

Retirement: Outline of a sociology of the vulnerability of civil servants at the end of their working life in Cameroon

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Résumé: Au Cameroun, le moment de départ à la retraite pour les agents publics est généralement perçu comme le début de tous les problèmes. En effet, ces acteurs sociaux et professionnels ayant servi l'Etat à différents niveaux rencontrent souvent de nombreuses difficultés à la fin de leur carrière, faisant ainsi d'eux une catégorie vulnérable de la société. Le présent article tente de dégager les différentes trajectoires qui concourent à créer les conditions de vulnérabilité chez ces anciens fonctionnaires qui subissent tant les lourdeurs du système bureaucratique camerounais que les détournements orchestrés dans les perceptions par ce qui ont la charge de les payer lorsqu'ils sont absents ou décédé. L'hypothèse de fond est que ces anciens agents de l'Etat subissent les affres de leurs concitoyens encore en service, ce qui favorise l'émergence des maladies psychologiques et physiques dans un environnement où, lorsque la retraite n'a pas été minutieusement préparée, le mal-être s'installe progressivement en conduisant inéluctablement à la mort sociale ou biologique. Au prisme du modèle dramaturgique d'Erving Goffman, il s'agit, au terme d'entretiens semi-directifs dont les données ont été analysées par la technique de l'analyse de contenu, de relever la fausse note dans les interactions entre retraités et actifs pour aboutir au principal résultat selon lequel, la signification subjective que les seconds donnent à leurs actions est incomprise, contestée, combattue et subie par les premiers désormais vulnérables.

Mots clés: Etat, Retraités, Agents publics, Vulnérabilité, Interaction sociale.

Abstract: In Cameroon, the timing of retirement for public officials is usually the moment of all problems. Indeed, these social and professional actors who have served the state at different levels of its structures often face many difficulties at the time of their retirement thus making them a vulnerable category of society. The present article attempts to identify the different trajectories that contribute to creating the conditions of vulnerability among these former civil servants, which nevertheless merit particular attention from a State they have served. The underlying assumption is that these former state agents paradoxically suffer the pangs of their fellow citizens still in business, which promotes the emergence of psychological and physical diseases in an environment where, when retirement was not painstakingly prepared, the bad being settles progressively while leading inevitably to the social and biological death. The prism of Erving Goffman's dramaturgical model is, after semi-structured interviews whose data will be analyzed by the technique of content analysis, to note the false note in the interactions between retirees and active to arrive at the main result according to which the subjective meaning that the latter give to their actions is misunderstood, contested, combated and suffered by the first now vulnerable.

Keywords: State, Retirees, Public Agents, Vulnerability, Social Interaction.

1. INTRODUCTION

Retirement is the moment when a professional activity carried out over a long period of time comes to an end. It induces the passage from a state of activity to a state of inactivity. It is a call that follows the decline in the worker's performance as a result of the considerable increase in his or her age (Motaze, 2008). From this point of view, retirement is the moment when the civil servant is called upon to retire from the position he or she has occupied in order to devote himself or herself to rest after good and loyal service. Depending on the field in which they worked in the Cameroonian administration, retired civil servants are called upon to cease this activity once they reach retirement age. On the face of it, retirement is a godsend for civil servants, who will now be able to free themselves from the constraints,

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risks² and side-effects of work³. But they are often far from imagining that their retirement will be the start of a new challenge that will not only pit them against the different administrative levels⁴ involved in processing their retirement applications, but also against the new demands of life, which may require them to cut back on the lifestyle they enjoyed when they were in service. In a Cameroon where economic shortages are endemic (Ela, 1994), this challenge consists in pensioners surviving in an environment where retirement pension applications are blocked or followed up via networks of corruption, which necessarily force them to lose between ten and twenty percent of their pension benefits.

On the other hand, it is also a question of coping with the Cameroonian way of operating when the retired employee plans to collect his pension by cash voucher. Social actors in this administrative environment routinely develop strategies for opaquely using the salaries of retirees who are absent during pay periods to pay them back 'little by little'⁵ when the person concerned or a member of his or her family turns up to collect his or her entitlements. Moreover, speaking of these collections, their daily supplies are sometimes interrupted, which often forces pensioners to wait entire days before being able to collect what they are owed.

However, this does not take into account the social, mental, physical and even psychological status of the retired employee. They are generally elderly, sometimes still with dependents, sometimes living in the village (Ela, 1982), and often unable to survive on the thirty percent that the State grants while waiting for their retirement pension file to be regularised. The failure to complete this file, or the delay in doing so, combined with the administrative hassles and dishonesty of the officials in charge, plunges the pensioner into a permanent nostalgia for the hardships he endured during his working years and makes his state of health precarious. In short, when they stop working, retirees lose their salary and benefits and join the ranks of the destitute, the idle, and, if necessary, are forced to re-socialise in agriculture, animal husbandry or fishing if they still have the strength and, above all, the means. And even those who have prepared for their 'retirement' are not immune to these problems. This creates a psychosis among Cameroonians that traumatizes both those who are no longer working and those who are still working. In any case, when the standard of living decreases, social pressure builds up, and when this is combined with all the empirical problems already mentioned, the retired social actor sinks into vulnerability in all its forms. And this has consequences for themselves, their family and their friends, who also put them under pressure, sometimes provoking conflictual interactions between them and themselves⁶.

The aim of this article is to study the mechanisms by which social vulnerability is constructed among civil servants at the end of their career in Cameroon. The aim is to show that when civil servants are no longer in post, they face problems ranging from the difficulties they encounter in recovering what they are owed, to the constraints imposed on them by the new social configuration in which they find themselves, not to mention the fact that at the end of their working life, they are generally no longer in good health, suffering from minor or major illnesses linked to their age, and these may be aggravated by idleness, need, vice, boredom, stress or marginality. So what are the routes by which social vulnerability is constructed among Cameroonian civil servants at the end of their careers? What are the consequences of this marginality? How can we understand the social interactions that emerge from the dramaturgy observed between workers and retirees, and between retirees and the other actors who come into contact with them on a daily basis? What constraints do retired people face in relation to their new social status?

² With the current state of insecurity in Cameroon, with Boko Haram attacks in the far north and claims of secessionist movements in the north-west and south-west regions, many people feel that it has become very dangerous to join the army, for example.

³ Other sectors of activity, such as teaching, often lead to eye problems among teachers, as well as nerve-related illnesses.

⁴ Supervisory Ministry and Ministry of Finance.

⁵ This is a reimbursement system still referred to as 'the return of the coxage' by the public agents in these perceptions, who know that they are generally covered by their hierarchy on the spot.

⁶ Generally, when retirees return to their village, they are stigmatised by the 'big family' that is supposed to welcome them. It's a time for intrigue and backbiting, centred around all the things the retiree wasn't able to do when they were working.

2. METHODOLOGY

The present work has been carried out through the prism of the dramaturgical model, which emerged in the 1960s as a result of the dynamist and critical current induced by the Frankfurt School. This theory, developed by the American sociologist Erving Goffman following in the footsteps of George Mead, states that social interactions are theatrical representations that pay close attention to the setting in which the actors move, the masks they wear and the roles they play. This model is based on propositions such as: the world is nothing more than a stage on which people, seen as real actors, perform the play of their lives. What's more, in order to interpret their daily lives, actors have at their disposal a symbolic apparatus that Goffman (1973: 29) calls 'the façade', the purpose of which is to help fix the definition of the situation they are trying to define. These façades, which make it possible to dramatise the actors' daily lives, are grouped together in "distinctive signs of function and rank, clothing, sex, age and racial characteristics, height and physiognomy, attitude, manner of speaking, mimicry, gestural behaviour and other similar elements" (Goffman, 1973: 30-31).

From then on, this theoretical model enables the researcher to observe how the players idealise the roles that they themselves occupy or aspire to and to which a certain consideration is associated. This analytical grid allows us to situate the role of social actors still in office in the interaction with retirees. Thanks to this paradigm, we can see that all those who interact with the retirees leave the theatre stage to slip into the second region of the presentation that Goffman calls 'backstage' (1973: 105). This is a place bounded by perceptual obstacles, a space where actors can contradict the impression given in the theatrical presentation. Here, the workers and most of the other day-to-day interactants use the props and elements of the décor to create the conditions for the vulnerability of their former colleagues or for the family member or friend now 'in distress'. They carefully examine each team member's façade and rectify it if necessary. So it's backstage that the social actors still in office cunningly deceive both the agents due to retire and the country's courts. This is where they symbolically take the reins of the political game by introducing 'a false note into the interaction' (Goffman, 1973: 229). A blunder whose effects can be seen at different levels of the exchange. Speaking of the vulnerability of retired people, the false note implies that 'each participant will feel unease, discomfort, a disturbance linked to the questioning of the common reality'. In this case, the embezzlement of pensions, the delays in processing applications for retirement, the marginalisation of pensioners on a daily basis by their own families, or quite simply the involvement of these pensioners in networks of corruption, create a sense of unease that can be seen in the various forms of suffering that they engender in elderly people who are in fragile health and originally had no considerable means to look after themselves.

Data was collected using qualitative techniques. In particular, we made direct observations in three Perceptions in the Central Cameroon Region: Ngoa-Ekellé, Tsinga and Ngoumou. These observations were also made in the vicinity of the Ministry of Finance, where all retirement applications are processed. As Madeleine Grawitz puts it: 'Qualitative methods are human science methods that seek out, explain and analyse visible or hidden phenomena. In essence, these phenomena are not measurable (a belief, a representation); they have the character of human facts' (2001: 345).

We also used semi-structured interviews with pensioners receiving their pensions in the above-mentioned tax offices, as well as with some who were still following up their files at the Ministry of Finance. To bring out the confrontation, we also interviewed the government officials responsible for processing these pensions and those responsible for their payment in the tax offices. In all, we conducted twenty-three interviews before reaching saturation point. As for the interpretation of the data, this was done through the prism of content analysis, which Laurence Bardin (1977: 43) considers to be: '*A set of techniques for analysing communications which aim, through systematic and objective procedures for describing the content of messages, to obtain indicators (quantitative or otherwise) enabling the inference of knowledge relating to the conditions of production/reception (inferred variables) of these messages*'.

Thanks to this technique, we were able to analyse and critically highlight the sociological relevance of the comments made by the various respondents approached through on-site sampling. The material collected enabled us to identify the pathways by which social vulnerability is constructed among civil servants due to retire in Cameroon, a pathway that is largely defined by their fellow citizens, whether or not they are still working. On the other hand, this work also makes it possible to see the status of

vulnerable social agents in Cameroon in order to show that these individuals are divided between disputes, marginality and illnesses that can inevitably lead to death, given their age and sometimes their state of service.

3. THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL VULNERABILITY AMONG CIVIL SERVANTS DUE TO RETIRE IN CAMEROON

The retired civil servant in Cameroon is generally perceived as someone who has left⁷, and who is subjected to injustice by social actors who may or may not still be in service. In a post-colonial environment that favours the domination of man by man (Mbembe, 2000), the interactions between retirees and their 'former collaborators' are generally conflictual and tense. It is at this level that the marginalisation of those who must now leave their fate in the hands of others, without the means or resources to intervene or arbitrate, begins to take shape. When retired civil servants start the procedure to receive their retirement pension in Cameroon, they are in fact socialised into suffering, which can be seen in the formal and informal hassles they encounter in completing their pension files. Even if pensioners systematically receive 30% of their income while waiting for their full pension once their application has been completed, the fact remains that in a Cameroon where the high cost of living is not a mere figment of the imagination, everyone aspires to receive what is rightfully theirs.

So, paradoxically, the investigations carried out show us that several pension files of people called upon to claim their right to retirement who have served in the Cameroonian administration disappear, are not completed or are completed at the sluggish pace desired by those who are generally responsible for processing these files. The first hypothesis to be verified is that a number of retirement pension files are lost between the former supervisory ministry and the Ministry of Finance, which is responsible for evaluating the time taken and facilitating the release of funds. The reasons generally given by administrators are that pensioners *'leave to stay in the village and don't keep track of their files'*⁸. However, according to the pensioners, these lost files are 'calls' intended to direct them towards subcontractors who would lead them to hire the services of a 'facilitator' who would earn a percentage varying between 05 and 20% once the file has been completed. *'When you ask an old man who has served his country to give up part of his retirement pension because you're the one handling his case, you're killing him'*⁹. This information confided to us by this former manager from the Ministry of Youth enables us to understand that, on a voluntary basis, the social players still in post are dragging their feet with the files so that those who have retired can go and *'see'*¹⁰ them. This attitude shows that the interactions are dominated by those who are still in office, who dictate what has to be done in order to quickly receive the payment due. This is also the reason why cases relating to the payment of pensioners' pensions are never brought to a successful conclusion. And when they do, it's after a great deal of negotiation and intervention by the 'various networks' set up for the purpose. In other words, retirees are sometimes forced to give in to the blackmail of public officials and to adopt corrupt practices (Zambo Belinga, 2009) in order to cope with their new social situation. One of our interviewees, who was in his seventies and had worked in the basic education sector, told us that *'when you want something to be done quickly, you sign a written or verbal contract with these people who know the ins and outs of the finance sector. They take charge of moving the file through quickly. And at the time of the transfer, when you go to collect your remainder or your salary, you give them their percentage'*¹¹. For this respondent, these people have the profile of subcontractors, individuals with no official function who use their proximity to the real agents of the Ministry of Finance to swindle pensioners. This exchange, characterised by the lack of any traceability in the follow-up of files, is one of the ways in which it is possible to read the trajectories of social vulnerability of retired public servants.

But this is hardly the only way. There is another even more significant fact that has not escaped the sociologist's attention. We have observed atypical, pathological modes of operation in the places where pensions are paid, specifically the collections, these dismemberments of the public treasury in charge

⁷ The one who has lost all influence within the administration as a result of his departure.

⁸ Interview conducted in May 2018.

⁹ Data collected from a pensioner in May 2018.

¹⁰ In the Cameroonian context, the vocabulary formed around the word 'me voir' generally refers to the corruptive measures that can be taken to speed up a process in a blocked system.

¹¹ Interview conducted in July 2018

of the payment and financial management of pensioners, which constitute levers of vulnerability. Here, vulnerability can be seen first and foremost in the way the State supplies the tax offices. This supply is generally done on a part-time basis, which means that *'when you arrive around the 5th of the month to collect, you are told that there is no more money. You then have to wait for supplies to arrive, or go to the tax collector to get special authorisation for your payment, as the coffers are usually empty at that time'*¹². Mr Abodo, a pensioner at the Ngoa-Ekéle collector's office in the Yaoundé 3^e arrondissement, says that when a pensioner spends a month or more without collecting for health reasons, he can only collect one cash voucher, that for the current month. For the other vouchers, he has to go to the general treasury to get paid. Not to mention the fact that *'at their age, travelling is no longer easy'*¹³.

In the same wake, still in perceptions, there is a phenomenon that is built by public officials with the complicity of their different hierarchy and consists of using money from pensioners regularly absent when paying salaries. The fact of using in pensions for pensioners has actually become commonplace in contemporary Cameroon perceptions. On the ground, a retired lady told us that she did not know that she had to touch in the perception of Ngoumou in the department of Mefou and Akono. She was just following her file in Yaoundé and the day she showed up in Ngoumou three years later with all her cash vouchers to collect her pension, The agents on site dragged her for more than two years before she got all of her money. She told us that the collector was giving her money in a drip because she was part of *"returns to manage"*¹⁴. Implicitly, the collector convinced him not to resort to judicial proceedings and guaranteed the indexed public agent who had to pay the sum of one hundred thousand francs each end of the month until the lady had received everything. The pension payment houses have thus become places of creation of suffering, given that the actors in place engage in the diversion of funds intended to promote the survival of those who served the state to the point of earning the right to retire. Public servants are thus drawing on the resources of pensioners until they come forward to claim their rights. And a dispute ensues which is resolved either by an arrangement or by the intervention of judicial authorities.

In these conditions, the pensioner presents himself as an individual at the mercy of those who have the responsibility to participate in his resocialization as he is called to retrain, change activity or field of work. The arsenal of blockages, consisting of daily hassles that he encounters both in setting up his pension file and in the payment mechanisms by cash vouchers, is a route of marginality relevant enough to redefine the latter's status in society. *«The life of the retired person is not an easy one »*¹⁵ everything happens as if he starts from a situation of stability and prosperity to find himself in a new configuration (Elias, 1991) where public agents, holders of decision-making power ensure that he is contained in a *«prison»* (Foucault, 1975) where they have the monopoly of interactions. This therefore contributes to the construction of suffering among pensioners who must face their respective social status. When the marginality that retirees suffer from those who are still in office is associated with the new social status of these, Generally and somewhat unmistakably, there are reactions of contestation that serve as a lever for frustrations related to poor living conditions and also physical and psychological illnesses.

4. THE CHALLENGES OF BEING A VULNERABLE SOCIAL AGENT: BETWEEN PROTEST, INITIATION TO SUFFERING AND DISEASE

A social agent, different from a social actor, is the one who undergoes social interaction (Bourdieu, 1984). In this perspective, Faced with the marginality that retirees suffer from those who feel they have left, these often respond by social movements and petitions which serve as an instrument or indicator of vulnerability¹⁶. Aware of the loss of their influence in society, pensioners do not hesitate to use their age as a tool to assert their right. Generally inept in the use of social networks and lacking physical and psychological strength to calmly prepare strikes or demonstrations, these people meet on a daily basis and get together to solve individual problems. The protests (Neveu, 1996), induce a relative time-dependent and problem-dependent community (Olson, 1978). A pensioner from the Ngoa-Ekele

¹² Interview conducted in July 2023

¹³ Interview conducted in July 2023

¹⁴ Return is a finance vocabulary used to refer to the repayment of misappropriated money once the owner shows up.

¹⁵ Interview conducted in July 2023

¹⁶ It would simply mean that the person being treated well does not complain.

perception told us that for retirees, *'going down the street is the ultimate remedy. They use signs, get together to invest the revenues when the treasury is slow to supply the cash where they have to touch and it stops at this level when their grievances are satisfied'*¹⁷. Similarly, *"when the collection owes you money and if an agent has used your money in your absence, they must reimburse it to you when you show up to avoid alerting the competent authorities. At our age, we avoid problems as much as possible."*¹⁸ The protest movements are therefore felt when the misnote in interaction (Goffman, 1973) is large, since generally the retiree is an individual who has trusted the system he has served and defended. That's also why he is known to look for holes in the system so he can get what he wants as quickly as possible. It must be said that the retirees are defined here as individuals already adapted and accustomed to the system to the point of mastering all the red even corruption that develops daily; they accept to face despite their age and their limited means.

Thus, pensioners, regardless of the fields in which they worked, are people with limited resources. They no longer have their full salary and the benefits that went with it. The situation of a retired person in a context of precariousness and economic stagnation (Samir Amin, 1973) generally requires a return to the village or at least to his home locality. Even if some of those who say they have been able to prepare for retirement continue to live in the city, it is still a condition that necessarily requires resocialization, new activities that allow, according to one of our respondents *"to drive out anxiety and disease"*¹⁹. And it is at this level that retirees re-experience suffering since it is sometimes painful activities requiring the use of the *«pickaxe»* (Ela, 1971), involving agriculture, trade, fishing or livestock. In other words, retirees must think about their daily survival in an environment where the possession of the *"number card"* can no longer really help them in the realization of their projects. This exhaustion of the assets of the registry imposes a diversification of the source of assets and forces retirees to think about the solution of vital problems. The vulnerability situation is here to the extent that new activities required of pensioners are most often activities to which their organizations are not or more accustomed. One of our interviewees told us that *"The work on the fields is not easy. When I started the fields in the villages, I was sick every day. I had rheumatism and all my joints hurt. For someone of my age it is not easy. But if you do not, who will give you. In town as in the village everything can be bought"*²⁰. Even in managing families, whether polygamous or monogamous, it is no longer easy to make ends meet. The retirement situation creates an imbalance in the management of any household and opens the way to vulnerability as needs are enormous and resources now limited. *"If you still have children in charge at the time of retirement, you are dead"*, a pensioner entrusted us to the Tsinga collection in Yaoundé. He told us that *"ration, education, daily needs"* cannot be satisfied with the crumbs left over, talking about the pension.

As a result, there is a fact that the researchers do not raise much, but which contributes to vulnerability like the tensions that usually arise between retirees and their *"brothers"* those who have not been employed at the same level of administration as the latter. Retirees generally face insults, mocks and torments²¹ of any kind from their close or distant relatives. *Sometimes it is people you have spent time supporting, feeding and sheltering who lack respect for you. People whose children lived with you while you were in office.*²² All things considered, the social tensions that usually arise between pensioners and close or distant members of their family are such that they sometimes regret the altruistic suicide (Durkheim, 1986) which was theirs at the time of their social radiance. All these problems that pensioners face make Bonnet et al. (1999) say retirement is considered the ultimate stage of precarization.

And this precariousness, evidence of vulnerability often leads to physical and psychological illnesses involving the cessation of physical work, revision of diets, anxiety related to problems posed by the new status and even death. Indeed, as is evident, retirement is defined first of all by age (Bonnet, 2001). Age is a disease indicator *that "the money from your working days is hiding; and when you stop working, all these diseases come back if you don't have a strong mind and the means to maintain your*

¹⁷ Interview conducted in August 2023.

¹⁸ Interview conducted in August 2023.

¹⁹ Interview conducted in August 2023.

²⁰ Interview conducted in August 2023.

²¹ We refer for example to land disputes, as well as the aggressiveness developed around the person of the retiree by his brothers in a rural context.

²² Interview conducted in August 2023.

health”²³. This statement by a former senior police inspector is ample testimony that seniors are individuals who suffer from minor illnesses that worsen in the absence of medical follow-up. The situation of the pensioner is therefore delicate, given that not only is his social security constantly under the cost of the misappropriation (Motaze, 2008), but in addition, Day-to-day interactions with other members of society are not easy, as they keep reminding them that the days when they had influence because of their activities are over²⁴. All this means that some of them find themselves “*talking alone, to reminisce nostalgically about their work situations*” (Blanpain et al., 1999: 64). In addition to this, the new demands of life as a retiree are usually conducive to anxiety-related illnesses such as high blood pressure. Being a prisoner of nostalgic memories, the retiree can plunge into neuroses related to the repetition of reminiscence (Freud, 1982). This is how many retirees, as they age, lose their memory and the notion of time. Others who do not bear the frustrations are constantly reliving in their minds the various responses that they could have implemented if they had still been at business. The regret that eats them up can be very dangerous when they are not strong enough to move on. For many, it is stroke, for others it is cancer, for others it is sight or hearing problems. In any case, retirement sometimes inevitably leads to social death, psychological death or physical death. Thus, we can conclude this articulation with the words of one of our respondents who had informed us “*that a retiree can die at any time and from anything. It all depends on how he leads his retirement life and on his ability to endure the hardships he faces in his daily life.*”²⁵ In an environment where when an old man dies the hypothesis of witchcraft is quickly evoked (Geschiere, 1995), this work shows that it is the vulnerability, even the precariousness in which some retirees live, that leads them most often to death.

5. DISCUSSION

The above discussions have tried to highlight the routes of construction of social vulnerability of public officials called to assert their rights to retirement as well as the ways in which a condition generating suffering is lived out daily and sometimes of death. However, the presentation of such results, even if they are relevant and fruitful for research, must be discussed or even relativized to the extent that sociology is presented as a discipline in perpetual search of itself. We must therefore start from the ambiguous and dynamic character of societies. Thus, the place of pensioners in the evolution of the debate on the state and society remains in perpetual construction. In other words, the present work which has been oriented towards the staging of suffering and marginality in the daily lives of retired people can also be relativized. Indeed, the categories of people selected by our sample were essentially those who live and feel this vulnerability. It is also possible to see the problem differently in a society of so-called gaps, distinction (Bourdieu, 1979) and ritualisation (Goffman, 1974). Another orientation of the theme would have made it possible to observe that, while some suffer under the same conditions, others, such as the sacred things described by Durkheim (1968), do not feel any difficulty. As a result, words and things remain fundamentally separate (Foucault, 1966) and each individual moves towards the experience of retirement according to his or her social trajectory. Even if, in general, in a contemporary Cameroon until then still prisoner of the «big night» (Mbembe, 2013), the majority of pensioners constitute a social cluster to be included in the field of suffering related to the difficulties of the administrative system and the stigma resulting from its interactions with the rest of society, it must be said that a contradictory perspective, would point out that the generalization of vulnerability at the level of all retirees may be a limit. Because those that Machiavel (2000) calls «the great ones» do not know almost all the difficulties raised by this article. They have the opportunity to circumvent all the barriers imposed by the system from their privileged status. They have, on the one hand, because of their proximity to the system all the means to avoid being subjected to the wrath of public officials in office and, on the other hand, the wealth they possess allows them to raise and practice all the activities of retraining pensioners only as hobbies. In other words, “*they are individuals for whom the fields, fishing, livestock and all other activities built around the life of the retiree are carried out*”²⁶. They invest in agriculture and their financial means mean that they do not pay for themselves on the way (Zambo Belinga et al., 2012). But to come back to our thesis that does not suffer from anything in this

²³ Interview conducted in August 2023.

²⁴ Here, those who have never worked represent themselves as a retired person without any sacrality and who would become like them because of their retirement.

²⁵ Interview conducted in August 2023.

²⁶ Interview conducted in August 2018.

particular case, let's say that even if there are rich, powerful and safe pensioners in Cameroon, they really are not very many. This explains the fact that the majority of Cameroonian pensioners fall under the blow of vulnerability. The perspective advocated in this discussion is therefore fruitful, given that a considerable²⁷ number of former civil servants are affected by the vulnerability situation described.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research problem that this article attempts to study is the social situation of state agents at the end of their career in Cameroon. We have shown that curiously, the place of retirees in Cameroon is a privileged place for the experience of vulnerability and marginality when the resources and status of the individual called to assert his or her retirement rights do not represent anything in terms of symbolic and social capital (Bourdieu, 1982). From there, it becomes more obvious to rationally explain some of their illnesses and even deaths. The social vulnerability of retired people is thus built on the one hand social actors still in function, the agents responsible for completing pension files that slow them down or sometimes make them disappear in the hope of creating an area of uncertainty allowing them to obtain a share when the file is successful. On the other hand, in the collection system, which is the place where pensions are paid, there is another scheme of deception that consists in diverting pensions from absent pensioners. A situation that usually creates litigation when the individuals or their family members come forward. Finally, the social interactions between pensioners and their families, especially in rural areas, are generally conflictual. Similarly, adapting to their new lives is not easy. New activities such as agriculture often prove very difficult for those who have been accustomed to dissociating the pen from the pickaxe (Ela, 1971). Suddenly, these difficulties resulting from the new life configuration gradually give way to awakened or sleeping diseases that are responsible for rushing retirees towards social and sometimes physical deaths. However, the vulnerability routes are entirely dependent on the field in which the public servant has served, what he has accomplished and invested in his time. And so, everyone suffers retirement in his own way. It is still the case that when the individual switches to retirement, he loses relatively something²⁸. This makes it possible to classify it as a vulnerable person. Even if the lost element is primarily a function of the individual's personality, the lack of it plunges him into a turmoil that, a priori, diminishes his relationship with others. In one way or another, retirement is usually synonymous with the onset of problems that vary from individual to individual depending on their respective social category. As a result, retirement is still rejected by most of the Cameroonian civil servants who are still in office and are now afraid.

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²⁷ The numbers presented here are less relevant as the work is more concerned with the relationship to money, influence and daily life of retirees.

²⁸ Power, money, reputation, prestige, right to speak etc.

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