

CITIZENSHIP IN CAMEROON: REASSESSING CAMEROON'S RESTRICTIVE NATIONALITY LAW AND THE NEED TO RECOGNIZE DUAL NATIONALITY

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Abstract

In light of global trend towards more open nationality laws, this article aims to examine the societal impact of the nationality law in the Republic of Cameroon, which currently prohibits the holding of dual nationality. In this article, detailed tenets of current Cameroonian nationality law are assessed to provide context of what limitations do and do not exist. The direct and indirect impacts of these limitations are also examined with regards to the legal, economic, social, political, and cultural spheres of the Cameroonian society. It must be mentioned that this article is the outcome of a research undertaking by the authors as part of PICAM's work and an upcoming "Campaign for Dual Nationality in Cameroon" to be launched by Progressive Initiative for Cameroon (PICAM).

Keywords: Citizenship in Cameroon, dual nationality, globalization, democratization, human rights, economic integration, naturalization.

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1. Introduction

In an era when international trade, economic integration and large-scale migration are all on dramatically upward long-term trends, many of the traditional constrictions governing the idea of citizenship are weakening. Especially considering the comparative ease of international travel to that of decades previous, the prospect of individuals possessing multiple, simultaneous homelands has become increasingly prominent. Globalization, some argue, has created the possibility of “global citizens”. While by most accounts this concept remains an overstatement, modern migration statistics demonstrate the undeniable presence of individuals who may call two countries home. This, in turn, has led to renewed interest in the possibility of such immigrants holding dual nationality and, where a country’s policy currently prohibits such dual citizenships, a renewed push to make nationality law reflect the new global reality. As a consequence, the general world trend is towards a more open citizenship regime in which increasing numbers of countries allow their citizens to possess the citizenship of another country.¹

2. Existing Cameroon Nationality Laws

Cameroon nationality law is laid forth primarily in Law No. 1968-LF-3 of June 11th 1968, “To Set up the Cameroon Nationality Code”, with supplementary procedural detail provided in Decree No. 1968 DF-478 of the 16th December 1968, “To Establish Rules of Procedure Under the Nationality Code”. Based on Law No. 1968-LF-3, Cameroon nationality is conveyed primarily by descent (*jus sanguis*), while nationality conferred by location of birth (*jus soli*) is restricted to cases in which the nationality of one or both parents is unknown. Cameroonian nationality may also, at the discretion of the state, be acquired through marriage or naturalization. Notably, Cameroonian nationality is exclusive, in that acquiring a foreign citizenship is automatic cause for loss of Cameroonian nationality.

¹ Adrienne Millbank, “Dual Citizenship in Australia”, presented on behalf of the Social Policy Group, *Current Issues Brief 5 2000-01*, (November 2000), <http://www.apf.gov.au/library/pubs/cib/2000-01/01cib05.htm#arguments>, accessed June 2009.

2.1. Definition of Citizenship

As defined in both Law No. 1968-LF-3 and Decree No. 1968 DF-478, Cameroonian citizenship is defined solely as “nationality”. While the term “citizenship” is not used in either document, the terms of discussion are similar to those associated with “citizenship” in other countries and consequently “nationality” is considered equivalent to citizenship for the purposes of this paper. Notably, the law and decree make no mention of the explicit rights or obligations associated with being a Cameroon national, other than Section 30 (1) of Law 1968-LF-3 which dictates that naturalized citizens shall share all rights associated with nationality from date of naturalization (though with caveat).

2.2. How Citizenship is Obtained

There are three primary methods for attaining Cameroon nationality: birth, marriage, and naturalization. Of these, the foremost is birth, which follows primarily a *jus sanguis*, descent-based definition of nationality. For determining nationality through birth, Cameroonian law places a clear distinction between children born “in marriage” (legitimate child) and those born “out of marriage” (illegitimate child). In all cases, majority for purposes of nationality is not attained until the individual has reached 21 years.²

2.2.a. Nationality by Birth

The most straightforward method of becoming a Cameroon national is to be born to two parents, both of whom are Cameroon nationals.³ Similarly, a child born legitimately to at least one parent of Cameroon nationality is also eligible to claim Cameroon nationality.⁴ For a child born illegitimately, Cameroon nationality is provided if the parent to whom connection is first established is a Cameroon national, or, in the case that the first-established parent has no or unknown nationality if the second-established parent has Cameroon nationality.⁵

² Law No. 1968-LF-3, section 4.

³ Law No. 1968-LF-3, section 6.

⁴ Law No. 1968-LF-3, section 7(a).

⁵ Law No. 1968-LF-3, section 7(b).

Nationality based upon being born in Cameroon is limited to a select few cases - if the child has unknown parents or can claim no other nationality.⁶ A legitimate child is also eligible for Cameroon nationality if born in Cameroon with at least one of the child's parents, though of foreign nationality, also born in Cameroon⁷, while an illegitimate child born in Cameroon can claim nationality only if the first-established, foreign national parent was born in Cameroon.⁸ Because the occurrence of these cases is fairly limited, nationality by birth is thus predominantly determined by descent rather than location of birth.

2.2.b. Nationality by Marriage

At the time of marriage, a foreign woman may request and acquire Cameroon nationality if marrying a Cameroonian man.⁹ However, this acquisition is subject to government approval as the government may by decree prevent the acquisition of Cameroon nationality.

2.2.c. Nationality by Naturalization

Cameroon nationality may be acquired by foreign citizens who have met minimum residency requirements within Cameroon (5 consecutive years), are judged to meet character and health standards and whose "main interests" are based in Cameroon.¹⁰ This acquisition is provided by government decree and as such is ultimately subject to government approval.

The naturalization process may be simplified for foreign individuals that have married a Cameroon national woman, were born in Cameroon, have "rendered exceptional service to Cameroon" or whose naturalization would be "highly advantageous" for the state.¹¹ Similarly, children born in Cameroon to foreign

⁶ Law No. 1968-LF-3, section 9.

⁷ Law No. 1968-LF-3, section 11(a).

⁸ Law No. 1968-LF-3, section 11(b).

⁹ Law No. 1968-LF-3, section 17.

¹⁰ Law No. 1968-LF-3, section 25.

¹¹ Law No. 1968-LF-3, section 26.

parents, or adopted by Cameroon parents, may adopt Cameroon nationality at majority if residency requirements are met. In all such cases, the government may prevent acquisition of Cameroon nationality by decree.¹²

2.3. Categories of Citizenship

No formal categories of citizenship are defined by the applicable law and decree. Section 30(1) of Law 1968-LF-3 explicitly states that nationality by naturalization shall be equivalent in rights to that obtained by birth. However, an unofficial division exists between naturalized and born nationalities, in that naturalized citizens may not hold elected office for a period of five years after the date of naturalization.¹³ This limitation, however, may be annulled by government decree for exceptional service or state interest.¹⁴

2.4. Loss and Forfeiture of Cameroonian Citizenship

There are three main ways by which Cameroon nationality can be lost or forfeited - acquisition or retention of a foreign nationality, voluntary renunciation or Cameroonian nationality, and government decree.

2.4.a. Acquisition of a Foreign Nationality

Cameroon nationality law leaves no ambiguity on this point. Any individual who willingly acquires the citizenship of another nation shall automatically lose their Cameroonian nationality.¹⁵ Perhaps most prominently, this dictates that any Cameroonian immigrant who becomes a naturalized citizen of a foreign country automatically loses their Cameroonian nationality.

More subtly, it also requires that children of parents with different nationalities must choose to adopt either one nationality or the other upon reaching majority. Note, however, that only willful retention of foreign citizenship is prohibited by

¹² Law No. 1968-LF-3, sections 20, 21, 23.

¹³ Law No. 1968-LF-3, section 30(2).

¹⁴ Law No. 1968-LF-3, section 30(3).

¹⁵ Law No. 1968-LF-3, section 31(a).

Law 1968-LF-3 in order to prevent bi-national children whose foreign parent's country does not allow renunciation of citizenship (ex: Greece) from forcibly losing Cameroonian nationality.

2.4.b. Renunciation of Nationality

Cameroon nationality law also allows for an individual of Cameroon nationality to willfully renounce that nationality. The example provided in Law 1968-LF-3 is that of an individual marrying a foreign person and so renouncing Cameroon citizenship in order to acquire foreign citizenship through that marriage.¹⁶ Note though, that this instance of renunciation is effectively dictated by the previous requirement that no other nationality be willfully acquired. Though potential situations may exist in which an individual could renounce Cameroonian nationality without regard to the exclusion of holding foreign nationalities, they are obscure and consequently likely to play only a minute role in total numbers of individuals forfeiting Cameroonian nationality.

2.4.c. Government Decision

Any Cameroonian may lose their nationality if he or she continues to work in an international or foreign body despite an injunction by the Cameroonian Government to resign it.¹⁷ For Cameroonian nationals who have gained that nationality through marriage or naturalization within the previous 10 years, the government may revoke that nationality by decree if the individual has either committed a criminal act against state security, or committed the even more broadly defined charge of "acts harmful to the interest of the State".¹⁸

2.5. Discriminatory Aspects of Cameroon Nationality Law

The use of the words 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' is not only old-fashioned, but also offensive to the dignity of children. Whether a child is born of married or unmarried children should have no consequence in determining nationality

¹⁶ Law No. 1968-LF-3, sections 32 & 36.

¹⁷ Law No. 1968-LF-3, section 31(c).

¹⁸ Law No. 1968-LF-3, section 34.

issues. Children have no choice in determining which homes they are born into, and as innocent creatures of humankind, should not be labeled and categorized differently, with separate rights and privileges.

Also, because of the emphasis on which parental connection is established first in the case of 'illegitimate' children, the nationality law clearly discriminates against children born to Cameroonian fathers and foreign mothers. In cases in which the mother and father may be estranged, the connection of a child to its mother is almost certain to take place prior to a connection to the father.

The nationality law can also be seen as discriminatory to bi-national children in general. This is because when one of the parents is a Cameroonian, the law forces them to choose between the nationality of their father and the nationality of their mother, even in instances in which the child is born legitimately and in Cameroon.

The ability of the government to waive naturalization requirements for individuals who have done great service to the state or would notably benefit the state naturally encourages a disproportionate favor to be placed upon individuals friendly with the regime in power. Similarly, the government's power to veto naturalizations or revoke naturalized nationalities based upon rather broad criteria provides opportunity for an unscrupulous regime to selectively target individuals who displease the existing administration.

2.6. Other Relevant Considerations: Dual Nationality of Convenience

Though not strictly a consideration based upon the contents of either Law 1968-LF-3 or decree 1968 DF-478, it should be noted that reports exist of inequitable application of the Cameroonian nationality law contained within those documents. To take a prominent, if largely benign example, the Cameroonian government largely turns a blind eye to the sections of Law 1968-LF-3 dictating the exclusivity of Cameroon nationality in favor of players on the national soccer

team who may also hold nationality of European Union countries where they play professionally. In the same regard, children of Cameroonian diplomats born in foreign countries acquire the nationality of their countries of birth, while still remaining Cameroonians by virtue of their parent(s) being Cameroonians.

Though the detriment such action may have on Cameroon as whole is comparatively minor, it demonstrates a willingness to selectively apply the country's nationality law that could indicate more severe transgressions in situations of political, social, or economic unrest.

3. Consequences of Restricting Dual Citizenship

The negative ramifications of prohibiting Cameroonian nationals from acquiring and retaining foreign citizenship span a broad and deep set of quandaries which take form across a spectrum of scales stretching from personal, family trauma to macroeconomic trends of the country as a whole. For the purposes of this paper, the consequences of maintaining strict singular nationality have been broken into economic, social, political, legal, and cultural categories. Many ramifications have complicated and interdependent effects which may span multiple of these categories. However, there are two recurrent themes that appear repeatedly across the categories. In the first, the opportunities for Cameroonian nationals who have immigrated to a foreign country, but do not want to lose their native nationality, are limited by their inability to adopt a second nationality. In the second, Cameroonian immigrants to foreign countries who embrace the benefits of taking their adopted homes nationality are inhibited in their ability to return to Cameroon with the skills and prosperity they have accumulated while abroad due to the loss of their original, Cameroonian nationality.

3.1. Legal Ramifications

The legal ramifications of prohibiting dual nationality are among the most explicit consequences and primarily act as the basis for other, more severe but also more amorphous detriments. As a result, the legal impacts of restricting

individuals to a single nationality will be discussed in this paper within the context of the larger problems they create. For instance, limitations on Cameroonian immigrants who choose not to become naturalized citizens of their destination country will be addressed with regards to the effect those restrictions have on hindering economic and educational success in the destination country. Similarly the legal complications that forfeiting Cameroonian nationality has on voting and domestic property holdings will be addressed as part of discussions on political ramifications and reduced reinvestment. While there undoubtedly exist unique legal quandaries created by current Cameroonian nationality law's prohibition on dual citizenship, obscure legal consequences will be deliberately passed over in order to better emphasize the bulk effects which have the greatest impact on the population as a whole.

3.2. Economic Ramifications

In today's increasingly interconnected world economic environment, each country's citizens must operate within an international marketplace that is characterized by heightened levels of trade, manufacturing and service sectors that span countries and continents at a time, and large-scale migration, both to developed countries and between developing ones. Given this progression, the ability of each such citizen to thrive is directly contingent upon their ability to integrate into the global economy, including their ability to follow the demand for skills to whichever geographical location offers them the most robust opportunity.

The importance of increasing globalization, and the economically motivated migration that helps underpin it, is a common argument for allowing dual citizenship. For example, this theme plays a primary role in the major Australian Parliamentary assessment of permitting native Australians to acquire a second nationality.¹⁹ However, such a perspective – that of a developed economy looking to facilitate expanded exports – will tend to understate many issues which are even more prominent, and essential, in the case of a comparatively poor country

¹⁹ Adrienne Millbank (note 1 above).

such as Cameroon. In this case, the role of immigration – for education and employment – affects not just individual opportunity, but the macroeconomic success of the homeland through remittances, investment, and increased integration with the destination country. Thus, factors which inhibit the ability of immigrants to succeed in their destination country, or which discourage their continued links to their homeland once there, will have a profound economic impact on the homeland. Prohibiting dual citizenship is exactly at the pinnacle of such detrimental factor.

3.2.a. Immigration and Remittances

The Cameroonian economy does not fulfill its potential for providing employment, especially to young, recently graduated individuals, or for elevating the standard of living for the population as a whole. Given this situation, many native Cameroon nationals have turned to immigration to more developed economies as a means to achieve individual economic elevation and potentially, long-term personally prosperity. In addition to the individual benefit derived from such immigration, the increased prosperity associated with successful migration can produce a significant monetary flow back to the immigrant's family. Accumulated over the large numbers of immigrants mentioned above, these remittances can provide a valuable source of foreign currency for the home country's economy.

The influx of additional funds from these remittances can play a vital role in improving living conditions and stimulating economic development in the home country. As Wagh and Pattillo discuss in their report on remittances to sub-Saharan Africa,²⁰ remittances play a direct role in reducing poverty and can be a more stable source of funds than either foreign aid or direct investment. Given the significant benefits that remittances can provide in improving the lives of a nation's poor and in stimulating macroeconomic growth, it thus seems especially

²⁰ Smita Wagh & Catherine Pattillo, "Impact of Remittances on Poverty and Financial Development in Sub-Saharan Africa", *IMF Working Paper No. 07/38*, (Last Revised March 4, 2007), pp. 6 & 11, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=967879#, accessed May 2008).

relevant for developing nations to encourage and facilitate the immigration and foreign employment necessary for such remittances.

Considering the difficulty of obtaining immigration to a developed nation, retaining such residency stands as a high priority. Perhaps more importantly, obtaining naturalized citizenship in a destination country can enable or speed the ability to support immigration of family members to share in the enhanced economic opportunities. Naturalization thus enables a snowball effect whereby increasingly large numbers of immigrants may enjoy the economic benefits of developed economies, and potentially also expand the remittance flow to the home country. Obtaining citizenship in their destination country also enables immigrants to pursue expanded employment opportunities. The United States again offers a good example of this trend, as federal government positions are generally restricted to US citizens while other non-governmental jobs in fields such as aerospace, composites or electronics that are related to defense technologies are also restricted to US citizens due to security concerns. Failure to obtain naturalized citizenship in a destination country can thus create serious obstacles towards employment, or professional advancement, depending on the field of employment.

However, for native Cameroonian nationals, taking this pragmatic and largely beneficial step comes with the severe, and currently unavoidable, drawback of having to forfeit their original, Cameroonian nationality. This tradeoff can carry a sizable degree of sociopolitical detriment, a price that many immigrants are unwilling to pay. For them, the added prosperity, security and stability that come with naturalized citizenship in their destination country are consequently unavailable, forcing them to work at a distinct disadvantage in the global marketplace. Given sufficient numbers, this can have a significant, detrimental impact on the resulting flow of remittances back to Cameroon, where those remittances not only improve the standard of living for the individual recipients, but can help stimulate the Cameroonian economy as a whole. Of course, the

other option for native Cameroonians facing this quandary is to forfeit their Cameroonian nationality in favor of their destination country's nationality.

3.2.b. Restrictions on Reinvestment

As with the remittances born of immigration, the impact of prohibiting dual citizenship on reinvestment in the Cameroonian economy is felt in two stages. First, Cameroonian immigrants to developed nations who wish to keep their native nationality are placed at a strategic disadvantage in their destination nations' economies. This disadvantage can translate directly to a hindered ability to succeed professionally, meaning that Cameroonian immigrants are likely to have not just reduced incomes, but less of the advanced expertise and capital accumulation that they could then bring back to Cameroon.

Second, and potentially more severe, Cameroonian immigrants who assume the nationality of their destination country face significantly increased difficulties in reinvesting their foreign economic gains into the Cameroonian economy. Though foreign property ownership is technically recognized in Cameroon, the dysfunctional judiciary and administration which handle property matters make such investment precarious. As the US State Department report on the Cameroon investment climate advises, "Cameroonian courts and administrative agencies often grant preferential treatment to domestic firms and have been accused of corrupt practices".²¹ Moreover, a loss of Cameroonian political rights makes it more difficult for such expatriate investors to financially or legally protect their property or investment as they no longer possess a right to vote in elections which, at least in aggregate (and in theory) will dictate the course of government policy. Though these deterrents do not fully prevent reinvestment, they certainly discourage it and as such, fail to take advantage of the economic resources and business expertise which immigrants may gain in their destination country.

²¹ US Department of State, 2008 Investment Climate Statement - Cameroon: Openness to Foreign Investment, (2008), <http://www.state.gov/e/eeb/ifd/2008/100834.htm>, accessed May 2009.

Should a native Cameroonian who has enjoyed financial success via naturalization in their destination country wish to reinvest their economic gains and honed skills in Cameroon by returning to their homeland (despite its depressed economy and current corruption), they face a mirror image of the dilemma faced at naturalization. They may either reside in Cameroon absent political rights and subject to the aforementioned prejudices of foreign bodies, or forfeit the nationality of their destination country and, by doing so, reimpose the same limitations the immigrant Cameroonian experienced prior to naturalization and potentially jeopardize their professional accomplishments and remaining holdings in the destination country. Thus, rather than building on the successes in the destination country in Cameroon, the restriction on dual citizenship effectively requires those foreign successes to be sacrificed. Facing such deterrents, it should be of little surprise that Cameroonian immigrants would instead prefer to simply remain in their destination country.

While the continuing residence of Cameroonian immigrants in developed economies can provide a beneficial stream of remittances, the repatriation of native Cameroonians who have gained valuable skills and financial resources abroad represents a far greater opportunity for achieving significant economic development gains. At an estimated 232,000 people, the Cameroonian diaspora represents a startling 1.4% of the national population; to actively discourage the reengagement of such a large group through dual citizenship limitations is startling.²² Besides sheer numbers, a failure to encourage the eventual repatriation of such individuals carries a severe loss of human capital, for the emigrant population is disproportionately well-educated. According to World Bank estimates, nearly 15% of the Cameroonian diaspora possess tertiary degrees.²³ Such highly qualified individuals are key elements of thriving economies and to

²² Dilip Ratha, Sanket Mohapatra, & Zhimei Xu, Outlook for Remittance Flows 2008-2010: Growth Expected to Moderate Significantly, But Flows to Remain Resilient, Migration and Development Brief (November 2008),

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1110315015165/MD_Brief8.pdf, accessed April 2009.

²³ Ibid.

discourage their return through stifling citizenship laws represents a gravely missed opportunity to stoke the competitiveness of Cameroon in the global economy and other fields such as technology, health, and enterprise.

3.2.c. Constrained Movement in Global Economy

In an era of increasingly cross-border supply and production lines, a company's ability to successfully bridge the economies of two nations plays a key role in its ability to benefit from the emerging opportunities in the global marketplace. As corporations based in developed nations look to reduce costs in their supply chain, markets with low labor costs, such as Cameroon, offer enticing incentives for outsourcing. For such outsourcing to prove an efficiency-inducing benefit rather than a complexity-carrying detriment, a close degree of integration of main companies and their subsidiaries is necessary. Even given the ever-escalating capabilities of global telecommunications, successful integration still requires supplier liaisons who can provide a physical link between the two companies.

Such supplier liaisons must be able to operate seamlessly in the nations on either side of the trade link. This, in essence, is a role that is tailor-made for dual citizenship, as such dual nationality allows unfettered travel in and out of each country. In contrast, those without such dual nationality must gain visas to simply complete the execution of their job. Cameroonian nationals require a visa for business travel to EU countries and the United States. Allowing Cameroonians to maintain dual nationalities would eliminate visa restrictions and time wasted for such processes, uncertainties, and enhances business efficiency.

Beyond allowing such individuals to become expedited conduits to corporations within the primary developed nation, the increasing flexibility that the destination country's nationality affords can also make such Cameroonian nationals a natural expeditionary to other developed nations. For example, a Cameroonian national who obtains French citizenship while acting as a liaison between a Cameroonian supplier and a French corporation may then become a natural focal point for

expansion into business not just with other French corporations, but with corporations in other EU nations as well.

3.3. Social Ramifications

Beyond the purely financial impacts of prohibiting dual nationality, Cameroonian nationality law also carries numerous consequences for the functioning of Cameroonian society. Mandating singular possession of Cameroonian nationality can limit the ability of native Cameroonians to obtain world-class education, or, for those who do, it can discourage their return, resulting in a brain drain that deprives Cameroon society of essential professionals. Current, single-citizenship nationality law also creates crises at the individual level. Children born of parents from different nationalities must choose an allegiance through one parent over that of another. Similarly, the need for immigrants to choose between their native Cameroon and the potential prosperity of their destination country can create misperceptions of having forsaken their homeland and generate a division of isolation despite deep and continued feelings of loyalty.

3.3.a. Advanced Education

While Cameroon certainly does maintain institutions of higher learning, there is little argument that can be made for the quality of Cameroon's universities being equivalent to the world-class elite institutions. As a simple demonstration of this, note that no Cameroonian universities are among the top 500 in the Shanghai rankings for top world universities.²⁴ Thus, for talented Cameroon students aspiring to the highest peaks of academic excellence, the prospect of immigration becomes a necessity.

As with the limitations born of foreign citizenship discussed with regard to occupation, being a foreign national carries additional restrictions for pursuing higher education in nations with elite institutions. Though these limitations may

²⁴ Center for World-Class Universities, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, *Academic Ranking of World Universities* (2008), [http://www.arwu.org/rank2008/Top500_EN\(by%20rank\).pdf](http://www.arwu.org/rank2008/Top500_EN(by%20rank).pdf), accessed May 2009.

generally be less severe for students, they nonetheless do exist. Elite academic institutions may have strict quotas on the number of international students that may be admitted, resulting in disproportionately competitive admission processes. International standing also plays a crucial role in the relative ability of students to finance their education. In the US, where college tuition costs tend to greatly exceed those of other western nations,²⁵ international students are not eligible for federal or state financial aid, nor are they eligible for federal education loan programs. International students in the US also face limitations in their ability to obtain alternative, private loans to finance their education. Additionally, US immigration law requires that foreign students attend classes full-time, meaning that it is far more difficult for students to help fund their education by holding full-time jobs and attending school part time.

Especially in cases where Cameroonian immigrants want to pursue multiple advanced degrees - be they PhD's or pursuit of professional degrees such as in medicine or law - the prospective advantages of obtaining citizenship are even greater given the total devotion of time and money to the educational venture. Yet the necessity of forfeiting their native nationality may deter Cameroonian immigrants from seeking their destination country's nationality, and so force them to pursue education at a distinct disadvantage - potentially driving them to lower caliber universities or wholly deterring them from pursuing additional higher education.

3.3.b. Brain Drain

Therefore, many native Cameroonians pursuing higher education abroad may view the advantages of becoming naturalized citizens of their destination country as significant enough to warrant the sacrifice of their native Cameroonian

²⁵ As a vivid demonstration of the increased financial burden for international students, UK universities chief, Ivor Crew has publicly defended accepting lower-quality international students as a way to compensate for underfunded domestic students since those international students can be charged more . See "Non-EU students 'needed for cash", *BBC News*, Wednesday, 14 July, 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/3893179.stm, accessed April 2009.

nationality. Similarly, the loss of their native nationality creates a serious obstacle to returning to Cameroon following the completion of their education. Countries with elite educational institutions clearly perceive the value of such highly-qualified immigrant graduates and in general, seek to retain them following completion of their education. This is clearly reflected in US immigration policy, as immigrants with advanced education are given preference in obtaining permanent residency.²⁶ Moreover, there is an increasingly large acknowledgment of the essential role that such well-educated immigrants play in US economic success, and a growing push to provide further incentives for their migration to or retention in the US.²⁷

With destination countries increasingly recognizing the value that highly-educated immigrants can provide to their countries, native homelands must provide incentive for such qualified individuals to return home and contribute to development of their native country. Instead, the policy of single-nationality currently required by Cameroonian nationality law directly discourages such return. Besides the aforementioned economic impacts of this constrained nationality law, it can also prove seriously detrimental to the strength of civil society in the homeland by depriving that society of the doctors, lawyers, scientists, and engineers needed to stimulate growth and improve living conditions. The reality of such a “brain drain” taking place is clear, with expatriation rates of educated individuals from sub-Saharan Africa occurring at ten times the expatriation rate of the populous as a whole.²⁸

Cameroon too offers a vivid demonstration of this, with 19% of Cameroon-trained nurses and up to 45% of Cameroon-trained physicians emigrating to other

²⁶ Randall Monger & Nancy Rytina, “U.S. Legal Permanent Residents: 2008”, *Annual Flow Report*, March 2009, http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/lpr_fr_2008.pdf, accessed May 2009.

²⁷ Thomas L Friedman, “The Open-Door Bailout”, *The New York Times*, Tuesday 10 February 2009, India, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/11/opinion/11friedman.html>, accessed April 2009.

²⁸ Smita Wagh & Catherine Pattillo (note 21 above), p. 10.

nations.²⁹ The problem of a brain drain of the nation's most qualified individuals is thus quite real, and distressingly encouraged by restrictions on dual citizenship that effectively encourage the most talented and qualified elements of Cameroonian society to remain abroad. In consequence, not only are economic growth and public health potentially affected, but the decreased presence of the educated population so vital to robust democracy can indirectly enable political corruption, suppression of human rights, and perpetual underdevelopment.

3.3.c. Bi-National Dilemma

While the "brain drain" effect of prohibiting dual citizenship showcases the macroscopic effects on Cameroon, the current Cameroonian nationality law also generates problems on a more personal level. For Cameroonian children born to parents of both Cameroonian and foreign nationality - especially when such birth occurs within marriage - such bi-national birth carries with it the oppressive dilemma of assuming a single nationality at majority. Except for the rare cases where foreign nationality cannot be renounced (Greece being the prime example), children who cannot claim more than one nationality face the difficult and unavoidable choice of siding with one parent's nationality and rejecting the other's. Though such a choice may be fairly simple in some situations, in many, it generates a dilemma of self-identification that can damage familial bonds. Instead of looking to such individuals as a natural source for the economic envoys, current Cameroonian citizenship law thus subjects them to a potentially painful decision regarding which part of their heritage to abandon.

3.3.d. Perception of Forsaken Homeland

Though the reasons for which Cameroonian immigrants forfeit their native citizenship in favor of their destination countries' may be purely economic or educational, the impact of such forfeiture on their perceived relationship with their

²⁹ Dilip Ratha & Zhimei Xu, "Migration and Remittances Factbook", Migration and Remittances Team, Development Prospects Group, World Bank. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1199807908806/Cameroon.pdf>, accessed May 2009.

homeland can be significant. For those remaining in Cameroon, an immigrants' forfeit of Cameroon nationality can appear as if that immigrant is forsaking their homeland, and by extension, the people of that homeland. This can create an emotional and relational rift between immigrants and their families that mirrors and exacerbates the inherent physical separation. In their survey of feelings on dual citizenship among German immigrants, Carroll and Vollhardt offer an illustrative example of this thought: "A first generation immigrant from Poland emphasized the social bonds citizenship represents: Giving up citizenship is like officially stating that you do not want to belong to the people you grew up with...others might think you are drawing a line between them and yourself".³⁰

On the converse side, the requirement to forfeit Cameroonian nationality to become a naturalized citizen in their destination countries can provoke a sense of emotional and intellectual isolation from their homeland. With restricted legal rights, and no longer able to vote in the country of their birth, Cameroonian immigrants may resign themselves to the imposed isolation from their homeland. As Carroll and Vollhardt chronicle in an interview with an immigrant student who expressed their belief that "the citizenship of the country of my origin means family, friends, culture, my past".³¹ Hence, to discard citizenship would carry the emotional weight of discarding all the links to one's homeland that the citizenship represented. This sense of mental and emotional disconnection to one's homeland thus makes the likelihood of attempted return far lower and can have a serious impact on the extent to which those same immigrants may continue to send remittances home. In such a situation of alienation, any resentment from those remaining in Cameroon based on perceptions of forsaking the homeland simply exacerbate the situation and reinforce the divide created by prohibitive nationality laws.

³⁰ Megan Carroll & Johanna Vollhardt, "If People Want to Have Dual Citizenship, What's Wrong With That?: Examining the Legal and Emotional Aspects of Dual Citizenship in Germany", http://www.humanityinaction.org/docs/Carroll_Vollhardt_2002.pdf, p. 128, accessed April 2009.

³¹ Ibid, p. 128.

3.4. Political Ramifications

While the potential social detriment from sacrificing Cameroonian nationality may be hard for immigrants to accurately gauge while weighing the pro's and con's of becoming naturalized citizens of their destination country, the political impact is certain: a loss of all participatory political privileges, most specifically, the right to vote. For a society in which political apathy runs rampant and the validity of elections is routinely questionable, such a sacrifice may appear minor to anyone contemplating naturalization. However, for some Cameroonians, such a prospect holds foremost prominence in the costs of forfeiting Cameroon citizenship. Immigrants who feel that such a sacrifice is too dear are thus subjected to the strategic economic and educational disadvantages already discussed.

However, can a desire to retain political rights in their homeland inspire Cameroonian immigrants to avoid naturalization? This merely subjects them to the potentially more fraught prospect of retaining the nationality of a homeland where they have no ability to participate in the democratic process. As a result, such Cameroonian expatriates would not be able to influence items with potentially far greater immediate impact to their lives, such as the tax rates, local administration, transportation plans, education policies, and a host of other matters settled by, or at least subject to, the ballot box of their destination country. Especially when contrasted to the relative lack of responsiveness present in the Cameroonian democratic process, this marks a grave sacrifice for an immigrant who desires to retain their native nationality.

As with other ramifications, the second phase of political consequences from the prohibition on dual nationality comes from those individuals who choose to forfeit their Cameroonian nationality for the advantages associated with naturalization. The impact of this effect is felt more at the macroscopic level, as it can help to deprive Cameroonian society of vital demographic elements necessary to support a robust democracy. This is especially true given that those Cameroonian immigrants who become naturalized citizens in their destination

country are likely to be disproportionately well-educated. These well-educated professionals are often considered to be among the strongest counterpoints to malfeasance by the governmental elite and their diminished presence may enable increased corruption and infringements on human rights and the democratic process. As one somewhat extreme, but illustrative example, consider the public demands which eventually led to Pervez Musharraf relinquishing his illegitimate control of the Pakistani presidency. Though the protest movement that forced his eventual abdication eventually bridged much of the population, the originators of the movement were overwhelmingly lawyers.³² Had Pakistanis trained in the law emigrated at the rates seen for some professions in sub-Saharan Africa, the numbers to instigate such a change may not have been present in Pakistani society.

Given the scales of corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency and opacity, and human rights violations present in Cameroon, it could thus be argued that the policy of prohibiting dual-citizenships contribute to such ills. By extension, the decision to retain the single nationality policy despite a strong international trend towards permitting dual nationality may even be seen by some as an attempt by the current regime to limit the influence of a well-educated Cameroonian Diaspora who may challenge the government's influence.³³

3.5. Cultural Ramifications

Unlike most socioeconomic consequences of prohibiting dual citizenship, the cultural impact of such restrictive nationality law appears primarily in the second phase, when immigrants have chosen to forfeit their Cameroonian nationality in favor of naturalized citizenship in their destination country. Besides the emotional and relational divide this choice can create between immigrants and those remaining at home as above discussed, in bulk it can cause a general isolation

³² Aamir Latif & Kevin Whitelaw, "Pakistan's [Lawyers](http://www.usnews.com/blogs/news-desk/2007/11/07/pakistans-lawyers-take-on-musharraf.html) Take On Musharraf", *US News and World Report*, 07 November 2007, United States, <http://www.usnews.com/blogs/news-desk/2007/11/07/pakistans-lawyers-take-on-musharraf.html>, accessed in April 2009.

³³ Dibussi Tande, "Dual Citizenship (I): Time for a Long Overdue National Debate" (2006), http://www.dibussi.com/2006/05/dual_citizenshi.html, accessed March 2009.

between Cameroon and the world at large. That is, if the native population comes to feel isolated from the Diaspora, it can breed a sense of resentment towards both the Diaspora and, by extension, the foreign populations the members of that Diaspora reside in. Though unlikely to take place on the same scale in Cameroon, such a scenario operating on even a minor level risks directing Cameroon down a path of insular nativism and xenophobia when global trends point strongly towards ever greater integration.

Additionally, current nationality law's potential for encouraging brain drain carries a distinctly cultural consequence. Just as talented Cameroonians seeking world-class education in sciences, law, or medicine may turn abroad, so too may its burgeoning artists, writers, and musicians. With the greater potential for patronage that developed nation's higher incomes afford offering a powerful incentive for immigrant artists to remain abroad, Cameroon risks losing its foremost cultural contributors to naturalization in their destination countries. Prohibiting dual nationality thus harbors the potential to deprive the Cameroonian people not just of doctors, engineers and lawyers, but the elite artists who may best express the unique qualities and struggles of the Cameroonian culture.

In addition, the general assumption is that each Cameroonian is an ambassador of his culture. Therefore every Cameroonian has an implied responsibility to showcase Cameroonian culture in whatever forum possible in their destination country. However, the enthusiasm to do so is diminished when faced with a nationality law that forces you to choose between your homeland (which in many instances offers you little survival options), and your destination country, which provides you better educational and employment opportunities. Cameroonians, just like any other nationals consider livelihood to be an important facet of life and would rather choose their destination country for its opportunities. Under such circumstances, it becomes tricky to be a cultural ambassador of a homeland that does not recognize you as a native.

4. Perspective on Dual Nationality

As established above, current Cameroonian nationality law's prohibition on dual citizenship acts primarily as a detrimental force that negatively impacts both emigrants from Cameroon and those remaining at home. In the most simplistic summarization, removing that detrimental force thus eliminates the corresponding negative impact. In the interest of avoiding redundancy, the need for dual nationality strongly highlighted throughout section 3 above will not be repeated. It is important though, to understand that simply removing the obstacle of mandatory single nationality will have positive impacts proportional to their contribution of the problems discussed. For some of the dilemmas discussed in section 3, the prohibition of dual nationality stands as the single cause a problem, so revocation of that prohibition effectively solves the problem. Bi-national children, for example, will no longer face the painful decision of choosing one parent's nationality over another. Similarly, Cameroonian emigrants to developed nations will not have to forgo their voting rights in Cameroon in order to obtain those rights in their destination country.

This does not mean, however, that simply allowing dual citizenship will eliminate all problems discussed throughout section 3 above. The vexing issue of brain drain will likely persist so long as both developed nations preferentially seek such skilled individuals and the economic opportunities in Cameroon do not relatively rival those of developed nations. Instead, allowing dual nationality will remove an active deterrent to reintegration and repatriation that makes the problem of brain drain more severe. That is, the prohibition on dual nationality is but one of many causes leading to complicated effects like brain drain, so removing it alone will not magically eliminate that effect. By most indications, it will, however, help to counteract that effect. To put it more bluntly, removing the prohibition on dual nationality will not transform Cameroon into an economically successful, developed nation, but it will significantly improve its ability to become one.

5. Conclusion

The current Cameroon citizenship law's prohibition on holding dual nationality creates a diverse set of detrimental impacts on its people, both in Cameroon itself and among its sizable emigrant population. The negative effects of the current policy range from dilemmas at the personal level to hindrances on macroeconomic growth. Though the prohibition on dual nationality may not be the singular cause of all such problems, it stands as a profoundly discouraging influence on the Cameroonian immigrant population, limiting their successes abroad and deterring their retention as an integral, beneficial part of Cameroonian society. Cameroon's continued implementation of a restrictive nationality law that does not reflect today's world realities is just baffling. As illustrated in this article, there appears to be a clear global movement towards greater acceptance of dual nationality in countries around the world and the reasons underlying this upward trend are numerous and diverse. Considering the numerous benefits dual nationality brings to a population and the country, Cameroon should embark on a path towards dual nationality without any delay.