The Changing Material Conditions of Cameroonian Migrants in South Africa: What does this say about an "Afrophobic" post-apartheid State?

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Violent attacks on African migrants have produced a richer body of knowledge on African transnational migration, xenophobia/Afrophobia, and their intersections with questions of citizenship and autochthony, especially in a country that historically has always been a home for African migrants. Constellations of narratives now vilify South Africa as a demonic state whose hatred of Africans and fixation on exorcising them have short-circuited the process of nation-building. The vilification of South Africa also tells us that many researchers, scholars, and even migrants are unaware of the ways that the country has transformed the lives of its increasing African migrant population. This article reflects on the changing material conditions of Cameroonians in South Africa to understand why this "Afrophobic" state is still a key migration destination for Cameroonians. Drawing on personal exilic experiences, observations, and relevant literature, we argue that despite the victimization of Africans, including Cameroonians, this constitutional democracy has opened up political, economic and sociocultural opportunities for many Cameroonians residing permanently in the country. In forging this argument, the article interrogates the political landscape in Cameroon and examines key economic and sociocultural moments/activities in South Africa as well as accomplishments in this migrant community, to elicit how access to different opportunities in South Africa has significantly transformed the lives of Cameroonians.

Keywords: Cameroonians; Afrophobia; post-apartheid; South Africa; Africa migration

INTRODUCTION

Is it possible to assess the physical and psychological effects of the attacks on African migrants from other African countries without equally examining their quality of life in South Africa? Can we simply condemn South Africa as a demonic state by applying conventional scholarly theories and research methodologies? As South Africans and Africans from other African countries continue to compete over resources, perhaps one way of understanding the exilic experiences of Cameroonian migrants and writing about the attacks on Africans in South Africa is to examine the quality of their lives since migrating to South Africa. Using this approach to analyze the lives of South African-based Cameroonian migrants was necessitated by claims of invasion of South Africa by Africans and locals' impassioned attempts to exorcise these invaders (Landau, 2011; Amusan and Mchunu, 2017; Pineteh, 2017). The destruction and looting of African-owned businesses as well as the brutal attacks and killing of African migrants in cities and townships across South Africa have therefore been written as expressions of Afrophobia. Although these forms of attack are common in many postcolonial African states, the gruesome nature of South African cases has managed to fracture diplomatic relationships between South Africa and African states (Hassim et al., 2008; Zondi, 2008; Landau, 2011; Isike and Isike, 2012; Pineteh, 2018).

Recent studies on African migrants in South Africa have, on one level, focused on this violent display of imagined Afrophobic tendencies and its implications for questions of citizenship and/or autochthonous belonging, especially in a country that historically has always been a home for African migrants (Zondi, 2008; Isike and Isike, 2012; Angu, 2019). These studies have tended to vilify South Africa as a demonic state whose hatred of Africans from other countries and fixation on exorcising them "has short-circuited the process of nation-building since transitioning into a democratic dispensation" (Zondi, 2008: 33). Here, many researchers have consistently represented post-apartheid South Africa as one of the most xenophobic, negrophobic, or Afrophobic countries, not only in Africa, but in the world (see Murray, 2003; Neocosmos, 2010; Amusan and Mchunu, 2017; Pineteh, 2017, 2018). This raises key questions, which this article seeks to address: (a) Why is it that despite the horrific attacks on African migrants, we have not seen a significant decline in the numbers of Cameroonians attempting to emigrate to South Africa or an exodus of Cameroonians from South Africa? (b) What does the increasing immigration into South Africa tell us about statecraft in postcolonial states like Cameroon? (c) Put differently, why are many researchers obsessed with the inhumane treatment of Africans in South Africa without equally examining the improving quality of their lives?

Writing this article as insiders – Cameroonian migrants – we have decided not to frame it around any conventional theoretical/methodological protocol. Also, we do not intend to replicate familiar narratives that denigrate the new South Africa or the findings of numerous studies that have investigated and documented the existential struggles of African migrants in South Africa. Neither do we intend to

dismiss the existence of xenophobes/Afrophobes/negrophobes in South Africa nor to condone the attacks on other Africans or any non-citizens (see Landau, 2011; Angu, 2019). Rather, this article is an auto-ethnography which draws on existing studies, personal experiences and observations of the changing material conditions of many Cameroonians in South Africa to understand why this "Afrophobic state" is still an attractive migration destination for Cameroonians. As South African-based Cameroonian migrants, we attempt to espouse and argue in this article that despite the victimization of other Africans, including Cameroonians, this constitutional democracy has opened up political, economic and sociocultural opportunities for many African diasporic communities (Pineteh, 2017, 2018). The article is therefore not claiming that Cameroonian migrants have not experienced different forms of alienation, marginalization or victimization in South Africa. In fact, they have had their share of struggles or challenges like other African migrants. For example, many of them have struggled to obtain legal documents to reside in South Africa permanently (Pineteh and Mulu, 2016; Pineteh, 2018). Also, not all Cameroonian migrants have been economically successful. However, as argued in the following sections, many studies on this diasporic community have failed to tell the stories of Cameroonians who have accessed opportunities in this erstwhile apartheid state and used them to transform their lives. It is therefore against this backdrop that we decided to write this article.

To support the argument above, we interrogate Cameroon's political landscape and we examine selected political, economic and sociocultural moments/activities in South Africa as well as accomplishments in the Cameroonian migrant community. Then, we explain how these patterns of social existence and exilic experiences have contributed to transform the lives of Cameroonians residing in South Africa.

SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSES TO AN IMAGINARY AFRICAN MIGRANT INVASION

To understand South Africans' attacks on Africans and Cameroonians' resistance to these attacks, we start by examining South Africa's strategies to mitigate the in-flow of Africans and to "exorcise" those already residing in South Africa. As South Africa grapples with an ailing economy, the government has prioritized tourism as one of its key strategies to regenerate economic growth. Prioritizing tourism over other political and social challenges draws on studies that have highlighted the contribution of international tourism to economic growth (see Rogerson, 2012, 2013; Moyo and Ziramba, 2013). To boost tourism, the South African president has repeatedly spoken about the urgent need to relax visa requirements for selected countries, increase the number of visa-free countries and institute a visa-on-arrival system. However, the same government, its citizens, and its diplomatic representatives have employed different strategies to trigger an "exodus" of Africans and curb attempts to immigrate into South Africa. These strategies have implications not only for Africans resident in South Africa, but also for the president's ambitious plans to revive the economy

through tourism. Some of these strategies include tightening and securitizing borders, scapegoating Africans as architects of South Africa's social and economic problems and therefore inciting Afrophobic/xenophobic violence and unlawfully forcing legal migrants to become illegal migrants (see Nyamnjoh, 2006; Hassim et al., 2008; Landau, 2011; Pineteh, 2017, 2018). Using these multi-pronged strategies to exclude Africans from South Africa raises critical questions about "black consciousness of blackness" and how fixations on autochthonous citizenship influence and disrupt Africans' relationships with Africans (Geschiere, 2009; Mbembe, 2019: 30). Claims to this form of citizenship explain why the right to eliminate Africans from South Africa has been tied recently to the power of borders, with autochthons criticizing the government for leading a "borderless" post-apartheid South Africa. Today, we listen to politicians ranting in very dystopian language about the dangers of a borderless state to the sovereignty of South Africa. Here, they attempt to use the concept of risk management to control human mobility because they see the movements of foreign nationals, particularly Africans, in and out of South Africa "as sources of danger and risk" (Mbembe, 2019: 24). Put simply, there can be no peaceful and safe South Africa without securitized and militarized borders. For Comaroff and Comaroff (2001: 650), focusing on borders to curb migration reminds us about the paradoxes of globalization such as "the rights of the autochthon versus the rights of the stranger; the politics of protectionism and exclusion versus the borderless economy; the construction of the immigrant as parasite or benefactor; and the ideology of universal inclusion versus the limits of provisioning commonwealth". These discrepant idioms help us to understand the prospects and pitfalls of globalization and South African citizens' "growing distrust of immigrants" and the urgency to regain spatial control (Geschiere, 2009: 23). However, the increasing attacks on African migrants tell us that "when state institutions evidently failed to deliver on their promises to protect and promote a politically entitled but materially deprived citizenry, the population (or parts of it) [takes] on the obligation to alienate and exclude those standing in its way" (Landau, 2011: 3).

In principle, the use of border security to constrain human mobility is nothing short of a contradiction, when the ideology of globalization preaches free movement of people, goods, and services. In fact, Comaroff and Comaroff (2001) point us to one of the many criticisms of globalization – the privileging of free movement of goods, technology, and financial capital at the expense of human mobility (Nyamnjoh, 2006; Pineteh, 2017). However, securitizing borders can never stop human beings from migrating because journeys to exile have shown us that migrants can endure and overcome some of the most adverse challenges associated with migration (De Haas, 2008; Pineteh, 2017, 2018). This is because "the body is made first and foremost to move, to walk, which is why every subject is a wandering subject" (Mbembe, 2019: 144). In fact, research evidence has shown that border control has "had a series of unintended, often counter-productive effects" in Africa, America and Europe (De Haas, 2008: 1310). South Africa is no exception, and frankly, it is very unlikely

that tighter borders will curb African immigration into South Africa. Firstly, since South Africa is still a very attractive migration destination on the African continent, Africans will always find new and innovative ways to circumvent border security. Secondly, attempts to outsmart border control have resulted in a lucrative business syndicate at borders, which involves smugglers, border security officials and migrants (Nyamnjoh, 2006; De Haas, 2008; Landau, 2011; Pineteh, 2018).

As citizens continue to blame other Africans for their miseries, the South African government has done very little to change the narrative. Although it has argued that the attacks on other Africans and their businesses are sordid incidents of criminality, to date there is hardly any evidence that a South African citizen has been tried and sentenced for these "crimes" (Landau, 2011; Pineteh, 2017). Instead, the government has contributed to entrench populist narratives from citizens and right-wing politicians who seem to believe that migration is a serious threat to South Africa's sovereignty. So, while South Africans are calling for stringent border control, they are also using different internal tactics to express their anti-African sentiments and incite attacks on African migrants (Murray, 2003; Amusan and Mchunu, 2017; Pineteh, 2017). One such tactic is to construct pejorative narratives that blame African migrants in particular for crime, joblessness, poor service delivery, collapsing state institutions, and poverty. South Africans use these narratives to justify unlawful attacks on vulnerable African migrants from other countries on the continent and different forms of thuggery that happen during these attacks. However, these attacks are not necessarily driven by Afrophobic tendencies, but rather by citizens' fears, uncertainties, anxieties, and hopelessness as the South African economy declines and unemployment increases. Given that the attacks are unlawful, perpetrators justify their actions by claiming that they are cleansing South Africa of illegal immigrants, undocumented migrants, or African drug lords and criminals, although victims are both illegal and legal African migrants. Challenged by several social pathologies such as employment, poverty, and crime, politicians now use the scapegoat ideology as a political strategy to mobilize voters and/or deflect attention from their political and economic blunders that have contributed to worsening the material conditions of ordinary South Africans (Harris, 2002; Pineteh, 2017). Here, South African media reportage, political oratories, social debates, and township street-level conversations are fraught with anecdotes blaming the influx of "illegal African migrants" into South Africa for all the evils of the new South Africa (Landau, 2011; Pineteh, 2017; Nyamnjoh, 2006). Today, behind every bad deed in South Africa, there is a Nigerian, Cameroonian, Zimbabwean, or Somali, and this fixation on an imagined influx of illegal migration is intended to force an exodus of Africans from South Africa. These incendiary narratives have also created opportunities for the state police to conduct systemic raids in immigrant ghettoes, alleging that these spaces are crime hotspots and hideouts for illegal migrants. However, the recurrence of these attacks since the maiden incident in 2008 suggests that this strategy has failed to produce the intended results. The police raids as well as the maiming, looting, burning, and killing by

locals have simply resulted in an unethical display of power by the authorities, and resistance from African migrants, many of whom are ready to die in South Africa rather than return home (Pineteh, 2017, 2018; Angu, 2019).

The multi-pronged approaches to force Africans out of South Africa or curb immigration into South Africa also include unlawfully complicating, rejecting, or simply delaying the processing of Africans' applications for temporary visa renewals or permanent residence to force legal migrants to become illegal (Pineteh, 2017, 2018). The intention is to ensure that applicants' current permits expire while they wait endlessly for the outcome of renewal application. The Department of Home Affairs (DHA) officials who deliberately delay the processing of African applications naively think that their actions can actually force African migrants to leave the country or expose them to unlawful arrest by the police. This strategy is intended to fortify the previous strategies because, for South Africans, "unauthorised immigrants were overrunning South Africa's cities…" (Murray, 2003: 448). Again, the strategy is unlawful because it contravenes South African immigration laws pertaining to the renewal of temporary permits or granting of permanent residence to migrants. Here, DHA officials explore the perception that many African migrants are not very familiar with their South African immigration laws or lack the financial resources to secure the services of immigration lawyers. For example, it is unlawful to arrest an immigrant with an expired temporary permit if such person is in possession of a valid proof of submission from the DHA, or from a DHA-accredited agency such as Visa Facilitating Services (VFS). Conversely, this strategy has also yielded unintended results. Firstly, it has led to high-level bribery and corruption in the DHA, involving top-ranking officials, agents, and migrants, with those in legal limbo ready to pay thousands of South African rands to regularize their stay in South Africa, even though they are simply victims of unlawful administrative practices. Secondly, it has worsened the undocumented migrant crisis, with illegal African migrants devising innovative strategies to escape police arrest and potential deportation. But why are Cameroonian migrants determined to stay in a country that has been repeatedly represented as an Afrophobic state? To respond to this question, we examine the political situation in Cameroon and the political, economic, and sociocultural benefits of residing in South Africa.

THE CAMEROONIAN COMMUNITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Since this article is based primarily on personal experiences and observations as well as on existing studies on African migrants, and not on empirically gleaned primary data, there is no separate methodology section. However, a general brief description of this diasporic community can enhance readers' understanding of the claims made in the article. For instance, since the transition from apartheid to democracy, the number of Cameroonian migrants in South Africa has increased exponentially (Pineteh, 2015; Pineteh and Mulu, 2016). This can be attributed to the worsening economic and political challenges in Cameroon and the promises of South Africa's

fledgling democracy. This growing migrant community is made up of francophones and anglophones, with an almost equal gender representation. Although Cameroonians are scattered all over South Africa, the majority of them live in major cities like Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town and Durban. They are mainly business owners, petty traders and professionals in different sectors of the South African economy such as health, higher education, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), banking and so on. They reside in South Africa on different permits – asylum, refugee, study, work or permanent residence permits. There is also a significant number of Cameroonian migrants who have obtained South African citizenship. Finally, this community has managed to build strong networks through its sociocultural activities and associational lifestyle (Pineteh, 2008, 2015; Nyamnjoh, 2018).

CAMEROON'S POLITICAL LANDSCAPE AND THE BENEFITS OF LIVING IN A CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY LIKE SOUTH AFRICA

Since 1982, Cameroon has been led by Paul Biya, a predatory dictator and his authoritarian rule has been one of the main drivers of emigration from Cameroon (Takougang and Amin, 2018). To rule Cameroon for more than three decades, this octogenarian has employed the fallacy of advanced democracy, the spectacle of divide and rule, and extreme repression to silence any threats to his statecraft (Lawyer, 2017; Mbembe, 2019) Despite the ushering in of multiparty politics in the 1990s, Cameroon is one of many exemplars of postcolonial African states where dissent is construed as extremism and where marginalization, repression of human rights, and press and speech censorship are the essential political orders. It is a symbol of an African democracy without the preservation of human rights (Effiom, 2013; Mbembe, 2019). For 38 years, Biya's political tactics have also been about "centralization and personalization of power", while using his political patronage networks to infiltrate and dismantle opposition parties (Dicklitch, 2002: 166). Although Lawyer (2017) argues that Cameroon's turbulent political landscape has escaped a full-blown civil war since the Cameroonian Civil War, the country remains a politically fractured state, evidenced in the collapse of key political, economic and social institutions (Kombi, 2015; Lawyer, 2017; Takougang and Amin, 2018). For years, tension has simmered and Cameroonians have expressed their discontent and frustration with Biya's repressive leadership through civil disobedience, pro-democracy demonstrations and social protests. Such collective actions have always been met with more repressive reactions resulting in illegal arrests, torture and incarcerations, often with the complicity of key judicial institutions, which are supposed to protect the rights of citizens (Effiom, 2013; Agbor, 2015; Seemndze, 2016). In Cameroon today, "common life has been reduced to the satisfaction of greed for money, power and material well-being" at the expense of basic human right principles such as justice, dignity and respect (Seemndze, 2016: 169).

Here, the ideals of liberal/constitutional democracy, which allow for different freedoms, are propagated, while "at the same time promoting the struggles for

recognition and representation of the various cultural, ethnic and sectarian groups..." (Nyamnjoh, 2005: 3). For example, Biya's administration has promoted a Beti hegemony, francophone domination and the subordination of the anglophone minority (Anyefru, 2008, 2010; Koning and Nyamnjoh, 2019). In 2016, the tension that had been simmering in Cameroon for decades exploded in the anglophone regions of North West and South West. Cameroonians from these regions mobilized in Cameroon and the diaspora to resuscitate their longstanding pursuit of self-determination and the establishment of an independent state, or simply a return to the two-state federation established after independence (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2019). From 2016, this struggle for self-determination degenerated into an armed conflict between secessionist forces and Biya's militia, resulting in several deaths and internal and cross-border migration (Gwaibi, 2016; De Vries et al., 2019). Significantly, this struggle also has led to an upsurge in the number of Cameroonians attempting to enter South Africa as forced migrants. In light of the current political fragility and ensuing economic stagnation in the anglophone regions, we argue that this part of the country has become a very unsafe space with an uncertain future for anglophone Cameroonians, both at home and in South Africa. This is because "it is unlikely that the anglophone movements' call for an independent Southern Cameroon state will receive any support from the Francophone leadership and the international community" (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2019: 84). In addition, the number of deaths recorded between 2016 and 2020 suggests that anglophone Cameroonians in South Africa are more likely to survive any attacks on African migrants than secessionist and militia forces in the anglophone regions of Cameroon. The sporadic attacks of Africans with mainly knives, pangas, stones and sticks are a lesser threat to the lives of Cameroonians in South Africa than a full-fledged armed insurgent that has plunged the entire Cameroon into a restless and fragile state. Here, normal patterns of life have been disrupted, human lives have become worthless as human rights violations increase, and the economy of the anglophone regions is on a downward trajectory. For anglophone Cameroonians in South Africa, the risks of returning or simply visiting home are significantly high as the armed conflict in the regions worsens. Although this is a localized conflict, the political atmosphere in Cameroon has been fragile for years because Paul Biya's administration has employed the same dictatorial tactics to deal with francophone dissidents. Today, there is an equally large population of disgruntled francophones as anglophone Cameroonians in South Africa, suggesting that the quality of life in many francophone provinces has also declined (see Agbor, 2015; Takougang and Amin, 2018). Since multiparty politics, democracy in Cameroon has been short-circuited by Biya's authoritarianism and "unequal access to wealth and power", positioning South Africa as a relatively safer home for many Cameroonian migrants (Nyamnjoh, 2005: 2).

Although Collier (2009) argues that political violence is a curse, in the case of a postcolonial sub-Saharan African state like Cameroon, it is also a blessing for its citizens residing in South Africa. Despite South Africa's multiple socioeconomic and

political challenges (see Mangcu, 2008; Gumede, 2012), the country still outperforms many francophone sub-Saharan African countries, including Cameroon, in terms of the protection of human rights and freedoms (Nyamnjoh, 2005; Cheeseman, 2015). The watchdogs of South Africa's democracy, such as Chapter 9 institutions, ensure that even non-citizens like Cameroonians benefit from its preservation of human rights, judicial independence and the other freedoms that underpin any democracy. Although South Africa has been represented as a "demonic society" (Landau, 2011: 213) because of its xenophobic tendencies, African migrants in South Africa still enjoy far better political, sociocultural and economic rights enshrined in South Africa's Bill of Rights and constitution (RSA, 1996; Kende, 2003). The country's political and socioeconomic obligations to its citizens create a safer environment for African migrants from predatory dictatorships, where they are able to exercise their rights and enjoy their freedoms as human beings.

Furthermore, South Africa's political landscape has created a unique space for political education and consciousness for young political aspirants in the Cameroonian migrant community. For example, the critical role played by the African National Congress (ANC) Youth League in influencing South Africa's political transformation, or the emergence of the Economic Freedom Front (EFF), led by the relatively young charismatic Julius Malema, or broader civil society activism, offer useful political lessons for Cameroonian political and/or social activists residing permanently in South Africa. These political benefits have not featured prominently in research because South Africa's treatment of migrants is often not compared with that of other African countries, but with European countries and America (see Neocosmos, 2010; Landau, 2011; Pineteh, 2018). By not pitting South Africa against other African countries, many studies have tended to neglect the factors driving the influx of migrants into South Africa and the political benefits of living in a constitutional democracy for Africans fleeing from autocratic regimes. Since Cameroon is a quasi-democracy/dictatorship, it is expected to have comparably high cases of human rights abuses. But a constitutional democracy like South Africa, with unrestricted freedom of speech, media, movement and association, supported by an active citizenship, has provided a unique space for political education for Cameroonian political aspirants.

Cameroonians' political expediency in South Africa is evidenced in the formation of diaspora chapters of Cameroon's ruling party, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM), and the main opposition party, the Social Democratic Front (SDF). Through the formation of these diasporic political spaces, Cameroonians have been able to freely mobilize and protest against Biya's repressive regime and the marginalization of the anglophone minority from South Africa (Takougang and Amin, 2018; Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2019). It is no surprise that the anglophone community in South Africa has been singled out as one of the most vibrant diaspora communities supporting the anglophone struggle for an independent Southern Cameroon state (see Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2019). It is therefore disingenuous to downplay how South Africa's constitutional democracy

has shaped Cameroonians' political thoughts even in the midst of the violence against African migrants. The emergence and growth to prominence of the South African chapter of the struggle for self-determination in the anglophone regions of Cameroon exemplifies the extent to which Cameroonians have benefited from a democratic space that allows people to exercise their rights as long as it is done within the realms of the law. Through different forms of political mobilization – from public rallies, university seminars, and community discussion forums, to non-violent protests at different diplomatic missions in South Africa – Cameroonians have contributed remarkably to sensitizing international communities about the marginalization of the anglophone minority. We are not claiming that social activism or political protests do not happen in Cameroon. Rather, we are opining that Cameroon's political space, with its repressive laws, stifles political agency and active citizenship. As such, studies that condemn and label South Africa as an Afrophobic state should also investigate the political gains of residing in South Africa, particularly for Cameroonian migrants who are continually forced to flee their ancestral home because of complex ethnic conflicts and a deeply rooted repressive regime, which uses different "levers of power to control and accommodate the many demands of Cameroonians" (Takougang and Amin, 2018: 43).

SOUTH AFRICA AS A COUNTRY OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR CAMEROONIAN MIGRANTS

Attacks on African migrants are triggered partly by the economic successes of migrant communities, with citizens claiming that Africans are reaping the fruits of years of struggle against the apartheid government (see Nyamnjoh, 2006; Neocosmos, 2010; Landau, 2011; Pineteh, 2018). Studies on immigrant entrepreneurship have argued explicitly that the exponential increase in African-owned businesses in major South African cities can be attributed to immigrants' exceptional business acumen, resilience and migrant networks. They have also attributed this increase to the failures of the South African government to mitigate the rising unemployment rate (Moyo, 2014; Tengeh and Nkem, 2017). The findings of these studies repeatedly foreground the contributions of African businesses in boosting the South African economy, often neglecting how these businesses have transformed the lives of African migrants. This suggests, rather erroneously, that South Africans should be eternally grateful to African businesses for contributing to curbing unemployment. The contributions of African businesses in South Africa are not in question here because there is substantial research evidence on the impact of immigrant entrepreneurship on the South African economy (see Tengeh, 2016; Pineteh, 2018). But what are some of the equally important factors that have contributed to the successes of migrant businesses, besides migrant networks, business acumen and resilience? How has the success of African businesses in South Africa transformed the lives of Africans, such that they are ready to risk their lives to stay in South Africa?

Writing about Cameroonian and other immigrant businesses in South Africa,

Pineteh and Mulu (2016), Tengeh (2016), and Pineteh (2018) have focused on their business skills, social capital and migrant resilience as the main predictors of their economic successes. For example, Tengeh (2016) and Tengeh and Nkem (2017) argue that the success of Cameroonian and Somali businesses is a consequence of their entrepreneurial strategies, financial assistance from social networks and immigrant associations, and their resilience in the face of adverse situations such as xenophobic attacks. For them, any migrants with these sets of skills and attributes, with startup capital, can achieve immeasurable economic success anywhere and at any time in South Africa. Although these factors have played a critical role in the economic growth of Cameroonian businesses in South Africa, these studies ignore the importance of a relatively stable and enabling South African political and economic environment, which has liberalized and removed "corporatist rigidity in inner of Johannesburg" and other major cities (Moyo, 2014: 261). This enabling business environment creates avenues for Cameroonians "without experience in immigrant entrepreneurship [to be] as successful as those with a wealth of experience…" (Moyo, 2014: 261–262). Unlike in Cameroon, where an autocratic government uses repressive business laws to control and regulate its business environment, South Africa's free market economy increases the chances of operating a successful business. Economic policies in South Africa promote the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through tax incentives. The policies also give markets the freedom to self-regulate, allowing business owners to set their own prices and influence market trends. For example, the profit margins of Cameroonian-owned grocery shops in South Africa are significantly higher than similar businesses in Cameroon. Unlike in South Africa, Cameroon's rigid business regulations and corrupt taxation system have stifled the expansion of the SME and informal business sector. It is important to note that many Cameroonian migrants who are successful business owners in South Africa today started their business ventures in Cameroon, and some had no previous business experience before migrating to South Africa. However, many of these businesses were not profitable, even with the same business skills and tactics outlined above (Moyo, 2014; Tengeh, 2016; Tengeh and Nkem, 2017).

Contrary to studies by Hassim et al. (2008), Landau (2011), and Pineteh (2017), which continue to portray South Africa as an anti-African migrant state, this article contends that the country has exposed Cameroonian migrants to economic opportunities that have changed their material conditions. The Cameroonian community, particularly in Johannesburg, Durban, and Cape Town, now has a new class of "nouveau riche" who were inconspicuous petty informal traders in Cameroon. Members of this class of "nouveau riche" own several businesses, multiple luxury cars, and some have become property moguls in their own rights. The display of economic successes is very noticeable because in Cameroonian communities, success in general is measured in terms of material consumption or accumulation. Here, the number and size of individual cars and houses, or the display of riches during social gatherings/events, are indicators of human achievements (Pineteh, 2008; Nyamnjoh,

2018). Furthermore, the increasing amounts of immigrant remittances from South Africa to, and investments in, Cameroon symbolize the economic successes of Cameroonian migrants. These remittances and investments have been used to support families, revive ailing family businesses, and they have also contributed to reducing unemployment in Cameroon (Tiemoko, 2004; Maposa, 2007).

In a climate of increasing attacks on Africans in South Africa, remittances from South Africa and business investments by South African-based Cameroonians create an image of South Africa as a land of opportunities, and therefore a desirable migration destination. To claim that African migrants' business growth is mainly because of survival strategies such as resilience, social capital, associational lifestyle, hard work and entrepreneurism, is in fact a one-sided story, which undermines South Africa's participation in the economic transformation of non-citizens. For us, South Africa's enabling business environment and the buying power of diaspora communities and citizens have contributed as much to the flourishing of immigrant businesses. Despite South Africa's myriad socioeconomic and political challenges, Cameroonian economic experiences and successes tell us that South Africa has always been hospitable to Africans regardless of nationality (Zondi, 2008; Isike and Isike, 2012). While Amusan and Mchunu (2017: 13) can afford to argue that "South Africa's image and reputation has been dealt a major blow by the recent xenophobic attacks", the economic lives of Cameroonians suggest that there is still a strong sense of "ubuntu" in South Africa, shown in decades of hospitality towards other Africans. To aptly capture the exilic experiences of Cameroonian migrants, researchers should not only represent Cameroonians as victims of a demonic South African state but also as people who have benefited from many political and economic opportunities in South Africa. For example, many Cameroonian professionals with permanent residency and South African citizenship have been able to access several opportunities in universities, the health and banking sectors. Despite these success stories, the recurring narrative of victimhood seems to suggest that Cameroonians' quality of life has been on a downward trajectory since the day they entered South Africa. This narrative breeds an unhealthy fixation on the ills of South Africa, neglecting the economic transformations in African migrant communities including the Cameroonian community.

SOCIOCULTURAL BENEFITS OF RESIDING IN DEMOCRATIC SOUTH AFRICA

One of the many social formations of African diasporic communities is the repertoire of sociocultural activities and performances. Showing a close affinity with its ancestral roots, the Cameroonian community in South Africa has experienced an exponential growth in cultural associations, Cameroonian food outlets, traditional fashion businesses and cuisines (see Pineteh, 2005, 2008; Nyamnjoh, 2018). In African diaspora communities globally, these social practices are used as strategies to cope with the physical and psychological burdens of displacement.

In the case of Cameroonian migrants, these markers of cultural identity compete with their adaptation strategies, such as intermarriages, affinity for South African music, linguistic slang and dress codes. Here, we see a unique display of cultural fusion designed to implant Cameroonians into South Africa, while at the same time emphasizing the value of ancestral attachment (Pineteh, 2005, 2008; Nyamnjoh, 2018). Although new migrants often experience difficulties in coping with a new food culture or culture shock in host countries, transnational cultural choices/activities are not only tropes of memory – they have also been seen to influence and/or transform migrant lives as they struggle to adapt (Terragni et al., 2014; Nyamnjoh, 2018).

Changing cultural patterns and associated sociocultural activities in the Cameroonian community have opened spaces for very lucrative business enterprises in major South African cities that cater for these changing lifestyles. For example, the Cameroonian food and fashion sectors in Johannesburg and Cape Town have become a very profitable source of livelihood, catering for different food choices and fashion trends of both Cameroonians and South Africans with African spouses (Pineteh, 2008, 2015; Nyamnjoh, 2018). Here, food and fashion acculturation and South Africa's flexible market environment have transformed this business sector into a multi-million-rand industry involving a network of importers, wholesalers and retailers not only in South Africa, but also in Ghana, Nigeria, and southern Africa (Maposa, 2007; Nyamnjoh, 2018). The expansion and profitability of this sector, together with the previously outlined political and economic benefits of residing permanently in South Africa, have entrenched in Cameroonians a determination to die in South Africa rather than return home.

Besides the financial gains associated with these sociocultural repertoires, there is an upsurge in Cameroonian social and cultural activities across South Africa because of the political instability and armed struggle in the anglophone regions of Cameroon (Pineteh, 2015; Nyamnjoh, 2018). Sociocultural festivities that have always influenced particularly anglophone Cameroonians' decisions to visit Cameroon annually are now performed in South Africa because of political insecurity. Since 2016, the Cameroonian community has seen a surge in traditional and social activities such as marriages, cultural rituals, funerals, death celebrations and so on, performed freely in the vicinity of "Afrophobic" South Africans. Although some of these gatherings happen even during incidents of xenophobic violence, there have not been major incidents during these events driven purely by "Afrophobic" attitudes – only familiar sporadic and opportunistic crimes. This is very telling about South Africa's sense of hospitality, which has been affected unintentionally by psychological and physical effects of an "incomplete liberation" and unfulfilled political promises (Murray, 2003; Gibson, 2012: 5).

Furthermore, in the global knowledge economy that we live in, "the global structure of knowledge production and distribution" is critically important (Arowosegbe, 2016: 324). To meet the demands of a global knowledge economy,

universities are expected to teach and produce research that is innovative, transformative, and relevant to 21st-century economies (Jowi, 2012; Altbach, 2013; Arowosegbe, 2016). African universities therefore have an essential role to play in ensuring that Africa joins "the global knowledge society and…compete effectively in the sophisticated knowledge economies of the twenty-first century" (Altbach, 2013: 316). Global university rankings show that many South African universities are now competing favourably with other developing and middle-income countries in the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) block, and to some extent with European countries (Jowi, 2012; Altbach, 2013). However, knowledge production in many African countries has been hampered and sometimes "halted by the challenges of Africa's political economy, including the rise and consolidation of autocratic rule across the continent…" (Arowosegbe, 2016: 326). What does this mean to Cameroonian migrants in South Africa? Over the more than 20 years that many Cameroonians have lived in South Africa, we have witnessed a rapid development of intellectual capital in the Cameroonian community, a new generation of scholars and researchers. Despite increasing incidents of violence that have threatened the social existence of African migrants, Cameroonian migrants, like many other African nationals, have obtained undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications from elite South African universities (Pineteh and Mulu, 2016). Many of these migrants have studied on full scholarships provided by South African universities, private and even government departments.

Moreover, intellectual mobility into South Africa has increased significantly, partly because of former President Thabo Mbeki's vision of an African Renaissance. Besides Cameroonians who studied in South Africa and are now employed in public and private universities, as well as in the corporate sector, we have also seen an exponential increase in Cameroonian academics and professionals migrating to South Africa. They are attracted by favourable employment conditions, quality and efficient social services, and relatively high remuneration (Malan, 2010). If the ranking of South African universities in Africa and the world is an indicator of academic and research excellence, it is clear that South Africa, with its multiple challenges, has given Cameroonians access to quality education and highly remunerated jobs that are not easily accessible in Cameroon without a strong patronage network. Like many universities in francophone sub-Saharan Africa, Cameroonian universities still suffer from a crisis of quality and relevance of knowledge because of a lack of modern infrastructure, outdated curriculum and persistent political meddling (Nyamnjoh and Jua, 2002). In this part of Africa, "repressive states have perpetuated and capitalized on this [predicaments] by manipulating desperate academics into compliance and complicity with mediocrity" (Nyamnjoh and Jua, 2002: 1). For example, in Cameroon, academic freedom is still hamstrung by "overt government interference [and] exclusion of certain groups of people from tertiary" education, with far-reaching epistemological consequences. The increasing number of Cameroonian doctorates from South African universities tells us that despite

the country's socioeconomic challenges, its institutions of higher learning have opened up a new world of opportunities for the diaspora community. Today, the Cameroonian community takes pride in the number of high-ranking researchers and academics participating in knowledge production in South Africa. While in South Africa, academic tenures, research rankings and fellowships, and promotions are mostly based on the lure of meritocracy, the situation in Cameroon is exactly the opposite. What we often experience is a "political commodification of knowledge" in the way academic appointments and promotions are managed, resulting in intellectuals being "subjugated by party political affiliation" despite earning miserable salaries (Nyamnjoh and Jua, 2002: 3–4).

Finally, South African-based Cameroonian migrants have been beneficiaries of quality social services such as primary healthcare and healthcare facilities, as well as other quality social amenities. For instance, Section 27(1) of South Africa's constitution states that "everyone has the right to have access to health care services, including reproductive health care…[and] basic health care services for children" (RSA, 1996; Phillips, 2004: 10). Although this provision is to preserve the healthcare rights of its citizens, it has allowed many Cameroonian migrants and their children to access quality healthcare in South African public hospitals for free or at very affordable prices (Phillips, 2004; Moyakhe, 2014). Those for whom it is financially feasible now choose to access the same high-quality healthcare through private healthcare providers. Many Cameroonians in this category now bring their sick family members to South Africa for medical examinations and treatments. This tells us that Cameroonians are unlikely to return home, where quality healthcare is not only a privilege, but the public health system has collapsed and citizens are dying of easily treated diseases such as diabetes, malaria, prostate cancer and so on.

CONCLUSION

Although there are many Cameroonian migrants who are still confronted by several economic challenges or who cannot access economic opportunities because of lack of legal documents, the lifestyles of most permanent residents and those who have obtained South African citizenship, tell a different story. Given the changing material conditions of this category of South African-based Cameroonian migrants, it would be deceptive and somewhat hypocritical to write about Cameroonian exilic experiences only through the lenses of hegemonic and generalized narratives that vilify South Africa as an anti-African state (Mosselson, 2010; Neocosmos, 2010; Pineteh, 2018). These narratives often paint a "stereotypical image of African misery" with the worst cases of forced and economic migration because of predatory dictatorships, regional and ethnic conflicts, whose victims now find themselves in similar deplorable human conditions in exile (De Haas, 2008: 1305). These narratives are intellectually meaningful if we closely examine the social conditions in many of the postcolonial African states. However, they entrench a narrative of victimhood, which Cameroonian migrants have used for years to attract sympathy/pity from

researchers, human rights organizations and mainstream South African media. It is not surprising to read statements such as that xenophobia/Afrophobia is "a problem which is particularly shocking given the massive international support for the struggle against apartheid, particularly during the 1980s" (Neocosmos, 2010: 1). This statement portrays South Africa as a demonic state unwilling to reciprocate the spirit of humanity shown to the country during its darkest days. These dominant narratives suggest that the material conditions of African migrants have either not changed or have worsened since the day that they entered South Africa (Murray, 2003; Landau, 2011; Pineteh, 2018). One of the reasons such narratives persist is that many studies on African migrant communities have failed to track the lives of African migrants from the time they entered South Africa. Alternatively, they have relied on empirical evidence from the same migrants who have been psychologically conditioned to imagine themselves as victims in an Afrophobic/xenophobic state.

This article recognizes the challenges associated with global human mobility and the implications for South Africa, with its own socioeconomic and political challenges. Moreover, it is humanly insensible to condone the horrors of black-on-black violence, not only in South Africa, but also in several other postcolonial African states (Pineteh, 2017; Mbembe, 2019). Black-on-black violence in Africa is, in fact, what Fanon explained as "a permanent see-saw between African unity, which fades quicker and quicker into the mists of oblivion, and a heart-breaking return to chauvinism in its most bitter and detestable form" (Fanon, 1990: 126). With this in mind, this article sought to understand why incessant violent attacks on African migrants have not managed to influence Cameroonians' perceptions of South Africa as an enticing migration destination. In addition, it attempted to determine why these horrific attacks have not triggered an exodus of Cameroonians to their motherland or to other countries. Finally, it wanted to find out how Cameroonians have implanted themselves firmly in South Africa in the midst of the country's many internal socioeconomic and political challenges, which continue to spark off xenophobic/Afrophobic attacks. Using personal experiences and the changing material conditions of Cameroonian migrants, the article has analyzed the political landscape in Cameroon and how economic and sociocultural benefits/opportunities in South Africa have transformed the lives of Cameroonians resident in this erstwhile apartheid state. In light of the changing material conditions of Cameroonian migrants, the article holds strongly that South Africa has always been an attractive migration destination, particularly hospitable to African migrants, but whose sense of 'ubuntu' has been deferred by a political transition, which "has not seen a radical transfer of wealth or the creation of social programs based on human needs" (Gibson, 2012: 53).

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