

Migration to the Gulf States and China: Local Perspectives from Cameroon

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Abstract

This contribution discusses local perspectives on international migration with a focus on South-South and South-East migration, namely from Cameroon to the Gulf States and to China. The report is based on a joint research project involving anthropologists and students of the Universities of Zurich, Yaoundé and Douala.

As in many African countries, international migration has become a major concern for large parts of the population of Cameroon. While western countries still feature as preferred destinations, many Cameroonians have turned to other, more easily accessible options within the South. Popular destinations are countries within Africa as well as the Near and Far East. In all these migration enterprises the family plays a crucial role, both in the preparation of the journey and with regard to transnational exchange relations. For Muslim migrants, religion may be a significant factor influencing their choice of destination besides other considerations, such as economic and educational incentives.

Keywords

transnationalism, South-South migration, South-East migration, exchange relations, Cameroon

Résumé

Cette contribution examine les perspectives locales sur la migration internationale avec un accent sur la migration Sud-Sud et sur la migration Sud-Est, à savoir du Cameroun aux Etats du Golfe et à la Chine. Le rapport est basé sur un projet de recherche impliquant des anthropologues et des étudiants des universités de Zurich, Yaoundé et Douala.

Comme dans beaucoup de pays africains, la migration internationale est devenue un souci majeur pour la majeure partie de la population camerounaise. Tandis que les pays occidentaux figurent toujours comme les destinations préférées, beaucoup de Camerounais se tournent vers des pays plus accessibles dans le Sud. Les destinations populaires sont les pays africains et l'Extrême et Proche Orient. Dans toutes ces stratégies de migration la famille joue un rôle crucial, tant dans la préparation du voyage qu'en ce qui concerne les relations d'échange transnationales.

Pour les migrants musulmans, la religion peut être un facteur significatif influençant le choix de la destination en plus d'autres considérations, comme des motivations économiques et éducatives.

Mots-clés

transnationalisme, migration Sud-Sud, migration Sud-Est, relations d'échange, Cameroun

Introduction

International migration is a crucial theme widely discussed in Cameroon, both privately and in public. While individuals have long been travelling, studying and living abroad, the vision of finding a better future elsewhere has gained prominence over the past fifteen years. It has become a popular conviction that Cameroon has little to offer its economically, intellectually and politically aspiring citizens (Jua 2003).

This development has to be seen in the context of the country's economic and political liberalisation of the 1990s. In line with structural adjustment programmes, government employment has decreased significantly, and with the devaluation of the FCFA in 1994, local buying power has drastically reduced (Konings 1996, Monga 1995). Moreover, the country's democratisation has been accompanied by an increase in corrupt and illegal practices (Eboussi Boulaga & Zinga 2002). As the civil unrest of February 2008 confirms,¹ many Cameroonians are dissatisfied with the country's 'cosmetic democracy' (Nyamnjoh 2002, see also Ngwane 2004). Thus, in the absence of valid prospects of a decent future at home, many Cameroonians have turned to alternatives elsewhere. Most have focused on the West, i.e. the US and Europe, where economic and educational opportunities are thought to be plentiful.² However, with increasing restrictions on migration to Western countries, alternative destinations within Africa and in the Near and Far East have gained currency.

The issue of Cameroonians' urge for international migration and the perception of migrants' transnational relations³ by members of their commu-

¹ For reports on the upheavals responding to rising oil prices and the President's attempts to change the Cameroonian constitution, allowing him to stay in power unlimitedly, see e.g. BBC News, 29.02.08. Deadly violence rages in Cameroon (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7268861.stm>), The Post (Buea), 11.04.2008. Cameroon: Amending the Constitution for One Man (<http://allafrica.com/stories/200804110638.html>).

² On Cameroonian perceptions and imaginations of the West see also Nyamnjoh and Page 2002.

³ Transnationalism here refers to mobility across multiple national borders and to migrants entertaining regular and sustained contacts with individuals or communities in two or more

nities of origin was the subject of a collaborative research project, on which this report is based. Subsequent elaborations will focus on migration from Cameroon to the Gulf States and to China, which constitute novel areas of research.⁴

The research project involved three anthropologists and ten graduate students of the Universities of Zurich (Switzerland), Yaoundé and Douala.⁵ Conceptually and methodologically, it centred exclusively on the migrants' home context, and data was collected from a variety of sources, including migrants' relatives and friends as well as traders, travel agencies, prospective migrants, and returnees.

The project was conducted in Cameroon in July to September 2007 and entailed a one-week preparatory seminar, four weeks of field research and one week of data analysis. It was generously supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation and the Laboratoire CASS-RT in Yaoundé. Starting with the above hypothesis that – besides migration to the West – alternative destinations have gained currency, we centred our investigations on three regional clusters: While a first team focused on population movements within Africa, a second engaged with the migration of Muslim Cameroonians to the Gulf States, and a third researched Chinese-African exchange relations. All three teams collected data on the motives of migration, preferred destinations, networks of migration, the role of the family in the migration enterprise, communication and exchange relations between migrants and their relatives and friends at home, as well as the perception of migrants in their host and home countries.⁶ Research was conducted in three locations; in the two major cities Yaoundé and Douala in francophone Cameroon, and in Bamenda and its rural surroundings in the anglophone part of the country.

nation states. On the concept of 'transnational migration' see e.g. Glick-Schiller et al. 1995, Levitt & Jaworsky 2007, Portes et al. 1999, Vertovec 1999, 2004.

⁴ We would like to thank the editors and anonymous reviewers of *African Diaspora* for their constructive criticisms.

⁵ The project participants were Michaela Pelican (University of Zurich), Peter Tatab (University of Yaoundé 1), Basile Ndjio (University of Douala), as well as Achu Owen Teneng, Afu Isaiah, Arrey Marie Tudor, Constance Chamu, Datidjo Ismaila, Deli Teri Tize, Delphine Nchufuan Fongo, Emmanuella Nsaise Maimo, Emuke Nnoko Ngaaje and Laurentine Mefire Mouchingam. Academic and technical support was provided by Antoine Socpa (University of Yaoundé 1, Laboratoire CSS-RT) and Francis Njilie (Laboratoire CASS-RT).

⁶ Knowing the difficulties of getting reliable information on remittances sent home, we instead focused on the methods of delivery and their intended use. The research team on migration to the Gulf States further investigated the role of religion for Muslim migrants, while the China-Africa team collected additional information on the Chinese presence in Cameroon.

In terms of methodology we worked with both informal and structured interviews as well as e-mail communication with migrants living abroad. In total, we talked to approximately eighty informants. Due to the brief research period, all project participants were encouraged to capitalise on existing contacts with migrants or their family members. Unfortunately, our attempts at collecting quantitative data from foreign embassies and the Cameroonian immigration service yielded no valid information.

'Bush Faller': Cameroonians' Longing for International Migration

Cameroonians' focus on international migration as the only way to a better future has been reflected in many conversations with informants: 'Everyone wants to leave – if not legally, then illegally.' 'Those who are still here, are the ones who haven't made it yet.'

Paradigmatic for the idea of a better life elsewhere is the concept of the *bush faller* (in Pidgin English, the *lingua franca* of Anglophone Cameroon). A bush faller is 'someone who made it,' i.e. who left Cameroon and now leads a good life in the West. As the etymology of the term shows, *falling bush* implies going to the bush to hunt, gather or harvest; i.e. one never returns from the bush with empty hands. But *bush* has a double connotation: on the one hand it is associated with wilderness and backwardness, on the other with places of enrichment – thus the US and Europe equally qualify as *bush*. However, not all migration destinations are seen as such. Within the continent, only South Africa may count as *bush*, and informants consider it the African US. Meanwhile, the Gulf States – on the basis of their ultramodern appearance and visible prosperity – are equally perceived as *bush*, an image readily promoted by Cameroonian and international television channels.

While *bush faller* is a novel term, there have been earlier concepts, such as *been to* which refers to elite members of the post-colonial era who, with the help of mission networks or personal connections, studied abroad, and returned to Cameroon to take up white-collar jobs with the government or international corporations. In comparing the two notions, a shift in ideals of personal success is evident: Whereas *been to* implies mainly educational achievement and is a term no longer in use, *bush faller* is associated with adventure and self-enrichment.⁷

⁷ The term *been to* and its vernacular equivalent *woyayie* (the one who 'has arrived') are also used in Ghana (Martin 2005, van Dijk 2002). A similar notion to *bush faller*, yet with a much longer history, is *Jaguar* widely used in Western Africa (see Rouch 1954/1976, Stoller 1999).



Figure 1: Film poster 'Paris à tout Prix'

As most Western countries have fortified their borders with the aim of reducing the number of immigrants, migration to the US and Europe has become more difficult. Many Cameroonians, however, have not given up but have tried alternative, often irregular ways; some successfully, others with negative experiences.⁸ For a long time, migrants have emphasised economic and educational success in recounting their experiences. Thus until recently, international migration has largely been considered in a positive light. Over the past years, however, new perspectives have emerged with much more critical and ambivalent undertones. For example, in August 2007 the Cameroonian feature film 'Paris à tout prix' (by Josephine Ndango) opened nationwide. It tells the suffering of a young woman who ended up in Europe as a prostitute. Concurrently, a book entitled 'From dust to snow' (edited by Lydia and Wilfred Ngwa) was sold in Cameroonian bookstores in which migrants (predominantly Cameroonian students) told of both their positive and negative experiences of living and studying in the West. To which degree and in which ways

⁸) For example, Olivier Jobard has made a photographic documentation of the illegal migration of Kingsley, a young man from Limbe, Cameroon (available at http://www.mediastorm.org/0010_NST.htm.)

these novel, critical perspectives have a lasting impact on local perceptions of international migration remains to be seen.

While for many Cameroonian migrants the US and Europe remain their 'dream-destinations,' their movements are not limited to the West. Neighbouring countries such as Nigeria and Gabon have long been established migration destinations, and over the past years, other African countries, such as South Africa, and destinations in the Near and Far East have gained currency.

Muslim Migration to Saudi Arabia

For some time, religion has played a significant role in motivating African Muslims to migrate to Arab and Muslim countries. The pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj* in Arabic) has a long history, and large numbers of West African farmers, traders and pastoralist have crossed the continent on foot, by car or by air to reach the Arab peninsula. Many of those who travelled overland faced difficulties in returning home and eventually settled along the pilgrimage route, forming migrant communities in the Sudan (e.g. Bawa Yamba 1995, Birks 1977).

Contemporary migration from West Africa to the Arab world is motivated by religious as well as educational and economic considerations. While the *hajj* continues to attract large numbers of African Muslims, the Gulf States also offer business and job opportunities. In addition, the Saudi Arabian government promotes population exchange in conjunction with Islamic values, for example by offering student bursaries. These opportunities attract Cameroonian Muslims who may aspire to migrate to the Arab world as much because of their desire to leave Cameroon as due to religious reasons.

Our research team on Muslim migration concentrated its inquiries on the Briquetterie, considered the main Muslim quarter of Yaoundé. For many of its inhabitants, Arab countries are preferred destinations of migration. Primary motives for migrating to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Libya or the Sudan include education, trade and prospective marriage partners. For example, the Saudi embassy offers stipends for Islamic Studies to African Muslims. While men may study in Saudi Arabia or other Muslim countries, women are offered stipends only for the International University of Africa in Khartoum. In Yaoundé there are a number of national and international Islamic networks, such as the *Association Culturelle Islamique du Cameroun* (ACIC) or the World Assembly of Muslim Youths (WAMY), which may assist the aspiring migrant in the application procedures and subsequent preparations for the journey.⁹

⁹ The role of Islamic networks in transnational migration has also been addressed in recent

Alternative avenues to reach the Arab world include the pilgrimage to Mecca which, besides religious accomplishment, also offers economic incentives. Many pilgrims take along trade goods which they sell during their journey and then return with souvenirs from Mecca (e.g. perfumes, clothes, decorative items), widely desired among the Muslim community in Yaoundé. Moreover, as historical work on West African pilgrimage to Mecca has shown, the boundary between travel and migration is fluid. Accordingly, some pilgrims may aim at settling permanently or continuing to other destinations. The journey to Mecca is organised by Islamic travel agencies accountable to the Cameroonian and Saudi governments. While under ordinary circumstances Muslim women are allowed to travel only in the company of their husbands or close male relatives, the pilgrimage is one of the few travel options also available to single women. As mentioned by some informants, the latter may even aspire to find an appropriate husband during their journey. However, to which degree single African women stay on and establish contacts with Arab men remains an open question requiring further research in Saudi Arabia.¹⁰

In addition to Islamic networks, family relations play a significant role in the planning and execution of the journey. Frequently, the scholarship stipends offered by the Saudi Arabian government cover only part of their living expenses and, in the absence of work opportunities, they remain dependent on the financial support of their families. Thus many students have regular contact with their relatives and friends – mainly through letters, since phone calls are relatively expensive. The support, however, is mutual and pilgrims often act as carriers of presents in both directions.

For Muslim students their stay abroad is limited in time; after finishing their studies, they are required to return home. Back in Cameroon there are only very few jobs where they can apply their acquired training. Some are lucky to be employed with Islamic organisations; others work voluntarily or for a small salary as Koranic teachers.

research on West African migrants in Europe and the US (e.g. Babou 2002, O. Kane 1997, Riccio 2001, Soares 2004). Among other things, these studies indicate that Muslim brotherhoods, such as the Murid order of Senegal, create a transnational public space which migrants employ for economic activities. Furthermore, they offer them social and moral support, and confirm their construction of a distinct West African Muslim identity. Conversely, in Cameroon, Muslim brotherhoods are largely absent, and Islamic networks are mainly concerned with Muslim identity and community development.

¹⁰ In an article on Nigerian sex workers Onyeonoru (2004: 116) mentions that the Saudi Arabian authorities protested against the influx of Nigerian prostitutes into their country.

Labour Migration to Dubai¹¹

Besides Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have become a popular destination for Cameroonians, irrespective of their religious affiliation. The Gulf States constitute a region with a high demand for foreign labour (Whitwell 2002). While most migrants are from South Asia or the Middle East (Choucri 1986, Osella & Osella 2007, Suter 2005), there has been a considerable influx of Africans over the past decade.

Dubai is the commercial hub of the region and attracts large numbers of African traders from all over the continent who buy for their domestic markets. It offers a wide variety of goods of varied quality, mostly imported from Asia. Due to the near-absence of value added tax, prices are relatively moderate, and costs negotiable for bulk acquisition. The presence of African traders creates job opportunities for Cameroonian migrants, many of whom act as intermediaries and conduits, facilitating the traders' purchases and accommodation as well as the transport of acquisitions back to Africa. Another strand of the so-called 'cargo business' is the provision of entry visas to the United Arab Emirates. While European and American tourists are freely allowed to enter the country, other nationals need a business or visiting visa to be acquired through a company registered in the UAE. Many Cameroonians are associated with local companies and facilitate visas for traders and aspiring labour migrants.¹²

Other job opportunities within the informal sector include operating private cars as taxis, selling African food and alcoholic beverages in private homes, as well as prostitution. Many of these informal activities verge on illegality. Moreover, Cameroonians and Nigerians have the reputation of money doublers and conmen, as some have seemingly succeeded in duping wealthy Emirati.¹³ Finally, some more educated or skilled Cameroonians have found employment in the formal sector, such as in the domain of construction, as security personnel or medical staff.

While the UAE seem to offer ample opportunities to Cameroonian job seekers, getting there entails its own difficulties. Many migrants operate through travel agencies or migration brokers who, in exchange for a fee, orga-

¹¹ The elaborations in this section are based on further research carried out in Dubai by Michaela Pelican and Deli Teri Tize in October/November 2009.

¹² The 'cargo business' is generally organized along national lines, i.e. traders tend to collaborate with their compatriots. Accordingly, Cameroonian migrants depend largely on the business activities of Cameroonian traders.

¹³ On the reputation and practices of Cameroonian and Nigerian swindlers see Ndjio 2008.

nise visas and flights. Some may also promise to provide accommodation and assistance in job seeking. However, several informants reported irregularities with the visas, and disappointment with the expected services.

The journey to Dubai is costly: between one and three million FCFA (1600-4800 Euro), depending on the arrangement with the migration broker. In addition, migrants require considerable start-up money, as living costs in the UAE are high. As a result, they frequently rely on regular financial support from their families before being able to make a living and, subsequently, send remittances back home.

Several interview partners confirmed that the United Arab Emirates was not their primary choice, but an alternative suggested by the migration broker; often following failed attempts to secure a European or US visa. Accordingly, their ambition is to continue to the West where, as they believe, living conditions are more promising.

Chinese-Cameroonian Exchange Relations¹⁴

Substantial Chinese presence in Africa is a relatively recent but significant phenomenon. While academic interest in Chinese-African relations has started only recently, the body of literature is growing at a constant rate.¹⁵

China has shown a growing interest in opening up new markets and investment opportunities and in accessing the energy resources of the African continent. In return, it has offered debt forgiveness and development assistance as well as strategic partnerships with African governments (Alden 2005, van den Looy 2006). The latter are equally interested in collaborating with China as they envision new business opportunities and ways to bolster regime stability. As Alden (2005) argues, several African countries have benefited from Chinese investment and tourism. Moreover, China's policy of 'cooperation free of political conditionality' has opened new avenues for those governments notorious for human-rights violations or engagement in armed conflict. Yet members of the public may perceive the presence of Chinese workers and entrepreneurs less positively than African governments. As Dobler (2007) has

¹⁴ China here stands for mainland China and Hong Kong. While Cameroonians may not distinguish between Chinese, Koreans, Taiwanese, Japanese, Malaysians or Indonesians on the basis of phenotypical differences, they do differentiate migration destinations, as these countries offer different migration incentives and regulations.

¹⁵ The African Studies Centre (ASC) in Leiden put together a web dossier on China-Africa relations, available on their library homepage (<http://www.ascleiden.nl/Library/Webdossiers/ChinaAndAfrica.aspx>).

noted with regard to Oshikango in northern Namibia, locals have responded to the rapid expansion of Chinese enterprises with discourses of xenophobia.

Increased Chinese presence can also be noted in Cameroon, mainly in the country's major cities Yaoundé and Douala. Many Chinese are entrepreneurs running shops with Chinese import goods, providing Chinese medicines and treatments, or operating Chinese restaurants. Some of the latter are exclusively for Chinese customers and also offer opportunities to Chinese sex workers (Ndjio 2009). Others engage in the agricultural sector, growing vegetables, raising chickens or fishing; their products are destined primarily for Chinese customers in Cameroon. A third group are workers in Chinese construction companies, employed to build roads and public buildings, such as the new football stadium in Yaoundé.

Compared to the business opportunities Chinese encounter in Africa, their country offers limited migration incentives to Cameroonians. Nonetheless there are some who have moved to China and work as translators or intermediaries for African traders. Over the past years there has been a demand for English teachers, which motivated a number of Anglophone Cameroonians to move to China. This option, however, has turned out to be ambiguous. Many of the teachers are sent to rural areas where they have to work long hours for little money. In addition, they face considerable communication problems, as only few make an attempt to learn Chinese before leaving Cameroon. Some informants also complained about latent racism. In China an American accent is in demand and so they saw it necessary to pretend to be Afro-Americans. But although China is considered 'no bed of roses,' it is seen as offering the possibility of moving on to the US.

The subject of migration to China has also been addressed in the recent home video production 'China Wahala.' Here the focus is less on Cameroonians' encounters with Chinese society, but on the potentially abusive practices of their own countrymen who offer their services as migration brokers and local conduits. The fate of Cameroonians in China is a topic repeatedly dealt with in the Cameroonian press. Most articles, however, focus on Cameroonians involved in illegal activities, such as money-doubling, and their prosecution by the Chinese government.¹⁶

Local perspectives on Chinese-Cameroonian relations are ambivalent. Many parents support the decision of migrants, hoping for their economic success in China. On the other hand, the strong presence of Chinese and their goods in Cameroon has produced frequent criticism, particularly by Cam-

¹⁶ See e.g. The Herald, no. 2199, 30.-31.03.09, p.1/3. For duping woman of 19m FCFA: Nine Cameroonians in hot waters in China!



Figure 2: VCD cover 'China Wahala'

eronian businesspeople who see their interests endangered. Cameroonian consumers, as well, have expressed their dissatisfaction; on the one hand, the Chinese offer a wide range of goods at all prices, so 'there is something for every purse.' On the other, the quality of the cheap items is often so poor that Cameroonians complain about being dumped with substandard goods. Finally, the attempt of Chinese individuals to enter the informal sector has raised criticism and incomprehension among Cameroonians. Many are wondering, why these 'whites' (Asians as well as Europeans and Americans are considered 'whites' on the basis of their skin complexion) debase themselves to such a degree that they even sell homemade cakes in the streets. Seemingly, China must be even poorer than Cameroon. This consideration contributed to China's decreasing attraction for Cameroonian migrants, as compared to other destinations in Africa, the Near East and the West.

The Role of the Family in the Migration Enterprise: Contributions and Expectations

A number of our informants in Cameroon remarked that incessant or exaggerated requests for goods and remittances by members of the extended family

are a nuisance and burden to migrants. Consequently, some limit their communication to a minimum. Similarly, Nyamnjoh (2005) reported that Cameroonians living in *whiteman kontri* (the West) compare themselves to zombies – threatened by their relatives with witchcraft attacks, and enslaved to work for the latter's enrichment without consideration for their personal well-being. It is important to remark, however, that exchange relations between migrants and their families are not one-sided.

The family in Cameroon is an active partner in the migration enterprise (Fleischer 2006). Most often, close relatives, i.e. parents, siblings, spouses, and occasionally aunts and uncles, are involved in the preparation of the journey, and frequently continue to provide financial as well as moral and spiritual support. Conversely, distant relatives are informed only at the last moment, or after the migrant has left, as the extended family is also seen as a possible source of jealousy and occult danger (see also Geschiere 1997).

Falling bush is a costly enterprise. Most migrants are financially assisted by their close kin, who may borrow money from neighbours and friends, take loans from thrift associations (*njangi*), or mortgage family land. Frequently, the migrants' need for assistance does not end there, but continues until they have found work and legalised their status. This process may take several months, occasionally years. In addition, families also provide spiritual and moral support, which may equally be seen as long-term economic investments. Migrants frequently seek spiritual backing both in the preparation of their journey and during their stay abroad. Close kin may be asked to organise cleansing rituals to ward off malicious spirits that may hinder the acquisition of travel documents. Family members also support migrants with prayers and blessings. While Christians may organise special thanks-giving ceremonies on behalf of their relatives abroad, Muslims may offer generous gifts to the needy so as to invite Allah's compassion. When things are not moving as smoothly as desired, migrants frequently ask relatives or friends to consult a diviner and provide spiritual fortification. Spiritual support is considered crucial to migrants' success and is highly valued by its recipients. While rituals and alms involve considerable expenses, these expenditures are believed to be invested sensibly, as in the long run, they may lead to higher return.

In addition, parents and siblings offer moral advice to bolster migrants in moments of loneliness, sickness or stress. They counsel them on 'good behaviour' rooted in Christian or Islamic values, and occasionally send gifts of symbolic value, such as photographs, food items or spices, to give them a reminder of home.

Our interlocutors emphasised that these types of support are provided willingly, as close relatives are generally dedicated to their migrants' success. Many parents share the conviction that Cameroon has little to offer its youth, and will readily make all necessary sacrifices to provide their children with a more promising future. Considering the money spent on the preparation for the journey, they frequently elect to continue their investment. It should be noted that a child or sibling *in bush* adds to their own prestige. Parents expect their children to make the necessary arrangements to start a family, i.e. to build a house in their home area. In the Anglophone parts of Cameroon, house construction counts as a mark of maturity. In addition, *bush faller* houses have symbolic value; they testify that the *bush faller* has met success, and confirm the status of the family.

Parents are usually proud that they have been capable of sending their children abroad. However, when the latter stay for long periods without communicating or sending remittances, they tend to become discouraged and dissatisfied. At this point, parents may suspect that their children's migration enterprise has failed. When unable to fulfil their relatives' expectations, migrants develop various coping strategies. Some reduce contacts with relatives and friends to a minimum; others completely cut communication links, embarrassed by feelings of failure and shame.

Conclusion

These elaborations represent the preliminary results of a brief research project centring on 'local perspectives on transnational relations of Cameroonian migrants,' conducted by Swiss and Cameroonian anthropologists and graduate students. The aim of the project was to gain a basic overview on Cameroonians' ideas and experiences of international migration, particularly with regard to South-South and South-East migration, and to identify subject areas that merit further research.¹⁷

Our research suggests that, for many migrants, moving to a destination within the South is not an end in itself. China, Dubai or South Africa are seen as promising transit destinations that may offer opportunities to accumulate

¹⁷⁾ The findings of this initial research projects have provided the basis for further, on-going research on transnational relations of Cameroonian Muslim migrants' conducted by Michaela Pelican in collaboration with Deli Teri Tize and Ibrahim Mallam Sali.

money and acquire the prerequisite travel documents. Their final aim is Europe or the US, both of which still count as ideal destinations and ultimate *bush*.

As concerns the study of exchange relations between migrants and their families, there has been a one-sided focus on remittances and goods sent by migrants, while the economic, moral and spiritual support provided by relatives and friends has largely been neglected. We suggest that both directions of exchange relations ought to be considered. Moreover, we would like to draw attention to the spiritual industry which has sprung up alongside tightened migration regimes, such as praying over visas, preparing amulets for safe journey, and offerings in favour of successful family re-unions. All these activities have an economic undertone and deserve further in-depth inquiries.

Researchers of transnationalism also concern themselves with national frameworks of migration. In this respect, we believe detailed research into the migration of Muslim Africans to Arab countries will yield valuable information. In particular, researchers may investigate the motives of Muslim governments for supporting African students, as well as the impact of the migrants' experience and Islamic training on ideals and realities at home.

Finally, as concerns research on Chinese-African relations, this is a vibrant field – particularly for anthropologists, as the majority of observations, so far, have been contributed by economic and political scientists. On the basis of our own experiences, we see the potential for a very fruitful collaboration of Chinese and African social scientists, thus integrating both perspectives. A first step in this direction was realised in the conference 'China in Africa: Who benefits?', co-organised by the Interdisciplinary Centre for East Asian Studies in Frankfurt (December 14-15, 2007), which brought together European, African and Chinese academics and policy makers.¹⁸ We look forward to more such international and interdisciplinary collaborations – not only with regard to research on Chinese-African relations, but more generally in the field of transnational migration.

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¹⁸ Conference presentations are available on: <http://www.izo.uni-frankfurt.de/Aktuell.html>.

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