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Review Article

Traumatic experience and link to others among internally displaced persons during the crisis in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon

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Abstract

According to psychoanalytic bond theory, unconscious alliances, when disrupted, may para-doxically become more entrenched. However, in the face of psychological trauma, a narcissistic re-organization can occur, leading to a disruption rather than a strengthening of these bonds. This study seeks to understand how traumatic experiences alter the underlying structures of interpersonal relationships, disrupting the bond with others in internally displaced persons. To explore this, we conducted a clinical case study using semi-structured interviews with three Internally Displaced Persons from the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon. Data was analyzed using content analysis. Our findings suggest that traumatic experiences can significantly disrupt personality struc-ture. In IDPs, this disruption manifests in alterations to the foundational aspects of interpersonal relationships, leading to an imbalance in their connections with others. The weight of past trauma can hinder adaptive mechanisms, making it difficult for individuals to form and maintain healthy relationships.These results underscore the urgent need for specialized care and support for vulnera-ble IDPs affected by the crisis in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon.

Keywords: crisis; traumatic experience; interpersonal relationships; internally displaced per-sons; unconscious bonds

Introduction:

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the world has been hit by internal crises. These crises are multiplying throughout the world in general, and in Africa in particular. The crisis in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon is part of this trend. In these crises, which tear communities apart and cause whole societies to explode, civilians are not spared and are often forced to move to their own countries, leaving behind their possessions and families. The displaced are regularly subjected to physical and psychological deprivation, leading to numerous difficulties such as the trauma caused by the atrocities they experienced in their home regions. In such living conditions; the option offered to populations in crisis zones is flight, the abandonment of their villages, homes, regions, towns, families, couples and professions to the detriment of villages and towns unaffected by the crisis. Unicef (2019) speaks of more than 885,000 internally displaced people in Cameroon. Unlike refugees, who are protected by international conventions and benefit from various forms of assistance, internally displaced people are not covered by these same texts, and are the subject of much questioning.

Faced with this situation of forced internal displacement, the Cameroonian government has set up strategies to combat the phenomenon. In addition, humanitarian organizations and United Nations agencies are mobilizing to strengthen the capacity to build a climate of trust between the population and them. Despite these efforts, the numbers remain alarmingly high, becoming a source of anxiety and trauma that weakens the ties that bind IDPs together. According to Kaës (2010), the consistency of unconscious alliances is clearer when they fail, but it has been observed among internally displaced people that, when faced with a traumatic experience, the bond with the other becomes unbalanced. We are therefore interested in the function of a traumatic experience on the bond to the other. We want to understand the process of alteration of the organizers of the bond that unbalances the bond to the other in the psychatraumatized internally displaced person.

According to the UN (2019), "more than 437,000 people) fleeing the crisis in the North-West and South-West regions, are currently on the move in Cameroon, including "246,000 in the South-West region, 105,000 in the

North-West region and 86,000 in the Coastal and Western regions". The UNHCR points out that most of the refugees and displaced persons are women and children, who face great "precariousness". "In addition to causing internal displacement in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon, the conflict between the population and the forces of law and order has also forced more than 35,000 Cameroonians to seek asylum in Nigeria. With the fighting continuing, these figures are likely to increase" (UNHCR, 2019). Separation from families is brutal, creating gaps within families. According to Unicef (2019), there are more than 855,000 children in Cameroon. internally displaced people not attending school. Internal displacement is accompanied by gender-based sexual violence. These displacements are also accompanied by psychological disorders. These disorders include a range of pathologies such as depression, bipolar disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder. These pathologies are thought to be caused by the multiple traumatic events that accompany mass displacement (Dougueli, 2019). Guilt is also conscious and overwhelming among some survivors who have lost loved ones or companions during war or torture (Martin, 2015). It is reminiscent of the "survivor's syndrome" (Niederland, 1981) described for those who fled concentration camps, and can also be accompanied by "skepticism, disillusionment and despair" (Grinberg & Grinberg, 1986).

According to the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement drawn up in 1998 by the Special Representative of the Secretary of the United Nations on Internally Displaced Persons, internally displaced persons are defined as persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their place of habitual residence, in particular as a result of armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights violations or man-made natural disasters, and who have not crossed state-recognized international borders (UNHCR and Ecosoc, (1998). This definition highlights the forced and involuntary nature of internal displacement. With this in mind, the Cameroonian government has set up a disarmament commission to address the problem of internal displacement. Humanitarian organizations and United Nations agencies have also set themselves the goal of building capacity to create a climate of trust between the population and them.

Focusing on the same question of connection, Maurin (2018) believes that traumatic experience situates the individual in the normal and the pathological, and has repercussions within the family, on professional functioning and in the subjects' social relationships. From our perspective, the psychologically traumatized internally displaced person's psychic equilibrium is disrupted, and his or her social perceptions are altered. During this traumatic experience, Freud (1919) points out that the functioning of the psychotraumatized accident victim undergoes a real dysfunction, his cognitive structure is reprogrammed and his sensitivity to psychic realities is affected, calling for the reversal of constraints. In this way, we can understand the impact of traumatic experience on the relationship with others in internally displaced persons. Tsoukatou (2005) has shown that, following a rail accident, fraternal, social and professional ties are intensified by a feeling of pity for the victim.

In the same vein of studies on bonding, Maurin (2018) has questioned the effects of trauma on the social bond. Trauma is said to lead to a rupture in the social bond, i.e. a break in the link to others and to the world. In his work, Maurin focuses on the concept of disaffiliation, which has the advantage of breaking away from a concept of loss and introducing a possible reversibility into the logic of the trauma/social bond phenomenon. These studies on bonding lead us to question its origins. According to Kaës (2010), subjects identify with each other and with a

common object in order to bond with each other from the very beginnings of psychic life, and later to form a couple. They are attuned to each other through exchanges parallel to identifications, through encodings that occur below or on the bangs of speech, through phantasmatic resonances and through the various modalities of identifications.

Lachal (2015) shows the major importance of the experience of dissociation at the time of the event, the fact that the traumatic experience, the break-in, is accompanied by the experience of loss, the sensation of reality and a temporary relational rupture that can be relived as in care, with for the displaced person the feeling of not being understood, of being rejected towards his or her isolation. From our perspective, this rejection can be understood as a break between the subject and the group to which he belongs. He sees himself liquidated from his native land. In addition, basic or primary unconscious alliances are the foundation of all bonds. It is one of the early processes and formations of socialization Kaës (2009). The first alliances are the primary or encoding ones, between mother and baby; they are reciprocal and asymmetrical, and involve an environment in which mother and child are included in various ways. Clearly, the bond is important for both the subject and the group to which he or she belongs. The bond is like a "facetted mirror" that serves as a model for every subject in the group (Joubert, 2004). To this end, the bond enables each subject to feel sheltered from the world, to establish unconscious agreements (negative pacts, secrets). These agreements bring subjects closer and closer together, enriching partnerships.

Faced with traumatic experiences, the subject of the bond is disinvested from his or her love objects, and the ego that was supposed to protect the subject from external anguish becomes his or her own persecutor. This creates a double ego-cleavage. Because the first cleavage relates to the initial trauma, and the second to the second, the ego becomes a source of anxiety for the displaced person; the loss of human heritage and the loss of landmarks impact the displaced person's psyche. This, in turn, makes it difficult for the displaced person to fit into a new psychic space. Following Bayle (1996), echoed by Joubert (2004), our interviews revealed that, in the face of psychic trauma, unconscious alliances become unbalanced, whereas, according to Kaës' theory (2010), in the face of psychic and societal catastrophes, unconscious alliances become more solid.

Methodology

It should be recalled that the study population in this work is the internally displaced people of the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon. To carry out this study, we chose an integrated health center in the city of Yaoundé: the "trauma center". This is a private health center working on the issue of internal displacement in Central Africa in general, and in Cameroon in particular. The trauma center is located in the Biyem-Assi district of Yaounde, in the center of Cameroon. Our participants come from these two regions. We have also drawn up selection criteria for our participants. We will be using a rigorous method to select the participants. Before meeting the selection criteria, participants completed the post-traumatic stress disorder checklist scale by Weathers F.W et al in 1993. This study uses both test and interview techniques. This research is appropriate in the context of our study, because it places great emphasis on revealing the subjectivity of subjects, and on describing and explaining clinical phenomena through verbal data (Fernandez and Pedinielli, ibid.). We chose the case study method to achieve our objectives.

Semi-structured interviews provide us with a wealth of information about internally displaced people in post-traumatic stress situations, as well as

enabling us to grasp the meaning that internally displaced people give to their traumatic experience. It is also a question of grasping the meaning they give to relationships with those around them (Fortin 2006). Interviews were conducted with three Internal Displaced Persons using a semi-structured interview guide. Content analysis was selected as the most appropriate approach for this study. Two complementary approaches will be used. On the one hand, we will use thematic analysis, and on the other, sequential analysis.

The analysis will be cross-sectional. We will identify the points of convergence and divergence between the narratives collected. As Fortin (2010) points out, we will codify the content of each interview according to the issues addressed. In the first instance, all the content will be grouped according to pre-established themes. The entire content will then be meticulously reviewed in order to make a finer coding by identifying the units of meaning. Each unit of meaning will be classified according to the theme to which it corresponds. Sequential analysis will also be used in this research as a complement to thematic analysis. This analysis technique deals with the sequence of events experienced by the subject and their repercussions according to his or her own reading (Brunelle et al., 2002). These interviews will be conducted in strict compliance with the ethical code of social science research.

Ethical considerations: This study highlights the traumatic experiences and family situations of internally displaced persons (IDPs), allowing us to investigate the impact of these traumatic experiences on the organizers of the bond. We are aware that conducting interviews with IDPs may evoke painful memories, which is why we deemed it necessary to obtain their informed consent and explain the objectives of this study. These interviews allowed us to identify not only what was said but also the unspoken emotions expressed during the sessions. Participants were free to choose the language they felt most comfortable using to express their experiences.

This study offers a benefit to participants, as the interviews provide an opportunity for IDPs to verbalize their psychological suffering. Follow-up support was offered to those who wished to explore their distress further. The names used in the study are pseudonyms and do not correspond to the participants' real names.

3- Findings

Within the framework of this research, we worked with 03 participants who gave their consent to take part in this study.

The Emma case: Emma is a 47-year-old adult from the North West (Bamenda). He is a veterinary doctor, a profession he has been practicing for 14 years. He comes from a monogamous family of which he is the eldest of 8 children, he is internally displaced by the crisis. He has been in Yaoundé for 9 months. To be selected as a participant in this study, the Pcls (post-traumatic stress scale) was administered to Emma. He obtained a score of 53, reflecting the presence of moderate post-traumatic stress.

The Tati case: Tati, 30 years old, is a teacher, married, mother of 2 children, eldest of 15 siblings. She is originally from the North-West region (Bamenda), she is internally displaced by the crisis. To be selected as a participant in this study, the Pcls (post-traumatic stress scale) was administered to Tati. Tati obtained a score of 65, reflecting the presence of severe post-traumatic stress.

The Doudou case: Doudou aged 21 is a student in a high school in the city of Yaoundé, orphan of both father and mother, third in a family of

05. She is originally from the South-West region (Buea). To be selected as a participant in this study, the Pcls (post-traumatic stress scale) was administered to Doudou. Doudou obtained a score of 54, reflecting the presence of moderate post-traumatic stress.

We carried out the analysis on the basis of three themes: traumatic experience, dynamic traumatic experience/imbalance of the connection to the other and the intersubjective connection. The psychological trauma in the present study occurred in the participants following the experience of the crisis in the North-West and the South-West. This trauma is the result of many traumatic factors including: killings, kidnappings, ambivalence, losses and exposure to the reality of death. The events that caused the trauma in Emma, Tati, Doudou are not the same despite the similarities. For Emma, it involves material losses, kidnappings, killings, loss of human life. For Tati, it is also about killings, beatings, kidnappings, loss of human life, exposure to the reality of death and ambivalence. In Doudou, it is about the tragic assignment of his parents, family abandonment and exposure to the reality of death.

The study allowed us to see the feeling experienced by internally displaced people. These feelings are: the feeling of helplessness, the feeling of vulnerability, the feeling of sadness, the feeling of guilt, the feeling of hopelessness and the feeling of shame. On the other hand, that internally displaced people experience a lack internally within themselves. From the participants' speech, psychological trauma comes from four sources: the killings experienced and heard (the beatings and kidnappings), the affects, the ambivalence and the losses of human and material life. These results show that these events were experienced with very high intensity and this is accompanied by difficulty in verbalizing, lack of interest in life, lack of interest in family relationships, the astonishment, the despair, the lack they feel.

-Traumatic experience

According to Mowrer's model (1996), exposure to a traumatic event (unconditional stimulus) provokes strong reactions on the motor, physiological, emotional and cognitive levels of the individual. These events produce a reduction in fear. When the person flees phobic events, this could reduce their anxiety. As the displaced Emma points out: "*I go there more for fear of going to relive these events again.*" This model helps explain the strong anxious reactions found in IDPs presenting with psychological trauma when confronted with a neutral stimulus. This is the case for Doudou: "*even here in Yaoundé, when I see a soldier, I am afraid.*" People who have experienced trauma have a rearrangement of their psychological balance. For example, in Emma's functioning, we note the inability to get back into the bond to share the realities of the bond. Because it testifies to his great insecurity in being there. Furthermore, Mowrer's conditioning model (1993; 1998) emphasizes the phobogenic nature of perceived characteristics, a traumatic event can be the origin of a violent and unexpected emotion, there is then a structure of fear pathological establishment which would be at the origin of the modification of beliefs in an individual and the creation of new cognitive patterns.

From the modification of these cognitive patterns, we note that following a traumatic experience, the personality of the subject undergoes modifications which are at the origin of the upheaval of his psychological reality, which endangers his reality in the bond. According to the model mentioned by Horowitz (1976; 1996), psychological trauma is due to an excess of information received during the traumatic event. The maintenance of the disorder here would be the consequence of the

inability to integrate previous cognitive schemas with new schemas. This inability emerges in Emma's story: "*in Bamenda, when it is not a police officer who asks you for the card, it is a civilian like you who asks you for it (...) you cannot stay at home without being constantly worried. It's a total panic situation.*" According to the Chamtob et al (1998) model, people who have experienced traumatic and threatening situations are carefully activated. This activation will be controlled by an inhibitory action sent by the incompatible nodes, which would lead to a danger threat reaction. In a case of psychological trauma, intrusive thoughts and images are cascaded by the cascade activation of the higher nodes of the threat of danger to the lower nodes representing the elements associated with it (emotions, thoughts and behaviors). The feedback loop helps explain the hypervigilance and hyperactivity observed in subjects suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. The experience of victimization causes a significant change in the victim's self-image. This important change can be noted in Emma's words. He says: "I*'m a little down on myself because there are times when I have to visit a sister or brother before I'm sure I'm going to have what I can eat. Sometimes I even have to beg someone to help me with 500 or 1000F, that wasn't what I did at the time, I went back like a kid".*

-Dynamics of traumatic experience/imbalance of connection to others

Based on the writings of Kaes (2009), unconscious alliances constitute the foundation of the psychic reality of the link and that of the subject of the link, they accomplish several functions, in particular that of guarantor of the metapsychic framework. Among the unconscious alliances; we have the primary alliances which are the principle of all links. The link itself is a more or less stable movement of investments, representations and actions which associate two or more subjects in the accomplishment of certain psychic realities that they could not obtain alone: fulfillment of desires, construction of representations (Kaes, 2010). From this conception of Kaes, we cannot live outside the connection. This regulatory function of the link gives rise to questions that go well beyond the individual in a situation of psychological trauma and thus touches the interactional dimension of the individual psychotraumatized by the crisis.

In a crisis situation, the metapsychic guarantors find themselves in difficulty and push the subject towards their isolation which leads them to move to seek a new psychic balance because they no longer share the same thoughts of the group. To properly support these remarks, it is appropriate to question the organizers of the link following a traumatic experience. The function of the link organizers is to organize the link. Unconscious alliances constitute the foundation of the psychological reality of the bond (Kaes, 2009). To make the connection, subjects must identify with each other, find common objects and common traits. In the narcissistic contract, an individual is himself his own end and is at the same time a member of the chain to which he is subject. The negative pact is at the base of the link, it is an organizer of the link made up of two polarities, an organizing one (allowing the link to be organized on unconscious representations aimed at satisfying desires) and the other defensive polarity which is organized on the denied, the repressed and the rejected. Following a traumatic experience, we witness a personality upheaval, which will be at the origin of the alteration of the organizers of the link. This alteration of the organizers of the link which is accompanied by the internal displacement of the psychotarumatized person thus calls into question the psychic organization of the personality of the psychotramatized person. As evidenced by Emma's words: "*...so I see that, even if I cry, even if I think too much, even if I no longer have friends*

(...), what I have to do is to rebuild my life ". The experience of the crisis will then give rise to an attempt to reconstitute the broken balance and an idea of reconstruction and conquest of new friends. On this subject, Emma relates: "yes I have to try to adapt and build good relationships again with the animal breeders (…) also for the family, it's complicated, everyone has taken their own path ". In doing so, let's examine the psychotraumatized person's connection to others.

-The intersubjective connection

Let us return to our psychoanalytic theory of the bond from Kaës (2010) which relies on the organizers of the bond to maintain balance, bind, and organize the bond. We noted that when the organizers of the link are bankrupt, there is a balance between the link and the other. Indeed, it appears that in a crisis situation, and when this crisis leads to an internal shift, a rearrangement of the psychological balance takes place. From this psychological rearrangement, we note a profound alteration of the organizers of the link (narcissistic contract, negative pacts, unconscious alliances), which are responsible for regulating the link. This alteration leads to an imbalance in the bond with the other. This relational upheaval depends on the variations of the link to the other: there is an impasse which is created in the organizers of the link. The bond undergoes an imbalance (the family bond, the narcissistic bond, the fraternal bond, the filiation bond), which then explains the words of Tati who declares: "*I am in Yaoundé, I can no longer visit my family , I can't even try, because if I go there, my life is in danger (...) now I can no longer see a brother, a sister or even colleagues.*" The loss of heritage constitutes, for an internally displaced person, a wound which very profoundly affects their identity and also the nature of the relationships they maintain with those around them.

In a cultural approach, family takes on its full meaning. This is how we explain the seriousness of the feeling of loss of family ties among displaced people who have lost acquaintances, parents, and also their jobs, and it is these people who, sometimes against all evidence, hope always recover this heritage even if it is in an uncertain future. Awareness of the future for internally displaced people depends on their experiences. Particularly for the displaced who have lost their parents, there is a despair for the future, and a lack of interest in daily activities. This is justified by the fact that he is not yet adequately integrated into the host environment, it is due both to the fallout from the successive displacements suffered by the majority of people and to the situation which has remained unstable for a long time leading to the total panic and ambivalence of feelings between each other. From the speeches of the participants, we can see that both women and men describe the North-West and the South-West as no longer habitable and speak of the permanent insecurity experienced in this part of Cameroon. These people suffer wounds within a community which also heals its wounds and attempts to rebuild their lives, their relationships with others, and their revitalization. We also note this emptiness, these desires and paternal love lost by them. It is then these that the displaced person has lost and that he needs to find in order to be reborn and to realize himself, they need to insert themselves into a social network and into a new psychic space.

Discussion

Our results showed that the traumatic event is accompanied by the experience of a feeling of helplessness, unhappiness, relivings and being confronted with the reality of death. These results are in the same direction as Crocq's (1999) study on trauma. For him, the specificity of the traumatic event is accompanied by the feeling of fear, horror and

helplessness. Our results also match those of Lebigot (2015) for whom a traumatic event is a direct encounter with the reality of death and the work of Louville (ibid.) who thinks that individuals experience traumatic events in different ways. It is the way in which individuals will react which will give the traumatic character to this event. In this study our three participants met these conditions. Furthermore, our results also go in the same direction as those of Louville (2013) for whom psychotraumatized patients manifest symptoms of reliving, the central characteristic of psychotrauma. For reliving symptoms we have: Spontaneous or stimulus-triggered, repetitive, involuntary, and overwhelming memories of the event causing distress and composed of images, emotions, or sensory perceptions. Repetitive dreams relating to the event causing distress.

Our results corroborate with those of Millan (2015) in that internally displaced people need psychological assistance. The link between the sudden event and the movement is complex and can have two meanings as evidenced by our results. They still go in the same direction as those of Feril (2015). For him, the events suffered by IDPs create a sort of emotional shock and personality disorders. Regarding the types of trauma, our results are in the same direction as those of Herman (1997) for whom complex trauma can be at the origin of profound changes in the victim's personality and his relationships with himself and others. We also found the same results as Terr (1999) for whom type 1 trauma can have long-term consequences, itself causing psychological or even traumatic suffering. Thus a person injured during an attack may retain a disability. Also, we speak of type 2 trauma when the subject has been exposed to the traumatic event repeatedly, an event occurs chronically or abusively.

Our study showed the imbalance of the bond with the other which is due to the alteration of the organizers of the bond in the face of psychological trauma. This study shows how a traumatic experience contributes to the alteration of the organizers of the link and extends to the life of the subject of the link. The results go in the same direction in certain studies which have shown the consequence of a traumatic experience on family, social and professional ties. This work is in line with that of Kaes (1984) for whom a serious narcissistic injury in one member of the link causes significant suffering in the other members of the link. This bond takes different forms depending on whether we are talking about the fraternal bond, the narcissistic bond and the denial pact. This work also goes in the same direction as the work of Pinel in (1809) on the denaturation of the link among train accident victims.

Our results also agree with those of Kasparain et al (1995) who show that displacement can cause a disorganization of responsibilities and roles within the family. The changes imposed by the new situation will often disrupt traditionally well-established situations. These changes can affect social positions and alter the power of those involved; they can result in the hiring or resignation of people, taking into account the heaviness of the tasks in carrying out the roles. The authors approach the notion of psychological trauma as a destroyer of the person which is similar to intentional and relational trauma (Chakraoui, 2015). The work of this author goes well with ours; among our participants, an alteration of the relationship with others emerges. The concordance of our results and those of previous studies does not differ.

Our study also shows that negative attitudes towards foreigners in the host group delay their integration and prevent social cohesion. With our results, we are in the same direction as those of Kasparain et al (ibid.), for whom, the links with the inhabitants of the place of origin have endured changes, those, thanks to the hostilities which were at the origin of the

movement. This work also highlights the fact that the link with the inhabitants of the same place of origin is increasingly broken. This work is in the same direction as ours. Furthermore, we can emphasize that our results do not deviate from those of Auberet (1994) and Granjon (2005) for whom, the injury of a family member leads to family suffering. This suffering corresponds to a disconnection of links, to an unsupporting of individual or group psychic spaces, to a loss of filial anchoring, that is to say family dysfunction. It is about the psychological suffering of each person, an anxiety linked to the dissolution of the bond of family belonging and the feeling of loss of identity and the despair which will overtake each member of the family.

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to understand the process of alteration of the organizers of the link which unbalances the link to the other in the psychatraumtized internally displaced person. The method used was the clinical method, more precisely the case study method. We chose our participants based on the inclusion criteria and the score obtained on the Weathers et al. trauma scale. These participants were 47 years old, 30 years old and 21 years old, respectively. It should be noted that we had two participants from the North-West and one participant from the South-West Cameroon. We noted that in the face of psychological trauma, there is an alteration of the organizers of the link, a renunciation of the narcissistic contract, the negative pact and the unconscious alliances, which find themselves bankrupt. This alteration of these link organizers leads to an imbalance in the existing links between the subjects and their families. We nevertheless noted that this connection to others has suffered a blow and the IDPs are experiencing an emotional family gap linked to the experience of the crisis. In addition, there is also a feeling of helplessness and betrayal among them. This study highlights the need for psychological care for internally displaced people in post-traumatic stress situations. This study is of particular interest for Cameroon in the constitution of its current society on the sidelines of internal displacements and in the prevention of conflicts which could arise again. To continue to carry out studies on the link, a study is possible on the experience of sexual hostages of separatists and the couple bond. On the other hand, it is possible to carry out a study over a long period on the process of resilience of internally displaced patients and their reconstruction on a psychological level. Here, this research will aim to investigate the process of resilience that internal IDPs bring into play to be able to rebuild themselves. It should also be emphasized that a study is possible on the study of the couple bond among sexual hostages of the crisis in NW and SW Cameroon.

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