Cameroonian immigrants in Germany are on average six

years younger than the Ghanaians and Nigerians living in the country. Ghanaians in Germany are on average 34 years old, Nigerians are 32, and Cameroonians are 27 (Federal Statistical Office 2006).[143] I assume that this difference is due to the fact that Ghanaians and Nigerian live on average five to 10 years longer in Germany than Cameroonians. They arrived in larger numbers in the early 1990s, while Cameroonians started to come at the end of the 1990s and in early 2000. Between 1995 and 2000, around 1,000 newcomers from Cameroon were registered each year (1995: 4,513; 2000: 9,311) (Federal Statistical Office 2000). In 2006, the average duration of stay for Ghanaians and Nigerians was 12 and eight years, respectively, while the average length of stay for Cameroonians was five years (Federal Statistical Office 2006). Another explanation for the age difference could be that Cameroonians, who often come as students to Germany, are therefore younger than other migrant groups. In Berlin, where I conducted most of my fieldwork, statistical data on Cameroonians generally follow the national trends. The registered number of Cameroonians in Berlin has also increased.

## 5.5.1 Cameroonian migrants in Berlin

Berlin is often referred to as the 'city of immigration'.[144] Of the around 3.3 million people who lived in Berlin in 2006, every eighth person, or 14% of residents, had no German citizenship. The number of migrants in Berlin almost doubled from 1980 to 1993 (Statistical State Office Berlin 2006). Since the mid-1990s the number of persons without German nationality has remained quite constant at around 460,000. According to the State Office of Statistics of Berlin, three-quarters of all foreigners living in Berlin originally come from another European state. Most of them live in the districts Wedding, Kreuzberg, and Neukölln, where also the majority of my interview partners lived. In Wedding, every third person has a foreign nationality.

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[143] It should be noted that this age information is the average age of registered migrants in Germany. The data does not allow for any conclusion about the average age of migrants in Germany, since undocumented migrants are not registered and are hence not taken into account. I assume that undocumented migrants are younger than registered migrants because they have not yet gone through the time-consuming process of legalization.
[144] See Berlin's official web page: http://www.berlin.de/lb/intmig, last accessed 20 September 2008.

**Map 2: Districts of Berlin**



Source: http://www.berliner-bezirke.de, *last accessed 26 April 2009.*

In line with national trends, Ghanaians, Nigerians, and Cameroonians constituted the largest groups of all sub-Saharan Africans in Berlin. In 2006, migrants from Ghana were, with around 2,000 registered persons, the largest group in Berlin, followed by Cameroonians (1,288) and Nigerians (1,163). As Table 8 illustrates, the number of registered Cameroonians in Berlin has increased continuously in recent years.

**Table 8: Registered Cameroonians in Berlin**

| Year | **1999** | **2000** | **2001** | **2002** | **2003** | **2004** | **2005** | **2006** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number | 1019 | 1117 | 1152 | 1197 | 1288 | 1371 | 1382 | 1394 |

*Source: Statistical State Office Berlin 2006*

Of these 1,394 Cameroonians registered in Berlin in 2006, 919 were male and 475 were female. This corresponds to the general gender distribution of Cameroonians in Germany.[145]

## 5.5.2 Categories of Cameroonian migrants in Germany

As already mentioned, in order to legally enter Germany, every Cameroonian citizen must have a visa or a residence permit. This can either be a tourist or business visa or a long-term visa, such as student or family reunification visa. Cameroonians who enter Germany without a visa arrive undocumented. This section is an attempt to categorize Cameroonian migrants in Germany according to their paths of entry. A clear differentiation between these categories is not possible. Instead, migrants often use a combination of different forms of status and residency, as the section "Insecure status" will explain. In the following, I distinguish migrants according to their purpose of stay and hence, to the type of legal status between:

- students – the largest group of registered Cameroonians in Germany,
- family members – Cameroonians on a temporary residency due to 'familiar reasons',
- asylum seekers – the third largest group of registered Cameroonians in Germany,
- Cameroonians on a tourist visa,
- Cameroonians on a business visa, and
- undocumented immigrants.

### *Students*

In the winter term 2005/06, about 5,300 Cameroonians were registered at a German university or a college of higher education (DAAD 2006). This means that more than one-third of all Cameroonians documented in Germany are enrolled as students. Each year, around 1,000 new students from Cameroon enroll (ibid.). Of all the sub-Saharan African countries, Cameroon sends by far the most students to Germany. The high levels of education achieved before

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[145] These official statistics do not tell us about undocumented Cameroonians living in Berlin. The journal "Africa Positive" (2005, no. 16, p. 40) estimates the number of non-registered sub-Saharan Africans in Berlin to be around 3,000, but does not give information about nationalities. I assume that the number of Cameroonians actually living in the German capital is higher than what the official statistics report.

migration might be one reason why numerous Cameroonians are enrolled at German universities.[146]

**Table 9: Students from Cameroon, Ghana and Nigeria in German institutions of higher education**

| Year | Cameroon | Ghana | Nigeria |
|------|----------|-------|---------|
| 1997 | 1795 | - | - |
| 1998 | 2291 | 403 | 584 |
| 1999 | 2851 | - | - |
| 2000 | 3466 | 353 | 664 |
| 2001 | 4003 | - | - |
| 2002 | 4309 | - | - |
| 2003 | 4709 | 735 | 632 |
| 2004 | 5111 | 698 | 630 |
| 2005 | 5521 | 441 | 541 |

*Source: DAAD 2006*

Taking into account all foreign students in Germany, Cameroonian students constituted the ninth-largest group in 2005 (DAAD 2006). Compared to other sub-Saharan immigrant groups in Germany, Cameroon is exceptional because of its high proportion of students.[147] Particularly

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[146] In a personal conversation, Parfait Eloundou-Enyegue, Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology at Cornwell University, explained why Cameroonians have such high rates of enrollment in schools and universities. First, there is less gender discrimination in education in Cameroon compared to other West and Central African countries. Second, Cameroon is slightly more urbanized than many of the countries in the region, and, third, it is possible that Cameroon could (in some way) benefit from it bilingual status, with each side striving to be at its best.

[147] In her unpublished article, "Gender Pattern Change in a Cameroonian Diaspora Community" Moira Luraschi finds similar results for Italy, where the majority of registered Cameroonians obtain a residence permit for

in comparison to Ghana and Nigeria, it becomes evident that Cameroon sends ten times more students to Germany.

Table 10 shows the gender distribution among Cameroonian, Ghanaian, and Nigerian students in Germany. Female students constitute around half of all Cameroonian students. In contrast, 22% of the students from Ghana and 24% of the students from Nigeria enrolled in Germany universities are women. I may therefore conclude that both Cameroonian women and men enter Germany mainly as students, while Ghanaians and Nigerians seem to have found different ways of entering and staying in Germany, but may also have different reasons for migration and different aims.

**Table 10: Male and female students from Cameroon, Ghana, and Nigeria in Germany in 2005/06**

|  | **Men** | **Women** |
|---|---|---|
| Cameroon | 3791 | 1730 |
| Ghana | 363 | 78 |
| Nigeria | 437 | 104 |

*Source: DAAD 2006*

In the winter term 2005/06 almost 70% of all Cameroonian students took courses in the fields of technology, natural sciences, or engineering. Most female Cameroonian students in Germany were enrolled in natural sciences, languages and cultural studies, law, economics or social sciences; while male Cameroonian students preferred mathematics, natural sciences, and engineering as fields of study.

After arriving in Germany, many students need to finance their studies by themselves, while at the same time they are expected to send money home. Jerome, 27 years old, who arrived on a student visa three years ago, said:

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studying at a university, compared to Senegalese and Ivorian migrants, who mainly work undocumented as hawkers and lack higher education.

When my parents and I agreed that it would the best for me to go to Germany to complete my education, I had to convince my relatives to support me in my migration plans. Some were cautious at the beginning, but then decided to give me money. Now that I am living in Germany, they expect help from me. But it is hard, to study, work for my own living, and financially care for my relatives. Often I have to work night shifts and study during the day. It is not easy.

Most of the Cameroonians students I talked to work in addition to their studies – often on construction sites, as temporary assistant in supermarkets or in restaurants or hotels. Long work hours or personal difficulties in Germany can prolong the time it takes to complete their studies, which might lead to a refusal by the authorities to extend the student visa that has to be renewed every two years. Some students fail to complete their studies, and hence forfeit their right to remain in Germany.

## *Family reunification*

Another possible option for entering and staying in Germany is to apply for a family reunification visa or to marry within Germany.[148] In 2006, 3,426 Cameroonians possessed temporary residency for familiar reasons (Federal Statistical Office 2006). That means Cameroonians who have the right to temporary reside in Germany due to familiar reasons, constitute the second-largest group of all Cameroonian migrants in the country. Familial reasons can include Cameroonians who enter Germany on a family reunification visa, or migrants who obtained a temporary residency due to familial reasons, such as marriage. Official statistics do not provide any information on the number of Cameroonians who enter Germany with a family reunification visa.

During my field work in Cameroon and in Germany, I observed five cases of Cameroonian men who married a German woman in Cameroon, and who subsequently applied for a family reunification visa to join their wife in Germany. The process of application until the visa is issued can take up to one year. The story of Daniel provides an example of the challenges involved in the application procedure:

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[148] See Chapter 6.

Daniel, aged 34 in 2006, came to Germany in the mid-1990s as an asylum seeker. Despite the fact that his claim for asylum was denied, he remained 'tolerated' in the country. Several attempts to find a German wife and receive temporary residency failed. In 2004, the foreign office refused to renew his toleration status. Daniel stayed undocumented. A short time later, he met a German woman who promised to marry him. Because of his undocumented status, a marriage in Germany was not possible. The couple traveled to Cameroon, where they got married in his home village in the Northwestern province. Soon after the wedding, his wife returned to Germany. She was self-employed and had three children by a previous man to take care of. I met Daniel in Bamenda as he was desperately waiting for the family reunification visa that would make a legal re-entry to Germany possible. After more than six months waiting, he received the visa. Daniel is currently living with his German wife and her children in Berlin.

In my further analysis of the binational marriage procedures and processes of family reunification, I explore the legal framework for marrying binationally in Germany and give examples of my fieldwork on how Cameroonian migrants attempt to circumvent exclusionary structures and regulations.

## *Asylum seekers*

> Being an African in Germany is difficult.
> Being a refugee in Germany is difficult.
> Being an African refugee is twice as hard.

*Source: http://inspiredcomm-unity.blogspot.com/2009/02/podiumsdiskussion-positive.html*, last accessed 3 April 2009.

Parallel to the increase in the number of Cameroonian students attending German universities, the number of asylum applications from Cameroonians has been rising in recent years, despite the fact that recognition rates are almost zero. Each year, around 600 Cameroonians ask for asylum in Germany, but less than 1% are granted asylum (Federal Statistical Office 2006).

A comparison of asylum applications from Cameroonians in other countries reveals that Germany receives the most applicants from Cameroon, together with France, Belgium, the UK, and the Netherlands.[149]

**Table 11: Asylum applications of Cameroonians in different countries**

|  | **Cameroonians** | **Year** | **Source** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Germany | 514 | 2005 | Federal Office for Migration and Refugees |
| UK | 290 | 2005 | UK Home Office |
| UK | 360 | 2004 | UK Home Office |
| UK | 505 | 2003 | UK Home Office |
| UK | 615 | 2002 | UK Home Office |
| UK | 380 | 2001 | UK Home Office |
| UK | 355 | 2000 | UK Home Office |
| France | 614 | 2004 | www.migrationinformation.org |
| France | 806 | 2003 | www.migrationinformation.org |
| France | 639 | 2002 | www.migrationinformation.org |
| France | 401 | 2001 | www.migrationinformation.org |
| France | 320 | 2000 | www.migrationinformation.org |
| Netherlands | 332 | 2001 | www.migrationinformation.org |
| Netherlands | 221 | 2000 | www.migrationinformation.org |
| Netherlands | 99 | 1999 | www.migrationinformation.org |
| Belgium | 506 | 2004 | www.migrationinformation.org |

*Source: Statistical State Office Berlin 2006*

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[149] The number of asylum applications in the EU has been falling for the past five years. In 2006, some 192,000 asylum applications were filed in all 27 EU member states, compared to over 670,000 applications in 1992. With almost 27,900 applications filed last year (2006), the UK was ahead of France (26,300), Sweden (24,300) and Germany (21,000) (EUROSTAT 2007).

In 2004, 717 Cameroonian asylum cases were decided. In only two of these cases, asylum seekers were granted asylum and received a temporary residence permit. Nineteen asylum applicants could not be sent back for some reason and obtained 'temporary suspension of deportation' status. In total, 585 applicants were denied asylum without any explanation, and 111 were formal decisions, i.e., the asylum seeker did reject his/her application or another EU country was responsible for this person, or it was a follow-up decision and the person had applied for asylum before (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees). Joseph, a 28-year-old asylum seeker, complained about the confusing and often contradictory asylum regulations in Germany:

> On the one hand, German politicians say that people who are persecuted because of their nationality, their race or their political position are suppose to be able to obtain the right to asylum and be allowed to remain in Germany. On the other hand, in practice, they deny asylum to everybody who is not half-dead when arriving.

Although the chances of recognition are almost zero, Cameroonians continue to claim asylum in Germany. One reason might be that the asylum process 'buys time' to look for alternative paths to long-term legalization. As Oliver, a 26-year-old asylum seeker from Western Cameroon, states:

> I know that they [the authorities] will never accept my asylum claim. You know, in Cameroon there is no war and therefore, they do not recognize you, no matter what. I need to use my time as asylum seeker to look for other ways to become legal in Germany.

The asylum procedure follows a strict order: application for asylum; several interviews; distribution to reception centers[150], and, subsequently, to asylum homes; more application hearings, and so on. The asylum process can take up to five years or longer. Meanwhile, the so-called 'residence obligation' (*Residenzpflicht*) restricts the movement of asylum seekers to their administrative district (articles 56 to 58 of the law governing the asylum procedure in

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[150] All asylum seekers are required to be housed in a reception center, regardless of whether they have family already living in Germany or not (Schwarz et al. 2004: 132).

Germany (*Asylverfahrensgesetz*).[151] Here they are lodged in 'asylum homes' (*Asylbewerberheime*), which are often situated far outside of cities and towns.[152] Conditions in these homes are described by my interview partners as poor, dire, and miserable. Reaching there by public transport is both time-consuming and complicated, and often there are only a few buses a day. As one Cameroonian woman reflected, "The government gave us houses in the forest to show its citizens that we are not like them". Rooms are shockingly small.[153] Bathrooms and kitchens need to be shared, which is no easy feat when people from more than 20 different nations are living together. Private life is hardly possible. Additionally, asylum seekers are often given vouchers for foods, clothes, and cosmetics which can only be exchanged in certain supermarkets.[154]

Asylum seekers from different African countries call themselves *aduro,* literally translated, 'to suffer', and referring to the hard living conditions in asylum homes. Grace, 28 years old, describes the desperate situation in the asylum home:

> The worst part of all is being bored all the time and having nothing to do. No task. Every day is like the other. We are not allowed to educate ourselves or to work. We don't have any contact with Germans. A normal life is impossible.

Only minor asylum seekers are allowed to attend school. An apprenticeship or training is not possible due to the employment law. The residence obligation and the prohibition on apprenticeship and employment complicate the situation of asylum seekers. Above all, interviewees reported that there is no way to attend a German language course. Thus, most asylum seekers do not speak German, and must rely on a translator every time; they receive documents from the Immigration Office or in case of a medical emergency. Several asylum

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[151] The African organization *Voice*, which was originally founded by Nigerian and Liberian asylum seekers in Germany, pleads for abrogation of the residence obligation. The *Voice* and other associations like *No Borders*, the *Brandenburger Flüchtlingsinitiative*, and the *Berlin Antiracist Initiative* consider freedom of movement as an essential human right.

[152] For a detailed description of the socio-economic conditions (housing, health, education, work etc.) in asylum homes in Germany, see Nsoh (2008), a Cameroonian political scientist and former asylum seeker.

[153] Some asylum homes offer only six square meters per room. Families usually have to share one room, whereas single adults are required to share rooms and facilities (Schwarz et al. 2004: 133).

[154] The German welfare state provides social benefits for asylum seekers, but since 1993, the rate has been set roughly 20% below the standard minimum welfare provision (Morris 2000: 233). The monthly pocket money is around 40€ per person aged 15 and above, but varies depending on the district.

seekers reported that they were suffering psychologically from these inhuman conditions in the asylum homes. A 32-year-old Cameroonian man stated:

> They allow us to stay in this small room all day and night. It is hard for me. I feel like in a prison and there is nothing to do. I studied at the university in Buea and now I don't even have the chance to go to school or to work. Sometimes I feel like going mad, because there is hardly any hope in the near future.

Interviewees stated that they often feel like criminals, locked up far away from the German society and living in prison-like conditions. Asylum homes constitute isolated spaces, and this isolation was often mentioned by interviewees as especially depressing. In Brandenburg, the project 'Refugees Emancipation' initiated by asylum seekers attempts to improve the quality of life in asylum homes by setting up Internet cafes.[155]

According to the UNHCR, a refugee status will be granted to people who are persecuted because of their religion, nationality, membership in a social group, or their political orientation (www.unhcr.de/rechtsinformationen/asyl-in-deutschland.html, last accessed 05 March 2008). People who leave their countries because of poverty, drought or natural disasters are officially not considered refugees. However, paragraphs and regulations can be interpreted, and the so-called non-state persecution is construed in different ways. Officially, refugees cannot return to their country of origin, while migrants can. Obviously, the interpretation on the part of authorities plays a major role in deciding each individual case. Who is regarded as persecuted? Who cannot return because he or she is in danger? Only people who can show credibly that they are being persecuted have a chance of obtaining refugee status. Interlocutors told me that the fact that they originate from Cameroon was enough to make them ineligible for recognition. For that reason, some Cameroonians felt obliged to conceal their country of origin, and pretend to come from a recognized conflict area, like Sierra Leone, Sudan, or Togo. However, in other cases, 'true life histories' were labelled as false by the authorities. Hence, asylum seekers are under pressure to tell their story or create a life history so that it finds 'German acceptance'. In this regard, "credibility is the most important thing…when the credibility is damaged, you hardly have any chance" as one of my interlocutors declared.

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[155] Wolf E. Blaum and I helped the chairman of Refugee Emancipation to organize computers and printers for the Internet cafes.

Authorities attempt to discover the identity of the asylum seeker by carrying out language analysis.

Some Cameroonian asylum seekers obtain a 'temporary suspension of deportation' once the asylum claim has been rejected. However, people are only temporarily 'tolerated', which leaves them in permanent fear of deportation. In addition, rights to education and employment are strongly restricted. According to the 'New Right of Abode' (*Neues Bleiberecht*), from 2007, individuals who have been 'tolerated' for eight years and families who lived on 'toleration' for six years in Germany receive a temporary residency for two years if they can provide a work contract. These new regulations did not apply to my interview partners yet, and it is in any case almost impossible to obtain a work contract in Germany while being on 'toleration'.

The German government, in line with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), promotes and finances a reintegration and emigration programs for asylum seekers, refugees, and denied asylum seekers: Reintegration and Emigration Program for Asylum Seekers in Germany (REAG) and Government Assisted Repatriation Program (GARP). These programs are designed to provide financial support to (denied) asylum seekers who are willing to return to their countries. The financial assistance depends on the country of origin. In the case of Cameroon, adults receive initial aid of 200€ and children under the age of 12 years receive 100€ (IOM, Germany, www.iom.int/germany/downloads/REAG-GARP-Programm%202009_Merkblatt%20kurz.pdf, last accessed 8 May 2008). However, special conditions apply to each individual case. During my field work, I did not encounter a single case of Cameroonian asylum seekers participating in the program.

## *Tourist visa*

A tourist visa, which allows a legal stay of up to three months, is another option for entering Germany.[156] There are no statistical information on how many Cameroonians enter Germany on a tourist visa.

The applicant for a tourist visa has to prove that he or she can finance his or her stay in Germany. A host who is living in Germany must agree to take full responsibility for all costs,

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[156] A tourist visa as a ticket of immigration has a long tradition. As early as in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Spanish and Portuguese traveled with tourist visas to Germany in order to look for work (Holert & Terkessidis 2006: 41).

including fees for possible medical treatment. In principle, due to a decision of the European Council, a travel insurance policy with an indemnity limit of at least 30,000 € is necessary for entering all countries within the Schengen space. Another important criterion for obtaining a tourist visa is evidence of the willingness to return to Cameroon, and of the likelihood of a return to the home country. Each application is checked and approved separately. Tourist visas can be denied without any explanation, which, according to my informants, frequently occurs. Several of my interview partners have experiences with inviting family members to Germany. Some told me that the procedure for applying for a tourist visa is complicated and nerve-racking, but that, in the end, their mother, father, or a sibling was able to visit them. Meanwhile, others had negative experiences, and were not able to receive visitors from home. A 29-year-old Cameroonian woman with a temporary residence permit in Germany explains:

> My mother applied three times for a tourist visa. We provided all necessary documents. She really wanted to come to see me for only one month. We have not seen each other in more than four years. They [the authorities] refused each time without any explanation. Can you imagine how I felt? At the moment we are not trying again, maybe I can go home next year or so.

Interlocutors stated that they were annoyed by the arbitrariness of the authorities, who have the right to decide whether they issue a visa or not. The procedure was often lacking in transparency. While some applicants were rejected without any explanation, despite the fact that they could provide all the necessary documents and meet the obligatory criteria, others received the visa with less effort.[157] I was told that applicants who had traveled to Europe before have good chances of obtaining a tourist visa. The same holds true for people who can produce a work contract in Cameroon, or who are married and have children in their home country. In these cases, the authorities assume that the applicant will return.

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[157] For the Soccer World Cup in Germany 2006, Ghana qualified. The country received 10,000 tickets for its supporters. However, only few fans could come to Germany since they required a tourist visa which was only issued to those with enough money and who could prove their willingness of returning, i.e., Ghanaians without a formal employment did not obtain a visa because it was feared that the person would not return. Many Ghanaians were not able to support their soccer team in Germany because of these restrictions (http://www.afrika-start.de/artikel-185.htm, last accessed 14 April 2008).

## Business people

I assume that the number of Cameroonians entering Germany on a business visa is relatively small. Again, there is no statistical information on how many Cameroonians enter Germany on a business visa.

In Cameroon, I conducted interviews with artists who told me that they travel frequently between Germany and Cameroon on a business visa. These artists travel to Germany in order to sell their local products, like sculptures, jewellery, or handcrafts. In addition, they trade and buy consumer goods to sell in Cameroon, such as mobile phones, computers, or DVD players. Interviewed artists stated that they do not attempt to stay in Germany. Because they are able to obtain business visas, it makes more sense to travel between Germany and Cameroon in order to earn money. A 35-year-old interview partner, who trades handicrafts, explains:

> I have very good business relations to Germany. My German partners are very satisfied with me and my products. So from time to time, maybe twice a year, I travel there to do business, but that's enough for me. I do not want to stay there, also because my business relies on me being in Cameroon.

I have been told that there are also cases in which people have arrived with a business visa and did not return, but instead started working at a company of a relative or friend in Europe. However, according to my interview partners, these are exceptional cases. Moreover, the granting of business visas to Cameroonian citizens is rare compared to student or tourist visas.

## Undocumented migrants

As the previous descriptions demonstrate, it is difficult for Cameroonians to legally enter, stay, and work in Germany. For that reason, some migrants from Cameroon and other non-OECD countries rely on 'illegal activities' to achieve their migration goals. Several authors emphasized the difficulties of using the term 'illegal migrants'.[158] A person cannot be illegal, only his or her current status or activities can be regarded as illegal or contrary to regulation (Koser 2005). In my study, I refer to migrants without residency in Germany as

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[158] The following studies emphasize the problematic of illegality in Germany: Alt (1999, 2004), Anderson (2003), Cyrus & Vogel (2005), and Lederer & Nickel (1997).

'undocumented migrants'.[159] We must also distinguish between 'undocumented entry' and 'undocumented residency'. In addition, a migrant may have arrived in Germany legally and obtained residency, but work undocumented or without permission to work.

Undocumented migration can be caused by:

- entering a country or crossing borders without the consent of the authorities;
- crossing a border in a seemingly legal way but using false documents or using legal documents in a false way;
- staying in a country after the expiration of a legal status, for example, expiration of tourist visa (cf. Heckmann 2004: 1106).

It is hardly possible to estimate the number of undocumented Cameroonians living in Germany, since there is no information on the immigration and emigration of undocumented migrants (Lederer & Nickel 1997).[160] Alt (1999, 2004) estimated the number of migrants without residence and work permit in Germany at around one million people. Cyrus's estimations (2004) suggest that there are up to one and half million undocumented persons in Germany, with the largest concentration in the capital city of Berlin. In contrast, Lederer (2004) estimates only around 100,000 people without residency in Germany.

Living and working undocumented in Germany forces migrants to find ways of dealing with this insecure and unsafe situation.[161] Interview partners told me that it is important to not attract the attention of Germans, and particularly of authorities. They reported on their attempts to behave as inconspicuously as possible. In Germany, the police have the authority to stop people in public and ask for their identification. Cyrus (2004: 17) notes that, particularly for

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[159] In the current literature, different terms are used to describe 'illegal migrants': 'irregular' or 'unauthorized'.

[160] Concerning problems of estimating the number of undocumented migrants in Germany, see Vogel (1999).

[161] The studies of Alt (1999, 2003), Anderson (2003), Cyrus & Vogel (2005) and Lederer & Nickel (1997) describe the situation of undocumented migrants in Germany. Research in this field is still in its explorative phase, and the question of how immigrants from different countries of origin develop strategies to deal with German immigration and integration policies remains largely unanswered. In addition, the "European Forum of Migration Studies" (EFMS) at the University of Bamberg focuses on 'illegal migration', particularly the problem of informal labor markets in Germany. The "Institute for Migration and Integration Studies" (IMIS) at the University of Osnabrück examines international migration developments and the consequences for respective societies. Bade and Bommes address the relation between migration and illegality. Particularly interesting is the diploma thesis of Benjamin Franken, who developed a board game called *Unter uns* ('Among us'), in which players assume the role of undocumented foreigners in Germany. On their way to legalization, they need to work in the informal sector or buy faked documents. The connected web page is called: "No passport, no fun" – www.keinpasskeinspass.de, last accessed 11 July 2009.

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African migrants, the risk of being controlled is high because of their appearance. Theodor, who arrived with a tourist visa two years ago and who has not yet found a way to legalize his status, stated: "I am trying to be invisible and to behave like everybody around me". There is a need to blend in and avoid attracting attention. For that reason, migrants who live undocumented in Germany stay away from large gatherings and rarely organize in public. In addition, they shy away from hanging around in parks or train stations, and usually dress in European style. Living undocumented in Germany has consequences for almost all areas of life, be it access to housing, education, employment, or health care.

Most undocumented Cameroonians I talked to live with relatives, friends or fellow countrymen. It is hardly possible to rent a flat without obtaining any papers. On the one hand, they were happy to have a place to stay, but on the other hand, they talked about many conflicts with their 'roommates'. In some cases, undocumented migrants were forced to pay an extra rent because the owner of the apartment claimed to be afraid of police controls, and wanted some extra money as a form of security.[162]

While finding housing is problematic, finding a job is just as difficult because the German labor market is strictly regulated, and frequent police controls are not uncommon. However, Cameroonian men without residency commonly work on construction sites or in restaurants, while Cameroonian women attempt to earn money as cleaners, maids, or as eldercare nurses. Interlocutors reported that the most common way to work without papers is either by possessing fake ID cards, or by using the passport and insurance card of a fellow countryman.[163] One of my interview partners told me about the practice of working with the identification documents and work permits of others:

> Many migrants are working with papers of their friends who look similar to them and who have a permanent residence permit. The Germans cannot distinguish between us. For them we all look the same.

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[162] Alscher et al. (2001: 40) provide an excellent description of the housing situation for undocumented migrants in Berlin. He speaks of an "accommodation business", where undocumented migrants are forced to pay overpriced rents.

[163] Vasta (2008: 10) reports that renting or lending documents and identities cards to compatriots is another way of being able to work.

As in the case of housing, working with 'borrowed' documents may cause problems and conflicts. It is a common practice that, in exchange for using a passport, a work permit, and an insurance card, those who actually work, have to give part of their salary to the owner of the documents. In two cases, I was told that the workers never received their salary. The 'paper owners' kept it for themselves. Renting or borrowing documents and papers might lead to exploitation among compatriots.

The documents of fellow country men are also used in cases of illness. Insurance cards are shared when it is necessary to see a doctor.[164]

Migrants without residence permit are in a vulnerable position. Therefore, in searching for housing, work, or in case of an emergency, social networks are important, and an essential means of survival, as a young Cameroonian woman from the area around Bamenda states:

> Those, who do not have any papers, need networks and connections; otherwise it is hard to survive. Particularly newcomers are provided with information, help and support in difficult situations. These networks often consist of a group of people from the same area or who speak the same language.

Migrant networks play an important role in managing the circulation of social capital. For example, compatriots may help in finding accommodation, in searching for employment opportunities, or in case of an emergency, like sickness (see also Vasta 2008). Among Cameroonian migrants in Germany, these networks often consist of people linked through kinship, friendship, and community or ethnic ties. However, as already mentioned, these networks not only provide solidarity and support, but are often also hierarchically structured. Dependencies and control are not uncommon within these relationships (Mahler 1995: 222-6).

The last section was an attempt to categorize Cameroonian migrants according to their ways of entering the country and their legal status in Germany. These classifications are not fixed. Transitions between different types of status and residence permits are common, even between legal and undocumented residency. Calavita (1998: 531) notes that "boundaries between legal and illegal are porous and in constant flux, as people routinely move in and out of legal status". In the following, I explore the many degrees of legality and illegality.

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[164] The situation of undocumented migrants from South America in Berlin is described by Huschke (2009).

## 5.6 Insecure status

> Immigration law creates and recreates an excluded population and
> ensures its vulnerability and precariousness by blurring the boundaries of
> legality and illegality to create grey areas of incertitude
> (Calavita 1998: 530).

Legality and illegality are often intertwined processes. The areas between being officially registered, working with faked or borrowed documents, and being defined as undocumented merge in many cases (see also Vasta 2008). Clear-cut definitions are nearly impossible. There are fluid transitions between areas of legality and illegality (see also Levitt 2001, Vasta 2008).[165] Migrants need to alternate between legal and undocumented status and situations. Menjivar (2006) describes this 'in between status' as "liminal legality", which expresses the temporary nature of the condition and its ambiguity. As mentioned before, some Cameroonian migrants need to rely on so called 'illegal means' to enter and stay in Germany, such as faked or false documents and identities. Vasta (2008: 3) found that migrants have developed innovative identities and cultures of resistance around papers and documentation in order to work out ways of managing discriminatory structures set up by the state. Migrants are forced to adjust to the respective legal situation. As the Ewe (an ethnic group in the southern parts of Togo) proverb says: "You change your steps according to the changes in the rhythm of the drum". If the law changes, migrants need to change their strategies and practices in order to fit in. Most of my informants were very well informed about the current immigration, residence, and employment laws. They appeared to be extremely flexible actors. For them, it is essential to be aware not only of legal changes and new restrictions, but also of newly available options. Only migrants who know the respective laws and regulations are able to develop practices to deal with them, to find ways of legalization, and to avoid the trap of being defined as 'illegal'. Some Cameroonians become undocumented when their claim for asylum is denied, and they are supposed to be deported. Others leave asylum homes before the asylum procedure has been

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[165] I will not go into detail in the literature on migrant illegality. Several authors have discussed the issue for the context of Germany: Heckmann (2004), Stöbbe (2000), Lederer & Nickel (1997), Alt (1999), and Cyrus (2004).

completed because they know already that their chances of being recognized are almost zero. Some told me that they could not stand the situation in the asylum homes anymore. They preferred to live with friends, work undocumented, and search for other options to legalize their status. In an interview, the head of one asylum home in Brandenburg explained:

> It happens quite often that asylum seekers simply leave and don't return, but the authorities don't mind since then they don't have to count them as a denied asylum seeker anymore. It counts as 'uncontrolled leave' and the state saves social benefits.

Other migrants arrive legally to Germany on, for example, a tourist or a business visa, overstay the three-month period, and live undocumented in the country. Students can also become undocumented migrants when, for example, their student visa expires or when they drop out of university, and thus their student visa is not renewed.

In interviews, interlocutors used the term 're-legalization' to describe the change from a temporary undocumented situation to a legal status. Because of the constant insecurity of a temporary permit, the primary goal for most Cameroonians in Germany is to acquire permanent residency. Only with a permanent settlement permit are the chances of finding adequate employment realistic. A long-term legal status would allow them to achieve their migration goals, i.e., to earn enough money to support the family or to set up their own business in Cameroon. An asylum seeker remarks: "Germany offers a lot of opportunities, but only to those who possess permanent residency".

However, the paths for acquiring permanent residency in Germany are very limited for Cameroonian migrants. In 2007, only 1,275 of 14,650 registered Cameroonian migrants had a permanent right to remain in Germany, compared to more than 10,000 migrants who were only allowed in Germany temporarily.

While permanent residency is much desired by many Cameroonians and other sub-Saharan Africans, informal talks and interviews revealed that only a few Cameroonians aim for German citizenship. In addition to the fact that the application for German citizenship is complicated and time-consuming, citizenship does not offer additional benefits for migrants who plan to return in the long run. Mirabel, a 32-year-old woman from Buea, who received a settlement permit two years ago by marrying a German man, explains: "With the German citizenship, I only gain the right to vote and I would not know anyway who of the German politicians to vote

for". According to the German Federal Statistical Office, in 2006, only 423 Cameroonians (261 men and 162 women) became naturalized in Germany. I do not assume that the number of naturalizations is likely to increase in the coming years.

## 5.7 Conclusion

In concluding the chapter, I come back to the title: "The structural framework of transnational migration". As proposed in the introduction of my study, I am interested in the relationship between structure, networks, and agency in the context of transnational migration from Cameroon to Germany. This chapter helped me to explore the role of the state (macro level) – in this case, the German nation-state – in transnational migration. The question of how the state sets up structures to exclude unwanted migrants from immigrating and integrating has been asked. I made the argument that the legal constraints of the nation-state on some migrants are not emphasized enough in transnational migration research. My study demonstrates the continuing importance of national policies and legislation for marginalized migrants like Cameroonians. For them, national policies regulating entry, stay, and work allowance continue to be decisive.

By exploring Germany's immigration history focusing on the Immigration Act of 2005, I showed how the German legal framework determines who is entitled to enter the country, and under what circumstances. My analysis offered evidence for the fact that there are stratified rights for different migrants, depending on their nationality, type of legal status, purpose of stay, etc. The result is a classificatory system that structures legal statuses and connects them to certain rights. Germany's immigration and integration policy allows some migrants to enter, and provides them with residency and work permit, whereas it excludes others from coming, and an even greater number from staying and working.

The last part of the chapter elaborated paths of emigration out of Cameroon and immigration into Germany by looking at different categories of migration: students, family members, asylum seekers, tourists, business people, and undocumented migrants. It argued that all categories of migrants face restrictive and discriminatory modes of regulation. If Cameroonian migrants are allowed to enter Germany, they receive only temporary residency, be it as student or family member. Many migrants are only allowed to work part-time, if at all. As a consequence, they are confronted with fluid transitions between 'legality' and 'illegality'. As

described, different forms of illegality exist, ranging from informal employment to borrowing documents and identities. Because a temporary residency allows only limited options to stay and work, and hence to achieve personal and family goals, Cameroonian migrants aim to obtain permanent legal residency. The following chapter examines how Cameroonian migrants develop ways to gain long-term legal status, including by marrying a German spouse or bearing a German child.

# VI        LEGALITY, MARRIAGE, AND PARENTHOOD

Since hunters have learned to shoot without missing,

birds have learned to fly without perching.[166]

Since the early 1990s, Germany has issued a number of immigration laws and policies to further prevent and control immigration of mainly non-EU citizens.[167] The grounds for non-EU citizens to enter and stay legally in Germany have been whittled down to basic human rights, such as the protection from persecution and prosecution (asylum), the protection of the nuclear family (e.g. family reunification), and the right to freely choose a spouse (binational marriage).[168] Therefore, Cameroonian men and women must increasingly resort to a combination of asylum application and family formation processes to obtain legal status, and thus receive a work permit.

My research identifies some gender-specific pathways by which Cameroonians must move across national borders to obtain a necessary settlement and work permit in Germany. I argue that diminishing options for legalizing their status in Germany by other means make Cameroonian men increasingly dependent on sustaining a three-year marriage to a German wife. Cameroonian women increasingly obtain residency permits, and hence access to the social welfare system, by becoming a parent of a child who is a German national.[169] In my

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[166] One of my interlocutors used this proverb to illustrate the strategies of African migrants to, as he said, "to deal with the draconian laws adopted by the German government". I found a German version of the proverb in the book of the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe: „Seit die Menschen gelernt haben zu schießen, ohne zu fehlen, habe ich gelernt zu fliegen ohne innezuhalten" (Achebe 1983: 29).

[167] Here I will just mention the most important changes: reform of the Asylum Law (1993) limits the right of asylum – 'Asylum Compromise', Act to Amend Foreigners and Asylum Provisions (1997), Immigration Act (2005), and reform of the Right of Abode (2006).

[168] For many third-country nationals (including Cameroonians), family-related modes of entry remain one of the last legal ways to enter and reside in the EU (Beck-Gernsheim 2007, Bledsoe 2006, Lahav 1997, Kofman 1999). The book "Gender, Generations and the Family in International Migration", edited by Kofman et al. (forthcoming), emphasizes family-related modes of entry, which have become one of the main, and in many countries, virtually the only legal – but at the same time highly contested means – of gaining admission. The book comprises a section on "Family-Making as Migration Strategy" including "Marriage over space and time among male migrants from Cameroon to Germany", by Annett Fleischer.

[169] However, the number of Cameroonian women marrying German men is also rising (Fleischer 2007b).

analysis, I mainly concentrate on the marital behavior of Cameroonian men and on the reproductive patterns of Cameroonian women in Germany. The distribution of marriage and parenthood over space and time become a means of securing the right to stay and work in Germany. While marriage and childbearing are life events that are losing their legal and social relevance for many German citizens, they ironically become essential – and often the last resort – for migrants who have no other way of staying.

Despite being the dominant mode of legal entry for the past two decades in EU states, family-related migration, including binational marriages and parenthood, are weakly explored research topics. Existing studies on marriage strategies of migrants concentrate on foreign-born women entering a country of destination by relying on marriage to a native-born man (Gulicová-Grethe 2004, Lauser 2004). Despite an increase in the number of men as spouses or fiancés, they are rarely investigated in family-related migration research (Kofman 2004: 251). Male migrants joining their wives, or male non-citizen marrying female citizens, are only exceptionally analyzed (e.g., Gallo 2006 on Malayali men joining their working wives in Italy). Studies on the reproductive behavior of foreign-born women in relation to the legalization of residence permit status are rare. In the US context, the debates concentrate on 'anchor babies': "a pejorative term to describe the birthright of citizenship of individuals born in US territory to non-citizen parents" (Nyers 2006: 24).

My analysis describes marriage and reproduction among Cameroonians coming to Germany, elucidating the hardships and contradictions inflicted on people caught in the impossible demands that German rules create. Here again, the increasing restrictions imposed on this form of transnational migration highlights the continuing role of the German nation-state. The following research questions are investigated: How do Cameroonian migrants distribute life events – and here I focus on marriage and childbearing over space and time as the inducers of rights – to enter, stay, and work in Germany? What role does marriage to a German partner play as a means to 'inclusion' and 'integration'? What are the options for legalizing residency by parenthood of a 'German baby'? Are there different requirements for Cameroonian fathers and Cameroonian mothers? Do marriage and parenthood essentially go together on the way to permanent residency? Finally, what relevance do binational marriage and childbearing in

Germany have for Cameroonian migrants' life courses and their future plans of returning to Cameroon?

This chapter comprises three main parts. The first section provides the reader with the legal framework on (binational) marriage, family reunification, and parenthood. In this context, I elaborate on the cultural history of German marriage which helps me to understand the concept and meaning of marital unions in the German society. In addition, I emphasize the role of authorities in excluding migrants by defining their marriage as a 'marriage of convenience'. Marriages between a German and a non-EU citizen are treated differently than those between Germans.

Second, I examine binational marriage as a key element in migration strategies. After illustrating some puzzling statistical findings on the number and kinds of Cameroonian-German marriages, the perspectives of German women and Cameroonian men are investigated in order to provide a comprehensive picture of binational marriages. It becomes clear that marriage is linked to multiple meanings and interpreted from different positions. In this context, I also examine the phenomenon of transnational polgygyny. I encounter some cases in which male Cameroonian migrants were married both in Cameroon and in Germany.

Finally, I make the argument that binational marriages cannot per se be seen as an indicator of migrants' social and cultural integration into the host society, as several authors argue. The third section analyzes the reproductive behavior of migrants from Cameroon in Germany. Here I focus on how particularly female Cameroonian migrants find ways to circumvent increasingly restrictive immigration policy by giving birth to child of German nationality. As a consequence, unique paternity practices, such as that of *Imbissväter* ('fast food fathers') have developed.

## 6.1 The legal framework of marriage and parenthood

The previous chapter emphasized the role of the German nation-state in regulating entry and residence of non EU-citizens. In a similar way, family formations patterns, such as marriage and parenthood of third-country nationals, are determined by the German state. Regulations on family formation and reunification for non EU-citizens are generally interpreted in highly

restrictive terms in Germany (Kofman 2004). The following sections highlight some relevant legal and policy conditions of (binational) marriage, family reunification, and parenthood for non-EU nationals. Subsequently, I discuss how these laws can be interpreted in practice. In doing so, I emphasize the fundamental role of authorities, who have the discretion to decide in each individual case whether or not they will allow a binational couple to marry or to reunify. Also, in cases in which fatherhood is established through a formal acknowledgment of paternity, there is scope for interpretation. Since an amendment in the law in 2006, authorities have the discretion to claim abuse of rights. They can appeal a paternity claim if neither biological fatherhood nor a social-familiar relationship between the father and the child has been established. This overview on the legal framework and the possibilities for interpretation is necessary for understanding the requirements and constraints of family-related migration to Germany, but also its options.

According to international laws, "the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State" (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 16, paragraph 3). In Germany, the protection of marriage and family is inscribed in Article 6 of the Basic Law: "Marriage and the family shall enjoy the special protection of the state" (*Grundgesetz: "Ehe und Familie stehen unter dem besonderen Schutze der staatlichen Ordnung" (Artikel 6 (1))*. According to this ordinance, marriage and family are, on the one hand, protected by the state, and on the other hand, subject to state regulations. Nation-states are in conflict with international laws when it comes to family-related migration (Lahav 1997). International laws are supposed to ensure the unity of the family, i.e., spouses and their children should live together in the same country.[170] The state needs to comply with the international regulations, but has the sovereignty to determine the kind of family formation and reunification and its conditions. The state protects marriage and family, but it is also allowed to take all possible measures to regulate the family lives of migrants. Hence, despite international conventions, the state retains a high degree of sovereignty and discretion in terms of the conditions imposed on different categories of migrants (ibid.). Another important convention in this regard is the right of free choice of spouse (Articles 12 and 14 of the European Human Rights Convention). The nation-state puts limits on this right in order to

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[170] According to this definition, family does only include spouses, parents, and minor, unmarried children, but not grandparents or other relatives. Decisive is that the family is living in a shared flat, a so-called *Beistandsgemeinschaft*.

control access to member- and citizenship (Breger & Hill 1998: 130). In this regard, authorities in Germany have the right to use their discretion in deciding whether a foreign spouse, and, therefore, the marriage, is acceptable (Breger 1998: 137). The legal and policy aspects are based on normative principles of the right to family life, but constrained by state regulations (Lahav 1997). This results in a contradiction between international humanitarian legislation and national law.

Resulting from article 6 of the Basic Law, the German state privileges married individuals and couples with children in family, social, and immigration rights. In consequence, according § 28 of the Residence Law, a residence permit can be issued when:

- a foreigner is married to a German partner (§28, section 1 (1, 1)),
- a foreign parent has custody of a child born by a German partner
 (*Ausübung der Personensorge*) – (§28, section 2 (1) (1,2)).

Following, I briefly explain the legal conditions for (binational) marriage, family reunification, and parenthood for non EU-citizens. Subsequently, I examine the role of authorities as gate-keepers for family-related migration from third-country nationals to Germany.

## 6.2 Marriage in Germany

Before examining the legal framework of binational marriages in Germany, I elaborate on the cultural history of German marriage. This helps to understand the following: What role does marriage play in the German society? How did the institution marriage change over time? What does it mean to marry in Germany today? Finally, why do Germans marry nowadays?[171] Furthermore, I would like to emphasize that this description of the German marriage is important to illuminate the model by which Cameroonian-German marriages are being evaluated by the German state, represented by its authorities. It is important to note that in exploring German marriage as a cultural/historical object, I step back in the same distance way that anthropologists usually treat practices in more 'exotic host societies'.

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[171] Motives for entering married life, in Germany as elsewhere, are numerous and diverse.

The German term *Heirat* (wedding, alliance, marriage) stems from the Germanic *Hîwa* which means household. The German word *Ehe* (marriage) comes from the Old High German word *ewe* or *ewa,* which means law or common law (*Gewohnheitsrecht*) (Schmohl 2005). Accordingly, marriage is seen as an alliance in a common household with specific regulations and laws. Marriage is regulated by various social and cultural (e.g., partner choice), religious (e.g., sexual behavior or attitudes towards divorce), and juridical norms and rules (e.g., divorce or inheritance).[172] In Germany, as in many other parts of Europe, marriage has been mainly shaped by the doctrines and policies of the Christian church, the demands of the Protestant Reformation, and the social impact of the Industrial Revolution.

Until the early Middles Ages, diverse kinds of marital unions existed. One of these forms of unions was the so-called *Muntehe* which was a legal contract between two aristocratic families.[173] In this patriarchal society, a woman was exchanged for cash payment. The bride price (*Muntschatz*) was negotiated between the two families. The woman moved to her husband's family. In these kinds of arrangements, the economic, political, and social benefits were decisive. Since the 13th century, marital arrangements have required a church wedding. Non-marital unions were banned and even penalized.

In 17th and 18th century, the institution 'marriage' was a social binding mode of living and working which was largely inaccessible to individual intervention (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 9). Often martial unions were not held together by love and emotions, but were rather a kind of contract between different families or lineages (Schmohl 2005). Thus, most marriages were arranged. Individual desires and affections were considered to be less important than practical and strategic arrangements. Since the wife was responsible for the household and the children, the husband was the 'breadwinner'. Decisive for the partner choice were economic aspects, like labor or the dowry. The institution of 'marriage' was viewed as the foundation of family formation (procreation), and as a key pillar of society. Therefore, a single person had to get married. A formal relationship between a man and a woman was seen as ensuring various functions, such as protection, control, and organization. In addition, marriage was for a long

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[172] According to Leach (1961), marriage has at least four general meanings:
   1. legal aspects of marriage (rights, legitimacy of children etc.),
   2. routine of marriage (actual, practical household),
   3. ceremonial aspects of marriage (wedding and other ceremonies), and
   4. affinial relationships, which are formed on marriage (joining of families).

[173] The term *munt* refers to protection.

time the basis for childbearing and childrearing. Children born out of wedlock were often not legally recognized (ibid.).

Until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, marriage in Germany was primarily a church issue. With the influence of the French Code Civil, civil marriage started to be accepted and by some even preferred. In 1875, Otto von Bismarck, first chancellor of the German Empire, enacted a law that made civil marriage before governmental officials the only valid form of marriage. Religious weddings were still permitted, but only after the civil ceremony had taken place. In addition, divorces were possible (ibid.).

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century (time of the German Romanticism), it became more common to wed for emotional purposes. The so-called 'love marriage' (*Liebesheirat*) slowly became the ideal (*Leitbild*) in many parts of society. As a consequence, the influence of the parents on the marital choice of their children became less important. Even so, until well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century for most couples, marriage was still basically an economic arrangement and the patriarchal role allocation persisted until the 1960s (ibid.).

In the 1950s and 1960s, a long-lasting, monogamous marriage based on continuity and exclusivity continued to be the social norm (Peuckert 2004: 24). It was considered 'normal and self-evident' that adult men and women marry in order to form a family. However, there were differences in the marital behavior in the GDR and the FRG. Generally, couples in the GDR married earlier and more often than their counterparts in the FRG. In the GDR, being single or married without children was not considered in the conception of life (Nauck et al. 1995).

In the 1970s and 1980s, in line with the secular, more voluntaristic trend, the importance of the institution marriage in both parts of Germany decreased, and non-marital unions became more common.

Since 1970, 'legitimate' children and children born out of wedlock became legally equal. In the past two decades, the registered number of weddings in Germany decreased, while the number of divorces increased (ibid.). Nevertheless, the monogamous love marriage is still the only form of union protected by the law, and it continues to be highly respected.

While German marriage has been losing both legal and social relevance for many citizens – with many long-term couples cohabiting, but not marrying – it has, ironically, become essential – and often the last resort – for immigrants who have no other way of staying. For those people in Germany who do choose to marry, marriage in Germany is regulated in Article 6 of the Basic Law. This means that the institution of 'marriage' is under special protection of the state;

it is not a private and personal issue after the official marriage ceremony at the civil registry office (*Standesamt*) has been performed. Marriage is situated between the private and public spheres (Cott 1997). As a public institution, marriage has huge importance for the state. The state grants marriage, and thereby decides who belongs to the nation. The nation-state has a strong interest in defining marriage practices, since the institution is concerned with the reproduction of its population:

> By creating incentives for some kinds of marriages and disincentives for others, by preventing or punishing some marriages and not others, the states and the nation have sculpted the body politic. A long history of regulations nullifying or criminalizing marriages between whites and people of color in the United States, for example, has signally shaped the racial order (and, arguable 'race' itself) (ibid.: 1443).

Because of its political and juridical relevance and implications, marriage in Germany has long been a public, state-managed institution. Hence, the state attempts to regulate and control particularly those marriages between its citizens and non-citizens. A brief historical overview on binational marriages in Germany shows that marital unions between partners of different nationality have always been treated differently than marriages between partners of the same nationality.

## 6.3 Binational marriages in Germany

The history of binational marriage before and even after 1945 was marked by the National Socialism regime. The National Socialist tactic was to prevent any form of binational partnership by denying these marriages through administrative means. The 'Law for the Protection of the German Blood and Honor' (*Gesetz zum Schutze deutschen Blutes und deutscher Ehre*), which was announced in 1935, forbade any kind of mixed marriage (*Mischehen*).[174] The focus of the prohibition were marriages between Jewish people and Germans, although Jewish partners were often German citizens.[175] Definitions and terms were kept quite unclear so that any relationships between a non-German citizen and a German could

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[174] The term *Mischehe* ('mixed marriage') was used by the Nazi regime and codified in the Nuremberg laws of 1935 to forbid interdenominational marriages, particularly those between Jewish and Christians.
[175] The number of mixed marriages in Germany declined from 35,000 in 1935 to 20,454 in 1939 (Meyer 2006).

be prevented by law (Kleiber & Gömüsay 1990). In 1938, a law for the standardization of marriage and divorce came into force (*Gesetz zur Vereinheitlichung des Rechts der Eheschließung und der Ehescheidung*), which defined racial arguments as acceptable divorce grounds. In 1950, Germany enacted a law for the recognition of free marriages (*Bundesgesetz über die Anerkennung freier Ehen*). This legislation permitted marriages that the National Socialism regime had denied.

As late as 1953, German wives lost their citizenship when marrying a foreign husband, while foreign wives gained German citizenship through marriage with a German man. Until 1986, binational marriages were a matter of the International Private Law (*Internationales Privatrecht*), but since then German law is in charge of binational marriages. In 1998, new regulations reforming the marriage law came into effect (*Gesetz zur Neuordnung des Eheschließungsrechts*). The right to marry became part of the German Civil Code (*Bundesgesetzbuch*). However, special regulations apply to marriages between a German and a non-German citizen (Aichhorn 2003).

A foreign partner married to a German is entitled to obtain a residence permit in Germany. Whether the marriage was conducted abroad or in Germany is insignificant. However, according to the German Civil Code § 1353, both partners are required to live in a so-called 'matrimonial unit' (*Lebensgemeinschaft*) in Germany. A matrimonial unit means that the partners live in a permanent relationship that is characterized by affection, solidarity, and support. Hence, it is required that the intensity of the relationship extends beyond that of a simple 'encounter relationship' (*Begegnungsgemeinschaft*).

Foreigners who marry a German spouse receive, first of all, a temporary residency permit (Residence Act paragraph 23 (§17 Section 1)). After three years of marriage, they can apply for an unlimited settlement permit (*Niederlassungserlaubnis* – § 28 Section 2 Residence Act). The issuance of an unlimited settlement permit is contingent upon the ability of the applicant to finance his or her own living, without relying on social benefits.[176]

Following a change in the law that went into effect on June 1, 2000, the foreign spouse has been able to obtain a right to residency independent of the continuity of the marriage to the German spouse (*Eigenständiges Aufenthaltsrecht*).[177] This means that, after two years of

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[176] Unless otherwise specified, all regulations apply to the period 2006-2007.
[177] During the first two years of marriage, the foreign partner depends strongly on the good will of the German spouse, since the right to residency depends on the maintenance of the marriage. In some cases, this regulation is

marriage with a German spouse, the foreign partner can stay in Germany even if the couple is about to divorce (§ 31 German Residence Act). The independent residency right enables the immigrant to stay in Germany temporarily. After five years of independent residency and meeting other requirements, there is the possibility of applying for an unlimited settlement permit.[178]

The right to marry depends, among other things, on the legal status of a foreigner. Marriage to an undocumented migrant living in Germany is almost impossible. The civil registry office will report the 'illegal status' of the migrant to the immigration office (*Ausländerbehörde*), which means that the foreigner can be arrested and deported immediately (Rose 2001: 97). In some cases, it is possible to file for an 'exceptional leave to remain' (*Duldung*) in Germany with the support of a lawyer. 'Tolerated immigrants', i.e., denied asylum seekers who cannot be deported immediately, have the right to marry, although it is becoming more and more difficult for them to do so. Providing the necessary documents remains complicated for migrants with an insecure status in Germany. Foreigners who enter Germany on a tourist visa are allowed to stay for three months. If the wedding does not occur within the three months, the foreign partner has to leave Germany. He or she might then apply for a new visa in order to marry in Germany.

Bledsoe and Sow (2008) argue that family reunification is now a key mode of legal entry into Europe.[179] Hence, foreigners may also enter Germany with a family reunification visa. To apply for the family reunification visa, a foreigner has to have married a German spouse abroad.[180]

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misused by the German partner. He or she can file for divorce at any time and endanger the insecure situation of the foreign spouse. The dependency of the right to residency on marriage seems to be problematic in practice. I will come back to this point in Section "Challenges of binational marriages".

[178] Prior to 2000, the marriage had to last four years before the independent residency right has been established.

[179] To illustrate their argument, they examine three examples of African groups in Europe: Moroccan youth in Spain (Empez Vidal 2007), Cameroonian men and women in Germany (Fleischer, PhD dissertation in process), and Gambian families in Spain (Bledsoe et al. 2007).

[180] In this regard, there is also the opportunity to marry a migrant with an unlimited settlement permit, and hence obtain the right to remain in Germany. The person with an unlimited settlement permit has to prove enough financial means to secure the livelihood of the incoming spouse and adequate housing space (Section 29 § 3 of the Residence Act). However, Cameroonian migrants rarely rely on this pathway. Therefore, I will not go into detail on this category.

## 6.4 Family reunification

Family reunification in the EU context means the reunification with the nuclear family, consisting of spouse and dependent children, usually under the age of 18 years.[181] Migrants cannot determine for themselves the persons who legally constitute their family (Kofman 2004). According to Kofman (2004), Germany and Switzerland impose the strictest conditions for family reunification and formation. The EU has so far produced no binding legislation on the right to family life for third-country migrant workers.

In order to apply for a family reunification visa, the foreign spouse has to submit the marriage certificate and other documents to the German representative in the country of origin. The application process can take up to several months, since all documents are checked for correctness and creditability. In addition, in most cases, the partners will be interviewed separately. The German representatives in the country of origin and the German authorities in Germany cooperate and decide jointly whether to grant the visa.

From 2007 onwards, spouses from non-EU countries have had to demonstrate simple German language skills before being allowed to enter the country for the purposes of family reunification. They have to be able to communicate in a 'rudimentary way' (Migration und Bevölkerung, no. 6, 2007). Exempt from these regulations are family members who are allowed to enter Germany without a visa. Spouses from countries like South Korea, Japan, Australia, or the US do not have to prove language skills, but family members from Argentina, Thailand, Turkey, or most sub-Saharan African need to prove German language skills.

Family reunification does not only include the reunification with spouse, but also with unmarried minor children, and, in specific cases, with other family members if evidence of 'unusual hardship' can be presented (Manual for Germany 2005).[182] Generally, within the EU, dependent children may join their parents or the parent has the right of custody of the child until the age of 18 years. However, Germany applies particularly restrictive regulations. A

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[181] Family reunification is justified by the protection of marriage and family (Article 6 of the Basic Law). However, the article is based on Christian ideas and only allows reunification with one wife (§30, paragraph 4, Residence Act).

[182] Other family members, such as grandchildren or grandparents, may also have the right to join their relatives in Germany under certain stringent conditions, as in cases of 'extraordinary hardship', which applies, for example, for serious illnesses or advanced age; or if there is need on either side – either Germany or in the country of origin – for urgent care.

legislation change in June 2002 lowered the age of children who are allowed to follow their parents from 16 to 12 years (Bommes 2003, Kofman 2004).[183] There are many exceptions to this rule, and regulations are complex. For example, children of highly skilled migrants and children of persons entitled to asylum and refugees under the Geneva Convention may join their parents until the age of 18 (Residence Act § 32).

## 6.5 Parenthood

A foreigner may also gain residency when becoming parent to a child whose other parent is a German citizen. The child of a German parent, mother or father, is eligible for German citizenship. A foreign parent of a child of German nationality is granted residency and access to the social welfare system; since 1998, this also true for the children of non-marital relationships (Rose 2001: 96). According § 28 of the Residence Act, the residence permit can be issued when a foreign parent has custody of a child born by a German partner (*Ausübung der Personensorge*).

It is possible for the foreign parent of a German child to obtain a residence permit from the day of birth, provided the German partner is resident in Germany, and the foreign parent has custody of the child. While the custody of the child can be claimed by both women and men, it is in practice easier for women to claim custody than for men.

Fatherhood can be established through a formal acknowledgment of paternity (*Vaterschaftsanerkennung*) at the youth welfare office (*Jugendamt*). A foreign man does not necessarily need to be the biological father of the child with a German woman, but it is essential that he can prove that he is taking care of the child (child custody). According to the German Civil Code § 1592, a law which was implemented in 1998 to expand the rights of single mothers, a mother has the right to declare the identity of her child's father, which is then confirmed by the father's acknowledgment (Castaneda 2007). There is no need to provide further evidence for (biological) fatherhood. The law which allows foreign parents to acquire residency to be together with their children is intended to protect children, preventing children from being separated from their parents, who are regarded as responsible for their upbringing.

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[183] Of the EU member states, only Germany has a provision subjecting children over 12 years to special conditions in terms of family reunification. This legislation is a prominent example of Germany's ability to compromise at the expense of human rights, particularly the rights of the child. In legal terms, the duration of childhood seems to shrinking.

In sum, fatherhood is established through a formal acknowledgment of paternity which, ideally, is registered before the child is born. The paternity acknowledgment becomes particularly important for pregnant undocumented women. If the father is German, the child has the right to German citizenship. This may also provide the mother with a residency permit and access to the social welfare system based on the child's status as a German national (Castaneda 2008).

## 6.6 The role of authorities

All regulations and laws outlined above can be interpreted widely in practice. As Breger (1998: 137) states, "the German law is restrictive, but in many cases open to interpretation … depending on the hierarchy of acceptability, the nationality, and culture of the group of foreigners". The authorities have the discretion to decide in each individual case whether or not they will allow a binational couple to marry or to reunify.[184] A foreign parent to a child whose other parent is German needs to provide evidence that he is taking care of the child (child custody). In addition, unmarried parents have to credibly prove that their parental relationship is a 'matrimonial unit' (*Lebensgemeinschaft*), rather than a 'chance encounter relationship' (*Begegnungsgemeinschaft*). Laws and policies can be interpreted in practice by the respective authorities, mainly by the civil registry office and the youth welfare office.[185] In doing so, I focus on the discretion of bureaucrats to recognize a binational marriage as legitimate or not. In this regard, the definition and interpretation of 'marriage of convenience' is discussed. I will only touch on the role of authorities in family reunification and the acknowledgment of paternity, simply because I have less empirical evidence for these cases. In the following descriptions, I rely mainly on informal conversations with Cameroonian migrants and their

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[184] By binational marriage, I refer to the relationship between spouses from different nation states, and in my study particularly between Cameroonian and a German partners. Other terms used in a similar way include:
  – intermarriages – marriages between persons belonging to different racial, religious, or national origin groups (Cretser & Leon 1982),
  – inter-ethnic marriages – marriages between different ethnic groups (Beer 1996, Thode-Arora 1999),
  – cross-border marriages – marriages that link kin groups of different national origins to a new social unit and create affiliations and obligations across different nation states (Lauth Bacas 2002), mixed marriages – equivalent for binational marriages (Rodriguez Garcia 2006). The German term *Mischehe* has a negative connotation, because of its application during the National Socialist Regime for marriages between Aryan and non-Ayran (Beck-Gernsheim 1998: 50).

[185] Ticktin (2006) examines the role of humanitarism and compassion in immigration situations that makes illness a primary means by which undocumented migrants obtain legal residency in France.

German partners, on the website of the German Association for Binational Couples and Families: www.verband-binationaler.de, and on relevant literature.

Binational marriages, particularly those between a German citizen and a third-country national, such as those from Africa, are often viewed with great suspicion by the majority of the public, as well as by the authorities. While authorities see the purpose of binational marriage as crucial, they are not at all interested in why German-German couples marry. German citizens may wed for reasons of tax reduction, economic stability, or advantages in career building. Yet for binational couples, the German state effectively sees love as the only legitimate grounds for marriage. Hence, couples have to give proof of their emotional closeness. According to the statement of a member of the German Association for Binational Marriage and Family (cf. www.verband-binationaler.de), a pregnancy may indicate 'real love' and could facilitate the marriage process. As a consequence, women might become pregnant to avoid arousing suspicion of having entered into a 'marriage of convenience' (de Hart 2006).

Authorities have administrative discretion to decide whether to allow a couple to marry.[186] Some of the criteria on which the authorities base their decision include:

- whether the wedding was scheduled to take place after an intended deportation was announced,
- whether the partners speak a common language,
- whether the German partner was formerly married to a foreigner,
- whether money has been handed over in order for the marriage to be contracted,
- whether the future spouses are consistent in their accounts of their respective personal details and about the circumstances of their first meeting,
- whether the couple shares a common apartment (communal living arrangements/cohabitation), and
- whether one partner is much older than the other (especially when the woman is older than the man).

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[186] Any kind of marriage which does not conform the 'traditional' marriage pattern is suspect and under special investigation; for example, gay marriages and marriages between partners with big age differences.

To help them determine whether a relationship is genuine, authorities are permitted to interview the partners separately, and to talk to neighbors, friends, and co-workers (§ 5 Section 2 (1) Law of Civil Status). In these interviews, partners are often confronted with all kinds of questions. Interviewees reported being asked a wide range of questions, such as the following:

– living arrangements: e.g., who pays the rent, who washes the clothes, what are the names of the neighbors, what heating system do you have, do you have a dishwasher;

– familial relationships: e.g., what are the names of your mother- and father-in-law and where do they live, does your partner have siblings, and, if so, what are their names, occupations, places of residence;

– the partner: e.g., what educational qualifications does your partner have, what eye color does your partner have, what is your partner's shoe size;

– miscellaneous: e.g., hobbies, common friends, is your partner left-handed or right-handed, what drink and food does your partner prefer for breakfast, which brand does your partner smoke, which kind of drivers license does your partner have, what did you give your partner for the his or her last birthday, what toothpaste do you use in your common apartment, where is the bedroom light switch, etc.

Interlocutors reported that, in cases, of contradictory answers and inconsistencies, authorities quickly assumed that the marriage would be a 'marriage of convenience'.[187] If a 'marriage of convenience' is suspected, the civil registry office has the right to delay or even refuse to conduct the marriage ceremony (*Eheaufhebungsgrund der Scheinehe*, German Civil Code § 1314, section 2(5)).

According to the EU Council of Ministers (2003), a marriage of convenience is a marriage contracted between a national of an EU member state and a third-country national with the sole aim of circumventing the rules of entry and residence for third-country nationals, and securing for the third-country national permission to reside in a member state (article 1) (cited by de

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[187] The so called 'marriage of convenience' is also referred to as a 'fictitious marriage' (*Scheinehe* or *Aufenthaltsehe*). The terms 'fictitious marriage' (in German *Scheinehe*) means the marriage does not really exist. The German term *Scheinehe* developed during the National Socialist Regime, and was mainly used for the racial ideologization of the marriage law. Germany enacted a reformed marriage law in 1946. However, in 1998, 'marriage of convenience' was again introduced as general annulment of a marriage (see Eisfeld (2004) on the history of the *Scheinehe* in Germany in the 19th and 20th centuries).

Hart 2006: 252).[188] The draft text stipulates that the same rules apply in cases of registration of a marriage performed abroad.

The main aim of the interview questions above is to find out whether there is evidence for such a matrimonial unit. According to my interlocutors, who cited bureaucrats of the civil registry office, a matrimonial unit establishes the basis for a marriage, and hence for providing the foreign partner with a residence permit. However, 'matrimonial unit' is a broad and vague term, and the concrete obligations and responsibilities associated with matrimony are not defined. Similarly unclear is the term 'love marriage' (*Liebesheirat*), which is often differentiated from a marriage of convenience. According to the decision-makers, the German state recognizes only love marriages as legitimate marriages. The great irony is that love marriages have become common in Europe only in the last century, and make up an extremely small percentage of all marriages worldwide (Breger 1998: 140).[189] Nonetheless, the burden of proof is upon the applicants to demonstrate that their only motive to marry is love. They need to provide evidence that their marriage is proper and not one of convenience, i.e., the rule of primary purpose (ibid.: 139).

The problem is that authorities have to identify certain conceptions and ideas of a 'proper' and 'genuine' marriage as a basis for their decision-making, but in Germany there is no general acknowledged guiding principle of marriage (*Eheleitbild*) (Eisfeld 2004). A binary divide between marriages entered into for 'good' reasons, such as sexual compatibility or companionship, and those entered for 'bad' reasons such as social, economic, or legal gains, is impossible. The latter may partly determine the former, and motives cannot be neatly disentangled (Wray 2006: 304). Or, as Breger and Hill (1998: 6) describe it, "a good marriage means very different things to very different people". Therefore, bureaucrats base their decision often on little more than on personal impressions, their feelings about the applicant, and intuition (Wray 2006: 312).[190] In his doctoral thesis on binational couples in Israel,

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[188] The German law prohibits registrars from marrying a couple when it is 'obvious' that it is a 'fictitious marriage' (§ 1310 German Civil Code).

[189] Many successful marriages in many cultures (also in many parts of Cameroon) are motivated by pragmatism, as the extensive academic literature on the economics of marriage illustrates (Becker 1981, Goody & Tambiah 1973). Western societies often link marriage with love and feelings, rather than with utilitarian motives. However, being a tactical in marriage decision, does not exclude love (Waldis 2006).

[190] According to a survey of 16 civil register offices, German civil registrars reach a decision on whether a marriage is genuine and proper mainly on the basis of intuition, knowledge of human nature, own experiences,

Korczyn (2009) claims that emotions play a double role in the decision-making process. First, bureaucrats attempt to uncover the feelings the spouses have towards each other to determine whether the couple share a romantic love, or whether the marriage is 'fictitious'; and, second, the decision reached by the bureaucrats depends, to a large extent, on their feelings about the applicant. Accordingly, authorities function as moral gate-keepers when deciding whether a marriage is 'credible' and 'advisable' (Wray 2006: 312). Anderson (2003: 93) talks about "the legitimate immigration regulation within the scope of marriage". In this sense, the authorities or, more precisely, individual officials, regulate immigration to, and residency in, Germany.

The focus of the immigration office is on the matrimonial union of the couple. Therefore, controls are also possible after the wedding. Although the regulation that binational spouses are required to share a common household is debatable and the subject of controversy, authorities check on whether a couple is living together and draw their conclusions.[191] In cases in which the civil servant can 'prove' that the marriage was conducted for the sole purpose of obtaining a residence permit, the marriage can be dissolved. According to § 92a of the Foreigner Law, the foreigner can lose the residence permit and the German person involved can be prosecuted and penalized. In addition, the penalty for the German person is even higher when he or she accepted money in exchange for marrying the foreigner (Beck-Gernsheim 2006: 120). In my fieldwork, I did not encounter the dissolution of an already existing marriage. This however, does not mean that it does not happen to Cameroonian-German couples.

Authorities also play a major role when it comes to decisions regarding the immigration to Germany of immediate family members of German citizens or permanent residents, such as spouses, children, or other close relations. If the couple cannot provide sufficient evidence that their marriage is not a 'fictitious' one, their entry into Germany and temporary residency for the foreign partner can be delayed (in some cases, for years) or refused. The decision to deny a family reunification request because authorities suspect a 'marriage of convenience' is according to my interview partners often made arbitrarily.

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emotions, and impressions (www.fabienne-iaf.de, last accessed 18 November 2008). This study was conducted between 2000 and 2001 by Fabienne, an association for binational families and couples in Europe (*Fabienne – Familles et couples binationaux en Europe*), on behalf of the EU Commission.

[191] The practice of controlling and checking on binational couples before and after their marriages in Germany has been widely criticized, particularly by human rights organizations as violating basic human rights. In their view, the private and intimate sphere of a couple is harmed when an individual cannot organize his or her marital life independent of the choice of marital partner

Bureaucrats play also a significant role in the formal acknowledgment of paternity. According to § 28 (1) of the Residence Act, a foreign parent of a German minor is to be granted a residence permit if he or she takes care of the child. Since an amendment in the law in 2006 authorities have the discretion to claim abuse of rights (§ 1671b German Civil Code). They can appeal a paternity claim if it neither biological fatherhood nor a social-familiar relationship between the father and the child can be established. That means that if public authorities suspect that the father is not fulfilling his child custody obligations (*Personensorge*), they can deny paternity, which also means the refusal of entry, residency, and work permits.[192] The abuse of paternity is referred to as 'false paternity' (*Scheinvaterschaft*). Abuse exists when paternity is acknowledged when the only aim to enable to establish residency in Germany. This decision does not affect the child's citizenship, because residency law does not test citizenship law.

In short, despite the fact that marriage and family are legally protected by the German Basic Law, different regulations apply for binational couples and parents. In this regard, authorities in the civil registry, in the youth welfare, or immigration offices play a decisive role. They have the discretion to refuse binational couples the rights to marry in Germany, to rejoin their spouses, or claim paternity. The danger is that they will impose their own understanding of what constitutes a genuine marriage or what social paternity should look like, and hence penalize atypical and unconventional unions and families (Wray 2006: 319). Any assessment of a marriage of convenience or a fraudulent paternity claim entails a comparison with the perceived ideal of marriage and parenthood. As a consequence, bureaucrats effectively deny some foreigners entry and residence and work permits by refusing their requests to marry, rejoin family members, or claim paternity. In part, the state gives individual civil servants the authority to give or withhold permission to marry or to form a family, and hence to exclude migrants not primarily because their marriage or their paternity is considered as fictitious, but because they belong to an "undesirable as a category" (ibid.: 319).

This overview on the legal framework of binational marriages, family reunification, and parenthood, and its interpretation by authorities, provides us with a basis for understanding

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[192] From 1998 until 2006, the youth welfare office was not involved in the decision to formally acknowledge paternity. During these years, it was sufficient that both parents affirm to be the parents of the German child. Since 2006, public authorities, often the youth welfare office, have the discretion to appeal against a paternity claim. In doing so, each German Federal Land has its own regulations.

how the German state sets up structures to regulate the family formation and reunification of non-EU nationals, and, hence, to restrict their entry to and residency in Germany. The following sections analyze how Cameroonian migrants develop ways of managing the often discriminatory regulations of the German state concerning entry, residency, and work. My focus is on, to what extent marrying, becoming pregnant, or begetting a child may serve as options for acquiring residence and work permits. I start my discussion with an examination of Cameroonian-German marriages using available data from the German Federal Statistical Office, and examples from my field work, illustrated as quotes or case studies. The following sections deal mainly with Cameroonian men marrying German women. These sections include passages intended to illustrate how Cameroonian migrants meet German partners, the perspectives of Cameroonian men and German women, the challenges of being married binationally, the reunification of spouses, and the issues surrounding transnational polygyny. I then analyze whether Cameroonian-German marriages could be seen as evidence for integration. Subsequently, I describe the role that parenthood of a German child plays as means of acquiring legitimacy. In this context, I explore the term *Imbissväter* which is used by bureaucrats to describe German men who 'sell' their paternity to foreign mothers.

## 6.7 Cameroonian-German marriages

The number of binational marriages in Germany has increased continuously over the past two decades (Beck-Gernsheim 1998, Haug 2004, Straßburger 2003). In 1960, every 25th wedding was between a German citizen and a non-German partner, while in 2006, one in every eight newly married couples was binational (cf. www.verband-binationaler.de).[193] In contrast to the general decline of weddings in Germany, the number of binational marriages has increased significantly in recent years.

Since 1995, more German men have been marrying foreign women – mainly from Thailand Poland, Russia, and Romania – while fewer German women have been marrying foreign

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[193] In 2006, a total of 373,681 couples entered into marriage in Germany. Of these, 319,384 (85.5%) were German-German marriages and 46,719 (12.5%) were binational; in 7,578 cases (2.0%), both spouses were not German citizens (Federal Statistical Office 2006).

men.[194] Before 1995, the trend was reversed. When marrying binationally, German women largely prefer men from Turkey, Italy, and the United States (Federal Statistical Office 2006).

In contrast, more German women than men marry a partner from Africa.[195] In 2006, 2,128 men from the African continent wed a German woman in Germany, but only 949 African women married a German man (Federal Statistical Office 2006). A similar trend can be observed for Cameroonian-German couples between 1991 and 2006. As illustrated in Figure 1, in every year except 1998, there were more cases of German women marrying Cameroonian men in Germany than the other way around. Generally, weddings between Cameroonian and German partners steadily increased between 1991 and 2006.

**Figure 1: Number of Cameroonian-German marriages conducted in Germany, 1991-2006**
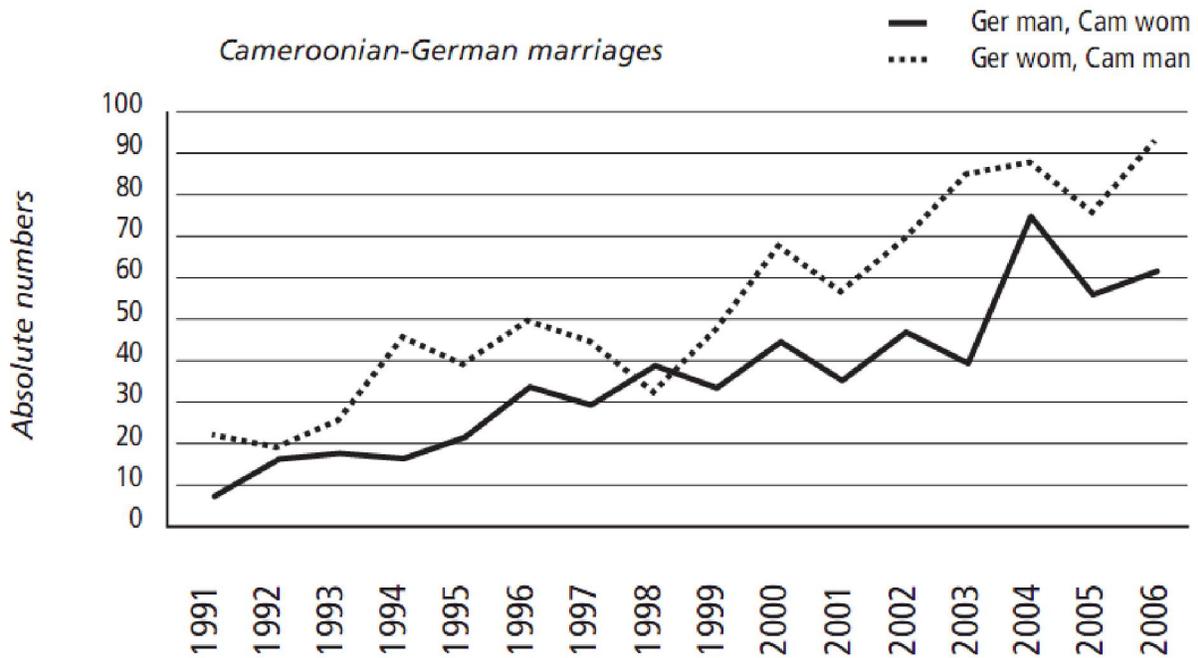


*Source: German Federal Statistical Office 2006*

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[194] 19,748 (5.2%) German women married a foreign partner, while 26,971 (7.2%) German men wed a non-German woman (Federal Statistical Office 2006).
[195] Proportionally, German men marry half as many Africans as German women (Breger 1998: 133).

While the number of weddings between Germans and Cameroonians in Germany is on the rise, in the year 2006, the German Statistical Office registered only four marriages between Cameroonian men and Cameroonian women in Germany.[196] That means that Cameroonian migrants in Germany orient their marital lives more toward Germans than toward their compatriots.

The number of binational marriages in Germany is assumed to be much higher than the data of the German Federal Statistical Office indicate. Statistical information on binational marriages in Germany allow only a limited analysis and interpretation, since weddings conducted outside of Germany are not registered in the German marriage statistics. Migrants marrying in their country of origin, in the consulate of their country of origin in Germany, or in a third country are not recorded (Straßburger 2000). According to the Association for Binational Marriage and Family (IAF), the number of binational weddings between Germans and foreigners outside of Germany could be significantly higher than the number of ceremonies held in Germany. Many German-foreign couples marry outside of Germany for administrative reasons, and because bureaucratic obstacles for binational couples in Germany are difficult to overcome: foreign documents need to be not only obtained and translated, but also certified by the public authorities of the foreign country, and subsequently legalized by the German foreign office. In addition, Germany asks for the provision of a 'certificate of non-marital impediment' (*Ehefähigkeitszeugnis*[197]) which does not even exist in Cameroon. Interview partners described these bureaucratic procedures as complicated, annoying, and extremely costly and time-consuming. In addition, interlocutors explained that they had to constantly bear in mind that their attempt to marry a German partner could be denied by the German authorities. Therefore, quite a large number of interviewees and some of their friends and acquaintances decided to marry abroad, either in Cameroon or in Denmark.[198] Marrying outside of Germany hastened

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[196] Interestingly, Moira Luraschi from the University of Turin reported in her unpublished article, "New Family Ties in a Diaspora Context: The Case of Cameroonian migration in Italy", that in the small town Varese, in Northern Italy, Cameroonian migrants almost entirely marry fellow countrymen. Luraschi concludes that Cameroonians are not interested in marrying Italians; they prefer Cameroonians as partners, maybe also because a marriage with an Italian partner does not bring them legal advantages in Italy.

[197] The certificate proves that there are no barriers to a marriage according to the law of the home country (§ 1309 Section 1 German Civil Code).

[198] Due to the German-Danish certificate agreement, marriages conducted in Denmark are recognized in Germany. The German newspaper "Welt am Sonntag" (05/10/2003) published an article about binational couples marrying frequently in Denmark because of the liberal Danish marriages laws. For this reason, Denmark is also referred to as a 'Marriage Mecca' (*Heiratsmekka*), a 'Marriage factory' (*Heiratsfabrik*) or 'the Las Vegas of Denmark'.

the marriage process and brought fewer administrative problems. In sum, the number of Cameroonian-German couples in Germany is much higher than the German marriage statistics report, because a number of binational couples marry abroad, but subsequently live in Germany.

When examining Cameroonian-German marriages, it is interesting to compare them with Ghanaian/Nigerian-German couples. Figure 2 presents relative numbers of Cameroonian men marrying German women between 1991 and 2006, in comparison to Ghanaian and Nigerian men in binational relationships to German women. While the number Cameroonian-German marriages has increased over the last 15 years, marriages between Ghanaian/Nigerian and German partners have decreased since the mid-1990s.

**Figure 2: Numbers of Cameroonian, Ghanaian, and Nigerian men**
**who wed German women in Germany, 1991-2006**
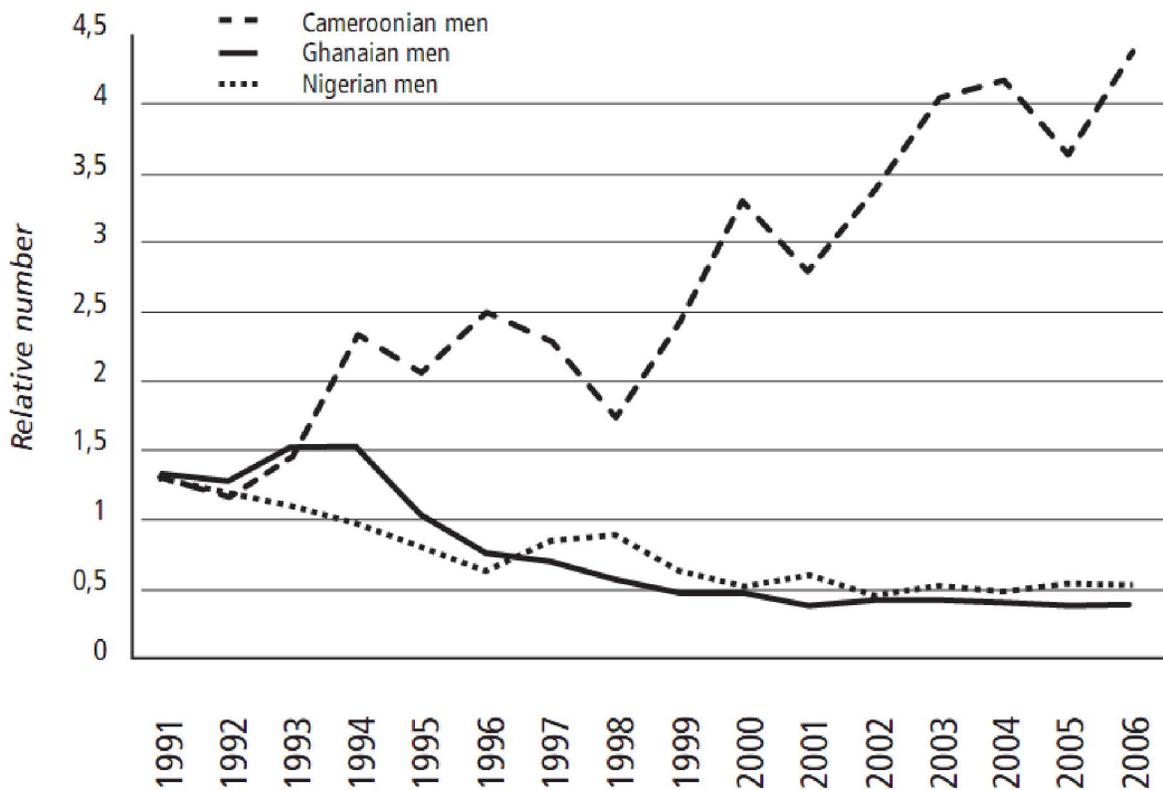


*Source: German Federal Statistical Office 2006*

There are also marriage agencies which offer professional help, for example, www.danwed.de, last accessed 18 June 2008.

– *in reference to 1991*

– *only marriages registered in Germany*

The number of marriages between a Cameroonian man and a German woman has quadrupled from 1991 to 2006, whereas marriages between Ghanaian and Nigerian men and German women have declined radically. In 2006, official figures show that only 30 men from Ghana and 78 men from Nigeria, but 93 Cameroonian male migrants, married German women. One explanation for the increase in Cameroonian-German marriages versus the decline in Nigerian-German and Ghanaian-German marriages might be that Cameroonian migrants have arrived in larger numbers since the 1990s, mainly due the severe economic crisis in their home country. Another reason could be that, because migrants from Ghana and Nigeria have been in Germany longer, they have found other ways to obtain residency. It is also possible that Cameroonian men are, because of their educational backgrounds, more attractive for German women than Ghanaians and Nigerians.

### 6.7.1 *'Go and find yourself a German wife!'*

The following provides a description and an analysis of the means used by Cameroonian migrants to circumvent restrictive immigration policy. For my analysis, I have relied on available data from the German Federal Statistical Office and fieldwork examples. According to statistical information from the German Federal Statistical Office, which support my fieldwork results, Cameroonian men are more likely than Cameroonian women to marry a German partner. This might be due to the fact that the number of Cameroonian men living in Germany is higher than that of Cameroonian women. It could also be the case that women rely on pathways other than marriage to acquire a residence permit, such as the acknowledgment of paternity of a child by a German man. Here, I focus mainly on the marital behaviors of Cameroonian men, and, subsequently, on the reproductive practices of Cameroonian women.

Most Cameroonian interview partners in Germany, as well as in Cameroon, were aware of the fact that marriage to a German partner constitutes a possible pathway to long-term legality in Germany. In the preparation stage of the migration process, potential migrants gathered information about the options for obtaining residence and work permits in Germany; marriage

to a German partner was one possibility that was often mentioned. Interview partners reported that, while marriage confers only limited benefits in many European countries like Spain and Italy, it is widely know that marriage to a German national provides opportunities to remain in the country and have access to the labor market. This awareness was reflected not only in interviews, but also in Cameroonian newspaper and local songs.

The Cameroonian artist Koppo, who sings in Franc-Anglais, articulates the future perspectives of many young Cameroonian migrants in one of his songs, named "*Si tu vois ma go*" ("If you see me go"): [199]

I am going to the white man's place to make money.
The suffering of Cameroon,
you work, you work, but no money.
My brother I swear, I am tired, I have done everything.
I have done all to send away misery.
I washed cars, there was no way. I have sold shoes. There was no way…
So I have said that's too much I must leave…

When you watch TV you see that in the white man's place do they suffer? Everybody is fine.
As soon as I reach there, I find a job, any kind of job, which can give me money: take the dog to a walk. I will work. I will wash corpses. I will work. I will even marry the widows.

Tell her [the girlfriend] there is no time to say goodbye, because girls like to be petted, it is a waste of time and time is money. I must leave…
between leaving to make money and the love of my girlfriend I take love, but without money there is no love, we need money. I must leave. I will never forget her. I will get her nice clothes.[200]

In the media like TV programs and shows, Europe is portrayed as a paradise (see Chapter 3). In the white man's place nobody suffers, everybody enjoys a good life that modernization has brought. The 'Western way of life' is perceived as realization of their dreams (Nyamnjoh & Page 2002). However, the first problem is to get there; bureaucratic obstacles are difficult to overcome. After arriving in the white man's land, the second difficulty emerges: the goal is to

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[199] Franc-Anglais is a mixture of the two official languages French, English, and a lingua franca Cameroon Pidgin English.
[200] The extended version of the song can be found in the appendix.

find a job – any kind of job. Opportunities to earn money in the white man's land are extremely limited for Africans. Hence, for those living at the margins, it is necessary to do jobs which white men do not want, like, for example, taking the dog for a walk – a very Western habit. Even if those jobs pay only a few Euros, it is still much more than a man could earn in Cameroon. Because job opportunities are so limited, Cameroonians would even wash corpses, which is considered as one of the worst jobs anyone can get. The protagonist in the song "*Si tu vois ma go*" would even consider "marrying a widow" if there were no other options for staying in the country and accessing the labor market.[201]

Finally, the protagonist says that he had to choose between migrating and staying with his girlfriend; thus, between money and love.[202] He reflects that he had no choice, since there is no love without money. This reminds of a saying in Nigeria, quoted by Smith (2009: 164), "no romance without finance", referring to the two main elements of 'modern relationships': intimacy and exchange. Modern women expect both emotional closeness and financial support; young men have often difficulties to fulfill this ideal. Thus, some men, as the protagonist in the song, think about migrating and making money abroad in order to meet expectations as the breadwinner of the family. In the song, the protagonist promises to send nice things like clothes home to his girl. Reflecting the assumed Western style of life, he does not even have time to say goodbye to his girlfriend, since time is money, which he does not have.

Another popular song, originally from Algeria, (the lyrics appeared in an article by Andrea Elliot, "Where Boys Grow Up to Be Jihadis", published in the New York Times on November 25, 2007) tells the story of "a son of Jamaa Mezuak", who tries to immigrate to Spain:

> Despite the diplomas in our pockets,
> We have no jobs…
> Go to Spain
> If for bread alone
> Continue till Germany
> And live like the Mafia
> Marry an old woman
> The age of my grandmother
> She will get me papers and a visa.

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[201] Marrying a widow is not regarded as the best and most attractive marital choice in Cameroon; in Europe, however, a young man would even consider marrying an older widowed woman to achieve his personal (and family/community) life goals.

[202] The book "Love in Africa" edited by Cole and Thomas (2009) examines the relationship between money and love.

The plan outlined in this song is to migrate first from Algeria to Spain, and then to continue on to Germany. Despite their university degrees and diplomas, many young people in Algeria and elsewhere in Africa cannot find work and earn money in their countries of origin. Even if they just go to Spain to earn enough money to live and "buy bread" that is already something. Living as a migrant in Germany, most probably as an undocumented migrant, is pictured as a life in the underground. Like the mafia, marginalized migrants, often without legal documents, have to hide and run away from the police. In Germany, the only chance such migrants have is to marry a woman who could be as old as their grandmother.[203] However, despite her age, this woman is able to help him legalize his status and thus, receive the right to work and move freely within the country.

The fact that marriage to a German woman helps them to obtain residency is mentioned in a number of African songs. Moreover, potential migrants as well as Cameroonians living already in Germany told me that friends and relatives advised them to marry a German woman in order to facilitate their stay in Germany, but mainly to legalize their status. However, it was not only fellow country men who suggested marriage, but also in some cases German authorities. Two of my respondents who were only 'tolerated' in Germany at the time of the interview reported that they were advised by German civil registry officers to look for a German woman who was willing to marry them:

> The German legal situation does not give you any other chance than to get married. I went to ask for temporary residence and they [the authorities] told me, go, and find yourself a wife (Cameroonian man, 27).

It is widely assumed that marriage to a German would be the best way to secure long-term residency in Germany: "If you are afraid that they send you back the only chance you have is to marry" said a 34-year-old Cameroonian man whose claim for asylum was denied. In order to avoid being sent back to their country of origin, some former asylum seekers and now temporarily 'tolerated migrants' consider marrying a German woman, even if they are widows or much older than themselves, and, therefore, do not fulfill the criteria of an ideal marriage

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[203] Several Cameroonian interview partners reported that German women who are willing to marry African men are generally much older than their partners. These age differences caused lots of debates on gender roles and division of power among the Cameroonian migrants.

partner. For them, a marriage to a German woman represents their last chance to remain in Germany:

> Taking a German woman is the best ticket to secure papers and employment, since marriage to a German allows you to work and live in Germany (Cameroonian asylum seeker, 28 years old).

> We from Africa have no chance of obtaining asylum in Germany and there is no other way than to marry (Cameroonian asylum seeker, 24 years old).

These quotes describe the impasse of many Cameroonians, be they asylum seekers, 'tolerated' or undocumented migrants. The German law places them in impossible situation, in which marrying a German woman remains often the last resort to avoid deportation (see also Englert 1993 on Ghanaian migrants in Germany).

The majority of my Cameroonian interlocutors married to a German woman were former asylum seekers. The story of Jean, 28 years old and currently living in Berlin, is typical:

> Jean completed high school in a small town in the southwestern province of Cameroon before moving to Douala. There, for two years, he worked in the informal sector: cleaning cars, selling goods on the market, and doing 'small business deals'. The money he earned financed a modest living, and allowed him to save some money. In addition, his uncle supported him financially. In this way, he managed to collect enough money to pay for a tourist visa (a friend who lived in Germany sent an invitation) and a plane ticket to Germany. Shortly, after his arrival to Germany, he claimed political asylum. Jean remained three years in an asylum home in Brandenburg. During this time, he did some small jobs, but he was not able to earn enough money to live on his own or even to send money back home. After talking to a lawyer about his chances of obtaining refugee status, he realized that his only chance of being allowed to live and work in Germany was through marriage to a German woman. Together with other asylum seekers, he started to visit night clubs in Berlin although he was officially not permitted to leave the district ('residence obligation'). At the beginning, he was shy, not knowing what to do and how to behave, but he learned quickly by observing who danced with

whom, or on whom other Africans concentrated. He dated several women, and, after few months, he met his current wife, who is 42 years old, divorced, and working as a teacher. Shortly after they met, Jean moved into his girlfriend's apartment. They got married after less than one year of cohabiting. Due to the marriage, Jean received a work permit which allowed him to found an African association supported by the German government.

I met Jean and his wife when they had been married for two and half years. Jean was about to apply for permanent residency, and planned a visit to Cameroon. During the last two years, he managed to send a car to his family loaded with electronic equipment and hardware.

Jean complained a lot about his relationship with his wife, particular about the fact that she is too old and cannot have any children. In addition, he blamed her for not supporting him enough financially. In our last interview, he told me about his plans to divorce her. He intends to return to Cameroon in few years.

However, asylum seekers, 'tolerated migrants', and undocumented migrants are not the only Cameroonians who consider marriage. Cameroonian students may also face insecure legal situations due to different circumstances, as a former student from the western province in Cameroon explains:

I tried hard to complete my master's, but it did not work out. I had to work a lot in addition to my studies and I rarely had time to study. The language barrier made it even more complicated, and I failed the exams three times before they made me leave the university. I had no other choice than to obtain a residence permit in a different way. A friend recommended that I marry a German woman.

As this statement as well as the story of Simon in the introduction of this study clarifies, marrying a German is often not the first preference, but rather the last resort for many when there are no other options available. Cameroonian migrants need to find ways to circumvent the often discriminatory structures of the German immigration policy. Marriage to a German citizen might help to manage these structures, and hence obtain permission to stay and work.

## 6.7.2 Getting to know each other

In this context, it is interesting to examine, how Cameroonian men and German women meet. Male respondents frequently mentioned African night clubs in Berlin as a common place to get to know German women. One interviewee reflects on the situation in these clubs:

> In these places there are mainly Cameroonians with an insecure status who are looking for German women. And then there are these German women who come mainly out of curiosity. Some of them come to have sex with a black man (Cameroonian man, 34).

This quote gives a first impression on why Cameroonian men and German women visit these places. Interlocutors frequently mentioned the fact that German women would come to African nightclubs to look for an African man for a night. Charles Ofoji (2005: 63-5), a former Nigerian asylum seeker who was later living undocumented in Germany, has his own explanation for why African men and German women meet there:

> In the clubs: black men and white women, they needed each other for different reasons, most men wanted wives through whom they could get a residence permit. For women: those who were naturally attracted by black men, the sex maniacs and those who turned to blacks for comfort, not because they liked them but because their own people rejected them….

This provocative statement illustrates the different motives of African men and German women in visiting these night clubs – at least according to the views of male informants. Ofoji and some of my interviewees argued that German women are mainly interested in having sex with African men. They know that these men, who are often without a secure legal status, look for women to marry. Interlocutors believed that German women, who are often much older and not very attractive, or who have been disappointed by German men, use their positions of power to have affairs with young African men. An interlocutor explains:

> Many German women exploit their Cameroonian boyfriends sexually. They tell them that they would help them by marrying, but it never happens. I know a man who has

been together with his German girlfriend for more than two years, and finally the woman started to date somebody else. For him, all hope was gone, because no marriage means no papers (Cameroonian businessman, 32 years old).

In his book "Illegal in Berlin", Ofoji (2005) explains that West Africans in Germany call women whom they consider to be marriage material *kpali*. The term *kpali,* a popular epithet of West African origin, refers to German women who were deemed to willing to marry asylum seekers (ibid.: 50).

Ofoji (2005: 65) further describes the precarious situation for African men in the night clubs of Berlin: "Hustling for women here is a serious business, and for most of the blacks it is a do-or-die affair". Ofoji explains that African men need German women for different reasons, but mainly to obtain a residence permit and often to avoid deportation.

Other ways of meeting German women include marriage advertisements or lonely heart ads in newspapers or on the Internet; chat rooms for Germans interested in getting to know Africans, and vice versa; introductions by friends; engagement in non-governmental organizations and associations; or African-specific events, such as concerts or readings.

Some Cameroonian men are pretty desperate and are even willing to pay for their marriage to a German woman. During my field work, I have had several relevant experiences myself. Once I was asked to marry the brother of one of my informants. He offered me 15,000€ for the marriage. In another case, I was supposed to find a German woman who would be willing to fly to Cameroon to marry. Her Cameroonian husband would then apply for family reunification in Germany, and they would remain married for three to five years. It was clear that the arrangement was set up to be temporary from the outset. Travel expenses, like the flight ticket and visa, would be covered. The wedding ceremony would be arranged in Cameroon, and the German woman would receive around 20,000€ in installments. One respondent reflects on the situation of many migrants:

I either need plenty of money to convince a German woman to marry me or I would have to make one to fall in love with me. Both possibilities are hard to achieve (Cameroonian man, 29 years old).

I was told that particularly Cameroonian women searching for a German husband use the Internet. A male interview partner explains the different pathways:

Women don't look for husbands in clubs. Many of them search via the Internet from Cameroon for husbands in Europe or US. When they are already in Germany, relatives and friends help them to find somebody.

My own observations in African night clubs in Berlin confirmed this statement. There were only few African women in comparison to a large number of young African men and quite a number of German women. During my field work in Cameroon, I observed that mainly young Cameroonian women search the Internet for potential husbands abroad (see also Johnson-Hanks 2007). The example of Marie, 35 years old, illustrates how Internet contacts to German men can turn into marriage:

Marie got to know her German partner through an online international African dating web side. He invited to her twice to Germany. During her second visit, they married. This was eight years ago. Since then, Marie has a son from her German husband, but lives separated from him. During her stay in Germany, she earned her master's in business administration and is now working in an insurance company in Berlin. Due to her marriage and her son, she obtained a permanent residence permit, which allows her to remain and work in Germany as long as she likes. However, her future plans are to return to Cameroon, first alone and later together with her son. She plans to open her own business. Therefore, she applied for the German reintegration and emigration program from CIM (Human Resources Provider for German Development Cooperation). The program's "returning specialist" supports people from developing countries who studied and worked in Germany and would like to return. The German government pays their salaries for the first two years after their return.[204] Currently,

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[204] Special conditions apply to participate in the program; for example, it is essential to prove that the applicant had a working contract for at least two years in Germany.

Marie visits Cameroon to search for potential business partners and to re-establish her networks. Her son is momentarily living with his father in Germany.

According to Malaquais (2001: 106), young women use the Internet "to look for a white man to establish oneself". There are several websites – like abcoeur.com, drague.net, or amour.fr – where it is possible to virtually meet people from Europe, the United States, Canada, or other countries. On some of the websites, visitors can explicitly search for potential spouses. After contacts are established, chat rooms are often used to communicate.[205]

On September 29, 2006, the 'Cameroon Tribune' reported on the "Hidden Side of Internet Marriages". In addition to observing that the Internet had become the fastest means of finding a husband abroad, the article revealed the strategies of boys who use random pictures girls to apply as females searching for men. When the communication is established, they ask these men to pay for a passport or flight tickets, or they demand money in advance to book a hotel. These strategies of providing false information in order to gain trust and make money could be seen as part of the *feymania* phenomenon.[206] Here, as in other cases of *feymania*, these are 'white collar crimes' in which the aim is to quickly earn money by taking advantage of the naïveté of the victims, who are often Europeans or Americans. Here, the Internet is an example of how new communication technologies facilitate transnational migration. The use of digital technologies often makes migration possible, by enabling would-be migrants to establish contacts, build networks, and collect information.

For many Cameroonian men, but also for some women, marriage to a German spouse plays a crucial role in the migration process, and particularly for their legal integration.[207] A marriage to a German partner offers to the prospect of permanent secure residency, and hence access to the German labor market. Thus it is essential to dig deeper into the incentives and perspectives towards a binational marriage of Cameroonian migrants and German partners. First, I examine

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[205] Increasingly, webcams make transnational communication even livelier, but in some ways also more 'dangerous', as the story of an Internet café owner in Kribi illustrates. This businessman, himself a former migrant who lived for many years in Belgium, told me that his female customers asked him to install separate rooms for the usage of webcams. In order to have better chances on the 'virtual marriage market', young Cameroonian women would like to present themselves in a private atmosphere to their potential European spouses via webcam. The owner got also requests from European men to set up these private rooms. He quoted one European man: "It would be better to install webcams. Ultimately, I would like to see what I buy".

[206] For a detailed description on the phenomenon *feymania*, see Chapter 3.

[207] See also Lydia and Wilfried Ngwa's (2006) collection of 24 stories and experiences of Africans (primarily Cameroonians) in Europe and the United States. Some of these stories deal with the possibility of marrying a German woman to avoid deportation or to receive residence and work permit.

the diverse motives of German women for marrying Cameroonian men, and, second, I look at the aspirations and expectations of Cameroonian men.

## 6.7.3 Incentives for German women to marry binationally

During my field research in Berlin, I had the chance to interview six German women who are, or have been, married to Cameroonian men. In addition, I analyzed reports, comments, and requests made in the Internet forum 'Fast Africa' (www.fastafrica.de) by German women in relationships with African men. These contributions helped me to understand the perspectives and views of German wives. Unfortunately, I was not able to conduct interviews with German men married to a Cameroonian woman.

Conversations with German women illustrate their motives, the complexity of binational marriages, and the difficulties associated with the phenomenon.[208] Concerning the reasons for marrying an African partner, it is hard to draw general conclusions. As with every marriage, there are diverse motives, incentives, and impulses which lead to the decision to marry somebody. My guess is that, only for very few couples, binational or otherwise, love is the only motivation for marrying. Rational motives, perceived risks, and anticipated gains also play a significant role. It can be assumed that a marriage often fulfills several needs. For most German women I talked to, the reasons for marriage were diverse, and could not be reduced to a single on. Some women told me that they were already thinking about marriage shortly after meeting their Cameroonian partner. In a couple of cases, the partner had only an 'exceptional leave to remain' in Germany. The insecure status of their partners caused fear and anxiety in the women, as well as in the men (see also Simon's story). The women were afraid of losing their partners. In order to avoid the deportation of their partners, they agreed to marry much faster than they would have 'normally' done:[209]

> The problem is that he came into the country under a wrong name [with a fake identity]
> and he is now asylum seeker with exceptional leave to remain. Now I am pregnant and I

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[208] Several studies focus on marriage between African and German partners. Englert (1993) describes the worries and fears of both partners using case studies. In her diploma thesis, Rose (2001) examines stereotypes of binational relationships using the example of Ghanaian-German couples.

[209] The association "Binational families and relationships – iaf" conducted a survey of binational couples. More than half of them stated that they would not have married, or that they would have married but at a later date, if other options for living together would have been available.

would like to form a normal family with him. Marriage will make things much easier. He will receive residency and my child will have a father (German student, 28 years old).

As indicated in this statement, a pregnancy could be another reason for marriage. Many women claimed they would have married their partners anyway, but not so quickly. A German woman, 35 years old, reflects upon her relationship as follows:

I met my husband in a Salsa disco where I usually went every Wednesday to dance. After a couple of dates, he quickly moved into my apartment since he had just a small room for himself in a friend's flat. He came as an asylum seeker to Germany and when we met, he was only tolerated here. I feared he would not return home one day because they deported him to Cameroon. Sometimes I could not sleep because I was worried about him. I was simply afraid of losing him. My fears were the main reason for the quick marriage. In other circumstances we would have waited much longer. We were married for four years and we now live separated, but we are still good friends.

Other couples were forced to marry because the foreign partner lacked a work permit. By marrying, the Cameroonian spouse receives residency and a work permit. He then acquires access to the labor market and can support his wife (and his family back home) financially. Ofoji (2005: 63) comments on the motives of German women marrying African men:

Most of them [German women] were without jobs and depended on unemployment benefits; they therefore need a man who would go to work and earn money. They were also less complicated to catch; they easily married asylum seekers.

Like Ofoji, some interview partners complained that those German women, who were willing to marry them, were often receiving social benefits. In my field work, however, I equally encountered German women who were employed and therefore, able to support their husband. Sympathy and charity were other reasons for a binational marriage. In one case, the German woman reported that she married because she wanted to do a favor for a friend; otherwise he would have been forced to leave Germany and return to Cameroon. She told me that she did

not receive any money for the marriage. A 37-year-old woman explained to me: "I felt sorry for him and I wanted to help him to stay in Germany and earn some money".

Three of the German women interviewed were already divorced from their Cameroonian husbands. Two of them told me that they felt betrayed by their former Cameroonian partners.[210] After the separation, they realized that their husbands had married them for a residence permit. One woman, 29 years old, stated: "I think he never really loved me. Now I am sure he just married me for the papers". Both women told me that they had romantic ideas of love. Their relationship with an African man promised to be special because "he was so different…the way he looks, the way he talks, his culture, everything". Some women admitted that cultural differences, mentality, and vitality fascinated them at the beginning of their relationship, but became problematic at the end. Regina, who was married to a Cameroonian (with one son from the marriage) for eight years and is now divorced, remembers the turning point in their relationship:

> Everything was fine. I was happy and we got along very well until the moment when he constantly asked more money to send to his mother and other family members. I used to work as a software engineer and earned a very good salary, but I was not willing to spend everything on his relatives when the two of us could not even afford a yearly vacation. My husband did not show any interest in me anymore. All he wanted was money.

A number of German women reflected on the role of their husband's family. The statement above illustrates that some women underestimated the great importance of family and kin in Cameroon. Before marrying a Cameroonian man, they were not aware of the fact that the available money had not only to be sufficient for them and their husband, but also for the husband's family and kin. On the one hand, regular remittances often caused conflicts within the couple's relationship. Several women expressed the feeling that they had to finance the livelihood of their husband's family, which was not in their interest. On the other hand, a couple of my interviewees told me about their fascination with the solidarity and strong bonds between family members in African families, and they hoped that Cameroonian men would

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[210] The web page "1001 Geschichte" (http://www.1001geschichte.de, last accessed 14 August 2009) publishes stories from German women (and also some men) who got betrayed by their foreign partners.

fulfill this ideal. In addition, they hoped to become part of such a family. The majority of the German women were older than their Cameroonian spouses, and some of them had relationships with African partners before. One woman, 39 years old, confessed: "I was so happy to have a young, good-looking man at my side. My female friends admired me and I was really afraid to lose him and be all by myself again".

In her book "Marriage to Germany – Motives and Incentives of Thai-German Marriages", Ruenkaew (1999: 198) divides 'typical' German husbands married to Thai women into the following categories:

1. The one who is disappointed by his failed relationships to German women and decides for this reason to marry somebody from a different nation.
2. The aging bachelor who decides late to marry an Asian woman, having thus far spent his life without a marriage or a relationship.
3. The physically unattractive German man who corresponds most to the stereotype of 'sex tourist'. His appearance stigmatizes him in Germany and therefore, he is thankful to marry his holiday girlfriend.
4. The one who is interested in other cultures.

My findings on reasons why German women marry Cameroonian men partly correspond to the categorization of the 'typical' German husband of a Thai woman. Some of my German interviewees were disappointed by their previous relationships with German men, and were therefore, looking for 'something new'.[211] Others said they were interested in other cultures and ways of living, as the fascination with the imagined solidarity between family members in Africa described above illustrates. The majority of German women married to Cameroonian men were older than their husbands. They decided late in their life courses to get married (again). Some German women got attracted to Africans because of their exotic physical appearance. In this regard, sexuality played a major part in the relationship. These often older women felt desired and attractive when together with a younger, good-looking African man. The story of Barbara, a 51- year-old German woman (married for eight years to a 38-year-old

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[211] Vaskovics (1987: 146) assumes that a foreign partner could be a 'compensational partner' (*Ausweichpartner*) because previous relationships with a German partners failed.

Cameroonian man, and about to divorce) summarizes the motives and incentives of other German women:

> Barbara met her husband in an African nightclub in Berlin, where she used to go with two of her female friends. She had been married twice before her marriage with her Cameroonian husband. Both times, Barbara had been disappointed by her German husbands. This was the main reason why she was looking for something different; a man who still treats her like a real woman. She got married to her Cameroonian boyfriend just a half year after they met each other. The main reason for the quick marriage was that he did not have permanent residency in Germany. The relationship worked out pretty well for both of them; the only thing, her husband complained about was that she was too old to become a mother. After five years of marriage, the problems started. Her husband began to travel to Cameroon in order to organize building a house there. He spent all his money on this endeavor, and then started to spend her money as well in Cameroon. Although both of them had good salaries, they got into debt. Since he started to travel frequently to Cameroon, his parents and other family members constantly asked for money from him. They argued that his 'white wife' has lots of money, which she should share with her husband's family. Her husband took sides with his parents which lead to a conflict between the couple. In addition, Barbara found out that her husband had a child out of wedlock in Cameroon of whom he never told her. After six and a half years of marriage, they separated (they are officially still married). Barbara explains the separation as resulting from their different concepts of love and relationships. She said "I love you" means something completely different in the Cameroonian setting. To express love, becomes a means of gaining prestige and having money.

Christine Thomas-Khaled, legal counselor from the Afrika-Center in Berlin and a specialist in German immigration and residence law, informs and advises African-German couples and families. She summarizes the motives of German women for marrying an African partner as follows: curiosity, compassion, the desire to escape the German culture and 'to break rules', a longing for the exotic, but also disappointment and frustration with German partners. After

exploring why German women marry Cameroonian men, I focus now on the perspectives of Cameroonian men.

## 6.7.4 Perspectives of Cameroonian men

The interviews and informal conversations with Cameroonian men revealed another side of the story than the view of German women. Cameroonian interview partners often described their situation in Germany as desperate and hopeless:

> For many of us, there is no other chance than to leave home and try to earn some money abroad. In Germany, it is crucial to have a residence and a work permit. Many of us see no other way than to marry…a marriage to a German woman is a way of becoming legal plus to improve access to resources (Cameroonian asylum seeker, 32 years old, for three years in Germany).

For various reasons, many of my interview partners saw no alternative to marriage. Many Cameroonian asylum seekers feared deportation, other migrants were afraid that their temporary residency would soon expire and would not be extended. Some students searched for alternatives to remain and work in Germany after graduation. Many interlocutors reported that they felt totally exhausted and at the end of their tether. In a frank admission, one 28-year-old respondent stated:

> Africans use German women only for the purpose of obtaining their permit. And when they have obtained their legal status they leave the women and look for somebody from their own background. I know this is very hard, but it is no secret that marriage is in many cases the only chance to stay in Germany.

This quotes point to the fact that it is widely known that many Africans marry German women to secure their legal status. By saying this, my interview partner could also report prejudices or justify himself by talking about all Africans. In addition, he states that it is also emotionally "hard" for them as Africans to consider marriage as last loophole. If there were alternatives to

marriage, they would rather use these.[212] However, the majority of my interlocutors stated that they do not consider a marriage of convenience to a German woman as immoral or objectionable. A marriage mainly conducted for the purposes of legalization could still involve sympathy, emotions, and affection; even love could develop over time. Besides, Cameroonian men stated that German women also benefit from these marriages, and nobody forces them into these kinds of unions. In addition, my interlocutors argued that the German state, with its restrictive and discriminatory immigration policies, pushes them into situations where they do not have any other option. The following part of a story from the book "*Die Brandenburger Brücke*", by Mokini Obiri (2007) illustrates the dilemma of many African migrants:[213]

> **"Wedding day"**
>
> Pastor (P): "Do you love her?"
> African migrant (AM): "Yes Pastor I do."
> P. "Do you really love her?"
> AM: "Yes, I must love her."
> P: "Why must you love her?"
> AM: "Because I really need her to be my savior, my redeemer and my everything."
> P: "Are you aware of what you're doing?"
> AM: "Yes, Pastor, I'm fine. I know that I must love her if I really want to remain in this land. I have no other option but to love her with all my heart as I stand before you. Please do not look beyond my face. Do not send your inner eyes into my inner mind, please do not read my face nor read my palm, Listen to what I say and do believe me. I really love this woman who stands next to me. Please marry us. Bless this marriage if I must live past this hour…"

Marriage to a German woman can also lead to dependency for as long as the residence permit is contingent upon the existence and maintenance of the marriage. Some Cameroonians felt under extreme pressure from their German wives, who threatened to file for divorce unless the men did as the women wanted. One informant, 27 years old, explained:

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[212] Another interviewee explained that, for him, the marriage to a German woman was an obligatory phase in order to remain and work in Germany. He compared his time as a married man to the military service. After his divorce he said: "I have served".

[213] Obiri's book "*Die Brandenburger Brücke*", (2007) explores the world of African refugees in Germany. It focuses on the lives of refugees in the Belzig asylum home, where Obiri lived as a refugee for years.

In many marriages between African men and German women, there is a strong inequality. The German women clearly have the power. They can decide when to get married, but also when to divorce their husband. The African man depends totally on his German wife in many ways, since the marriage has to last at least three years in order to get the permit. The situation makes some men mad.

Another man, 34 years old, was emotional as he described his situation:

My German wife and I had to go to the *Ausländerbehörde* [immigration office] to extend my temporary residence permit. As soon as we got there my wife told the authorities that she wants to get divorced. You cannot imagine how I felt in this situation. I was totally afraid and I did not know what to think. There was nothing wrong in our relationship. We were almost two years married and I could not think of what to do without the permit... I was so afraid of losing my residence permit and that they would send me back to Cameroon. After some arguing and discussion in German which I only understood in parts, my wife explained to me that she just wanted to test me to find out whether I would be afraid of losing her. She told me to behave better in the future and not to come home late anymore, otherwise she will get divorced.

The quote clarifies, that marriage is also an insecure and uncertain status, at least for the first few years until the foreign partner obtains a marriage-independent residency and subsequently has the right to apply for permanent residency. As one informant puts it: "A German woman can destroy your entire future by applying for divorce from one day to the next". German laws make Cameroonians and other foreigners increasingly dependent on sustaining a three-year marriage to a German wife, and thus contribute to the creation of inequality through law. As one interview partner explains: "The Cameroonian man depends on his German woman in many ways".

German women have important forms of power within their relationships to Cameroonian men, since they are the ones who provide legal documents and a work permit for their foreign spouses. In many German-Cameroonian relationships, 'traditional' gender roles are turned upside down. The German wife achieves a strong and powerful position, not only due to the fact that she provides her partner with residency, but also because she is a native in the country

(speaks the language, knows the customs and regulations, etc.). Englert (1993) argues that the German woman takes over the husband's traditional position, i.e., being financially responsible, dealing with administrative issues; simply being the head of the family. In contrast, Cameroonian men are expected to do household chores, such as cleaning, washing, shopping, or even cooking – tasks which are regarded as women's tasks in Cameroon. Some respondents complained that they do not feel like "real men" anymore since getting together with their German wives. They feel they are treated like "house slaves", but there is nothing they can do since they depend on their German partners:

> Women here are very different from the ones in Cameroon. The girls I had there [in Cameroon] admired me and did not dare to approach me about issues like meeting my friends, coming home late, or who is going shopping, but here my wife has a lot of say. I never did washing, shopping or anything like that in Cameroon, but here I have to do it. My wife even earns more money than I do.

Almost all respondents stated that being married to a German woman means to them something completely different than being in a relationship with a Cameroonian woman. The fact that these German wives often do not correspond to the ideal marital partner plays a crucial role in their attitudes. Often German partners are older than Cameroonian men. An interlocutor observed that, given her age, his German wife could be his mother. These older, often divorced or widowed women, are referred to as "second-hand wives". I was told that these women would have little chance of remarriage in Cameroon. Interlocutors admitted they would never marry one of these women in Cameroon. However, in Germany, options are limited.

The majority of Cameroonian men expected to return to Cameroon in a few years. Their final aim was to marry a Cameroonian woman in Cameroon, and their families also awaited their return and their marriage at home. One Cameroonian man, 29, explained:

> Getting married here in Germany is somehow a problem for us, since marriage in Cameroon has a totally different meaning than here. I know many who got married to a German woman, but when they received their permit, they got divorced and now they are living together with a woman from Cameroon, because they always wanted this.

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Some also argued their ideal would be to have a white wife in Europe and another spouse in Cameroon. The European wife would provide legal and economic security, necessary networks, and prestige, while the Cameroonian woman would give him children, secure his position within the family, and keep him culturally and socially connected to his home country. Despite the fact that many interviewees told me that the main reason for their marriage with a German woman was to obtain residency and a work permit, it does not mean that they did not feel emotionally attached to their partners: "Primarily, I married because of papers, but that does not mean that I do not feel anything for my wife. I like her a lot". A couple of men reported that after some years of marriage they felt emotionally close to their wives. They appreciated particularly the friendship with them. This might be one reason why many couples live separated after some years without getting divorced. Another reason might be that divorce in Germany is expensive.

In contrast to Ofoji (2005: 63) who stated that African men often have to marry unemployed German women, in two conversations it was mentioned that Cameroonian men appreciate German women for their financial independence. It was said that Cameroonian women constantly ask their boyfriends or husbands for money, while German women are less interested in their husband's money. In addition, the emotions of German women were considered more honest and proper than those of Cameroonian women.

Some men appreciate it when their German wives become pregnant and give birth. A child gives them additional legal security. Even if the marriage does not last, the father of the common child can remain in Germany in order to carry out his responsibilities as a father since the child has German nationality (see Section "Parenthood and Legalization"). A 32-year-old respondent remarked:

I was happy when my wife told me that she was pregnant. First, I like children, and, second, now I am less dependent on my wife. If she wants a divorce, fine. I can still stay in Germany and prolong my residency because of the child.

Certainly some marriages, as reported both by Cameroonian men and German women, were happy despite the fact that the couple had to marry faster than others, and their administrative trouble was much more intense. Englert (1993) claims in her book that love will develop with

the course of time. She argues that binational couples need time to "get used to each other". On the basis of case studies, Englert (1993) describes possibilities for a harmonious binational relationship where love was not the initial motivation, but developed in the course of time. The same holds true for some German-Cameroonian couples, who reported being happily married despite bureaucratic obstacles. Like a former student from Douala explains:

> At the beginning I was only interested in my papers and in getting a work permit, but after some time I learned to love her. It is very different now; because of my wife, my life became more meaningful than before.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that most binational couples have to face a number of problems and barriers which are specific to binational couples, and do not affect German-German relationships. My interview partners, both Cameroonian men as well as German women, reported that the often insecure legal situation of the foreign partner, and the consequences of this insecurity, caused major conflicts in the relationship. In particular, the role of the authorities and the general suspicion that binational couples may be in a 'marriage of convenience' were major sources of problems, and frequently affected the daily life of the couples. In addition, interviewed couples reported experiencing discrimination from the authorities, but also from family members and friends.

## 6.7.5 Challenges of binational marriages

The fact that marriage to a German spouse is one of the few remaining options for non-EU citizens to acquire residency has led to attempts to restrict and control the right of marriage and free choice of partner. Because a binational marriage, as Rose (2001: 28) puts it, "…is often the entry ticket into the legal world", the German state and its officials are alarmed to discover that some marriages are conducted 'only' for the purpose of acquiring residency – 'marriages of convenience'. Binational couples and particularly African-German marriages are increasingly becoming the target of authorities.[214] In the final report of *fabienne*[215] (2001: 20),

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[214] Since 1998, civil registry offices in Germany were given the right and the duty to prevent 'marriages of convenience' (§1310 German Civil Code, marriage of convenience § 1314 paragraph 2). Hence, authorities fulfill the function of gatekeepers, and decide who is allowed to marry and who is not.

an EU-financed project on binational families and relationships in Europe, it is argued that Africans in binational relationships are controlled and checked by authorities far more often than Americans. Some interlocutors in binational relationships described the marriage procedure they experienced as "racist". An interview partner from Yaoundé recounted his experience with the German civil registry office. When he went there to submit necessary documents for the wedding with his German partner, the woman at the desk told him that his chances of being allowed to marry are very low because "… Africans are all liars. They want to sneak into the system to gain social benefits". He was shocked when he heard this statement, but there was nothing he could do. Interviewed couples often felt disadvantaged and discriminated against in comparison to German-German couples. In contrast to these couples, they must state the purpose and motives for their marriage. In addition, they often could not decide on the time and place of their marriage. As mentioned before, for some couples a quick marriage was needed to secure the right of the foreign partner to remain in Germany. Several German women reported that they believed that, if the couple had enough time to get to know each other before marriage, disappointment, and frustration could have been avoided. As with the timing of marriage, binational couples often cannot choose the location of the marriage. As described above, in many cases, a marriage in another country than Germany is necessary.

Both Cameroonian and German interlocutors largely described German authorities as arbitrary and discretionary. According to them, most civil registry officials decide on the acceptability of a foreign spouse, and thus on the marriage, on the basis of their own understanding of what a genuine (love) marriage should look like. The decisions bureaucrats reach depend to a large extent on their feelings about the applicant, and their personal impressions and experiences (see also *fabienne* 2001, Korczyn 2008, Wray 2006). The authorities who represent the German state only recognize 'love marriages' as legitimate. Hence, the model of 'love marriages' that Cameroonian-German unions are expected to uphold has arguably reverted to the period of Romanticism. While German-German marriages have become more informal, i.e., cohabiting unions and children out of wedlock, etc., Cameroonian-German unions are being evaluated by the 'old marriage ideal'. Therefore, in interviews, fiancés are asked to prove that love was the initial motive for their decision to marry, and not pragmatism or legal status. However, the final decision is made by civil registry officers, who have the right to use their

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[215] http://www.verband-binationaler.de/europaeischevernetzung/AbschlussberichtD.pdf, last accessed 15 June 2008.

discretion in applying or modifying, and in lengthening or slowing down the process of application. Thus, the personal stereotypes and prejudices of individual bureaucrats can influence the ease with which a couple starts a life together (Breger 1998: 139). As one of my interview partners observed:

> They [the authorities] decide whether they like you or not…I assume I was just luck. It is all about luck and coincidence. If the lady has a good day, fine, if not, you can forget about it.

The interviewee went on to explain that, since everything was regulated from above, he felt powerless and unable to act. A German woman who applied to marry a Cameroonian man told me about her experiences at the civil registry office. While filling out documents, the female civil servant expressed her worries: "The way you look, you could get a German man. You don't have to take one from Africa". Other women experienced similar reactions.

In some cases, the couple was allowed to marry, but every half year, they had to renew the temporary residency of the foreign partner. On these occasions, authorities questioned them again, or even came to their apartments to check whether the marriage was 'real'.

Difficult legal situations have significant consequences for the relationships between a foreigner and a German partner. On the one hand, the foreign spouse depends heavily on the marital partner for the first three years of their marriage[216]; on the other hand, German women are insecure about whether their partner simply married them for residency. Particularly in times of a crisis within the relationship, these aspects become relevant and are often a source of conflict and tension.

German-African couples experienced different forms of discrimination, not only from the authorities, but also from friends, colleagues, or relatives. Family members of German women advised them not to marry an African. As arguments, they stated that they would only marry them for papers, money, or to have a place to stay. Most binational couples had to deal with forms of discrimination and prejudices from the outside. Research shows that binational marriages in general experience more harassments, injustices, and social sanctions than other

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[216] Englert (1993) describes that foreign partners step back in situations of conflict, rather than putting their marriage and thus their right to stay in danger.

couples (Thode-Arora 1999: 244ff). A 35-year-old German woman married to a man from Ghana illustrates regular prejudices against her binational relationship:

> It does not matter whether I talk to relatives, friends, colleagues, neighbors or acquaintances, almost everybody is skeptical about my relationship. Most people want to warn me against my husband. They say, he is going to exploit you, he just wants your money, he married you for papers or he is not good for you. These accusations do not make our life easier.

Cameroonian men reported that they often have to explain their families and relatives back home why they chose to marry a white woman. Parents advised them to rather marry a Cameroonian instead of a German woman.

In addition to the discriminatory legal framework and bureaucratic ordinances (including common delaying tactics), prejudices and injustices in the everyday lives set different basic conditions for the relationship of binational couples (see also Lauser 2004, Lauth-Bacas 2002). Thus, as Varro (2000) puts it, the choice of a foreign partner depends not only on love and attraction, but also on rational choice, on perceived risks, and on expected gains on both sides.

## 6.7.6 Binational marriage in Cameroon and subsequent family reunification

As mentioned before, a number of German-Cameroonian couples do not marry in Germany due to the bureaucratic obstacles and the time-consuming and costly procedure. Some interviewed German-Cameroonian couples married in Cameroon, and the Cameroonian partner subsequently applied for a family reunification visa to join his wife in Germany. In the cases I observed, the Cameroonian men met their future wives in Germany, but I was told that there are also instances in which the couples meet in Cameroon for the first time, and the future husband has never been abroad before the marriage.

As Bledsoe and Sow (2008) explain in their article "Family Reunification Ideals and the Practice of Transnational Reproductive Life among Africans in Europe", family reunification law is based on the humanitarian right to marry and found a family life. Insisting on the family as the core unit of society, family reunification doctrine gives the family precedence even over the nation-state, which is charged with maintaining the family's integrity. Thus, spouses of

German citizens or of migrants with permanent residency in Germany should be allowed to join their partners in the new country of residence. However, in practice, marrying in Cameroon and subsequently applying for family reunification seems even more complicated than marrying in Germany. German authorities on both sides (Cameroon and Germany) carefully examine required documents, check circumstances, and conduct separate interviews with both partners. As with a binational marriage that takes place in Germany, Cameroonian citizens applying for entry to join a spouse in Germany are held to standards of emotional attachment ('love marriage'). The following case study illustrates the process of a 'transnational marriage'. Several back-and-forth movements for the Cameroonian interviewee were necessary before he could legally enter, stay, and work in Germany.

Joe came to Germany for the first time in 1995, as an asylum seeker. He spent three years in different asylum homes in Germany. After these three years, the German government allowed him to stay only on 'exceptional leave to remain'. Joe worked on construction sites, in restaurants, and in cigarette factories, despite his high level of education; he had completed high school in Cameroon and studied some semester at university. He had several German girlfriends who promised to marry him, but each one of them broke up before the wedding. After living for six years in Germany, he was asked to leave the country and return to Cameroon. The German government no longer saw any obstacles to his deportation. Joe remained illegal. In 2004, he met his current wife Sabine who had already three children and was working as a teacher in Berlin. Sabine agreed to marry him so they could stay together and live in Germany. Because of his illegal status, a marriage in Germany was impossible. Joe returned to Cameroon to prepare the wedding and Sabine followed a few weeks later. They got married in July 2005. She stayed for only one week in Cameroon because of her job and her children. After coming back to Germany, she had to notarize the marriage certificate at the civil registry office. She was then able to apply for family reunification. Joe remained in Cameroon. He had to pay around 150,000 CFA (228 €) to arrange his papers and finance additional costs, such as fingerprints and interviews at the consulate. Finally, he was able to demand a family reunification visa at the German consulate. The coming months, both of them spent with waiting, consulting the lawyer, visiting the authorities and attempting to convince the officials that their marriages was genuine and not a

'paper marriage'. I met Joe for the first time in Yaoundé while he was waiting for another appointment in the German consulate. That was in February 2006 and he had already been waiting for the family reunification visa for more than six months. Joe, who was fluent in German, explained his worries and concerns to me. He was afraid that while he was waiting here in Cameroon, his German wife, who was six years older than him, could abandon the plan, give up, and ask for divorce. On the telephone, she was complaining about the long time they had not seen each other and she was blaming him for not doing enough to hasten the process. After coming such a long way, he was desperate to return to Germany, with a proper residency, he wanted to set up his own business. In Cameroon, there was nothing to do for him except small jobs. He received pocket money from his wife. He told me that his family liked his German wife and that they expected him to go to Germany and send back money. Casually he explained me that he had a 14-year-old son living in Douala. One of his aims was to support the child, offer him a good education and invite him one day to Germany for university. Each time I met him, he was more distressed. Joe even started to make new plans in case the family reunion visa did not work out. He would buy a fake passport and enter Belgium under a false name, since his real name was already registered as rejected asylum seeker in the system of Schengen space. Friends told him that living and working without papers is supposed to be easier in Belgium than in Germany. By the time I left Cameroon, he had still had no reply from the consulate. In June 2006, I finally got an email that they gave him the visa and he made it to Germany. By that time he was already legally working in an Italian restaurant and earning his own money. The first time I met him in Germany, he explained to me that the marriage with the German woman had been his entry card to Germany. He was optimistic about realizing his business plans and bringing his son to Germany one day. However, in a few years he wanted to return to Cameroon to work and live there. Meanwhile, he planned to build one or two houses in Douala and send money to his family.

Joe's story clearly illustrates that, in the severe constraints of the present German labor market, Cameroonians find that almost the only way to stay, as non-OECD citizens, and to earn money is to merge their family life directly with that of host country citizens: to marry a German citizen. After failing to legalize his status in Germany, he had to return to Cameroon, marry his

German girlfriend there, and apply for a family reunification visa. In total it took him more than ten years to obtain residency in Germany, and thus obtain the right to work.

The diminishing options for African migrants to legalize their status, with marriage to a German woman being one of the last resorts for achieving legal inclusion, may lead to forms of 'transnational polygyny', i.e., being married in Cameroon as well as in Germany.

## 6.7.7 Incentives for transnational polygyny

During my field work in Cameroon, I met two men in their mid-thirties who were married and intended to go to Germany knowing that they might need to marry a German woman there to acquire permanent residency. These married men were aware of the fact that their migration to Germany might be connected with another marriage to a German woman. I also talked to their Cameroonian wives about the migration plans of their husbands. They stated: "We do not have any choice other than to let our husbands leave". Asking about the possible remarriage of their spouses, they replied: "If they take another wife, we have to accept that". Jiemin (2003: 128) refers to these women left behind as "widows of the living ones". They often remain behind living with their husband's family. In my interviews, these two women were not much concerned about the remarriage of their husbands, rather, they worried about them sending money and supporting the family. The wife of a potential migrant, a mother of four children, argued that:

> He should leave for a while and send money rather than stay here and do nothing. I don't mind him having another woman as long as he transfers money. And, by the way, even though he is here, he is never at home anyway.

By sending remittances to his Cameroonian wife and his children, the migrant fulfills his economic obligations, and is, therefore, entitled to have an additional wife and family abroad (see also Jiemin 2003). An interlocutor explained that his Cameroonian wife is better off with him being abroad and sending money than being at home and having no work and no

money.[217] Jiemin (2003: 148) adds that remittances are often considered as a 'payoff' for the wife left behind: "remittances symbolize the absent husband".

One of my respondents in Berlin, also married to a German woman, admitted after several meetings that he had another wife in Cameroon, and also two children.[218] He had not seen them in over five years, but he confessed to sending money regularly to his wife and the children. His German wife knows nothing about his polygamous family arrangement. He intends to return to Cameroon in a few years.

In two of my interviews with German women who were already divorced from their Cameroonian partners, these women explained that they discovered during their marriages that their husbands had another wife in Cameroon, and also children. Both of them remained married despite the other wives, but refused to give money to their husbands since they suspected that they would send it to their families. The following quote from the "Fast Africa Forum" originates from a German woman who asks for advice:

> I am together with a wonderful man from Cameroon. Everything is fine, but there is one big problem: He has already two wives in Cameroon. He was open and honest from the beginning and showed my pictures. He asked me whether I would still marry him, although he has already two wives back home. He would be in Cameroon three months a year, and the rest of the year he would stay with me in Germany. I talked on the phone to his first wife and she told me that she agrees with this deal, but I am not to sure how this will work. Does anyone have experience with polygamous marriages and can help me?219

For the large majority of respondents married both in Cameroon and in Germany, pragmatic reasons were decisive. For them, the marriage to a German woman enabled them to acquire residency and work permit. However, this does not mean that they had no true feelings for their German wives. As a 35-year-old Cameroonian man explains:

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[217] When asked whether his Cameroonian wife could also marry another man, he was horrified and replied: "No, of course not, she is already married".

[218] Lately these practices might also be occurring among Cameroonian women who married in Cameroon are migrating to Germany. They meet German men on the Internet who invite them to Germany (on a tourist visa) where they get married. Their aim is to stay there for some years and support their children from abroad. In this sense, they take over the household position of the men.

[219] There were no responses from other women on this question.

Yes, I married her for papers, but I honestly like this woman. I have no personal objections to having two families. I also don't think what I am doing is immoral.

As explained above, some interlocutors kept their marriage in Cameroon a secret, while others talked openly to their German wives about their family in Cameroon. In any case, for the migrants themselves, the transnational polygynous family arrangement puts them in precarious situations. On the one hand, they depend for some years on their German wives in order to acquire residency and work permit. On the other hand, they are pressured by their Cameroonian family to send remittances and support their wife and children.

Lubkemann (2000), who works on polgygynous life strategies of migrant men from Mozambique to South Africa, defines transnational polygyny as a man's marriage to multiple wives residing in different countries. Or, as Jiemin (2003: 128) puts it "to have a family on both ends". In the case of Cameroonian migrants, these transnational polygynous marital arrangements can be seen as a consequence of restrictive immigration policies in Germany.[220] Although some Cameroonian men are already married in Cameroon, they are obliged to adopt a variety of life strategies, for example, to take a (second) German wife to gain access to resources and social mobility in Germany. In addition to the legal aspect, the German wife generally also offers housing, financial support, and necessary integration opportunities into the German society, e.g., networks and information. One Cameroonian man, who has been married to his German wife for three and a half years, explained: "Marriage helps you to survive in Germany, not only for the papers, but also for a place to live and some money to send home". However, the vast majority of Cameroonian men told me that they intend to return home. Thus, they see the formal and bureaucratic marriage to a German spouse as a temporary necessity, and talk about being rejoined with their families. That means the majority of male Cameroonian migrants look back to Cameroon for their 'real conjugal future'. This perception opposes to a classic view in demography. Most demographers consider marriage in Western societies to represent the real ('formally correct') model of marriage, compared to the more informal forms of marriage seen in, for example, African societies, where different types of marriages, such as 'traditional', religious, or civil marriage, are recognized and coexist. The

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[220] In France, for example, polygamy was permitted until the introduction of the Pasqua laws in 1993. Sargent and Cordell (2003) examine the relationship between French immigration policies and Malian nuptial (often polygygnous) and reproductive decisions.

concept of the 'Second Demographic Transition', mainly developed by Lesthaeghe and van de Kaa (1986) assumes the real marriage as the baseline, and sees informal unions as distorted variants. In contrast, Cameroonian migrants may come to see 'traditional' – or at least Cameroonian – marriage as the basic form of union, and 'formal' marriage to a German partner in the West as the temporary distortion.

As pointed out, German immigration rules leave Cameroonian migrants hardly any options other than to rely on a three-year marriage to a German citizen in order to achieve personal and family goals. Transnational polygyny has to be seen in this light; married Cameroonian men work out ways to circumvent discriminatory modes of regulation by marrying a German wife. Or, as Lubkemann (2000: 41) puts it: "transnational polygyny has emerged as a strategy for dealing with broader political instability and economic insecurity".

A marriage to a German woman is often seen as an entry ticket to Germany, but also as one of the few remaining options of legal 'integration' into the country. Several scholars assume a link between binational marriages and integration. A marriage between a citizen and a non-citizen is said to lower the 'social distance' between a majority and a minority group. In the following, I discuss binational marriages as an indicator for integration.

## 6.7.8 Binational marriages as indicator for integration

Several authors (e.g. Gordon 1964, Esser 1980, Lauth-Bacas 2002, Lieberson & Waters 1988, Rosenfeld 2002, Vaskovics 1987, Waters & Jiménez 2005, and for Germany: Haug 2002, Heckmann & Schnapper 2003, Schroedter 2006) argue that binational marriages can be seen as an indicator for the integration of foreigners into the host society. It is said that the number and the intensity of social contacts between foreigners and citizens is linked to the level of social-cultural integration. A specific close social contact constitutes a binational marriage between a foreign-born person and a citizen of the host country. In this regard, binational marriages can be understood as one of the main mechanisms of social integration of foreigners (Lauth-Bacas 2002). In contrast, if non-citizens mainly marry within their own group, this is seen as an indication of social distancing and even segregation.

I argue, however, that binational marriages cannot per se be seen as an indicator of migrants' social and cultural integration into the host society, but rather as a means to legal long-term residency. In the following, I review and examine the assumed link between binational

marriage and integration. In doing so, I briefly discuss the analytic differences between the concept of integration and the idea of assimilation. I then make the argument that marriages between Cameroonian migrants and German citizens might represent means of legal inclusion, rather than social and cultural integration.

The concept of integration has been closely linked to research on assimilation, and still is partly today. The idea of assimilation was introduced by the Chicago School of Sociology in the 1920s, and dominated the American sociological debate for several decades. According to the "race-relations cycle" of Park (1950: 138), immigrants pass through different phases of integration: contact, competition, accommodation, and assimilation. Assimilation in this sense refers to the process of giving up and leaving behind the immigrant's culture and identity, and completely adapting to the host society culture. The main assumption was that immigrants had to change their attitudes and behavior in order to join America's culture and society. Assimilation was seen as a one-sided process; immigrants were supposed to change, not the majority population.

In his classic book, "Assimilation in America Life", Gordon (1964) further develops Park's concept. Like Park, Gordon broke the assimilation process into seven sub processes: acculturation, or behavioral assimilation; structural assimilation or access to societal institutions; amalgamation, or marital assimilation; identification assimilation; attitude receptional assimilation, or the absence of prejudice; behavior receptional assimilation, or the absence of discrimination; and civic assimilation, or the absence of value and power conflicts. According to Gordon, acculturation (the first sub-process of assimilation) occurs when an ethnic group's cultural patterns change to resemble those of the host society. In the final stage of assimilation, immigrants abandon their ethnic identity.[221] They identify with concepts, ideas, and values of the host society, and become indistinguishable from the majority. Gordon extends Parks' definition of assimilation by including the necessity of both groups' participation, the immigrants and the majority community, in the assimilation process.

Although assimilation as a theory became less common in the 1970s, some scholars from different disciplines still work with a concept of integration that relies on the idea of

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[221] The German sociologist Hartmut Esser (1980) bases his work on Gordon's multidimensional model of assimilation, distinguishes between structural, cultural, social, and identificational forms of assimilation. Esser examines individual integration conditions of labor migrants ('guest workers') in Germany. In contrast to Gordon, Esser differentiates between structural, social, cognitive, and identificative assimilation.

assimilation. Although Alba and Nee (1997, 2003) critically examine Gordon's conception of assimilation, they also imply that assimilation processes are inevitable for immigrants:

> Assimilation can be defined as the decline and at its endpoint the disappearance, of an ethnic/racial distinction and the cultural and social differences that express it (1997: 863).

Migrants and their descendants change from being outsiders to natives, becoming participants in the host society. Over time, migrants have the same or similar socioeconomic opportunities as majority groups; despite the fact that ethnicity and race still matter for some aspects, like access to the labor market (Alba & Nee 2003). Alba and Nee see assimilation as a two-way process that involves not only the migrants, but also changes by the mainstream population. They refer to it as the "new theory of assimilation" (ibid.).

Despite the ongoing use of the concept of assimilation, the term has negative connotations, particularly in the German context.[222] Hence, the expression assimilation is often avoided in current research, since "it almost immediately evokes emotional reactions and connotations of cultural suppression in many audiences" (Heckmann & Schnapper 2003: 46). The concept of assimilation raises negative associations in Germany because of its historical implications with National Socialism. In the 1980s and 1990s, the term assimilation was widely replaced by the notion of integration. However, some scholars continue to use both terms assimilation and integration interchangeably, and do not conceive of them as contrasting concepts.[223] According to Heckmann (2001: 61), "immigration integration refers to the inclusion of new populations into existing social structures and the quality and manner in which these new populations are connected to the existing system of socio-economic, legal, and cultural relations".

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[222] Despite avoiding the term assimilation, favoring instead a discussion about the integration of foreigners into German society, political debates in the country were until recently mainly about the duty and responsibility of migrants to 'integrate' in Germany. Discussions about the German *Leitkultur* ('defining culture') were held just 10 years ago. Politician from the political parties CDU and CSU (e.g., Friedrich Merz and Jörg Schönbohm) used the term *Deutsche Leitkultur* to argue against multiculturalism and parallel societies. They demanded that foreigners assimilate. Other political parties, like the Greens, criticized the concept strongly.

[223] For Price and Zubrzycki, assimilation includes integration, but also economic absorption, social acculturation and physical amalgamation. They define integration as "the process whereby two or more ethnic groups adapt themselves so well that they accept and value each other's contribution to their common political and social life" (1962: 59).

The definition and the application of the term integration are quite ambiguous. Different meanings can be attached to the concept of integration, sometimes of contrasting perspectives. Some scholars emphasize the ability and willingness of the immigrant populations to fit into the host society, whereas others concentrate on integration programs and their realization in the host society. Still others focus on the openness and readiness of both the immigrants and the majority communities as preconditions of integration. Calavita (2005) argues that levels of immigrants' integration, laws, and labor market segmentation are strongly related. Despite their willingness to integrate, some migrants, especially undocumented and asylum seekers, live and work separately from the majority population and thus have no real chance of integrating. Whereas some scholars refer to integration as a theoretical model, others focus on the indicators of integration. In this sense, integration seems to be both a technical and a cultural term. In my further dealing with the term, I mainly concentrate on the indicators of social and cultural integration.

In addition to other indicators of integration – such as access to the labor market (unemployment rates), education (e.g., dropout rates and school performance), knowledge of the language of the host country, access to health care, housing and residential segregation, and discrimination rates – binational marriage is seen as a good indicator for social and cultural integration (Gordon 1964, Esser 1980). Gordon (1964) claims that binational marriages can be considered the ultimate proof of assimilation (see also Walters & Jimenez 2005: 110). Binational marriages are treated as a measurement of the social distance between groups. Marriage is regarded as an intimate, exclusive, and long-lasting relationship, and is, therefore, a valid indicator of integration. Vaskovics (1987: 132-46) argues that marriage and family are 'basis institutions' for the integration process of foreign populations. Thus, weddings between a German citizen and a foreigner would be more frequent, the more integrated the respective foreign group is. And, conversely, if an immigrant marries somebody from the country of origin, it is seen as potential exclusion (Zincone 2006).

I argue that binational marriages do not necessarily indicate the level of integration of a minority group in the host society. For example, Straßburger's study (2003) on the partner choices of Turkish-origin, second-generation immigrants in Germany challenges the assumption that the marriage behavior of migrants provides information about the degree of integration in the host society. Straßburger shows that the 'marriage market' in the respective

host country is decisive.[224] Although Turkish men in Germany mainly marry Turkish women from their home communities, the Turkish population in Germany contains only half as many single women as men. Straßburger argues that the marriage behavior of Turkish migrants in Germany does not suggest potential exclusion or separation from the host society, but rather represents an opportunity to find a like-minded partner for life. The author concludes that Germans who marry Germans do not necessarily need to have a negative attitude towards inter-ethnic marriage, and vice versa. She adds that other indicators of integration, such as social contacts (relationships, friendships, and acquaintanceships) should be considered. In addition, there is a need to include the divorce rates of mixed couples in the analysis, since high mixed marriage rates may uncover individual strategies to get access to a secure legal status, as Zincone has observed in Italy (2006).

In my example of Cameroonian migrants in Germany, binational marriages between Cameroonians and Germans might represent strategies for achieving legal inclusion, rather than indicating cultural and social integration. Binational marriages do not necessarily provide evidence for the level of Cameroonian integration in the German society. It is significant to point out that there might be a distinction between cultural/social and legal integration, whereby one does not necessarily require or involve the other.[225] A migrant can be socially and culturally integrated – i.e., speaking the language of the host country, being educated in the host society, and having social contacts – but still lack full legal integration.

So far, this chapter has highlighted the marital practices of Cameroonian men seeking to legally enter, live, and work in Germany. I showed that diminishing options for immigration and residency make male Cameroonians increasingly dependent on sustaining a three-year marriage to a German wife. In some cases, this relationship between immigration and marriage results in men engaging in a 'dual family system', i.e., being married to a Cameroonian woman in Cameroon and subsequently marrying a German woman in Germany. In addition, I emphasized the discretion of authorities in delaying or refusing to grant permission to marry or to reunify with one's spouse. In the following, I will shed light on reproductive patterns of Cameroonians, focusing on Cameroonian women in Germany. While Cameroonian men must

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[224] Beside the structural conditions of the marriage market, individual preferences and the influence of social groups are important to consider when examining marriage patterns and partner choices (Kalmijn 1998: 398).
[225] Calavita (2005) points to efforts of immigrants in Italy and Spain to socially and culturally integrate, despite lacking legal recognition and working in low-paid jobs that keeps them away from the majority population.

increasingly resort to contracting and sustaining a marriage to a German woman to acquire permanent residency, Cameroonian women increasingly obtain permission to reside by becoming a parent of a German child. As I will illustrate parenthood, particularly motherhood, is increasingly distributed over transnational space to enable residency for non OECD-citizens.

## 6.8 Parenthood and Legalization

According to my interviewees, a German child might be another option for acquiring permanent residency, and, hence, a work permit.[226] This is the case when a Cameroonian and a German are the parents of a child who is born in Germany, and who is, therefore, eligible for German citizenship. The non-German parent acquires residency and access to the social welfare system, because the child is of German nationality. Interestingly, since July 1, 1998, this holds also true for the children of non-marital relationships (Rose 2001: 96). That means the non-German parent does not have to be married to the father or mother of the German child to obtain residency.[227] In addition, fatherhood is established through a formal acknowledgment of paternity (*Vaterschaftsanerkennung*) at the youth welfare office or before a solicitor. Ideally, the acknowledgment of paternity is registered before the child is born. The acknowledged father of the child does not necessarily have to be the biological father.[228] He must, prove that he exercises parental responsibility and takes care of the child (*Ausübung der Personensorge*), i.e., that he is the 'social father'. This legislation (§ 1592 German Civil Code) went into effect in 1998, when the rights of single mothers were expanded. A mother has the right to declare the identity of her child's father, which is then confirmed by the father's acknowledgment (Castaneda 2007). The law which allows foreign parents to obtain residency in order to be together with their child is intended to protect the child, and to prevent the child from being separated from the parents who are regarded as responsible for him or her. What does this mean for my case study of Cameroonian migrants in Germany? In the following, I discuss

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[226] Sargent and Cordell (2003) examine the link between changes in the French immigration regulations, e.g., prohibiting polygamy in 1993, and Malian reproductive decisions.

[227] According to the German Civil Code §1591-1594 (introduced in 1998), a mother is the woman who has given birth to the child. Paragraph 1592 indicates that a father of a child is: 1. the man who is married to the mother at time of birth, 2. the man who acknowledges paternity or 3. the man whose fatherhood is declared by law.

[228] The state has no right to request verification of the parent's claim through DNA or blood testing. That right is reserved for the parents and the child.

some statistical data on married and unmarried Cameroonian-German parents in Germany. I then analyze my ethnographic findings and examine some case studies. Finally, I discuss the term *Imbissväter*, used to describe German men who 'sale their paternity'.

## 6.8.1 Cameroonian parents in Germany

The number of children born in a Cameroonian-German partnership has increased almost continuously in the last years. Table 12 shows the number of children born to married Cameroonian-German couples.

**Table 12: Children born alive from married Cameroonian and German parents**

|  | Father German/ mother Cameroon | Mother German/ father Cameroon |
|---|---|---|
| 1965 – 1975 | 0 | 16 |
| 1976 – 1990 | 49 | 133 |
| 1991 – 1996 | 55 | 186 |
| 1997 | 27 | 39 |
| 1998 | 28 | 50 |
| 1999 | 34 | 40 |
| 2000 | 41 | 55 |
| 2001 | 51 | 55 |
| 2002 | 70 | 65 |
| 2003 | 66 | 79 |
| 2004 | 84 | 81 |
| 2005 | 91 | 94 |
| 2006 | 104 | 88 |

*Source: German Federal Statistical Office, different years*

Until 2001, there were more children born to a German mother and a Cameroonian father, but in the last six years the number of children born to German fathers and Cameroonian mothers has increased. This development caused me to take a closer look at the marital status of Cameroonian parents in Germany. Figure 3 shows children born by Cameroonian parents according to the marital status of the parents.

**Figure 3: Children born alive according to nationality and marital status of parents, 2006**
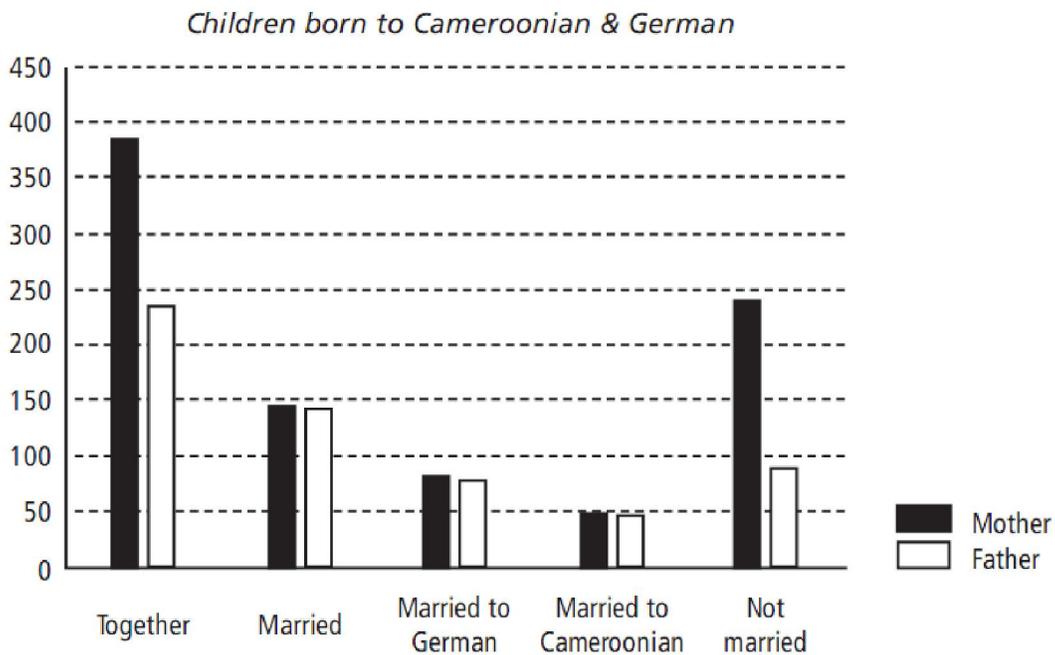


*Source: German Federal Statistical Office, differet years*

Figure 3 illustrates that, in 2006, a total of 307 children were acknowledged by Cameroonian men: 162 of these men were married (88 to a German woman and 58 to a Cameroonian woman) and 145 were not married. Statistical information on Cameroonian women show a quite different picture than for men. In 2006, a total of 483 children were born by Cameroonian women. Of these women, only 175 were married, 104 to a German man and 58 to a Cameroonian. However, the majority, or 308 Cameroonian mothers were unmarried when they had a child in Germany. In contrast to male Cameroonian migrants, the majority of female Cameroonian migrant parents were not registered as married. More than twice as many

Cameroonian mothers were not married as Cameroonian fathers. How can this statistical information be interpreted in relation to my ethnographic findings?

According to these statistics, which confirm my ethnographic data, it is possible to conclude that the majority of Cameroonian men become fathers within a marriage, often a marriage to a German woman. This could be seen as evidence that Cameroonian men find ways to obtain permanent residency, both by marrying a German woman, and by acknowledging paternity for a German child from this marriage. A 28-year-old Cameroonian man describes the advantages of having a child while being married to a German woman:

> For the man, a child becomes quite practical, since it makes him independent of his wife…if it works with the German woman, fine, if not he is going leave her the child and forms another family somewhere else. Within the marriage, a child allows the man to remain in Germany.

Paternity acknowledgment during a marriage to a German woman doubly secures residency, and hence access to the social welfare system. For Cameroonian men, their best route to staying is through contracting and sustaining a three-year marriage to a German woman, and, ideally, having a child while being married. A child facilitates a man's independence of his German wife since, once the child is recognized, the marriage could be theoretically dissolved. In addition, respondents stated that a child increases the probability of obtaining marriage-independent residency. A German woman, 24 years old, explains her situation:

> I am married to a man from Cameroon and we have one small child together. When I got to know my husband, he was only 'tolerated' in Germany. Now that we are married and have a child he got his residency permit. Sometimes I think he is only together with me because he feels guilty that he got his residency permit with my help, and that's why he is staying with me, out of charity.

For Cameroonian women, the situation looks quite differently. According to the statistical information available, 63% of Cameroonian women are unmarried when bearing a child in Germany. This confirms my ethnographic findings. It can be assumed that Cameroonian

women acquire residence rights by bearing a child who is acknowledged by a German man. While for a Cameroonian man, marriage to a German woman seems essential, for a Cameroonian woman, bearing a child by a German man seems sufficient to secure her residency status. The story of Claude illustrates my argument:

> Originally, Claude comes from the West province, from a small village close to Bafoussam. When she was 14 years old, she moved to her aunt's house to Douala, where she continued her education. Afterwards she studied three semesters at the University of Dschang before traveling to Germany. Claude was invited by her older brother to visit him in Berlin. She was not planning to stay, but after few weeks she got a job offer from a friend of her brother's. When her tourist visa expired after three months in Germany, Claude became 'illegal'. Thereafter, she not only worked without papers, but she also remained in the country without the permission to stay.
>
> In chat rooms she got to know a German man who was interested in her. They dated for four months before she discovered that she was pregnant. Her brother strongly suggested that she keep the 'German child', since this child would mean legal residency for her. Claude was not happy with the situation. She told me she liked this man, but she did not love him and would never marry him. However, in a way the child came quite practical. The father acknowledged paternity and Claude obtained residency.

Without the paternity acknowledgement of her German boyfriend, Claude would have most probably been deported to Cameroon shortly after the child was born.[229] In Germany, for undocumented migrants, every visit to the doctor can quickly result being taken into immigration custody. Therefore, undocumented pregnant women face particularly precarious situations. They need to interact with the health care system and the state authorities.[230] For

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[229] According to a resolution urged by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), since 2003 the registration of a child born in Germany, including the granting of a birth certificate, must occur immediately and regardless of legal status (UNFPA 2003). That means that undocumented migrants, asylum seekers or refugees obtain a residence permit from the day of birth (§28 Section 2 Residency Law).

[230] In Berlin, there are only few places which provide prenatal care and try to arrange deliveries for undocumented migrants. One of them is the office for medical assistance for refugees (*Büro für medizinische Flüchtlingshilfe* – www.medibuero.de), a self-organized and non-governmental organization. This organization works with 130 general practitioners, psychologists, midwives, physiothearapists, and interpreters. All of them agreed to offer their services anonymously and free.

Huschke (2009) explores the health situation of undocumented women from South America in Berlin.

that reasons, some women decide to abort their child, and others try to solve their problems by finding a German man to acknowledge the child.

## 6.8.2 'False paternity'?

Over the past decade, a discussion about 'false paternity' (*Scheinvaterschaft*) which is comparable to the public dispute on 'marriage of convenience' has developed in Germany. Since children are eligible for citizenship if at least one parent is German, a "shadow economy for paternity acknowledgments has emerged" (Castaneda 2008: 352). In the public debate, the negative term *Imbissväter* ('snack bar fathers') is used to describe German men who sell their paternity. Several German newspapers have reported that false paternity claims are being made in exchange of money (cf. FAZ, 29/07/2006, Die Tagespost 31/05/2005). The term *Imbissväter* refers to welfare recipients who often spend their time at typical German snack bars called *Imbiss*. It is said, that at these locations, these often unemployed German men also sell their paternity, acknowledging children of foreign mothers for a price.[231] In these cases, the child of a (often undocumented) migrant receives German citizenship, the mother generally obtains the right to residency and a work permit, and the German man can supplement his low income. According to Koop (2005), *Imbissväter* are particularly common in Berlin. He reports on a German man who has formally acknowledged paternity for nine children whose undocumented mothers were about to be deported. This is made possible by the fact that the legal father does not have to be the biological father.

In my research, I encountered two cases of Cameroonian women who relied on the acknowledgement of paternity of a German man to obtain residency. One of the women arrived in Germany four months pregnant, while the other became pregnant by her Cameroonian boyfriend while living undocumented in Germany. In numerous meetings and conversations, both women explained that they managed to find a German man who claimed to be the father of their children. Madeleine tells her story:

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[231] Many of the German men who claim paternity are welfare recipients, and thus are nor required to pay child support (*Unterhaltspflicht*) (see also Koop (2005)). Hence, the German state welfare agencies pay the maintenance obligations for the child and the mother.

When I discovered that I was pregnant, I was shocked. My boyfriend and I lived undocumented in Germany. Neither of us had a decent profession, although he worked from time to time on construction sites and in restaurants. A friend advised me to look for a German man who would claim fatherhood for the child, and thus to obtain residency at least for me. And that's how we did it. Through connections we got in contact with a German who was unemployed and lived on welfare. He agreed to acknowledge the child, but asked us for 2.500€. We managed to borrow this huge amount of money from friends. Then the procedure was quite easy. We had to fill out some papers at the local courthouse and that was it. Everything went well.[232]

As Madeleine's story reveals, many Cameroonian women in Germany I talked to were not aware of the relationship between bearing a child and obtaining residency. Hence, paternity fraud does not appear to be a common practice for Cameroonian women. In contrast, once they were pregnant and particularly vulnerable to deportation, they were advised to look for a German man who would be willing to claim paternity for the child. Castaneda (2008: 353) notes that there are also cases where the reverse scenario has occurred: men awaiting deportation have claimed paternity for a pregnant German woman's child, and thus were granted a residency permit. In my study, I did not encounter undocumented, single Cameroonian men claiming paternity for a child of German nationality.

On several websites, I found German women discussing the issue of paternity claims and asking for advice from others. One woman asked for help:

I need urgent help. My Cameroonian husband asked me this morning what would I say if he acknowledged the child of his friend so that the mother of the child could get a residency permit in Germany. The friend and his girlfriend are both students here, but they are almost finished. They want to stay in the country after they have finished their studies; therefore they need a permit to stay.

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[232] According to my interviews, costs for 'paternity' range from a couple of hundred Euros to 5.000€. Koop (2005) reports of a 50.000€ as 'salary' for 'false paternity'.

Another German woman is disappointed by her Cameroonian husband's ideas:

> I have been married to a Cameroonian for over eight years and we have one child together. Yesterday he told me that he wants to have a child with a Cameroonian lady. Only for charitable purposes, so that the woman can gain legal status. He told me that I would still be his wife and nothing would change for me. I would have loved more children from him, but I had to help him to pay off his debts.

Recently, politicians from all parties are debating a reform of the law of parent and child (*Kindschaftsrecht*). The controversial issue is whether paternity claims can be appealed by the German state authorities. The Christian Democratic Union (CDU), a center-right party, advocates a law which allows the state to request DNA testing in cases where fraud is suspected. The amendment of the law of parent and child is expected to prevent 'false paternity' claims. As evidence of the need of action, representatives of the CDU often cite a study conducted by the German Ministry of Interior. According to this survey, between 2003 and 2004, 1,694 undocumented, single mothers were given a residency permit based on a paternity acknowledgement by a German man (Koop 2005). The political left has strongly criticized this study. According to them, these registered numbers are perhaps suspicious cases, but not evidence of fraud. The law of 1998 was designed to protect a mother's autonomy and to prevent the state from determining paternity of children born to unmarried mothers. Therefore, the political left argues against an amendment of the law (see also Castaneda 2008: 353).

By the time of writing this book, no consensus between the different political parties and positions has been reached. However, since the June 1, 2008, a number of authorities, varying by the respective German Federal State, are permitted to contest paternity claims if the parents are not married (§1600 German Civil Code). These changes were made possible by an amendment of the law (*Gesetz zur Ergänzung des Rechts zur Anfechtung der Vaterschaft*). This means that the respective authorities, in cooperation with the foreign office, are authorized to investigate 'suspicious cases' of claimed paternity and report them to the regional government (*Bezirksregierung*). A prerequisite for appealing a paternity claim is evidence that no social-

familiar relationship (*sozial-familiäre Beziehung*) exists between the child and the claimed parent (§1600 Section 3, German Civil Code). According to the law, a social-familiar relationship exists when the father can prove that he exercises parental responsibility and takes care of the child (§1600 Section 4, German Civil Code). In practice, this means, the father

- has to pay alimony,
- is involved in all important education decisions concerning the child (e.g., choice of school, religious affiliation),
- gives attention to the child, including giving gifts,
- spends time with the child, or
- lives together with the mother.[233]

To find out whether a social-familiar relationship exists, authorities are permitted to conduct separate interviews with parents, grandparents, neighbors, etc. This procedure is reminiscent of the approach used in cases of suspected 'marriage of convenience'. Naturally, the clearest way to avoid suspicion is a DNA test which proves the biological fatherhood. If parents cannot afford a blood test (costs between 250€ and 600€) or do not wish to undertake such as test, the only remaining option is to provide evidence for a social-familiar relationship. An appeal is possible during the five years after the acknowledgement of paternity. In cases in which authorities suspect a 'false paternity' claim, all legal consequences for the foreign parent are postponed until a decision is taken. That means no residency permit is issued until it can be proved that a social-familiar relationship exists between the child and the alleged parent. In the worst case, the child can be denied the German nationality, and hence the foreign parent does not acquire residency. However, in my interviews I did not encounter a case where authorities appealed a paternity claim. This might be due to the fact that I conducted most of my interviews before June 2008. Debates concerning a reform of the law continue, also because the subject of 'false paternity' is relevant for the immigration discussion.

In sum, a single Cameroonian woman might obtain residency through a child of German nationality. In such a case, a German man much either be the biological father or the social father of a child. The same holds true for single Cameroonian fathers, who could apply for the

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[233] See also www.fluechtlingsrat-bw.de/Download/Beratungs-Info/2008-10%20Vaterschaftsanfechtungen.pdf, last accessed 17 March 2009.

right of custody, given that the mother of the child is German. Statistical data and ethnographic findings provide evidence of how female Cameroonian migrants in particular find ways to circumvent increasingly restrictive immigration policies by giving birth to child of German nationality. As a consequence, unique paternity practices, such as that of *Imbissväter* developed.

## 6.9 Conclusion

This chapter has explained that increasingly restrictive immigration and integration policies in Germany affect Cameroonian migrants' practices, especially migrants' marital and reproductive behaviors. The results are changing family forms and the rise of new family forms, such as transnational polygyny.

Germany is a case in which obtaining legal employment and residence has become exceedingly difficult for an outsider. The country has tightened its labor market to such an extent that non-OECD citizens without highly sought technical skills have little chance of staying. The only way for these third-country nationals to stay and earn money is to merge their family lives directly with those of host country citizens: that is, to marry a German spouse or bear a German child.[234] Such is the case for Cameroonians seeking to go to Germany. The pathways for doing so are, however, quite different for men and women.

For Cameroonian men, their best route obtaining residency is through contracting and sustaining a marriage to a German woman for at least three years, when they can apply for permanent residency. Accordingly, in 2006, there were 155 binational marriages between a Cameroonian and a German in Germany – 93 of them Cameroonian men marrying German women, but just six marriages between Cameroonian men and women.

For Cameroonian women, the situation looks quite different. Some Cameroonian women who stay in Germany gain residence rights by bearing a child of a German man who was willing to recognize it officially, irrespective of any long-term paternal obligations. Using German Federal Statistical Office figures on the children of married parents, I found that, in 2006, only

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[234] "The more migration becomes a common ambition and other means of migration are closed, the more marriage becomes a major hope, a dream of a better life – not any marriage, but marriage to a man or woman resident in the West" (Beck-Gernsheim 2007: 278).

few children were born to parents who were both Cameroonian, but a larger number of children was born to a Cameroonian and German conjugal pairs. Of these latter children, far more were born to Cameroonian women and their German husbands than to Cameroonian men and their German wives. However, what is particularly interesting is the fact that, in 2006, the majority of Cameroonian women were unmarried when bearing a child in Germany. It can be assumed that some Cameroonian women acquire residence rights by bearing a child who is acknowledged by a German man. While for Cameroonian men, marriage to a German woman seems essential, for Cameroonian women, bearing a child of a German man seems sufficient to secure their residency status.

What is important for my study is that Cameroonian migrants in Germany now orient their marital and reproductive lives more toward Germans than toward their compatriots. This is because a migrant can gain residency by marrying a German partner, or by becoming a parent to a child whose other parent is a German.

Of particular interest has been the role of authorities as gatekeepers for family-related migration by third-country nationals to Germany. As the long arm of the state, the authorities have the discretion to decide in each individual case whether to allow a binational couple to marry or reunify. In addition, they can appeal a paternity claim if neither a biological nor a social-familiar relationship between the father and the child can be established. That means that if public authorities suspect that the father is not honoring child custody obligations, they can deny paternity. This, in turn also means in many cases, a denial of permission to enter, live, and work in Germany. By delaying or even refusing some binational couples permission to marry or by making an appeal against a paternity claim, the state and its respective authorities play a crucial role in restricting the entry and residency of third-country nationals. The nation-state, represented by its respective authorities, defines categories of acceptable marriage partners and parents, but also sets restrictive conditions for family reunification and formation of non-OECD nationals. As a consequence, Cameroonian-German couples need to conform to the 'imagined' German marriage ideal to look 'real'. That means, it is necessary to prove that love and emotional affection are the only motives for marriage. Otherwise, couples are suspected of having entered into a marriage of convenience. A similar procedure holds true for the acknowledgement of paternity. According to the authorities, 'false paternity' exists when paternity is acknowledged with the sole aim of enabling a migrant to establish residency in

Germany. However, any assessment of a 'marriage of convenience' or a 'false paternity' implies a comparison with the perceived ideal of marriage and parenthood. Despite the fact that marriage and family are legally protected by the German Basic Law, different regulations apply for binational couples and parents. Thus, authorities in the civil registry or in the youth welfare or immigration offices play a decisive role. They have the discretion to refuse binational couples permission to marry in Germany, to reunify with their spouse, or claim paternity. The danger is that authorities could impose their own understanding of what a genuine marriage or social paternity should look like, and hence penalize atypical and unconventional unions and families by denying the individuals involved permission to marry or to form a family. Thus, some migrants are excluded, not primarily because their marriage or their paternity is considered fictitious, but because they are considered undesirable migrants.

# VII CONCLUSION

Using the example of Cameroonian migrants to Germany, this thesis has analyzed the relationship between dynamics across national borders, issues of family and kinship, nuptial and reproductive practices, and legal conditions. In doing so, the study has looked at the spacing and timing of key life moments of marriage and birth across continental boundaries as strategies for gaining rights to work and live. To provide a comprehensive picture of Cameroonian migrants' experiences, my work has been organized in a sequential order: starting in Cameroon, following the migration process to Germany, and, in part, back to Cameroon. This study examined the kinds of family formation patterns that have emerged in the wake of recent immigration policy changes.

Germany is a case in which obtaining residence and legal employment has become exceedingly difficult for non-OECD nationals. Post-war Germany's immigration policies have gone through several phases. The 'guest worker' period, from the 1950s to the 1970s was followed by an asylum phase in the early 1990s, during which Germany received and granted far more applications than any other European country. In the 2000s, however, the country has tightened its immigration and labor market to such an extent that third-country nationals without special qualifications and highly sought technical skills have little chance of staying. The few non-OECD citizens who now attempt to come to Germany are, for the most part, highly educated: they come for advanced training, or to fill highly skilled positions in science, business, or industry. Those who come to claim asylum have almost no chance of being recognized. This research has found that a large number of Cameroonian migrants rely on gender-specific means of responding to these exclusionary immigration and labor market restrictions. Almost the only way for Cameroonians to stay and earn money is to merge their family lives directly with those of German nationals, i.e., by marrying a German spouse or bearing a German child. Diminishing options for legalizing their status in Germany by other means make Cameroonian men increasingly dependent on sustaining a marriage to a German woman for at least three

years. Meanwhile, Cameroonian women consider having a child by a German man who is willing to recognize it officially as a means of attaining long-term residency.

After an introduction to my methodological approach, I gave an overview of the political, economic, social, and cultural factors that affect emigration in Cameroon. By outlining Cameroon's political, social, and economic development in a historical perspective, I provide a foundation in which my empirical findings are embedded. As my results have shown, there are a wide range of reasons young Cameroonians have considered migrating to Germany: the severe economic crisis in Cameroon at the end of the 1980s led to a drop in salaries and the dismissal of many employees, resulting in high rates of unemployment, especially in the formal sector. Particularly educated Cameroonians could not find a job in the labor market, and were looking for alternatives outside the country. For many who had completed high school, and for some who had already begun their studies at university or had received a degree, Europe appeared to be a good solution. Germany in particular was known for allowing migrants to continue their studies at university (without fees) and to find adequate working opportunities. Furthermore, there were also people who suffered from the human rights situation in the country. Interviewees reported being aware of the constant presence of military, police, and security forces; or even witnessing torture and political arrests. Some victims of these human rights violations claimed asylum in Germany. Whatever the reason for coming, most potential migrants come from rural areas, and moved to one of the larger towns or cities before trying to migrate internationally. Internal migration before moving abroad seems to be common throughout the country.

In addition to the relevant economic and political aspects of emigration, cultural components play an important role in creating incentives for emigration. Images of the paradise-like West transmitted by various media created incentives for international migration. The discussion of local terms such as bush falling, mbenguiste or feyman contributed to an understanding of the meaning of migration for the different actors involved, including migrants, family and community members, and sponsors.

The case of Cameroon demonstrates that it is not possible to determine one single reason for movement. Incentives for migration always consist of an interplay of various factors. A combination of high levels of education, but, at the same time, high rates of unemployment and urbanization, severe human rights violations, and a large number of young people, together with positive perceptions of the West, created motives for international migration. Although

international migration from Cameroon in particular has increased rapidly over the last two decades, it is not a new phenomenon. My study provides evidence that migration is deeply embedded in the daily lives of many Cameroonians.

In the next step of my analysis, I explored the role of familial, marital, and intergenerational relationships in the sending context Cameroon. It became evident that these personal ties were important in the entire migration process, for emigration and immigration, as well as also for the return to Cameroon. The concept of 'wealth in people' enabled me to examine social relationships, organization, and networks; including familial bonds, marital arrangements, and parent-child interactions. This study has found that family and kin play a crucial role in the migration process. My results illustrated the significant influence of – often senior – family members on the decision of an individual to migrate. Parents and elderly family members constantly test younger family members to find out their personal abilities. My investigations have shown that, in these socialization processes through which the qualities of children were recognized and fostered, certain people were selected for certain tasks depending on their respective skills and abilities. Children chosen for migration were raised in special ways. They often received a higher education and lived in a larger city before the actual migration.

In most cases, families see migration as an investment strategy in human capital that involves specific obligations in return. The elderly are willing to contribute to the costs of education, training, visas, travel, etc. In return, they expect regular remittances, consumer goods, and long-lasting reliability and support. I provided evidence that the decision to migrate is often made by senior family members, kin, or even the community, rather than by the individual migrant. It is an attempt to improve the chances of securing a successful and sustainable livelihood for all parties involved. In this sense, then, the findings may be partially seen as supporting the theory of the 'new economics of migration' (Mincer 1978, Stark 1991), which considers the importance of the extended family as the relevant decision-making unit. According to this theory, the family and the migrant often enter a mutually beneficial "contractual arrangement" based on an understanding of the obligations and benefits enjoyed the two parties (Stark & Lucas 1988: 466). Hence, migration is seen as a strategy that shifts the focus from individual independence to mutual interdependence.

My work also contributed to the considerable body of social network studies (Faist 2000, Portes 1998) which regard networks, such as interpersonal ties, kinship, and friendship, as catalysts for migration. The 'unwritten contract' between a family and the migrant includes

obligations and responsibilities, but also promises benefits and gains. My research proved that the family unit strongly influences decisions about who is moving, the destination country, and the length of time the member will remain abroad. Migrants did not solely move to pursue their own goals and for their own purposes, but because they are significant members and representative of their extended family. Therefore they – the chosen ones – have the opportunity to achieve better personal life conditions. Despite this, they are expected to honor certain duties and responsibilities to their relatives who enabled them to migrate. Obviously, obligations to family, kin, and community were not always fulfilled. There were some strategic attempts to thin out ties when necessary. Reciprocal commitments between the family and the migrant were often causes of debates and conflicts. However, migrants only rarely broke with their core relatives.

The investigation of reciprocal social systems between family members revealed another peculiarity of my study: migration to Germany is regarded as a temporary event. Sponsored migrants are expected to return to the country of origin after having met the assigned requirements. None of the interviewees, whether in Cameroon or in Germany, spoke of an intention to stay permanently in Germany. The aim is to stay abroad until migration goals, like completing their education and earning money, are achieved. Families insist on the return of their relatives, since they fear losing human capital that is working power at home. The finding that migration is intended to be temporary is also relevant for understanding marital and reproductive practices of Cameroonian men and women in Germany.

The illustration of marital behavior and reproductive practices in the West and Central African context with reference to the Cameroonian setting revealed that migration (plans) have a powerful impact on marital behavior. The desire to migrate often leads to a postponement of an 'official marriage ceremony', since financial means and personal as well as familial efforts are invested in the preparation of an international migration, rather than in marital arrangements. However, there is a difference between the pre-migrational marital behaviors of men and women. Whereas Cameroonian men are able to migrate alone even after they are married, married women face more difficulties in leaving the country without their husbands. For male migrants, it is possible to leave their wives and children behind and migrate to Europe for some years and then return. In some cases, their parents and kin even prefer a marriage before migration. It is believed that the wife and children left behind constitute a kind of insurance that the migrant will definitely return and send remittances during his absence. For married

women, in contrast, it is less likely that they will be able to find sponsors and support for their migration plans among their families and kin. By the time a woman is married, it is hard to find sponsors who are willing to pay for the preparation of the trip abroad. It is widely assumed that it is better to invest in unmarried female family members, most probably because the expected remittances will then go directly to the family members, and not to the husband and his kin. Basically, both young men and women need to decide between marriage and migration since both life events are costly and require long-term planning.

While marital behavior is highly affected by migration plans, and vice versa, reproductive practices are less influenced. For both men and women, it seems to be no major problem to have children out of wedlock before migrating. The practice of fostering children out also makes it possible for mothers to migrate. Particularly young mothers leave their children with relatives when moving within Cameroon or outside the country. In line with several demographic studies (Carlson 1985; Andersson 2004; Kulu 2005, 2006; Kulu & Milewski 2007), my investigations have shown that migration and family formation are strongly interrelated processes. Hence, my results contribute to the discussion on the impact of international migration on family formation, both in the sending and in the receiving contexts – that is, on the timing of marriage and of first and subsequent births.

In studying Cameroonian migration to Germany, I am in agreement with Carling (2002), who stated that recent literature on transnational migration is weakened by its failure to deal with the legal constraints on migration. My study demonstrated the remaining importance of national immigration policies for migrants from Cameroon. For them, German (and EU) policies regulating permission to enter, stay, and work in the country continue to be decisive for obtaining rights to residency and access the labor market. My thesis on Cameroonian migration to Germany – including leaving the country of origin, arriving in Germany, and returning to Cameroon – made it possible to extend and deepen the transnational migration concept by emphasizing the relationships between the exclusionary structures set up by the state, and migrants' abilities to circumvent these restrictions.

By exploring Germany's immigration history, I demonstrated how the German legal framework determines who is entitled to enter the country, and under what circumstances. My analysis provided evidence for the proposition that there are stratified rights for different migrants, depending on their nationality, type of legal status, purpose of stay, etc. The result is a classificatory system that structures legal statuses, connects them to certain rights, and

prevents migrants from attaining permanent residency and access to the labor market. Germany's immigration and integration policy allows some migrants to enter, and provides them with residency and work permits, whereas it excludes others from coming, and makes it even more difficult for them to obtain residency and work permits.

In this context, I described methods of emigration out of Cameroon and immigration into Germany by looking at different categories of migration: i.e., students, family members, asylum seekers, tourists, business people, and undocumented migrants. All categories of migrants face restrictive and discriminatory modes of regulation. If Cameroonian migrants are allowed to enter Germany, they receive only temporary residency, whether as asylum seekers, students, or family members. Many migrants are only allowed to work part time, if at all. As a consequence, they are confronted with fluid transitions between 'legality' and 'illegality' – i.e., areas between being officially registered, working or living with falsified or borrowed documents, or being defined as undocumented – merge in many cases. In describing these gray areas, my work contributed to discussion on the permeable boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate situations in migrants' lives (Calavita 1998, Coutin 2000, Menjivar 2006, Vasta 2008).

What is crucial is the temporary nature of the condition, and its ambiguity. If Cameroonian migrants receive permission to stay, they obtain a temporary permit which allows only a restricted right to residency and limited access to the labor market. Intensified uncertainty and insecurity are often the consequence, since temporary residency as a legal condition is neither permanent nor reliable. Therefore, it is essential to acquire permanent residency in order to achieve personal and family migration goals. For Cameroonian migrants, often the only way to stay and earn money is to merge their family lives directly with those of host country citizens: that is, to marry a German citizen or have a German child.

This study has identified some gender-specific practices of Cameroonian migrants used to obtain long-term residency, and thus a work permit in Germany. I argue that diminishing options for legalizing their status in Germany by other means make Cameroonian men, many of whom are educated, increasingly dependent on contracting and sustaining a three-year marriage to a German woman. Accordingly, in 2006, there were 155 binational marriages between a Cameroonian and a German in Germany, 93 of them involving Cameroonian men marrying German women. In the same year, however, there were just six marriages between Cameroonian men and women. For Cameroonian women, the situation looks quite different.

Some Cameroonian women gain the right to stay in Germany by having a child with a German man who was willing to recognize it officially, irrespective of any long-term paternal obligations. Using German Federal Statistical Office figures on children of married parents, I found that, in 2006, while there were just 58 children born to parents who were both Cameroonian, there were 192 children born to a Cameroonian and German conjugal pair. Of these latter children, far more were born to Cameroonian women and their German husbands than to Cameroonian men and their German wives. However, what is particularly interesting is the fact that, in 2006, the majority of Cameroonian women had a child in Germany were unmarried. It can be assumed that Cameroonian women acquire the right to stay by having a child who is acknowledged by a German man. While for Cameroonian men, marriage to a German woman seems essential, for Cameroonian women, having a child with a German man seems sufficient to secure their residency status.

My work made a special contribution by complementing the existing literature on transnational migration with perspectives on marriage strategies of male migrants and reproductive practices of female migrants. Existing studies on marriage strategies of migrants concentrated on foreign-born women entering a country of destination by relying on marriage to a native-born man (Beer 1996, Lauser 2004). The marriage strategies of male migrants are highly under-researched. Likewise, the investigation of reproductive practices of female migrants is rather new. What is important for my study is that Cameroonian migrants in Germany orient their nuptial and reproductive behavior more toward Germans than toward their compatriots.

It is significant to point out that there might be a distinction between cultural/social and legal integration, whereby one does not necessarily depend upon and involve the other. An immigrant can be socially and culturally integrated – i.e., by speaking the language of the host country, being educated in the host society, and having social contacts – but still lack legal integration. However, the opposite may also be the case. In line with Straßburger (2003), I argue that binational marriages do not necessarily indicate the level of integration of a minority group in the host society. In doing so, I reject the stereotype that the marriage behavior of migrants provides information about the degree of integration in the host society. In contrast, I argue that binational marriages, but also binational parenthood, cannot per se be seen as an indicator of migrants' social and cultural integration into the host society; instead, these arrangements must be – to a large degree – viewed as a means of attaining legal long-term

residency. Binational marriages do not necessarily provide evidence for the level of Cameroonian integration in the German society.

One main objective of the study was to elaborate on the meanings of family formation, namely, marriage and childbearing. As the discussion has shown, the perceptions and definitions of family, marriage, and parenthood vary not only between the sending and receiving contexts, but also between the perspectives of different actors involved. This study has considered relevant actors on all sides: individuals, families, and state. In doing so, it offers a broad understanding of the – often dissonant – sides of the story. Obviously, the German state defines family, marriage, and parenthood quite differently from Cameroonian migrants, German spouses, or migrants' families and kin. Two main points are of interest in this context:

First, since the end of 'guest worker' recruitment in 1973, the German state has restricted immigration mainly to its moral and legal core: asylum seeking and family reunification. Other than highly qualified persons and some foreign students, only asylum seekers and family members are protected by the law, and hence tolerated. The German constitution recognizes the right of asylum applicants to make a claim, and the right to family reunification. However, in order to limit and control immigration, the German state increasingly restricts both rights. In the case of asylum claims, fewer and fewer asylum seekers actually qualify for asylum. Similarly, the German state defines family quite narrowly, allowing only cohabiting spouses; dependent children, usually under the age of 16; and parents in exceptional circumstances only to reunify. My research reveals that Germany has sharply reduced its modes of entry down to the moral and legal cores of German society. Hence, third-country nationals such as Cameroonian migrants often rely on a combination of asylum applications and family formation to manage restrictions set up by the state.

Despite the fact that family, marriage, and parenthood are legally protected by the German Basic Law, different regulations apply to binational couples and parents. Of particular interest in this context is the role of authorities as gate-keepers for family-related migration from third-country nationals to Germany. As the long arm of the law, the authorities have the discretion to decide in each individual case whether or not they will allow a binational couple to marry or reunify. In addition, they can appeal a paternity claim if it neither a biological nor a social-familiar relationship is found to exist between the father and the child. In practice, that means that if public authorities suspect that the father is not fulfilling his child custody obligations, they can deny paternity. The implications for the father in such situations may be the refusal of

permission to enter, live, and work in Germany. By delaying or even refusing permission to marry for some binational couples, or by making an appeal against a paternity claim, the state officials play a crucial role in restricting the entry and residency of third-country nationals. The nation state represented by its respective authorities defines categories of acceptable marriage partners and parents, and, hence, sets restrictive conditions for family reunification and formation of non-OECD nationals. In order to fit in ('to legally integrate'), immigrants have to strive to follow the German family model, i.e., a lifelong, monogamous marriage based on love and affection (McGlynn 2006). Contemporary German immigration laws take these ideal family models to a distorted extreme for third-country nationals. This often results in the demonization of even the 'best' of such unions, by construing people of unwanted nationalities as potential exploiters of the last remaining concessions. Hence, the model that Cameroonian-German unions are expected to uphold has arguably reverted to the period of Romanticism. For these couples, there is a need to prove that love and emotional affection are the only motives for marriage. Otherwise, officials may suspect that their marriage is one of convenience. In contrast, German-German couples are not asked why they want to marry. A similar procedure holds true for the acknowledgement of paternity. According to the authorities, 'false paternity' exists when paternity is acknowledged with the sole aim of establishing residency in Germany. However, any judgment of a 'marriage of convenience' or a 'false paternity' implies a comparison with the perceived ideal of marriage and parenthood. The danger is that authorities may impose their own understanding of what a genuine marriage or social paternity should look like, and hence penalize atypical and unconventional unions and families by denying permission to marry or to form a family. Thus, some migrants are excluded not primarily because their marriage or their parenthood is deemed fictitious, but because they are considered "undesirable as a category" (Wray 2006: 319). Accordingly, authorities function as moral gate-keepers, and regulate immigration when deciding whether a marriage or a parenthood is 'credible' and 'advisable'. This study dealt seriously with the German culture of family and marriage, and the impossibility of achieving these ideals for anyone, including people who are the targets of exclusion, who are most forced to comply with them.

The second argument is strongly connected to the first, and relates to a classic view in demography. Most demographers consider marriage in Western societies to represent the real ('formally correct') model of marriage, compared to the more informal forms of marriage seen in, for example, African societies, where different types of marriages, such as 'traditional',

religious, or civil marriage, are recognized and coexist. The concept of the Second Demographic Transition, mainly developed by Lesthaeghe and van de Kaa (1986) assumes the real marriage as the baseline, and sees informal unions as distorted variants. In my study, Cameroonian migrants often view the formal and bureaucratic marriage to a German spouse as a temporary necessity, and they often look back to Cameroon for their 'real conjugal future'. And hence, they may come to see 'traditional' – or at least Cameroonian – marriage as the basic form of union, and 'formal' marriage in the West as the temporary distortion. As pointed out, it is crucial to note that German immigration rules leave Cameroonian migrants hardly any options other than to rely on a temporary marriage to a German citizen in order to achieve personal and family goals.

Thus, the life-course planning of Cameroonians depends strongly on their future migration plans out of the country, as well as on their intended return to their country of origin and their expected marriage in Cameroon. Leaving Cameroon at young ages, many Cameroonians postpone what they regard as their 'real marriage' in Cameroon (not only for the lack of financial means). Following their life trajectories, many of them engage in a temporary marriage of convenience in Germany in order to gain residence and work permits. The often assumed formal and real marriage in Europe becomes for them transitional: it is a means of returning to their home country as a financially successful and honored member of society, and then to continue the real marriage process with a Cameroonian. In my case studies, union formation in Europe is seen as a temporary event which enables migrants to stay within the borders of the EU and to gain the right to work and earn money, whereas the 'real' marriage follows after the successful migration in the context of origin. These practices bear some resemblance to forms of serial monogamy described in Africa, which most often takes the form of a wealthy man marrying several women over time, or a young man trying out several unions before defining one as a marriage (see, e.g., Comaroff and Roberts 1977, on southern Africa). In this case, however, a Cameroonian man seeking to resume a reproductive life back home must circulate, in both space and time, through a legally monogamous marriage. It is also important to note that the German wife in such a marriage, who is often older than her husband, may well have had a previous union, and hence she is technically doing the same thing.

In this regard, my study also contributed to the life-course approach (e.g., Elder 1985, Straßburger 2003, Kulu 2005), which incorporates the interconnections between migration,

marriage, childbearing, and other transitions. A large body of the recent literature in population studies emphasizes the interaction between the family and the migration careers of individuals. Kulu et al. (2007) examine how changes in the family domain lead to changes in residence, but also how migration influences individual fertility and family behavior. In line with these authors, my explorations have shown that life events such as marriage and birth strongly intersect with transnational migration. Because migration has become part of the life courses of many young Cameroonians, they have to split their education, work, marriage, and reproductive lives across national borders to achieve their key life-course goals. As I have demonstrated, the spacing and timing of marriage and childbearing become essential in the context of migration. At least for many male Cameroonian migrants, the real marriage procedure starts in Cameroon, continues with a temporary marriage in Germany, and is completed after the return in Cameroon. Female Cameroonian migrants also often postpone their marriage in Cameroon and have a child after their arrival in Germany. Hence, my study suggests that migration, marriage, and reproduction are best conceived of as interrelated fields which are part of a dynamic transnational process involving individuals, families, and global structures in Cameroon and Germany.

As the section on transnational polygyny explains, restrictive immigration regulations create incentives for multiple wives residing in different countries. Confronted with recent efforts to tighten immigration rules and the severe constraints of the present German labor market, married Cameroonian men attempt to circumvent these discriminatory modes of regulation by marrying a German wife. For the large majority of respondents married both in Cameroon and in Germany, pragmatic reasons were decisive. Some kept their marriages in Cameroon a secret. Others, however, talked openly to their German wives about their wife and family in Cameroon. In any case, for the migrants themselves, the transnational polygynous family arrangement puts them in precarious situations. On the one hand, they depend for some years on their German wives in order to gain legitimacy. On the other hand, they are pressured by their Cameroonian family to send remittances and support their wife and children. German women were often insecure about the motives and incentives of their Cameroonian husbands. They were troubled by unanswered questions about whether Cameroonian men married them simply for residency or whether true feelings were involved. The examined cases illustrate a conflict between African and Western ideas of marriage and fidelity.

In the course of this study, I have considered the interplay between structure and agency in the process of migration. In line with Brettell and Hollifield (2000), my investigations have shown that, on the one hand, migrants are shaped by the respective cultural, social, economic, political, and legal contexts; and that, on the other hand, the migrants themselves actively shape the migratory process. Giddens (1979, 1984) proposes that human agency and social structure can not be analyzed separately because human beings are both constrained by society, but also create social structure. In my study, I defined structure as those factors which shape migrants' actions, whereas agency was defined as the capacity and action of migrants.

As I have outlined throughout the study, migrants' behaviors and practices are affected by structural forces and circumstances that influence the process of moving across national borders. The prevalent structure can enable or constrain human agency. In the Cameroonian setting, both the economic and political situation (e.g., financial crisis, labor markets, educational system) as well as social and cultural forces (e.g., familial support and obligations, cultural images) affect not only emigration, but also return migration. In this regard, my study contributed to the discussion on social networks and the importance of the extended family in the migration process, a key theory for explaining the perpetuation of international migration streams (Brettell 2002). I find that familial obligations and expectations towards the (potential) migrant play crucial roles in the timing, direction, and kind of migration. However, social networks also play an important role in shaping migrants' actions in the German context. In Germany, the influence of fellow Cameroonians or German spouses is decisive. These ties may restrict action, while also enabling agency because they provide links to jobs, housing, education, and other information. Individual migrants operate within these networks, and their behavior is shaped by their relationships, both in the sending as well as in the receiving contexts.

In the receiving context, EU and German policies determine immigration and integration, and thus the life courses of migrants. However, the process of exclusion starts not only after their arrival in Germany, but even as they are preparing for departure. Cameroonian (potential) migrants are already restricted and marginalized while still in Cameroon. Visa restrictions, a lack of contacts, and a lack of financial means exclude many of them before they can even reach their country of destination. My work has extensively illustrated how Cameroonian migrants are constrained and restricted in their actions by structural forces, such as the German immigration policy. At the same time, I argue that individual migrants are agents of their

behavior. The German state sets up discriminatory structures and Cameroonian migrants are compelled to work out ways of managing these structures. As shown, some migrants choose pathways to gain long-term legal status which may include marrying a German citizen or bearing a German child. The distribution of marriage and parenthood over space and time becomes a means of securing the right to stay and work in Germany. While both life events lose legal and social relevance for many German citizens, they ironically become essential – often the last resort – for immigrants who have no other way of staying. Hence, the family formation patterns of migrants could be seen as a consequence of legal exclusion and marginalization.

My results contributed to the discussion on structure and agency within transnational migration literature. Transnational migration research has emphasized individual migrant agency as a defining feature of contemporary migrations, but it ignores the extent to which family, kin, and community as well as national policies have shaped migrants' practices and behavior. I argue that a whole range of phenomena have an impact on, and are affected by, migration. My study is about the structural constraints and circumstances in both the sending and the receiving contexts that shape lives of migrants, but it is equally about the agency of an individual who makes decisions in the face of these constraints, and finds ways to circumvent them.

To conclude, I come back to the starting point of my study. I recall the story of Simon (see Introduction) which pointed to the interplay of structure and agency and brought light to a number of key issues of my study: the linkages between transnational migration, family formation, and immigration policy. Simon's story illustrated motives for migration, difficulties of border crossing, and the struggle to find ways to legality. It suggested also to what is increasingly becoming a norm, among Germany's African immigrants: migration as a temporary phase in a life course that begins and ends in Africa. I would like to add a statement by Simon which he made during one of of our last conversations:

> My situation is like a computer which you load with special software and you run and run according to the software installed and you just hope and pray that the computer will never break down and you do not have to reload the software again.

By using the metapher of a computer software which 'usually' runs once installed, Simon described his migration endeavors. The statement points to the constant fear of failure, but also

to a great insecurity and uncertainty. This uncertainty starts by leaving Cameroon without knowing what to expect from Europe. Upon their arrival, most migrants are frequently compelled to reconstruct their life story in order to circumvent modes of exclusion. Interviewees expressed their fear to be discovered, be it because they were working undocumented or circumventing the rules, which resulted in a permanent insecurity. Simon's comment points to his anxiety to start again from the beginning. So many things could go wrong, he could be deported, he could loose his job in the company of his father-in-law, his wife could file for divorce, etc. In these cases, Simon would be left with nothing, he would face the horrifying specter of having to start it all again – 'to reinstall the software' – which would be much more difficult this time. After a 'failed' migration is much harder to regain people's confidence, to persuade them to invest, etc. Uncertainty is a crucial aspect in the lives of many migrants, hardly anything is secure or reliable: education, work, financial situation, marriage, and even returning home. Migrants need to constantly adapt and respond to shifting immigration regulations and structures.

Interestingly, a whole part of the software is already loaded from Cameroon. Simon, for example, knew before leaving his country of origin that marriage to a German woman is most probably the only opportunity to secure his position in Germany. His quote points to a cumulative history of struggle – a laid set of plans and carefully orchestrated actions. Listening to the life story of Simon and other Cameroonians in Germany, I concluded that many steps and pathways, which lead to a migration to Germany, are already planned and deliberated while still being in Cameroon.

Simon's statement also implies that the development of so many rules and policy measures in Germany that aim explicitly to exclude immigrants, like those that Simon represents, has paradoxically generated an entire industry of responses – including marrying a German partner and bearing a German child – that potential migrants try to follow. Simon'story illustrates the emergence of a set of scripts centered particularly on family reunification and marriage that put people at risk but at the same time offer a tiny possibility hope for making a living for oneself and one's family through a period of work in Germany. These scripts emerge and evolve in Africa as well as in Germany, in direct response to the German and EU rules themselves. To achieve the goals of being a successful bush faller and to return with enough means to support the extended family involves to know the immigration and integration scripts and to find a loophole.

The quote beautifully embodies the tremendous pressure on migrants and why it is so dreadful. On the one hand, they are under constraint to satisfy the German society (authorities, officials, and German wives) to make them believe their stories and be granted residency and work permit. On the other hand, they pervert the facts to meet needs and expectations of their families and friends in Cameroon who suppose that they are successful migrants in Germany.

This study provided deeper insights into the complex reality of transnational migration from Africa to Europe, in particular from Cameroon to Germany, than was previously available. Taking into account the perspectives of the state, families, migrants and their German partners, I find that migrants' nuptial and reproductive practices in both the sending and the receiving contexts are largely shaped by immigration politics. In contrast to individuals, the state has the power to legally define family identities, and to set the parameters for what it expects and tolerates in a marriage relationship or from parents. Hence, to acquire rights to residency and access to the labor market, migrants adjust and adapt in order to conform to the 'traditional' nuclear family model. The more Fortress Europe, including Germany, restricts immigration options by policing marriage and parenthood, the more third-country nationals who seek legitimacy must stage their key life events according to imagined ideals. My study provided evidence for the proposition that family networks are becoming increasingly important as rights to immigration, residency, and access to the labor market are increasingly restricted. My guess, however, is that, even if family-related migration is further restricted, migrants will find new pathways to reside and work in Germany.

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# GLOSSARY

**Local terms**

| | |
|---|---|
| *419 scheme* | named after a relevant article of the Nigerian penal code which makes obtaining money under false pretense a criminal offense |
| *aduro* | literally translated 'to suffer', referring to the hard living conditions in asylum homes |
| *been-to's* | refers to those Cameroonians outside of their country who represent the West |
| *bière* | term for corruption and bribery |
| *bush faller* | term used for international migrants |
| *cadeaux* | little gift, term for bribe |
| *couper et décaler* | *couper* literally be translated with to 'cut' and *decaler* refers to 'disarrange': to dislocate or to displace, it actually means to cheat somebody or to steal and to run away |
| *famla* | popular form of witchcraft employed mostly between relatives of the extended family, the term can be used in a metaphorical sense when describing situations where young Cameroonians are forced by relatives to leave their country, seek employment abroad and send remittances to support relatives (alternative terms: *nyongo, kupe*) |
| *feyman* | refers to a 'social bandit', a trickster, a money-doubler or more general to successful swindlers |
| *feymania* | (occult) fraudulence, confidence art |
| *fon* | chief ruling an hierarchical structured independent chiefdoms in the Grassfields |
| *frontier* | exploring new land and to settle in newly discovered regions, here migration is seen as an adventure |
| *gombo* | okra, ladyfingers, a metaphor for various forms of kickbacks, freebies, and rewards |
| *Imbissväter* | snack bar fathers, term is used to describe German men who are willing to recognize it officially, irrespective of any longterm paternal obligations |
| *kola nut* | term for corruption and bribery |
| *kpali* | referring to German women who were deemed to easily marry asylum seekers |
| *la crise* | economic breakdown at the end of the 1980s in Cameroon |
| *lamidat* | hierarchical and centralized socio-political system under control of a *laamiiDo* (Fulbe superior chief) |

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| | |
|---|---|
| *mbeng* | literally translated *white people's country* |
| *mbenguiste* | people going abroad |
| *nasara, nasa* | white person in Bamoun |
| *nyongo* | witchcraft of the new riches, term used in the description of young Cameroonians who are forced by relatives to leave their country and send remittances |
| *oyibo* | means 'white man' or 'white woman', but the term is also used for expatriates and returning Cameroonians |
| *Rio de Camaroes* | Prawn River, initial name for the Wouri Estuary that gave Cameroon its current name |
| *Sagacité* | refers to a place which does not actually exists, as a result of imagination of many young Cameroonians who believe that a better life is possible abroad |
| *sugar daddies* | old, wealthy man having a relationship with an adolescent girl, often involves gifts or other favors in exchange for sexual relationships, (also called *sponsors*) |
| *sugar mamas* | older women who engage in sexual affairs with younger men |
| *tchoko* | term for corruption, small tip |
| *tontines* | informal saving and loan associations which have financial as well as social functions |
| *V.V.V.* | house, bank transfer, car (*villa, virement bancaire, voiture*) |
| *whiteman kontri* | country where white people live, considered as place of material miracles |

## Technical terms

| | |
|---|---|
| *Anwerbeabkommen* | agreement on labor recruitment |
| *Asylkompromiss* | asylum compromise, safe third country rule |
| *Aufenthaltserlaubnis* | temporary residence permit |
| *Aufenthaltsgesetz* | Residence Act |
| *Ausländerbehörde* | immigration office |
| *Aussiedler* | are repatriates of German origin from the countries of the former Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact who have been allowed to settle in Germany under a special program |
| *Begegnungsgemeinschaft* | encounter relationship in contrast to matriminial unit (*eheliche Lebensgemeinschaft*) |
| *Bundesagentur für Arbeit* | Federal Employment Agency |
| *Drittstaatsangehörige* | third-country nationals are citizens of countries which do not belong to the EU or the European Economic Area, used in contrast to EU-nationals |

| | |
|---|---|
| *Duldung* | exceptional leave to remain , being tolerated in Germany |
| *Ehefähigkeitszeugnis* | certificate of non-marital impediment |
| *Eheleitbild* | acknowledged guiding principle of marriage |
| *Eigenständiges Aufenthaltsrecht* | right to residency independent of the continuity of the marriage to the German spouse after two years |
| *Grundgesetz* | Basic Law |
| *jus sanguinis* | principle of descent |
| *jus soli* | principle of birthplace |
| *Kettenduldung* | chain toleration |
| *Lebensgemeinschaft* | matrimonial unit |
| *Neues Bleiberecht* | New Right of Abode (2007) |
| *Niederlassungserlaubnis* | settlement permit |
| *Personensorge* | child custody |
| *Residenzpflicht* | residence obligation |
| *Rotationsprinzip* | rotation principle |
| *Scheinehe* | marriage of convenience |
| *Vaterschaftsanerkennung* | formal acknowledgment of paternity |
| *Vorrangsprinzip* | priority principle |
| *Zertifikat Deutsch* | German language certificate |
| *Zuwanderungsgesetz* | Immigration Act (2005) |

# QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SURVEY "INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION"

Questionnaires were available in French and English.

Please answer the questions below. You can choose several possible answers or add information if you like. All information will be kept confidential and anonymous. Please write your name, some biographical information and give your contacts on this paper, so that we can contact you for further questions. Thank you very much!

1. If you are asked to choose one of the following countries for an international stay abroad, which one would it be?
   - France
   - United States
   - United Kingdom
   - Germany
   - Spain, Italy, Belgium
   - Scandinavian countries
   - Japan, China, Singapore, Saudi Arabia
   - South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia

2. Why would you like to leave abroad?
   - Doing the Master degree /PhD
   - Finding work
   - Getting married
   - Business
   - Football or other sports
   - Joining other family members

3. Who influenced you decision to migrate?

– Parents

– Extended family

– Associations

– Friends

– University or training school

– Nobody

4. What are your expectations of international migration?

– Money

– Future contacts

– Work

– Improvement of living

– Degrees

– Others: what?

5. Do you know already people living abroad? If so, who?

6. How are you planning to reach your target country? Please, explain!

7. Suppose you do not have a visa or money, but your target country requires a visa, what would you do?

8. Suppose one of your family members/friends/association members paid your journey, what do you think they expect from you in return?

– Degrees

– Job

– Money

– Contacts – support other family members

– Marriage

– Other explanations:

9. Suppose you become 'illegal' abroad, what would you do?

10. If you would have to choose between a European and an African spouse either abroad or here, what would you do and why?

11. What is the most important event in your life?
   – Marriage
   – Children
   – Migration

12. Suppose you are already in your target country and you are forced to return, what would you do?
   – Return
   – Moving to another country
   – Staying and trying ways to legalize status

13. What do you think about the questionnaire?

## KOPPO: SI TU VOIS MA GO (If you see me go)

Chorus: ///Si tu vois ma "go" / if you see my girlfriend
Dis lui que je go / tell her i am leaving
Je go chez les "whites" / i am going to the white men's place
Pour "fallah" les do / to make money
La galère du "Kamer" / the suffering of Cameroon
Toi même tu "know" / you too know
Tu boulo tu "boulo" / you work you work
Mais ou sont les "doo" but no money///

Mon frère je te jures / my brother i swear
Je suis fatigué / i am tired
J'ai tout fait /i have done everything
J'ai tout do / I have done all
Pour chasser le "nguée" / to send away misery
J'ai wash les voitures /i have washed cars
Il n'y avait pas "moyo"/ there was no way
J'ai "tum" les chaussures/ i have sold shoes
Il n'y avait pas "moyo"/there was no way
Le poisson, les chenilles / Fishs, caterpillers
Il n'y avait pas moyo / there was no way
Alors j'ai "tchat"/ so i have said
Que c'est trop / that it's too much
Il faut que je go /I must leave

Le "pater" la "mater" / my father my mother
Quand je suis deja go /as soon as leave
Va leur tchat / go and tell them
A tous les gars du" kwat" / to all the neighbours
A toutes les go du "kwat" / to all girls of the neighbors
Que ça gate ça gate / i don't care

Si tu vois ma nga /if you see my girlfriend
Dis lui que je pars / tell her that i am leaving
Quand tu such la télé / When you watch the TV
 Tu vois que chez les whites / you see that in the white men's place
Est ce qu'on suffer même / do they even suffer?
Tout le monde est bad / everybody is fine
Dès que le tombe làbas / as soon as i reach there
Je hold un boulo/ i find a job

N'importe quell boulo / any kind of job
Qui peut me give les do /which can give me money
Promener le chien / take the dog to a walk
Moi je vais boulo/ i will work
Laver les cadavres  / wash corps
Moi je vais boulo / i will work
Même épouser les veuves / even getting marry to the widows
Moi je vais boulo / i will work
Fis quoi  fais quoi / anyway
J'aurais les do / i will have money
Foumban foumbot je vais go / Foumban, Foumbot[235]
I will leave

Dis lui qu'il n'y plus le "pond"a / Tell her there is no time
De lui dire adieu / to tell her goodbye (farewell)
Parce que les go aiment "joss" / because girls like to be pet
C'est le ponda que'elles lost / it is waste of time
Or le ponda c'est les do/ whereas time is money
Il faut que je go / i must leave
Entre les do si je go / between leaving to make money
Et le "ndolo" de ma go / And the love of my girlfriend
Je tcha le ndolo / i take love
Mais sans les do / But whithout money
Il n'y a pas Ndolo / there is no love
Il nous faut les do / We need money
Il faut que je go / I must leave
Dis lui qu'il n'y a pas de "pet" / Tell her there is no matter
Je ne vais jamais la forget / I will never forget her
Si tu vois ma go / If you see my girlfriend
Dis lui que je go / Tell her I am leaving
Je vais toujours "mimba" qu'elle a un large debat / I
will always remember she has a large bottom
Si tu vois ma go / if you see my girlfriend
Dis lui que je go /Tell her I am leaving
Je vais te garder la "sappe" / I will keep you nice clothes
Les sacs les sacs / In bags in bags
Si tu vois ma go / If you see my girlfriend
Dis lui que je go / Tell her I am leaving
On va faire comment le "kamer" a les dents / What will
we do ? Cameroon has teeth

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[235] *Foumban, Foumbot* are two towns in Cameroon, used for the rime.

Et tout ceux qui me pleurent / And all those who miss me
A quelle heure ! / is late
Si tu vois ma go Dis lui que je "tum"[236]/ if you see my
girlfriend Tell her I am leaving
Si tu vois ma go Dis lui que je "Lance"[237]/ if you see my
girlfriend Tell her I am leaving
Si tu vois ma go Dis lui que je "Nyon"[238]/ if you see my
girlfriend Tell her I am leaving
Si tu vois ma go Dis lui que je "Trace"[239]/ if you see my
girlfriend Tell her I am leaving
Si tu vois ma go Dis lui que je Que c'est fort / if you see my girlfriend Tell her is strong
Si tu vois ma go Dis lui que je Je "pem"[240]/ if you see my girlfriend Tell her I am leaving
Si tu vois ma go Dis lui que je Go/ if you see my girlfriend Tell her I am leaving
Si tu vois ma go Dis lui que je Lance/ if you see my girlfriend Tell her I am leaving
Si tu vois ma go Dis lui que Tout ce que tu veux/ if you see my girlfriend Tell her All that you want.

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[236] *Tum* is a Bamoun word and means 'going out' – leaving the country.

[237] *Lance* literally translated means 'to throw', but in Camfrancais it refers to 'go away or abroad'.

[238] *Nyon* is a Duala word which means to 'run away' when the situation is considered bad.

[239] *Trace* is originally a French word meaning to 'draw', but in Camfrancais it means 'to run away' equally to the term *nyon.*

[240] *Pem* is a Duala term and means the same like *nyon* or *trace* 'to run away'.