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Understanding the Trajectory of Migration and the African Condition in the 21st Century

BY

Mbuh Tenu Mbuh

Department of English
The University of Bamenda

*Corresponding Author:

Mbuh Tenu Mbuh

mmbuh@yahoo.com

+237 676061514

ABSTRACT

Using data from music and comparing the manifestation of migration from Mexico and Cameroon, this paper analyses the phenomenon as a human condition that only appears existential during our time. The disinterest in its contemporary hyping is related to the vested ideologies that manipulate the ambivalence of postindependence into notorious spaces where the labour force is exhausted through a combination of forces ranging from the ineptitude that characterises political mimicry to the flashy horizons of the western metropolis. In its glocal context then, the engagement with musicians will indicate the casual dynamics of



migration for observers and commentators from which individual citizens begin to take their destinies in their hands; and highlight the entrapped context of migration both as a national and international impasse for vested interests. This will also expose the ironies of nation-building and globalisation as an inability to participate or cooperate convincingly within the brackets of neoliberal ideology.

Keywords: *migration, postindependence, nation-building, neoliberal globalism, empire of migration*

Introduction: Conceptualising migration

The migration trajectory has shifted so dramatically in our own *fin de siècle* moment that those of us in the global South in particular easily forget that the human race has always been a migratory species based on survivalist circumstances at every given moment; and that no one owns space until it is scarred by exclusive ideologies which seek to justify the spatial sphere of their temporary supremacy. As my analysis will suggest—combining a typical American genre in Willie Nelson’s “Living in the Promised Land” and Dan Seal’s “Border Town” with Awilo de Bamenda’s “Bush Faller”—the commonality of human ancestry should help us reconsider the binaries of Self and Other as almost redundant. Indeed, all empires are imagined, built, and collapsed by the illusion of permanent ownership of space. This always develops from or leads to the conceptualisation of Benedict Anderson’s concern with “the ‘anomaly’ of nationalism” (*Imagined Communities* 4), and provides the template for formal bullying-as-conquest, after the European model. While we are pricked to wonder what existed prior to the moment of “horizontal-secular, traverse-time” communities (37), Anna Lindley underscores this scenario as a metaphor for conservative propaganda against migration; the “deep well of sedentarist thinking, which in some sense frames migration *as* crisis, and staying put as the

natural and desirable human condition” (“Exploring Crisis and Migration” 1). This simultaneously explains why “the debate about migration is often dominated by groups with the extreme positions of ‘no borders’ or ‘no immigrants’”, (Martin, Abella, and Kuptsch, *Managing Labour Migration in the Twenty-First Century* xiii), and the leftist sympathies that accompany migration in works of art. Still, overgeneralizations such as Alexander Betts’ claim in *Survival Migration* that the migrant’s fate “makes the international society of states both legitimate and civilized” (1) weaken every argument about the accrued potentials of the displaced. The vagueness of international conglomerations today, together with the vested interests that define their fraternity, means that previously humiliated migrants will think twice before endorsing any goodwill gesture from the bloc-diplomacy of interest that always rehabilitates totalitarian excesses.

Put differently, the currency of migration discourse can be misleading in paying too much attention to our own contemporary moment and its fluid diplomacy of conquest and subjugation. My earlier analysis of this conundrum concentrated on early European migrants, notably from the UK, and how they facilitated the establishment of Settler colonies that became major partners in the bloc-conceits against migrants.¹ Having transformed the Settler space into independent national entities with exclusive laws against the aborigines, they still recognised the English throne as symbolic central authority.² However, the editors had suppressed “early” from my title, consequently giving an atemporal reading of European migratory patterns. Such generalisation is what I intend to override here, mainly because as already indicated, migration reflects the manner in which humanity populated and still populates the earth across continents. Literally

¹ See “European Migrants and Self-consciousness in Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* and D. H. Lawrence’s *Kangaroo*” in Neba and Chiatoh (eds), 2015. (3-30)

² There are indicators that Australia and Jamaica will become more autonomous with the ascension of Charles III to the throne.

deprived of any possibility that will ameliorate their condition, the desire of the African youths to migrate has intensified even with the dramatic perils that they endure. These castaways are the new pilgrims of the 21st century, casting doubt on every gesture of goodwill and the complicit processes that generate migration in the first place. At the humanitarian level, there is nothing wrong with this, only that the attempt to negotiate human misery along a profit-making axis of soft capital exposes its ethical claims.

Based on Cheikh Anta Diop's perceptive contribution in *Precolonial Black Africa* about the common ancestry—and perhaps destiny—of mankind (213), and his further insistence in *Civilization or Barbarism* (2) that “[r]ace does not exist”, I will argue that migration generally opposes the geo-economic mappings and their bullish globalism. The notion of “imperial preference” which, as Carl Mosk points out in *Trade and Migration in the Modern World* (168), was already speculating on a system of preferential tariffs for beneficiary countries, unveils the dynamics of a fixed binarism in global interaction. In opposition to this, in “Histories and Contemporary Challenges of Crisis and Mobility in Somalia” (2014), Lindley and Hammond suggest with ample evidence that the discourse of crisis/mobility should not be seen as monolithic but relative and contextualized.

If today western incentives in ideo-technological contexts have considerable predominance over trans-human activities, it is mainly because the way each system is structured and monitored; that is, brands, sells, and guards its values, either guarantees or fails to guarantee the comfort and future of its citizens. The development vision in the postcolony, from where the mass of migrants emanate, has alienated the citizens, unlike the case in the West, where practical needs are generally taken care of by the state. Thus, even youths from a neighbouring country to the US like Mexico are still vulnerable to the allure of the American Dream—itself the iconic fetish in nationalistic prefiguring of the migration trope. Indeed, notional West is a migration abstract within which migrants configured nation-states (while most



South American countries imprinted nationalist difference in similar ways) by displacing, dispossessing, and erasing indigenous identity markers.

In Africa, on the other hand, and as Sarah Dorman *et als* suggest in *Making Nations, Creating Strangers*, a significant reason for the inability of the nation-state to evolve according to the exigencies of the “moment” is the fact that “the discourses of nationalism and ethnicity have instead run in parallel within and across states, sometimes clashing and at other times cross-fertilising one another” (3). In the representative case of Cameroon, however, cross-fertilisation has been substituted by a systemic form of tribal and ideological intercourse that dilutes the bicultural energies of the country. This has made the Anglophone condition in then the country, as Awasom (2007) elaborates in “Language and Citizenship in Anglophone Cameroon”, to create linguistic and their complementary rifts of otherness that facilitate migration. On the whole, and located on the fringes of global migration, the desperation of the Cameroonian youth is best expressed in the phenomenon of visa racketeering which, according to Pigeaud in *Au Cameroun de Paul Biya*, has been institutionalised:

l’arrestation de quatre jeunes gens fin décembre 2008 à l’aéroport de Yaoundé alors qu’ils étaient sur le point de s’embarquer pour les États-Unis qui a révélé l’affaire: tous quatre étaient munis d’ordres de mission émanant de l’Assemblée nationale et indiquant qu’ils étaient des employés de l’institution. Ils ont déclaré aux enquêteurs avoir versé chacun 3 millions de FCFA (4500 euros) pour obtenir le document. (152)

Understanding such “push-pull” forces in the postcolony relates to the disturbing question regarding “[r]ésistance au système ou fuite”, in answer to which we are told:



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En 2007, une petite association, l'Association de lutte contre l'émigration clandestine (Alcec), a mené une enquête auprès de 500 jeunes de Yaoundé: ses conclusions montraient que 83% des 15-35 ans interrogés avaient l'intention de quitter le Cameroun. Le président et son mode de gouvernance sont souvent présentés comme la cause principale des départs (Pigeaud 224).

When youths declare unequivocally that "Si je reste au Cameroun, ma vie est foutue," they also provide a similarly unblemished reason: "Rien n'est fait pour encourager les jeunes alors que notre pays est riche ... Quoi qu'on fasse, l'État tue les initiatives. Quand quelque chose marche ici, au lieu de l'encourager, il le freine ... Ce qui fait fuir les Camerounais, c'est l'absence de perspectives individuelles et collectives" (Pigeaud, 224). Such is the dystopian future from which they flee, often couched in the habitual political rhetoric of patriotism which falls literally on deaf ears because that ideal has been patterned into empty slogans. Evidently, the postindependence nation-state has not only failed in fulfilling its vision; it has also humiliated those who aspired through it to have an average welfare and future. It is not just the youths who are lost at the crossroads of opportunities, but also the senior citizens whose retirement trust has become a nightmare because the social insurance scheme has been compromised.

Accordingly, and considering the strategic stranglehold on the postcolony at independence, Pigeaud's description of the ambiguous influence of France in sustaining Cameroon through a form of fiscal messianism that was meant to have the exact opposite of its avowed intention, some 30 years ago: "son aide annuelle a plus que doublé, passant de 175 millions de dollars en 1991 à plus de 407 millions en 1992. Le Cameroun, qui avait déjà eu en 1991 le soutien de la France pour obtenir du FMI un nouveau prêt, est devenu à cette période le deuxième plus grand bénéficiaire de l'aide financière française, derrière la Côte d'Ivoire" (Pigeaud 236).

These financial agreements constitute the remote causes of South-North migration by determining the nature of government policy. Calls for their reconsideration from Chihombori-Quao Arikanna (2018), in the specific case of France-Afrique, with regards to “who’s got the larger crump” in the aftermath of colonial and neocolonial strategy, have hardly been heeded to by those whose bloc interest is served in this way. On the whole, the causes are so abridged into pull-and-push factors today that we also tend to ignore their historical origins and how these still recur in several forms of marginalisation for territories like Cameroon and Mexico, and a highly industrialised country like the USA. In the former, the confusion between colonial and postcolonial boundaries in geo-ideological terms further colludes with an osmotic complicity with the latter to create the unidirectional curve of migration. These are eventually subsumed into diplomatic doublespeak both within and between blocs as the invisible and abstract demographics of what becomes a migration crisis. International conferences have been convened, conventions signed, to better manage the scourge of people crossing borders under duress; but these have remained ideals and promises at best, orchestrated and undercut by the very blocs that are responsible for the fate of the postcolony.³ Yet, the cautious appraisal of push-and-pull factors remains a consequence of marginalisation at home and seduction abroad; factors that have been diluted in totalitarian excesses and neoliberal flatteries beyond a simple binary of either-or.

Predictably, the theoretical perspective that captures the subtleties of migration literature today easily adopts, in a questionable manner, a postcolonial frame where, for instance in “Migration Literature: A Theoretical Perspective”, Fatemeh Pourjafari and Abdolali Vahidpour suggest that “[t]he theoretical assumptions of postcolonial

³ In 2019, there was an unusual row between France and Italy over the migration issue, with Italy urging France to liberate her outposts in Africa so as to stem a phenomenon that was gaining epidemic proportions (<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/307126>).

studies can be applied to the topic of migration because migrants are predominantly positioned at the margins of society and are subject to the hegemonial claims of the majority” (685). The problem with this assertion is its mitigation of the agitations that provoke the need to seek new frontiers in the first place; and by ignoring the trauma associated with this, they also implicitly vindicate the original cause(s) of such instability. Consequently, there is the rather convenient supposition that migrants are fixed at the margins of the new society, forgetting the fates of internal migrants whose birth rights have been usurped by other conquering migrants who will go on to remap the land, endorse commissioned histories, bury or customise indigenous values, and impose new religious rites, together with their economic principles, on the othered natives, already seducing us into the self-serving abstract of a global village. Eventually, the appellation of “native speakers” becomes a linguistic misnomer of the Settler authorising his language as a national medium. This is evident in especially the fates of the Amerindian and the Australian Aborigines following the incursion of Settler communities from Europe from around the 17th century, to the extent that Amerindian spaces are still described as “Reservations” today; just as in Cameroon “national language” is confused with Mother Tongue, and both of them subjugated by “official languages”, which ironically are colonial languages. Postcolonial hegemony is thus an overlapping and consequently limiting zone of contact that enables our vulnerabilities in the globalised world and complicates the emergence of new data from furls of the old; and where characteristics of the so-called civilising mission have re-emerged as mimic whorls of the Fanonian layered image, finally displacing any sense of organic adjustment.

We need this caution in order not to be swooned in the amorphous discourse whose ancestry is postcolonial binarism. For this analysis, both postcolonialism and globalisation will be used implicitly and disinterestedly, to propose that the postcolony in Mbembean rehabilitational hermeneutics of “age” and “durée”—where the one “encloses multiple *durées* made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias

and swings that overlay one another, intergenerational one another, and envelope one another" (*On the Postcolony* 14)—needs to rethink the contact points of theory and their ideological sways when dealing with the practicalities of migration. Postcolonialism stagnates us in exhaustedisms that are generated from the West, and subtly invite us at the same time to jumpstart economic emergence by poorly mimicking the globalising mores of the North in the guise of what Bill Ashcroft propagates as a "master narrative, the explanation of all forms of oppression" and from which the construct of "postcolonial futures" legitimises "the paradox ... [of the] polarisation of attitudes" (*On Post-Colonial Futures* 1); while globalisation lubricates the corrosive discourse of a global village along an exclusive paradigm of a New World Order.

Otherwise, the growing interest in migration discourse can easily become reductionist today because its focus almost always displaces the historiography of the phenomenon. This is the case when scholarship in this area is partial and generally tends to empathise with the orchestrators, given their continuous affiliation with the homeland and global stakeholders. Yet, the atrocities which these colonists perpetuated are easily glossed over by the veneer of capitalist and democratic experimentations. It is also possible to take for granted the Christian outreach which developed simultaneously with the expansionist scheme, coded today in the postcolony as "civilised" natives whose streaks of mimicry echo salvationist illusions; whereas such developments into the enclaves of western civilisation and their platitudinal discourse which disavowed indigenous worldviews wherever they manifested, were the cornerstone for the radical devolution of fixed migratory patterns into a universalist scheme. Even so, the colonial centre disavows unwavering fixity, continues to adjust its geopolitical alignments whenever convenient, and migration diplomacy is just one way of ensuring both its hegemony and continuity.

Geo-historical context of migration re-contextualised

As already suggested above, it will help to underscore the manifestation of migration in antecedence as a human phenomenon through time and space before its politicisation today. Understanding migration in this way results from over-generalisations in discussing it almost as a 21st century problem, whereas its origins are inseparable from the first dating of human existence and occupation of the earth. Throughout recorded history, therefore, migration has always been determined by the functional imperatives of humans in their respective spaces. The difference at every stage of human development has been the result of changes in human lifestyle, relationships, and prospection of the future in its various forms. Thus, the story of human migration is also an attempt to understand the negotiation of the relationship between humans and their environment. This link between sustenance and spatial mobility is an important angle from which to appreciate what is almost viewed as a twentieth-into-twenty-first century phenomenon, when we consider that, according to Peter Bellwood in “Prehistoric Migration and the Rise of Humanity”, our earliest ancestors were “both hunter-gatherer and agriculturalist” (56). Survival was an existential concern, if not necessity, and made it possible, in the words of Ungar and Scott, that “[i]f any of the early hominins had critical keystone foods (those essential for survival and reproduction) found only in more closed habitats, then migration or extinction may well have followed” (“Dental Evidence for Diets of Early Homo” 121). Once the privilege to survive was exhausted or taken away, the need to migrate became imperative.

This view contrasts with the misleading preponderance of a one-way trajectory of migration today, buoyed by both mainstream and social media biases. In its apocalyptic variations, the consequences of death in the form of deprivation in deserts, seas, and forests, condescension of othered existence, conference conclusions and other forms of humiliation at every port of entry (formal or not), has engendered diplomatic crises that cast worrying shadows over the

goodwill of proposals to end or significantly minimise its effects. In other words, the permissive attitude of international diplomacy makes the “international community” an accomplice in the conundrum of migration today. This also explains the enthusiasm of donor agencies together with the international and local charities along the migratory chain, to assuage the impact of displacement in all its forms. The protection of nuanced boundaries and their bloc-fraternity in the global North is another indicator of the exclusive mentality on which the tragic sequences of human integration feed. At the same time, even the boundaries at decolonisation and the politics/diplomacy within them have failed to provide the necessary safeguards to the citizens, who then look elsewhere for apparently more fulfilling alternatives.

Describing the expansionist character of human evolution in *Evolution: The Human Story*, Alice Roberts notes that “We are a truly global species. There are humans just about everywhere—on every continent, on almost every scrap of land. But our ubiquity is no recent phenomenon. The colonization of the entire planet by *Homo sapiens* started more than 50,000 years ago” (176). While it is necessary to differentiate between spatial presence—which took the form of a progressive gyre—and colonisation on the one hand and voluntary or involuntary movement on the other, it should also be noted that the increasingly disproportionate ratio between human density and available land meant that territoriality was not a priority initially; shifting settlements and their communities were an existentialist way of life, whose evolution makes it possible to appreciate the need to delimit space in terms of ownership. Thus, it becomes clear that migration is an invaluable subtext to the human condition, and varies contextually whether influenced by human geography or by political activism. Ultimately, a hypothetical argument can be made that the abuse of resources in their diverse forms and the tensions that arise from this, dramatizes the phenomenon.

While humanity has always been a migrating species then, it is important to note how the nomadism translated into the geo-political

feuds that still characterise our evolution as a species, and makes migration a characteristic of our survivalist nature. A necessity from the beginning of human communities when there were no formal boundaries, human nomadism was a purely functional necessity. The pressures of survival, together with the lack of the means for long-term food preservation meant that a contingent lifestyle necessitated a similar form of settlement. It was only when societies started organising themselves into exclusive units of families and tribes that a selfish mentality started restructuring space, which had hitherto been a free-for-all commodity. Natural boundaries like rivers, mountains and trees became formal pegs to demarcate territory and transiting from one space to another was considered a violation if not sanctioned by one form of entente or another. The relative might of the respective communities also prefaced their dominance and, by implication, their vulnerability to conquest by another community or blocs of communities.

This bellicose turn in human subsistence had previously been mainly animalistic or instinctive, but eventually became possessive and monetised along parallel political and economic ideologies. What makes migration so distinctive within the 20th and 21st centuries are the complementary systems of slavery, imperialism, and colonialism, with a rather precipitated resolution that did not allow the conscripted persons and territories to reimagine their past, present, and futures against the original backgrounds. Unlike other spaces which rationalised these tempo-ideological phases into the politics and diplomacy of independence, Africa literally parachuted into the culture of development as determined by outsiders. This partly explains why, in Africa more than any other space, migration reveals a classicist demographic imbalance that privileges members of the ruling elite who evade the lens of scrutiny which zooms on migratory miseries and so are hardly highlighted in the data since they easily filter into the bourgeois class of the West.



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In *Consciencism*, Kwame Nkrumah explores the interstices between communal conscience and ideology, and suggests that the distortion of a previously organised communal life resulted in a social mobility that favoured the ruling class. Precolonial Africa revered royalty, war heroes, great hunters, artistes, etc., but at independence, these were grafted onto a colonial-house-slave servitude, with attendant forms of suspicion, recriminations, and demands for rights that partly culminated in sectarian outbursts. Consequent alienation of the sidelined (such as we saw in Pigeaud) became inseparable from migration which then evolved toward a more enabling or “ownership” view of territory. From inception, the postcolony not only alienated its own, it also neglected the politico-religious and economic systems of precolonial nations, leading to the ideological determinism that harnesses poor governance to its consequences.

In the historical and imperial heritage of migration discourse with which we are concerned, therefore, the phenomenon has become the common currency of diplomatic engagements between the global North and South, and more specifically between the former colonial powers and their colonies. However, while contemporary migratory routes no longer follow colonial alignments, largely because of proximity advantages or more attractive opportunities offered by neo-imperial spaces or configurations like the US, the EU, and post-Brexit UK, it is still evident that a predictable dislocation in the nationalist aspirations of the erstwhile independent states energises this phenomenon. As a consequence, migration remains a trope of controversies, one whose debates ironically energise its options, such that the acrimonies which are generated from this often degenerate into unnecessary self-vindicating blame from the postcolony on the one hand, and the homely overtures from the target destinations on the other hand. Even so, none of these helps to vindicate the collateral ambiguities which characterise the conversation. Accordingly, there is need for a shift in migration discourse from causal binaries of geopolitical and economic strategizing today, to instead focus on the interstices between

it and the evolutionary imperatives of human existence as a whole, before highlighting the postindependence (and no longer postcolonial) context.

Considering the fluid nature of the discourse since humans started crisscrossing the earth, exploiting it for various reasons, and eventually laying formal claims to carved-out sections, it is clear that everyone is a migrant, or is potentially so. Migration discourse is therefore undergoing an interesting shift today in which composite identities explain a complex setup that may begin with dual and even multiple nationalities in the West, and end in a shift in the trajectory of the migratory route back to the former colonial centre. Consequently, the notion of the diaspora—which is the corollary of migration—always changes and overlaps: it is not a notional constant but a zone that continuously shifts and determines the fates of global citizens caught in especially geo-political and economic vicissitudes. Events may change and dispel this possibility, but in essence, the migrant is a product of quest and instability. The one cause was and remains survivalist and manifested/manifests at the initial stage of human need for a sustainable lifestyle, while the other is a direct consequence of the dissatisfaction that resulted from a complicity between nationalism and its colonial offshoot like decolonisation, which has continued to be vulnerable to the interests of neoliberal globalism.

Alternatively, we should consider migration discourses as trans-human variations in continuity, beyond the overhyped interest in contemporary exigencies around the fate of migrants, and how these collate into varying imperatives of identifying and executing functional agendas. Consider for instance, David Bacon's description of "[t]he word 'illegal' [as] ... a one-word mantra in the U.S. political debate" that reflects its overall use in both the US and Europe in *Illegal People*:

Without a doubt, this has been a victory for a small but vocal nativist movement, with deep racist roots. Using the word to demonize undocumented people is part of this movement's campaign to oppose all immigration. It feeds an anti-immigrant hysteria promoted by some

politicians and feared by others. It has important economic payoffs for many employers. It is used incessantly in the media by people who don't think about what the word really means, or what happens to those so labeled. (v)

We may quarrel with the use of "nativist" here because of its suggested affirmation of exclusive Settler status, blanking out the earliest peoples like the Amerindian. Nevertheless, the focus on such "illegal people" together with globalisation and the generalised criminalisation of immigrants feeds the extreme Right-inspired myth of aliens threatening settled ways of life in the West. On his part, in *The Global Economic Crisis and Migration* and *Elusive Protection, Uncertain Lands* Bimal Ghosh is passionately concerned with migratory patterns in the temporal *now*, with the urgent question, *where do we go from here*; and then becomes futuristic in making projections for a mid-century solution. His other concerns (2006, 2008, 2010) are similarly contemporaneous, delving into ethical issues of human rights and migration. In this way, the migrant becomes the new site for symbolic forms of preventive diplomacy while making piecemeal proposals that only perpetuate the situation and solidify existing boundaries of exclusion. Gosh sheds considerable light on this idea of mutational migration; that is, the complex necessity that empowers migrants across borders, creating new peripheries and their corresponding hybrid identities. Therefore, to label the US and Australia as migrant countries is a realistic but also vested description that attempts to phase out indigenous or first-migrant identities. In this continuum, we notice how the notional indigene is displaced through systemic dispossession, while the "formal" migrant insists on presence and visibility within the reconstituted political establishment.

Willie Nelson, Dan Seals and the ironies of migration in the US

Herself the archetypal land of migrants, and having built her global status on the myth of a Dream that guarantees possibilities of success to every wayfarer, the US has been celebrated as the dreamland of/for

migrants. Even with its ambiguous image—we recall that African-American artists and activists migrated to Europe and (rarely) to Africa during the Jim Crow days—the flow of humans has largely been toward what President Ronald Reagan popularised as the “shining city on the hill”. In the songs of Nelson and Seals, we observe the clash between such idealism and existential imperatives at the migrant’s crossroads. The geo-historical and ethnic proximities between Amerindians, Mexicans and the US are violated, so to speak, by an ideologically motivated “dismemberment” of precolonial bonds to the advantage of more lucrative engagements that continue the othering and dependent process of the disadvantaged. Consequently, the artist’s vision offers us a more integrative perspective from which nationalist/global biases can be understood. Nelson, himself an Amerindian of Cherokee heritage, who naturally spices his musicology with slices of history as in “Seven Spanish Angels” and “Remember the Alomo”, can be seen as sympathising with the fate of the Other within the multi-ethnic web of the American Dream. In “Living in the Promised Land” he customises Jewish myth into the immediacy of relative need and desire, fitting the seduction of the Dream agenda:

Give us your tired and weak
And we will make them strong
Bring us your foreign songs
And we will sing along
Leave us your broken dreams
We’ll give them time to mend
There’s still a lot of love
Living in the promiseland

This is the “promise” that facilitates the push factors in especially former colonies whose systems have been broken and taken control of by neoliberal agencies. Between the ideal and the reality, the US is always confounded by the crisis of migration which successive governments, irrespective of party allegiance, have exploited for political capital. Nelson’s idealism therefore exposes the subtle ironies that characterise



this discourse whether as a vote-hunting strategy or as a truly human acknowledgement of the Other in its variegated form who is entangled in cross-party clashes that culminated in Trump's fence diplomacy.³

Interestingly, Seals had anticipated the fate of the migrant who is bugged in the hope of the promise and despondency of resistance. In "Bordertown", he problematizes migration by depicting the need for a human face behind the façade of doublespeak by depicting how a conservative, duty-conscious officer eventually transforms into a libertine sympathizer of immigrants' dreams. The song opens with the methodical description of the border policeman who "Buttons up his uniform/ Takes out his badge and pins it on" and goes out "before the dawn". He is proud that "For thirty years he's enforced the law", significantly so "on this side" of "the Rio Grande" where "he takes his stand again". He celebrates a robotic consciousness in which "the law's the law [and] it's not his place to say what's wrong". The significant markers of personality, duty, and patriotism here are reinforced by "this side" and "again", in terms of exclusive nationalism and dedication to its enforcement. The potential breachers are personified by a young girl who, "at dusk ... wades across [the Rio Grande]/ And he sees the hope that's in her eyes/ Child with dreams of a brand new life". In a final showdown, and in a dramatic reversal of fortunes, the officer "waits there as she comes ashore/ Finished, there's a moment of faith/ He turns his back and he walks away". In his transformation, captured in the epiphanic word "finished", the conscious idealist eventually metamorphoses and enables change on a humanitarian, and no longer ideological, basis. The chorus also reveals the push-pull factors in which "the streets are paved with gold/ ... beyond the sound of this

³ For evidence of increased funding to protect borders in Europe and the US, see Antje Ellermann, (2009), *States against Migrants: Deportation in Germany and the United*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

bordertown". The metaphoric nightfall in which the migrants lunch their final campaign coincides with the change in the guard who finally understand "the hope in her eyes" and so "turns his back and walks away". Seals does not suggest the reason for migration but considering "the changing political economy of crime in Mexico" especially when "the crisis has been largely denied by the government and ignored by international actors" (Díaz-Leal and Albuja, "Criminal Violence and Displacement in Mexico" 74), it is plausible to connect the two.

The conversation of interests that inscribes global borders, both physical and virtual, is vital to the realisation that beyond the macho-conceits of legal justifications, the human need for an enabling space overwrites every other authoritative argument. Both Nelson and Seals challenge us to come to terms with what is legally permissible and humanely imperative. The dilemma of authority depends on whether one is attentive to the dictates of political ideology which he may not share, or those of our common humanity to which he belongs intimately. The former is, in the case of the US authoritative positions, both colonialist and therefore exclusive, and is opposed to the latter, which highlights the need for a communally oriented world in which physical borders will remain symbolic lines at best. Ultimately, Seals' song leads us into an understanding that while the West easily circumvents its own strict migration policies into symbolic citizen status—with hurdles of certification and authentication as "aliens", "residents", and "citizens"—African countries are fixated on the letter of the law even when the resources are either limited or misappropriated, and then make dual nationality to be the privilege of only a select few.⁴

The religious roots of the Dream as a migration motif are echoed in Nelson's reminder that "the prayer of every man/ is to know how freedom feels", and repeated through the important intervention of faith in the officer's "conversion" in Seal's song. The "tired and weak" in

⁴ See Spivak's critique of this duplicity in "Resident Alien" (2002); and Benhabib's *The Rights of Others: Aliens, Citizens and Residents* (2004).

Nelson are those overwhelmed by the favour-driven politics of misplaced priorities in the postcolony whose “broken dreams” have been alienated from the homeland and therefore “need time to mend” in the new space because “there’s still a lot of love/ living in the promise land”. Here, the migrants are represented by an “aimless woman, faithless child” whose destitution is equated to a “cross” from which they hope to be redeemed by a prayer “to know how freedom feels”. In all, the two songs cue into the migrants’ need of an availing life; and only possible if the push-pull factors interact in a binary of possibilities and difficulties, to be reconciled by juxtaposing the steel solidity of the Dream with the shifting sand. Put together, these songs anticipated and castigated Trump’s divisive diplomacy and its definitive standard toward migration.

Awilo’s Aesthetics of Bush-Falling and the New Frontier

If we compare pre-Trump America with the later days of New Dealism in Cameroon, it will be realised that in the former, migration remains a human condition that is exploited for political expediency on both sides of the political aisle; while the latter affirms a confounding sense of closure in statehood that affirms vested definitions of a failed state. A mosaic of themes from which migration emerges as a consequence of failed policies after decolonisation, Awilo’s art evokes composite phases of missed opportunities, outright failures, and the crass attempts by the vulnerable youths to circumvent the systemic structures that always try to rationalise every indicator of failure as collective guilt. The doublespeak of politicians—“instead of ambition we get na depression”—is juxtaposed with the responsibility of artists as vision-givers. The demographical clashes between the conservatism of leadership and the unrestrained ambitions of millennials and new technological gadgets result in the desire for an alternative space. There are also undercurrents of discrimination and symbolic leverages of political demagoguery, the one meant to justify highlighted claims of

regionalism, tribalism, and nepotism; and the other to ease Machiavellian logic that sustains the status-quo. The problem however comes when the postcolony is no longer the “invisible” entity before the 1990s after which calls for political pluralism coincided with both the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dramatic turn in technology from analogue containment to digital exposure. This, more than any other reform of the post-Cold War world, facilitated the blurring of previous borders, the challenge of authority, and the resurgence of the restive, border-crossing searchers of so-called greener pastures, celebrated by Embolo Mbue in *Behold the Dreamers* as a US-oriented summons that (according to a critical observation) “will change the way [we] see the world” (v).

In all, Awilo de Bamenda reveals the dysfunctional exploitation of push-pull factors against the backcloth of sectarian agitations, the imperativeness of having a godfather, the drive for perpetual youthfulness through hair-dyeing and repeated revision of birth certificates, underemployment that devalues the higher education credentials, and the favouritism that impedes the development of even natural talents like playing football. Interestingly, the satirical names the artist uses point to the international collusion with national stakeholders such as Nanfa union for the bike riders and PMUC/tiercé for those seeking elusive lotto-fortunes from “Jacomoney”. And in apparent response to the grievances of the youths quoted from Pigeaud above, he wonders: “Who go fixam, papa and mami dem? Wouna don ful we. Wusai the future for this contri? Wusai wouna lebam? Pikin dem no get future again? Wouna no di shame?” This apparent determinism arises from the desire of the elders/leaders for eternal youthfulness; a Faustian fallacy that couples with Machiavellian delusion to reveal the dim future for the youths.

Awilo’s migratory discourse is essentially suggestive, without really pinpointing to unique cases. His macro view, so to speak, instead allows him to explore the subtle network of those responsible for the systemic phenomenon. The song which highlights this characteristic the

most, “Bush Faller”, begins with the chorus expressing a typical desire to go abroad. The combination of push-and-pull factors here reveals the neoliberal conspiracy that pacifies leadership in the postcolony in a compromising way, and in turn facilitates the permanently dependent state of development. Whatever aspirations the youths in particular have, these manifest as mirages that are refracted through imported gadgets which enable the dream variations always beyond the national frontiers. Then the narrative voice echoes the ambivalence that places the representative seer at the crossroads of mixed emotions of crying in an effort to laugh, in a dependent economy. The recurring desire to migrate throughout the song—with an ironic caveat which points to the love-hate ambiguities in migratory discourse: “If you lek [like/love] me, lef [allow] me ah go”—points to the contradictions in postindependence projections which have degenerated into echoes of desperation that warrant the urgency to abandon the homeland. Otherwise, there is a hankering after the status of the returnee-migrant-visitor. Even if this latter left in denunciation of the reductive system, his life has now changed, and in common parlance he has finally arrived as a celebrity-returnee.

Awilo’s music therefore reveals the consequences of the politico-nationalist dilemma of the Cameroonian youths who reverse the paradigm of patriotism by seeking alternative spaces and possible nationalities. Their enthusiasm reflects the perceived failures in consolidating the postindependence frontier. But the artist also recalls the frustration shared by African artists as a whole since the 1960s, and how failed promises have transformed the vibrant part of the population into stray constituents of a world that has betrayed their hopes and expectations.

In the aftermath of failed developmental programs (whose sponsors know better), this constituency has specialised in devising desperate methods of survival. Embodying a demographic backlash in the rhetoric of nation-building, the youths see such propaganda as the smokescreen for the implementation of ambiguous programs by

neoliberal agents who find Africa to be the most profitable area for investment. Almost every document about Africa's relationship with these agencies has highlighted the complicity of African leadership in the dubious outcomes, and when this is not possible, the "recalcitrant" leader is taken care of through several means. New burdens are crafted and engaged under the sign of multilateral partnerships, even as monitors and watchdogs do their job by turning a blind eye on evidence of wrongdoing. Public trust is seriously dented and the burden of debt repayment is transferred to a future generation that is as restive as it is unreliable.

Faced with such an unsavoury situation, the youths have weighed their options and literally embarked on a potentially new form of slavery that coheres with complicit terminologies like transnationality and transmodernity. What even scholars in these areas seem to ignore is the fact that the "trans" discourse always catches Africa at the intersection of global progress and she never knows how she found herself there. This is especially so in cases where treaties, both bilateral and multilateral, which endorse alien goals, have conscripted the continent in catch-up developmental projects at the same time that debates on dual nationality are proscribed. Besides, the notion of modernity has been grafted to our consciousness from foreign cultures, ignoring the fact that modernity is in fact the privileged form of cultural evolution. The migrant becomes the mediator of this osmotic geo-economics, with the hope of providing a viable antidote for the 21st century.

Ironically, Awilo uses the metaphor of a lover to define the relationship between the state and its citizen; but the relationship collapses into dissonance and the disfavoured constituency embarks on a Sisyphean adventure, retracing colonial routes voluntarily. This reverse epic unmasks the purported glories of independence. In traditional epics, the hero returns from challenging encounters with the booties of his endeavours, wherein his accolades are seen as earned recompense for which he is honoured and remembered. The

postindependence African hero however sets out as a stray, reductionist egomaniac whose authority struggles for recognition in dispersed spaces. The push-pull factors are revised designs to re-conscript the victim of independence delusion in complicity with the amorphous metropolis until his acclimatised consciousness legitimises his status as a key player not just in yearly remittances, but above all in recalibrating the axes of contact and interaction.

This is the reconstruction of myriad identities which migration is signposting as a postindependence dilemma today. The African condition in displacement is one of many that are a consequence of external forces, which finally mutated into postindependence complicity and their accomplices of the club of “Internationals”. The dilemma results from the ambivalence between the arrogance of nation-building and the misery of dependence on the very alien models that inspire and consolidate new, ever subtle forms of control and loss of sovereignty. Migration is both the result and extension of this “program”. The geo-historical scars of empire and colonialism successfully nurtured the dependent demographics of contemporary postindependence, and migration is a consequence.

However, the suggestion of a postindependence hermeneutics should remind us that the US itself is prior of such spaces and still struggles to reconcile its ideals with their demons. This fact has been diluted in North-South hegemonic politics as it evolved into subtle conquests. In its tentative conceptual usage, postindependence hermeneutics is defined here as a conscious dissociation from postcolonial complicities in the scripted furtherance of dependency in empire’s aftermath. While adjusting to the causality between the two, it castigates apologetics of convenience and exposes the queue-mergers whose wings of critical glory are always flapped in acknowledgement of mediated discourses that still focus on the reductionist formula of *tabula rasa* scholarship. Alternatively, it celebrates a level-headed, self-empowering diagnosis that may even appear recalcitrant in forging new dynamics of learning while appreciating previous perspectives that



inspire its claims, contextually. In this way, one ironic benefit of migration literature is that it helps officials in the metropolis—unlike in their peripheries—to revise their laws and strategies, given that this literature exposes tactics like arranged marriages, fake work permits, circumvention of visa restrictions, etc., that undermine the ultimate marker in disruptive multiraciality, notably a Trumpreal border-fencing politics.⁵ Comparing US and Cameroon postindependence aesthetical representations, it becomes clear that unlike Nelson’s song which is an invitational and Seals’ which suggests how the migration drama is staged at the informal port of entry, in Awilo’s the drama is rehearsed prior to departure.

Thus, to understand the manifestation of migration today, we come to realise the emergence of new colonialist tendencies from duplicities within the postcolony which are more humiliating to the native psyche than the well-documented atrocities of the colonial master and provoke the avalanche of migration and sectarianism. In order “to manage migration” so that it becomes “a nonissue, as among the ‘old’ EU-15 countries”, Martin et als suggest “a need for more dialogue on migration between emigration, transit, and immigration countries” (151). Such discussion of migration-as-policy is permissive to its excesses, given that within the last two decades *dialogue* only breeds more dialogue with same results. This routine explains Betts’ own suggestion for a “World Migration Organization” as a sequel to the fact that “the international society of states [is] both legitimate and civilised”. This “society” was at the roots of the policywise attitude toward migration in 1951, following the creation of the Convention on the Status of Refugees; and has been compounded by a Pontius Pilate fallacy whereby incumbent authority thrives by first absolving itself from the woes of the postcolony and attributing them to the machinations of the global

⁵ For me, Trumprealism is a more relevant philosophical niche for the former President’s unbridled ideas, where self-delusion is taken for fact.

metropolis—Robert Mugabe was the mastermind of this tactic—and then manipulating internal divisions while simultaneously grooming a fan club of apologists to banner pseudo-nationalist endeavours as alternatives to international conspiracies that undermine them.

Conclusion: Spoilt ‘Kontri’ versus Gold-Paved Streets

It should be obvious from my analytical trajectory that a leftist vision inspires migration sympathies. Nelson’s nativist remorse in remembering the Alamo, Seal’s deconstruction of the Dream mirage through nostalgia for the archetypal pull factor in the American imaginary, and Awilo’s jettisoning of postindependence priorities, rally around the common theme of communal deprivation, authoritarian fallacies, and eventual plebeian impatience. Meanwhile, Euro-America tolerates migration whenever it is convenient: when the interbellum between 1919 and 1939 was not enough for the labour force to be reconstituted the UK in particular opened the country’s borders to immigrants from its former colonies, already anticipating the Windrush generation. Little wonder that in the Executive Summary of *Europe’s New Refugees* (www.mckinsey.com/mgi) we are told that although “the surge of 2.3 million refugees and asylum seekers who arrived in Europe during 2015 and 2016 ... is only a small part of the broader global phenomenon, it presented Europe with the most dramatic wave of forced migration the continent has experienced since the aftermath of World War II”. Here, “forced migration” is a disclaimer that also condescends on mishaps that have been forged and managed in former colonies by a corrosive internationalism.

In its overlapping shades of interest, therefore, migration helps us to see through the inherent contradictions of globalisation, even from the collusive standpoint of Lyotard’s “most highly developed societies”, where his bias is complemented by the exclusive-inclusiveness of “our-culture” blinkers (*The Postmodern Condition* xxiii). As noted above, this conceptual bias contrasts the delusions of postcolonial propaganda from Ashcroft’s perspective both sentimentally as a “conditioned” empire

that writes back to the amoebic centre, and in a reductionist sense as a space where “postcolonial futures” depend on the vision of the globalised frontier. The clash between the global North and South further reveals the dangers of authoritarian leadership personalised by the likes of Donald Trump and his exclusive globalism embodied in “ideological” clones already manifesting in especially totalitarian regimes of the world today.

While migration has become the boogeyman of international diplomacy, there is reason to conceive of the proverbial silver lining in its aftermath or continuity. It is possible, indeed, that the future of migration in its present state harbours sways of new nationalities, which are already benefiting the host nations through the potentials of the empowered migrants. Ironically, in Cameroon, dual nationality is awarded abroad but denied at home, giving rise to a split consciousness form of patriotism that obviously tilts toward the space with more opportunities. There is therefore the possibility of a diplomatic swing when host countries mediate policies through the migrants that end up actualising the notion of a global village. A mosaic space like the US is exemplary of this development, where citizen-communities can easily evolve from activists to diplomats against the stagnant interests of their former countries. In other words, the era of the monolithic state is being undermined by both migrant activism and diplomacy. But where the above two consequences fail to manifest in exclusion of the postcolony, they become entrenched as pressure groups such as—in the case of Cameroon—the Anti-Sardinaire and Southern Cameroons militancy across Europe and the US. In all, and beyond the hyped dehumanisation and its politics, migration is breeding a category of untouchable new natives with amorphous credentials. These increasingly shun exilic miseries, amplify the discourse of global citizenship within less exclusive contexts, and prospect ways of redeeming the postcolony from the stranglehold of the Internationals and onto a platform where citizenship is gradually being despatialised. In such a context, programmed complexes would be neutralised because the transformed

and transformative migrant consciousness would also have negotiated a less dependent and less exclusive leadership in the postcolony.

Ultimately, it will be assuring to begin imagining an empire of migration, a collectivity of diverse migrants consolidating their experiences into a dominant force with geostrategic implications. Here, dominant migrant communities—inspired by those of Ireland, Israel, Armenia—tend to have the authoritative privileges that are increasingly being associated with national definitions and visions. It is one which will shed away all negativities and prefigurings surrounding the discourse. I will therefore suggest that Betts’ revealing term, “survival migration” is overwritten by this notion of migration’s empire which, while celebrating the migrant’s acomplex status, is also weaned of the schematic invocation and implementation of “human rights and security”. Apart from the usual exilic identities that have become brands in the counter-discourses to hegemonic manoeuvre, millennials like Francis Nganou and Joel Embiid (Cameroonians) and Koffi Kingston (Ghanaian) are already popular relay partners in this advocacy. While we seem to take it for granted that two of the most high profile governments today, in the US and the UK, are headed by descendants of migrants, President Joe Biden’s worry as to why people ever left Ireland, his ancestral home, is an indicator of the migrant’s short memory, doused by the favours of migration. Ironically, it is generally such descendants who are leading the charge, albeit in varying degrees, in scripting and enforcing anti-migration policies. Almost all of political leadership in the US at every level, and increasingly so in the UK, form this ambiguous cabal. However horrendous the reality in the host country, the fact that people still risk everything to be in a more appealing space, together with the fact that the migrants have and exercise rights abroad that could not have been imagined in the original homeland, proves that a new global community is emerging and internationalising its vision and priorities against existing systems. Those that are proactive engage this new constituency and solidify their global sphere of influence, while conservative systems that groom elitist

favours to the exclusion of plebeian concerns, will remain entangled in the predictable shackles of a non-binary multi-perspectival global conjuncture.

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