Ambiguous ambitions: on pathways, projects, and pregnancy interruptions in Cameroon
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‘I git abong ia di lik bi’. This Gbigbil proverb, which literally means ‘the elbow never disregards the back’, denotes a sense of connection, support, and reciprocity that is so important in the Eastern Cameroonian village where I did research. Used as it is to remind people of their indebtedness to the pillars and social networks supporting their personal projects, it is also applicable to me now that I have finished the long and collaborative project that my Ph.D. trajectory has been. Indeed, many people have served as that back that kept my elbow writing, and without them this thesis would never have been accomplished. In order not to disregard them but rather, in line with the proverb, give them the honour that they deserve, I would like to explicitly acknowledge the indispensable contribution and support of several groups of people.

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My collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health in Yaoundé, and its Provincial Delegation in Bertoua, was equally fruitful and instructive. Not only did our discussions offer me insight into the perspectives of Cameroonian biomedical experts, but I also learned a lot from all research reports and documents in the archives of the Ministry that were made available to me. I would like to thank in particular the three provincial delegates with whom I worked in Bertoua, Dr. Doaw Menkanda Jean Blaise, Dr. Roger Belinga Banga, and Dr. Nsom Mba Charles. The chef du district Dr. Tedjouka, as well as Dr. Njiki Dounou Rostand and Dr. Anjembe from the Sous-Programme Santé de la Reproduction provided me with useful statistics regarding the health area of Asung and reproductive health issues respectively.

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et la Communication (IRESKO), the University of Yaoundé I, the Catholic University of Central Africa (UCAC), and the municipality of Bélabo. Quite to my surprise, I found many written and (first-hand) oral histories on Eastern Cameroon in the beautiful fortress of the Fathers of the Holy Ghost (Paters van de Heilige Geest) in Gemert, the Netherlands. Especially Father Martin van Moorsel, so at home in the Gbibil area, and Father Martin Wilson, so at home in the congregation’s archives, were of great help during the preparatory phase of this research. I would also like to thank the Dutch ‘Monseigneur van Heijgen’ and ‘Frère Martin’ in Bertoua and Diang for elaborating upon this historical information and sharing their personal experiences with me.

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Specific insight into the incidence of pregnancy interruptions in the region, as well as the role of biomedical care in women’s health-seeking itinerary, could only be gained through access to the numerous hospital records that I was allowed to examine. I was lucky that, despite the incompleteness and privacy of these registers, the staff of health centres in Asung, Bélabo, Mokolo I, and the Provincial Hospital in Bertoua were always willing to offer me access to these data and help to digest them. I thank in particular Dr. Hamalamo Zaoro, Dr. Mvondo Severin, Dr. Meli Hervé, madame Moussa, Dr. Lono Serge, and the gynaecologists Dr. N’anggal Guy-Michel, Dr. Adamo Bongoe, and Dr. Nguelé for their kind cooperation and patience while manually checking the registers with me.

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