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The Migration Dreamer: A New Insight into Concepts and Issues in Cameroonian Migration

Vivian Besem Ojong¹, Muesiri Obero Ashe², Jeffrey H. Cohen³, and Sunday Israel Oyebamiji⁴

Abstract

Our paper reports on the challenges that confront Cameroonian migrants and, in particular, "migration dreamers" or migration aspirants who face serious limits, including social extinction or social relegation beyond recovery. Combining data from fieldwork with documentary records on trends in Cameroonian migration, this paper focuses on the social impact and adverse outcomes for aspiring migrants and movers. It reveals that there are migration aspirants who are victims of social extinction and feature prominently behind the camera. As their population increase, their activities have intricate and ferocious impacts at the micro or grassroots level with regard to the hazards thereof. In light of the intricate link between grassroots and national levels in socio-economic development, the article concludes that a major way out is to incorporate the issue into national policy frameworks and, in the process, also engage the attention of interested international agencies.

Keywords: Bush-Fallers; Cross-Border; Migration Aspirants; Policy; Social Extinction

Introduction

As stated in the abstract, this paper examines a theme of victims of social extinction in the Cameroonian migration scene that have featured prominently behind the camera over the years. The migration dreamers (MDs), as they are known in this study, emerge in response to economic and socio-political change in Cameroon, first in the 1960s but particularly since the 1980s. A major contributing factor to increasing migration was the declining value of the CFA franc in the 1990s, as the CFA franc was devalued by fifty percent in 1994 (Alpes, 2014). Moreover, the social structure in most Cameroonian societies is such that every individual wants to be an asset to the community, at least, the immediate social unit, the family. What Nyamnjoh (2011) referred to as the "fear of social extinction" describes a scene of those who are determined to sustain their social status and that of their family against all social odds. As economic crisis impacts adversely on the average income of the individual, supporting a

¹ Vivian Besem Ojong, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. E-mail: Ojong@ukzn.ac.za

² Muesiri Obero Ashe, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. E-mail: muesiri@yahoo.com

³ Jeffrey H. Cohen, The Ohio State University, United States. E-mail: Cohen.319@osu.edu

⁴ Sunday Israel Oyebamiji, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. E-mail: Oyebamijis@ukzn.ac.za



member of the family to migrate, particularly an educated and determined one was among the strategies of avoiding social extinction. Family sponsorship of an individual implies that such an individual has to support the family back home through remittance. Yet there are many of those whose emigration ambition is due to unemployment. This category is even in the majority. For instance, the devaluation of the CFA franc in the 1990s coincided with an increase in unemployment in Cameroon which was by available data within the range of 30-40 percent (Wanki, 2018; Alpes, 2014).

The primary objective of the work is to identify the probable challenges emanating from this as a social problem and how to evolve a policy framework that can recognize it as another issue in migration management that may be handled by initiating some experimental projects at grassroots level. The second objective is to conceptualize it like some other social issues in migration and therefore create a scholarly platform for easy reference that can encourage its investigation along the same line in some other African countries.

This social issue requires appropriate focus in the light of new trends in contemporary transnational migration and the difficulty confronting international agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in the management of migration for purpose of national and global development. This therefore, provides the primary justification for the study. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), and some other agencies are striving to improve on their level of precision with regard to projecting the future of global migration. This is primarily for the purpose of capacity building and implementation of new policy structures that capture the key indices of each region (IOM, 2010). The MDs of Cameroon constitute an index that has to be well accommodated in the policy framework of these agencies since apart from Cameroon there are also traces of this development in South-Eastern Nigeria, indicating the probability of similar development in other African countries in future.

Theoretical Framework

Humanity's attempt to unravel deep-rooted concepts is among the key reasons for adoption of theories in empirical research (Harrington, 2005). This is because theories display at a glance the extent to which a concept or idea can be replicated while the replicative quality of a concept or innovation determines its relevance in addressing the practical problem of man. The MDs are product of social change and social extinction. Therefore, the paper employs the theory of social change and the theory of social extinction to examine their situation vis-à-vis the expected response from the state to incorporate it into migration management program.

The theory of social change is significant in this context because apart from embracing the totality of the social institutions of man, the interrelationships and interactions associated with the structural intricacies of human activities are all amenable to the structural principles of change (Zheng, 2022; Arise, 2022). Social change is not just a recurrent issue, but has become parts and parcel of life in the evolution and development of every society (Zheng, 2022). Such change may be dynamic or retrogressive. The MDs are product of social change but along the retrogressive line. Unlike dynamic social change that promotes development, the retrogressive one creates challenges and structural platform that necessitate the need to go back to the drawing board in the process of policy formulation as a means of addressing them.



Social extinction is among the outcomes of social change and therefore, to some extent the theory of social extinction is a derivative of the theory of social change. Unlike the case of biological extinction of an organism or its specie defined as “the end of an evolutionary line” in the natural sciences (Jørgensen, 2022:1), social extinction does not necessarily mark the permanent demise of the social group and its role. Rather it is the demise or considerable relegation of a group in social life beyond recovery for a period of time long enough to eliminate the original actors while their offspring may possess the natural and social endowment to revive the social status and role of the group later in history.

This is why Kendra (2021:3) posits in the psychological analysis of the theory that “extinction doesn’t mean it is gone forever.” Even a recent study is of the view that the biological extinction of an organism or its specie does not necessarily mean its end or “potential future cut-off” from the evolutionary process and that to conclude otherwise is to ignore a host of empirical evidence in biology and the history of natural sciences (Jørgensen, 2022:1). Therefore, the MDs of Cameroon know that the future is not only determined by the present material status of a group, but also by the hardly predictable role of structural changes in the social system. But the fear of social extinction is hard to overcome as the current material asset of a group also determines its present influence in the society.

Research Methodology

The fieldwork for this study is structured to gather both qualitative and quantitative data. Previous published records of informants on their migration experience were combined with qualitative data from fieldwork. This is because it is easy to infer from the published narratives that beneath every success story, there are dozens that fall by the way side, thus constituting the MDs portrayed and empirically analyzed in this study.

Black (2020) has explosively examined the acute challenges encountered in the African scene with regard to any fieldwork on migration meant to obtain detail quantitative data. The Cameroonian case is not in any way less cumbersome. Thus, the fieldwork involves collection of official documents of a number of international agencies interested in global migration. Among them are official records of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), and International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD). Also consulted are online documents of a few public agencies in Cameroon interested in demographic and national emigration facts and figures.

The qualitative data complement facts and figures from quantitative sources. This involves interaction with a number of migrants and migration aspirants in Cameroon. The authors employ some ethnographic approach in the semi-structured oral interviews. But this is done within the context of the social history of migration in the area, embracing the *America Wandas* in the 1960s to 1970s and *bush-falling* since the 1980s. The participants explain their different experiences and sometimes in comparison with what some others passed through. The migration aspirants discuss, sometimes in detail, their experience in relation to the economic crisis of the country. They talk of different alternatives and the effort made to identify the right option in relation to funding and prevailing socio-economic forces. The return-migrants interviewed explained their experience abroad. Their efforts have been crowned with success and they often make suggestions on what should be the approach of the young ones interested in migration, particularly to the advanced nations of Europe and North America.

Thus, a simple methodology devoid of intricate mathematical theories was considered more appropriate by the authors in order to retain the practical nature of the problem under investigation and successfully investigate its various practical socio-cultural paraphernalia untainted.

Results and Discussion

Conceptualization

In terms of results, the first thing in focus from the data analysis is adoption of appropriate concept that captures the set of people the fieldwork is all about. The dynamics of migration and its impact at the family, national and even global levels in the context of development still faces the practical and intellectual challenges of issues that are yet to be empirically well defined. Thus, every country or sub-region may have certain peculiarities whose appropriate conceptualisation would contribute to effective policy formulation at both national and global levels. These individuals are described as those who invest all they have in the migration project and yet never have the opportunity to travel, in addition to apparent loss of all hope. At a glance, they are therefore, migration dreamers (MDs) or dummy migrants since on a closer look, like the dummy, they merely display the hazards involved in the entire scenario after a momentary façade of beauty that ends up in illusion and apparent hope that terminates in gloss oblivion.

Conceptualization in this context is relevant because concepts are fundamental tools for effective study and policy formulation in migration. Even the simple concepts of “migrant,” “emigrant,” and “immigrant” are significant because they provide the social and empirical foundation for the identification and conceptualisation of more complex situations. Until the last quarter of the twentieth century when migration was yet to significantly attract the attention of both policy makers and scholars, the aforementioned three concepts were the only key ones in traditional history of migration. But as both policy makers, scholars, and social analysts encounter complex situations and intricate scenario, new concepts are created to address the challenges emanating from such scenes. Concepts provide the maiden channel for assessing the practical, theoretical, and legal framework of any social context in relation to the challenges surrounding it (Sequeira, 2014).

This justifies the need to develop more appropriate and dynamic concepts. This is more so as the African case may even be more complex considering the intricacies and paraphernalia of its traditional extended family structure. Yet, within these intricate networks of family social units are numerous individuals that feature behind the camera in the Cameroonian migration scene and, therefore, can hardly be captured in the literature in the absence of appropriate conceptualisation. In the social context the MDs are a caricature of the true emigrant, metaphorically captioned as *bush-fallers* in Cameroon. Therefore, emigration in Cameroonian communities and their immediate neighbours of South-Eastern Nigeria operates in a social context with different challenges and set of actors that need to be well conceptualised for purpose of national development.

The Ratio of MDs to Successful Emigrants

Another key issue derived from the result is the probable ratio of the MDs to the number of successful emigrants including those who migrated but were unable to achieve their aim even



in the foreign land. A fieldwork figures illustrated in Alpes (2014) reveals that out of 100 informants in the major town of Buea, 80 were strongly determined to follow the option of emigration and 29 actually invested enormously to actualize the ambition, but only 5 were yet to realize the dream. The others were still on the drawing board marking out new strategies to see them through. This alone can give us a picture of those that end up as MDs and the long-term effect on the individual and the society. In the light of this figure and the qualitative data analyzed here, it is empirical and practical to state that for every successful migrant there were at least six who invested their last dime without making any headway, i.e. at best 1:6. The following comment from a fieldwork report also provides more evidence in support of the above ratio:

When studying people's ambitions about (transcontinental) mobility in Cameroon, I was struck by how many of the aspiring migrants in Cameroon never leave the country at all...Among the aspiring migrants, the experience of having tried, but failed to leave is extremely common. After one and a half years of fieldwork among aspiring migrants, my research assistant Delphine was the only person who had been able to actually travel out of Cameroon (Alpes, 2014:2).

Other published narratives of Cameroonian migrants provide some evidence in support of this. Overall, every success story shows that underneath or behind the camera, there are a host of others who have fallen by the way side after spending all they have on the migration venture and are in fact hardly comfortable to narrate their experience. For instance, one of such success story is the experience of a family recorded in Ojong & Otu (2014:65):

Before Ongie could finally travel to the US, her family had wanted her to go to Germany where there was someone they counted on to give her the support she would need before finding her feet. In trying to arrange for her travel documents, and acting upon the advice of Ongie, the family resorted to using the service of a 'doky man.' The sum of 2 million CFA was entrusted to this guy to process the necessary documents needed for the trip. This process which ended up not succeeding lasted for about eight months. Amidst bitterness and skepticism from the family, the zeal to travel abroad became an obsession for the family. After recovering from the loss, the family still managed to put some money together to exploit yet another opportunity. This time around the mission was successful as she ended up traveling to the US.

The case of Pa Oben in Ojong & Otu (2014) who incurred loans from local cooperatives provides another example. According to him, before his son could find his feet in North America, he (Pa Oben) had incurred enough loans for the cooperatives to drag him to court if his friends had not helped him to upset some debts.

Both Cameroonian immigrants in other African countries and their counterparts from South-Eastern Nigeria often talk about these categories of greener pasture seekers while interacting among themselves and even with other migrants. Thus, Vera Tatah from the Buea region of Cameroon, an immigrant resident in the Berea area of Durban in South Africa, narrated the experience of two colleagues who were head-long bound in their dreams of migrating to any of the Western nations, particularly USA or Canada. According to her:

At the time I was processing my documents to come to South Africa, I had two colleagues who graduated the same year with me but from different higher institutions, though we finished from the same high school. Before I started processing my visa for my journey to South Africa, they not only spent all they had on their determination to migrate to Europe or North America, but they had collected so much from their parents and even well-wishers that the parents seem to have lost interest in the entire venture. I told them that they should think of something else and probably even change their migration plan, e.g. to an African country like South Africa, also reminding them of a good number of others who have invested their last earning without making any headway. They said that they would not allow the unfortunate experience of others to discourage them, adding that beside most of those I mentioned were not educated. When I visited Cameroon last, it appeared they had absolutely abandoned the entire emigration plan to the West and part of what they are exploring now is related to some of the suggestions I made.

This is also related to the following piece in Cameroon by Alpes (2014:17)

My research assistant Delphine was determined to fall bush. In our research, we repeatedly came across migration brokers that failed to send out their clients and families who had invested money in vain into the bushfalling projects of their children. Yet, Delphine would not change her mind about bushfalling at all cost. Half way through fieldwork, one of the informants whose bushfalling trajectory Delphine had been transcribing was deported back to Cameroon. Delphine saw first-hand how impossible Manuella's life had become in Cameroon after deportation. Although they became friends, Delphine did not trust, believe, or take seriously Manuella's advice. Why should the bad luck of others discourage her? Whatever the odds, she wanted 'to see bush' with her own eyes. She was going to go at any cost and in any way. If others had been unlucky, she would work hard ... She was going to have success and bush was the only means and place to get there. Delphine is not an isolated case of extreme fixation on bush.

Ojong & Otu (2014) has observed and examined a theme of obsession among many young men and women in Cameroon with regard to the ambition of cross-border migration, often supported by members of their immediate or extended family. This is a key factor in the increasing number of MDs, explaining the probable ratio of six to every successful emigrant. An earlier study of the Cameroonian situation aptly portrayed it thus: "Everyone wants to leave – if not legally, then illegally, those who are still here are the ones who haven't made it yet" (Pelican, 2008:3).

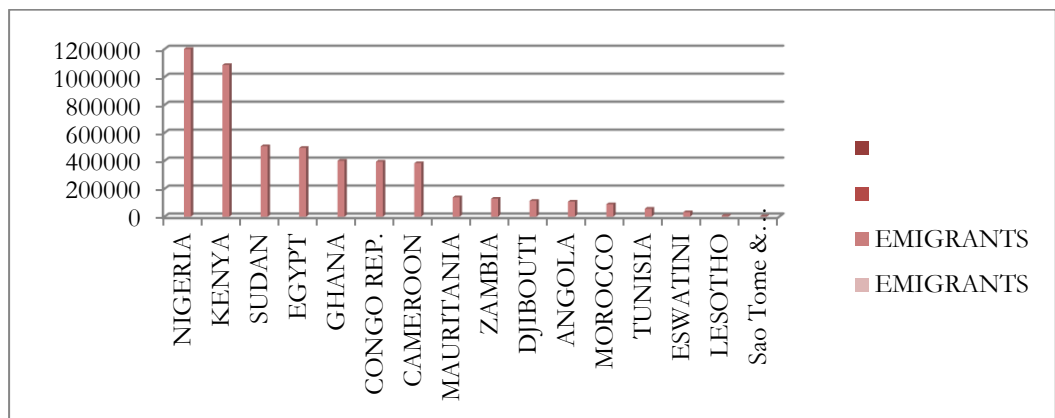
This is despite the fact that in the Cameroonian scene, the contemporary metaphorical conception of emigration to the Western world as *bush-falling* (Alpes, 2014) reminds the ambitious ones of the acute challenges involved. But since the metaphor captures both the thrills and chills in terms of benefits and hazards, many people are willing to accept the option when they feel all other avenues have failed to yield results. In fact the rate of emigration from Cameroon to the West was such that the country was rated the first in Africa and among the first five globally in asylum seeking during the 1990s (Nyamnjoh, 2011). This has continued to increase over the years, though slightly dropping as percentage of total population. Thus,



in 1990 the population of emigrants to the West was 265,344.00 (2.2% of total population). This increased to 381,984.00 in 2015 (1.64% of total population) (UNHCR, 2021).

Yet a comparative analysis of the African scene in 2015 with regard to migration to the West (as shown in the chart below) indicates that Cameroon occupied seventh position among 16 African countries rated to have the highest population of emigrants in the Western world. Therefore, the chart tends to indicate that this phenomenon may not be peculiar to Cameroon. In any case, there are traces of it in South-Eastern Nigeria and it is significant to note that Nigeria has the highest figure on the chart and also shares border with Cameroon.

Ranking of African Countries with the highest population of Emigrants in non-African Countries (2015)



Source: Drawn with the aid of data obtained from UNHCR (2021) Migration Profile: Cameroon, October, <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/CMR/cameroon/immigration-statistics> [accessed 20th January 2023]

The metaphorical portrait of emigration to the West by placing its benefits and expected hazards on the same platform with the bush-falling experience of a farmer who chooses a virgin forest with expectation of higher yields was coined during the 1990s and by the middle of the following decade it had been well ingrained in Cameroonian social structure as reflected in the detailed portrait of the scene in Nyamnjoh (2011). According to the author, “Just as every hunting and distance-farming expedition is meticulously prepared for, so too is bush-falling ... *Bushfallers*, a magazine that describes itself as ‘the Bible of moving abroad and achieving success,’ was launched in November 2007 and the maiden issue advised would-be *bush-fallers* on what they needed to know before leaving Cameroon” (Nyamnjoh, 2011:705). Among the key issues discussed in this magazine is the type of visa relevant for the *bush-falling* adventure and the probable huddles to expect when applying for one. Some others are the challenge of racism, mechanisms of managing the high cost of living over there, and huddles to expect in the search for a source of income. In March 2008, another edition of the magazine was published which provided the basic facts and figures about “the best cities in the world for bush-falling and 20 things to take with you when leaving Cameroon.” (Nyamnjoh, 2011:705)

Fondong (2008) explains that unlike earlier set of Cameroonian emigrants of the 1960s and 1970s known as “*America Wandas*, education is not always the priority” of the *Bush-fallers* but acquisition of hard currencies, while “they generally acquire legal residency status through the

DV lottery or by seeking asylum.” According to the author, they “consider themselves ‘smarter’ and more ‘upbeat’ than the *America Wandas* and will stop at nothing to pursue their goal, whatever that goal is” and “like the true hunters that they are, the bushfallers always endeavour to return home as often as they can, usually in December, to show off their latest catch: ... a massive building project, an exotic business, etc” (Fondong 2008:1). In this context the multiplicity of the MDs is not surprising. The MDs are obsessed emigration dreamers who have been so immersed in the glamour of the “latest catch” culture, in addition to the search for a reliable source of addressing their financial needs vis-à-vis the threat of social extinction due to financial relegation.

The social dynamics of migration from the Cameroonian context revolves around a number of key elements, two of which are the historically defined sets of emigrants, the *America wandas* and *bush-fallers* mentioned above. The worldview of both sets in terms of what constitutes investment and contribution to communal development have played a major role in the increasing number of those at home with extreme fixation on cross-border migration even though some could have exploited certain opportunities in the local economy to actualise their dreams. But a good number of those at home rather imbibed visions hardly divested from on-going trends in transnational migration and its emotional paraphernalia at the grassroots level, visions that end up in complete failure and yet the victims continue to hope against hope as they find themselves in a state of dilemma.

The first set, *America wandas*, consists of those who left the country in the 1960s and 1970s for the advanced nations of Europe and North America largely for the purpose of further education, some of them on scholarship while others were self-sponsored. They were expected to return home to invest their knowledge and asset in communal and national development or at least contribute in any other way, partly by assisting other members of the extended family. But only very few did what was expected of them. As those at home were aware of the relative affluence and wealth they enjoy, the first set of MDs emerged as many thought of also joining the rank and file of these successful foreign dwellers. In other words, few of the home dwellers who envied the *America wanda* successfully achieved their vision of transnational migration while majority of them merely ended up as dreamers (i.e. MDs)

The determination to do what the *America wandas* failed to do partly contributed to the emergence of the *bush-fallers* and it was probably expected that this would end the era of the MDs since its structural social framework may be likened to that of a jungle or forest where everybody tries to do it in his/her own way, e.g. there are no necessary conditions like education or scholarship and government approval compared to the period of the *America wanda*. But surprisingly the MDs multiplied and this era could even be said to have marked the true origin of this set of individuals. Two simple reasons account for this. In the first place, everybody is now qualified to join the cross-border trip, as education and/or government scholarship are now optional. The essential ingredient is the ability to raise the fund the *doké man* requires to secure the necessary travel documents for the individual (Ojong & Out, 2014). Secondly, according to some migrants like Vera Tatab mentioned above, the educated ones tend to believe that since they have relative advantage based on their education, the failure of others is not a consideration in terms of expected limitations. It is for this reason that most of the real MDs are among the educated ones. However, the most important factor that led to escalation of the MDs is the new culture of return migration and its associated social



implication, with structural paraphernalia which include a parade of the latest catch by the return migrants, e.g. a modern car, a new business outfit or erection of new building.

According to Nyamnjoh (2011) and as mentioned above, the *America wanda* never imbibed the culture of return migration and made little or no effort to assist those at home or contribute to communal development. But later generation of migrants, the *bush-fallers*, according to him evolved this culture and in the Cameroonian context, the consequence of its numerous benefits was the increasing number of MDs. The gains, as already mentioned above, are contribution to communal development and financial assistance to members of the migrant family back home. But the element of some ostentation to demonstrate how much success was achieved made both individuals and families yet to have any one among the rank and file of these emigrants to develop some feeling of psychological relegation, thus creating a scene of obsession in their effort to join the class and a major consequence is the multiplication of the MDs.

The successful *bush-fallers* themselves did not get there on a platter of gold. Like the MDs they are exposed to all the huddles, but unlike the MDs they are confident that having crossed the border, what they needed is absolute determination, hard work, and courage (Ngwa, 2006). This study objectively captures some key issues in the entire scene. The authors attempt a complete portrait of the acute challenges encountered and an exploration of a scene which reveals that overall, there may be some *bush-fallers* who fall by the way side, i.e. they were able to travel but ended up like the MDs who never got the opportunity at all. The work attests to the fact that it was in a way a herculean exercise that “takes perseverance, undying hope, a strong will to survive, the willingness to be an alien, to be away from one’s comfort zone, the readiness to thrive where nothing is taken for granted, or perhaps where one is (unfortunately sometimes) taken for granted” (Ngwa, 2006:viii). This and some other analyses of the other side of the *bush-falling* culture must have been embarked upon as a means of encouraging those back at home to have a second look at the drawing board. Therefore, it was partly an effort to reduce the number of MDs by making those at home see the need to explore and utilize the opportunities available at home even though they may not create immediate wealth like those anticipated across borders.

Set-Backs Associated with the *Bush-Falling* Culture

The final key issue that emerged from analysis of the data is the set-backs associated with the *bush-falling* culture often ignored or at least underestimated to amplify the glamour and achievement recorded by those who successfully made it there including their contribution to communal development. This can be described as the other side of the coin. Beneath the beauty of this migration culture are social ills and hazards that have either remained unnoticed or deliberately ignored. Indeed there are informants who feel that whatever the achievement of the successful *bush-faller*, on the average, the benefit of the entire ‘project’ for the society is not worth the sacrifice.

This implies that such individuals have identified a number of retrogressive features yet to be socially defined and conceptualised to provide a total portrait of the entire scene. The MDs are among these retrogressive social elements behind the curtain. Identifying other set-backs associated with cross-border migration, these informants explain various evils going on in the society in the name of *bush-falling* ranging from enmity, conflicts and bad blood in different families, increasing rate of secret cults, ritual killings and robbery with civil servants and

religious leaders, including pastors, involved. As some studies now examine the issue of migration and crime in the host countries (Herda and Divadkar, 2023; Bersani, et al, 2018), there is a need to relate it with trends in the home countries in the light of noticeable elements of crime. In the *bush-falling* culture, this is also reflected in an article entitled “The Western World as a Trap for Most Africans” published by Jude Nji Foy in 2005:

Friends have become enemies just because of the idea of falling bush. Families have separated, parents have abandoned children, children have turned against their parents, pastors and priests have abandoned their congregations, people have joined jojo and secret societies, civil servants have abandoned their duties with continuous salaries, people have stolen and have killed, just because they want to fall bush by all means. All the young want to fall bush! (cited in Nyamnjoh 2011:704-705)

Within the African context, there may be a need to relate the MDs scene to any other perspective of a halted or unfinished emigration journey, partly for empirical objectivity. This is more so as Cameroon is just seventh in the rating of African countries based on the population size of migrants in the Western world as shown in the chart above. The challenges encountered at different stages in the history of migration and their corresponding social impact may in some respects vary from region to region, depending on socio-economic context and structures put in place through socio-political institutions for management of human resources in each society. However, there may be some similarities. In a way the MDs could be likened to what Jinnah (2014) refers to as “unfinished journey” in her study of Somalians experience using their female migrants in Johannesburg as a case study. But unlike the Somalian case of *buufis* “interpreted as a dream of a better life abroad that is not fully realised...partly laced with a feeling that they are halfway to realising their dream of a better life” (Jinnah, 2014:175), the MDs are stranded individuals, the best of whom may be described as hoping against hope. In other words, the MDs are dreamers with visions never realised in any form after all their resources or income have been exhausted in an effort to fulfil the vision. In this way emigration creates a set of people in the area who have lost confidence in utilisation of virtues of the local resources even when the alternative hope of life across border seems to have been lost.

At this stage many may also have no confidence in themselves and in the visions they have so much reverend. Since this occurs at a time when the zeal to create new ones have been exhausted, it could portend an intricate future for affected societies in terms of socio-economic development. This is because socio-economic activities at the micro level are deeply interwoven with socio-economic forces at the national level. In the long-run this has a multiplier effect on individual communities and the state in general. This arises from the fact that the victims of a life and destiny wasted in an inordinate ambition of realising an emigration dream (to be part of the Eldorado of the Western world) now gradually attain an age when they are expected to be counsellors, head of small households and even sponsors of the younger ones. Their inability to respond to the role expected of them may in one way or the other dwarf the career of the younger ones. Jinnah (2014) portrait of the Somalian scene has some positive connotation as she describes the *buufi* adherents as evolving a vision or initiating a dream which may be fulfilled in an unknown future, hence the title “unfinished journey...” But the MDs of the Cameroonian scene and their counterparts in South-Eastern Nigeria are largely individuals in a state of dilemma because of a dwarfed destiny arising from



a much cherished dream now confirmed unrealisable, i.e. a vision terminated by both the hazards of life and absence of proper focus in projecting the future.

Labour migration, especially to the advanced states of Europe and North America, has gradually evolved over the years as a key social security, even among smallholder families (Shrieder, 2000; Pelican, 2008), and this invariably creates two basic social problems. First, every family seeks relentlessly to have a representative there sometimes resulting in inefficient use of funds and asset that could have been invested in some other projects locally as a source of regular revenue to keep the family going and contribute to communal development. Second, the failure to realise migration plans derived from initiatives that are believed to be well structured creates a set of individuals who apparently conceive the entire project of life as a permanently lost dream, a terminated or ruined vision and an unfulfilled journey, at a time when they feel it is too late to create a fresh vision.

Conclusion

Amidst the hustle to actualise the cross-border dream, the MDs are migration aspirants who get it wrong in one way or the other and now strive, though unsuccessfully, to avoid social extinction. This becomes a challenge for the society at the micro-level as this also has adverse effects on dependants, including their own children who may look up to them for direction. As stated under introduction above, international agencies and NGOs interested in migration are striving to improve on their level of precision with regard to projecting the future of global migration and the MDs of Cameroon constitute an index that has to be well accommodated in their policy framework since apart from Cameroon there are also traces of this development in South-Eastern Nigeria. In an evolving social structure of a new migration age with transnational dimension, even the pre-migration experience of almost every Cameroonian emigrant (in terms of the huddles encountered before the journey or before reaping of any benefits) involves an indirect portrait of some element of this underneath identity (the MD).

In other words, national policy framework should include how to manage the adverse social effect emanating from their survival strategies and probably the adoption of devices that can minimise their number. A careful look at creation of socio-economic structures that can mitigate rural-urban migration is one way of addressing the situation because majority of cross-border migrants start with a vision of relocating to an urban centre with expectation of better job opportunities in the formal sector or good self-employment. But when the expected opportunities are not forthcoming, they join the “club” of emigration aspirants. More often than not, these aspirants believe that whatever treasure the cities and towns of Cameroon could not offer is readily available in their counterparts in Europe and North America. Thus the gradual emergence of the MDs starts from rural-urban migration.

In the African context, it is however, not surprising that rural-urban migration increases the number of emigration aspirants. A World Bank Study by the beginning of this century observes that the structural indices in urbanization in African states differ noticeably from what is obtainable in other continents (Fay & Opal, 2000). The key observation in this context is that contrary to what is obtainable in other continents urbanization in Africa has not been accompanied with economic growth. Among the major reasons is the fact that the informal sector apparently provides “a significant source of income for urban migrants” (Fay & Opal, 2000:15). It is significant to point out here that this is done partly through mobilization of

fund from poor rural dwellers, i.e. members of the extended family, for those in the cities to survive. This is also largely how those who cross the borders are sustained until they manage to find their feet.

Even though the informal sector is made up of about eighty percent of total population of each African country, it controls a considerably lower percentage of the national revenue and is largely dominated by the unemployed and low income earners, including petty traders. This informed the observation of Nieuwkerk (2020:5) that “in reality, the typical African economy is characterised by a relatively small and well-resourced formal sector that operates in isolation from a large, growing and poverty-stricken informal...communal subsistence economy”. Therefore, an urban structure that tries to derive its dynamics and developmental impetus from the income of the informal sector is not the best for the twenty-first century African states. This is due to the fact that such structure is neither likely to sustain the type of economic growth anticipated for development of the continent nor provide the platform for actualisation of the career expectation of rural-urban migrants. There are already studies on rural-urban migration in African countries including Cameroon (e.g. Fumagalli and Schaefer 2020; Lall, et al, 2006) and their findings can also be improved upon. Adopting the key findings of these studies would provide one effective means of managing the new social context of MDs vis-à-vis expected benefits of the *bush-falling* culture.

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