

Original Research Article

The Social Re-Integration of Ex-Prisoners of the Kondengui Central Prison into the Society (Yaounde-Cameroun)

Dr. Jaika Womiven Vedvin^{1*}

¹Doctor in Anthropology, University of Yaounde I, Cameroon

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Abstract: Objective: This article is a result of a study carried out in the town of Yaounde in order to analyse the process of ex-prisoner reintegration in the community. The objective is in an attempt to understand the socio-cultural perceptions that the community holds about ex-prisoners which makes re-integration difficult. **Method:** Both the qualitative and quantitative methods were used in data collection. This was done through techniques such as documentation, interviews, observations, focus group discussions and a review of literature. Analysis was done using the conflict, incapacitation and the equilibrium model theories respectively. This data was categorised into themes and sub themes such as community's socio-cultural perceptions, family treatment and consequences of these perceptions on ex-prisoners. **Results:** Findings revealed that, the family is the determinant factor that helped ex-prisoners re-integrates in the society. This is because 11 out of 15 informants were able to re-integrate into society following the help and understanding from their families. By studying the cases of those rejected by their families, it can be deduced that, their crimes contributed enormously to this rejection. Nevertheless, if one puts aside the fact that they have been able to re-integrate without much problems, the prison is not a place one should be proud of being a member. We then confirmed the saying that the prison is the best place to keep all criminals. **Conclusion:** This article presents the entire life of ex-convicts while in prison and after (professional, political, economical, social, cultural, distractive and even religious). This will help us understand clearly the link between life in prison, and out of prison. This article is to know the professional activities that have been carried out in prison hence, the influence it might have on them on release back into mainstream society. A senior staff officer in the Kondengui central prison advised that, a good method of rehabilitation is to give prisoners a chance of self- rehabilitation, by encouraging them to use talents, abilities, enterprises and initiatives.

Keywords: Social re-integration, ex-prisoners, central prison.

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INTRODUCTION

Crime today is a key concern of the society worldwide and particularly in Africa. According to Bagbo, criminality in African towns is as a result of the economic crisis of the 80's and 90's, and children who become victims of their parents' macro-economic resignation, "*transitent par la rue avant de se retrouver dans les prisons...*" (E.Bagbo, 2001:14). All communities therefore developed sanctions and measures not only to punish criminals but also to reintegrate culprits back into society. These sanctions and measures had as mandate to socially include and consider all culprits as having equal status with other members of the community. Re-integration paroled prisoners back into the community is arguably as one of the greatest challenges currently facing the criminal

justice system. High rates of recidivism lead many to believe that convicts should not be allowed back into society. Often, other less zealous individuals suggest that perhaps the problem lies on the institution itself. If parolees are not prepared to re-enter the community, then perhaps the prison should provide the training and preparation necessary in order for them to become productive members of society.

Imprisonment as a penitentiary system is supposed to ensure social inclusion and equality in order to minimised high risk of marginalisation of prisoners on release back into mainstream society. This implies ex-prisoners should be given training in some skills to take responsibility for preparing themselves for a more law abiding life on release. A successful re-

*Corresponding Author: Dr. Jaika Womiven Vedvin
Doctor in Anthropology, University of Yaounde I, Cameroon

integration of ex-prisoners into society should be the primary function and central objective of the justice system and this function should be given increasing priority by the judicial, prison and post release system.

Many citizens of Yaounde and other towns who were affected by the strike term of hunger were specially convicted and sent to prisons. Some who were found guilty of the conviction had a stigma in this community. For this action however brought fear and insecurity in Yaounde town were it not for the intervention of the forces of law and order, the number of lives lost would have been far reaching. In order to rehabilitate the image of prisoners in the society and the prison system in general, this article is intended to gain an insight into the social register of the community and the established social hierarchy in everyday life to address the myriads of problem facing the social transformation of ex-prisoners, since ex-prisoners are greatly affected by public attitude to crime.

Re-integration itself is a problem to prisoners who have just been liberated. Some of these prisoners after their liberation find things and life in general very difficult. This at times is due to some setbacks like accommodation. Accommodation which turns to be a particular problem to this group of people due to public resistance to the provision of facilities in the local community and resistance also on the part of offenders. The problem of employment too becomes very pertinent. At times these ex-prisoners lack the necessary skills and confidence to secure and keep a job. Ex-prisoners priority is that of obtaining a permanent job but this is not always the case, because ex-prisoners in Yaounde town are not really worth talking at all. In brief, these people are rejected by their various communities. Some are even stigmatised when they come out from prison. Though the society usually looks at them as social misfits, we still thought it wise to study them, after all, there are citizens and fellow Cameroonians too.

This system envisages that, upon their leaving prison, prisoners should re-integrate into mainstream society with skills and resources needed to find a job and accommodation. Meaning the provision of services for prisoners should address their offending behaviour and prepare them for a more law abiding life on release. It will be no wonder that released prisoners cite finding a job as their greatest re-entry challenge.

It is rather unfortunate that prisons in Cameroon neglect or at best do not fully implement these worldwide recommendations as they should have been. Consequently, prisoners find it very difficult to settle back in mainstream society with the result that we have a high rate of recidivism. For example, in Doc 11092 of the Parliamentary Assembly held by the Committee of Ministers in Europe on the 6th November 2006, based on European prison rules, it was made clear

on one of its Recommendation's N° 1741 which poses on social re-integration that, "*All detention shall be managed so as to facilitate the re-integration into free society of persons who have been deprived of their liberty*".

We might sometimes begin to think that the education of these prisoners is not pre-occupying for them. The community has got negative socio-cultural perceptions like on accommodation and stigmatization on ex-prisoners up to the point that it becomes difficult for them to fully re-integrate in society: the need to access human, material, socio-cultural and financial support from the communities and government are the barriers that made time in prison less helpful for re-integration; the treatment gotten from the family determined the ex-prisoner's re-integration into mainstream society; the consequences of these perceptions may result to ex-prisoners in-adaptation to their new society. A central objective was looking at the socio-cultural perceptions that the community has about ex-prisoners that make re-integration difficult: to look at the barriers that hinder life in prison helpful for re-integration back into society; to examine the treatment that ex-prisoners get from family members that make re-integration difficult and to evaluate the consequences of these perceptions on the ex-prisoner. This article is limited both in the subject matter and study area. With regards to the subject matter, it is limited to re-integration of ex-prisoners and the trends they go through when released from prison. This part comprises all problems encountered during their struggle to come to terms with their families and societies on release back into mainstream society. Geographically, taking Yaounde town as our study area is due to the prevalence of crime waves which push defaulters to prison hence the problem of re-integration and its process.

Looking as its usefulness to the society, the study will help gather and identify local knowledge on prisoners before, during and after prison that can contribute data to better understand the penitentiary and re-integration system. Thus this will enhance documentation on the custodial option as the system of punishment. By so doing, we could fill the gap which can be of interest to the penitentiary system to. Also, gaps which can be of interest to penitentiary authorities may help amend the situation. The study will alert Cameroonians, adults and youths alike on the treatment that awaits them if they happen to be a member of the prison. This study will also help the community, individuals, policy makers and educationalists to adjust their strategies on the rights of prisoners and ex-convicts.

Brief History of the Kondengui Central Prison

The town of Yaounde is situated at the heart of the southern plateau of Cameroon. Yaounde is situated at latitude 4° North and longitude 11°35 East of the Equator, some 200 km from the Atlantic Coast.

Cameroon comprises a population of about 28,236,031 inhabitants following the Worldometers.infos of Tuesday 24th January 2023. The territory has a surface area of 475,650 km² following 'Annuaire Statistique du Cameroun' in 2000. (A.S.C) with two official languages: French and English. This town which is however our study area is the political capital of Cameroon which undergone mutations on the eve of its independence (1960). The town of Yaounde also called "la ville de sept Collines" meaning a town of seven hills is the headquarters of Mfoundi division. Following decree N° 87-1365 of 25 September 1987, Yaounde was partitioned into seven municipalities: Yaounde I, II, III, IV, V, VI, and VII.

This article is concentrated in Yaounde IV, that is, where Kondengui Central Prison is found. Yaounde IV including Kondengui counts about 25 principal sanitary trainings. So far there exist about 30 micro health structures (GIC Santé). The Kondengui Central Prison which is found in Yaounde IV was built in 1967. Before it was built in the Municipal Lake (Lac municipal) with a capacity of eight hundred prisoners which could take even one thousand detainees. But today, the prison counts up to about 3680 inhabitants (Kondengui Central Prison Archives). The first registrar was a civilian by name YOGO TONGA and a late Commander KANA Boniface took care of discipline in prison. At this time, most of the detainees in prison were cessationists who were deported from the South West Province. It was only after the 1972 Reform that different prison services were created and prisoners were classified into categories like those awaiting trial, minors, just to name these few. This was in a bit to ease the administration carry out their duties well. Since then, criminals that are condemned to death are not more executed. They remain like those condemned for life unless for a presidential degree for reducing prisoners' terms come and help them be released.

METHODOLOGY

In all scientific fields of study, there are standard methods which help the researcher on how to collect data in order to have good analysis at the end. These methods consist of research instruments, techniques (quantitative and qualitative), field work procedures and data analysis. In view of having good and quantity data to make our results interesting and credible, some tools were effectively utilised to collect data. Documentation method was used to find out the views of other authors and researchers, the criticism, in order to make analysis by filling certain loopholes. We carried out interviews. The answers given were verified to confirm the impressions we had through observations. It should be noted that the same questions were asked, to better compare informants' information on what they thought, or how they felt about custodial method of social control. The Focus group discussion too with about 6 informants who freely express themselves on given themes about re-integration on

release back into mainstream society. This technique helped to determine in a more profound way the perceptions or misconceptions of ex-prisoner on recidivism and why they do not easily integrate into mainstream society upon their release from prison. The semi structured interview technique was used to verify the data collected through observation. Interview was equally done to gather information about the history of the people, the perspective they have about the Kondengui Central Prison, the cultural lifestyle in prison in which may impact on them after they have served their terms in prison.

Investigations were conducted to identify ex-prisoners and recidivists in the community. As regard data collection, passive observation or active entry and temporal editing of information was done on the field. Once an informant was identified, observation and interview were conducted at the time and place of convenience of the informant. The interview and observation were conducted parallelly because of time constraint. Interview was conducted in the two Cameroon official languages, that is, French and English. The objectives that the study wished to obtain were done with much care. Ex-prisoners who were our principal informants were contacted before to obtain convenient appointments. Attention was paid on small details which helped us avoid careless errors on the field. The random sampling method was used to carry out this research. The characteristics explored were age, sex, periodicity, ethnicity and post-imprisonment experience as well as religious background. The sample aimed to provide multiple clarifications on the life of prisoners after they left the carceral milieu. In order to understand this article clearly, the sample was composed of 18 informants that is, 15 ex-convicts and 3 prison administrators, all randomly selected. Informants came from different quarters of Yaounde, precisely the Biyem-assi, Kondengui and Nsimeyong neighbourhoods. The age group of these informants range from 20 years to 45 years. From 20 to 40 years, 9 informants and the rest from 31 to 45 years. The rest of the people interviewed were prison authorities who all fell under the second age group, that is, from 31 to 45. It should also be noted that out of the 15 informants, (ex-convicts), 12 were males and the rest were females. As for the prison authorities, 2 were males against 1 female. Thus accounting for a number of 14 males against 4 females. The majority of ex-convicts fell among the age group of 20 to 30 years, justifying that the youthful generations are mostly those that fall prey to crimes in Yaounde town. Most of informants were Catholics. This may be because the catholic denomination turns to be one of domineering not only in Cameroon, the world at large, but Yaounde town in particular for we have been a youth in this town and so we noticed. 8 of informants were Catholics against 7 Presbyterians, 1 Moslem and 3 Baptists.

The scope of this article was limited both in space and time. With regard to the subject matter of the work, it was limited to some prisoners and ex-prisoners from the Kondengui Central Prison those identified in the municipality of Yaounde and those who may have served their prison terms in another correctional institution in the country. The choice of the subject matter and area of study was due to methodological reasons. However, the findings in this research can be subsequently extrapolated to the entire plight encountered by ex-prisoners to re-integrate on release back into mainstream society. The concept of ex-prisoners was gender inclined as both sex were under consideration. A combination of the function of sample and analysis result to interpretation. In this work, consideration was given to interpretation, generalisation and limitation. Generalisation was to indicate the target population (in time or space) to which the result could be generalised while limitation involved the keeping of works weakness at a minimum and inform readers as to how the weakness preclude generalisation.

The next pre-occupation now is to make an overview of the problems we encountered in the course of collecting the data for this study. The first problem that we came across was assembling informants for focus group discussion as earlier mentioned in our methodology. Key informants were scattered all around the town. Thus having a mix interview of men and women was not easy. To gather some of them to have a group discussion was very difficult and even very costly. By virtue of our mobile nature, that is, from one quarter to another, it was practically difficult. Going through this study was not an easy task due to the incomprehensive nature of certain informants despite the introduction and objectives of wanting to work with them; they usually drove us and threatened brutalising. Some even went further to say we had come to make fools of them as they are considered as social misfits.

RESULTS

To be identified as an ex - prisoner was a problem to these ex- prisoners. Some did not want to because of the fear that they might be rejected by the society especially when they were to start all over again in nearly all aspects of life. Even though, some simply did not want to be identified, others did not have time to allocate to the informant due to their new pre-occupations. Apart from that, the researcher still found the research interesting. Nevertheless, the researcher still managed to carry out data and avoided most of these problems that seemed insignificant but very important for they retarded data collection. Despite all constraints, the objectives were attained since some informants made the researcher to know that they avoid unnecessary interviews because they do not know who they might be talking to, the researcher might be a spy. Despite all odds, the data gotten from the field is satisfactory because of attained objectives.

Looking at the perceptions that the society holds about ex-prisoners, how life in prison can be more or less productive for a good re-integration, treatment gotten from family members and friends on release from prison and the consequences of the society's perception on prisoners and their re-integration. In general, it talked on their new lifestyle out of prison. We also devoted a section on other cases and consequences. So far, Yaounde is highly populated, so as is its high level of mortality rate which are caused mostly by the poor living conditions. Life in Yaounde requires that one has minimum revenue in order to survive and have access to the different human services like health, habitat, transport and food.

Re-Integration

Looking at the study outside the prison, that is, with ex-prisoners, the researcher came across the following local concepts with re-integration as the main concept.

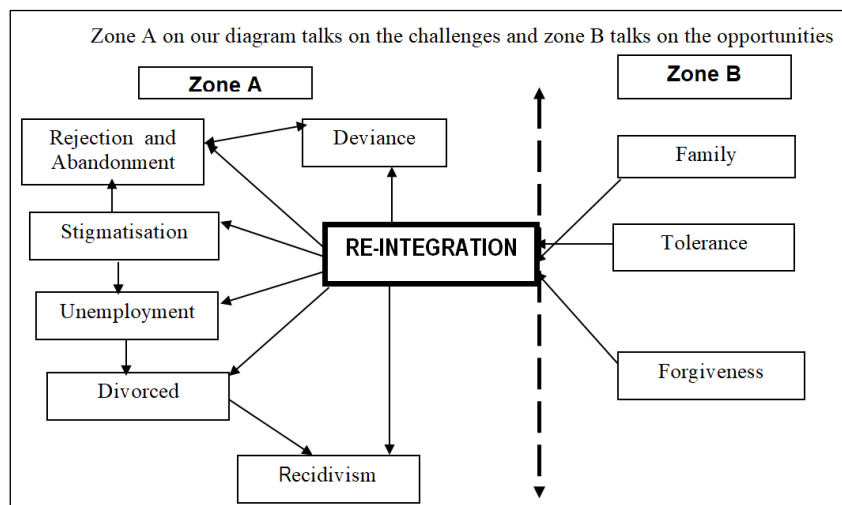


Figure 1: Challenges and opportunities to re-integration

This concept is one of the concepts we had outside the prison and it turned to be our main concept. Generally, the word re-integration or rehabilitation presupposes that detention is organised in a manner that facilitates a return to normal living and working conditions. This is a long and difficult process which requires the cooperation of the social, medical and judicial services if it has to be effective. Returning successfully to a life in mainstream society prevents repeated offenses. People who are recovering from an illness as schizophrenia often hear the word, "re-integration". At this point it refers to all the things you do from the time you start treatment until you meet your recovery goals. In other words, to return someone to a good, healthy condition state or way of living.

In the diagram above, all local concepts are geared towards re-integration. Looking at the diagram keenly, one notices that there is a line separating the diagram (zone A and B). Zone A shows the negative concepts of re-integration hence the difficulty in the process, while Zone B shows the positive concepts of re-integration. When ex-prisoners are abandoned, they become stigmatised and this can lead to unemployment. When a man is not employed, it becomes very difficult for him to run the family and divorce can come as a consequence. The rejection of ex-prisoners by their families and the society can make them become recidivists, that is, can fall prey again to crime. Zone B portrays the positive concepts that favour re-integration. An analysis in the preceding pages showed that the family is the determinant factor to a successful re-integration. Where there is tolerance and acceptance, there is forgiveness. When you study the diagram well, one notices that all concepts are geared towards re-integration which is our main concern. Fourteen informants against 1 who confirmed having learned a trade while in prison, adult as well as youth. They didn't learn this because they had no profession before coming to Kondengui, but because it was time consuming and made them forget all their grievances. The person who had nothing to pre-occupy himself while there was one ex prisoner who served ten years of prison terms. To him, his years were regarded as his whole life, so he spent his time lamenting and loose hope in himself. That is why nothing good could come from him, especially the fact that he went to prison because of rape. Two female informants out of 15 learned hair dressing, one did nidding with wool. Out of the 11 male remaining, 3 engaged in weaving, 3 in shoe repairs, 2 in jewellery fabrication and the 3 others involved themselves in gardening. This kept them always very occupied so much such that by the end of the day, they did not regret it and time passed so fast towards their release period.

Political and Economical Life

Being a prisoner one is restraint from certain political activities like belonging to a political party and even voting. That is why politics is forbidden in prison

though that does not mean inmates can not argue or discuss political issues amongst themselves. Most of their political rights were reserved only to be seen on release back into society.

Social Life and Religion

This domain became one of our focus points. Their social life here included religion, education, culture and even distraction if there were any. Some prisoners have come to know God only in prison and the way they preach, one becomes very amazed. Knowing God not only help boost their morals but also help them in their behaviours. Some prisoners who went there as harmful as ever have become very responsible and morally upright. They have form small church groups in prison, so much such that they have bible studies and religious talks, even if Fathers and Pastors were not with them. The researcher was forced to believe that these type of prisoners are those who will easily re-integrate into mainstream society on release. It might sound funny that $\frac{3}{4}$ of our informants now own bibles of their own. That is, out of our 15 informants, 14 had except for the one Moslem. The fact that this Moslem did not have a bible does not mean he did not know God. From this our religious analysis, we begin to think that a prisoner is not as bad as one may imagine except depending on his crime.

Education

In Cameroon as elsewhere every human being has the right to education which tend to reduce the illiteracy level of the nation. The fact that prisoners are deprived of their liberty that is, locked in some long and big walls does not mean they do not have to be educated. Minors especially attend classes during their school hours. Some prison warders are teachers at the same time and they help these children a lot in their education. Some other teachers were adult prisoners who were literate and so disposed their time in giving free lessons to these minors. They sat for examinations too but this time as external candidates though it was always difficult for them to have access to text books. Adults too were not forgotten or left aside, the same as an adult school exists outside the prison, it does exist in prison. The slide difference is that theirs turn to be in the form of small workshops like sensitizing on Aids and STDs. Some educated prisoners took upon themselves to give talks on what they might know better like nursing, how to give first aid treatment to any sick person, just to name these few. One of our informants of the Senegalese nationality told us, he used to teach some prisoners how to make jewellery especially when he had the material. If he did not have, interested prisoners will contribute money and give to any one going out of the prison like the prison wader to buy the raw material.

Cultural Expressions

In prison, some prisoners are identified from the way they behave which is part of a culture. Edward

B. Tylor, makes us understand that culture is not in born, but acquired. This idea of Tylor ties so well in prison. Some prisoners we met made us know that they had never eaten “*corn chaff*” that is cooked mixture of beans and corn. It’s only in Kondengui that they have eaten which turns to be their main meal. Even though some had never tasted, they made this meal part of them. This we deduced is because of the condition in which they are found, that of no choice. The researcher also discovered small cultural groups in there like the “*Bamun Come together*” which reunions prisoners from the Noun Division of Western Province once a while. Their meetings always centred on how to help each other while in prison may be health wise or nutrition. They sometimes wrote letters to their fellow elder groups in town or village for aid. This however depended on the type of aid required like a sick brother who needed medical attention and prison authorities’ do not take the situation serious. In there, groups have presidents, secretaries, just like what is out of the prisons. We also noticed female association groups like the come together of hair dressers in prison. When they meet, they talk on how to keep one’s hair clean and

even demonstrate new styles of hair do’s may be learnt on a visit outside the prison or a workshop. What really looked most interesting was the cultural group that unites prisoners from the North West Province. They had different dance groups that belonged to their various small villages, but the famous ‘bottle dance’, was the general one for all. We then come to realised that being a prisoner does not mean, one’s culture or identity is forgotten no matter the number of years one had to serve in prison. This cultural diversity helped them to forget about their worries for the main time.

Different Categories of Crimes and Sanctions

One of the questions asked our informants was on the crimes they committed that took them to prison. Informants gave us different crimes which ranged from aggravated theft, usurpation, abortion, incest, lack of identity card, passing of false information, rape, false trademark and involvement in strike actions against the public.

The informants fall under these sub groups. It ranged as follows:

Table 1: Sample of the different categories of crimes

Number	Crime	Number involve	Percentage (%)
1	Theft	5	33.33
2	Usurpation	1	6.6
3	Abortion	2	13.3
4	Incest	1	6.6
5	Lack of ID Card	1	6.6
6	False information	1	6.6
7	Rape	1	6.6
8	False trade mark	1	6.6
9	Strike action	2	13.3
TOTAL		15	100

Source: Jaika (April 2009) Fieldwork Studies

From the above table, one could conclude that most of the informants got involve in theft. This is so because theft is the part that carries the highest percentage on this table (33.3%). The rest fell under the other crimes. We begin to think that if out of 15 informants, 5 were involved in stealing, then stealing as a crime was one of the famous crimes that push so many prisoners to Kondengui. The sanctions allocated to crimes differed a lot. The same sanctions were not given to all. For example, one of our informants who committed rape spent 10 years in prison. With such crimes, he was even lucky may be his lawyer defended him to his highest or luck was playing on him that day.

Perception of prisoners on ex-prisoners

One of the questions we asked during our passage in prison was to know what prisoners think about ex- prisoners. Some prisoners said they really admire ex-prisoners especially when they come to render them visits in prison and will like to work hard to get to their liberation. To others whom we think were just jealous or mere disillusioned, they did not admire

those out because if they have not got any job or means to earn a living, then they are not better than them. To some, when an ex-prisoner goes out and does not follow the norms of the society, they know he will come back to prison because he will fall prey to crime waves. These prisoners said so because they have seen so many of such cases hence a high rate of recidivism.

As seen from the above, we have learnt that as we participate in activities out of prison, that is how prisoners to carry on their daily life with a difference that they are surrounded by big and long walls which hinder them from going out as they might wish. From here, one begins to think of what life will look like once out of prison which boils to ex- prisoner’s new life.

New life of ex-prisoners

This section presents the new life of ex-prisoners, that is, on their release into mainstream society. The first look is at the perceptions and altitudes that the society has about ex-prisoners. Also, we looked in detail how they put the knowledge gotten in prison in

use. The second part dwelt on the treatment that ex-prisoners receive from their families and how it affected them. The researcher also looked at the consequences on their re-integration and talked on other cases of prison stories and their consequences.

Societal perceptions

This section dwelt mostly on what the society thinks about an ex-prisoner. This included societal domains like the church, education, economic and social life like getting into associations. Data gathered, showed that once you have been a prisoner, the society does not look at you again as somebody of good integrity. The society considers you from the first day that you go to prison as a social misfit. This however also depends on the crime because there are certain cases of imprisonment where once out, the family feels for the faultless and seeks for a way to help the individual cope with life. Out of the 15 informants, 10 said it has not been easy for the society to accept them especially depending on their crimes. The rest 5 ex-convicts told us they found no difficulty coping with the society. Others were rejected from their worksites where they worked before going to prison. Some employees think they might come and contaminate the other workers. We begin to think that when your society and your environment start rejecting you things will never be that easy especially to get a job and survive. This can even push some ex-prisoners to fall prey to crimes again because of lack of help.

This article could not have finished without talking to people of God to have their own impressions on what they think about ex-prisoners. According to a Reverend father of the Catholic denomination, ex-prisoners should still be considered as normal citizens. Going to prison does not mean one should be looked down upon. He said so because the bible stipulates that when one has been punished for a crime, then he has to be forgiven. To him, these prisoners are just being human like any other human being who is liable to mistakes. The Reverend told us he usually go to the Kondengui Central Prison every Sunday mornings at times for mass or to reader other services.

According to educationalists, any Cameroonian or individual in general can go to prison but not all can take to corrections which can help them re-integrate easily into society. This was gathered from teachers who taught in the juvenile delinquency section of the Kondengui Central Prison. To them, some prisoners are so heady while in prison that it is not when they will be liberated that they will not still fall prey to crimes. Some few economists we came across looked at ex-prisoners especially those who were convicted for stealing as people who will continue to steal. To them, *'a tiger can never get ride, of its black spots'*. This meaning that, once you are a thief, you will always have traces of theft running through your veins.

According to them, it will be very difficult for ex-convicts to handle money issues.

Few groups were interviewed and one of them was an association *'njangi group'*, cultural name withheld. They said that they cannot confide any financial post to an ex-convict for security reasons. To them, accepting him in their group was already a very big step. Finally, some few people were randomly cited in the streets and were asked what they thought about ex-prisoners or prisoners in general. These street people believed an ex-convict remains a defaulter and a social misfit no matter what happens. This was however contrarily to what was seen on the field. Some of the ex-prisoners (11 of them) did not behaved in conformity with the description we had from street interviews.

Family Treatment and Effects

Not only the society's altitude had to be taken into consideration but that of the family too which was in line with our major concerns. An English saying which states that *'charity begins at home'* helped a lot. If after serving years upon years in prison far from your family, and on release back the family is well placed to welcome or reject you. The family's altitude turned to be one of the determining factors for a successful re-integration or the contrary. Of all 15 informants, 4 after being release from prison were rejected by their families, the 11 others were accepted back into their families; hence after all *'home is home'*. It can be concluded that the failure for the proper re-integration into the society of the remaining 4 came as a result of their family's rejection. It is known that the family is a place where one has to feel happy and at home. When it comes a time when the family has no respect and attention for you especially when released from prison, one becomes very disappointed and loses hope in every bit of thing around him. Some informants who were rejected by their families found things very difficult. An example could be seen with one of our 25 years old informant whose family even after serving 9 months in prison, the parents still did not want to accept her, despite the fact that they are not only christians but charismatic ones of that matter. A Christian is that person who has to forgive, since the questioning of why this parent will not forgive her. So committing an unauthorised abortion is disobeying God. They will not condole with such an act. The prove being that she has learned hair dressing as she was released, the person promising to open a hair dressing saloon for her is her uncle not the parents who are really wealthy.

Amongst the 11 others who had no problems with their families on return gradually but successfully got themselves into daily activities which occupied them and made life a new one again apart from the to and fro movements in prison. The researcher also discovered that amongst these 11 ex-prisoners, they were about four family heads that involved married men

who kept behind their wives and children before going to prison. Some told us that just the welcome they had from their families was already a big step to good re-integration. An example can be drawn from one of our informants, the oldest amongst others (45years), who now resides at Etoug- Ebe quarters in Yaounde. Though he sold a piece of land to two different people, it was not his fault and his family confirmed that too. The first buyer disappeared for years and its only four years after that he resold the land that the first buyer came back and claimed his money. Since he could not produce the money that is why he went to prison. To his family, that is, wife and children, that was not a crime, so they supported their father up till the day of release reasons for the welcome party. Its because his family was always with him that he never felt the five years he spent in prison were long, while some people will look at these five years for being life imprisoning.

Impact of Serving Prison Terms to Ex- Prisoners

In so far as ex-prisoners are concerned, re-integration has a role to play either to their success or to their failure in life. They are positive as well as negative consequences.

Positive Consequences

Despite the fact that ex-prisoners are regarded as social misfits, the prison however has got something to offer to them. Some positive merits singled out can be analysed below. Information gathered from informants or ex-prisoners showed that when one goes to prison, he has gone to another world where he has to obey. And if you obey, it means you are somebody who can acquired new knowledge. An informant who learned how to weave at least makes some monies out of it. Had it been while in prison, he didn't make use of his time, then he would have worked at a lost both on the number of years spent and for nothing too. People who had never dream of fabricating shoes now can burst of it. It should also be noted that one can make so much money from such trades. And with this, they are acquainted with active life and hence know how to manage their lives in general.

Moreso, some came out of prison with the notion of an existing God. They become God-fearing so much such that they believe everybody, is that way. An example can be seen with one of our ex-prisoners who after serving his prison terms, he expected that the family will forgive him. To him, his going to prison was already enough punishment for the act he committed "rape" but that was not enough in the eyes of his family. However he knows that there is a supreme being somewhere, he will not commit this crime again.

In addition, someone who had served prison terms can be well placed to compare the two different worlds. That is, life inside the prison where there is no liberty and life outside. Many of the informants called it "*la onzième province*", referring to the Kondengui

Central Prison. All of our fifteen (15) informants said the prison was not a place to be, let alone the so many crimes that are still committed inside. Outside you have the freedom of nearly everything as an ordinary citizen too but inside, you cannot have that freedom. The way of life in prison is quite different from that outside. In short, there are two worlds apart. Last but not the least, the prison help to adjust social misfits. A conscious person who had been to prison turns to be more careful than ever. To him, going back to prison becomes a nightmare.

Negative Consequences

The prison especially the Kondengui Central Prison is not that place where one has to be proud to have been part of. This was gathered from some of informants that their friends and families have lost confidence in them. They are no longer respected even though they have been punished for their respective crimes. We know that when your family lost confidence in you, life becomes very difficult not to talk of the society and friends. At times when the family fails you, you might think of friends but at the time where you have no friends, everything is at its disillusioned point. And because of this, you turn not to have self-control. There are some acts that you pose or words that you say before regretting after. This lack of self-confidence is too bad for it can take you back to prison. Some prisoners on release came with bad health problems. Some because of the food they had been eating which gave them alimentary intoxication, some had gastric ulcers because they have not been eating at all. Some of them because of their flirtatious attitudes while in prison contacted STD's, tuberculosis and even AIDS. In short, when out of prison, it takes time for a prisoner to be balanced up especially one who had spent a good number of years in there.

Moreso, when you pass through the prison, your certificate of non-conviction is already soiled. You can never change it and this brings you so many setbacks in life. For example, some companies do not employ people with stained backgrounds, that is, they always study one's documents very well before employment. Out of 15 informants, 8 lost their jobs when they came back from prison. It is seeing how devastating it can be when one had served prison terms. Last but not the least, after serving prison terms, some of our informants complained of being poverty stricken. This we gathered from one informant who said, "*Since I came out, it has not been easy both with friends and family. I come from a very poor family, we barely eat to survive and my father had emptied all his pockets to get me out from prison. Up till now, things are still difficult for us. I still have the few friends I had before, though some look at me as if going to prison makes one an outcast in the society*". His confession came to confirm the fact that poverty turns to be one of the problems that ex-prisoners faced especially when they are being liberated.

Some of these stories are referring to information that was not given by informants but do apply to ex-prisoners, grouping into case histories. As an ex-prisoner once after release came back and discovered that his wife had a new born baby. She had a new man in her life and the man was staying right in his own house, a house he has built with his own money. His children turned to look at the man as their father. Not only this man was younger than him but he was financially upright. So now that he had nothing to offer to them, he was not even allowed to enter his own house. He had to go back to the village to rest and when he came back, one of his friends offered him lodging while waiting.

Another case was that of a man who had so much property that is; land, a flourishing business and enough money in his account. While in prison, the younger brother took care of everything, he controlled all entries in the supermarket, in short, he had confidence in the brother who sold everything both in the super market, lands, emptied his account and disappeared. He finally got news that his younger brother wasn't still in the country. The shock was too much for him, he went on a coma for some weeks. He recovered and after some few days finally died of cardiac failure. It is also believed that some prisoners after serving prison terms come out as hardened as ever. There in prison; they have learned how to smoke cigarettes as well as indian herb or even marijuana. Some even come out as full homo-sexual and go around harassing and corrupting young boys'. These type of people are very dangerous to the society because they can do anything in order to attain their objectives.

Looking at the host of reasons analysed in this article, one can depict that the family turns to play a major role in ex-prisoner re-integration. Some prisoners when liberated make good use of the knowledge or trainings gotten while in prison. The fact is that serving prison terms has got positive as well as negative impacts on the ex-prisoner. From the analysis acquired from these ex-prisoners, one begins to ask questions on knowing if the government or NGO's can make efforts to help these ex-prisoners in their re-integration process. Maybe the workshops that they had while in prison were government's own efforts to help them as one of our informants said. He stated: "*The government as I can say is trying to do something especially with the small training courses being offered in prison. I believe that if you learn a trade inside, then you can make good use of it when you come out if you are serious*". From what the above informant said, one could also believe that the provision of employment to these prisoners while on release from prison is crucial to reducing the risk of recidivism, nevertheless, it cannot be minimised.

One of the avowed objectives of the penitentiary system is to prepare the prisoner for better

rehabilitation by developing his capacities to take care of himself during and after his period of imprisonment. This is to facilitate the return of the prisoner into the society or the community. But with the means at the disposal of the penitentiary administration, one wonders whether this is possible. Here one thinks of the theme of recidivism. Because of this recidivist system, NGO's and national bodies become interested in ex-prisoner's re-integration.

The rehabilitation of prisoners and ex-prisoners turns to be one of their greatest goals, that is, to reform and rehabilitate and also create deterrence. They attain this objective by the acquisition of vocational skills in different domains, for future sustainability, with particular emphasis on women, youths and children thus alleviating poverty. This also helps them to bridge the gap between the prisoners and their estranged families, carrying out children and mother care projects in conjunction with the social affairs services.

One NGO stroke our attention, that is, the "Prison Fellowship" based in Yaounde that helps prisoners reintegrate. In order to enable this organisation attain these goals, they employed some programmes to come out with successful results. They engaged in prison evangelism, instructions and paid regular visits to prisoners especially those prior to be released. To these prior released prisoners, they give them counselling and support. They also give them after care and family assistance whenever necessary. It should be noted that these programmes may include those of simple volunteers. Prison Fellowship after release; propose volunteer recruitment and training to ex-prisoners. All these in order to facilitate the placement of skilled prisoners and to have a follow up of ex-prisoners with human rights groups so as to guarantee their re-insertion into society. One other interesting programme in the organisation has is to lobby for training and placement of children of prisoners. It should be recalled that during our passage in the Central Prison, some who did not have understanding families, their children were followed up and taken to the Ministry of Social Welfare. It should not also be forgotten that the follow up of these ex-prisoners is with other human rights groups in a bit to guarantee their rehabilitation into the society.

From the activities of these people, one could conclude that they not only spend much time with the prisoners and ex-prisoners but that they do a lot as it comes to ex-prisoner's re-integration into the society. The voluntary training turns to be one of their biggest goals which of course are worth mentioning. Nevertheless, we are still attached to them because they are concerned with the welfare of ex-prisoners be them children or adults.

That not with standing the involvement of the community seems to be of crucial importance. They have as mission to work closely with the criminal justice system, the public and families to improve on the conditions and lives of prisoners, ex-convicts, affected families and crime victims. They also aspire to be captains in the lives of offenders committed to their objectives. They are instrumental in steering ex-prisoners towards being responsible citizens, with the help of their families and the community, thus creating a secure and exemplary atmosphere between convicts, ex-convicts and the society. Going through their aims and objectives, their work is centred on the preparation of prisoners and rehabilitation of these prisoners when out. They believe that offenders have to be reformed, spiritually, socially and economically so that on discharge from prison, they can become law abiding being useful to themselves and the society. Thus the greatest objective should be considered because it does not only concern people whose lives have been affected by crime but it concerns the entire society. This is so because whether released persons have been rehabilitated or simply hardened by their horrible experiences in prison, it has a direct impact on people's peace of mind and their safety. That is why the society has a very big role in rehabilitating these ex-offenders, by welcoming them rather than stigmatising them. They dispense moral doctrine to prisoners, ex-prisoners, crime victims and their families in order to accelerate reformation and restore hope in them. This is so because most prisoners are always in the state of disillusionment. By so doing, they make it clear to prisoners that, the punishment meant by the penitentiary refers to the deprivation of liberty and nothing more.

DISCUSSION

Re-integration of prisoners into society continue to be a point of concern. In a presentation, Dominique Ngoe- Ngalla in "*L'hypothèse de l'inexistence du carcéral dans l'Afrique précoloniale...*", says that the Congolese traditional philosophy sees man as being greater than his faults and weaknesses and so should not be disgraced. Be he free or slave, and despite the crimes that diminish him as Man, a man remained a man and the community had the obligation to rehabilitate and re-integrate him and make him find back his equilibrium. Man could thus be imposed all sorts of punishment, but to lock him up was destroying him. His text raises a lot of questions in our minds about the sustainability of survival strategies.

Carlos Santiago Nino in "*The Ethics of Human Rights*", sees punishment and prison as an unpleasant but compulsory deprivation of rights that serves man effectively of social protection against greater harm. To him, punishment is necessary in society because the law would be disrespected without punishment attached to it. The fact that Carlos deals mostly on punishment and its definition turns not to be so involved in our domain of the penitentiary nevertheless he makes us know that

one has to be punished in prison according to his crime. He contradicts himself again because he sometimes condemns the use of punishment in prison but alongside says it is an effective means of social protection against greater harm.

Writing on the rehabilitation of criminals of America, (1978), Bennett Lawrence, in his book titled "*Counseling in Correctional Environments*", thinks that most of today's correctional institutions lack the ability and programmes to rehabilitate the criminals of America. He can predict that a prisoner held for two, four, eight or ten years, then released, still with no education, will still have disadvantages. For instance, members of the group might not be as open or show emotion because they want to appear "tough". He proposes '*halfway houses*' as another type of correctional centre used for rehabilitation. Halfway houses are usually located in residential communities and are aimed to keep offenders in the community. This means that they are halfway between the community and the prison. We become very interested in his work especially the fact that he proposes other measures which can help prisoner re-integration which is our concern.

This idea is also echoed by Florence Bernault in her study titled "*Enfermement, prisons et châtements en Afrique: Du 19e siècle à nos jours.*". As far as she is concerned, punishment in West Africa was based on reparation and amendment which thus leads to a good re-integration in the society. The compensation of the victim was to the African eye more important than punishing the guilty. The linkages amongst man, crime, ancestors, God and punishment therefore constitute the underlying factor that shaped the African philosophy of punishment which is slightly different from the western one. Though her work does not carry substantial information on our focus, nevertheless, it acts as a guide to our study.

An author worth mentioning is Tom O'Donnell, (2002), who wrote on "*The Re-integration on Prisoners*", where he handled the issue of rehabilitation. To him, one of the problems facing the prison institution in Ireland is the problem of re-integration of former prisoners into the community. He recommends that a fixed percentage of the overall prison budget should be set aside specially for re-integrating measures both in the prison and in the wider community. He also says that post-release supervision and support are essential if individuals are not to resume criminal activity upon their return to the community. He questions the essence of prison as a form of punishment. To him, there is a need for a fundamental change of focus to make prison the option of the last resort, to be used sparingly and only when other options have been tried and ruled out. The author's diversified interpretations of issues related to

imprisonment and re- integration equally gave us an insight on how to analyse similar situations in our area.

Our endeavours in this article share certain aspects with Andre Tatchouang's study. He feels that, since most prisoners are disappointed and frustrated persons, bad prison conditions only make them worse. Their psychological well-being would therefore be greatly improved through methods of rehabilitation into society after prison term. These methods must be followed by post penal social reinsertion centres. Tatchouang also argues that the greatest solution to the problem of crime lies in the improvement of living conditions in the society because the prisoner is only a victim of the unfavourable social milieu in which he finds himself. He echoes in his book titled "*Techniques et strategies d'animation en milieu carcéral*". He gives us a very important work despite the fact that he does not clearly show us that there cannot be a 'cause' without an 'effect'.

Still based on our secondary data, Wolff N., (2005), in his study on "*Community re-integration of prisoners with mental illness: a social investment perspective*", where he feels that responding effectively and efficiently to the needs of persons with mental illness returning to the community from prison requires identifying their needs and differences. This while placing their difficulties upon return and targeting re-integration investments to reflect these differences. We equally share this idea and so his work is of great importance to us since it deals with the return to normal life after prison.

The society's negative perceptions and impressions on ex-prisoners make re-integration difficult. Nevertheless, they still succeeded as has been seen in this article. In every scientific study, there is always some *knowledge gained* from it, without wish, then the work is lacking in some aspects. From this article, the following lessons were drawn. The family is the determinant factor that works towards a successful re-integration of an ex-prisoner. When an ex-prisoner is rejected by the family, frustration starts at that time and it becomes very difficult for him to cope with societal demands and life in general. Secondly, we learnt from ex-prisoners that having been a prisoner does not mean losing hopes. If they did not pray and hope for their liberation, they would have died in prison. They said so because of the psychological torture that one undergone while in prison. If one was not man enough, he might have died because of moral in adaptation.

Moreso, the major problems of ex-prisoners are that of accommodation which have always been neglected by authorities. Finding suitable accommodation is supposed to be one of the priorities addressed as prisoners are at high risk of disadvantage and homelessness on release. We confirmed this with

this report, (Forum Report N° 22, of The National Economic and Social Forum), where a prisoner confessed that; "*I have been in monitory for twenty one months and I have seen countless number of people who are homeless, have completed their sentences, being released and within a couple of months, I have met them back inside*". Last but not the least, we also learnt that the prison can shape, correct an individual as well as destroy him completely. Innocent prisoners come out as hardened criminals and those who committed crimes and were condemned change from the better. This was deduced from the 15 informants where 11 could easily re-integrate.

CONCLUSION

In the present century, prisoners' conditions have become a call for concern. This article dealt on ex-convicts dwelling in Yaounde town and some few convicts inside the prison itself. It lied on the trends that ex-convicts take to properly re-integrate into the family and economy when released back into mainstream society. That is, once an individual has been to prison, he will never be the same again. The society continues to look very low on them. Finally, the consequences of society's perceptions and impressions on ex-prisoners had their own major role to play. From the preceding analysis, it was noticed that the positive consequences outweighed the negative ones. It should be well noted that imprisonment is not the end of man's life. Many people have been released from prison and have become world leaders politically, economically, socially, spiritually or otherwise like the following: KWAME NKRUMA of Ghana, Nelson MANDELA of South Africa; Robert MUGWABE of Zimbabwe, OLESEGUN OBASANJO of Nigeria (most recently) and Charles COLSON, the founder of Prison Fellowship International who was imprisoned during the Water Gate Scandal during the reign of President Richard Nixon in the USA. Those informants who had succeeded in re- integrating themselves in the society are those that have learnt so many things in prison, those able to do petty trades and be independent. If they can occupy themselves as such daily, then they would not risk falling prey to crimes which can lead them to prison again.

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