

**IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION IN *FROM DUST TO SNOW: BUSH-FALLER* BY LYDIA AND WILFRED NGWA AND *SNARE* BY PRISCILLIA MUSOH “MANJOH”**

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**Abstract:** Migration remains a natural human phenomenon. Humans have always moved from one place to the other. People have always migrated internally (national) and externally (international). From a post-colonial approach, this paper focuses on international migration and aims to analyse the ideological construction of this phenomenon in two Cameroonian novels- *From Dust to Snow: Bush-faller* by Lydia and Wilfred Ngwa and *Snare* by Priscillia Musoh Manjoh. The findings show that migrants and aspiring migrants have some constructed ideas when it comes to international migration. To them, international migration is perceived as a quest for a better life and a means to upgrade families’ standards of living, the search for employment, a risk bearing phenomenon and a source of remittances flow to families back in migrants’ countries of origin.

**Keywords:** Ideological construction, migration, international migration, success, employment

**CONSTRUCTION IDEOLOGIQUE DE LA MIGRATION INTERNATIONALE DANS *FROM DUST TO SNOW: BUSH-FALLER* PAR LYDIA ET WILFRED NGWA ET *SNARE* PAR PRISCILLIA MUSOH MANJOH**

**Résumé:** La migration reste un phénomène humain naturel. Les humains se sont toujours déplacés d’un endroit à l’autre. Les gens ont toujours migré à l’intérieur (nationale) et à l’extérieur (internationale). A partir d’une approche post coloniale, cet article porte sur la migration internationale et vise à analyser la construction idéologique de ce phénomène dans deux romans camerounais – *From Dust to Snow: Bush-faller* par Lydia et Wilfred Ngwa et *Snare* par Priscillia Musoh Manjoh. Les résultats montrent que les migrants et les candidats à l’émigration ont des idées construites en matière de migration internationale. Pour eux, la migration internationale est perçue comme une quête d’une vie meilleure et un moyen d’améliorer le niveau de vie des familles, la recherche d’un emploi, un phénomène porteur de risques et une source de transferts de fonds vers les familles de retour dans les pays d’origine des migrants.

**Mots-clés :** construction idéologique, migration, migration internationale, succès, emploi

## Introduction

Migration as natural human physiological reaction is as old as humanity. Though a natural reflex, it can be effectively argued that some factors have accounted for its spreading in contemporary times. With the unprecedented rise of globalisation in all its

phases, the quest for wealth through migration, especially international migration (mostly from the global south to the north) remains one of the reasons for international migration which cannot be subverted. Movement has become part of the activities of human beings. In contemporary African society, many youths are involved in movement across international boundaries. According to Rees (2009), International migration is the movement of people across international borders for the purpose of settlement. Lydia and Wilfred Ngwa's book, *From Dust to Snow: Bushfaller* (2006) narrates the true-life experiences of (Bush-fallers) Africans (primarily Cameroonians) in Europe and the US. Featuring more than twenty accounts from students, asylum seekers and the employed, the migrants in this work share their experiences, first from the moment the idea of traveling abroad was conceived, through departure emotions, first impressions upon arrival, culture shock, hardships, funny moments, high points of each life, and even re-entry shock, including deportation. In reading these rapidly flowing stories, you feel the unadulterated emotions of excitement and apprehension that accompanied these authors as they made their journeys across continents.

*Snare* (2013) by Priscillia Musoh Manjoh offers the reader a conspicuous warning of danger visibility of the challenging life of the African in a developed world. The author portrays this through the love life of the main characters, Jerry and Pamela. Jerry is a young boy of about 25 years old who wishes to go to Europe (Germany) in order to improve his standards of living. He has been told by some *doki men* (migration brokers) in Cameroon that it is just enough for one to set foot on German land or any other European country or America, and their stay is regularized in just few weeks with the help of friends. Since he was such a believer, he abandoned his small provision store which he had in Cameroon and set out for Germany using the identification papers of a village uncle to obtain his visa. He trusts so much on the words of these *doki men* as he tells his friends who came and picked him up from the airport in Germany that his ambition was to regularize his stay for just two years, work really hard, earn huge sums and return home. All he needed was for them to give him the connections and after two years he will go back with a diamond ring for his queen's finger, Pamela.

Pamela on the other hand is a young university girl who has always refused Jerry's advances towards her to be his girlfriend because he never had money the way she expected. She has been living a promiscuous life, to have money but would not give in to Jerry's advances because he was poor. However, she finally gives in to Jerry's request when she learns that he has gotten a German visa. Jerry does everything and brings over Pamela to Germany and it is only when both of them are in Europe that the realities began to dawn on them. Pamela is so disappointed with Jerry's home while Jerry does everything within his power to satisfy her. Though he was doing a part-time job at a construction site, he would get up in the morning and dress in a suit just to make Pamela believe that he works in an office. Because Pamela did not see life in Jerry's house to be what she has thought of Europe to be, she went back to her promiscuity, leaving Jerry frustrated and heartbroken. She finally leaves Jerry for other men while Jerry obtains a resident permit with fake documents. When she gets the news about Jerry's resident permit, Pamela attempts to go back to Jerry but Jerry turns her down because he keeps picturing her on his bed with Emeka. Pamela then gets angry and says Jerry cannot frustrate her life and yet lives happily. She reports Jerry to the police and he attacks Pamela and stabs her. Pamela is rushed to the hospital by some passer-bys while Jerry wanders around for fear of being

caught by the police and imprisoned or even deported. This book is an eye-opener to those who still have the intention of traveling abroad or of becoming bush-fallers with the attractive and fascinating possibility of a successful life. This paper explores the ideological construction of international migration in *From Dust to Snow: Bush-faller* by Lydia and Wilfred Ngwa and *Snare* by Priscillia Musoh Manjoh. In the paper, ideological construction shall be seen as the different ways in which migrants and aspiring migrants present and/or conceive international migration. The post colonial theory shall be used as the theoretical framework. This theory, according to Elam, (2019) is a body of thought primarily concerned with accounting for the political, aesthetic, economic, historical and social impact of European colonial rule around the world in the 18<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most African youths in general and Cameroonians in particular see migration to the west or out of the country as the only way to improve their living standards. This ideology has been a catalyst for the mass emigration of youths to the western world. The problem lies in the fact that most of these migrants dreams are often marred, rendering them frustrated. The work attempts to answer to the question of how migrants perceive international migration. Before answering this question, the following section reviews some literature.

### 1. Literature review

A number of studies have concentrated on the reasons for international migration, presenting the ideologies which migrants and aspiring migrants have constructed around this phenomenon (Hatton and Williamson, 2003; Adepoju, 1991). Hatton and Williamson argue that one of the main reasons of migration is the large wage gap between sending and receiving countries. Low salaries, low saving rates and low economic growth cause people to leave their places of birth. Demographic growth is also a factor. High fertility combined with reduced child mortality has been fuelling rapid growth in the number of young adults (Hatton and Williamson, 2003). Given the prevailing high rates of unemployment in sub-Saharan Africa, migrating young people look for alternatives abroad (Hatton and Williamson, 2003). Adepoju (1991: 209) explains that the direction of migration has always been to countries that have historical or political links, for example, African francophone countries to France. The United States (US) and Germany are very interesting for scientists, technical and professional staff.

Van Dalen and his colleagues (2003) analysed micro-level data from a survey on seven different countries. They focused on the structural 'push and pull factors' that trigger migration. The source is from Van Dalen and colleagues. Their findings showed that the "typical African migrant is young, male and someone who has modern values". This person is mainly driven by his or her expectations about Europe. The intentions to migrate are driven by economic motivations and an optimistic view of finding a job and improve one's financial situation. This approach focuses on the migrant as an individual actor who is following primarily personal purposes. Fleischer (2006) remarks that migrants see migration as a means of family reunion. She pointed out that there are some categories of potential migrants who want to migrate for family reunion. The migrants differ in age, education level, employment status and kinship relations. Those who leave Cameroon are mainly female by Fleischer. They say that they migrate to take care of family members in Germany. Fleischer goes further to say that Cameroonians also migrate to find work and earn money. Those who plan to migrate to Germany primarily for reasons of finding work differ from those who migrate for educational reasons. They are typically male in their 30s,

married and already have children in Cameroon. The problem is that they cannot find work and see no chances to earn enough money to support their family and provide their children with an adequate education. Fleischer (2008) demonstrates the importance of national policies and legislation for marginalised migrants like Cameroonians. Germany has steadily tightened its criteria for entry and residency down to the moral and ethical cores of German society: asylum, marriage, and family. Unwanted migrants are thus forced to develop strategies and practices to become legally included. For Cameroonian men, marriage to a German woman often remains the only option for obtaining permanent legal residency and the accompanying right to work. While the importance of marriage has decreased for many German citizens and non-marital unions have become more common, marriage to a German spouse remains crucially important for some migrants. The German state, represented by its authorities, determines categories of acceptable marriage partners and denies marital unions which do not conform to the German marriage ideal. African-German couples need to prove that their relationship is based on love and emotional affection, criteria which the German state expects in a binational marriage relationship. Life trajectories of Cameroonian migrants are shaped by the boundaries of German immigration and marriage laws and regulations.

## 2. Findings

International migration is a booming issue in our contemporary world. It has been handled by scholars, Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) as well as literary writers. Lydia and Wilfred Ngwa (2007), all literary writers from Cameroon are some of them. Some ideologies have been constructed by migrants in their book around the phenomenon of international migration. These migrants see international migration as a quest for a better life and as a means to upgrade families' standards of living. Each and every person desires a better life, a life with little or no stress but with much gain. They need employment in one way or the other in order to be able to cope in this contemporary world where survival is for the fittest. Every parent's wish is to educate their children or give them a better life so that they will in turn bless them. This explains why most migrants migrate primarily in search for greener pastures. One of the characters in *From Dust to Snow: Bush-faller* says that, "... there was all indication that Europe was the only answer. I was never going to lift my family or my mother up if I did not go to Europe. I sat and prayed to God every day, for I wanted to travel to that heaven on earth..." (Lydia and Wilferd Ngwa, 2006: 6). This is also the case of Mr Ambe Lucas who leaves Cameroon abandoning behind his wife and children just because he believes he can work out a better future for them only in Europe (Finland). He confesses that "[...]there was no other option now, and I believed it was the only way to change our fortunes...we knew that I was going out there in order to work out a better future for the whole family[...]" (p.60). In *From Dust to Snow: Bushfaller*, international migration is regarded as a means to find employment opportunities. This is seen through the character Robinson Mukwanka who leaves home because he is frustrated with the unemployment situation in his beloved country (Cameroon). He seizes a miraculous opportunity and applies to do a Masters Degree in Sweden in order to go in search of opportunities. Robinson Mukwanka expresses his disappointment and dissatisfaction about the employment situation in the following extract:

[...] nothing is more frustrating than graduating from the university only to find you still dependent on your parents and family members. Years go by, you get older, yet you are hopelessly at the same spot... this is the situation I found myself in after graduating from the University of Buea. I could not support myself, let alone my family members who put hands together to see me through my university studies. To save this situation, I needed a degree higher than the Bachelor's.

Lydia and Wilfred Ngwa (2006: 47)

The above extract illustrates Robinson's frustration as he obtained a bachelor's degree but still cannot get a job with it. There is a common saying that "education is the key to success" but in Robinson's country, after completion of a university degree, one still finds himself unemployed. The situation is getting worse as the degree is fast losing grounds. Some migrants perceive international migration as a risk bearing phenomenon. This is the case with most Africans in general and Cameroonians in particular. They bear the risk of going abroad to countries where they have never been before. They know nothing about its rules and regulations, nothing about its inhabitants, countries which are far away from their homes, and as well with not enough money to sustain them. Mr Peter Nebangwa recounts his experience.

[...] in 1982, I decided to take a risk. I made up my mind to leave my country Cameroon and go abroad to Germany. This decision was not all easy for me. First of all, I could not count on financial support from my parents who were poor farmers. Secondly, I would have to stay without seeing my family and family members and third, I was going to a country where everything was new to me, language, culture, people, their way of living, weather, food and many other things. Also, the fear of loneliness and not being accepted were haunting me

Lydia and Wilfred Ngwa (2006: 67)

The above excerpt shows that Mr Peter knew that going to Germany when he could not support himself financially, where he will stay without seeing his family and family members and where everything was new to him meant taking a risk. While some migrants take the risk of leaving behind family and loved ones, other migrants migrate to meet their family members. They bear the risk of getting married to these family members. This is the situation of Ekuwa Addo in *From Dust to Snow: Bush-faller* who bears the risk of getting married to her own very brother just to be able to leave Ghana. Ekuwa reveals that "I had come to Europe on a family visa as wife to my own brother. I called him 'husther', from husband and brother." (p. 174) Priscillia Manjoh also presents how international migration is a risk. Jerry believes so much in Europe and its successes that he decides to travel to Germany. Instead of processing his documents legally, he used the identification papers of a village uncle to process his visa, but since the uncle was taller than him, Jerry took his boots to the shoe mender to add the extra inches he lacks (Manjoh, 2013:3)

International migration is also seen as a source of remittances flow to families. Remittances are funds and goods sent by internal or international migrants to their families and communities (Garip, 2011). Most migrants in *From Dust to Snow: Bush-faller* do not see migration to the Western World as a source of remittances to their country or community, but to their families. Simonie gets married to an old, sick white man just to make her family get a better life. The narrator describes Simonie as "...this is a poor girl, who had gotten married to an old white man who was very sick, just to make sure her family got a better

life. The white man was impotent, meaning that Simonie could not have children in her matrimonial home. She lived such a desolate life in Europe for the sake of her family..." (Lydia and Wilfred Ngwa, 2006: 16). This excerpt shows the extent to which Simonie has sacrificed her joy and happiness just to please her family back home. The families back home are always expecting remittances from their migrants abroad. This is the case with Simonie's family. "...when they manage to write Simonie, it is only to ask for money. Nobody cared to greet her or even ask about her husband" (Lydia and Wilfred Ngwa, 2006: 16). Another perception of international migration is that aspiring migrants see it as a source of happiness. When someone obtains a scholarship to study abroad or just tourist visa to go abroad, the family is overwhelmed with joy and happiness. They do not need to know whether the visa is genuine or not, their excitement comes simply from the fact that a family member has obtained a visa and will be going to the land which flows with milk and honey. In *Snare*, when Jerry obtains a German visa and breaks the news to his family, everyone is excited and rejoicing as they will soon have a bush-faller (migrant) in the family.

Jerry showed them his passport with the visa in it. His mother danced around happily while his father smiled happily. Jerry's two sisters, Maureen and Isabelle were attracted by the noise outside and so they rushed to the veranda from within. "Mum, what is it? Why are you so happy?" asked Maureen, Jerry's elder sister... "Your brother has gotten a visa to go to Germany. Look at it in his passport," their mother told them. Wao! Daddy, aroused, aroused!" Isabelle cried out. Their father stood up with his face beaming with a smile and said, "O.K. o.k. let me look for A-ROU-SE-MENT [...]."

Manjoh, (2013: 54)

This extract attests to the fact that international migration is surrounded with happiness. The dancing of Jerry's mother, happy smile of his father and the shouting of arousal by Isabelle are all evidence of joy. They are sure of one thing – that they will have connections in Europe and their standards of living shall be upgraded. Jerry's excitement is similar to that of Geraldine and Karen's sister. Geraldine's husband obtained a scholarship to study abroad and her excitement was that part of her had gone to Europe:

[...] two days later, he rang home to tell us he arrived safely. I was so happy. I felt so important. At least a part of me had gone to that land filled with milk and honey... my husband's travelling to Europe stated my own days of personal happiness. I was not only a successful university graduate, not only married to a handsome loving man, but also had a bush-faller to call my own[...].

Lydia and Wilfred Ngwa (2007: 9)

In addition to the various ideologies constructed around international migration analysed above, namely; a quest for a better life, an employment opportunity and a source of remittances flow, another one is that it is a modern form of slavery and racial discrimination. According to *Encarta Dictionaries*, slavery is a very hard work, especially for low pay and under bad conditions. It is a state of being completely dominated or controlled by another. The latter definition is evident with most of the migrants in the texts under study. They are either being controlled by the whites or they willingly submit themselves for domination and control either because they want to acquire a resident

permit or because they do not want to return to Cameroon or to their country of origin. This describes Ogochuku's situation who gets marry to a German woman who is old enough to be his mother just because he wants a resident permit. Ogochuku is maltreated by his wife but does not say anything for fear of losing his papers (Manjoh, 2013: 27). Jerry equally abandons his provision store in Cameroon in search of a better option in Germany. He is ready to do any odd job in Germany, even the ones he could not do in Cameroon. He tells his friends that immediately when he arrives in Germany; "...you people should just give me the connections m-e-n. Even if it is to wash corpses, I will do it. I know the white people will not like doing such a nasty job and will certainly pay well for it. Even to sweep the streets. I will do it. After all, what I am ashamed of? Nobody knows me around here" (Manjoh, 2013: 8). Another aspect of slavery is seen through Joe and Germaine's experiences. They portray and describe the Whiteman (man of the snow as they called) as being dominating. During the German colonial times in our country, the Germans thought that the black man is black because he does not wash his body well and that for a black man to be like them he had to brush his body with certain leaves called 'sponge leaves', a type of leaf which is used to wash dishes in the village when there is no modern sponge. A black man is easily betrayed by his colour.

[...] you may be intelligent or not, you may have the passport of the Snow, or be married to a woman or man from Snow: it does not make you a man or woman of Snow! You will always be reminded at each level (be it the classroom, office, playground, stadium or even in the church) that you are a stranger, you do not belong to and cannot be accepted in the Snow.

Lydia and Wilfred Ngwa (2007: 76)

This is a paradox which shows how opposite the black man is to the white man. No matter what you do in the whiteman's land to prove yourself human to them, they will always see you as a 'black monkey'; someone who has nothing and so does not belong to their class.

## Conclusion

The analysis revealed that most Africans still suffer from the centre-margin concept. This concept claims that some people (the superior class) are at the centre while others (the inferior class) are at the margin. Africans still have that feeling of nothingness and believe that they are at the margin while the Whites are at the centre. This explains why they are ready to kick aside all odds just to be able to go to the Western World. Africans live in illusions and hallucinations about the Western World – images built from films and the media. The Whites on their own part dominate the Africans because of their belief in universalism. The Whites think and believe that whatever they do should be done everywhere. In order to erase such mentalities from Africans, they need to start believing in themselves.

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