

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES on CAMEROON WRITING



Edited by

HANSEL NDUMBE EYOH,
ALBERT AZEYEH,
and NALOVA LYONGA

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Foreword

It has been observed that Cameroon literature is very rich, yet criticism of this has for a long time been the preserve of foreigners rather than nationals, who seem to think that they ought to consume that which comes from abroad and ignore that which is produced within their country. However, a first attempt was made in 1977 at the University of Yaoundé to bring writers and critics together to examine the works that existed at the time. It was a very successful meeting, but unfortunately, all the papers presented on that occasion into print.

The holding of the second Conference at the University of Buea came about from a determination to look at our literature straight into its face and criticize these using literary criteria of the strictest kind. Times were gone when the criticism was complacent because it was believed that a nascent literature could easily be stifled by application of rather strict canons of literary criticism, but “solidarity criticism”, obviously still goes on especially as far as the new liberation literature in which Anglophone Cameroonians are involved is concerned, where the message is projected way ahead of the medium.

Since the Second Conference on Cameroon Literature took place in December 1994, it has taken time to go through the articles and select those which could be published. It has not been easy to do this because the quality of most of the articles was quite high. In this first volume which is being published, it was decided to select articles to reflect the title of the work, which is “perspectives on Cameroon Literature.”

In the organization of the Conference as well as editing and compiling of these articles, I must give special thanks to all the members of my Office: Agnes Ayuk, Esambe Sona, Fonka, Youssouf, Leslie Fende Mbongo, Beatrice Nkweteyim, and Alice Ebob Mbi. Margaret Etengeneng and Henry Mota1e, all of who had to support me throughout the project making things move and reading all the typescripts to make sure we had as near a perfect copy as we could. This equally goes to the colleagues of the Faculty of Arts who in one way or the other joined to make the Conference the success that it was particularly Albert Azeyeh, Nalova Lyonga, and Tala Kashim. Samuel

Sumelong. Asheri Kilo, Paul Mbufung, Vincent Tanda, and George Nyamdi.

The Conference in Buea turned out to be exciting and exacting, too large and too intense. Seventeen years had elapsed since the first Conference in Yaoundé; the culturescape had evolved and expanded. Faces had changed and there was a new vibrant literature by women and Anglophones which did not exist at the time of the first Conference. Themes had been renewed and new ones had been exploited. Both writers and critics had a lot to say. Subjects dealt with ranged from general topics on literature, survival and national identity, through specialized articles on prose, poetry, drama, translation, language, folklore, children's literature Journalism and some politics. The understanding of all the colleagues who responded to the invitation, we hope, is worth its while as you scheme through these papers which obviously reflect various levels of scholarship.

In organizing the Conference as well as putting together the articles for this volume, we received support from both the University of Buea and the French Mission for Co-operation and Cultured Action in Yaoundé. We must, in particular, thank the then Head of the French Mission for Co-operation and Cultural Action, Pierre Jacquemot, Dr. Pierre le Boul and Mr. Jean-Marie-Langlais, both Counsellors at the mission; Dr. Jean-François Blanc, the then French Technical personnel at the University of Buea; and Mr. Pascal Bourrel of the Alliance Franco-Camerounaise in Buea, for all their support.

We also need to give especial thanks to the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Buea, Dr. Dorothy L. Njeuma, who gave her support to the project and participated in some of the sessions.

We also received support from some of the companies around, including Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), and the Cameroon Refining Company (SONARA), Amity Bank, Satellite Insurance, as well as Alliance Camerounaise in Buea, which not only contributed financially to hosting the Conference, but provided space to host some of the programmed events, including the Book Exhibition and Cultural Evening.

We are particularly grateful to Professor Peter Agbor Tabi, the Minister Higher Education, for having accepted to come to Buea to

preside over the opening of the conference. His presence was memorable in the annals of the young institution.

It was proposed that an “Association for the Study of Cameroon Literature” be formed and that conferences of this sort be held more often. It was also recommended that the education authorities consider seriously the inclusion of Cameroonian literature in the school curriculum at all levels.

We do hope that the publication of these papers will instigate the kind actions that we recommended and that the prolific nature of Cameroonian literature will equally give rise to a prolific and robust criticism.

Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh
Buea, October 1996

SPEECHES

**Welcome Address Presented By the Vice-chancellor of
the University of Buea Dr. Dorothy L. Njeuma on the
Occasion of the Opening Ceremony 1 December 1994**

Your Excellency the Minister of Higher Education,
Your Excellency the Minister in charge of Special Duties at the
Presidency of the Republic,
Your Excellency the Governor of the South West Province
Honourable Members of Parliament
Honourable Members of the Social and Economic Council, Your
Royal Highnesses the Traditional Rulers,
Director Generals of Public Corporations,
Deans and Directors of the University of Boca,
Provincial Delegates,
Dear Colleagues,
Dear Students,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

After the University of Yaoundé II at Soa, the University of Yaoundé I
at NgoaEkele and the University of Ngaoundere, it is the turn of the
University of Buea to receive Your Excellency, Minister of Higher
Education, and Dr. Peter Agbor Tabi. We are highly honoured indeed,
that you have been able to find the lime in your very busy schedule to
be here today to open this second Conference on Cameroon
Literature, which is bolding seventeen years after the first one at the
University of Yaoundé in April 1977.

We at the University of Buea are very proud indeed to welcome
you for many reasons which are obvious, but which must be stated.
There is a saying in Bakweri that a parent dances only in the backyard
when their child is honoured. But it would be awkward, and indeed
strange, for us and for me in particular, to dance in the backyard on the
occasion of the distinguished appointment of my son to the singular

office of Minister of Highest Education. I am consequently sure that the entire audience here, and indeed the entire nation, will understand that I dance in the front veranda, not in the backyard. So in my personal name, and on behalf of the entire community of the University of Boca, I am very happy and proud to welcome you Dr. Peter Agbor Tabi, Minister of Higher Education, to UB the Place to Be. It is also certain that having spent most of your youth here, Buea is indeed a very special place for you. And so we say, welcome home, congratulations on your appointment, and congratulations for the impetus you are giving to higher education in Cameroon.

We also wish to welcome your entourage as well as all participants who have come from far and near to deliberate during the next couple of days on the nature and state of our literature. Cameroonians have been writing a lot of recent, and interest in our literature is growing. This forum should offer participants the opportunity to evaluate our literature as intellectuals and to give direction to our individual and collective responses to it, as intellectuals.

Ours is a very young institution and we obviously have our teething problems. So we request your indulgence for any lapses in organization and inconveniences which you may undergo or which you may already have encountered. We promise to do better next time.

We wish to express our gratitude to those who have helped make this conference a reality, especially the French Mission for Co-operation and Cultural Action, SONARA, CDC, Amity Bank, Satellite Insurance. It is through their support that we are able to offer you the modest accommodation, albeit the best we' have in Buea. We also ask you to kindly accept the modest hospitality we are able to provide, given the hard times.

We should especially like to thank our colleagues of the other Universities who allowed their lecturers to take part in this conference.

Honourable Minister, we would have loved to have a larger crowd to receive you in this hall. You saw them all waiting enthusiastically outside there. Our audience here is limited by the size of this our largest lecture hall. We know however, that you are very conversant with our problems; so we shall not belabour the point. On our part, we are sure you know the efforts we are making towards the provision of better infrastructure for our institution. We wish to inform Your

Excellency of the contribution made by our Students' Union to the University's Development Fund, not a symbolic franc, but of 1,000,000 francs CFA.

The staff has contributed even more. This is an indication that staff and students are acting and not just waiting on the community. We should be grateful if the state, on its part, could multiply our contribution at least a hundred fold in recognition of our effort.

This conference was initially intended to be a workshop on Anglophone Cameroon Writing. In expanding it to cover all Cameroon Literature (Anglophone and francophone), the University of Buea wants to make its mark as a centre for the promotion of bilingualism and national unity in Cameroon, even though it may be English-speaking.

Par conséquent, nous vous souhaitons à tous la bienvenue et, un heureux séjour parmi nous. Je vous remercie.

**Opening Address by Dr. Peter Agbor Tabi, Minister of
Higher Education on the Occasion of the Opening
Ceremony, 1 December 1994**

Your Excellency the Minister in charge of Special Duties at the
Presidency of the Republic,
Your Excellency the Governor of the South West Province
Madam Vice-Chancellor of the University of Buea.
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Honourable Members of the Social and Economic Council,
Your Royal Highnesses the Traditional Rulers,
Director Generals of Public Corporations,
Deans and Directors of the University of Buea,
Provincial Delegates,
Dear Colleagues,
Dear Students,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me, first of all, on behalf of the family of Higher Education in our
country, and in my capacity as Chancellor of the Universities, welcome
you here today, in the University of Buea.

It gives me great pleasure to officiate at the opening ceremony of
this major cultural event which brings together distinguished writers
and critics. It is a clear indication that the University of Buea, in
keeping with its mission statement, cherishes freedom of academic
expression and the dissemination of knowledge for the good of
mankind and excellence. Knowledge which does not promote human
values and the amelioration of the human condition is worthless.

The University of Buea is today hosting the 2nd Conference on
Cameroon Literature. The first was held at the University of Yaoundé
in April 1977. Some sixteen years have elapsed since then, during
which period Cameroon has changed a lot. In 1977, we all know, as the
regime in place was rather autocratic and a debilitating censorship law
prevailed. Today, with the advent of democracy, times are changing.

The muzzled muse is gradually regaining its voice. A cursory look at Cameroon Literature in English before 1982 clearly indicates that there were not enough titles available to keep even a lazy student busy. Mbella Sonne Dipoko, Sankie Maimo, Victor Musinga, Kenjo Jumbam - these were the few creative writers of some talent. From 1982 to the present more titles in all the literary genres have been produced in the last twelve years than in the preceding two decades.

What, however, is or ought to be the relationship between the University, the creative writer and the literary critic? If the University's role is that of inculcating knowledge, then one of its main objectives would be to make known the theoretical principles of literature, for literature is a science, and as such it has its own rules. If it is that the creative writer depends on inspiration, it is truer to say that the masterpieces of today were 10% inspiration and 90% sweat. We believe that the university, with its manifold specialists, ought to serve as a nursery for the blossoming of talent. In other words, the University ought to be the creative writer's bed-fellow.

But the University also has the role of not only helping to bring forth, but of examining the product, of evaluating the work which has been brought to fruition of determining what is literature and what is not, of drawing the line between high culture and low culture, between the eternal and the transient, between what appeals to the best in us and what simply emphasizes our bestiality. The University should be the forum par excellence, where the literary work is dissected objectively and honestly, based not simply on impressions, but on the principles and practices of literature. As Alexander Pope once noted: the critic should have enough courage "to censure a friend and to praise an enemy."

I indicated earlier that there has been a substantial quantitative increase in the literary productivity of our writers this, unfortunately is not being matched by an equal improvement in the quality of the writing. It appears to me that many are unable to draw the line between art and rage. Not that we have anything against agitation and propaganda. In a sense, all art is propaganda in so far as the writer seeks to foster a certain vision of the world. But, if we remember Shakespeare, Racine. Dickens, Dostoyevsky, Hemingway, Richard Wright or Nicolas Guillen, it is not so much for what they said, as how

they said it; not so much for the matter as for the manner. There must be a marriage between the form and the content. The urgency of the message should not give rise to shoddiness of form.

Everyone on the streets can shout out against all the ills of our society. Everyone can rail against the establishment. That, unfortunately, will not make it literature. Literature is beauty even if it expressed a deeply felt angst. Slogans may be fine. They may draw applause since the author's aim is to play to the gallery. Unfortunately, the work may not have a life span longer than that of a shooting star.

Besides being a bilingual country, Cameroon is blessed with a rich and diversified culture. Our strength and survival as a nation are based on the diversification of our rich cultural values. It is in the light of this strength and diversity that I would like to call on all of you as scholars to promote the values that bind and unite us as a nation, in your works of art.

Cameroon culture, and specifically Cameroon literature in French, English and some of our national languages has made its mark in the international arena.

Several of our writers and critics such as Linus Asong, Francis Bebey, Mongo Beti, Bate Besong, Calixthe Beyala, Bole Butake, Yodi Carone, Ferdinand Oyono, Guillaume Oyono-Mbia, Were Liking, just to name a few, have won international acclaim for their works. It is our fervent wish that this tradition of success and solid achievements will be handed over to a new generation of artists so that they could uphold the dignity of our country for posterity.

Permit me, Mr. Governor, Madam Vice-Chancellor. Ladies and Gentlemen, to congratulate all of those colleagues here present - those who have organized this conference and those who are participating in it for working so hard to help sustain the current University reforms. We are very much aware that the times are hard. Conditions of work are not the most propitious. But all these colleagues have held together to try and provide a University system that we can all be proud of. The sacrifice has been enormous, but the results obtained, so far so soon, are promising.

If the University is to play a pivotal role in the fostering of the literary enterprise, then the appropriate tools would have to be placed at its disposal. Along these lines, and as part of the on-going university

reforms, the Ministry of Higher Education will, in the not so distant future, set up a university press, not only to encourage publishing but, above all, to encourage quality publishing. We shall be calling on many of you to place your sound academic and professional skills at the disposal of this press, so that Cameroon can, once more continue to play its leadership (ole in the realm of education in Africa.

I would, with your permission, like to stress the important role that Cameroon could play in the domain of translating literary works. The rendering of Cameroon literature in French into English and vice versa, as well as from our national languages into French or English is to my mind, at the core of understanding the idea of Cameroon literature. We should not depend on others to translate Rene Philombe into English or Linus Asong into French. I am convinced that the University of Buea is aware of its privileged role in the domain of the translation of not only Cameroonian, but literary works from the rest of the African continent.

In the time that the University reforms have lasted, the University of Buea in which we find ourselves today is taking the lead in several ways. We do congratulate you all and say you should keep it up. But do not seat on your laurels. Universities are not institutions which are transient. Many, we know have lasted some one thousand years. Buea is only less than two years old. You are only founding members. The way ahead is still very long. With the way things have taken off in Buea, we can all hope that the future is bright and that someday your progeny will remember you all and inscribe your names in gold letters on a commemorative plaque which will be placed at the entrance of the University.

For reasons which are very personal and which I do not need to specify, the University system in Cameroon in general, and the University of Buea in particular, can count on me, firstly as Peter Agbor Tabi and, secondly, as Minister of Higher Education, to give my absolute support to all of you. We have all heard it shouted from the heights of Mount Fako that the University of Buea is the Place to Be. We are here today to help make that dream come true. Buea has its ambitions. It is for us, individually and severally, to assist you all in achieving these.

Ladies and gentlemen, in wishing you a happy time throughout your proceedings, I declare open, the Second Conference on Cameroon Literature.

Long Live Higher Education in Cameroon!!!

Long Live the University of Buea!!!

Long Live Cameroon!

Keynote Address: The Writer as Visionary

Bole Butake
Department of African Literature
Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences
University of Yaoundé I

No one gives soul to something he does not understand, something he does not fully appreciate and does not know; because soul is the ultimate affirmation of the reality which cannot die. (Emmanuel Obiechina). I

I will begin my discourse by showing proof that I know who I am. My name is Bole Butake; born on July 28, 1947, of peasant parents in Nkor, the headquarters of present-day Noni Sub-Division, in Bui Division not Meme Division as many people have often thought. My parents were very deeply religious in the Roman Catholic faith and my father must have been some kind of deputy catechist because our home was less than a stone's throw from the village Catholic shrine of worship; and I spent my infancy in church reciting doctrine. At the age of four I lost both parents within one week; first my father who probably died of malaria and then my mother who must have died of a broken heart for losing her husband even though she had a set of lovely girl-twins to nurse. They were taken to the orphanage in Shishong where, a few months later, we got word that they, too, had succumbed. So with Mary and Martha dead, that is what the twins were called, I am the only survivor of that family although my own progeny is quite impressive - I am a father of six (three boys and three girls).

I was brought up for the most part by my maternal uncle and his wife (of blessed memory). At the time he owned cattle and was also a great coffee farmer. In effect he was a wealthy man in the village although over the years his wealth has gone into educating people like us and his own numerous progeny.

Bui Division is a very large and grand division with three ethnic groups: Nso, Oku and Noni, the latter (my own) being in the minority.

For a very long time the political leadership in Nso gave the impression that Bui Division was the only one in Cameroon made up of one ethnic group and speaking only one language. In fact, the division used to be called Nso Division. In spite of their numerical inferiority, the Noni people never hesitated to proclaim their separate identity and even went as far as submitting a memorandum to the United Nations Organization in New York.

I am really pleased to observe that Kumbo has acquired for itself the appellation Bagdad and Bui is regarded as the bulwark of opposition politics in the North West Province. I am glad because, at last, the Nso man can feel the pinch of belonging to the minority and so react against that lowly status by standing up in defence of his rights. I am happy also because the Nso man can and should now say loud and clear that belonging to the minority does not mean that one should turn oneself over into slavery. However, both the Nso man and the Noni man are today suffering what, yesterday, the Noni man suffered alone, being in the minority in a Francophone majority La Republique du Cameroun. ‘

My curriculum vita testifies to the fact that I went to the village primary school from where I proceeded to Sacred Heart College, Mankon, from Standard V. After obtaining G.C.E. Ordinary Level, I worked with the Veterinary Department in Buea and Bamenda for a year before entering CCAST Bambili where I read and obtained Economics, History and Logic at the Advanced Level. I then taught for a short spell (one term) at Bishop Rogan College, Soppo, before taking another job with the West Cameroon Ministry of Lands and Surveys, Buea. Having been disappointed in my attempts to obtain an ASPAU scholarship to go and read History, the only choice I had left was to proceed to Yaoundé and take a degree in Modern English Studies at the then Federal University of Cameroon. After a post-graduate diploma in Comparative literature, I proceeded to Leeds on a British Council scholarship where I read for an M.A. in English Literature. Finally, in March 1983, I defended a doctoral thesis on “Literature of the Nigerian Crisis” at the University of Yaoundé.

Turning to my creative life, I can say that, like most of us, it started late due to lack of exposure and want of examples to imitate. In those days (fifties and sixties) when we went to school, all the teaching

materials were authored either by dead people or by people whom we would never see and would never get to know. Furthermore, the mystery of the printed word was re-enforced by the perfectness of the finished work. The printed book was so very neatly done that it was impossible to find any errors in it. So we grew up with the conviction that ordinary people could not write books. To compound matters, the attitude of those who had the responsibility to bring us up intellectually did not help. Only once in my secondary education was I given the opportunity to write something of my own choice. I was then in Form II in Sacred Heart College and our Principal, Father Thomas Mulligan who, among other duties, taught English Language, English Literature, French, Latin, and History. Geography, Biology, Music, etc. (there were only two of them on the staff) came to class on a certain morning and announced a folktale competition. We were all required to write a folktale from our ethnic background and the first three would receive handsome prizes. So, we all got down to it and I can only guess today that the title of my folktale was probably “Wanti and Bia”, two recurrent characters in Noni narrative tradition who represent cunning and wisdom on the one hand and brute force on the other. Several months later, when we the students, had all forgotten about the folktales, (surprise! surprise!) Father Mulligan came to class and announced the laureates of his literary competition. I was one of the three heroes with a cash prize of two shillings and six pence. Above all, he announced that the winning stories would be published in a magazine or newspaper back in his great country, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Whether this publication actually did take place, I do not know. But I know-that I got my two and six.

It was several years later, when I was already an undergraduate at the Federal University of Cameroon, Yaoundé, that some of our lecturers, again for the most part British citizens, started encouraging us to write. It was also the first time that most of us could see and touch and feel a fellow Cameroonian who was a writer Guillaume Oyono-Mbia, who had already come out with his *Three Suitors: One Husband and Until Further Notice* (1968) was one of our lecturers. The mere fact of interacting with a fellow country man who had written and published two plays in one go gave some of us the courage

to try to write, especially as we had also just launched a student journal, *The Spark*, one of whose first editors was Dr. Eyoh. However, it was not until 1976, two years after I had become a teacher at the University level that I decided to engage seriously in encouraging creative writing. I brought together a small group of students, who had demonstrated interest in (writing, in a group which we called “The Mould”. We used to meet every Sunday morning in one of the rooms at the University campus and would discuss what people had written during the previous week. For the most part we discussed poems and short stories. Following the discussions we made suggestions to the authors as to how the works could be reworked and improved upon aesthetically. Sankie Maimo, who is often referred to as the dean of Anglophone Cameroon writing (his first play, *I am Vindicated* was published in Ibadan in 1959) and Kenjo Jumbam (*Lukong and Leopard*, 1975, and *The White Man of God*, 1980) were very regular at these meetings and their presence further encouraged the students to work harder. At the end of six months, we already had quite a good quantity of material which we thought we should release to the general public. This outlet was *The Mould, A Magazine of Creative Writing*. By the time we ceased publishing in 1983 due to lack of funds we had come out with seven numbers. Many of the people who were nurtured in that nursery are today writers: Nol Alembong, Pitt Tah Tawang, and Julianna Nfah. The rest have continued to write despite the lack of publishing opportunities.

In 1978, with the publication of *Abbia* 31-32-33 which carried an article by Patrick Sam-Kumbam entitled “The Paucity of Literary Creativity in Anglophone Cameroon”, was launched a hot debate in the written press, which at the time was only *Cameroon Tribune*, whether English-speaking Cameroonians were engaged in creative writing at all. In relaunching the debate, Professor Bernard Fonlon (editorial of *Abbia* 34-35-36-37, June 1979) said essentially that English-speaking Cameroonians were not writing because of the mainly practical and scientific type of education to which they were exposed in the British, Igbo dominated, colonial system. In a further response, Sankie Maimo, who knew the venerable Fonlon very well, and who himself had been writing since the fifties in Nigeria, retorted in an article in *Cameroon Tribune* that “Fonlon missed his spear at the

first throw”. In his article Sankie Maimo was at pains to prove the point that English-speaking Cameroonians were writing and had always written, citing among others, himself, Ndelley Mokosso, Mbella Sone Dipoko, as examples. The greatest point he scored was to underline the absence or lack of publishing opportunities for English speaking Cameroonians. Above all his main thrust in the article was to demonstrate that Professor Fonlon was out of touch with the contemporary literary scene and, therefore, could not know whether Cameroonians of English expression were writing or not.

The reaction to Sankie Maimo’s observations was immediate and even very violent. All those admirers and venerators of the learned Fonlon rose up like one man against Sankie Maimo whom hardly anyone had ever heard about. The arguments could be resumed in the following question “who was this nonentity who dared to challenge the pontifications of the learned Professor?” I do remember clearly that

Dr. Tala Kashim Ibrahim was one of the generals who led the slithering attack against poor Sankie Maimo who resisted equally violently.

I did not join in the fray. Neither did Dr. Nalova Lyonga. Both of us decided to investigate the problem scientifically and after a long research exercise which lasted over several months we put together our conclusions on paper. They can be found in a long article entitled “Cameroon Literature in English: An Appraisal which appeared in *Abbia*, 38-39-40 (1982).

What has all of this got to do with the topic of my discourse - “The Writer as Visionary or Combatant?” The answer is very simple. The writer, or the artist general, is an ordinary human being belonging to a given society in a given historical moment. He is a researcher because he must know his people and their environment thoroughly. The writer is not a messiah come to deliver the world from poverty hunger and suffering and disease. He is not a prophet come to prophesy the coming of the messiah. He is not a mad man whose rantings should be ignored and his person scorned. He is not a beggar to whom charity should be doled out from time to time to shut him up. He is not a subversive element who should be locked away in a police cell or concentration camp until he shows signs of repentance for having angered the powers that be by exposing their greed, abuse

of power, the propagation of untruths and the absence of social justice and equitable distribution of wealth.

His crime, for those who think him a subversive element, might only be the observes and analyses the problems of his society critically and passionately. He is able to do this because he is a little gifted or talented. But talent without drudgery is naught for, as the late Professor Bernard Fonlon said, “creativity is five percent inspiration and ninety five per cent perspiration.” The implication of this assertion is that although the majority of us may have one talent or the other, it is only in those who decide to apply themselves diligently that the talent is concretely and outwardly manifested.

The writer produces literary works (poetry, drama, narrative) which respond to certain aesthetic criteria because art, according to The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, is the quality, production or expression according to aesthetic principles of what is beautiful, appealing or of more than ordinary significance. The writer is even more important when it comes to the application of the moral principle of literature, for as Plato asserts,

We should reverence him [the poet] as something holy and marvellous and delightful; we should tell him that there is not anyone like him in our city and that there is not allowed to be; and we should anoint him with myrrh and crown him with a diadem and send him away to another city, and for our own part, continue to employ for our welfare’s sake a drier and less amusing poet and storyteller; who should represent to us the discourse of a good man. (Collingwood 1938:47)

In the above quotation Plato makes a very clear distinction, I believe, between art for art’s sake (that is the poet who is a mere entertainer because he talks about trivial and disgusting things and should be sent away “to another city”) and the committed poet or writer (that is the “drier and less amusing poet and story-teller, who should represent to us the discourse of a good man”). This latter poet, the “drier and less amusing” one, Plato recommends for his society “for our welfare’s sake”. The writer must, therefore, have a contribution to make to the moral, spiritual, cultural, social, economic

and political development of his society no matter the age 1 and clime in which he lives and operates. In the words of Emmanuel Obiechina (1988:2),

Whether he [the writer] is operating within an archaic world-order conditioned by the values of piety, heroism, and unswerving faith in the gods, spirits and ancestors, and a rigid code of honour and duty, or within the modern world order of humane concerns, benevolence, compassion and respect for individual and human rights, he uses his medium to affirm those values that give fullness to the quality of life as perceived in time and space and. by the same necessity, to attack those negative values that undermine the sense of fullness of life and the realization of man's full potential. That is why literature, the product of the literary artist, is one of the most reliable guides into understanding of a people and their time and why the writer in our time is a central figure, not only in the defining of the quality of our life and the realities of our time, but more importantly, in the cure of the multiple infirmities which afflict us.

The writer, therefore, has a moral duty to steer members of his society along a course that ensures the triumph of truth and justice for all. Some people may ask, what is truth? What is justice? As indeed, they have often asked. While it may be true that people living in an age of extreme decadence and gross moral depravity may have difficulties distinguishing right from wrong because of the deliberate misplacement of values, there is no doubt that the bottom-line of it all is one's conscience. Am I sincere or truthful in my dealings with the fellow human beings with whom I interact in my daily life? Am I not putting my personal interests above the interests of every one else thereby doing injustice to everyone else? Am I prone to sacrificing my moral and spiritual values on the altar of materialism and/or power over fellow human beings for the mere sake of it? Am I prone to imposing my will on others either by guile, cajoling or threat rather than by the logic of reason? Do my perception of humanity and the world reconcile me with fellow human beings in my community?

It is possible that some of the people can be fooled all the time. It is possible that all the people can be fooled some of the time. However, it is impossible that all the people can be fooled all the time. It is here that the writer's visionary prowess and combativeness come into play. Through keen observation of his society he affirms "those values that give fullness to the quality of life" and attacks "those negative values that undermine the sense of fullness of life and the realization of man's potential." In this way the work of the writer is like facsimile of that of the godhead: creating to reform and not to distort; to change for the better and not for the worse. In *Taboo Love*, for example, Joseph Ngongwikuo decries the lustful greed of his Highness and his gang of notables and the absence of love, liberty of expression and choice through the love between Jam and Iyafi, which is regarded by the leadership of the Mukongmagoc society as criminal simply because Iyafi, this poor, innocent, young and beautiful girl, has been selected to swell the number of women in the Fen's harem. Ngongwikuo registers his disgust for this practice through his character portrayal of his Highness who, although very old, cannot resist the temptation finger to virgin girls. However, Ngongwikuo's sanctioning of the phenomenon of Christianity and colonialism turns out to be illusory, frustrating and disillusioning for it is like preferring death by fire rather than by drowning.

The colonial experience for the Africans in general and Cameroonians in particular was a very traumatic and a psychologically, unnerving calamity. Such early and renowned African writers as Ngugi wa Thiongo, Chinua Achebe, Ousmane Sembene, Ayi Kwei Armah, T.M. Aluko, Peter Abrahams etc. have treated in a most vivid manner the calamitous iniquities that colonialism inflicted on African peoples. Taking the Cameroonian case, we know from the writings of Mongo Beti, Ferdinand Oyono, Francis Bebey, Mbella Sonne Dipoko, and Kenjo Jumban, which all of them without exception present the theme of colonialism in negative terms and their attitude towards it is that of violent opposition because colonialism was destructive, dehumanizing and unjust. Who of us does not empathise and sympathise with Me the old man in *The Old Man and the Medal* or better still *Le Vieux Negre et I Medaille* who, after generously giving all his lands to the mission and sending his two sons to be killed in a war that he knows nothing

about, having received insignificant medal from the hands of the white man, ends up spending the night in a police cell on the very day of his being decorated? Who of us does not see clearly that the ultimate message in Mongo Beti's *Mission Terminée* or *Mission to Kala* is that we should follow our own traditions and cultures which will make us mature and independent men and women rather than going to the white man's school which does not only enslave us but also makes us eternally dependent on the white man by design? When our hero turns his back on his father and screams out loud: "A nous la liberte" is this not the one single cry that we need desperately in order to free ourselves from the shackles of bondage and neo-colonialism? Is Yaya, in Kenjo Jumbam's *The White Man of God*, not a sounder philosopher than any of the white priests in that novel? Why do we refuse to hear the mocking voice in Tah Asongwed's *Born to Rule*? Or the warning against the futility of hatred and warfare in Stanley Pierre Ngeyl's *I see War, War, Real War Everywhere*?

Chinua Achebe's novel, *A Man of the People*, in which the army intervenes to save the situation through a coup-d'état after the Chief Nangas have despoiled the land came out six months before the first coup in Nigeria. My play, *And Palm-wine will flow* was being acted on stage in Yaounde in March and April 1990 while there were marches on the streets and ecumenical and multidenominational services in churches against multi-partism and precipitated democracy in Cameroon. Today we hear declarations to the effect that the wind of change never came from the East but had begun blowing here since 1982. Linus Asong's *A Legend of the Dead* first came out in 1991 a few months ahead of the declaration, of the state of emergency in the North West Province.

These few examples are a lucid illustrations of the fact that a writer who is concerned about the happenings in his society will predict the tum of events with shattering exactitude. But it is not just guess work or fortune-telling or fore-seeing. It is an elaborate process which begins with concern, passes through alarming observation and ends with that terrifying scream of warning from the top of Mount Fako or rather Mount Cameroon.

The writer shouts the terrifying scream because of his deep concern to steer members of his society away from untruths,

corruption, greed and injustice, along a course that will vindicate truth and justice for all. In order to achieve this, the writer must be committed and have the conviction about the tenacity and veracity of his course. Again as Obiechina (1988:3) says,

He [the writer] is a man who, at a time of crumbling values and traditions, takes it upon himself to promote reform, restoration or revolution. He is a man who cannot stand aside from the battle for the soul and the integrity of the people, not a man who stands aside, waiting for the battle to pass, so that he can write the history or provide the editorial footnotes. He should be a man who is found in the thick of the combat who, when occasion demands it, makes personal sacrifices, and, in extremity, pays with the most precious thing he has to sustain the integrity of his calling.

In very clear terms, therefore, the writer should be ready to die for a cause which he considers as righteous and just. A writer must never be a prostitute who sells his service to the minority for the exploitation, oppression or enslavement of the masses. If he engages in this kind of activity, the muse will immediately desert him and he will live only on past glories. What, for instance, has happened to the ink that used to flow through the veins of Ferdinand Oyono when he did battle with the colonising French? Were Cameroon's problems resolved with the attainment of independence in 1960? Or has the scramble for wealth and power muted the muse in him?

On the other hand, Mongo Beti, in full amour and fighting gear, is dauntlessly, indefatigably fighting on. For as long as decay, corruption, greed, tribalism and ethnofascism reign supreme in our society he will pursue them in hot combat, defying the tear gas and water canons and grenades, defying the guns bought with the people's money, with his pen. His most recent novel, *L'histoire du fou* (1994) is as virulent as ever. That is all the writer has as a weapon, his pen. Nothing but a common pen. Yet how true the adage: The pen is mightier than the sword!

Another combatant worth mentioning in our social context is Rene Philombe who is condemned to the wheel-chair because he is physically crippled. He has neither job nor inheritance and lives on the

fringes of life and death because of constant illness and zero income. Yet he is taller than the iroko and the baobab; he is hovering over Mount Cameroon, big, proud and full of dignity because he is ready to die so that truth and justice shall reign for all. His only weapon? His pen! Only his pen!

One final example: Bate Besong, the angry and violent Bate Besong. He is so violently angry with the wrongs and injustices done to the Anglophone community in our society in particular that he vomits nothing but filth and shit. He is our shitologist par excellence. And we dare not look him in the face because Bate Besong is right. We are all wallowing in filth and shit, pretending that we know truth, justice and human integrity. We call Bate Besong mad because he has dared to put a mirror to our faces so that we can see how full of filth and shit the reflection is. But Bate Besong is only using shock therapy. Haven't many writers used all the epithets, and metaphors and other images to no avail? But even Bate Besong's s therapy has fallen on deaf ears, on rock. Why can't our leaders listen to the sere of Bate Besong? Why won't they listen to the pleading cries of the other writers?

The writer who has vision and is ready for combat must know his people, is, his fellow country-men and women. He must know their history, where they came from; and their aspirations, where they are going. He must know their geography their customs, their cultures, their languages, their songs and dances, their economic and political lives. The writer as visionary and combatant must know everything as much as possible about his people. This is the only avenue by which he can clearly decipher their aspirations and so help in charting a course for the realisation and fulfilment of these in their lives.

But the writer does not write for himself. He writes for others to consume writings. In the context of our society reading is not a habit that many people have cultivated. Theatre-going is not, either. And our radio and television are managed by people who do not seem to have any respect for listeners or viewers. Thirty-four years after independence, our programmes on radio and television have very little relevance to the lives of Cameroonians. Important and effective mass media like radio and television can be used very easily in galvanizing people and transfonning the present tribal factions into a real nation that everyone of us should be proud There is even a law, or may be a

recommendation by the National Assembly that least 70% of programmes on national radio and television should be native Cameroon. I wonder if we have managed to attain 10%, especially on our television. Our mass media are therefore used to promote foreign culture while our artists and their works are reviled and snubbed.

With regards to publishing books, there are hardly any publishing houses speak of. Editions CLE in Yaounde is also suffering from the economic crisis and is practically tottering on the verge of collapse. Edition SOPECAM has closed down. While Edition CRAC and Patron Publishing House are still enjoying the limbo of babyhood. The majorities of writers in Cameroon, therefore, are either published abroad or are self-published, using the very meagre means at their disposal to print their own works. While this is a very commendable effort, I must say that the results of self-publishing have not always been satisfactory. Very often the writers rush to print works which, aesthetically, are not good enough to be placed on bookshelves. The quality of printing too often leaves a lot to be desired. A book is a commodity and so must be properly packaged. I did say in the opening lines of my address that the printed word has been demystified in our times because of the presence of errors in books. But when these are too many they become a vexation to the eye and can even result in misinformation and miseducation. So even if the writer is going to publish himself, our recommendation is that he should ensure that he gets a good editor to go through the work before sending it to a good printer so that we may not insult our readers with bad books.

For the dramatists and actors, I would dare say that a fairly commendable job is already being done. Not because I operate in that area as both playwright and director and maybe actor too, but because the theatre is the most immediate medium of communication available to the Cameroonian writer today. By using the technique of oral transmission, the theatre in Cameroon today is gradually filling the gap left by lack of enthusiasm among Cameroonians to read books. But again where are these plays performed since there are no theatre houses to speak of around the country? In makeshift community, mission or school halls with very inadequate facilities such as playing area, lighting and ventilation.

Our country can be taken out of the economic crisis through the exportation our very rich and diverse cultures. But the industry still needs to be developed through the provision of training facilities, infrastructure and sponsorship. Our policy makers in the domain of culture must take their responsibilities in their hands and develop a sound cultural policy that should transform the landscape of our economy which is now so completely dominated by imports from every land and clime. A people who only consume have never left any legacy to posterity.

Before I end, permit me to allude very briefly to a point that may be worrying host, the University of Buea. It has to do with the place of politics in literature or literature in politics. Literature is a human activity just like politics. The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, apart from defining politics as the science or art of political government, also states, among others, that politics is the use of intrigue or strategy in obtaining any position of power or control, as in, business, university etc. This therefore means that it is not only through political parties that we play politics. It pervades every human activity including religion. Yes, even religion, as witnessed by Mahatma Ghandi in the following statement:

To see the universal in the all pervading spirit of truth face to face, one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. Any man who aspires after this cannot afford to be left out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to truth has led me into this job of politics. And I can say without hesitation and yet in all humility that those who say religion (you may as well say culture) has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion actually means.

I will conclude by saying that those who say literature has nothing to do with politics do not know what literature actually means.

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GENERAL

Une Nécrologie: La Critique Littéraire Au Cameroun (1)

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Il peut paraître paradoxal que dans un pays où la littérature est des plus florissantes et qui compte des critiques dynamiques, bardés de diplômes, un tour d'horizon de l'activité critique commence par une nécrologie. Sans doute me fait-on le reproche de toujours rêver à la cité parfaite mais que représente la production critique réelle en ce pays par rapport aux vraies potentialités du Cameroun? Il est un fait indéniable que, bon an mal an, l'un ou l'autre Camerounais, d'ici ou d'ailleurs, publie, ça ou là, une thèse, un fascicule ou tout autre essai pouvant être raisonnablement considéré comme faisant partie de la critique littéraire. Toutefois, avant de dégager les principales orientations de la critique contemporaine au Cameroun, un détour par le cimetière littéraire du coin s'impose, tant il est vrai que pareille démarche permettra d'apprécier les efforts qui ont été déployés et qui, pour des raisons diverses, ont buté sur d'insurmontables difficultés.

L' APEC ET CAMEROUN LITTÉRAIRE

Au commencement, il y avait l' APEC (Association des Poètes et Ecrivains Camerounais) qui entendait rassembler en son sein tous ceux qui, à un moment ou à un autre, voulaient se lancer dans l'écriture en embrassant l'un ou l'autre genre: poésie, prose et essais de tous ordres. Raison pour laquelle L' APEC édite au début des années 1970 un organe connu sous le nom de Cameroun littéraire. Animé par Patrice Kayo (directeur), René Philombe (rédacteur en chef) et Stanislas Owona (directeur littéraire), le mensuel de l' APEC était à la fois une école de création et de critique. Qu'on se souvienne du brûlant débat

qui pendant un temps opposa J.-M. Abanda Ndengue, auteur *De la négritude au négritisme* (1970) et B.-J. Fouda, théoricien de la négrité. Cameroun littéraire fit largement l'écho de la polémique. Etudiants, enseignants et chercheurs indépendants se trouvaient alors associés à une vie intellectuelle intense: cours publics et conférences se dispensaient à qui mieux mieux dans les amphithéâtres de l'un ou l'autre établissement de l'Université fédérale du Cameroun.

Malheureusement, Cameroun littéraire disparaît à peine ne, sans doute faute de ressources. Un magazine du même nom surgit en juillet 1983 avec une équipe abondante et entièrement renouvelée, le format et la présentation de la nouvelle revue sont plus soignés. De toute évidence, la nouvelle équipe que dirige A. Kum'a Ndumbe et Adamou Ndam Njoya ne manquent pas d'ambition. La revue affiche des noms de correspondants prestigieux (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Paul Dakeyo etc.) et des rubriques percutantes: Forum, Bonnes Feuilles, Entretien, Enquêtes et Dossiers et j'en passe. Dans un éditorial particulièrement élaboré, Adamou Ndam Njoya (1983: 12) écrit:

Publication Individuelles

Puisque l'économie de la présente étude ne permet pas de passer en revue tout ce qui a paru ces derniers temps sur la littérature camerounaise, il faut renvoyer lecteur au beau petit livre de Josette Ackad, *Le Roman camerounais et la critique* (1985) En effet, Ackad donne une abondante bibliographie de la critique littéraire camerounaise et présente les grandes lignes de l'attitude de la critique à l'égard du roman camerounais. Contrairement à Ackard, je vais me contenter de quelques spécimens.

L'ouvrage le plus marquant de ces dernières années est assurément *Le livre camerounais et ses auteurs* (1984) de René Philombe. Véritable travail de bénédiction l'étude de Philombe est à la fois une bibliographie des auteurs (créateurs et critiques confondus) et un ouvrage d'histoire littéraire. On peut regretter qu'une publication plutôt artisanale n'ait pas permis une plus large diffusion du *Livre camerounais ses auteurs*. Il s'agit d'un instrument de travail fondamental car, en plus des analyses synchroniques et diachroniques, Philombe montre, photos à l'appui, qui est qui en Littérature camerounaise.

Il faudrait aussi retenir *Roman et réalités camerounaises* de David Ndach Tagne (1986), L'auteur fait le point de la production romanesque au Cameroun de 1960 à 1985. A l'heure où s'intensifie le débat sur les littératures nationales en Afrique, la vision panoramique que propose Ndachi Tagne est une contribution significative à l'analyse du genre le plus fourni en littérature camerounaise, d'autant que l'auteur prend aussi compte, ce qui est nouveau, les productions de langue anglaise.

Plusieurs essais ont vu le jour dans la collection "Comprendre" aux Editions Saint-Paul. On connaît, entre autres, le texte de M.-F. Minyono-Nkodo (*Comprendre le vieux nègre et la médaille*, 1978) ou encore celui de Charly- Gabriel Mbock (*Comprendre Ville cruelle*, 1978). On connaît aussi l'ouvrage de vulgarisation de S.M. Eno-Belinga (*Comprendre la littérature orale camerounaise*, 1978). Cependant, le titre qui nous semble devoir être retenu ici est *Comprendre l'œuvre de Mongo Beti* (1981) de Bernard Mourais. Le texte de Mourais va bien au-delà du canevas plutôt exigü et quelque peu artificiel de la collection pour proposer au public une lecture d'ensemble à la fois dense et lumineuse de l'œuvre de Mongo Beti. Qui plus est; les soucis méthodologiques qui sont ceux de Mourais rompent passablement avec les lectures personnelles auxquelles nous avions jusque-là habitués la plupart des critiques littéraires africanistes.

J. Fame Ndongo (1985) a, lui aussi, des préoccupations théoriques dans son *Esthétiques romanesque de Mongo Beti*. Le titre est un peu trompeur tant il est vrai qu'il s'agit d'un volume qu'on aurait pu ou dû scinder en deux publications distinctes. La première partie est une étude de littérature orale avec tout ce que cela comporte de collecte et de traduction. La deuxième partie, qui donne son titre à l'ouvrage, apparaît comme un appendice à la première et s'attelle à montrer que l'œuvre de Mongo Beti illustre ce que Fame Ndongo appelle "l'esthétique pahouine". Nul ne peut nier que l'œuvre de Mongo Beti prend certaines de ses sources dans les traditions orales africaines. Mais de là à réduire à leur plus simple expression les autres sources d'inspiration, qu'elles soient européennes ou afro-américaines, il y a un pas qu'il faut éviter de franchir trop rapidement. Il y aurait d'ailleurs long à dire sur le texte de Fame Ndongo, texte dont les bases sémiotiques restantes, mais dont certains présupposés idéologiques de

l'auteur, ajoutés à un travail d'amateur au niveau éditorial (trop nombreuses coquilles, table des matières oublié, etc.) en rend la lecture assez pénible.

Le récent ouvrage de Jacques Fame Ndongo est plus proprement édité. Il s'agit cette fois-ci d'une thèse qui s'inscrit au cœur du mouvement institutionnel qui est en train de voir le jour au Cameroun. Alors qu'un Patrice Etoundi-Mballa (1987) dans *Une vie à l'envers* en appelle pratiquement à une création inféodé au groupe dominant, Fame Ndongo, quant à lui, va encore plus loin et une critique littéraire qui vouerait aux gémonies tout artiste contestataire. Il condamne nommément Mongo Beti (1986) pour avoir écrit sa *Lettre ouverte au Camerounais*, c'est-à-dire pour ne pas s'être rallié à «M. Paul Biya, généralement considéré comme un leader modéré, tolérant, humaniste et libéral» (*Le Prince et le scribe* (1988:318)). Et l'auteur de conclure et de prescrire: «L'œuvre exaltante de construction nationale exige la participation de tous [...] C'est pourquoi il serait souhaitable que toutes les composantes de la nation se retrouvent sur le sol des ancêtres pour bâtir ensemble une cité heureuse » (ibid. 320). Toute écriture est certes logique et il y a lieu de penser que le débat idéologique sur la littérature camerounaise et la critique ne fait que commencer.

Lectures Camerounaises Des Littératures Du Monde Noir

En 1973, Thomas Melone publie *Chinua Achebe et la tragédie de l'histoire* après avoir sorti Mongo Beti, *l'homme et le destin* (1971). Ce faisant, Melone montrait que l'unité de recherche qu'il dirigeait avait des préoccupations authentiquement transafricaines. Avec le temps, on se rend compte que nombre de ses étudiants lui ont emboîté le pas. Minyono-Nkodo (1979) a publié *Comprendre les bouts de bois de Dieux de Sembene Ousmane*. Clément Mbom s'est intéressé aux Antillais avec *Le théâtre d'Aime Césaire* (1979) et *Frantz Fanon, aujourd'hui et demain* (1985). Tôt ou tard, on portera sur la place publique le débat concernant la discipline à laquelle il convient de rattacher la dernière étude de Mbom: littérature, sociologie, psychologie/psychanalyse ou même science politique? Je ne sais. Mais je ne voudrais pas non plus alimenter une polémique semblable à celle qui a cours depuis quelques années dans *Peuples noirs, peuples africains* (voir Nos 37,43 et 55, 56, 57), débat

suscite par l'acception que j'ai donnée de la littérature dans le *Dictionnaire des œuvres littéraires négro-africaines de langue française* (1983).

Après Clément Mbom, rappel de la diaspora a également été entendu par André Ntonfo (1979) qui, dans *L'homme et l'identité dans le roman Antilles et Guyane française* répertorie et analyse le « malaise antillais, ses sources profondes ou occasionnelles, ses manifestations troublantes parfois étranges » (Jack Corzani, Preface, p. 9).

Sylvestre Bouellet (1987) vient d'ajouter une nouvelle pierre à l'édifice avec *Espaces et dialectiques du héros césairen*. Aucun doute que l'œuvre de Césaire a marqué durablement les critiques littéraires camerounais! Dans un essai qui fit date, *Léopold Sedar Senghor ou servitude*, Marcien Towa (1971), ancien professeur à la Faculté des Lettres, s'en était vivement pris à l'idéologie servile qui, selon lui se dégage des poèmes de Senghor. Le texte de M. Towa n'était en réalité qu'un prélude à *Poésie de La négritude* (1983), ouvrage dans lequel Towa confronte les œuvres des deux géants de la négritude et montre sa préférence pour la vision du monde que révèle la poésie de Césaire. Soulignons que l'auteur est un fervent disciple de Goldman dont il applique avec rigueur la théorie du structuralisme génétique dans la *Poésie de la négritude*.

A Quand Le “Centre Camerounais Des Lettres?”

Tout indique, on le voit, que l'activité critique aurait pu connaître une très forte expansion si les moyens matériels étaient venus au secours des initiatives dignes d'être encouragées. Les sources de subventions des productions culturelles sont pourtant nombreuses et diverses. Le ministère de la Culture a par exemple subventionné à grands frais la préparation du colloque sur l'identité culturelle et l'édition des actes, *L'identité culturelle camerounaise* (1985). Le ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur subventionne nombre de publications scientifiques dont *African Theatre Review* que dirige Siga Asanga. Le ministère de l'Education nationale disposerait, lui aussi, de fonds pour l'aide à l'édition. Ces dernières années, l'université de Yaoundé a investi des sommes énormes dans la publication de nombreux ouvrages dont ceux de André Ntonfo, de Sylvestre Bouellet, de Jacques Fame Ndongo, de Clément Mbom, etc.

On peut se demander s'il n'y a pas lieu de regrouper ces fonds épars pour créer, à l'instar de la France, un Centre National de Recherches des Lettres ou en Sciences Humaines comme il en existe dans les pays d'Amérique du Nord. De la sorte, les publications scientifiques pourraient s'adresser à un organisme indépendant pour demander un financement institutionnel. Voilà qui mettrait fin au paradoxe qui fait qu'en ce moment, les seules revues culturelles dynamiques dirigées par des Camerounais se trouvent être Peuples noirs, peuples africaine, les « Temps modernes » de l'Afrique contemporaine, et Nouvelles du Sud, toutes deux, basées en France.

Notes

1. Article paru dans *Notre Librairie: Littérature camerounaise*.
2. *Le livre dans tous ses états*, 100, Janvier- Mars 1990, pp. 30-34. (réproduire avec la permission de l'auteur et de la revue).

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The Indigenous and the Alien In Cameroon Writing

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Abstract

Although Cameroon has made tremendous progress with the written word, a tradition inherited from the West, the dominant mode of cultural transmission remains the spoken word. Cameroon Writing is contextualized within a triple heritage of indigenous imperatives, Eastern traditions and Western legacies, some of which foster as well as constrain literary and scientific productivity. Cameroon's culture is the sorry story of how alien forces impacted on indigenous institutions and cultural systems and stagnated, corrupted, distorted, or replaced them at least partially. This accounts for the duality of the Cameroon socio-cultural system, characterized by the existence of Cameroonians at the fringes of traditional and modern worlds. The marginality of Cameroon Writers is exacerbated by their extensive academic acculturation which makes it difficult, if not impossible, for to discern the stark realities of their ecocultures. It is for this reason that the ecocultural framework is proposed here as a conceptual paradigm to inspire sensivity to the local ecoculture and a fresh look at our ethno-cultural histories and identities, which contribute to the Cameroon Identity that must be preserved.

Thus far, our strategies for the preservation of this identity have been misguided; they have been lopsided in favour of the Francophone majority and partial to the detriment of the Anglo-Saxon cultural minority. Cameroon Writers are called upon to research and bring out the truth about our identity of diversity. Only the truth shall set us free and save our nation from impending disaster. Each Cameroonian Writer owes an obligation for the survival of this identity.

Introduction

I understand Cameroon Writing to refer to that body of the written word, that is, the literature produced by Cameroonian women and men of science: arts, and literary culture. Even a cursory scrutiny of this literature would reveal that it contains elements of both the indigenous and the alien. It is indigenous in the sense that it is produced by Cameroonians and reflects their heritage culture and. ecological and existential realities, as well as the blind spots and shortcomings of its producers. It is alien in the sense that the outlooks of the Cameroonians who produce it and their ecology have been influenced by exogenous or alien forces whose impact on their writing cannot be ignored. This alien element is magnified by the fact Cameroonians inherited the Writing Tradition “ready-made from the West rather than having participated actively in its development” (Kagitcibasi, 1984).

In fact, the logic of discourse within African social thought differs considerably from its nature within Western scholarship. In consequence, Cameroon Writers can only attempt to present their indigenous reality in terms of what is acceptable in western academia. Thus, literature out of Cameroon is “neither entirely indigenous nor entirely alien”, it is a hybrid (Nsamenang, 1992a) suffuse with themes and images wherein “the old traditional ways have a continuing relevance, along with the new” (Ellis, 1978).

In the light of this dualistic, inherently conflictual, scenario, the major scholarly challenge to the Cameroon Writer is to strike a delicate balance between representing the indigenous and upholding, at least minimal standards of acceptable scholarship. From this perspective, it is extremely important to accept and work from the premise that Cameroon and Cameroonian Writers of all persuasions must measure up and compete at par with all others in the arena of international scholarship. However, in doing so, they must, at all times, preserve that unique Cameroon Identity; an identity born out of unparalleled diversity.

The primary purpose of this paper is to highlight the extent to which alien forces set to work on the varied raw materials (e.g., Davis-Roberts, 1986) of Cameroon’s heritage cultures and ecology and its impact on or implication for Cameroon writing. More precisely, my

intention is to briefly; trace the development of Cameroon's hybrid culture, and attempt to articulate how these foster or stifle Cameroon Writing; and present an ecocultural frame of reference, defined by ecology, cultural history, and the sociocultural system as a conceptual framework that can guide awareness of local points of view into Cameroon Writing. This is a framework that can promote indigenization of Cameroon Writing.

I begin the paper with an examination of the wide variability in the ecology of Cameroon Writing. Next, I trace the externalization of the Cameroonian space, culture, and psyche. My use of the term externalization rather than the conventional westernization is deliberate (see Nsamenang, 1992a. p. 99): Western influence is but one of several exterior influences on Cameroon. The main sources of the external forces, which are the focus of the second section, include Eastern cultures and Western legacies. In the third part, I describe the nature of the dualism of the sociocultural landscape and its impact on the Cameroonian psyche and orientations. The fourth part is devoted to a discussion of Cameroon Writing in the light of identity crisis and triple heritage of enculturation to the indigenous and acculturation to alien cultural elements. In the fifth section, I present an ecocultural frame of reference as a conceptual paradigm that can inspire the production of culture-relevant Cameroon Literature. The sixth section highlights the social impact of literacy and proceeds to the role of the Writer in the survival of Cameroon's identity in section seven. The paper terminates with a final word on Cameroon's "failing" experiment with bilingual federalism.

The Ecology of Cameroon Scholarship and Writing

No part of planet earth has been a greater recipient of alien influences and foreign invaders than Africa, especially Cameroon, "the one spot in the black continent where all the African peoples meet" (Fonlon, 1976). In fact, Cameroon is the historical "cross-roads for the extensive migrations of many peoples" (Smithsonian Institute, 1984). Cameroon's ecological, demographic, cultural and linguistic diversity qualifies it as "Africa in miniature", indeed as "all of Africa contained in a single triangle" (Dobel, 1977). This claim has support in

Nsamenang's (1992c) observation some of Cameroon's ethnic polities trace their roots across national borders to the ends of the continent and beyond. For instance

The Bantu claim kinship with people as far south as the South African Cape. The kinfolks of the Sudanese and Fulani are said to be found in Senegal and Mauritania in the west and Sudan in the northeast. Whereas an enclave of Pygmies, the hunter-gatherers of the south-eastern forest, are considered the aborigines of the land. Shuwa Arabs in the far north of the country claim and trace their ancestry via North Africa to the Middle East. (Nsamenang, 1992c. pp. 419-420)

This diversity is further magnified by Cameroon's encounters with three imperial powers - Germany, Britain and France - an unusual experience in the world. In this light, the birth of the Federal Republic of Cameroon in 1961 brought together

“La Republique du Cameroun and Southern Cameroons; peoples, whose separate ‘c roots and colonial experiences, in Levine's (1976) estimation, “provided marked contrasts not only in language, law, administration and education but also in such less tangible matters as political style and expectations”. From this point of view the key to an understanding of Cameroon history and issues of survival and identity, is the different ethnic roots and colonial experiences of La Republique du Cameroun (French-speaking Cameroon) and Southern (English-speaking) Cameroons, the two partners of the Cameroon Federation, as superimposed on indigenous cultural identities and an earlier German legacy.

A critical question deriving from Cameroon's diverse, albeit chequered, national history thus pertains to the role the Writer (e.g. scholar, researcher, scientist, journalist, politician, even elite) plays in the survival of this diversity. My considered opinion in this matter is that our diversity should be regarded and handled as a “divine gift”, bequeathed not in error nor as a national curse, but by design as the hallmark of our national character and mark of vitality. In other words, our diversity is a potential national resource that should be harnessed, not stifled, laid to waste, or used for destructive purposes.

From this backdrop, any strategy for the survival of this identity must, as matter of national duty and obligation, begin from and include as a primordial goal meticulous preservation of all the constituent elements (i.e., the multiple ethnic politics and cultural blocks) that formed the historic Cameroon Union. In plain terms, Cameroon's identity derives from the two distinct identities subsumed a unification in 1961 by La Republique du Cameroun and Southern Cameroons. That identity must not be disturbed or undermined; it is an integral component of our national patrimony.

The cleavages, tensions and conflicts the multiple ethnicity and colonial experiences evoked and continue to engender are not the anchor-points of this paper. Rather, my foremost concern is to explore and expand the point that Cameroon Writing should reflect the political evolution, rich cultural heritages and environmental imperatives of Cameroon's diverse peoples, rather than pay only lip service, to them.

We shall now proceed to explain how Cameroon Writing became contextualized within a hybrid culture.

The Development of a Hybrid Culture in Cameroon

The emergence and development of a hybrid culture in Cameroon is the sorry story of Cameroon's contacts and encounters with other peoples and cultures. In one sense, it is the history of how Cameroon's heritage cultures, especially religions and cultural norms, were derided, denigrated and coercively suppressed by European, imperialists, Arab envoys of Allah (Islamic clerics) and European emissaries of God (Christian missionaries). Mazrui (1986) coined the term triple heritage to label the forces that shaped an African hybrid culture, an uncomfortable state of affairs. This triple heritage refers to the current dualistic nature of the African social reality characterized by the triple existence of African heritage cultures, Eastern traditions, and Western legacies. Cameroon is, like the rest of the colonized world, heir to this heritage. The domesticated patterns of the external cultures have, in a manner of speaking, become inescapable components of the African experience and thus qualify as integral elements of the African condition (Nsamenang, 1992a). Science, literacy, Arabic, English and

French are a few examples of the domesticated fragments of exterior cultures that now constitute components of our national heritage from which Cameroonians in general and Cameroon Writers in particular cannot escape.

The current socio-cultural scenario in Cameroon therefore is the culmination of an insidious as well as frank symptomatology of centuries of slavery, colonial subjugation, economic exploitation, political manipulation (Nsamenang, 1993), and the “denigration of the indigenous systems of learning and science” (Sinha: 1989). This wrought irreversible changes in the material, institutional, and value foundations of indigenous cultures and replaced, twisted, distorted, and in the end corrupted them (Southall, 1988). Fortunately, nowhere has this led to the total disintegration of indigenous systems (Nsamenang, 1987): hence the presence of the indigenous and the alien in most, if not all, genres of Cameroon Writing.

Thus, the contemporary cultural landscape is characterized by an uneasy co-existence of endogenous and exogenous value systems and hybrid generations of Cameroonians, many of whom have more faith in life as ordained and directed by imperial Europe (Nsamenang, 1992a) than by their own compatriots. Our writers must grapple with this existential reality of the Cameroonian polity and national life.

Ellis (1978) alleged that all African cultures, to varying degrees of course have been exposed to external influences, the “effects of which should not be underplayed. “The implication here is that we should not undermine the ubiquity of the alien factor in Cameroon Writing. That is, Cameroon writers may not be under adulterated purveyors of their authentic culture; this point potentially carries profound social, cultural and political ramifications. The extensive suppression and naked denigration of our cultural traditions left Cameroonians with a “deep sense of inferiority and aggrievement” (Hunter, 1962). The impact of this trauma has literally remained a lively influence in the attitudes and behavioural repertoires of generations Cameroonians until today. It is Cameroonians with these kinds of value systems and thought patterns who are producing Cameroon literature. In this light, acculturation becomes a central theme and issue in Cameroon writing.

The Indigenous and the Alien in Cameroon Writing

The co-existence of indigenous traditions, Eastern legacies and Western norms in Cameroon, for example, paved the way for the development and entrenchment of three strands of social thought, value systems and administrative traditions, namely, indigenous African, Arabo-Islamic, and Western-Christian (Nsamenang, 1992a). Elements of these three strands can be discerned in the literature of most parts of Africa.

The long-term effect of living within the fringes of fiercely competing value systems, and ideologies is a marginality wherein Africans as a whole and Cameroonians in particular, are merely “groping desperately for answers to make their existence bearable” (Laosebikan, 1982). According to Nsamenang (1992a), the struggle to reconcile the contradictions and conflicts incidental to marginal existence takes a profound toll on the individual and collective psyche and health. Hence the restiveness, generalized debility and general lack of sense of direction in Cameroon today.

Most Africans, like Cameroonians, begin life in the village, and regardless level of acculturation or wherever they go after that, “they carry the village them. The extent of this marginality is captured in Obiechina’s (1975) lucid that the West African, indeed the Cameroonian, only has a “thin layer of modern sophistication concealing the deep centre of traditional beliefs and feel it. Yet, while contemporary Cameroonians are motivated largely by indigenous precepts our government (like any other government in Africa), has created “with eloquent but vain promises, socioeconomic programmes without adequate ecocultural roots in Africa” (Nsamenang, 1992a, p.67). The common denominator, of course, has been varying degrees of programme failure recorded across the country and the continent. One does not need an expert to locate the turmoil of unkept promises of most Five Year Plans, whose consequences are observable everywhere.

Although the traditional African and modern worlds look far apart in content and orientation, they are not so far apart in the reality of the contemporary Cameroonian condition. Their twilight zone is the psyche and individual lives of people. There is thus a certain degree of

ambivalence in Cameroonian attitudes behaviour repertoires. Most of the writers grapple with these ambivalences as well as with frames of orientation as evolved by Western civilization. To be more specific, most writers intimate nostalgia for Cameroon as teleguided by colonial “master” of this or that “federated state” or depict it as conceived from the vantage position of the adopted British or French outlooks. Why can we not evolve a Cameroonian perspective, a perspective born out of Cameroon’s unique but rich diversity? ‘

A substantial amount of popular literature has been produced on the actual and imagined tensions and conflicts between English-speaking and French-speaking Cameroonians regarding “who gets what share of the national cake, how, and why”. This raises the crucial issue of social power between the two cultural bloc In studying the power relations among constituent elements of the Cameroon polity we need to remember that an understanding of the cultural roots of each group mu add to, but not replace, an appreciation of the importance of its historical roots especially those of the two entities of the Cameroon Union.

Unfortunately, very little research has actually been carried out on this more critical aspect of our national life; this needs to be done and, within prevailing circumstances, be incorporated into national policy and development planning as matter of priority, if not national emergency. The extent to which the extra Cameroon literature reveals or reflects the actual diversity in the Cameroon Identity is thus doubtful. For instance, how many of our writers have objectively described the exact nature of our sub-soils with mineral resources, a natural endowment. Herein lies the true intellectual or scientific challenge to our hitherto misguide pursuit of strategies for survival and identity.

Identity Crisis and Cameroon Writing

Every cultural community has a theory of knowledge that specifies the limits of knowledge and the path to its acquisition (Ochs, 1988). Admittedly, African, and Cameroon in particular, has its own knowledge, and scholars. Cameroon knowledge differs from the Western in that it is framed by different world views and is oriented

towards different consequences (Nsamenang, 1992c). Ever since Euro-American presence was entrenched in Africa, local knowledge “increasingly ceased to be, rooted in the African soils” (Ojiaku, 1974). Like many an import into the continent, it increasingly became foreign as conclusions on, say, Cameroon literature and’ scholarship, were and are significantly influenced by “Western societal beliefs, value systems and ideological perspectives” (Ojiaku, *ibid.*). For example, dance and song are integral features of African cultural life and play a more important sociological role in Africa than they do in the Western world. However, the decision as to which specific African dance pattern or song ought to be given priority by a Cameroonian Writer or Artist is often reached as a result of examining what is regarded as important in the Western world rather than using indigenous criteria. The guidelines for the decision are usually obtained in reference to the literary and artistic traditions of a particular colonial power which ruled a particular African or nation. The choice is also often made in reference to the criteria forged by collaborating Western colleagues (indeed “superiors”) rather than in reference to the viewpoints of African peers.

By virtue of their training and extensive acculturation, Cameroon writers are ors and peddlers of alien cultural fragments, goods, ideas, tastes, and *modus operandi*. As such, they need to be aware that with every concession to externalization their cultural traditions are compromised and their people feel an intensifying sense of alienation and deepening loss of personal and collective identity; perhaps, of collective deception.

Cameroon writers, like their other compatriots, live on the fringes of aous and alien worlds. In point of fact, they are danglers, caught in a twilight zone of value conflict and identity crisis. An overview of the national press in recent years points to the depth of this crisis. The identity crisis of Anglophone Cameroon writers, for instance, is exacerbated not only by the presence and pervasive influence of the colonial “master” of their Union Partner (i.e., the French) but also by the assimilating ploys of the Partner herself. In consequence, the most assertive logical attributes and literary’ orientations of contemporary Anglophone writers largely emanate from a rejection of the majority’s ways and reactive response to the “evil’ machinations of “native”

assimilators and their neo-colonialist agents. In this respect, it is not at all whimsical or difficult to imagine it feels to be a member of a minority group, “whose distinctive culture is little appreciated” (Ellis, 1978) by a majority partner in a deliberately constituted union? By contrast, the mindset and literary orientations of many Francophone Cameroonians emanates from a claimed superiority and a covert experiment of assimilation those Cameroonians and the annexation of their territory, through a lopsided of national integration.

My focus in the next section shifts to a brief presentation of a conceptual paradigm to inspire indigenization of the written word in Cameroon. “Indigenization as a process of deriving theories, concepts, tools, and methods from a socio-cultural and reflecting back upon the culture has become accepted as a legitimate goal’ (Sahoo, 1993, p. 2). This becomes the more compelling against the background of extensive acculturation and most writers’ difficulty, even failure, to capture “the subject-matter: the theories and concepts through which owners of the culture see cultural world” (Anyawu, 1975).

An Ecocultural Frame of Reference

In my book *Human Development in a Cultural Context: A Third World Perspective*, (1992a) I paint “broad strokes” of the ecocultural framework which I claim to be relevant and useful for Africa. This framework is “a general guide to classes of variables ... in human behaviour and experience” (Berry, 1993). It is a heuristic device whose value lies in the questions it evokes and the kind of appropriate answers it supplies (Sternberg, 1984). In this sense, it represents a new way of looking at ourselves and our ecoculture in order to develop greater sensitivity to the naked realities of our environments. According to Stokols (1987), “by making explicit consideration of contextual factors a routine part of research, important aspects of the target [literary or scientific] phenomenon might be revealed that otherwise would have been neglected”.

Thus, the seminal concept of the ecocultural framework is contextual richness. Almost every literary or scientific phenomenon is embedded in a specific ecoculture, defined by geography, cultural history, and socio-cultural system. History shapes and sharpens the

psyche just as it canalizes orientations and emotions (Nsamenang, 1992a). Nowhere else is cultural history so potent a determinant than in Cameroon (e.g. Nsamenang, 1992a). Cameroon history has done this rather perfectly. For instance, in recent years Anglophone Cameroon writers have had to reflect on their cultural history and are increasingly becoming vocal in indicating the extent to which their adoption of Francophone ways undermines theirs, resulting in the loss of their own political and cultural heritage.

Ideas about and orientations towards a literary culture emerge out of cultural historical contexts. The physical and social environments provide cultural meaningful experiences for their members. The socio-cultural system offers scripts, agents, and institutions that inspire and nourish literary or artistic talents. Accordingly, Nsamenang (1992a, p. 36) claims that “artists and poets are among professional groups for whom the effective mode of experiencing environments both a literary theme and the principal source of professional inspiration”. This implies that creative art, like other scientific or literary productivity, cannot be properly understood out of their contextual embeddedness.

The ecocultural model draws attention to and seeks to focus interest and sensitivity on “local frames of reference” (Berry et al., 1992), *modus vivendi*, and the place-specificity of behaviour. Contextualism on the Cameroonian ecoculture expected to produce a body of facts, values, and beliefs which the Cameroonian has concerning himself or herself and his or her society as a polity. Such knowledge must have either originated and been validated in the Cameroon social structure environment or else, where borrowed from outside the country, must have been modified over time to fit into the Cameroon social reality (e.g., Ojiaku, 1974). Cameroon writers thus face the challenging task to ground their writings and science on an understanding of Cameroon history and societal structure.

The Social Impact of Literacy

The relationship between scholarship, or, in the present consideration; literature and society has long been recognized (e.g. Obiechina, 1975); but it has not always been fully appreciated the extent to which a particular society both inspires and influences the

subject matter of its science or literature and its development. Though most commentators on or critics of Cameroon writing are quick to point out its peculiarities; they sometimes fail to appreciate the extent to which it is conditioned by or falls short of Cameroon's peculiar ecology and history. As a result, such' commentators or critics tend to expect Cameroon writers to write as if they were writers with different ecological backgrounds, cultural outlooks and environmental imperatives.

Through the introduction of literacy, the corpus of Western, indeed world civilization, its institutions and values, arts and sciences, philosophies and theology, its values and the artefacts of its material culture have somehow been made available: (Obiechina, 1975) to Cameroonians, at least the literate classes. This new aspirations, quickened the urge toward new aspirations and emulations and provided novel notions.

Literacy is indispensable to the emergence and consolidation or development writing or literary tradition. Literature is more easily sustained and followed by reading it than by hearing it. The achievement of literacy produces social and psychological capacities in the individual which foster the growth of writing skills. Obeichina (1975) cites Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* as explaining how establishment of mass literacy precipitated far-reaching changes in the culture and social habits of the British working class. Can this be said of Cameroon?

Oral tradition implies a situation in which cultural transmission is carried out by word of mouth through direct contact between individuals depending largely on and habits of thought, action and speech for cultural continuity (Obiechina.1975) On the other hand, cultural transmission within a literary tradition is carried out through the written word and the existence of written records. However, in spite of the growth of literacy in Cameroon, the dominant mode of communication and expression remains the oral or spoken word.

The spread of literacy has been a major source of change in Cameroonian life and society. This reflects in the content of Cameroon literature which, on account of the dual cognitive repertoire of writers, contains elements of both traditionalism and modernity. There is evidence of both oral and literary traditions in the writings of many

Cameroonian writers. Knowledge of these traditions is relevant to an understanding of the tone and texture of most Cameroon writings, a situation which further highlights the co-existence of old and new sensibilities in the same works. In fact, in some of the writings we find several different historical periods rolled into one to give voice to the experiences peculiar to both the oral and literary traditions and to express the peculiarities of worlds as different as the traditional and the modern. The tenacity of traditionalism and its juxtapositioning with the imperatives of modernity come fully into life in the writings of Bongasu Kishani, Bole Butake, Ferdinand Oyono, Kenjo Jumban, and others. On the other hand, Bate Besong's and Babila Mutia's works typify the tensions, conflicts and ambivalences that are the bane of existence in Cameroon today. These points to the failure of or refusal by the national leadership to accept the most salient fact of the Cameroon Union, the diversity in the Cameroon Identity. As a result, the unsolicited fate of Anglophone Cameroonians, for example, is a distorted history, a despised culture as well as a shattered infrastructure and patrimony.

Strategies for Survival and Identity: The Writer's Role.

The introduction of literacy in Cameroon brought about profound social change. In this light, every writer must ask what impact his or her writing has or can exert on Cameroon society and identity.

The stand taken by the writer regarding the strategies for survival and identity will set the stage for the survival or destruction of the Cameroon identity. The Cameroon writer may take a back-seat as a neutral observer, a pure writer churning out knowledge for its own sake, or be an active agent, taking the centre stage in the preservation of Cameroon identity. Asked differently, shall the Cameroon writer be indifferent, strive to ensure that our enormous diversity is harnessed for national progress and welfare, or ascertain that it is used for self-inflicted acrimony and national destruction?

There is need for every Cameroon writer to foster collective self-awareness as a means of enhancing the survival of the Cameroon identity, a unique blend various constituent heritage cultures and the acquired British and French cultural

To contemplate on strategies for survival of the Cameroon Identity in its full diversity, I invite every Cameroon writer to reflect and take a stand on the following six questions: (1) Why should we so deliberately ignore conspicuous facts about collective identity and revel so much in collective deception in concealing our history? (2) Has my work or writing contributed or marred the survival of Cameroon's bi-cultural identity? (3) Shall my writing continue to make for or mar its survival? (4) How shall I contribute to the survival of the Cameroon identity in its rich diversity? (5) Will the truth about our national identity set us free, as the Holy Book claims? (6) Why do we regard our diversity as a national curse rather than evolve strategies to use it as a source of national strength and vigour?

In the light of these questions, the primary task for the Cameroon writer is to produce scholarly or literary and artistic works that promote Cameroon's bi-cultural identity. This can ensure its survival and the progress of the Cameroon polity. doing so, the men and women of letters and science in Cameroon should strive to expand the frontiers of national and international scholarship by upholding academy excellence in the broadest sense of the term.

Final Word

Many writers will acknowledge the fact that writing in a largely non-literate society like Cameroon, with very poor reading habits among the small literate segment of the population, lack of incentives for scholarship, poor infrastructure, scarce publication outlets, and a not-too conducive socio-political climate, is as constraining to productivity as it stands in the way of fruitful and fulfilling writing. These constraints notwithstanding, some of us seem to have adopted intellectual dishonesty as the frame of orientation of our writing. The following three examples of pseudo-economic analyses contributed, at least partially, to derail Cameroon's experiment in bilingual nation-building "... the east [i.e., East Cameroon] had a greater potential than the west [i.e., West Cameroon] ... "(Ndongko, 1975), "... the east has historically been more affluent and better endowed than the west..." (Kofele-Kale, paraphrasing Benjamin, 1980) and "... left on its own, the West Cameroon Government was incapable of maintaining a viable

economy without Federal assistance ... “. This nauseatingly false picture of Southern Cameroons gave La Republique du Cameroun immediate advantage over Southern Cameroons.

Today, we are living witnesses to the truth about our economy. We are also aware of what this kind of shallow and partial pseudo-intellectualism wrought on Cameroon as a polity and on Southern Cameroons as a partner in that polity. Intellectual dishonesty and prostitution are still the “intellectual property of many a Cameroonian writer. The silent facts of our national identity are conspicuous enough en by the newborn, yet, honest writers are conspicuous in their scarcity. We see ink flowing from the pens of Cameroon writers on a daily collision course, ready for a kill, on issues of our identity that are visible even to the blind. How can we also opt for collective deception regarding our identity and destiny?

Cameroon is a mosaic of over 200 variegated ethnic politics. These politics fall under one of two hybrid cultural traditions, the Commonwealth of Francophonie. Any strategies for Survival and Identity, if they are to be successful, must ascertain the preservation of these cultural identities. Cameroon in general and Cameroon in particular need to borrow a leave from Europe. In Europe today, the strategy of integrating immigrant minorities into the majority culture has virtually failed. Consequently, various European governments have accepted the basic differences between their minority and majority populations and are shifting their policy strategies from that of assimilation to co-existence.

Thus far, Cameroon sought national integration through state-building rather than via nation-building. State-building lays primacy on state authority, whereas nation-building concentrates on the needs and welfare of citizens. How can citizens be loyal to state institutions if their most basic needs are not satisfied? One must hasten to add that support or non-support for the survival of our national identity depends much, if not solely, on the perceived orientation of national leadership and/or the national government vis-a-vis the identity and role of each of the numerous constituent components that accord form and vitality to a true Cameroon Identity, subsumed by La Republique du Cameroun and Southern Cameroons, as envisaged at unification in 1961. For me, the link between politicians and

individuals, come and go, but Cameroon's identity persists; it transcends the life span individuals, governments, political parties, and interest groups. As knowledge-makers, a Writer may serve any politician, regime or group, but, in doing so, he or she holds a national obligation not to interfere with, much less contribute to the destruction of our identity. Cameroon's patrimony and identity do not belong to this segment of the country, political class, party, or regime, regardless of its avowed benevolence; they belong to all Cameroonians, including our ancestors, the present generation as well as generations of Cameroonians yet to be born.

Truth and only the truth which the Cameroon writer should take the centre to bring out shall save the impending disintegration of that identity and polity. We must forge an identity out of Cameroon's rich, chequered history and ethno cultural diversity/ Only writing that reveals Cameroon's identity of unity in diversity will prevent the looming national chaos and bring to Cameroonians the freedom and serenity that truth engenders. This timely conference, a rare forum for Cameroon writers, indeed intellectuals, to prove their doubted mettle, should act decisively and promptly, aware that their nation stands being torn apart by writing from their refined. as well as unrefined and petty pens. For how else can we judge a socio-political scenario wherein untruth, misinformation, and distortion of conspicuous national realities and issues have become the sole content domain for many a writer?

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Le Dépassement Ethnique: Esquisse D'une Théorie De L'identité

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Abstract

Le dépassement ethnique est un essai de théorisation d'un problème dont dépend la survie de notre société ou la figuration de notre identité. Le problème est de savoir si l'ethnie est une donnée éternelle pour l'Afrique en général et pour le Cameroun en particulier, donnée qu'il faut par conséquent assumer et entériner en l'état ou si, au contraire, elle comporte une dynamique évolutive qu'il faut donc canaliser, et dans quel sens. L'option pour la première thèse est un enfermement dans l'ethnisme et le tribalisme qui peuvent s'avérer destructeurs ou auto-destructeurs dans le contexte des luttes sociales. L'engagement pour la dynamique évolutive montre, de son côté, que notre identité se situe dans un future qu'il faut donc en s'inspirant des exemples de l'histoire universelle, dans laquelle les nations ne se sont construites qu' en dépassant les particularismes tant ethniques que linguistiques et religieux. En d'autres termes, c'est le dépassement de ces particularismes qui nous installe dans une identité solide et susceptible de garantir la survie.

I. La problématique ethnique dans L' Afrique d'aujourd'hui

Point n'est besoin de faire beaucoup d'anthropologie pour comprendre que la réalité africaine est faite d'une diversité ethnique qui constitue en même temps une bombe à retardement mettant son avenir en danger. Tout le problème est de savoir comment désamorcer cette bombe et garantir une survie harmonieuse du continent.

Il convient tout d'abord d'illustrer la diversité en question, avant de poser la problématique de son dépassement.

Cette diversité est en effet apparente dans certains pays où ce sont les diverses langues qui en délimitent les contours, de sorte qu'il y aura autant de tribus que de langues. Au Cameroun, les linguistes font état de deux cent trente-six langues environ définissant autant de tribus. (1) Le nombre n'est peut-être pas aussi élevé dans chacun des pays africains, mais la diversité apparaît comme un incontournable commun dénominateur; même dans les pays qui ont une langue véhiculaire. Au Sénégal, l'existence du Wolof ou du Sérère n'efface pas la diversité, et donc sentiment ethnique, pas plus que le Lingala ne le fait au Congo ou au Zaïre. Là même où l'on s'attendrait à une langue officielle commune qui déborde les frontières comme le Swahili dans les pays de L' Afrique Orientale ou le Peuhl dans ceux Sahel, on rencontre, plus exacerbe encore, et au sein même des Etats, le fait ethnique et tribal, chaque sous-groupe revendiquant avec véhémence son identité.

On aurait même pu croire que, s'imposant à tout le monde comme dans une sorte d'arbitrage impartial, la langue étrangère, celle du colon anglais, Belge, espagnol, français ou portugais, allait, avec la culture implicite qu'elle véhiculait effacer les particularismes originels et créer une grande unification nationale. Au contraire, et en appliquant plutôt le principe de César, diviser pour régner, l'administration colonial s'employa dans l'enracinement essentiellement ethnique de populations indigènes, qu'il s'agisse de l'"Indirect Rule" des colons anglais ou de la politique jacobine d'assimilation culturelle. Des exemples abondent pour attester ce fait. Les Tutsi au Rwanda, et cela depuis des générations, ont été conditionnés par le Maître occidental pour barrer la voie aux Hutu et leur imposer leur hégémonie L'holocauste d'aujourd'hui s'enracine dans cette histoire coloniale. Au Cameroun où les ethnies existent en grand nombre, l'antagonisme n'aura plus le même caractère tranche, dichotomique. Il sera diffracte en plusieurs grands pôles d'antagonisme dont les multiples partis politiques iront plus tard suivre la découpe. En dehors de la compétition ethnique qui prend par-ci par-là des allures d'une guerre larvée actionnée de l'extérieur, exemple Bamoun-Bamiléké, Béti-Bamiléké, Anglo-Franco, etc., le conflit le plus exemplaire, parceque le plus sanglant et meurtrier,

est sans doute celui de la partie septentrionale du pays, entre les Arabes-Choas et les Kotoko.

Il est anormal de placer 28,000 Arabes sous le commandement d'un représentant d'une race différente, que ne compte que 6,000 individus. Mais si nous supprimons ce Sultan ce sera l'anarchie, tant que nous n'aurons pas un nombreux personnel européen spécialisé à Goufel...Il est prudent de conserver Diagara" (2)

dira M. Cros (1920), ancien chef de bataillon colonial.

Le colon est donc conscient de cet errement colonial, mais il le maintient tout de même par pragmatisme. Ce commentaire d'une note du Chef de subdivision de Fort Foureau (actuel Kousseri) s'opposant dans les années 50 à l'ouverture d'une école franco-arabe à Am Choulga, en zone arabe, le prouve:

Il s'agit d'éviter toute progression culturelle de type arabisant, de préserver à tout prix le processus de désagrégation tribal, d'empêcher les Arabes d'accéder à la chose publique, bref, de les détourner de toute évolution collective consciente de leurs origines et de leurs droits... dans le but de maintenir la sujétion des Arabes aux Kotoko, considérée comme le garant de la tutelle française dans la région. (Bucher. 1973, p.22)

Le fait que les élites tant Arabes Choas que Kotoko écrivent des lettres ouvertes au Président de la République, pour se plaindre ou pour se justifier, montre, dans le sens de notre exposé, le rôle indispensable de l'arbitrage étatique, ainsi que le caractère rationnel de ce recours. Cette difficile volonté d'intégration se donne, par là, comme une correction du démembrement colonial, une tentative de dépasser le bétonnage tribal soigneusement implanté par l'occident qui ne négligeait aucun détail pour ce faire. Jean Mfoulou (1981: 7-8) le rappelle avec clarté dans sa brochure qui traite précisément du pluralisme ethnique en Afrique:

Furthermore, since the rulers were interested only in running the countries, they used tribal divisions to impose their authority. Lugard's philosophy of "indirect rule" and its application in countries such as Nigeria or Uganda are

too well known to need further elaboration on that here. But even the French, with their ideologies of centralized administration and cultural assimilation did not try to create a feeling of togetherness among their subjects. To support this I can cite the fact that somebody born in Senegal or in Cameroon, for example, was not a Senegalese or a Cameroonian? He was rather referred to in official records (birth certificate, school enrolment, tax roll. and so on) - as a Lebu, a Wolof, a Serer, a Bassa, a Duala, a Bafia, according to the tribe his (or her) parents belonged to. There was, therefore, no common socio-cultural reference to the new territorial entity, which remained a merely administrative unit. And, apart from some Western education they were getting in school, the only things which really united the subjects were their common subjection, and maybe a common desire and decision to get rid of their masters and start anew.

Un sentiment d'appartenance à une même entité territoriale, donne un sentiment d'appartenance nationale n'avait pas été inculqué aux nationaux et, tout au plus, d'après Mfoulou, pouvaient-ils avoir une volonté commune de se débarrasser de leurs maîtres pour entamer leur propre édification. C'est donc dans cette volonté commune que gît tout le problème: comment opérer cette synergie qui pourrait conduire du Multiple à l'un de l'ethnie à la nation, les maîtres étant partis?

Ce qui est clair en tout cas, et indépendamment de toute théorie de l'urgence, c'est que, pour se bâtir, les nations africaines ne peuvent et ne doivent adopter ni les procédures ni les délais de leurs homologues d'occident. Au contraire doivent-elles se servir de leurs exemples, bons et mauvais, pour l'impulsion d'une dynamique originale et sûre, autant que peut l'être un acte posé dans le drame de l'histoire.

II. Tâtonnements africains: les premiers pas de la nation camerounaise

L'héritage naturel d'une diversité inextricable, le renforcement d'identités primaires par administration coloniale, telle est la croix et la bannière de la construction nationale en Afrique. Comment transcender en effet toutes ces complexités et parvenir à l'unité en toute harmonie? Comment dépasser les particularités sans créer en même temps de la frustration et de la rancœur? Comment s'engager

dans l'aventure de la nation quand on sait que le prix c'est le déchirement, le dépaysement et peut-être l'exil?

Le plus souvent, l'Etat a été l'instrument à la fois efficace et terrible de la construction de la nation africaine. Terrible, parce que l'ethnie, qui est en soi une micro-nation ayant son territoire, sa culture puis sa langue, a dû parfois se nier sous la férule étatique pour entrer, avec d'autres ethnies, dans la constitution de la grande nation conformes aux frontières héritées de la colonisation et dont certaines, comme on sait, divisaient brutalement les nations d'origine en deux ou en trois. Ces nations d'origine devaient donc se faire violence pour s'intégrer dans de nouveaux espaces quasiment artificiels.

Dans son ouvrage *L'afro-fascisme*, l'Algérien Hocine Ait Ahmed (1980: 166) s'en prend à cette tendance d'une intégration nationale qui viendrait d'en haut c'est-à-dire de l'Etat fasciste, tel qu'il se manifeste presque un peu partout Afrique, au moyen de la mobilisation des masses par le parti unique, ou de manipulation des notables et clientèles régionalistes. A éviter surtout, d'après lui, l'imitation des formes historiques par lesquelles les nations européennes se sont constituées autrefois, en raison des risques d'implosion que comporterait ce mimétisme unitariste.

Réduire la Nation émergente au courant unitariste qui a porté cette nation vers l'indépendance c'est tomber dans la pire des aberrations qui est de nier le problème de la construction nationale en le supposant résolu par l'accès à la souveraineté politique.

Déduire la nation émergente de la nation européenne du 19ème siècle, c'est la condamner à la fois à commencer son intégration sur le mode étatique, vertical, homogénéisateur, unitariste, absolutiste des rouages centralistes et à recommencer les désastreuses expériences des nationalismes européens fondés sur l'oppression intérieure et l'expansion extérieure. On aboutirait à une véritable perversion des mouvements de libération, en courants néo-fascistes, à la création de pseudo-nations sans cesse menacées par des contradictions comprimés, minées par des virtualités contenues et harcelées par des jaillissements refoulés. Enchaînement d'autant plus fatal qu'il manque à la nation décolonisée les deux atouts principaux dont bénéficiait la nation européenne à sa naissance: la profondeur du champ historique et la disponibilité, voire la vacance, du champ économique international.

Mais le plus déroutant est qu'à la page suivante, l'auteur ne manque pas de recommander, néanmoins, le recours à "expérience de "l'autre". La solution qui reçoit les faveurs de Ait-Ahmed est celle du régionalisme comme dedication entre le particulier dégénéré ou dégénérateur, et l'universel trop abstrait et trop diluant.

Instrument d'intégration, le régionalisme peut constituer le palier intermédiaire entre les particularismes de base - qui n'ont ni la consistance ethnique ou propre, ni la morphologie géographique nécessaire de l'entité nationale (p.171).

Le régionalisme crée en effet une vie dans un ensemble moyen qui intègre les masses naguère marginalisées en leur faisant participer à leur propre histoire tant politique, économique ou intellectuelle.

C'est à ce titre que le régionalisme peut être libérateur et qu'il se distingue des régionalismes rétrogrades, réactionnaires et irrédentistes de la même manière que le nationalisme ou le socialisme libérateurs se différencient de leurs homologues de façade parce que d'oppression (p.173).

L'idée ici développée est une dénonciation de la forme abstraite du régionalisme à s'en tenir à cette abstraction sans distinction des formes, des contenus et des qualités, on peut tomber effectivement sur des régionalismes irrédentistes ou spontanéistes qui se transforment tôt ou tard en dictatures.

L'étude de Ait-Ahmed d'achève sur un volontarisme délibéré qui se concrétise par une vaste mobilisation linguistique destinée à créer une langue nationale unitaire à partir de celles existantes, aux fins de réinvention d'une identité libératrice.

Mais quoiqu'ayant montré le rôle dynamique de la dialectique régionale, ainsi que celui libérateur de la langue, cet auteur s'en tient à la généralité de la solution. En fait, on devrait pouvoir, à partir de cette généralité, esquisser une vision peu programmatique.

Thierry Michalon pense quant à lui que les micro-nations d'origine auraient dû, et devraient toujours constituer des Etats en tant que tels qui s'associeraient alors dans une formule féodative comme solution idoine pour l'Afrique actuelle. Après avoir détruit les cultures politiques locales pour transposer les énergies et les solidarités du niveau local au niveau national, c'est-à-dire au profit de l'Etat central,

Michalon (1978: 35) propose la solution inverse.

Ou bien, à l'inverse les institutions se réconcilient avec les solidarités existantes au lieu de les affronter. Réduisant considérablement l'importance de l'appareil central de l'Etat, on en transférerait la substance aux solidarités régionales et locales. Celles-ci, réhabilitées, fourniraient enfin aux incontestables énergies existant à ce niveau le moyen de se mobiliser pour le développement. Dans cette optique, une régionalisation résolue, pouvant déboucher sur un fédéralisme à définir pays par pays, région par région, devrait permettre aux collectivités naturelles de se doter elles-mêmes de leurs institutions politiques, administratives et économiques.

La solution que propose Michalon s'apparente vraisemblablement au refus de l'histoire dans la mesure où elle recommande l'exploitation de données naturelles qui dans l'évolution des sociétés, ne sont que des étapes transitoires appelées à se dépasser comme elles l'ont fait dans les autres parties du monde, et notamment en Occident. Dans le monde d'aujourd'hui, l'entité de la Nation-Etat s'avère trop fragile pour subsister librement et de façon respectables dans le concert des nations.

Si les grandes nations occidentales ou orientales ne sont constituées telles qu'on les connaît aujourd'hui par la force des conquêtes et des annexions, et si on trouve qu'elles valent mieux ainsi parceque plus viable; si même ce mouvement d'unification se poursuit encore de nos jours, comme il en est par exemple de l'Europe des Douze, en vue d'une éventuelle fusion le moment venu, la solution la plus étonnante que l'on puisse alors suggérer à la poussière de petites nations africaines de l'heure est celle de se constituer, telles quelles, en Nations-Etats. Cette consolidation au plan théorique de la diversité et de la multiplicité des micros Nations-Etats, disons cette théorie poussiéreuse et pulverisante, est une fragilisation qui correspond objectivement au schéma du *dividere ut regnare*.

Dans sa marche vers l'unité, le Cameroun a plutôt choisi la voie de la centralisation en vue d'une grande union nationale, non par annexion d'une partie par une autre, mais par consensus comme expression d'un vouloir-vivre-ensemble. Les deux grands ensembles concernés étaient les deux Etats du Cameroun ex-anglais et du

Cameroun ex-français, à savoir les deux parties d'une entité initiale que la parenthèse coloniale avaient accidentellement divisée, le referendum du 20 mai 1972, par lequel deux Etats, occidental (anglophone) et oriental (francophone) décidaient de quitter le statut d'Etats Fédérés, pour effacer la dualité qu'implique la Fédération et de devenir la "République Unie du Cameroun", était donné un acte de reconstruction de type "osirien" (2), une sorte de retour institutionnel aux sources ou, si l'on veut, une récupération politique d'un paradis perdu. Ce retour sur soi de la nation, à travers un consensus de 99, 97%, est une sorte de rejet symbolique de l'intermède colonial qui avait consacré une éphémère dichotomie sur la base d'éléments culturels importés.

Ce que l'on devrait par-dessus tout admirer dans ce remarquable sursaut identitaire, c'est l'ampleur du consensus, la quasi-unanimité de la volonté commune.

Citant Ahmadou Ahidjo, Jos-Blaise Alima (1977; 108) écrit dans son ouvrage, *Les chemins de l'unité*:

L'avènement d'une véritable nation, m'avait-il dit, suppose de la part des membres une adhésion constamment renouvelée à l'idéal qu'elle représente, une conscience d'appartenir à un ensemble plus vaste qui rassemble et transcende, pour les universaliser, les vertus, les valeurs et la force émotionnelles des patries tribales. Pour ce faire, ce n'est pas tant la forme de l'Etat, fédéral ou unitaire, qui est importante. C'est le rôle qui est dévolu à l'Etat. Dans l'étape actuelle, L'Etat doit être fort, c'est-à-dire doté des moyens nécessaires pour imposer sa volonté aux collectivités secondaires qui ont tendance à poursuivre leurs propres fins. Il doit, en outre, être monocephale, parce que la collectivité reconnaît son unité à travers l'unicité de son chef.

Mais en dehors d'Ahidjo dont on peut croire qu'il avait intérêt à unifier pour asseoir son autorité, toutes les composantes de la société camerounaise étaient d'accord pour cet aboutissement. Après avoir rappelé que l'unification était le leitmotiv de toutes les formations politiques sans exception. L'auteur apporte en outre ce témoignage:

Le 11 mars 1961 s'ouvrait à Yaoundé une conférence intitulée: *Réunification ou Fédération*. Elle était organisée par des anciens étudiants camerounais en France récemment revenus au pays et regroupés au sein du "Cercle Culturel Camerounais". A l'issue des travaux, les

congressistes devaient admettre que la fédération n'était pas la meilleure forme étatique dans le cadre de la réunification, mais qu'elle était néanmoins, pour l'heure, la forme la plus appropriée puisqu'il faudrait du temps pour harmoniser les différentes cultures et les habitudes des deux territoires (P. 108).

Dans son édition du 19 mars 1961, L'hebdomadaire catholique *L'Effort Camerounais* résumait la situation en ces termes:

A moins d'être démagogue tout le monde doit convenir que c'est une fédération qu'ils nous faut aujourd'hui. Mais une fédération fondamentalement provisoire, transitoire et dont le dynamisme puisse nous acheminer, le plus tôt possible, vers un Etat unitaire seul idéal de tous les héros du nationalisme camerounais et dont plusieurs ont déjà payé de leur sang. Il faut pour cela, un délai. Mais un délai n'est qu'un délai (cite par Alima. *ibid*: 109-110).

Appuyé à la fois par John Ngu Foncha, assez mollement il est vrai, et Solomon Tandeng Muna plus fermement, l'unionisme, ou le principe de la réunification s'implanta aisément dans les mentalités et le rubicon fut franchi le 20 mai 1972, évènement qu'on a appelé La Révolution Pacifique.

III. L'histoire à reculons, ou la toile de Penelope

Traitant de l'identité africaine, notre exposé aurait dû normalement éviter toute référence aux symboles de la mythologie étrangère, telle cette fameuse Toile de Pénélope (3). Mais, précisément, ce recours à l'étranger, cette extraversion chargée d'étayer notre discours endogène, ou notre intercommunication, est une tare qu'exprime un vide à combler en vue d'une restauration identitaire. Nous y reviendrons plus loin dans cette réflexion.

Pour l'instant, il s'agit de constater que la rationalité historique qui transporte l'évolution de l'ethnie vers l'Etat, et des Etats partiels à l'Etat unitaire, et qui devrait normalement se renforcer au fil des jours en vue de synthèses supérieures, est en train d'accomplir une évolution inverse, une sorte de retour en arrière appuyé sur des sophismes à la fois juridiques, politiques et sociologiques (4).

La *Révolution pacifique* du 20 mai 1972 par laquelle le peuple camerounais avait cêté unanimement pour la fusion en une *République Unie* (5), se trouve en effet remise aujourd'hui en cause, et même, sur fond de chantage et de menaces, par une partie de ce peuple, pour la raison présumée que cette partie du peuple n'y plus trouverait plus son compte. Tous les sophismes avancés pour justifier les tentatives cessionniste correspondent en quelque sorte au désir de "vaincre sans avoir raison", comme disait la Grande Royale dans *l'Aventure ambiguë* de Cheikh Hamidou Kane. En effet, il y a lieu de se demander si le discours irrédentistes actuel ne dessine pas une véritable aventure ambiguë, dont l'arnbiguïte tiendrait au fait que l'élite, pour assouvir des ambitions personnelles, trompe le peuple et les masses villageoises, en les entraînant parfois dans des actes suicidaires. Quand certaines de ces ambitions sont assouvies, l'élite en question, comme cela s'est vu pour d'autres manipulations, disparaît dans le confort douillet de l'exil ou de la superstructure administrative et politique de l'Etat, en abandonnant le peuple à son triste sort. Cherchant dans son texte déjà cité, d'où vient l'échec du panafricanisme, un peu comme nous cherchons aujourd'hui quelles sont les raisons du refus de l'unité accomplie en mai 1972, Thierry Michalon (op.cit.: 25) écrit:

Il faut donc chercher ailleurs les raisons de cet assoupissement de l'idée panafricaine, les chercher, en l'occurrence, dans le nationalisme exacerbé des classes dirigeantes africaines. Nationalisme d'élites, certes et non point nationalisme populaire: les masses elles-mêmes peu sensibles au prestige de la nation: - hormis un déplorable chauvinisme sportif - se méfient profondément de ce thème. Nationalisme jaloux et susceptible de la classe politico-administrative donné, car "quand une classe ou une catégorie de la population a acquis les positions de prestige ou de pouvoir politique, la moindre orientation dans le sens d'un ensemble plus vaste peut être regardée par cette catégorie comme une menace à son statut privilégié" (souligné par l'auteur lui-même qui citait alors Coleman à travers J. Ki-Zerbo).

Le refus de l'Etat unitaire naguère accepté, et la volonté corrélative de rentrer au fédéralisme, semblent donc relever réellement de ce "nationalisme jaloux et susceptible" qu'évoque Thierry Michalon et dans lequel on peut voir une liquidation fantasmagique de la misère du peuple, misère que l'on veut occulter par conceptualisation politique à

laquelle ce peuple, confronté à des problèmes de survie, ne comprend rien. Dans sa lutte à outrance pour les prébendes, une certaine classe de lettres shakespeariens rassemble des foules paysans pauvres, d'indigents de la ville ou de jeunes désœuvrés de la société, dans une bataille qui n'est pour elles que de l'hébreu, mais où elles doivent souvent servir de faire-valoir, et quelques fois de bouclier et de chair à canon.

L'on peut en plus déceler dans cet activisme une double mystification. D'abord la mystification des masses par des sophismes intellectualistes d'une petite élite qui évoque frauduleusement l'unanimité, puis, surtout, une auto-mystification de cette élite qui fonde son "nationalisme" et sa spécificité culturelle radicale sur une valeur théoriquement contestable: l'anglophonie et, symétriquement, la francophonie

Chercher à fissurer institutionnellement une nation sur cette base, c'est cristalliser en effet une intolérable séparation des frères d'avec eux-mêmes pour créer, au coeur de l'Afrique Noire, deux prolongements distinctifs de la métropole anglaise et de la métropole française. Ce qui revient à refuser la synthèse originale et enrichissante d'une entité spéciale dans laquelle, pourtant aucun pays européen devrait se reconnaître comme dans un reflet. La résurrection du fédéralisme correspond donc à une théorie du reflet, puisque chaque Etat fédéré sera le miroir où chacune des deux métropoles viendra se mirer, comme au temps de la colonisation dans l'extase de l'auto-satisfaction. En considérant obstinément les langues étrangères comme leurs non et prénom, les fédéralistes. Outre le fait qu'ils écrivent l'histoire à reculons, s'installent tout bonnement dans une extraversion culturelle qui n'est pas loin d'un complexe plus dangereux encore que l'assimilation intercommunautaire qu'ils refusent alors que c'est elle qui définit leur identité.

Quand on dédaigne ainsi un contact consanguin et que l'on s'évade d'une communauté confraternelle pour s'inféoder à la domination culturelle étrangère plus encore, l'on ne se définit alors, ni plus ni moins, que comme une *conscience malheureuse*, condamnée à l'errance mentale d'un moi qui ne se sent à terre qu'en d'exil (6).

La conscience malheureuse exprime son ressentiment ici en termes de renaissance culturelle et politique d'un peuple à qui elle

cherche à donner de nouvelles appellations qui ne sont que des mirages de la fierté, puisque perdre la séduction du nationalisme fédéraliste travaillent donc comme une anesthésia de la misère économique, une médication et une prescription frauduleuses de politiciens embrasés et illuminés par des promesses mirobolantes impérial et néo-colonial. Les agents de la division fédéralistes sont en effet traités, pendant que le peuple suffoque sous la pression ardente d'une mobilisation sado-masochistes.

Les peuples qui se disent différents parce que les uns parlent anglais et les autres français, et qui veulent institutionnellement entériner cette dichotomie, sont tout simplement oublieux des identités originaires. Il s'agit en effet de peuples qui baignent dans les mêmes traditions depuis des millénaires, qui parlent les mêmes langues consomment les mêmes nourritures, et pratiquent les mêmes rites, tant à la naissance qu'à la mort. C'est le cas dans le Bamboutous, dans la Menoua, ou dans le Haut-Nkam. De ces millions d'hommes et de femmes, quelques milliers seulement ont appris la langue de Molière et celle de Shakespeare, et la vision du monde de cette minorité de lettres prétend balayer le socle d'une identité millénaire, ou tout au moins séculaire, pour lui substituer, comme fondamentale, la dichotomie superficielle d'hier. Le français et l'anglais auront donc fonctionné comme un couteau à double tranchant, plante au coeur de la tradition, au coeur de l'Afrique, comme un facteur de division.

Un nationalisme authentique ne devrait nullement l'accepter, mais au contraire intégrer ces deux langues étrangères qui s'ajouteraient à celles d'origine, pour enrichir d'avantage les identités initiales. Les médias audio-visuels au Cameroun constituent une belle vitrine à travers laquelle un observateur objectif peut admirer cette extraordinaire symbiose, exemple unique au monde, où les langues étrangères se côtoient allégrement en compagnie des langues nationales. Ainsi, au lieu que les cultures étrangères viennent introduire une tragique séparation entre moi et moi-même elles ont plutôt transfiguré ma personnalité en l'enrichissant de façon admirable.

Traitant du problème de l'intégration culturelle, Bernard Fonlon (1968) en ne privilégiant que les grandes cultures occidentale d'une part et africaine de l'autre, a, pour souligner l'importance de ce phénomène, utilisé le concept de Kultur Kampf. Ses analyses peuvent

judicieusement se transposer dans notre problématique actuelle qui concerne plutôt l'intégration au sein d'une nation où, en développant des cultures ayant leurs spécificités, les différentes ethnies se considèrent comme étrangères les unes par rapport aux autres. Au terme du processus d'intégration activement menée, l'auteur brosse ce tableau tel un visionnaire:

And finally, with our indigenous way of life restored and rehabilitated enriched by the absorption of healthy foreign contribution: with the emergence of a new culture, unified, harmonized, fertile, productive, dynamic and endowed with dignity in the eyes of the world; with communal divisions eliminated and communal unity recovered; the healing of the Negro's wounded psyche, the ending of the internal split that rent his soul, will follow as a natural, ultimate consequence (Fonlon, 1968: 29).

Quand en effet on se détourne de cette problématique extérieure, pour considérer les différentes altérités intérieures, à partir desquelles les unes et les autres se considèrent comme des étrangers, la même solution s'impose avec évidence: le dépassement ethnique et l'assimilation réciproque des différences.

IV. L'un et le multiple: la théorie du dépassement

La première partie de cette réflexion a établi la généralité du phénomène ethnique en Afrique. Mais pour les commodités de l'exposé, il ne vaudra pas la peine de rentrer dans les débats théoriques concernant la définition de l'ethnie. On signalera toutefois le fait de certains sociologues s'efforçant de démontrer que l'ethnie n'est une donnée naturelle, mais une invention du pouvoir colonial. Il s'agit de Samir Amin (1989: 151) qui écrit notamment:

Les pratiques de la domination coloniale ont eu une part déterminante dans la création de réalités ethniques, en Afrique particulièrement. Pour dominer de vastes régions, souvent désorganisées par le déclin associé à la traite négrière, les colonisateurs avaient besoins de réorganiser et surtout de trouver à cette fin des intermédiaires locaux. À défaut d'Etats, de classes tributaires ou féodales, les colonisateurs ont inventé des chefs et les ont affublés d'un pouvoir qu'ils n'avaient souvent pas. Mais chefs de quoi pouvaient-ils

être? C'est alors que de mauvais anthropologues amateurs, mais bons serviteurs de la colonisation, militaire et civils, ont inventé les ethnies (plus franc à l'époque, on disait les races, ou les tribus). L'anthropologie professionnelle a repris sans grand esprit critique ces inventions (7).

Les ethnies ont peut-être été inventés, et les chefs créés de toutes pièces. Encore qu'on puisse débattre de cette théorie en raison de certaines homogénéités séculaires attestées par l'histoire des migrations africaines, ou par l'unité de langue de certains peuples, il faut reconnaître que ces ethnies et ces chefs sont des réalités aujourd'hui, et que c'est à partir de ces réalités effectives que l'on parlera des particularités à dépasser.

Le dépassement s'impose en effet non seulement à cause de la rationalité historique qui commande une évolution génétique du multiple à l'un, comme on l'a vu dans les vieilles sociétés, mais aussi parce que cette vaste ethnicité a pour conséquence la perturbation de l'harmonie sociale autant que la désorientation des procédures institutionnelles. Comme exemple, il suffirait de considérer les résultats des récentes consultations électorales au Cameroun - l'élection présidentielle d'octobre 1992 et les législatives de mars de la même année - et d'établir des corrélations entre le nom de chaque candidat et la localité où ces résultats avoisinent les 100%. La même corrélation peut aussi s'avérer pertinente entre le nom d'un leader de parti politique et la provenance de la majorité de ses militants. La conclusion à tirer est que le leader est très populaire dans son fief natal, c'est-à-dire dans la particularité de son ethnie, mais pas assez pour asseoir légitimement son autorité sur toutes les autres ethnies, à savoir dans l'universalité de l'Etat.

Quand on observe ainsi les ravages provoqués par les particularismes, notamment la stagnation et le piétinement sur place de nos sociétés, la permanence des dissensions explosives et la dilution de l'identité nationale, l'on ne peut plus douter ni de l'importance ni de l'urgence du dépassement. La création de valeurs culturelles communes doit être le moyen d'élaboration d'une identité nationale. Mais il ne s'en tient qu'à cette indication purement abstraite, sans esquisser le mécanisme concret de cette création de valeurs culturelles. Les lignes qui vont suivre se présentent donc comme un prolongement quasi

opérationnel de cette réflexion qui s'était arrêtée tout simplement au seuil de l'action.

Bien des réflexions de penseurs africains s'arrêtent en effet au seuil de l'action, afin de préserver un caractère philosophique dont on pense qu'il est incompatible avec toute analyse opérationnelle ou programmatique. Il s'agit aussi parfois de la peur de se tromper, et le résultat est que la pensée s'arrête toujours sur la dialectique ascendante, sur son versant théorique, sans s'engager avec précision sur l'autre versant, celui des possibilités de réalisation pratique, ou des conditions d'applicabilité de solutions entrevues dans les recherches théoriques. Nous pensons personnellement que la pensée radicale est celle qui parcourt l'ubac et l'adret de la montagne des problèmes qui nous assaillent au quotidien. Dans la question qui nous préoccupe présentement, il importe normalement de proposer des voies susceptibles d'être suivies et capables de mener vers la grande identité qui manque à notre nation en devenir. Si les hasards et les nécessités de l'histoire ont imprimé une évolution spécifique aux vieilles nations qui ne sont précisément devenues "nations" qu'en transcendant - de gré ou de force - les particularismes originaires, il ne nous est pas loisible qu'aujourd'hui de subir passivement la même rationalité, ni d'attendre quelques Vikings qui viendraient, nous unifier et nous pacifier. Si nous sommes convaincus de son bien-fondé, il nous incombe d'imposer cette rationalité et de la mettre sur orbite afin qu'elle puisse aussi nous mener vers la destination de la nation. Les stratégies que nous pourrions mettre en contribution pour ce faire, de même que l'esprit général qui présidera à cette entreprise est ce qu'on pourrait appeler le « *constructivisme culturel* ».

V. De la législation répressive à la création culturelle

Le recours à la législation se justifie par le fait que la légalité doit effectivement soutenir la moralité, les bons sentiments, variables et incertains de l'homme, ne pouvant être une garantie exclusive. Par analogie, le tribalisme est assimilable au racisme, et l'on sait que les sociétés modernes qui souffraient de ce racisme - les Etats-Unis ou L'Afrique du sud - n'ont pas fondé l'amélioration de leurs institutions sur la moralité naturelle des individus, mais sur la force de la loi. En

d'autres termes, ce sont les lois sur le racisme qui ont mis fin à la discrimination raciale, de sorte que les sociétés qui souffrent du tribalisme devraient s'efforcer également d'élaborer de bonnes lois répressives chargées de l'éradiquer à terme dans ses aspects négatif. (8)

Une telle législation, naturellement, ne consistera pas à utiliser les formules divines de la Genèse en décrétant: "*Que le tribalisme disparaisse*", ou encore: "*Que l'identité soit*", etc. Elle veillera plutôt à prendre des dispositions visant à promouvoir dans les faits une vision nationale de la société par la répression des excès ethnistes. Dans la pratique, les dirigeants africains ont excellé dans ce qu'on a alors appelé l'équilibre régional, et qui consistait à nommer, au gouvernement par exemple, des personnalités issue autant que possible de toutes les grandes ethnies. Certains sociologues politiques y ont vu un esprit de clientélisme. Mais le souci majeur de ces dirigeants était incontestablement celui de l'équité et de l'harmonie dans des sociétés excessivement plurielles.

En partant du fait que l'intégration nationale n'est pas seulement une idée, mais aussi et surtout un mouvement social qui met ensemble, pour les mouler en un tout homogène des hommes ou des groupes d'hommes diversement différent, l'on devrait envisager, pour contribuer à l'accélération de ce mouvement, plusieurs modalités possibles. Indépendamment des annexions de territoires, ou de simples voyages touristiques ou d'affaires, l'Etat central, pour les besoins de son fonctionnement, éparpille largement dans toutes les régions de son territoire, des fonctionnaires qui apprennent ainsi à connaître et à assumer la différence. Il n'est peut-être pas excessif d'imaginer tout un corps de spécialistes expressément commis, au sommet de l'Etat, pour une réalisation plus consciente de cette émulsion sociale.

Mais, plus fondamental encore comme mode d'homogénéisation est le phénomène du mariage intertribal, inter-ethnique. Par les liens du mariage en deux familles différentes se mettent ensemble, et les enfants issus de cette union prennent des noms, dans le système africain, en provenance des deux côtés produit donc toute une nouvelle redistribution toponymique qui ira en s'amplifiant et en se complexifiant inextricablement si la pratique des mariages interethniques pouvait être systématiquement encouragé.

L'interpénétration des valeurs culinaires joue également le même rôle intégrateur dans la mesure où la cuisine d'une ethnie, pratiquée dans une autre contribue à la diminution des distances et à une certaine assimilation réciproque. La grande diversité culinaire du Cameroun pourrait tout aussi bien en constituer un caractère national, une identité exemplaire, qui s'enracinera d'autant plus profondément dément que le peuple se mettra à consommer camerounais.

Si, comme nous venons de le voir, la loi peut aider à dépasser toutes sortes de particularismes retardataires, et à évoluer vers le royaume lointain de l'unité le règne imparable de l'intérêt général, une grande place doit aussi être faite, dans cette quête salutaire, au rayonnement des valeurs. A savoir les valeurs réelles qu'il faut exalter, ou les valeurs nouvelles qu'il faut créer parce que fonctionnelles.

Il faut en effet préciser, et telle est la force de la dialectique, que l'unité ou l'identité visée n'est pas celle d'un quelconque effacement des tribus et des ethnies. Loin de la car celles-ci doivent au contraire chercher, par un commerce mutuel, constant et sans préjugé, à exalter les valeurs qu'elles ont en commun. Les exalter et les promouvoir ouvertement, tant dans la pratique que dans la théorie et dans les arts.

L'on devrait même s'attendre à ce que certaines de nos langues actuellement parlées meurent, de préférence de mort naturelle, et tombent dans l'oubli au profit d'une seule, ou d'un très petit nombre, que nous partagerons tous en nous y identifiant. Il s'agit d'un processus inéluctable qui relevé lui aussi, de la rationalité (Towa, 1975: 113-114). Restait alors à travailler, parallèlement à l'action de la loi, à l'implantation de l'unité or de l'idée nationale dans le socle des arts et de la culture. Ainsi, des romans, des films, des pièces de théâtre, des peintures et devraient par exemple exposer avec soin et émotion, d'aventures, fructueusement menées ensemble, ou des épisodes de notre histoire nationale exaltant des valeurs semblables.

Afin de consolider le nationalisme, il faut un romantisme excessif, l'autocritique sévère et une certaine autocratie gouvernementale, divergeant que sur la méthode avec un dénominateur commun: la promotion et l'exaltation de la grandeur du peuple camerounais. L'étrange phénomène auquel on assiste aujourd'hui, savoir la multiplication des Centres culturels ethniques,

concomitante au dépérissement lamentable du Centre Culturel Camerounais, est révélatrice

Une fragmentation de plus en plus aggravée au fur et à mesure du renforcement dans l'Etat, d'une féodalité essaimée en mille petits royaumes traditionnels qui s'échinent à exercer des droits coutumiers souverains, dont la souveraineté s'affiche non seulement vis-à-vis d'autres petits royaumes similaires, mais aussi et surtout vis-à-vis l'Etat lui-même (Bayart, 1989: 190). Curieux retournement de situation: on voit des dignitaires de cet Etat abandonner des charges étatiques pour aller occuper dans leurs villages respectifs le fauteuil royal en levant les impôts les plus absurdes. Pire, les autorités administratives en poste dans ces "royaumes" donnent l'impression de s'y comporter comme des ambassadeurs de l'Etat et cela pour ménager la susceptibilité des micro-monarques que nos journalistes appellent d'ailleurs "Majesté". Les nations européennes, si puissantes et si fières aujourd'hui, ne sont bâties en tant que telles, et on le sait, le pouvoir et l'influence des principautés que nous autres nous continuons à renforcer ici!

Là aussi, la loi devrait aider, pour accélérer le dépassement: au lieu de renforcer les ethnies en consacrant les anachronismes dans la constitution. Notre identité et notre survie sont dans le futur, inscrites dans la rationalité de l'histoire. L'effort le plus méritoire est incontestablement celui qui consiste à inscrire tous nos actes dans cette direction, par une législation et une politique culturelle appropriées, et surtout une volonté commune de vivre ensemble, dût-on pour cela consentir de grands sacrifices. Pourquoi de reste, ne pas citer Renan (1947: 904) pour clore cette réflexion?

Une nation est donnée une grande solidarité constituée par le sentiment des sacrifices que l'on a faits et de ceux qu'on est disposé à faire: elle suppose un passé: elle se résume pourtant dans le présent et par un fait tangible: le consentement, le désir clairement exprime de continuer la vie commune.

L'existence d'une nation est un plébiscite de tous les jours, ou comme dirait le Russe, une conversation cordiale.

Notes

1. *Grosso modo*, la tribu est un sous-groupe de l'ethnie, de sorte que plusieurs langues ou variétés dialectales, correspondant à des tribus peuvent être parlées dans une même ethnie. Dans son article fort documenté, Problèmes théoriques de la question nationale en Afrique, in *Présence Africaine* (1985) M. Nsame Mbongo rappelle judicieusement les définitions les plus classiques que du clan, de la tribu, de l'ethnie, de la nation, de la nationalité. Mais l'orientation nettement théorique de cet article l'a globalement conduit à privilégier la vérification ou l'applicabilité des principes du matérialisme dialectique par rapport à la recherche des solutions véritables, le panafricanisme auquel aboutit étant une heureuse exception.

2. Extrait d'une lettre du Chef de Bataillon Cros à M. le Commissaire de la République dans les territoires occupés de l'ancien Cameroun, Garoua, le 1^{er} mai 1920, p. 5.

3. Analogie avec Orisis, un personnage de la mythologie égyptienne dont le corps fut déchiqueté et dispersé dans les quatre coins du pays avant d'être reconstitué par le travail patient et méticuleux de sa soeur et épouse Isis.

4. Pour déjouer l'impatience de ses nombreux soupirants, Penelope, épouse d'Ulysse parti en guerre et mère de Télémaque, leur promet de choisir l'un deux quand elle aura fini de tisser le linceul de son beau-père qu'elle tissait le jour tout en le défaisant la nuit.

5. Exemple: le référendum du 20 mai 1972 serait anticonstitutionnel, les Francophones auraient freiné l'évolution économique de la zone anglophone, y auraient arraché des biens et violé des femmes, etc. Lire à ce sujet l'abondante littérature irrédentiste publiée dans la *All Anglophone Conference AAC*, ou par le, *CAM* etc. Mais à ceux qui évoquent l'anti-constitutionalité du référendum du 20 mai 1972, il faudrait rappeler ces mots de Sieyès qui font de la nation la source même de la loi: "La nation existe avant tout; elle est l'origine de tout; sa volonté est toujours légale; elle est la loi-même" (Qu'est-ce que

le Tiers-Etat), cite par l'encyclopédie "Connaissance du XX siècle", EDILEC, t. 6, p. 1145.

6. Cette "République Unie du Cameroun" est (re) devenue, en février 1984, tout court, la "République du Cameroun".

7. Comment peut-on d'ailleurs sérieusement avancer cette dichotomisation du peuple, sur les bases exclusives de l'anglais ou du français quand on sait que des anglophones sont aussi francophones, et réciproquement! Que faire donc de cette intersection embarrassante?

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La Ville Et La Création Littéraire Camerounaise

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La source première de la création littéraire n'a pas cessé d'animer des débats dans le champ de la critique. Chaque école en arrive à illustrer une position particulière. Avant la nouvelle critique qui dénie toute influence externe dans la gestation d'une oeuvre, de nombreuses considérations ont été exploitées. Certains ont trouvé en l'histoire un site privilégié d'inspiration, d'autres perçoivent en l'auteur et en son univers intérieur, la cause efficiente de cette production. Dans ce monde grouillant de tendances, la socio-critique a connu un crédit singulier. Parcequ'on ne crée pas "ex-nihilo", la société, l'environnement immédiat, se donnent comme le creuset ou s'approvisionne l'écrivain, inéluctablement. C'est l'expression de ce que Roger Fayolle nomme dans son ouvrage intitulé *La Critique*, le "moment historique"(1).

La civilisation occidentale en s'implantant en Afrique a institué une littérature écrite, tout en orientant ses conditions d'inspiration par le phénomène de l'urbanisation. La sensibilité créatrice, dans ce contexte nouveau est remodelée et réorientée. Cette déviation se perçoit nettement lorsque l'on rapproche la nouvelle littérature des traditions orales ancestrales. La littérature écrite trouve dans le cadre urbain un site favorable pour la création, la production et la consommation du livre. Notre propos ici est d'examiner ce réseau à travers l'exemple de la capitale camerounaise: Yaoundé.

"En mutation, la littérature est capable de nous faire appréhender les réalités sous-jacentes à tous les systèmes politiques du continent."(2)

La grande mutation politique constituée par la décolonisation a incontestablement donné un statut particulier à Yaoundé, la capitale du

pays. Cette ville a-t-elle pour autant bénéficié de plus d'attention de la part des écrivains de la nouvelle génération?

La Littérature Camerounaise et la Ville de Yaoundé: La Création

En général, le nom de la capitale camerounaise paraît assez brûlant pour nos écrivains. Si l'action de leurs oeuvres ne se déracine pas en milieu rural, ceux-ci exploitent le cadre d'autres villes du pays ou de l'étranger. Parfois, ils créent simplement des cités fictives. Chez Guillaume Oyono Mbia, la capitale est souvent évoquée, mais on la quitte toujours pour vivre pleinement l'action dans une petite localité qui porte le nom de Mvoutessi. Ce village, lieu d'orientation de l'auteur de *Jusqu'à Nouvel Avis* (1970) traduit aussi une inclination comme chez les romanciers camerounais qui aiment user du cadre de leur vécu.

Dès lors, il n'est pas étonnant que Francis Bebey, Patrice Ndedi Penda. Alexandre Kum'a N'dumbe III ou, Mbella Sone Dipoko installent l'intrigue de leurs oeuvres dans la région côtière d'où ils sont originaires. Cependant, pour ceux-ci comme pour d'autres encore, la vision de la ville a de nombreux caractères communs avec toutes les cités de l'Afrique actuelle. On y dénonce la plupart du temps la corruption, la délinquance juvénile, la prostitution et toutes les formes de deshumanisation et de perversion engendrées par l'intrusion de la civilisation occidentale. Par-là, la ville de Yaoundé se trouve concernée, mais d'une façon assez indirecte.

L'image de la ville de Yaoundé ressort aussi de certaines créations ou cadres fictifs extérieurs à notre pays. La capitale ghanéenne, Accra, ou Francis Bebey installe l'action de *La Poupée Ashanti* contient, malgré sa précision, bien d'affinités avec la métropole camerounaise. Dans l'univers romanesque de Mongo Béti, les descriptions de Fort-Nègre ou Ngoa Ekelé trahissent des réalités qui nous restent proches même dans la fabulation. (4) En face de telles allusions volées ou issues de durs rapprochements, quelques auteurs ne s'empêchent pourtant pas d'instruire plus explicitement notre capitale politique dans leurs oeuvres.

Si au début du Journal de Faliou, Remy Mvomo ne nomme pas cette cité d'où il part et qui se situe à 307 kilomètres de Douala par voie ferrée, à l'intérieur du roman, la capitale camerounaise apparaît plus

clairement. Lorsque le narrateur y retourne quelques mois plus tard, il note dans son journal:

“Dès l’arrivée à Yaoundé, je me suis rendu directement au secrétariat de

L’Université ... (5)

Il apparaît en ces lignes un aspect propre à notre ville susceptible d’inspirer des créations de type autobiographique: la fonction intellectuelle.

Dans le roman de Medou Mvomo, cette mention autant que les passages effectifs du héros à Yaoundé, sont très sporadiques. *La lettre ouverte à soeur Marie Pierre* de Patrice Etoundi Mballa use plus largement de ce cadre comme centre d’éducation: ancien séminariste, le héros Owona Ngassimu vient préparer son baccalauréat au ... Lycée Leclerc (6). Même après un séjour en Europe, le narrateur s’installe à Yaoundé où il exerce ses fonctions de journaliste.

D’autres allusions à ce cadre sont contenues dans *Les lettres de ma cambuse* de René Philombe où l’auteur, installé à son observatoire de Nlongkak, relate des scènes de la vie quotidienne. Cette inspiration sociale, les nombreuses pièces qui passent dans nos salles de spectacle la révèlent également. Il en est ainsi des mésaventures de l’Onkpatt et autre Bassek Ba Kobio qui utilisent parfois le cadre social constitué par la métropole camerounaise.

La Production Et La Consommation De La Littérature Yaoundé

Malgré la grande dimension que lui confèrent ses fonctions politique, administrative, intellectuelle, économique et culturelle, la ville de Yaoundé est en définitive, un cadre peu exploité dans les créations littéraires camerounaises. L’importance de la cité de Yaoundé dans cette entreprise créatrice se situe plutôt au niveau de la production matérielle des oeuvres et de leur consommation déterminante pour les productions futures.

a) La Production

De récentes investigations menées par L’APEC (7) ont prouvé que plus d’un millier de jeunes camerounais détiennent dans leurs tiroirs

des manuscrits originaux d'oeuvres originelles inédites, Cette enquête montre que le cadre urbain est éminemment favorable à l'art d'écrire. Yaoundé se confirme alors à ce niveau en tant que grand centre intellectuel par le nombre élevé d'écrivains qui y vivent et qui ont conquis une notoriété. Ceux-ci représenteraient près des deux tiers de nos hommes de lettres: on peut citer:

- Les essayistes universitaires à l'instar de Marcien Towa, Bernard Fonlon, Englebert Mveng, Eno Belinga ...

- Des romanciers tels qu'Etoundi Mballa Patrice, René Philombe, Etienne Yanou, Charly Gabriel Mbock, Bernard Nanga, Pabé Mongo;

- Des dramaturges comme Joseph Kengni, Adamou Ndam Njoya, Asseng Protais, Georges Abelar, David Ndachi Tagne, Gilbert Doho, Bole Butake, Ndumbe Eyoh.

- des poètes et conteurs: Patrice Kayo, Fernando d'Almeida, Ernest Alima, Louise Marie Pouka, Takere Messack, Nol Alembong etc., et bien d'autres écrivains installés dans la capitale camerounaise, souvent à cause des contraintes professionnelles, dont les publications ont suivi et suivent le leurs recherches.

Le site est aussi favorable à la production littéraire à cause des structures de publication, C'est le siège des Editions CLE, de SOPECAM qui, au cours de ces vingt dernières années ont joué le rôle déterminant pour l'éclosion de la littérature nationale. D'autres maisons s'étaient lancées dans l'entreprise de publication à l'instar de Buma Kor, des Editions Semences Africaines. D'Objectif, ou de Saint Paul celles-ci ont connu un succès moindre. A cause de nombreuses imprimeries qui offrent leurs services au public - Saint Paul, Imprimerie Adventiste, CEPER. Colouma, Sogedi - il se développe de plus en plus des initiatives de publication à compte d'auteur. Malgré ces possibilités locales, le recours à l'Europe reste sollicité par des jeunes qui veulent accroître leur chance d'être publiés.

b) Commercialisation et Consommation

Publiée, l'oeuvre devient un produit à écouler. Ici survient le phénomène de consommation” qui est surtout développé dans les

villes, lieu de résidence de ce que Robert Escarpit nomme “le circuit lettre”.

Yaoundé, ville intellectuelle et siège des institutions de l’Etat, dispose d’un réseau de consommation riche, fourni par les collèges, les lycées, les facultés, les grandes écoles, les ministères et bien d’autres organismes professionnels. L’action de tous les “consommateurs de littérature” est favorisée par les librairies, les bouquinistes, les centres culturels, les bibliothèques et bien d’autres structures qui mettent le livre à la portée du grand public. Il est à noter que la plupart du temps, cette consommation de littérature est fonctionnelle. Les élèves et étudiants lisent pour préparer leurs examens; les enseignants recherchent des éléments pour meubler leurs cours ou constituer des oeuvres critiques.

La consommation des oeuvres se passe également au niveau des loisirs tels que le cinéma et les représentations théâtrales où il est facile de vivre toute une histoire dans un espace de temps réduit et sans un effort particulier.

La lecture relève d’une culture singulière qui construit l’individu, améliore son expression et peut même susciter des inspirations pour de nouvelles créations. Dans cette mesure, la ville, riche de ses librairies, bibliothèques, centres culturels, activités culturelles (expositions, conférences, spectacles...), est un lieu privilégié pour l’activité créatrice. A Yaoundé, ces structures sont assez développées par les formations scolaires et universitaires, et par les missions diplomatiques accréditées dans notre pays.

Avec les représentations théâtrales ou les adaptations d’oeuvres Camerounaises pour le cinéma, les activités culturelles deviennent une source d’émulation pour les écrivains en herbe. Les noms de Daniel Ndo, Raymond Ekosso, Dave K. Motkoi et Joseph Kengni émergent dans l’univers des dramaturges- tandis que les différentes adaptations cinématographiques des pièces de Oyono Mbia, de Mendo Ze, suscitent bien d’ambitions chez les jeunes écrivains. Il est simplement déplorable que ceux-ci se mettent à la quête de la gloire facile et en arrivent à la production d’oeuvres poncées sans profondeur, sans souci d’originalité et d’une forme bien élaborée, d’autant plus que le lecteur cherche aussi dans l’oeuvre une éducation et un plaisir.

L'Apport Des Medias

Dans une ville comme Yaoundé, l'apport des mass-médias à la création littéraire est éminemment précieux et s'exerce sur plusieurs plans. L'activité journalistique qui se dessine d'emblée lorsque l'on parle des moyens de communication de masses intervient d'abord pour informer le public des productions littéraires les plus récentes. L'homme de presse est ainsi un critique littéraire dont l'action amené le talent littéraire en herbe à s'éveiller autant qu'à travailler avec dévouement et sérieux. La ville, siège des organes de communication de toute nature: radio, vidéo, journaux, films, s'impose alors comme un creuset idéal pour la créativité.

A) Les organes officiels

Aux médias se greffe une gamme d'activités nécessaires pour l'exercice et la promotion du livre. Les moyens de production matérielle incarnés par l'imprimerie sont côtoyés par l'entreprise de promotion que constitue la publicité, celle-ci est surtout véhiculée par les organes de presse officiels que sont la radiodiffusion et Cameroun-Tribune. Les moyens d'adaptation sont aussi nombreux, à l'instar des émissions radiophoniques. Les bandes dessinées, des reprises cinématographiques et autres représentations.

La presse gouvernementale concrétise aussi son action pour la littérature par des émissions spécialisées ou des rubriques littéraires. Cette entreprise est souvent très sporadique: Témoin, les irrégularités qui caractérisent des émissions telles que le coin du poète ou la disparition de la *Tribune des Arts et Lettres* dans *CamerounTribune*. Des efforts resurgissent, notamment avec *Accords Majuscule* et *Romances* que la télévision nationale diffuse d'une façon régulière.

B) Le revues specialises

A Yaoundé, on a eu à apprécier dans les années 70 la parution de magazines littéraires colonnes qui ont constitué de véritables forums pour la révélation des jeunes talents de notre littérature. La revue, *Ozila* qui a publié de nombreux textes d'écrivains en rêve là au public les

premiers écrits de Pabe Mongo. La première oeuvre de cet, Un Enfant comme les autres, est surtout constituée de nouvelles qui connurent une première publication dans le “forum littéraire camerounais”, *Ozila*.

L’APEC publia aussi un organe d’expression baptisé *Le Cameroun Littérature* relance est toujours attendue. Quant à la revue *Abbia*, animée par le Professeur Fonlon, elle s’est surtout imposée comme organe d’expression de littéraire. Si non regrette de beaucoup la disparition ou la parution irrégulière des revues spécifiquement littéraires dans la capitale camerounaise, les portes restent cependant ouvertes pour une collaboration dans les revues basées à l’étranger à l’instar de *Présence Africaine*, *l’Afrique littéraire et artistique*, *Tropiques*, *Notre Librairie*, ou *La croix du sud* etc.

C) Les concours littéraires

Les divers concours littéraires organisés par Radio France Internationale (concours théâtral interafricain, concours de la meilleure nouvelle ...) ont contribué coup à la révélation de jeunes écrivains camerounais. Des lauréats tels que Mkpat, Abel Zomo Bern, Jean-Baptiste Obama, Asseng Protais Georges et Etoundi Mballa en sont des témoignages vivants. D’autres concours comme le prix Ahmadou Ahidjo et le Grand Prix Littéraire de l’Afrique Noire ont pensé la valeur d’auteurs camerounais comme Guillaume Oyono Mbia à Bebey et Etienne Yanou. Ces espèces de compétitions qui sont curieusement assez rares à Yaoundé pourraient bien contribuer un grand stimulateur de l’activité créatrice chez les jeunes auteurs.

Censure

La censure, exercée par les pouvoirs publics peut intervenir comme un obstacle dans l’oeuvre de création. Les productions de jeunes écrivains peuvent être saisies; leur diffusion et leur représentation prohibées à cause de leur contenu idéologique. L’entreprise de contrôle a pour but d’élucider route corruption du public. Elle peut cependant être à l’origine du découragement de certains auteurs. C’est ce qui peut expliquer la cause de la grande réserve de quelques-uns de nos ainsi pour les thèmes politiques, le

développement d'un style satirique et les écrits acerbes de Mongo Béti, de Yodi Carone, de Charly Mbock, de Bernard Nanga, raison de cette osmose politique/société, l'activité créatrice dans la capitale, malgré ses atouts, paraît courir le risque du silence.

Conclusion

De nombreux critiques et sociologues de la littérature situent l'importance lettres africaines dans le fait qu'elles sont un instrument précieux de connaissance et de compréhension de notre société. C'est ainsi que Charles Larson dans son *Panorama du roman africain* (1974) constate que l'écrivain africain a toujours un microcosme de sa société (p. 41). L'ouvrage de Patrick Merand intitulé *La vie quotidienne en Afrique noire à travers la littérature africaine* (1979) en constat aussi un vibrant témoignage. Mais, l'examen de la ville de Yaoundé capitale Cameroun, en tant que creuset d'inspiration et de stimulation de l'activité créatrice laisse percevoir la grande réserve qui caractérise nos hommes de lettres.

Certes, Yaoundé, ville intellectuelle, engagée dans un vaste processus de développement, offre d'énormes atouts pour le développement de la littérature par le biais des maisons d'éditions et des imprimeries pour la publication; des média pour la promotion; des librairies et d'autres formes de commercialisation d'adaptation pour la diffusion. Il est déplorable que la consommation du produit littéraire soit de plus en plus intéressée. Le développement des habitudes de lecture s'impose comme une urgence qui pourrait trouver sa thérapie dans l'extension réseaux de bibliothèques d'emprunts, de promotion et de diffusion de livres vers multitude. Cette initiative pourrait être doublement bénéfique pour les jeunes auteurs comme pour le public, ainsi que le constate Thérèse Kuoh Moukoury dans une interview à *Cameroun-Tribune*: pour encourager les éditions d'auteurs et sur de jeunes, le salut de notre littérature réside dans le développement des habitudes lectures (...) Plus on lira, plus les prix de tirage pourront baisser, puisqu'à un certain niveau de tirage les livres deviennent forcément bon marché.

Si le public apparait ainsi déterminant pour l'avenir de notre littérature, il est vrai que les écrivains seuls sont à la source de la créativité, la ville de Yaoundé, ci intellectuelle héberge en son sein de

nombreux hommes de lettres. L'entreprise créatrice y est néanmoins entravée par l'insuffisance des structures de publication et par une certaine peur de la censure. La conjonction politique/société crée méfiance. Ceci explique la rareté de l'exploitation de la capitale politique Cameroun dans les oeuvres de fiction. Yaoundé, par sa dimension et ses multiples fonctions pourrait pourtant constituer un cadre d'inspiration très riche comme l'est Accra pour les écrivains ghanéens. Une émulation de jeunes talents à travers des concours littéraires au niveau national et l'augmentation des chances de publication pourraient revigorer de beaucoup cette activité créatrice.

A un moment où, comme le constate Sunday Anozie l'urbanisation constitue une détermination dans la création littéraire négro-africain. Notre étude sur le cas Yaoundé par le double précède de la socio-critique et de la sociologie de la littérature aura confirmé et approfondi le constat de l'auteur de la sociologie du roman africain *La capitale camerounaise*, armée de toutes les potentialités qui lui appartiennent pourrait contribuer sur plusieurs plans à l'éclosion et à l'extension de l'activité créatrice nationale.

Notes

1. Roger Fayolle, *La Critique*, Paris, Armand Collin, 1978, p. 8
2. Christian P. Potholm, "Les thèmes politiques abordés dans la littérature Africaine récente", in *La politique africaine*. Paris, Economica. 1981. p. 107.
3. Francis Bebey, *La Poupée Ashanti*, Yaoundé, CLE. 1973
4. Entre autres, on pourrait consulter à ce sujet Perpétue et l'habitude du malheur. Paris, Buchet-Chastel, 1974. [et *L'histoire du fou* (1994)]
5. Remy Medou Mvomo, *Le Journal de Falion*, Yaoundé, CLE, p. 46.
6. Patrice Etoundi M'balla, *Lettre Ouverte à Soeur Marie Pierre*. Yaoundé. CLE. : 1973.
7. Association Nationale des Poètes et Ecrivains Camerounais.
8. Charles L. Larson, *Panorama du Roman africain*, Paris, ed. Inter. 1974. p.341
9. Paris, l'Harmatan, 1979

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Trends in Female Names in Cameroon: An Expression of Self -Affirmation?

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A) Preliminary

Feminism which has held sway since the mid-seventies has persistently urged for equal rights and opportunities in all domains of life for the both genders. In order to achieve such objectives feminists have moved from a concern with general identity to difference, from a concern with incompleteness to wholeness, and from a concern with representation to modes of presentation.

These concerns emerged through a dismal awareness that all figuration is chaotic, non-transparent, ambiguous and largely male-biased. In reaction to such inadequacies and misrepresentations women seek to address the themes and issues squarely and concretely so as to resolve or at least clarify the contending issues and misgivings.

Since an awareness of gender issues is sweeping across the globe among the, omen folk, their female cohorts in Cameroon have not been left indifferent. In fact it is being observed with growing fascination that women are in Cameroon seizing moulding their own creative resources capable of giving a positive and precise image of women rehabilitating the image. One of the ways of doing this is the tice of manifesting a certain voguish tendency to adopt an agreeable pattern of addressing or calling themselves. This study seeks to examine to what extent the names they adopt; advance or diminish their image. In order to do this we've to extend our vision of linguistic structure, especially the patterns of female roles, so as to deepen our powers of perception and insights. This little effort of discernment is necessary because some women's names in Cameroon display an

artistic quality to subvert oppressive cultural practices which are very rife.

For the purpose of this study, nine-hundred and ninety-nine of female students were collected from the registration office of the University of Yaounde I, as well as female staff lists from the Ministry of Public Service and Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV). The objective of this research was to analyse these patterns of female naming, ascertain a structural trend, appraise and interpret the meaning underlining these names on the touchstone of feminism.

B. Some Techniques of Affirmative Action

Some women in Cameroon may be experiencing, like Virginia Woolf's heroines, an alienation from the ordinary sense of language. These women - in the (manner of Woolf, who cried out in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) "a new woman's 'sentence'" goes ahead to interpolate linguistic fantasies into her revisionary narratives of women's histories are moulding a new idiom by adopting names in a particular way. These women know it very well that to have the power to define name things and people amounts to exercising power over them like the bible story of Genesis which gave Adam such power to govern and have dominion over everything on earth.

Cameroonian women have been quick to effect such name patterns in such a way that leave them in control of the situation when they are married but are who they are before marriage. In constructing their names innovatively, they want to break away from the universal structure of giving names to women which T and Hancock (1986:419) describe as oppressive and non-identificatory since everything is lumped under the man's name:

Women usually take on men's surnames and nationality after marriage with the result that history tends to be the story of men rather than both men and women.

The Cameroonian professional woman surely wants such history to be handiwork of both men and women. This is concretely and consciously done by some Cameroonian media women who continue to bear their maiden names and just have their husband's surnames

appended to their maiden names, hence stringed names like the following are becoming commonplace among women:

- Mary Magdalene Ngu Ekukole
- Esther Mulutakwe Azoh
- Mary Taka Tanni
- Anne Nkwain Nsang
- Marie Rose Messi Mezanga
- Pamela Egbe Messy
- Pamela Njotu Bidjocka

As can be perceived the maiden names have been italicised in order to demonstrate how they have been foregrounded while the surnames of their husbands appear normally to mark their subordination to the maiden names. In fact if separation between husband and wife takes place the appended surname may just as well fall off and the full maiden names continue unperturbed. Such marital name collocate contract relations with new referents so that the form of the derived names completely innovatory and revealing as the new name collocate conveys the complete personality of the woman - both maiden and marital.

This idea of maintaining the maiden names in marital situations is well illustrated among the Bassa speaking women of Cameroon where married women construct their names mainly by combining their husbands' names with their maiden names through a significant vocative of address "Ngo", for instance:

- Mrs. Mahop Ngo Billa
- Mrs. Nguimbous Ngo Nvemb Matilda
- Madam Nwel Ngo Mayi Esther

The vocative marker "Ngo" which is the initial component of the italicised maiden name is used to mean "daughter of" which is a way of highlighting the fact that her newly acquired name in marriage does not efface her past even though a new status is visible.

The androcentric practice whereby men assume dominant place in giving their wives by causing them to adopt a submissive posture is not reported in the two examples provided by the media women and the women of Bassa extraction.

It is also noticed that in order to preserve maiden names women prefer to be addressed as:

- Mrs. Ngassa nee Carol Ndikum
- Mrs. Njume nee Vera Ngalame
- Mrs. Ngale nee Anita Ngala
- Princess Happi epouse Azia.

In certain cases women advance professional reasons to negotiate the maintenance of their maiden names in their marital contract. A good number of cases already abound in Cameroon among women pursuing different careers: e.g. Susan Bamu of Radio Cameroon, Yaounde who maintains her maiden name whereas she married to Aparara; Roselyn Jua of the University of Buea who continues to use only her maiden name, in spite of her being married to Eric Ngwa; and Louise-Ngwa who maintains her maiden name but is married to Cheka.

Cameroon civil status traditions of keeping intact the maiden names of and the practice whereby females register and obtain their certificates and under these maiden names encourage and reinforce the preservation of names even in marital situations.

The time-honoured submissive pattern of female names inherited from culture appears to be giving way to a more assertive pattern of female names modern professional and traditional Cameroonian society, as her duality of personality is unmistakably preserved and safeguarded.

It has been demonstrated how instead of adopting their husbands' surnames Cameroonian women simply tend to graft these onto theirs. Such processes valuable insights into the struggle of women for autonomy and freedom within traditional and modern Cameroonian society. This new attitude is consonant Simone de Beauvoir's (1982) declaration that "one is not born a woman, one becomes a woman". This amounts to saying that disadvantaged situations are constructs. One is not born with them, but rather one is nurtured into them, assertive way of taking names by some Cameroonian women should therefore be seen as a positive step in gaining their rightful place in the scheme of things. In way Spender's clear and loud complaint (1981:1) that "women have been used as the producers of knowledge and as the subjects of knowledge" will be viewed as an appropriate consideration.

Female names are becoming like Willis' description of Black women's writing (1989:17) as not a mere collection of motifs and strategies but a mode of discourse which enables a critical perspective upon the past, the present and sometimes into an emerging future.

C. Evaluative Morphological Markers

But one aspect of language use which alarms linguists and sympathisers of feminist quest for self-affirmation is the French phonological pattern of the names taken by our young ladies and, in fact, ladies in general in Cameroon.

One would have wished to think that the names women take should not be accepted favourably into the women-speak mainstream but should pose influence and shape feminist consciousness. Patterns in name-taking contrary to the feminist trend of self-valorisation need to be discouraged.

It will be recalled that education in the tradition of the classics i.e. Latin and Greek used to function as a crucial step in gender demarcation where the in "a" symbolized feminine gender. The French language displays the suffixes and "ine", among others, to mark feminine words. But when these suffixes extended to English morphology, as it has become so fashionable nowadays, they do not just convey a feminine element but more importantly other expert connotations which may be hidden to the listener or user but are also significant when examined semantically.

The aesthetic aura of these suffixes provides an echoing spell of women have become victims. In fact they are obsessed with the rather "degr linguistic markers of "ette" and "ine" and these do not in any way enhance personalities. Instead, they devalue their assertiveness.

Like Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts* (1941) in which the mysterious La Trobe imagines words without meaning "rising from mud" as being wonde some women have a predilection for giving fanciful first names to their daughters, or their daughters purposefully rewrite the erstwhile meaningful first names the at birth, by adopting those which are voguish even though vacuous. In this many English speaking female Cameroonians are transforming their names into French equivalents:

- Angelina becomes Angeline
- Paulina becomes Pauline
- Carolina becomes Caroline
- Clementina becomes Clementine
- Victoria becomes Victorine
- Christina becomes Christine
- Balbina becomes Balbine
- Martina becomes Martine
- Claudia becomes Claudine
- Celina becomes Celine
- Regina becomes Regine
- Ernestina becomes Ernestine
- Justina becomes Justine
- Rufina becomes Rufine
- Josepha becomes Josephine

By using forms or words with identifiable gender counterparts, for exam “Paulinus” which is the male counterpart of “Paulina”, one is able to identify both forms as being symmetric. In fact latinized forms in English are considered to be the standard structure. However, when anglophone Cameroonian women fall victim to the French appeal of name-taking they are unconscious of the fact that such a taking can only be seen as reflective of inferiority complex. As a matter of fact when an “ine” suffix marks a word, it does not really mean the totality of that word. Rather, it symbolizes the fact that it is only pertaining to that full word, relating to it, looking in question. It is in this sense that we understand words like speakerine, serpentine, figurine, alpine and many others. That these words rather mean someone like a speaker or announcer, something like a snake, a semblance of a figure or image, something pertaining to the Alps, respectively, cannot be argued or disputed.

These examples only provide more evidence to the fact that some of our women have ignorantly opted for degrading forms of names rather than the original because of their musical sonority or because of their attempt to ape being Francophone. Inadvertently, the French-suffixes adopted only make them “like” and not the real thing. Why should anyone opt for the shadow rather than the real thing?

Some of the women are becoming more aware of this phenomenon and rather their names by adopting different orthographic presentations. We now have:

Carolyn for Caroline

Roselyn for Roseline

Gwendolyn for Gwendoline

Marylyn for Mariline

Nicolyn for Nicoline

The deletion of the letter “e” at the end and the replacement of “i” by the letter “y” is a measure of the self-valorisation that the women are trying to achieve through such forms of orthographic presentation. Unfortunately, these modifications change very little since these graphemes continue to have the same phonological input and the pronunciation remains intact in the two cases.

The adoption of the suffix “ette”, as we saw in the case of “ine” is equally degrading and widespread as exemplified below:

Juliette

Annette

Luciette

Josette

Jeannette

Henriette

Claudette

Florette

Majorette

Sakerette

Suffragette.

The ‘ette’ suffix like the “ine” equally marks the feminine form and also conveys the meaning of “smallness”. It especially connotes the meaning of being like....or an imitation of ... This is the meaning we give to leatherette or towelette or superette or diskette or cigarette or suffragette, which all connote the diminutive forms of the ‘big’ or “standard” things.

It is this contradiction that we need to watch out for in the process of naming. How can people who have so resolutely opted for self-affirmation on the one hand turn on the other, to adopt names

which contradict the concerns they articulate? The phonic appeal of some French names should not be seen to overwhelm the seen purpose and the need for self-affirmation that are manifested by these women.

Conclusion

The trend towards adoption of names by some Cameroonian women certainly emphasizes the role of the human agency in the process of social change, this should not remain cosmetic. Proper adoption of names, be these male or female will become one of the critical vectors of the development and rationalisation English language in Cameroon, particularly in the persistent quest for identity and freedom.

Some resourceful women are crafting new patterns for their names in order to expose their suitability and undermine the inappropriate structure of these. This investigation is an exercise in providing new ways of reading the significant female names which achieve self-affirmation. Practices that undermine the legitimate female concerns for self-revalorisation need to be discouraged. Should ephemeral fashionable though vacuous methods of name-taking be chosen over greater quest for identity and self-aggrandisement? The proper answer to question will go a long way to promoting feminist issues and concerns: empowerment and gender equity, I mean to say.

But it seems that the feminist desire to participate in development and the decision-making process, their clamour to be given greater recognition in their strive for sustainable human development may be compromised if the right process naming is not adopted. Non-marginalisation in feminine name-taking is there to be encouraged vigorously. The positive trend in name-taking which was outlined in the first part of this discourse is a step forward in the right direction; the practice being adopted as seen in the second part of this study, is regrettably retrogressive. The onus to bring about change in this societal practice and perception lies entirely with women themselves and not with the cultural and traditional mores which have been responsible in certain cases for women's low self-image and self-esteem.

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Littérature Camerounaise en Français: Voix et Voies d'Aujourd'hui

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Introduction

Par une espèce de reflexe ou d'inconscient collectif, l'on a tendance, parlant littérature camerounaise en français, à toujours focaliser le discours sur ceux qui en ont assis la réputation depuis l'époque coloniale jusqu'aux premières décennies de l'indépendance. Mongo Béti, Ferdinand Oyono, Francesco Ditsouna, Guillaume Oyono-Mbia, René Philombe, Patrice Kayo, Francis Bebey, Jean Ikelle-Matiba, Benjamin Matip, pour ne citer que les plus connus. Sans doute a-t-on de bonnes raisons de penser que l'âge d'or de la littérature camerounaise en français appartient au passé. Sans doute est-on loin d'avoir épuisé les richesses de cette littérature que l'on peut dire d'hier.

Mais force est de constater que malgré un environnement socio-politique et culturel peu propice à la création artistique en général et littéraire en particulier, des vocés de plus en plus nombreuses tentent de s'élever au-dessus de brouhaha d'une société camerounaise en panne de créativité, tous domaines confondu, proposer d'autres voies/viae.

Mon propos consistera à faire l'inventaire de ces voix qui s'élèvent aujourd'hui dans l'espace littéraire camerounais et qui préconisent une conception nouvelle de la chose littéraire entendu au sens le plus large du terme. C'est-à-dire qui proposent d'autres voies. Et cette génération de nouveaux écrivains se prêtent d'autant plus difficilement à toute tentative de catégorisation ou de classification qu'ils sont, à tous égards, d'une grande diversité.

Aussi me contenterai-je dans cet inventaire de poser quelques interrogations, suffisamment englobantes sur les nouveaux écrivains à leurs thèmes privilégiés, conception de l'écriture, les lieux d'où ils produisent et pourquoi, de même que l'audience dont ils jouissent auprès du public au plan individuel comme au plan institutionnel.

Contexte Nouveau Pour une Littérature Nouvelle

La spécificité des écrivains camerounais dits de la première génération, tient avant tout à l'inscription de leurs oeuvres dans la société coloniale, qu'ils s'efforcent entre dans ses divers compartiments. C'est ce qui leur confère, tant sur le plan thématique que celui de l'écriture, une grande unité. Aussi importe-t-il, pour bien hender la littérature camerounaise d'aujourd'hui de l'inscrire dans son contexte d'émergence qui est celui de la société postcoloniale ... laquelle a vu surgir des "femmes nouveaux, ou les rapports de domination et d'exploitation fondées sur la classe et les groupes d'intérêt se sont substitués à l'antique affrontement entre race supérieure et race inférieure avec tout ce que cela impliquait.

Avec cette nouvelle donné socio-politique on ne pouvait qu'assister à un renouveau littéraire d' autant plus que la plupart de ceux qui sont montés au créneau ces dernières années n'ont vraiment jamais connu la colonisation que par oui dire, sont devenus adultes avec la société post-coloniale. Aussi n'est-il nullement, étonnant que les problèmes qui les obsèdent soient ceux qu'engendre la nouvelle société camerounaise.

La première question à laquelle on se doit de répondre ici est de savoir qui prend la parole, qui écrit? Comment à ce propos ne pas relever l'irruption sur la scène littéraire camerounaise des voix féminines qui deviennent des voix prépondérantes? Ce phénomène, pour relever quelque peu de la mode, c'est-à-dire d'une problématique universelle de prise de parole par les minorités, n'en trouve pas moins sa justification dans le contexte camerounais. La fin de la colonisation a en effet révélé de manière dramatique l'autre domination dont la femme était victime, à savoir la toute puissance de l'homme. La prise de parole de la femme tient donc aussi de la volonté de venir à bout de

cette autre domination peut-être plus pernicieuse que la domination coloniale.

Ceci dit, c'est à une véritable invasion de l'espace littéraire par les voix des femmes que l'on assiste avec Were Were Liking (*Orphée d'Afrique. Elle sera de jaspe et de corail, L'Amour-cent-vies*), avec Calixthe Beyala (*C'est le soleil qui braise, Tu t'appelleras Tanga. Seul le diable le savait, Maman a un amant*), avec Mpoudi Ngolle (*Sous la cendre et le feu*), Axelle Kabou (*Et si l'Afrique refuse le développement*), Rabiadou Njoya (*La Dernière aimée*), et j'en oublie sans doute.

A cette percée quantitative s'ajoute une sorte de prééminence de l'écriture féminine. En effet, Were Were Liking et Calixthe Beyala sont aujourd'hui les deux écrivains camerounais les plus prolifiques, et qui ont la plus grande audience sinon nationale du moins internationale. Qui plus est Liking et Beyala sont les seules professionnelles de l'écriture de l'heure celles qui vivent de leur métier d'écrivains et qui le reconnaissent. A ce propos Calixthe Beyala est sans fausse modestie: "Oui, et très bien dans la mesure où mes livres se vendent à 150,000 exemplaires. J'ai connu un énorme succès dès mon premier livre" Si ce n'était que pour cela, on serait fondé à affirmer sa suprématie des voix féminines dans la littérature camerounaise d'aujourd'hui. Car aucun homme ne peut sans fanfaronnade tenir des propos identiques.

Si les voix féminines sont prééminentes, elles sont loin d'être exclusives". Et même fort nombreux sont les hommes qui verraient leur nom inscrits dans anthologie de la littérature camerounaise qui aurait quelque prétention à l'exhaustivité. On assiste ces dernières années à une prolifération d'écrivains hommes quoique talent inégal. Ce sont: Yodi Karone avec *le Bal des Caïmans, A la recherche cannibale-amour*, Pabe Mongo avec *L'Homme de la rue, Nos ancêtres les Baobabs* Paul Dakeyo avec *La Femme où j'ai mal, Les Enfants de Soweto*, Etouga Manga avec *La Colline du fromager*, Fernando d' Almeida avec *Traduit du pluriel, En attendant le Verdict*. Il y a ceux qui en plus d'être écrivain font de la critique littéraire et de l'essai: Charly Gabriel Mbock avec *La croix du coeur, Quand saigne le palmier, Cameroun: l'intention démocratique*, David Ndachi Tagne avec *Mr. Handlock ou le Boulanger politique, La Reine captive, Romans et réalités camerounaises, Ethnofacistes: la vérité du sursis*, Basseck Ba Khobio avec *Les Eaux qui débordent, Cameroun: La fin du maquis?* Il y en a qui en sont encore à de timides apparitions sur la scène littéraire:

Victor Mbouadjio avec *Demain est encore loin*. Simon Njami avec *Cercueil et Cie*. Il y a aussi, ceux qui font essentiellement dans l'essai, qui au crible la société camerounaise d'aujourd'hui et en devenir. Ce sont, parmi les plus célèbres, Jean Marc Ela avec *Le cri de L'homme africain*, *L'Afrique des villages*, *La ville en Afrique*, Eboussi Boulaga avec *Les conférences nationales en Afrique: une affaire à suivre*. Célestin Monga qui vient de se rappeler au souvenir des Camerounais avec *L'Anthropologie de la violence*, un ouvrage au titre révélateur de l'une des réalités les plus permanentes de la société camerounaise de ces 'dernières années.'

Tels sont donc, classés en fonction de ce qui les distingue fondamentalement, ceux qui ont émergé dans l'espace littéraire camerounaise au sens large du terme les quinze dernières années.

Quels Problèmes Posent Les Ecrivains D'Aujourd'hui? Quelles Voles Préconisent-Ils?

Les œuvres d'aujourd'hui ne tranchent sans doute pas d'une manière radicale avec celles d'hier. Un écrivain comme Victor Bouadjio tente même de sauver de l'oubli dans, *Demain est encore loin*, une phase de la lutte nationaliste qui a secoué le Cameroun jusque dans les années soixante et qui a nourri bien des romans d'un Mongo Beti par exemple. Toute la poésie de Paul Dakeyo, exception faite de son dernier recueil, *La femme ou j'ai mal*, tourne autour des luttes nationalistes d'ici ou d'ailleurs.

Mais en dépit de cela, l'on a de bonnes raisons d'affirmer que les thèmes focaux ne sont plus les mêmes. Car si les aînés s'étaient surtout préoccupés de contester et de combattre l'ordre colonial et néo-colonial, les voix d'aujourd'hui semblent plus soucieuses de mettre en question l'ordre social.

En effet l'agressivité avec laquelle une Calixthe Beyala dénonce la situation traumatisme que vivent les femmes, l'exploitation, la domination et l'oppression multiforme dont elles et les enfants font l'objet dans les nouvelles sociétés africain constituent les thèmes récurrents d'œuvres telles *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée* et *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*. Cette remise en question de l'ordre social commence chez Bayela, pourrait-on dire, par une véritable insurrection contre l'omnipotence de l'homme et le danger qu'il représente. Evoquant

son expérience personnelle, elle affirme dans une interview: « Et l'homme sera quelqu'un de dangereux. Avec lui la fille entre dans un cercle infernal. » La romancière ne met-elle pas tout son talent dans *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée* à peindre cet homme sous un jour particulièrement négatif?

On assiste aussi, avec la nouvelle écriture, à l'identification des ennemis réels de la société d'aujourd'hui, à savoir la tradition et ses nombreux recueils, Les mentalités rétrogrades, L'impossible modernité, le difficile avènement de nouvelles valeurs telles la liberté individuelle, l'affirmation de la personnalité, et qui sont autant de thèmes que n'avaient point privilégiés les aînés. Dans *Elle sera de Jaspe et de Corail*, Were Were Liking projette à travers les habitants de Lunai l'image d'une Afrique qui démissionne, qui refuse de prendre à bras le corps les problèmes qui l'assaillent. « Et ils remuaient leur lâcheté de boue, ils s'en gargarisaient, vomissaient, la chiaient et s'en torchaient impuissants, dégueulasses, a se gaver d'une dose-plus d'amertume pour mieux renoncer, mieux justifier leur non-passion, leur irresponsabilité. » (P. 7) Il s'agit de faire en sorte que surgisse des entrailles de cette Afrique une nouvelle race d'enfants qui soient de "jaspe et de corail." On est comme projeté au carrefour d'une foule de problèmes nouveaux.

On assiste aussi à l'émergence d'une poésie ou le lyrisme personnel prend le pas sur les préoccupations sociales. Ainsi en va-t-il de Fernando d'Ameilda qui puise de plus en plus dans son expérience d'homme à l'identité plurielle pour nourrir sa poésie. Son recueil *Traduit du je pluriel* était déjà annonciateur de cette poésie intimiste, personnelle. Avec *La femme où j'ai mal*, Paul Dakeyo inscrit sa poésie dans cette mouvance intimiste. De toute évidence, le poète y règle par le biais fiction un problème de coeur qui est loin d'être imaginaire; il y appelle de tous vœux la réconciliation et les retrouvailles avec l'être aimé. Ce recueil est-il besoin de le rappeler, inscrit d'emblée la littérature camerounaise d'aujourd'hui dans préoccupations des écrivains de tous les temps, c'est-à-dire dans l'universel.

On assiste par ailleurs à une autre forme d'évolution thématique à certains écrivains qui s'engagent dans une direction que n'avaient point empruntée mêmes ceux de leurs aînés vivant alors en exil, à savoir sortir leurs œuvre de l'espace national d'origine pour les inscrire dans

leur pays d'accueil. Il s'agit ces cas de puiser son inspiration dans les réalités quotidiennement vécues en terre d'exil. C'est le cas de Yodi Karone qui, dans *Les Beaux gosses* et *Negre de Paille* met en scène des personnes tirés de son expérience abidjanaise.

Il en va de même de Were Were Liking, cette artiste qui a fait de la Côte d'Ivoire, sa terre d'exil, une terre d'élection, y créant un véritable centre culturel connu sous le nom de "Villa-Kiyi." Rien d'étonnant que nombre de ses textes mènent bien souvent le lecteur loin de la terre camerounaise. Simon Njami s'attaquant à lui aux problèmes des milieux africains de France, notamment de la région parisienne. Calixthe Beyala elle aussi cède, dans son dernier roman, *Maman a un amant*, à cette inspiration nouvelle. Certes il appartiendra à la critique de déterminer le degré de camerounité de ces œuvres que l'on peut dire d'inspiration étrangère. Mais en attendant, force est de constater qu'elles apportent une coloration particulière au paysage littéraire camerounais d'aujourd'hui.

Mais on ne saurait, comme je l'ai relevée plus haut, évoquer le paysage littéraire camerounais d'aujourd'hui en se confinant dans la création imaginaire c'est-à-dire dans les œuvres de fiction, vouant par conséquent à l'oubli, nombreux essais dont s'est enrichie notre littérature en français durant les dernières années et qui n'ont épargné aucun domaine des réalités nationales et africaines.

On peut distinguer au moins trois tendances chez les essayistes. 1) Les partisans de l'afro-pessimisme; 2) les adeptes du retour aux sources paysannes ; 3) les défenseurs de la voie africaine de gouvernement.

Comment ne pas penser - honneur aux femmes une fois de plus - à l'explosif et en même temps provocateur ouvrage d'Axelle Kabou: *Et si l'Afrique refusait le développement*, par quoi elle apparaît comme la première théoricienne de l'afro-pessimisme, c'est-à-dire de cette vision qui consiste à désespérer de L'Afrique dans sa quête de développement? Dans cet essai qui a fait impression dans les cavistes, L'auteur élevé au niveau d'une pure construction mythique tout le discours sur la volonté africaine de développement. Sa première hypothèse y est que le refus du développement serait la chose la mieux partagée en Afrique noire et que la notion de développement repose sur des diktats post- coloniaux que supporterait mal les sociétés africaines.

Et Axelle Kabou se fait fort de démontrer dans son ouvrage les mécanismes du refus du développement. Et l'auteur d'affirmer dès son introduction:

Cet ouvrage ne consent par conséquent aucune révélation bouleversante. Il tente simplement d'expliquer systématiquement pourquoi aucun pays africain ce jour, n'a élaboré un projet de société clairement compris par ses populations au sens large. Les élites africaines cultivées savent-elles mieux les masses analphabètes où va l'Afrique fût-ce au niveau national? Quel que soit le domaine considéré, on note la prédominance d'une sorte de flou artistique, d'approximative clarté ou l'on paraît néanmoins se mouvoir l'aiment à force d'habitude, de combines, d'arrangements éphémères, de ruses, de complaisances, de compromissions sans aucune possibilité de progrès. L'Afrique est une sorte de cul-de-sac de terminus de voie de garage où aucun espoir de mobilité ascendante n'est permis.⁸

Propos dramatiques que ceux d'Axelle Kabou et qui interpellent au plus haut point la conscience africaine si tant est qu'elle soit encore capable d'un sursaut de lucidité.

De la même trame est l'ouvrage d'Etouga Manguel: *L'Afrique a-t-elle besoin d'un plan d'ajustement culturel*, qui n'est autre qu'une vive contestation des camisoles de force qu'au nom de la quête d'identité les pays africains s'imposent, au lieu de se laisser aller à la modernité.

Avec l'ouvrage de Jean Marc Ela *Quand l'Etat pénètre en brousse*, on est en plein dans la 2ème catégorie d'essais. Contre-discours par rapport aux thèses lie Kayou, il se veut une analyse sympathique des ripostes paysannes à la crise l'indique son sous-titre. Jean Marc Ela montre en effet comment les pratiques de développement à l'œuvre depuis les années soixante ont systématiquement utilisé les paysans et leur force de travail. Dans le domaine politique, les Etats ont imposé le parti unique afin d'étouffer toute tentation démocratique, sous le prétexte que la lutte pour le développement ne souffrait pas de la dispersion des forces.¹⁰

Plus proche de nous dans le temps et par les préoccupations il y a l'ouvrage de Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, *Les Conférences nationales souveraines en Afrique: une affaire il a suivre*. Il a voulu y fixer, et à chaud, les données fondamentales de l'esquisse de solution la plus retentissante au problème de démocratisation qui secoue l'Afrique en cette fin du

vingtième siècle et qui représente une conception purement africaine de la conquête du pouvoir. Comme quoi il n'y a pas lieu de désespérer totalement de cette Afrique, de sa capacité à inventer des solutions adéquates à ses problèmes les plus cruciaux. Faut-il relever que si pour des raisons tout à fait évidentes, à savoir une hostilité manifeste à l'idée même de la conférence nationale dont la voix la plus autorisée a dit qu'elle était sans objet chez nous si donc pour cette raison, on a peu parlé de cet ouvrage au Cameroun, il n'en reste pas moins qu'il a reçu un accueil remarqué dans bien des pays africains.

Tous ces essais représentent un pan extrêmement important de la littérature camerounaise en français, des ouvrages qui ont par ailleurs une réelle valeur littéraire et dont on ne saurait ne pas tenir compte dans une évaluation critique se veut totalisante.

Quelles Caractéristiques Formelles Pour La Littérature D'Aujourd'hui

Si le renouvellement littéraire est une question de thèmes, il est aussi et avant tout une question de forme, d'écriture. A ce propos, force est de constater que si, certains écrivains d'aujourd'hui reproduisent les structures et la langue telles qu'héritées des aînés, d'autres se montrent bien empressés de les bousculer. Si les uns font de l'allégeance, notamment par rapport à la langue, d'autres privilégient la dissidence.¹¹

Une fois de plus l'exemple vient des femmes, avec Were Were Liking comme porte-étendard, Elle est partisane d'une écriture subversive, qui se fout de toute pureté. Elle procède par mélange des genres, par superposition, par entassement.

L'histoire elle-même vole en éclat dans une œuvre comme *Elle sera jaspe et de corail* au point d'en paraître inexistante. Mieux elle transforme l'œuvre littéraire en lieu d'élaboration d'une théorie de l'écriture romanesque où sont soulevées toutes les questions qui se posent aujourd'hui sur l'art négro-africain. A la limite Were Were Liking accorde, dans sa conception de la littérature, la primauté à la forme par rapport au contenu. Elle affirme: "Bientôt une autre génération va davantage interroger de nouvelles formes, chercher dans d'autres directions, hommes ou femmes ... Lire une histoire ne m'intéresse plus

beaucoup, mais quand je vois qu'il y a une écriture différente, alors je lis pour voir dans quelles direction s'orientent d'autres auteurs.

Cette poétique nouvelle essentiellement théorisé dans *Elle sera de jaspe et de Corail*, baigne aussi des œuvres comme *Orphée d'Afrique*, *La puissance de Um*, *Une nouvelle terre*, pour ne citer que celles-là. Il s'en dégage le rêve de l'artiste Camerounaise de créer, à travers une nouvelle écriture, une nouvelle race d'homme et de femmes préservant dans leur modernité, le socle traditionnel. Liking puise en effet énormément dans la tradition qu'elle tente constamment de moderniser.

Si Beyala verse un peu moins dans la dissidence du point de vue linguistique, privilégiant une écriture plus classique, elle se singularise par son discours débride. Ainsi c'est avec une grande liberté de ton qu'elle décrit, notamment dans *C'est soleil qui m'a brûlée*, l'inacceptable condition de la femme réduite au simple obi de plaisir, et s'insurge contre toute forme de répression sociale qui se cache derrière des conventions ou une prétendue pudeur qui feraient que certains mots soi interdits de discours. En d'autres termes, Beyala préconise la libération de la femme par la libération de son discours, par la banalisation de certains réalités dont on en a toujours parlé en prenant d'inutiles précautions.

Pendant, ce serait avoir une vue trop réductrice que de croire qu'il n'y a que ces deux femmes, Were Were Liking et Calixthe Beyala, pour préconiser une nouvelle écriture ou une certaine dissidence linguistique. Chacun des écrivains que j'ai évoqué dans cette étude y va de son cortège de mots ou d'expressions, voire de constructions grammaticque spécifiques qui relèveraient de ce que l'on peut appeler des incorrections ou des barbarismes volontaires, et qui sont autant d'éléments par quoi s'affirme la camerounité des œuvres écrites en français.

Mais parceque le renouvellement ou L'enrichissement d'une langue n'est pas affaire individuelle, ne relevé pas du libre arbitre d'un écrivain fut-il le plus celebre, force est de constater que les écrivains camerounais n'ont point encore formuler ce que L'on pourrait appeler *le Manifeste de la langue française au Cameroun* lequel codifierait les usages particuliers aux locuteurs d'ici.

On ne saurait ne pas évoquer à ce propos l'exemple des écrivains antillais, Patrik Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, Jean Bernabé, qui préconisent dans leur Manifeste, *L'Eloge de La créolité*, une vigoureuse mise en question d'une langue française, langue d'écriture, d'où serait absent le ferment créole qui fait de la antillaise une littérature spécifique, voire autonome, y compris au plan linguistique.

A titre d'exemple, le lecteur du *Negre et l'amiral* de Raphaël Confiant se régale de mots nouveaux qui, sans nullement court-circuiter la communication, sans nuire au sens, confère au texte une sonorité particulière. Je n'en veux pour preuve qu'une foule de mots nouveaux construits selon une logique nouvelle : « *beletté, vigourensité, maudition, comportation, amicalité, tout-de-suitement, souvemment, vagabondageries, dégoutance, calculation, haïssance, fainéantisseurs, tout-à-faitement, bouleversader, l'ennuyance, boissonner, propreter, emmerdation, etc. etc.* »

¹³ Et c'est par centaines que l'on compte des mots ainsi formes 335 pages du roman. Et il en va de même des œuvres de Chamoiseau et des co-auteurs avec Confiant du manifeste qu'est *L'Eloge de la créolité*.

Comment ne pas rêver du jour où les écrivains camerounais, sortant de la dissidence individuelle, élaborant un manifeste pour codifier une dissidence collective qui déboucherait sur une camerounisation enrichissante du français et appartiendra ou plaira ensuite à l'Académie de reconnaître. Comment ne pas jour où, dépassant la dichotomie de l'anglophonie et de la francophonie, ils ont vers une écriture camerounaise intégrée assumant, mais aussi dépassant, le héritage qui est le nôtre. Et sans doute doit-on considérer l'expérience tentée par deux enseignants-écrivains de l'Université de Yaoundé I, Bole Butake et Doho dans l'écriture commune de *Zingraph and the Battle of Mankon* un heureux précédent. Il n'y a plus qu'à souhaiter qu'un cadre formel, si ce n'est institutionnel, se mette en place pour gérer de telle expérience.

D'où Parle·T·On? D'où Ecrit·On? Ecriture Du Pays/Ecriture D'Ailleurs

Parler de la littérature camerounaise en français aujourd'hui sans se préoccuper de la position d'écriture, sans poser la question de savoir d'où vient l'œuvre, et qui revient en fait-il savoir où vit l'écrivain, serait

l'amputer d' un des éléments les plus indispensables à son appréhension, à son évaluation.

A ce propos le constat est facile à faire. Les écrivains camerounais se classent en deux catégories. Il y a ceux de l' intérieur et ceux de la diaspora, ceux qui vivent en exil. Et lorsqu'on les appréhende du point de vue de la courbe de productivité, l'exil paraît bien plus fertilisant que le pays. A ce propos, deux pays d'accueil tiennent la vedette: La Côte d'Ivoire et la France. Et dans l'un comme dans l'autre les femmes se distinguent par leur rythme de production et aussi par leur succès, Were Were Liking vit en Côte d'Ivoire depuis une quinzaine d'années. Y est également installé depuis belle lurette son compatriote Yodi Karone. L'une et l'autre puisent, comme je l'ai montré plus haut une part de leur inspiration dans leur d'accueil, ce qui témoigne d'un véritable enracinement et justifie en partie leur grand succès auprès du public ivoirien. En effet Were Were Liking qui est paradoxale bien peu connue au Cameroun jouit d'une immense popularité en Côte d'Ivoire.

Mais c'est en Occident que vit la plus importante colonie d'écrivains camerounais exiles. Calixthe Beyala connaît Paris, où elle est bien intégrée dans les milieux littéraires, un immense succès. Elle y côtoie, sans peut-être jamais rencontrer, son compatriote Paul Dakeyo en qui l'écrivain se double du Directeur de la Maison d'Édition Silex-Nouvelles du Sud et qui en est à sa vingt-cinquième année d'exil. Sont également parisiens Axelle Kabou et Simon Njami.

Mais ce qui importe ici, c'est moins le fait d'être en exil que le pourquoi de l'exil. A cette question, tous répondent unanimement: "Pour des besoin de structures et de condition de travail que n'offre pas le pays". En effet, si personne ne prétend plus aujourd'hui être contraint à l'exil, autre qu'intérieur, pour des raisons politiques (même Mongo Beti a définitivement regagné le Cameroun après 32 ans - tous ressentent comme un obstacle particulièrement difficile à franchir le de vivre au Cameroun tout en étant créatif et productif. C'est comme si l'existence au pays avait un effet stérilisant sur l'imaginaire de bon nombre d'écrivains. Si comment comprendre que les œuvres qui nous viennent de l'intérieur soient si nombreuses ces dernières années? Est-ce parce que les écrivains de l'intérieur ne bénéficient pas de la même attention que leurs pairs de l'exil? Peut-être!¹⁴

Mais l'exil est-il aussi toujours sans conséquence pour la liberté de l'écrivain. Peut-on penser que Calixthe Beyala qui, cela ne fait aucun doute, doit subir les grandes pressions des éditeurs parisiens, puisse continuer à écrire comme elle veut comme il lui plait, Were Were Liking ne paye-t-elle pas un certain prix, en liberté contrôlée, pour le succès que lui vaut son exil ivoirien? Autant de questions que l'on ne peut s'empêcher de se poser.

Et pour revenir à la production littéraire elle-même, si l'on pose la question en terme de lieu de fabrication de l'œuvre en tant que produit de consommation c'est pratiquement toute la production littéraire camerounaise qui nous vient d'ailleurs. En effet, exceptés quelques ouvrages de Charley Gabriel Mbock d'Etouga Manguèle publiés aux Editions Clé, le reste nous vient de L'Harmattan, de Silex, de Stock, de Balland, ou de quelques autres maisons d'Édition parisiennes.

Et c'est là que surgit l'inquiétude quant au progrès et au devenir de cette littérature dont les structures de productions sont loin d'être contrôlées par des nationaux, voire sur lesquelles ils sont loin d'avoir la moindre emprise. Et à ce propos l'on ne saurait s'empêcher de relever le net recul qu'a connu le Cameroun par rapport aux années 70 où les Editions Clé tenaient une place de choix dans la lion du livre camerounais et africain. Et il faut redouter qu'une telle tendance ne s'amplifie à un moment où L'économie du pays s'effondre chaque jour davantage politique culturelle tarde à être définie, affirmée et défendue.

Littérature Camerounaise d'Aujourd'hui et son et Public Ou pour qui Ecrit-II?

Pour toute littérature constituée ou en voie de constitution, et c'est le cas pour la littérature camerounaise en français d'aujourd'hui, la question du public cible et de la manière dont le produit est mis à la disposition de ce public est l'une de celles auxquelles le critique doit impérativement répondre.

A ce propos l'on peut à priori dire que le public camerounais est celui qui obsède les écrivains d'aujourd'hui, qu'ils soient au pays ou qu'ils vivent en exil, qu'ils puisent leur inspiration ici, ou qu'ils se nourrissent des réalités d'ailleurs, de leur pays d'accueil. Car l'on

pourrait dire, parodiant Victor Hugo qu'en nous parlons - surtout des autres qui nous sont semblables - ils nous parlent de nous-mêmes.

Malheureusement, les conditions de diffusion et de distribution ainsi que la diminution du pouvoir d'achat dans une société où déjà le livre n'était pas un objet sommaton particulièrement prise, tout cela fait que la production littéraire camerounaise n'atteint point aujourd'hui son public cible. Non seulement peu nombreux sont ceux qui peuvent se targuer d'être au courant de ce qui se publie, mais cela relève de la gageure de trouver sur le marché local le dernier texte d'une Were Were Liking, d'une Calixthe Beyala, d'un Yodi Karone, d'un Paul Dakeyo, d'un Pabe Mongo, etc.

Et parce que la création artistique, notamment littéraire, fait figure de parent dans ce qui tient lieu chez nous de politique culturelle, parce que l'écrivain reçu avant tout comme un être gêneur et prétendument inutile à la société, les œuvres d'écrivains camerounais font l'objet d'une médiatisation presque nulle dans propre pays, quand bien même elles sont considérées ailleurs comme des bistros. Were Were Liking ne faisait-elle pas observer, dans une interview, qu'elle publie plus d'une dizaine d'ouvrages et qu'elle a connu la célébrité avant que l'on ait daigné parler d'elle au Cameroun?

Au-delà du grand public les structures pédagogiques, on le sait sont aussi les destinataires privilégiés de toute production littéraire. Ne dit-on pas que la "littérature" ce qui s'enseigne comme telle à l'école, laquelle école devient par conséquent 'instance privilégiée de légitimation? D'où la question de savoir quelle place la littérature camerounaise en français des dernières années tient à l'école? Ya-t-elle seulement droit de cite?

Certes les programmes scolaires ont vu figurer des œuvres comme *La Forêt illuminée* de Gervais Mendo Ze ou encore *Sous le cendre et le feu* de Mpoudi Ngolle, plus récemment *L'Amour cent vies* de Were Were Liking. Mais on peut dire qu'il ne s'est agit la que de quelques exceptions confirmant la règle de l'absence, sans d' ailleurs que l' on puisse dire ce qui en justifiait le choix.

Il convient donc de relever ici que la littérature camerounaise en français d'aujourd'hui est pratiquement absente du paysage scolaire et universitaire, celle d'hier y a toujours une portion congrue. Mieux encore, à la dernière réforme universitaire rentrée en vigueur en l'année

de grâce 1993, des études camerounaises peuvent faire, dans une université camerounaise, une licence de lettres modernes françaises sans avoir à étudier une seule œuvre de littérature camerounaise ni d’hier ni d’aujourd’hui, s’ils ne sont bien inspirés de choisir le module “Francophonie” où une “uv” sur trois traite de la littérature africaine en générale. Encore faut-il que l’œuvre au programme soit une œuvre de littérature camerounaise.

Ainsi donc la littérature d’aujourd’hui, comme support pédagogique, est en train de prendre un net recul dans le paysage scolaire et universitaire. Et il est à craindre qu’elle ne finisse par disparaître, abandonnant tout le champ à la littérature de l’amère-patrie francophone, “la française”, dont bien des universitaires camerounais se montrent, par conviction ou par calcul, des défenseurs acharnés. Mais c’est là un autre débat.

Conclusion

Tels sont, succinctement évoqués, quelques aspects fondamentaux de la

Littérature camerounaise en français dont on peut, en dépit de tout, affirmer qu’elle connaît une grande vitalité aujourd’hui. La diversité des voix qui en animent l’espace, voix des femmes, voix d’hommes, voix de créateurs, voix d’essayistes en font une polyphonie non seulement au plan thématique mais encore formel et linguistique. Et c’est par là qu’elle s’inscrit dans la modernité de toute la littérature négro-africaine, Mais cela ne saurait se faire sans l’avènement d’une institution littéraire véritable, fonctionnant dans tous ses rouages. C’est à ce prix, et à ce prix seulement que notre littérature jouera son rôle de transmission des valeurs par quoi se définira notre présence au monde, c’est-à-dire notre identité.

Note

1. Les ouvrages cités ne le sont qu’à titre indicatif, et ne représentent pas la totalité de la production de chacun des écrivains.

2. Voir la revue *Sépia*, no. 13, 1993, p.6.

3. Ici encore la liste des ouvrages par auteur est loin d'être exhaustive.

4. *Sépia*, (op.cit.) p. 7.

5. Were Were Liking, *Elle sera de jaspe et de Corail*, p. 7.

6. La question n'est pas encore tranchée de savoir si les œuvres inspirées les pays d'accueil des exiles font partie de la littérature camerounaise.

7. Il aurait été dommage de priver le panorama de la littérature camerounaise des œuvres d'essayistes qui sont même plus lues aujourd'hui que les œuvres de fiction.

8. Axelle Kabou, *Et si l'Afrique refusait le développement?*, p.13.

9. Jean Marc Ela, *Quand l'Etat pénètre en brousse*, p.

10. Il convient néanmoins de relever que la dissidence formelle dans la littérature camerounaise ne date pas d'aujourd'hui. Les écrivains de la première génération 'ont abondamment pratiquée. Mais elle prend une ampleur nouvelle chez les écrivains de la 2eme génération.

11. Voir Notre Librairie, 1994, No. 119.

12. Il s'agit-là d'élever à la dignité littéraire une sorte de barbarisme ne de la fréquentation dissidente de la langue héritée de L'ancien maître.

13. Pabe Mongo, un écrivain de l'intérieur, a déclaré, au cours d'une table ronde Centre Culturel Français de Yaoundé avoir ressenti une sorte de frustration devant L'importance que les critiques donnent aux écrivains exiles.

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Toward A More Humanized World: The Moral Obligation of Africa's Intellectuals: The Case of Cameroon

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Africa has always gone down badly into history books as the continent with gruesome stories and gory sights. Talk to many people in Europe and about this continent and all they know of the land is dreadfully malnourished children, frightfully looking AIDS patients, skeletal and starving wretches sitting in the squalor of our city slums.

Many Africans today feel ashamed of this picture of the continent and would and hear the other side of Africa in all her splendour and striking variety looks like we are doomed. Tribalism leading to fratricidal wars like the nightmare in Rwanda has become more vicious in the continent. Africans now possess lethal weapons, the same instruments with which they were subjugated and check by the colonial masters and now they ironically try them out on their “hers and sisters. Armed robbers and hired assassins kill with reckless and abandon. And human blood is beginning to lose its traditional sacredness because it is so frequently spilled even for the flimsiest reason. (I)

The characteristic African humaneness, personalism, hospitality wholesome personal relation and the overwhelming sense of the sacred seems to have withered away. In its place we find a clumsy self-centredness; inordinate ambition and lust for power and wealth; calculated malice and suicidal jealousy. Added to all are still the lingering Acquired Inferiority Complex and a confused sensitivity which makes the African too ready to accept the uncomfortable role of ‘buffoon when serious matters are being discussed. When a civilization or a, on reaches such a point of ridicule, she badly needs her thinkers and talented men and women of the academy to make a difference. Modern Africa can boast today, impressive gamut of intellectuals who would gain respect even from their worst output. But the fact that,

with such rare brains, the continent has continued to suffer before or even more, is enough temptation to consult the “Oku Ngambe”.

We are living in a world that has become victim of her own development: a world completely in disarray. If unassisted things could get worse. To avert this, this paper suggests a journey toward a more humanized world. Many methods can be used. Ours is the appeal to the intellectuals because our conviction the genuine intellectual should have more of what is needed to change the world than any other. Education is supposed to make a human being more human. However, with all our education, the dignity of the Human Person in modern civilization has nearly dropped to almost zero. In fact, “awe traditionally associated with corpses is disappearing because they now litter African roadways and highways unattended” (Bhusani. 1991: 16). Dig up our ancestors and most of them will second death from the shock of the horror that we strangely take today for a Human life means very little to the people of our times. That is why our consideration will be an examination of the dignity of the Human Person in our society today.

I. The Dignity Of The Human Person In Modern Civilisation

The Human Being is unique in his creation, existence and death. Another existence there is something transcendent in him that makes each sacred, unrepeatable and irreplaceable. That is why the Human Being possesses dignity that calls for reverence and respect. In fact anyone who does not feel the awe and mystery of Human Life is something short of a domesticated beast. As the being made in the image and likeness of God all human beings enjoy the equality of dignity as persons. None is more equal than the others; nor does one have more human rights than others.

Unfortunately notwithstanding our record-breaking advances in science and technology, our present civilization has still to learn the basics about human dignity. The crimes of this generation against humanity are legion. Their variety is bewildering.

All offences against life itself such as murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and wilful suicide; all violations of the integrity of the human person such as mutilation, physical and mental torture undue

psychological pressures: all on against dignity such as sub-human living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children in degrading working conditions where men are treated as mere tools for profit rather than as responsible persons; all these and the like are criminal: they poison civilians and they debase the perpetrators more than the victims and militate against honour of the creator. (*Gaudium et Spes*: 27)

But who cares in a world where people imagine and celebrate the death of God? A human being without God lacks the moral sense: and a person without moral sense could be a disgusting criminal capable of any imagined evil. A society of such people is eerie.

Our civilization runs the risk of being the greatest manipulator of the Human Person. Life has become so socialized to such an extent that individuals are mere nuclei determined by the crisscrossing of complex lines of socio-economic and political structures (Bonino. 1963: 16). Hence the human being has been transformed today “into a mere unit in some impersonal system” - economic, socio-cultural, and political. (Macquarrie, 1965:85)

a. Human Dignity in World Politics Today

It was the Greek Philosopher Aristotle of Stagira, who called the Human Being “a political animal”. By this appellation Aristotle wanted to stress the social nature of the Human Being. We cannot exist in isolation. We need others and that is why we have community and society. However, community can be a frustration as it can be a realization of individual life. The society can oppress individuals in the name of so called “social order”. The same society can equally provide wonderful opportunity for authentic expression and growth of the self. This is what makes the kinship of the individual to the social such a complex one. (Macquarrie. *ibid*: 68).

Politics has to do with social organization and rule. Ours today has to do with skilful manipulation a weird system in which Nicolo Machiavelli is adored therefore the end justifies the means. If a human being says just as much as is, unpalatable to the one that matters he is tactfully liquidated even if this will not ally liquidates what has been said. Such a system easily makes robots and trains nauseating political prostitutes.

Modern Africa is victim of this and has further her bad image before the world by enslaving her own children. There is a justified cry in the continent for multi-party democracy. But ours is ill-conceived and only provided another arena for more human blood to be spilt.

b. The Economics of Utility

It was the British School of 19th Century Philosophers who formulated the theory of utilitarianism. Jeremy Bentham, James Mill and John Stuart Mill the theories of John Locke and David Hume, asserted that an idea or person is only worth its Use. This philosophy which for some time seemed to have been put off is now forcefully at work in our civilization.

Ours is a civilization of utility; “a civilization of “things” not “persons”, a civilization in which persons are used in the same way as things are used,” (John Paul 1994) In ,such a civilization of use, “a woman can become an object for a man. a hindrance to parents, the family an institution obstructing the freedom of its members,” (ibid.) For a culture of use, the “blessed fruit of your womb” (Lk. 1:42) in a certain sense an accursed fruit (ibid.) Little wonder then that people be pressing for abortion to be legalized in one breath and in another, they seriously condemn murder in our cities! In the one case the person to be aborted is not considered “useful’ whereas the other is! What a weird sense of morality!

The world is ruled today by what we could call “Materialistic Monism”. In the logic of this economy, it is ‘the group of Seven who can shape and decide the, and they get this power simply because of their financial status. When money is concerned, fair and foul play is permitted if that will yield profit. Human dignity sacrificed; the conscience can be thwarted and we are allowed to play the. After all “tout est bien qui finit bien” [all is well that ends well!].

Africa’s poverty is not due to lack of human or natural resources. Ours begins and ends with our inexplicable myopia, lack of the will to do the right things correctly and a system that makes it impossible for even the best talent to its full potentiality. This is a continent that has all that one needs for viability but for some ungodly reasons she

continues to starve in the midst plenty. And the gods are not to blame! We have imprisoned ourselves and kept on pointing an accusing finger at the West that perhaps only built our prison yard have sold away all that made us what we really should be. And so many have become cultural hybrids who fail to understand that in this land of our forefathers has dignity simply by being a human being.

c. Socio-Cultural Hybrids

A society without a culture of its own lacks identity. Africa today finds herself at the crossroads of culture .She is torn by traditions each fighting for relevance. One is native to her but has been made to appear inferior while the other is foreign to her but is very much alive.

By definition, culture is dynamic and therefore open to others. But in her interaction with other cultures, African culture seems at a loss. And so where she has not become like the young of a puff adder who devour the flesh of their pare (Kunene, 1973:20) then the situation of our “Phlora” who has now become an unredeemed harlot, and the illusory girls in repellent “Miniskirt” must convince us that the “Roses are Withering”. We must stop them.

II. Education as Humanization

If education means anything at all, it must make the human being more human. The human being operates on four levels: physical, emotional intellectual and religious. On the physical level he is no better than a brute. As an emotional being, he is a “bundle of passions”. His intelligence could transform him into a wise rogue while at the religious level the danger of falling into fanaticism looms very much in the background.

Historically and at different times various tendencies have tried to educate by emphasizing one of these aspects of the human being. Hence the Spartan educated only to produce the ideal soldier – obedient, firm and ferocious. So if a child was born, it was examined by the elders. If found weak or deformed, it would be exposed to die on the mountain side. At seven boys had to go bare footed in al weathers and were given only one garment. This, for the Spartans, was

education to produce a man who was capable of enduring hardship. Then came the Epicureans for whom pleasure was the highest goal. Education for them was to train the senses to attain the greatest pleasure. Hutchins concentrated on the cultivation of the intellect since he saw reason as the unique characteristic of the human being. As Flemings would say later education should be for “mental health”. The Church clearly added the need for Religious and Moral education.

In as much as each of these forms of education supplied a desired goal, none by itself can be considered Education. Education must aim at the entire person; the whole being. It must at the same time train the body and make it physically healthy; enlighten and educate the senses to appreciate the beauty in the world; cultivate the intellect to judge correctly and apply reason in the moral sphere to get a well formed conscience. This is what education means. It should produce what the late Fonlon called “the genuine intellectual’ who is both Saint and Scholar. Such an education makes the human being more human and sets him aside as an asset and catalyst to development.

III. The Genuine Intellectual as an Asset and Catalyst to Development

The history of the world reveals how the intelligence and talent of many was put into effective use to redeem a decaying civilization. King Amenophis IV alias Akhenaton, reformed Ancient Egypt when things were falling apart. Siddharta or “Buddha” remains the light for India even today; Cungfus-tse is the Chinese idol; Zarathustra spoke for Persia. Speak of wisdom and the Greeks have ght to boast about the impact of their philosophers: Socrates, Plato and Aristotle are an indispensable trinity. From Rome the likes of Augustus Caesar, Marcus Aurelius, Virgil and Lucius command respect. The English can boast of a galaxy of names. Think only about the subtle Geoffrey Chaucer, the immortal William Shakespeare, and the incorruptible Thomas More. Our French masters could shame us worth their Diderots, Voltaire, Montesquieu and the Encyclopaedias; the German flash an impressive gamut of seasoned men and women from the saintly Goethe to atheistic Nietzsche. If we were to make the monstrous mistake of daring to stake these with what we could boast of today as

Cameroonian academicians. There would be a spontaneous uproar in the peaceful grove of the academy. Gerald once made the following observation:

If a college doesn't teach a man to think his own thoughts and speak his own mind, it doesn't teach him anything of prime importance. He may accumulate any amount of book learning; he may be fluent in seventeen languages including Etruscan; he may be able to square a circle. But if he comes out of college without the capacity to form an opinion of the way the world is going and the nerve to stand on that opinion in the face of stout opposition he remains an ignoramus, though his degrees may take up half the letters of the alphabet (quoted by Fonlon, 1979:29).

In the words of the Brazilian visionary, Paulo Freire (1972: 6), education does not consist in a proud display of letters before and after name, but in "critical consciousness" and what one can achieve because of his learning. Education is for life; it is a wonderful asset for the development and promotion of the human species. Where development has already taken off, the intellectual should become the catalyst by speeding or slowing down the pace. Africa has got lots of raw talent and resources that are untapped and unexploited. It requires the expertise of her educated men women to harness these resources which could otherwise become booty to more nefarious but sharper minds. Where our progress is slow (and it is very slow in most countries), it is the obligation of these intellectuals to give it the push. And where we have run too fast off the rail as in most cases, they should put us back on course again. Unfortunately, we must sadly join Kofi Awonoor to send this message to our ancestors:

Agosi, if you go tell them
Tell Nidevu, Kpeti and Kove,
that they have done us evil;
tell them their house is falling
And the trees in the fence
Have been eaten by termites;
That the Martels curse them.

Ask them why they idle there
While we suffer, and eat sand.
And the crow and the vulture
Hover always above our broken fences
And strangers walk over our portion.
(A song of Sorrow, Poems of Black Africa)

To realize what the greatest manipulation and horror are being wrought today Africa when she has so many educated sons and daughters leaves those who aspire for academics with no ambition. To imagine that some of these educated offspring of Africa connive to keep their mother in the dustbin is to think of academy sacrilege. But honesty makes us to say that this is true.

IV. The Opium Of The Intellectuals

An opium is a dried latex from unripe capsules of a poppy; reddish-brown' colour, with a heavy smell or bitter taste, smoked or eaten as a stimulant, in toxic or narcotic and used in medicine as a sedative. The late and notorious Mexican drug trafficker, Pablo Escobar, could have given a more pragmatic definition. But using the word "opium" here we mean those distractions that seem to disorient the attention of some of our intelligentsia. Pope John Paul II was probably aware this aching phenomenon when he addressed the Cameroon intellectuals on 1 August 1985. The Supreme Pontiff had this to say:

Titles, diplomas, promotions, access to lucrative and influential posts -made possible by your studies ought not to be the fundamental motive of your work. Ask yourselves whether you truly promote the progress of culture since your country has need of it; whether you train men and women capable of serving their countrymen the good of the nation and the progress of international relations; whether you develop qualities of the heart as well as the critical spirit dedication to work, objectivity,

discipline the taste for truth uprightness of conscience and I solidarity with the poor.

There are many things that distract our intellectuals from helping us to build a more humanized world. These include an unfortunate and inordinate desire for prestige and wealth; the will to power and a dreary myopia.

A genuine intellectual is more conscious of how much he does not know than how much he knows. He remains a thinker, scholar or scientist-philosopher at home with the academy but readily going out to the rustics for his research findings. The impression one gets in this country is that the more educated one is, the less he can interact with the “hoi polio”. Money is his worst bait. Hence, it is not strange to find unschooled millionaires tossing round academic stalwarts and science luminaries. It would appear that money can buy off even the most refined mind in this country. Knowledge is wealth. As the Chinese proverbially put it. “Do not give the poor what he needs. Teach him how to get what he needs”. When an intellectual is caught in the snare of money, he thinks money, reasons money and organizes for money. Gradually he loses the joy of learning, the flair for research, the discipline and thoroughness of judgement. Money becomes the big maggot eating into his skull. We have to move toward a more humanized world. The intellectuals will have to seize power from the money magnates and teach people that happiness consists not in ‘getting’ but in minimizing wants.

But there is in each of us what Nietzsche calls “The will to Power”. This is the desire to conquer others and become the *Urbmensch* or the Superman. In a continent where authority is expressed in terms of arrogant exercise of power the intellectual must present the other alternative. On the eve of the 21st Century brute and violence belong to the jungle. What makes the difference between a human and a beast is the intellect. Therefore intellectual power rather than Herculean should be supreme. In this way, even the blind, the dumb and the handicapped have the opportunity to liberate themselves from subjugation. Sad to say many Africans do not understand the concept of power. It is not the license to destroy, torture and date. Rather, it is authority to serve. Many of our intellectuals readily put on rather than

face the “Flames of Lilliput with stark reflection” or receive “heated needles”. Worse still some are lured to accept the very elements that kept Africa for long in the mud. The principle of operation is: Give power to intelligent stooges, blur their vision, ruffle their minds and keep Africa in It!

The Swiss missiologist, Walbert Buhrmann has recently published a book: *Byes to See* (Orbis, 1989) which should certainly be an eye-opener to any he blames the backwardness of African countries on their inexplicable

, He cannot understand why Africans refuse to use their eyes to see and t the signs of the time, we hardly think about the future generation and the we are ready to bequeath to them, just a little bit of foresight and we could t of the mess with a brighter future for those coming after us. Until then we still have a debt unpaid.

V. A Debt Unpaid: Changer Le Cameroun

We were almost going to celebrate the death of the Cameroonian Academy because of their apparent silence over the state of our dear fatherland. But happily we stumbled on a *Livre Blanc* - a wonderful document by an anonymous of intellectuals, published in Douala in 1990 and edited probably pseudonymly by a certain Emmanuel Akika,

The book itself - *Changer le Cameroun: Pourquoi pas?* is of immense value. 1397 pages these intellectuals have bequeathed to us a treasure that merits nation by those who genuinely love this country. The book is in French but is a bilingual preface and conclusion. A general introduction proceeds the on of-the main work which is in four parts. Part One deals with Political Structures. It makes suggestions about a re-examination of our Human Rights; Territorial and Public Service Administration. Defence and the role of Law and Order in the development of the country. The Economy is examined in Part Two with a view to helping us encourage private initiatives build -African based banking-system. Depoliticize the economy and give a serious to Agriculture and Regional integration of our industrial set up. Part Three at our social life, laments our present inadequate educational system while making useful suggestions about a more pragmatic approach. The health of the Cameroonian needs to be taken

more seriously. Therefore the apparent laxity in our government hospitals needs to be checked. Social justice, work conditions, *cui* and sport are reviewed with the conclusion that we can do better the last situates Cameroon in World politics. We are manipulated tele-guided and are a long way from independence. Hence even with the best good will, we need to let others realize that we are now mature and must allow our umbilical cord to be severed.

All that is presented in the *Livre Blanc* provokes much reflection. The matters raised are delicate and demand specialized talent. Not everyone can get' discussion on these issues. At the same time these are not subjects to be exposed demagogues, sycophants or opportunists. They are meant for men and women of stamina, decency and with well-formed consciences. These are issues that should not be clouded by our dirty political polemics. But the fact that these intellect whoever they are were afraid to attach signatures or claim authorship. Raises' question of the role of the intellectual in the propagation of the truth.

a. The Intellectual and the Splendour of the Truth

The latest Encyclical of Pope John II is called *Veritatis Splendor* (splendour of Truth). The purpose of this encyclical was to correct certain mis ideas in the world today about the Truth and Morality. The moral law accords the Pope is divine. It is not something external but the truth about what it me be a human being. Sincerity to oneself and to others makes human life meaning Otherwise, once the truth is flouted or manipulated community existence can very tedious.

Ours is a world where people are prepared to sell away conscience and kill the truth. The truth that will help always asks sacrifice from us. Few are ready make that sacrifice. They would rather prefer to tailor the truth to suit the object of the intellect is the truth, scientifically acquired and demonstrated. The objective, eternal, and stubborn. Our intellectuals owe us that duty to examine tell us what the real truth is. The worst tragedy that could happen to a people is their best minds are corrupt. *Corruptio optimi est pessima* [the corruption of the best is the worst].

b. Formation for Self-Service

What has probably ruined the good will in many people in this country is a stinking form of self-centredness that hardly looks at the common good and future. There is a decadent greed that has eaten deep into most of us. Too many people think only about themselves and their immediate relations or associate with others are more concerned about what they would gain from a venture. So even what they do helps the public, they will only sacrifice if they are sure to get more of the deal as individuals. Until we reach a day when selfless service will be instinctive in the work ethic of this country, we are still far from our journey toward a more humanized world.

c. “Tribal Idolatry” and Sectionalism

The real story and figures are only beginning to emerge from Rwanda, over a million people killed; doubled that number now turned into refugees in neighbouring countries; survivors completely traumatized by the experience; children left as orphans! And all this in the name of love for tribe and ethnic group! According to the United Nations' Commission, this was neither coincidence, accident nor the result of spontaneous provocation which one could understand, But “the extermination of the Tutsi had been planned months before” (cf, *L'Effort Camerounais*, No... “ 16-29 October 1994, p. 9) The motivation was simply a diabolic application of the Hammurabic Law of retaliation (*Lex Talionis*) due to the mutual hatred between Tutsi and Hutu. This explains why it took barely 30-40 minutes after the staged plane crash which killed President Habyarimana, for violence to escalate in Kigali.

The pictures that come from there are gory to watch. They nauseate the tutored conscience. The British Times probably carried one of the most ingenious captions to read: “There are no more Devils in Hell: They have gone down to Rwanda!” Grim humour, one may say; but it was apt. To imagine that these abominations took place in a country which is more than 90% Christian gives efficient reason for each of us to re-think the depth of his own Christianity. Worse to hear that some church leaders, lay and cleric alike, actually instigated and

actively took part in some of these atrocities, is enough to make even the most devout to falter. The agnostic is pushed to go the other way from the Church; the atheist is strengthened in his position and the sceptic has to borrow the most refined Chaucerian subtlety in order to chuckle well. Yet, this is not the time to chuckle or poke fun. We have before us an insult on our civilization and only those with a weird sense of humour can afford to take this for amusement.

The horror may have already passed the worst stage but what is even more frightening is the realization that what has happened in Rwanda could happen again

‘Somewhere else in Africa if we do not face the problem of ethnicity, tribalism and sectionalism openly. The Rwandan case may just be Act One of a long, repulsive: melodrama. Perhaps we are sitting on time bombs and dormant volcanoes! Therefore before the explosions once’ more make a ridicule of us, it is about time to draw serious lessons from the grotesque drama that has taken and is still taking place in Rwanda. Too many people in Cameroon today think along tribal, regional and political party lines. The intellectual should steer clear of this bickering. Academics know no favours. It acknowledges and rewards merit. Mediocrity here is out of “question.

Conclusion

Our country is burning and bleeding everywhere. Life is becoming too, tedious for many. But this could become Africa’s paradise if we all knew what to do, how to do it and when to do what should be done. We are presently at a stalemate. At such moments it takes the genuine intellectual to act the scientist-philosopher and assist the conscience of the society. We do have some of these genuine intellectuals. We are in a mess. We would like to live in a more humanized world. So shall these make or mar?

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Literature in Anglophone Cameroon and the African Context: Towards a Sociology of Cameroon Anglophone Writing

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Introduction

At this point in time when we are talking of a conference on Cameroon Literature, it would also be necessary to attempt sociology of Cameroon literature. Examining relevant literature we thought it worthwhile to narrow down to a sociological analysis of Anglophone Cameroon Writing. Two reasons justify our approach. Firstly some groundwork has been done in, terms of the Sociology of Literature as a whole (Mfoulou, 1988: 87-93; Mbom, 1988). We observed these pioneer studies were lopsided in taking only francophone data for analysis. This leads us to the second point which is the fact that the situation of Anglophone literature and the Anglophone Cameroonians are unique in the African context viz. that English-speaking Cameroonians have had to evolve vis-à-vis a French-speaking community and that the former's literature has been developing.

The principal question to be answered is: In what way is Anglophone Cameroon literature a reflection of its society? In other words how has this literature been a projection of the problems and pre-occupation of Anglophone Cameroonians?

The paper's perspective is in support of the hypothesis that this literature has predominantly occupied with "Anglophone-ness" as opposed to current fashions of "African-ness" embodied in "negritude" and "Afrocentricism". The bind this can be found in the Anglophone/Francophone dichotomy/cleavage that constitutes an important component of Cameroon society.

The Sociology of Literature and the African Literary Experience

The Sociology of Literature is a fairly recent academic discipline. It aims at understanding the social content of literary works, the social context of authorship and the impact of literary creativity on its society of origin (Laurenson and Swingwood 1971: 13-22). Hence the sociology of literature would go beyond the critics' preoccupation with issues of style and form to deal with the social origins and relevance of artistic creation and the status of the writer and his message in his society.

They would join a functionalist perspective where literature does not only perform a function (i.e. role) but is a function of the society. In many cases societies have been equated with nations and in distinction to states, this distinction highlights the concepts of solidarity, territorial identity, history, language popular will. It is in relation to such cohesive wholes that a sociological analysis literature can be made or rather it is such a background that IS used in a sociological analysis of literature.

This brings us to our question of the possibility of sociology of African literature. In other words in relation to what background is such a literature to be judged? It is in relation to a society which is built on indigenous cultures subordinated to structures/ideologies derived from the colonial experience. It relation to what Jean Ziegler (1980) calls "definition".

The colonial experience, the struggle for independence and the experiment in "nation building" have been the principal motive forces behind the national experience in Africa. Within this process the African has had to strive to project his personality at least in terms of cultural identity. Various cultural trends accompanied the clamour for and achievement of sovereignty. Notable among these are negritude, authenticity, Africanity or the return to African cultural values (Poirier 1978:54).

These intellectual fashions had a profound influence on literature or even created by literature. The cry for a return to African values or an exposition the alienation of the African as a result of the colonial experience was the stock in trade of negritude poets and largely echoed

in the works of the less ideologically vocal writers of the Anglophone world. This was the most intense period in cultural movement. !

As the euphoria of independence gave way to the demands and imperative of economic survival, there was slowing down in literary production and a shift in emphasis towards dealing with the African in his context. Most of this literature with the contradictions of the new “nation” - state formation. It was mainly a too social awareness for the new literate classes - literate classes because access to literature has been largely open only to the literate few. It also served as a weapon in the struggle between the literati and the political/military class to the extent we would be cautious in reading class conflict into most of the literature.

What values were therefore championed? Negritude had a vague concept of what African values as such were and even to the extent that Senghor recklessly put it as “emotion” as opposed to Eurocentric “reason”. Anglophone African writers were directly inspired by the ethnic values of their contexts: Chinua Achebe’s I culture, Ngugi’s Kikuyu, Soyinka’s Yoruba, to name but a few. A crisis of values seems to characterize the second generation of writings. The rapid urbanisation extensive pervasion of modernisation puts the contemporary African writer at crossroads of conflicting values which are at times accepted and at times reject either way. Such a situation risks putting the writer in a position of an anarchist somebody who sees nothing good in prevailing values. It must be noted that writer is first of all a man of faith. As some critics have stated, “Literature de reflects norms ... values in the sense of the writer’s own intention, and it might suggested that it is on the level of values where literature is seen to reinforce illuminate purely sociological material.” (Laurenson and Swinghood, op.cit. 15)

Thematic value of Anglophone Cameroon Literature

Anglophone Cameroon literature has evolved in near isolation. It is least reflected by the fashions that have characterized African literature. It is motivated by own elite. Historically this literature is a late starter (Sam-Kubam, 1978).

As opposed to other African literatures, it is highly urbanised and deals with issues restricted to the Anglophone elite. In other words it is abstracted from the preoccupations of the rural masses. At the beginning it is the presentation of the conflict between traditional values and the new values projected by Christianity/modernisation (Sankie Maimo, Kenjo Jumbam, Ngongwikwo), it is a literature which fails to pioneer traditional values. On the contrary indigenous values are presented as being on the losing side.

This literature quickly transcends the dialectic of the context, of culture to that of the post-colonial experience (Victor Musinga, Mbella Sone Dipoko, Bole Butake). Here the literature adopts the posture of an art of finesse and predominant preoccupation being the trivialities of life. The tension observed in earlier phase is lost. The transition from commitment into an art for art sake or which aims at entertaining and dealing with the comic incidents 'of life has been of the most astonishing characteristics of Anglophone literature. At this point lacked the militancy characteristic of other African literatures.

The last stage in the development of this literature has been the transformation of the writer into a champion of Anglophone values. This has been prompted by experience of cohabitation with the French-speaking community. Here literature is not only used as a means of satire for decrying the abuses of a French-speaking elite vis-a-vis an English-speaking elite. More often this is extrapolated to mean the exploitation of the English-speaking Cameroonian by the French-speaking Cameroonian. Hence literature and especially theatre, became a weapon of culture conflict (Victor Epie Ngome, Bate Besong). Although we may find this defence of English language culture an interesting feature of this type of literature, we notice that it is wanting in thematic value: what are Anglophone values? Are Anglophone elites placed to undertake the defence of English values? Do the writers not run the risk of eclipsing of indigenous values in the blind attempt to uphold imperial European values? What then is the fate of indigenous values? The orientation of this literature had the effect of orienting the young literate Cameroonian outside his own indigenous value system which is often described as backward and primitive. English speaking Cameroonians are therefore left only with two sources of inspiration for traditional values. The first is colonial ethnography and its

prolongation in Social Science which lacks scientific depth and breadth. Some of this ethnography on the exoticism of an outsider point of view has produced some form of literature in Pat Ritzenthaler's *Fon of Bafut* (1967).

Anthropology and sociology have not been sufficiently serious enough in research into Cameroon society and its values. In other contexts both sociology and literature play a central role in bringing to the limelight values that are central a society. In this attempt both the social scientist and the writer are involved in an observer perspective which abstracts them from their contexts so that they can have a certain level of objectivity. An insider perspective in this case would be very important in the sense that both observers are involved in a psychological adjustment necessary for objectivity. In our case what can be the view of colonial or exogenous ethnography/ethnology or a literature harped on alien cultural values?

The second source of inspiration is the research into oral forms of lit (cf. Tala. 1988. Menang. 1988). This research has evidently highlighted the role of indigenous forms of art, but this has remained at the level of academia. It to involve a wide public outside the academic circles.

Conclusion

For Anglophone Cameroon writing to survive it must be ready to review the values it has to champion. It must be ready to be rooted in the values of its This trend seems to be emerging in the works of Linus Asong and the theatrical creations of Bole Butake and Gilbert Doho (*Zintgraff and the Battle of Mankon*, 1994) and Eyoh (*The Inheritance*, 1992). These authors do not only inspiration from historical contexts but also strive to project the values of their communities in the face of an increasingly globalising world.

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FOLKLORE

L'envers d'œdipe Ou les Onze Travaux de Djeki

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Mise en scène de la conception qui a notre société traditionnelle des bons rapports qui devraient présider entre les hommes, entre ceux-ci et la nature entière, ainsi que de l'intérêt de la connaissance de ces lois pour la réussite de l'ensemble du corps social, le mythe de DJEKI LA NJAMBE s'avère être un véhicule fantastique de communication et un puissant outil de régulation sociale au même titre que la quête du Graai, Les Métamorphoses d'Ovide l'Iliade et l'Odyssée d'Homère. Cela explique l'intérêt qu'il y aurait à connaître cette épopée en cette veille de changement de paradigme au niveau du village-monde, afin de préparer à bon escient l'entrée de notre continent dans le troisième millénaire.

Aux Editions Libermann de Douala est paru (1987), sous la direction du Père François de Gastrines, un ouvrage singulier dont nous recommandons vivement la lecture à tous ceux qu'enchanter et jusque-là, déçus la lecture de la production ou le discours de la l'orature. Car il s'agit cette fois, on ose le dire, d'un chef-d'œuvre la matière. A cause, d'une part, de l'escorte apéritive figurée. Doublement par la préface de l'incomparable Thomas Melone, qui démonte le cadre du genre et en révèle les fastes: par l'introduction éclairante du Père de Gastrines sur la genèse de l'œuvre, la méthode d'élaboration et les composantes idéologico-esthétiques du munia-mwa Djèki là Njambé. A cause d'autre part, de la performance du 'munia' que l'on doit, doublement, au talent du conteur Pierre Célestin Tiki a Koullé a Penda lequel s'est initié, entre autres, auprès de maîtres tels Lobé a Duba et Bonny a Young avant de pouvoir arranger par la suite à sa manière ces récits fabuleux que la transcription et la traduction soigneuses de

Joseph-Marie Epée permettent au non-locuteur duala ou côtier de savourer sans beaucoup de perte substantielle.

A l'ère de l'audio-visuel et de la télématique ou s'amorce, sans nul doute, la fin de la dictature de l'écriture, il n'est pas indifférent que les cultures, qu'on avait prétendus précaires, ainsi se voient provisoirement sauvées de la caducité générale en exploitant précisément la médiation de leur fossoyeur initial, en attendant qu'il soit fossile à son tour! Demain, *Les merveilleux Exploits de Djeki la Njambé* désormais fixés par l'écriture, pourront retourner à leur mode d'expression naturel à travers, soit la semi-oralité de la bande dessinée soit l'oralité plastique et du cinéma et de la danse soit l'oralité mimétique ou abstraite du théâtre, de la peinture et de la musique(1). Car tels sont les linéaments de ce mythe archaïque qu'on va faire défiler à rebours.

L'intrigue déroule, selon une fréquence répétitive. l'histoire d'un père qui demande à diverses reprises son fils puiné pour lui demander d'accomplir une série de travaux au terme desquels à contrecœur, il le salue comme mombalé, c'est-à-dire héros. Chaque épreuve constitue ainsi une séquence complète à cinq propositions:

1. - Equilibre initial: mandement par le Père.
2. - Introduction d'une force contraire: imposition de l'épreuve au Fils.
3. - Situation de déséquilibre: recherche et affrontement de l'obstacle.
4. - Action d'une force inverse: victoire héroïque du Fils.
5. - Equilibre nouveau: contrariété du Père,

En somme il s'agit d'un parcours gradué d'obstacles éliminatoires de caractère humain, soit surnaturel, dont voici, dans l'ordre, le détail que nous allons suivre les motifs hiérarchisés, du niveau de la qualification à celui de la glorification.

I. La Syntaxe Narrative

A. Parcours de qualification: les défis d'ordre humain.

La qualification opère d'après des séries d'épreuves de topiques variées dont les sont familiales, les secondes, sociétales, sanctionnables de mort à chaque fois.

a.) Le cycle familial

1. La première épreuve d'individuation, de topique domestique, est du gnoséologique: Djèki est sommé de deviner ce que Njambè, le père, a - de connivance avec ses autres enfants - caché à son insu dans un coffret. Le jeune omniscient met à profit ce test d'intelligence pour, en contre-épreuve, sonder le degré d'inimitié de son géniteur à son égard. Ensuite il lui révèle, en s'en gaussant, que le coffret contient si peu: un pou!

2. La deuxième épreuve d'individuation, de topique sylvestre, est du genre technique: Njambè mande tous ses fils de rapporter de la chasse trois pintades chacun, sous peine d'indignité et d'abandon en forêt. L'assurance qu'il a de la supériorité cynégétique de ses autres enfants sur Djèki se révèle une présomption et un leurre, car c'est plutôt Ebakissé qui, en ne prenant qu'un oiseau, s'avère un mauvais. Par un effet inattendu de boomerang, Njambè se trouve finalement responsable d'un infanticide par la vertu de ses fils, lesquels exécutent leur frère pour obéir aux dispositions paternelles.

3. La troisième épreuve, de nature filiale, consiste à affronter l'armoire à panthère (2), totem sylvestre du père. Epreuve mixte de genre magique et technique dont Djèki triomphe sans encombre, annihilant du même coup un des éléments de la puissance cosmique de Njambè.

4. La quatrième épreuve, de même nature, consiste à ramener le caïman, totem aquatique du père, du fleuve qu'il habite à la maison du village. Elle souligne d'ubiquité et de polymorphisme de Njambe, être humain et animal à la fois présent dans l'eau, les forêts, les nuages et la case. L'hébétude finale du deuxième totem terrasse accroît l'animosité du Père qui amalgame dorénavant dans une égale le fils et la mère, accusés tous les deux de sorcellerie.

5. Tout aussi filiale, l'épreuve suivante participe d'un même registre mixte. Djèki doit couper les régimes de palmistes de l'arbre qui porte l'oiseau Kambo, totem de Njambe. Devant la peur du

génocide de sa descendance, le père affolé demande en suppliant, grâce à son fils, attestant, de ce fait, la supériorité de celui-ci qu'il n'en hait que davantage.

6. Du même registre, **cette épreuve consiste pour Djeki à aller en forêt tailler une pirogue peinte dans l'arbre-fétiche-qui-tue.** Défi magico-technique relève, cette prouesse signe, par l'épouvante de Njambè devant le surgissement de son image spéculaire à travers la pirogue, la dégradation du père, lequel perd de plus en plus de sa substance cosmique par la phagocytose nécrophage que son fils exerce sur ce totem-ci, comme sur les précédents.

La fin de ce cycle familial correspond à la qualification héroïque de l'enfant prodige, lequel s'est ainsi distingué du reste de fils de Njambè par la supériorité intellectuelle et technique, sa force morale et ses pouvoirs magiques. L'agression progressive du père aboutit à ce résultat pour le moins paradoxal: chaque qualification individuelle et familiale du fils a entraîné une régression du père dans l'ordre cosmique (technique, aquatique, astral) des divers règnes animal, végétal, minéral. La déliquescence suivie de perplexité est inversement proportionnelle au, degré de l'agressivité, implacablement sanctionnée par un revers du père qui, par ricochet, implique une ascension équivalente du fils, dans ce jeu vertigineux où se, manifeste la volonté - impuissante - de meurtre de l'une par l'autre. Le cycle se termine de l'épuisement du persécuteur, qui déplace alors la scène du cadre de la famille, celui de la société.

b. Le cycle sociétal

7. **La septième épreuve, sociétale et politique, c'est l'exercice de tir du « ngoti », cible mobile.** De genre technique et moral, il s'agit d'un jeu avec la mort, qui a lieu dans un village voisin. Une méprise symptomatique, suivie d'un coup de théâtre retentissant, permet de révéler le désir profond de Njambè: celui-ci, apprenant la nouvelle de la mort imminente de Djèki, festoie avec ses fils revenus précipitamment du "ngoti"; mais il doit déchanter au retour du fils singulier inopinément sorti vainqueur de la joute inégale, confirmant ainsi sa supériorité absolue. Pour la première fois, le père célèbre - mais

à contrecœur -la louange du fils intraitable, lequel “en vérité sait y faire ... sait s’y prendre” (3).

8. Procédant du même registre, l’épreuve du mbauge sacré des Balombi où il le mande est l’occasion rêvée par Njambè de se voir débarrasser de l’importunité du champion superbe. Exercice de la danse « au pied levé » et de la « lance » fatale, cette décadanse - dont le père préserve ses autres rejetons - est un jeu d’amour et de mort au cours duquel Djèki l’emporte sur Engomé Manjojo Njoh à la jambe jusque-là victorieuse et assassine. Exaspéré par l’insolence d’une telle réussite, Njambè fait perfidement reproche à son fils d’avoir causé la mort de la fiancée de son frère, Mitousan: le père paraît ainsi accorder la précéllence à l’étrangère sur son propre fils.

La fin des qualifications coïncide avec l’extension de la maîtrise de Djèki à la contrée environnante. Parce qu’il a, par ses exploits, fini de faire ses preuves humaines, le héros est désormais m’r pour affronter les démiurges.

B. Parcours de glorification: les défis surnaturels.

Ici, commence la série d’épreuves qui vont conduire à la consécration héroïque. Champion révolutionnaire, qui oblige chacun d’aller au bout de soi-même dans la difficile quête de la perfection, le héros remet en jeu les acquis du jeu, subvertissant en conséquence tous les enjeux préalables de la lutte pour la vie. Assuré d’être fort même dans la mort, Djeki provoque les défis qu’il relève, prend tous les risques possibles aux fins d’asseoir solidement sa gloire.

a) La descente au séjour des morts

9. La neuvième épreuve est une visite commandée au séjour des morts. Exercice initiatique, elle est de genre mystique, de topique infernale: Njambe mande son fils d’aller ramener la fille aînée de sa mère Ngrijo Epée Toongoum, naguère enlevée par le chimpanzé, chef des fantômes. Cette aînée, dénommée Engomé Njambè par homonymie avec la mère de Njambè, apparaît dès lors comme l’objet d’une quête archétypale dont l’enjeu s’assimile à une preuve formelle de virilité.

“Ta sœur ainée (...) s’appelait Engomè Njambè; où est-elle? Va un peu demander à ta mère où elle est pour que tu ailles la chercher, comme ça je saurai que tu es homme!” (5)

Djèki s’en va, vit et revient, Njambè comblé entre dans son délire d’enthousiasme, tenais pas de reconnaissance - devant la prouesse inespérée du fils, sentant sans, dans son chant d’allégresse, la prémonition de sa fin qu’enclenche cet exploit humain:

*“Mama, s’en est fait pour
moi! J’ai vu quelque chose!
Mon enfant, tu sais t’y prendre!
Tu as ramené Engomè
Tu sais t’y prendre!” (6)*

Seconde descente aux enfers, la dixième épreuve, dont l’objet inconsistant apparentée est une igname, tourne court, attestant qu’il s’agissait d’une lubie de ce père lunatique, qui n’a plus qu’une obsession désormais; exposer par tous les moyens la vie de son fils, afin d’éprouver son invulnérabilité. Mais après que sur son chemin Djèki - qu’accompagne, cette fois, Engomè - a eu affronté victorieusement un boa fétiche, il entend le tambour battre son rappel pour une mission autrement urgente.

b) La reconquête du Nom-au-père

11. Il s’agit, cette fois, de venger l’honneur bafoué du nom. Car, cependant que son fils était pardonné, Njambè a reçu la visite intempestive de Ngoon Ngokobi, lequel l’a gratifié de deux gifles magistrales qui l’ont mis par terre, sous le regard impuissant de ses autres enfants. Njambe réussit à séduire Djèki en tambourinant les devises du nom du seul être qu’il puisse charger de n’importe quelle commission, certain qu’il est de sa capacité de surmonter n’importe quel obstacle.

Cette supplique est l’aveu de la retraite du père caduc, qui s’en remet dorénavant aux mains du fils, jusque-là réprouvé, du soin de relever son nom.

Face à la menace de déchéance, le héros jusque-là marginal est réhabilité. La concorde s’établit au sein de la famille: le triomphe ultime

de Djèki engendre l'émerveillement du père célébrant - pour la première fois sans rancœur - le Fils!

II. Le Paradigme Discursif

La moindre des curiosités des Merveilleux exploits de Djèki la Njambè n'est-elle pas qu'ils se prêtent, à l'instar de nombre de récits, à une pluralité de lectures? Nous voulons provisoirement n'en privilégier que deux des plus notoires, quitte à revenir plus tard sur la signification du *munia* au plan de la manifestation le niveau logique; au plan de l'immanence, le niveau symbolique. Ces deux niveaux réfèrent tous à une histoire encodée que le narrataire peut, suivant sa compétence, soit se satisfaire de décoder au fil des lignes dans une approche heuristique s'astreindre à déchiffrer dans une phase rétroactive, dite herméneutique, parce qu'elle concerne moins la surface que la profondeur du récit sommé, dès lors, de livrer les clefs de son interprétation hypostasiée.

C. Protolecture: le Père de nation et le Fils rebelle.

Si l'on s'en tient à la lettre que déroule receveuse narratif, il s'agirait du conflit itératif d'un père dénaturé avec son fils rebelle qu'il persécute et, de ce même, transforme en héros malgré lui. Aux yeux de Njambè, Djèki a le tort d'être à la fois et tour à tour, le plus beau, le plus intelligent, le plus industriel de fils. Pourtant l'ostracisme de l'épouse avant la gestation incertaine et anormal longue (douze années) tout comme, au reste, l'enormité difforme de celle-ci sont autant de facteurs objectifs qui avaient, au contraire, laissé augurer, sinon une tare congénitale, du moins un enfantement compromis ou un rejeton débile.

Las! Njambè, le géniteur contrarié, doit se résoudre à l'aimer démenti, qui ira se confirmant avec les travaux et les jours: non seulement Djèki n'accuse aucun handicap de naissance, mais encore il surclasse ceux qui passent pour être ses aînés au point de les enrober, au même titre que leur père, dans un souverain mépris. Car si l'on voulait la mettre en formule, l'algorithme de sa devise représenterait Djèki comme le *mombalè* par excellence, le véritable homme, héros

exclusif et suffisant qui “incarne la victoire” absolue sur toute forme d’adversaire (7). Aussi N’jambè déformation selon certains auteurs de Nyambè - le dieu créateur - conçoit-il. Au-delà du dépit, une haine inextinguible et de plus en plus pugnace, au fur et à mesure que ce dernier surmonte les épreuves, envers Djèki.

Celui-ci, pour sa part, n’aura de cesse qu’il n’ait administré la preuve cinglante de sa supériorité sur tous les êtres vivants peuplant la terre, les mers, les airs, les enfers même. Pour séduisante qu’elle apparaisse, cette lecture, qui cependant à la lettre d’une réelle sollicitation du conteur, pêche néanmoins par sa myopie réticulaire.

Certes, par le relais de Ngrijo, la mère de Djèki, ou de ses propres commentaires, Tiki, le narrateur, a émaillé son récit de remarques signalant la haine lancinante que le père vouerait à son fils (8) et sa femme confondus (9), quand il ne s’agirait pas de la commune animosité du père et des frères (10). Djèki lui-même confirme l’intensité du rejet paternel à la faveur d’un test d’hostilité initial (11) qu’il réitère à la suite de la mort d’Engomé Manjojo au “mbang” de la décadanse: l’occasion lui est offerte de constater ainsi le peu de cas fait de sa personne. Il n’en demeure pas moins que loin d’être un révolté, Djèki représente le modelé de ras soumis jusqu’à la complaisance au père: il met un point d’honneur à obéir à celui-ci avec un tel zèle qu’il finit par lui donner raison de l’importuner sans cesse et lui seul - tirant orgueil précisément de cette exclusivité (12).

De même, il est indéniable que la fin (provisoire) du récit présente, sinon la concorde parfaite, du moins une forme objective de solidarité de tous les membres de la famille confrontés à l’imminence de la perte de l’honneur puis à celle de la vie.

De par cette conclusion, *Les merveilleux Exploits de Djèki la Njambè* ne peuvent pas correspondre au récit en miroir que décrit D. Paulme, au cours duquel un héros positif à l’itinéraire ascendant serait affronté à un héros négatif à l’itinéraire descendant. Il semblerait s’agir plutôt d’un récit en sablier (13) où les acteurs changent de position de manière synchronique et non pas successive, suivant une courbe d’équilibre et de substitution. De là, notre seconde lecture.

D. Rétrolecture: Djèki ou le défi originaire.

Parce qu'il a été conçu après la consommation de la brouille entre sa mère et son père, lequel reprochait à cette dernière, outre le don de sorcellerie, la négligence dont elle aurait fait preuve en laissant le chimpanzé, chef des fantômes, ... enlever et emporter leur unique fille. Engomè (dénommée d'après la propre mère de Njambè), la naissance de Djèki est doublement importune - non désirée et tardive - aux yeux de son géniteur. Aussi l'enfant puiné est-il marginalisé autant par ses frères que par son père, qui ne consentira à le prendre pour fils qu'après qu'il aura eu fait preuve de ses mérites.

Ce, d'autant qu'il manifeste à suffisance une arrogance qui a la vertu de le rendre immédiatement antipathique. Il se trouve, en conséquence, soumis à une succession graduée d'épreuves qui, chaque fois, mettent sa vie en danger. Ils les surmonte toutes, se qualifie et acquiert une gloire qui force l'admiration, et de ses frères et de son père, Ce denier finit par l'accréditer lorsque, par son intervention seul se trouve réhabilité l'honneur au point d'être compromis du nom de la famille: Djèki a ainsi prouvé que lui seul est le Fils qui devra **refléter L'image du Père** aux yeux de la société.

En dernière instance, Les merveilleux Exploits de Djèki la Njambè apparaissent, au même titre que Oedipe Roi, comme un mythe fondateur. De souche prométhéenne, l'aventure du héros grec se résorbe cependant dans le parricide et l'inceste, qui impliquent la transgression de tabous et d'archétypes. Il s'ensuit implacablement un juste châtement, attesté dans la peste, fléau qui s'abat sur Thèbes.

Naguère bienfaiteur adulé d'une cite dont il aura conquis le trône sous le couvert d'une promesse qui s'avère une imposture, Oedipe se voit, au terme de sa geste, acculé à se crever les yeux et à se tenir éloigné de ses concitoyens, afin que son destin soit accompli.

A travers l'exemple d'Oedipe, l'ambition de l'Occident semble de la sorte consister dans la quête triple du savoir, du pouvoir et de l'avoir, pour enfin se résumer dans une volonté de science et de puissance dont le héros revient déchu, méconnu par les siens et déçu, à cause de l'échec de l'entreprise dont il aura été l'instigateur et le régime incertains.

A l'inverse, Djèki n'est pas celui qui défie le père, l'on aura noté la complaisance avec laquelle il consent à se plier à la plus saugrenue des volontés de cette figure originaire, symbole absolu de la Loi. Certes, le héros africain semble manifester une certaine arrogance dans sa manière de relever sinon de provoquer les défis auxquels son père le soumet. Cette arrogance apparente ne signale, somme toute cependant, qu'une forme de coquetterie, le panache de la bravoure, La visée foncière en est la recherche par le fils de l'admiration paternelle. Cette admiration transparaît par intermittences dans les exclamations successives de Njambe, et va s'amplifier jusqu'à l'ultime reconnaissance de dette pour la restauration du Nom-du-père.

Désormais, l'origine s'abolit ou s'inverse en faveur du commencement, puisque le fils s'est montré digne de devenir à son tour un second-son-père, selon la formule d'un proverbe toucouleur. Aussi bien, loin d'être une aventure subversive, un récit de disjonction de l'ordre traditionnel, les onze travaux de Djèki la Njambè seraient un mythe fondateur de type épiméthéen ayant davantage une structure conjonctive et d'intégration tout à fait conforme au paradigme du palabre africain: celui-ci préconise, en effet, une action résolue de conciliation familiale et sociale, geste finale de bravoure, d'amour et de sagesse.

Notes

1. Djèki a été produit sous forme de ballet au Cinéma Le Concorde en décembre 1988, lors du Festival des Arts et de la Culture. Voir infra l'article de Grâce Etonde-Ekoto.

2. La mention de cette épreuve ne peut être qu'une interpolation dans notre glose à cause de l'erreur éditoriale qui a malencontreusement fait substituer, dans version de l'ouvrage, une reprise des pages 157-168 relatives à "La chasse aux oiseaux" au lieu des pages 168-184 qui manquent.

3. Les merveilleux Exploits de Djèki la Njambè, éd, Collège Libermann, Douala, 1987, p.273.

4. Cf. le chapitre intitulé "La colère de Mitousan", ouvrage cité, p.293 et suivi

5. Ibid, p. 301.
6. Ibid, p, 331, Nous soulignons.
7. Cf. Introduction du Père de Castignes, ouvr. cit, p.46.
8. Cf. ibid. p. 139, 151, 155 notamment,
9. “La haine de Njambè pour Djèki et sa mère devenait de plus en plus grande.” Ibid, p.199.
10. Cf., ibid p. 249 et 299 notamment
- 11.”Et ses frères le portèrent comme un cadavre (...) Ils s’apprêtaient à le porter pour le mettre dans la tombe quand il se réveilla, ouvrit les yeux. Il dit à son père : « Je voulais seulement savoir à quel point tu me haïssais. Maintenant, je le sais. » Ibid.p.153.
12. “ Le jour allait se lever, quand Boudoboudou et Eboy se présentèrent.” Toc, toc, papa te demande! ” Alors Djèki se mit en marche, avança avec élégance, d’alerte, très vite et s’arrêta net, il dit à Boudoboudou et Eboy: “C’est normal, Si père m’appelle, il a raison!” Et il continua à marcher.” Ibid, p. 335.
13. Cf. Françoise Tchoongui: (1986) surtout “La morphologie des contes africain’, p.8-17.
14. D’après les propos des Yaka Pembele à Inono Njambe, le père de Njambe Inono géniteur, Ouvr. cit. p. 65.

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Folklore and Identity: Lessons for Cameroon

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Igbos of Nigeria proverbially contend that “the firewood which a people have ‘adequate for the kind of cooking they do’”. (Achebe, 1975: 17) This is an ‘on testable fact, for no amount of carefully selected wood, for instance, will help in the preparation of salad. On the other hand, the Igbo akpo, the Bayang eru, the rubaamala, the Ngemba achu, the Bafaw koki, the Bakweri timambusa, etc. ... are prepared in a large iron pot placed over three huge stones with fierce flames from logs placed in between the stones.

The forging of a national culture is synonymous to a woman at work in her hen, She does not only synchronize various ingredients needed to produce the timing sauce but she also needs to make a judicious selection of the wood that will produce the required steam to boil the pot. Just as a good knowledge of the mired recipes and utensils is necessary in culinary science so too is it worth the while to know how important folklore is in the forging of a country’s cultural identity.

First introduced in 1846 by William Thorns to designate “some record of old time - some recollection of a now neglected custom - some fading legend, local tradition, or fragmentary ballad”, (Thorns in Finnegan, 1977: 35” the word folklore come to mean the “social, material, and oral culture” (Crystal, 1990: 454) of national societies. We are further informed that:

The social culture comprises such forms as festivals, dances and religious rites: the material culture comprises architecture and arts and crafts; the oral culture includes songs, tales, legends, proverbs and riddles. (Crystal. 1990: 454)

From the foregoing definitions one will readily agree with Stith Thompson that folklore is essentially a study of tradition.” (Thompson, 1952: 253-254)

Given that a study of tradition must necessarily take into account ethnicity would be fallacious to conceive of ways of enhancing a country’s cultural identity without taking into account the social, material and oral cultures of all the ethnic “ups that constitute the component parts of that country. Ethnicity (that is, an awareness of and a sense of belonging to one’s ethnic group and the putting into practice of its cherished values) should normally foster cultural identity and gender a sense of national pride.

What is cultural identity, one may ask. Reverend Father Engelbert Mveng, intends that it is “the cultural heritage of a people, a country, a nation. in all its riches, poverty, variety, originality, in what precisely makes it different from the cultural heritage of other peoples”. (Mveng, 1985: 65) One would suppose that Father Mveng sees the cultural identity of a country as stemming from those of a collectivity of ethnic groups that are constituent parts of that country. His use of the phrase “a nation”, however, is disturbing because anthropologists, sociologists an ethno-political scientists will testify to the fact that the Bassas the Bamilekes the Nwehs, the Pahouins, the Igbos, the Yorubas, the Hausas the Zulus the Mandigos the Jews, the Croates, the Serbs, etc. are all nation-states each in its own right.

Various ethnic groups and sub-groups in Cameroon and the world over, have their myths of origin, specificity of geography and ethno-political institutions and art forms that are unique in them. This fact certainly informed Father Mveng’ (1985:66) contention, to wit, that:

Cameroon cultural identity is a fact evidenced by factors such as history, geography, political institutions and an extraordinary artisti, linguistic, ethnic and economic variety.

To imagine, therefore, a Cameroonian cultural identity that does not take into account the existence of the various cultures of our different ethnic groups is not only an aberration but also a contradiction of the well-informed contention that folklore is fundamentally an ethnic discipline and that to be meaningful it must be

studied in its ethnic context. Our contention in this paper then is that Cameroon's cultural identity is a meaningless concept if not looked at in the context of ethnicity.

For the purpose of this paper our attention will be focused on those aspects of our oral culture (the literary dimension) whose promotion may help enhance pyramidal ensemble of the cultural identity of Cameroon.

If the Cameroonian nation hopes to help Cameroonian society "regain believe in itself and to put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement" (Achebe, 1973: 8), if the Cameroonian leadership hopes to develop an sustain in the people an awareness of nationhood and a sense of national pride bas on the cultural heritage of our different ethnic groups. then it must do all in its powers, to enable people imbibe the fact that they "did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had philosophy of great depth and value and beauty that they had poetry and above all they had dignity. (Achebe. 1973: 8). It is therefore imperative that such aspects 0 our folklore as folktale, legends, myths, proverbs, riddles, songs etc." should be pa and parcel of the school curricular. Folklore courses in our schools and university should be sanctioned by legislation, especially now that our cultural world is threatened by rapid urbanisation, the proliferation of alien religions and the rises modern mass media as alternative to folk pastime and leisure hours.

It is interesting to note that oral cultures have engendered and fostered t pride of many nations in the world. The Polish national anthem (While Still we Live, for instance, was a popular folk ballad sung in Poland during most of its turbulent history, marked especially by invasions and wars. With the attainment of independence in November 1918 the song was officially recognized as the country's national anthem. The Poles did not need to hire so-called experts therefore, to compose national anthem. All they did was to sap from their oral tradition, for they knew that it was the veritable bed rock of their national identity and pride.

Here in Africa various aspects of the people's folklore have been used to achieve national goals. A long and dark history of foreign domination in Kenya gave rise to stiff resistance on the part of the

natives unprecedented in the Africa continent. The Kenyans formed nationalist organizations to pressure for reforms through petitions, matches and demonstrations. Faced with ruthless suppression and bans some of these movements regrouped themselves in the hinterlands and bushes to wage one of the fiercest liberation wars Africa has ever known. These militant groups of workers and peasants came to be known as the Mau Mau. What accounted 'for the people's victory? Not their military arsenal of course, for the colonialists were better armed in this regard. Their victory, surprisingly, was as a result of the fact that they identified and developed those aspects of their folklore which strengthened their identity and resistance. Songs of struggle, songs of praise, songs of faith, songs of hope, for example, were common features of their daily lives. At last the ('Colonialists gave in and so on the 12th of December 1963, Kenya, like many an African country regrettably, got its constitutional or political independence.

Similarly, the Shona of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) fell back to their oral traditions as sources of inspiration and courage in their attempt to liberate their country from white domination and rule. The following song (Okpewho, 1985: 147) a case in point:

Take up arms and liberate yourselves [an extract]

Our ancestor Nehanda died with these words on her lips,
"I'm dying for this country."
She left us one word of advice
"Take up arms and liberate yourselves."

Aren't you coming with us to fight?
Aren't you really?
We are running about carrying sub-machine guns
We carry anti-air missiles
"Take up arms and liberate yourselves.

Chitepo died with these words on his lips
"I'm dying for the fatherland/"
He left us one word of advice,

“Take up arms and liberate yourselves.”

Father Chitepo died in the thick of the struggle,
Saying, “Now I’m dying for the fatherland.”
His last words for us were,
“Take up arms and liberate Zimbabwe.”

Hence we are going to the war front,
We hit the enemy and run carrying sub-machine guns,
We brandish anti-air missiles,
“Take up arms and liberate yourselves.”

Now we are in the thick of it,
Running up and down with our guns,
Our anti-air too.
“Take up arms and liberate your fatherland.”

Okpewho (1985:258) informs us that “this song (titled *Toro gidi uzvltlon* in the original Shona version) was one of many used by the members of Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) for enlisting recruits inside the then Rhodesia for guerrilla wars against forced white rule”. It is worth noting to the song shows a sense of urgency (“Take up arms and liberate yourselves”) as does reveal a sense of history and national commitment. Okpewho (1985: 249) further informs us that Nehanda, a spiritualist among the Shona, is said to have been the first woman freedom fighter executed by whites in the first armed resistance to colonial rule in the nineteenth century. She is thus regarded as the principal inspiration to the liberation war. Chitepo, for his part, was chairman of the war council of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), the revolutionary part headed by Robert Mugabe. Chitepo was killed in Lusaka, Zambia, in a land-mine explosion believed to have been engineered by colonialist agents.

The Polish, Kenyan and Zimbabwean examples of a reliance on one’s heritage for inspiration and national ideals underscore the fact that man must firmly anchor himself to his roots while looking out to the external world for, to us Francois Sengat Kuo’s (1971: 19-20) felicitous

metaphors and turn of phrase, “the tree goes out in the conquest of the sun only by holding firm on mother earth, fee moistened in the lake of the grave”. We have a rich heritage - a triple heritage’ historical, cultural and religious - on which we can draw in order to sustain life 0 earth and make it more meaningful. The Ugandan poet and scholar, Okot p’Bitek (1984: 41), tells Okot (the culturally deracinated African that he is) through Lawino as a spokesperson in the poem, that:

The ways of your ancestors
Are good,
Their customs are solid
And not hollow
They are not thin, not easily breakable
They cannot be blown away
By the winds,
Because their roots reach deep into the soil.

The good counsel contained in the above extract amounts to a good enough reason why we in Cameroon should take our folklore seriously. Ours is an age in which societal values are flouted with impunity and so a revival of, and a tapping from our oral traditions will help in the fostering of social propriety. Our folktales, legends and myths, for instance, teach us the virtues of love, kindness, obedience, fidelity, gratitude, hard work, heroism, spiritual sanity, etc. While the characters in these narrative forms who promote these values are rewarded those whose actions or behaviour amount to their negation are mercilessly punished. These forms of our folklore therefore are used for social regulation or control. Does good judgement not demand, then, that we should use these forms of folklore in the education of our children, and even for our own edification? And when properly schooled in our oral tradition, when properly edified by their teachings, does it not follow then that these traditions shall remain the bed rock on which we can raise the solid foundation of our identity?

Fortunately enough some of our writers are drawing on the rich repertory of oral traditions, not only to give their works a distinctive cultural stamp, but also enable their readers and people in general

regain belief in themselves. Writers like Linus Asong, Bole Butake, Gilbert Doho, Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh, Patrice Kayo, Ongassu Kishani, Joseph Ngongwikuo, Rene Philombe and Fale Wache are worthy of note in this regard. The works of these writers bear testimony to the fact that like all life and attitudes in the continent “Africa’s literary culture [should] be colonized and liberated”. (Chinweizu, 1980: 1) This decolonization and liberation of our literature can only be effectively done if, and only if, our writers consider this literature as a separate, autonomous entity - a literature whose mission must be informed by the African experience, And experience is not something of the past only; it is equally a thing of the present and further requires a projection into the ,future, How can one reasonably talk about the past if he ignores his triple heritage, .that is, historical, cultural and religious? Is the present meaningful if it is not seen the light of the past and the future? These questions underscore the need for our literature to be the torch bearer of our triple heritage, and consequently contribute: not only to the proliferation of our folk traditions but also to the promotion of our ethnic-cum-national is identity at the base of which these traditions.

The logical conclusion to draw from the foregoing is that a country’s identity is the sum total of the triple heritage of all the ethnic groups that make up that country. This identity is a concept that can be seen in terms of a hand. One cannot talk about the hand without considering its component parts, namely, the metacarpals and the phalanges, without one or the other a hand cannot be seen in its entirety. And even then, each of its component parts has its specificities, as it is the case with each of the ethnic groups that make up a country. The cultural identity of a country therefore, is conceived of in terms of a synchronization of the heritage of the various ethnic groups in that country. The country, it must be noted, cannot afford to ignore any of its ethnic groups in the image building venture of its identity; but an ethnic coup can afford to ignore the others (and even the coup) in the building of its own image.

It is in the best interest of the leadership of any country, therefore, to identify with the heritage of the multiple ethnic groups, to promote that heritage and not seek to cloud it with political rhetoric that “tends to obscure the ethnic composition of [that country] and its attendant

conflicting interactions” (Mentan, 1994: 156). We join Charles Binam Bikoi (1984: 92) in asserting that a nation can only exist and be strong if it is conscious of its individualities and can identify

them, direct them, and cement them without demagoguery into the framework of a chain of solidarities, willingly, patiently, and freely assumed, a chain in which the individual recognizes himself in the whole, and where the whole far from seeking uniformity, works to reinforce individual components of its unity.

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*Les Merveilleux Exploits de Djeki La Njambe: De
l'épopée A La Scène Ou Les Méandres D'une
Adaptation Théâtrale*

par
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La présente communication est un maillon d'une longue cogitation sur la recherche de modèles authentiques, réponses à la dérive morale et sociale connue aujourd'hui par la jeunesse africaine désarçonnée et existante dans nos sociétés en mal d'héroïsme et de valeurs. (Etonde-Ekoro, 1990).

Dans cette quête, j'ai emboîté le pas à Henri Lopès en privilégiant la littérature comme source d'inspiration, comme mode de connaissance; littérature et idéologie rimant parfaitement dans leurs essences:

Je crois beaucoup à l'approche esthétique des choses: même dans la connaissance historique. Je préfère d'abord passer par la connaissance artistique d'un milieu ou d'une époque, qui ensuite me rend beaucoup plus défrichable tout ce qu'un manuel d'histoire pourrait avoir de rebutant. (Interview avec Marie-Clotilde Jacquey: 1986: 50)

Le genre épique m'a souri. Je suis allée à l'épopée de Djeki, version des Editions Collège Libermann (1987). Mais au lieu d'une lecture et d'une méditation solitaires, j'ai choisi de partager de concert avec d'autres hommes de culture et de spectacle; une adaptation théâtrale de cette épopée est née. Nous l'avons livrée à un public dont la diversité a constitué un véritable défi.

Porter sur une scène à l'italienne une légende sans âge, infiniment ressassée et retouchée dans sa matière comme dans son expression, en réalité, toujours en création au moment même où elle se conte, tient

assurément de la gageure. Mais alors, pourquoi une telle entreprise? Comment en assurer la viabilité? A quelles fins?

Pour prévenir ces questions et y répondre tous ensemble, je vous convie à me suivre dans les méandres de l'élaboration de la pièce de la fable éponyme. En d'autres termes, cette étude se plaît à révéler la langue et les langages generateurs du succès de l'adaptation théâtrale de *Les merveilleux exploits de Djeki La Njambe* au Festival des Arts et Culture de 1988 à Douala. (1)

Pour ce faire, deux volets caractérisent cette réflexion: d'un côté, la mise en exergue des techniques utilisées pour la production du spectacle; de l'autre, la justification de la pertinence d'une telle dramaturgie.

Mais auparavant, que raconte le mythe de *Djeki* (2), tel que rapporte par Pierre Célestin Tiki Koule à Penda, l'un des tout derniers héritiers d'envergure des conteurs duala.

La légende narre les exploits extraordinaires d'un héros exceptionnel. Djeki, fils du puissant Njambe mais, dès la naissance après une gestation de plusieurs années marquées de trois fausses sorties, encore plus terrible que lui. Leur antagonisme, bataille de géants, s'exprime dans les épreuves les unes plus périlleuses que les autres auxquelles Njambe soumet son fils qui, d'une ingéniosité supérieure, en sort toujours vainqueur.

La narration nous mène de l'enfance du héros avec les jeux enfantins où il domine continuellement le pion à ses demi-frères, à la maturité où il affronte les redoutables chefs voisins en passant par des tournois virils, véritables combats à mort et par deux descentes au pays des morts. Dans le second tome, une demande en mariage permet à Djeki d'accomplir totalement son destin d'homme." (Etonde- Ekoto, 1990: 123).

1. Les Techniques de Production de la Pièce

Quatre techniques saillantes me semblent avoir présidé à la mise en scène de *Djeki* et en avoir assuré la réussite. (3)

1. la technique de la parole bilingue
2. celle de la suggestion
3. une dramaturgie polymorphe et polyphonique

4. la centralité du conteur traditionnel

Certaines techniques furent générées spontanément par la nature même de l'épopée (la centralité du conteur); d'autres requièrent une cogitation plus élaborée (la parole bilingue).

La Parole Bilingue

Nombreuses sont les motivations qui ont poussé à l'option de la parole

bilingue dans la pièce à l'instar de la version bilingue des éditions Libermann. Elles peuvent cependant se ramener à deux principales: l'essence de la langue duala et la quête d'une audience plus large.

S'agissant d'un conte, c'est-à-dire d'un art spécifique et exigeant, le maintien de la narration en duala permet d'une part, de garantir au conteur toute sa maestria et d'autre part, de favoriser la redécouverte de la langue donc de la culture du cru.

Rompu à la rhétorique duala, Tiki a Koulle a Penda s'assure ainsi un aisance et une assurance défiant toute lacune linguistique possible, consécutive à une appropriation partielle ou erronée de la langue française. Son emploi de la langue vernaculaire en préserve en outre, la truculence et étale le génie propre du contour.

A vrai dire, les vertus de la langue duala facilitent une telle entreprise. Riche à défaut d'être hautement technologique selon le reproche adressé à la majorité des idiomes africains, elle manie aisément les concepts recourant rarement à périphrase. Langue vivante, elle propose un important registre lexical et syntaxique. Par ailleurs, sa "gentillesse" au sens de grâce, d'harmonie, d'amabilité la prédestine à "passer la rampe" aisément. Non qu'elle ne puisse pas heurter le tympan par des éclats de voix discordants mais dans l'ensemble, elle témoigne d'une musicalité plaisante à l'oreille en même temps que d'une vitalité susceptible de fixer l'attention des spectateurs.

Légende surtout racontée *in loco*, à savoir à l'intérieur de l'aire dualaphone (Malimba, Bakoko, Pongo, Douala etc.) où le récit est réputé connu, Djeki, joué dans le texte, crée une complicité supplémentaire entre le narrateur et les initiés. Tout en les dépayasant de la narration simplement orale, il défie le théâtre camerounaise actuel trop souvent bâti sur l'utilisation des langues officielles d'importation

sans souci de l'humus culturel dont elles se repaissent. Maintenant, nos ancêtres étant tous devenus des Gaulois, des îles du Wouri à la savane du Nord en passant par les monts de l'ouest et la forêt de l'Est, les dramaturges et les metteurs en scène cultivent l'habitude d'un théâtre en français ou en anglais - axe figé du bilinguisme au Cameroun! - dont l'approximation tient davantage à l'évidence, de leur défaut de maîtrise linguistique que de leur niveau de culture africaine. Fort heureusement, dans l'épopée comme sur la scène, Djeki suivant en cela son père Njambe et son grand-père Nono, accepte de parler le duala.

Langue d'évangélisation, d'école et de culture (4), le duala constitue encore de nos jours, l'une des langues les plus parlées et les plus comprises du pays. Ce statut a encouragé l'initiative de la parole bilingue duala/français. Le spectacle pouvait escompter un auditoire respectable.

En effet, la conscience de la présence dans la salle de néophytes en duala ou d'allogènes intégraux a imposé une traduction pour une meilleure "audibilité" et une réelle compréhension du message narratif chez eux. Cependant, cette traduction n'est pas voulue simultanée ni *in extenso* c'est-à-dire pure répétition du texte initial. Succinte, elle s'est limitée, hormis l'introduction et la conclusion de chaque épisode, à des synthèses où le sens prime sur l'expression.

Le résumé en français, le plus souvent non expansé de tournures diverses, notamment humoristiques et explicatives, abondantes dans l'écrit en duala, devient, *de facto*, infiniment plus court. De "belles trahisons" inhérentes à toute traduction conservent ainsi sa fluidité et son dynamisme à la narration de base et maintiennent le public en éveil. En réalité les grandes articulations sont seules traduites entre les épisodes comme au sein de ceux-ci; les redondances en langue douala, parce que difficilement traduisibles, sont réduites ou supprimées en français. C'est pourquoi, pour préserver la vérité historique et la poésie de l'épopée, les chants, les onomatopées, l'onomastique et autres procédés de style sont restés en duala.

A tout prendre, la technique de la parole bilingue - langue vernaculaire/ langue étrangère - a empreint d'originalité la représentation et constitué le ferment d'une communion générale entre le conteur, les actants et le public lui-même continuellement en scène comme nous le verrons plus loin. Cependant, si plaisante soit-elle, cette

parole bilingue n'aurait pas suffi à établir le succès reconnu de la pièce. D'autres procédés y ont concouru.

La Technique de Suggestion

La représentation s'est efforcé de rappeler la réalité du mythe de Djeki., de transférer le village sur scène pour donner substance à des mondes imaginaires. Ce faisant, la technique de la suggestion fut employée sur un quadruple plan spatial temporel, textuel et actanciel.

L'espace du jeu devient un village par un acte rituel posé par Tiki a Koulle a Penda affirmant que la magie du mythe à jouer ne peut opérer que dans un espace sacralisé... La scène le fut pour rendre vraie la performance par et dans l'imaginaire tous. De même, Tiki a procédé, dans les coulisses, à la préparation mystique des acteurs. Dans un huis-clos, trois heures avant la représentation, il les a enfermés et entretenus, "o lombwa babo", pour que nul ne soit plus tard, au cours de la pièce, "piège" par un mauvais esprit éventuel. Cet acte d'exorcisme par anticipation transforme désormais la scène en village.

La technique de suggestion au niveau de l'espace se remarque également par une bipolarité: rétrécissement/expansion, manifestée dans le décor et dans l'utilisation du parterre de la salle.

Le décor, fruit de la créativité d'artistes aux talents variés et complémentaire recourt aux arts plastiques comme à la nature environnante, vivante, évoquant tout à la fois un village des rives du Wouri et un lieu de récréation.

Une toile de fond, immense, tapissant toute l'arrière-scène face aux spectateurs, ressuscite astucieusement les activités de la vie communautaire, les faits et gestes de la paysannerie côtière: des cases, des coqs chantant, des femmes pilants la mer au loin, etc. ... En sus, en bonne place, se distinguent sur cette peinture, le Grand Fromager, l'Arbre aux feuilles qui tuent, l'oiseau Kambo et bien d'autres redoutables antagonistes du fils de Njambe qui hantent l'épopée de *Djeki* et qui seront tout à l'heure mimés de la voix sinon du geste, par Tiki.

Jouxtant ce tableau coloré mais figé, une haute végétation naturelle calée dans des pots ou des bacs et autres objets réels des rivages africains posés à même le sol de la scène, accentuent le réalisme

écologique: papayer, bananier, cocotier autres plantes aquatiques; pirogue, rames et filet de pêche négligemment jeté des comme au repos. Tous ces éléments sont disposés de manière à ne pas porter préjudice à l'évolution des acteurs.

Mais un cadre n'a de sens que s'il est habité. Il faut donc meubler ce village resurgi sur la scène. C'est en cela que précisément, la scène à l'italienne s'est trouvée partiellement disqualifiée.

Trop étriquée par rapport à la scène circulaire d'antan au périmètre non restrictif où le conteur rassemblait autour de lui tout le village dont il sentait chaleur, la scène moderne a du être déployée. L'espace scénique a gagné la salle pour permettre aux trente-quatre personnes de la troupe officielle de Tiki outre lui-même, et aux dix personnes y incorporées, au total quarante-cinq personnes, trouver place pour jouer chacun son rôle(6). Aussi, à l'exception de vingt personnes le reste de la troupe s'est réparti de manière égale (nombre et emplacement) aux premiers rangs des deux ailes du Cinéma Le Concorde.

La scène circulaire de nos veillées, artificiellement cassée pour les exigences du spectacle moderne, a cédé le pas au demi-cercle, parterre à la fois. Ainsi, cette scène en arc rappelle l'idée de la foule villageoise et de l'ardeur communautaire.

Djeki, aux exploits innombrables et glorieux, renvoie naturellement à la durée. Celle-ci a constitué par conséquent une préoccupation majeure de la mise en scène. En effet, si le temps de l'histoire est admis une fois pour toutes, un temps immémorial ordonné par le chant préliminaire, il en va tout autrement du temps de la performance.

“Salut au public” fait remonter jusqu'à l'époque du “maso ma ndala” du merveilleux où “mangolo a yai mboma!” (p. 56), où l'extraordinaire a enfanté l'extraordinaire. A chacun des spectateurs de définir ce moment mythique ou mieux, de renoncer à le circonscrire pour ouvrir tout simplement ses yeux et ses oreilles à la narration. Et celle de Tiki posa problème.

Eu égard aux quatre-vingt-dix minutes, entr'acte compris, généralement imparties à tout spectacle de théâtre en salle, le temps du récit “joue” a été réduit, au grand dam de Tiki a Koulle a Penda nostalgique des contes des veillées ancestrales, chevauchant des nuits,

des semaines voire des mois sans crainte de lasser les locataires prompts à la réplique.

S'agissant d'épopée, des déictiques temporels et des locutions plus complexes, imprécises à souhait et échappant à la contestation, garantissent la complicité public: "tout de suite" (p. 151); "le lendemain" (p. 171); "l'aube se levait" (p. 143)"Avant que le jour se levait" (p. 157); "Comme le temps n'attend pas", "comme le récit va vite"(p.161); "le jour n'était pas encore tout à fait levé" (p. 173); "Un autre jour jeu avant le lever du soleil" (p. 221); "Alors que le jour arrivait de resté et achevait de se lever" (p. 235) .

Cette manipulation du temps autorise à enjamber avec outrage la durée donc on suggère le prolongement sans la fixer, la longueur sans le respecter. Et Tiki a Koulle a Penda en a usé sans scrupule pour réussir à cantonner son récit dans l'espace de trois heures d'horloge.

Le rétrécissement du temps en appelle à la contraction du texte narratif, exercice ardu pour gagner le pari de la durée de la représentation. L'astuce s'est trouvée dans la structure externe du récit et dans celle interne des épisodes. La comporte une entrée ou introduction c'est-à-dire "le salut au public" et deux parties correspondant respectivement à la naissance et aux exploits inachevés de Djeki. Sont retenues intégralement l'entrée et la naissance relativement courtes préludes aux exploits. Par contre, des onze prodiges du héros en y joignant celui de Ngkang Nkong a Ndikang" du second tome alors inédit (7), sont reproduits pour caractère spectaculaire à cause de nombreux chants et danses qui y sont contenus: "L'oiseau Kambo", "Premier voyage au séjour des morts", "Ngoum Ngokobi" et "Nkongang Nkong a Ndikang".

Même à ce niveau, des ablations nouvelles sont opérées au sein des épisodes, certains de leurs passages semblant répétitifs, dépourvus d'un impact dramatique suffisant ou constituant des doublets narratifs. En fait, au théâtre comme dans l'épopée le seul lien entre les épisodes étant d'appartenir au répertoire des défis de, la compilation du texte oral s'avère inévitable et pardonnable.

L'épopée n'a pas de fin, sa trame souple quasi inexistante se signale par le nombres des épisodes commençant et s'achevant à discrétion. La fable, objet d'élaborations successives, colle au projet

initial: le merveilleux comme source d'art et c'est ce qu'a permis une dramaturgie appropriée, polymorphe et polyphonique.

Dramaturgie Polymorphe et Polyphonique

L'originalité de la pièce tient de son polymorphisme et de sa polyphonie. Récit, chant, musique et danse s'y mêlent, authentifiant la représentation au regard des veillées antiques. Ces différents arts, soucieux de la Geste de la vie collective riveraine (pêche, guerre, lutte, jeu etc. ...), excluent de fait, les rôles individuels à l'exception de celui du conteur qu'est Tiki a Koulle à Penda.

Musique et danse imprègnent la version théâtrale de Djeki et rappellent la règle d'or de nos contes. Tous les acteurs sur scène et en salle participent de la voix et jouent chacun d'un instrument. Le « ngoso » par exemple, chant spécifique de côte camerounaise les met en transe. La phrase-clé le “muninga” est reprise sur une note différente et achevée par le “rnbape”, la suppléante du conteur, et par son “kwese”, la fermeture du “muninga”. Un chœur imposant englobe toute la troupe

Si les “miseseko”, minuscules paniers enfermant des graines ou des cailloux bruyants à la secousse, reviennent aux huit jeunes filles sélectionnées pour la représentation, le “mbaka”, deux morceaux de bois frappés l'un contre l'autre, sont maniés par le « mbape » et son auxiliaire. Elles sont aussi autorisées, de concert avec le conteur, à jongler avec les “muken”, trois clochettes de dimensions et de sonorités contrastées idéologiquement baptisées par ordre de préséance: « mon mwa muke » clochette homme: “modi mwa muken”. clochette femme et « Ngondedi a muke clochette » jeune fille. Les “manjos”, chasse-mouches, demeurent la prérogative du seul Tiki.

L'orchestre compte aussi une batterie placée dans la zone du conteur et non en face de lui comme à l'accoutumée. En effet, deux tambours (un petit porté sous le bras et un grand sur pied) ainsi que trois tam-tams sont respectivement livrés aux mains expertes de deux jeunes gens et des professionnels de la troupe.

Allant de pair avec cette polyphonie inusitée, la danse se veut créative. Attentive autant au passé qu'au présent, elle cherche à satisfaire les besoins du spectateur moderne friand de rythme et de

couleurs chatoyantes sans toutefois sacrifier la récitation elle-même. C'est pourquoi la chorégraphie s'est attachée à la sobriété tant au niveau du nombre des danseurs que de l'exécution des figures et des pas. Elle a été élaborée de manière à éviter de distraire de la parole narrée. Les figures bien qu'authentiques sont suffisamment épurées pour être accessibles aux jeunes filles, uniques danseuses quasiment jusqu'à la finale. Ici, elles miment le rythme la pagaie sur les flots, là les imitent les lamentations de l'épouse en disgrâce ou de la mère en quête d'enfants, plus loin, elles se réjouissent des travaux d'Hercule de Djeki ou s'effraient de ses défis etc...

Bien que tout l'élément masculin et féminin puisse danser parfaitement, l'adaptation théâtrale de Djeki a opté de donner le monopole des ballets aux huit adolescentes du Collège Libermann attrayantes à souhait pour un public échappant encore à l'insulte de l'âge. Ce choix a équilibré le spectacle en le pourvoyant de la beauté que ne pouvait lui offrir le professionnalisme des femmes mûres. Les jeunes filles sont de tous les tableaux les marquant de légèreté, de grâce, parfois d'adresse inattendue chez des novices.

Cependant, c'est la "finale" qui crée l'évènement et consacre l'apothéose de Tiki et des deux "mbape", les jeunes reléguées maintenant au second plan.

La chorégraphie est conçue en adéquation avec le port de la tenue traditionnelle.

Le vêtement souligne et maintient l'unité et l'esprit du spectacle. Les hommes en "sanja mbowa", les femmes en "kaba mbowa", c'est-à-dire en pagnes de tous les jours et de tous les clairs de lune au terme d'une journée de travail. Différents du "sanjax" ou du "kaba ngondo", atours des grandes fêtes, leur tenue se distingue également du "sanja bila", uniforme de guerre et du "sanja besuwa", costume des jeux de lutte etc.

Chez les hommes, la quotidienneté de l'habillement est accentuée par le torse nu, ou à tout prendre, un tee-shirt blanc sans fioriture. En harmonie avec ce costume, le "kaba" des femmes, cotonnade imprimée aux motifs dépouillés, est porté non agrémenté de colliers de cauris ou de bijoux, sans écharpe assortie jetée avec décontraction et ostentation sur l'épaule gauche comme pour le "ngondo". Toutes les femmes portent le "kaba yéyé", le "kaba" de grand-mère, stylisé par

Emily Saker (8). La coupe en est simple, l'empîecement rectangulaire, l'encolure dégagée sans atteindre le décolleté. La prédilection pour les couleurs vives ou prédominant vert, le jaune, l'orange, le marron et le blanc, se justifie par leur meilleure rétenion des feux de la rampe. Le "musuka", foulard noué autour des reins, fait ressortir la taille et modèle le langage du corps lors de l'exécution des danses.

Cependant, dans le groupe féminin, une bonne lecture sémiotique du vêtement étaye le clivage des classes d'âge et renseigne sur le statut des actrices.

Un foulard orne la tête des femmes mûres; la chevelure des adolescentes tressée et nue selon la tradition duala, le port du foulard étant prohibé chez la jeune fille.

Par ailleurs, l'amplitude du "kaba" et de ses manches de longueur égale pour toutes est notamment moindre chez le jeune groupe car "ngondedi e si ma boto ka muto", [la jeune fille ne se vêt pas comme une femme].

Ainsi, le contraste entre les costumes des hommes et ceux des femmes, là ce perceptible entre le "kaba" des adultes et celui des jeunes filles recèlent un élément dramatique qu'illustrent les différents rôles.

Les rôles, tous nécessaires et complémentaires, peuvent se ramener a trois principaux: l'animation, les danseuses, le conteur.

L'animation est assurée par la troupe entière de Tiki à laquelle se sont adjoints les deux musiciens de tambours, les huit collégiennes et à certains moments d'intense communion, comme dans les jours d'antan, le public donnant aussi de la voix ou des claquements des mains. L'animation en partie sur la scène, grandement répandue en salle, cadence les danses, rythme à bon escient la parole du conteur, assure les répons opportunes attendues d'elle.

En son sein se détachent six femmes mures restées sur scène autour de Tiki, trois de part et d'autre. A la droite immédiate du conteur, la première "mbape" à sa gauche, son auxiliaire; elles ont autorité sur la troupe qu'elles guident. En outre, expertes du texte autant que le maître, elles en assurent la suppléance à la moindre défaillance (carence de mémoire, fatigue etc. ...). Artistes d'élite au nombre forcément limité sur la scène comme dans le village, les "mbape" doivent témoigner de leur maîtrise du récit, assurément, mais

tout autant de celle des chants, des danses et des instruments. Le sens aigu de leur intervention dans le jeu rehausse l'éclat du spectacle.

Les danseuses ont déjà fait l'objet d'une présentation. Il suffit de rappeler que leur maestria diversifiée repose sur la science des différents arts sollicités et le besoin d'esthétique. Néanmoins, leur prestation si éclatante soit-elle, ne saurait éclipser celle du récitant dont la centralité s'exprime aussi bien dans le physique que dans le jeu.

La Centralité du Conteur

Respectueuse de la loi de l'épopée, l'adaptation de Djeki s'est organisée autour de l'image centrale du conteur, nommément Tiki à Koulle à Penda. Son costume comme son personnage échappe à toute assimilation au reste de la troupe.

En effet, la tenue de Tiki à Koulle à Penda, création libre du conteur, sans verser dans l'accoutrement, tire quelque peu sur l'excentrique. Ne va-t-il pas par métaphore, à certains moments, devenir Djeki, le "ngoum", ce champion n'a nul autre semblable?

Tiki est en "sanja ngondo", singulier par son velours rouge, la longueur de ses "besambu", pans significatifs descendant de chaque côté de sa taille et retenus par un nœud du pagne torsadé ceignant ses reins. Dans celui-ci, véritable tabernacle, se cachent les amulettes, celles de Tiki et celles imaginaires de Djeki. Une chemise blanche à manches courtes, col chemisier et sophistiquée, supporte un foulard jaune autour du cou, noué sur la poitrine. Un bandeau assorti au foulard serre la tête de l'acteur. Deux autres foulards encerclent les avant-bras et les poignets; deux derniers dégringolant l'un en une longue pointe dans le dos, l'autre de la taille sur le ventre dissimulent à moitié le nœud. Des sandales noires achèvent le costume, les pieds nus n'ayant pas été agrées.

Juché sur un siège traditionnel "ebongo a bebon", sculpté, légèrement plus haut que ceux des autres acteurs qu'il domine discrètement, Tiki peut ainsi prendre la mesure de la salle entière. C'est du reste, de ce piédestal qu'il s'élance à des moments de sortilège, vers l'avant-scène, muni d'un ou de deux de ses instruments (« manjo », « minken », le "muséséko" etc. ...) pour exécuter l'une ou l'autre des

danses ou figures gymniques scandant les intermèdes entre les épisodes, les obstacles opposés au héros, l'espoir d'un protagoniste ou le cri précoce à la victoire antagoniste condamné à la défaite. Ce "vedettariat" intervient soit pour accentuer un fait soit pour détendre l'atmosphère après un moment de tension ou de terreur, soit pour rompre le suspense, intermèdes privilégiés ou le professionnalisme et le comique s'entremêlent ces provoquent l'admiration bruyante de la salle.

Le jeu de l'alternance à l'avant-scène de Tiki et des jeunes filles ou de loin en loin de celles-ci et des "mbape" ou encore de tous les danseurs au tableau final, suscite la participation des spectateurs et récuse la monotonie du récit qui dans cette donne théâtrale demeure la pièce maîtresse.

Ordonnateur du gestuel des uns et des autres, « le maître de la parole » orchestre les déplacements et les mouvements suivant les exploits et l'esprit que les anime: combativité, courage, adversité, trahison, amour, plainte, nostalgie, es désespoir etc. Commentés, enrichis d'improvisations, parfois mimés, ces sentiments et d'innombrables autres connaissent l'hypertrophie ou l'atrophie. L'humour du récitant est aussi varié que l'humeur des actants de la fable.

Tiki est présent sur la scène du début à la fin de la pièce. Il est aussi omnipotent de sa voix qui ne saurait se taire sans mettre un terme au spectacle à telle enseigne que même pendant les interludes en français, elle continue à fredonner en sourdine. La parole de Tiki crée l'action. Elle établit la succession des épisodes retrace les combats; elle entretient le culte du héros et l'omniprésence de la merveille en un mot, elle actualise la mémoire des âges.

Ses phrases, pure rhétorique duala, sont longues, parfois répétitives ou explicatives à l'excès, expansées de dictons et de proverbes, d'interjections et d'interpellations, d'hyperboles car tout, ici, est évènement, "maso rna ndala" ou golo a yai mboma". Le conteur, autre griot, "élément du drame historique et la force des peuples"(9), table sur une récitation sans faille.

Le ton, en apparence de témoignage et d'objectivité, en réalité, de confiance et de complicité, laisse deviner la partialité du narrateur

pour Djeki, chimérique héros adulé par un public qui, à son tour, se garde mal d'une émotion peu compatible avec l'objectivité.

Le texte, alimenté par une culture animiste et magique, évoque et construit l'imaginaire collectif une myriade de représentations fabuleuses. Le mystificateur émérite, maître incontesté d'un art pluridisciplinaire - conte ou mime, chants et danses dont l'ordre n'est pas figé - use, à longueur de la représentation, d'un scénario tripartite chronologiquement immuable:

- L'envoi en mission périlleuse de Djeki mandé et accrédité par Njambe, son haineux père.

- Affrontement titanesque de l'ennemi et du héros toujours victorieux.

- Retour triomphant suivi d'une nouvelle épreuve plus dangereuse encore, identifiée par Njambe déconfit et craintif.

Mais, cette fixité de la structure narrative ne nuit en rien au caractère ludique de l'épopée qu'a su rendre, à mon avis, la virtuosité de la troupe de Tiki.

Toutefois, on ne saurait parler du conteur dans l'adaptation théâtrale de Djeki s'il revient à la parole bilingue et s'arrête un moment, bien que court à dessein pour les raisons idéologiques évoquées plus haut, sur un personnage discret permanemment accroupi aux pieds de Tiki ou assis en retrait telle l'ombre du maître: le traducteur.

Rôle inexistant dans la légende, il est créé pour des raisons d'«audibilité» du texte par certains spectateurs et interprété par un jeune acteur de la troupe nationale du Cameroun. Cette «doublure» du conteur, à priori, rappellerait le «fou du roi» des pièces classiques occidentales. L'analogie prompt à germer dans les esprits à cause de leur présence assidue dans le sillage des «maîtres», n'offre guère de consistance cependant.

L'habit du «fou» le particularise au milieu de la Cour; celui du traducteur, banal, n'affiche aucun signe distinctif. Il porte un «sanja mbowa» comme tout un chacun. Son physique, moyen et menu, contraste avec la carrure imposante de Tiki. Aucune place privilégiée ne lui est accordée, S'il partage avec le fou le privilège de prendre la parole alors qu'elle est refusée aux autres acteurs, sa liberté est canalisée, l'étreinte. Le «clown» royal non seulement dit, mais dévoile, interprète, analyse et donne son avis, se gausse d'autrui ou le

congratule, pose des actes ou refuse d'agir, etc. ... ; bref, il est et il pense. Le traducteur dans la pièce de Djeki est réduit au rôle étroit de courroie de transmission entre l'émetteur ou le narrateur et le récepteur ou la portion du public ignorant le duala. Son verbe et son agir s'en trouvent limités aux courtes périodes épisodiques de la traduction. Même si sa dextérité et son expressivité peuvent en faire une bonne courroie, il n'en demeure pas moins une, c'est-à-dire dépourvu d'initiative sur le récit et de sentiments personnels, à la différence du "fou du roi".

Simple ombre du contour donc, le traducteur le suit ou le précède dans la pièce selon l'orientation solaire, j'entends, suivant le message à décoder avant ou après la prestation du récitant. Dans les intervalles, il regarde lui aussi, devenant spectacle mais très attentif à ne pas loucher ses entrées en jeu. A tout prendre, sans pouvoir à aucun instant, disputer sa centralité au "magister", le traducteur en est un pion stratégique essentiel dans cette représentation théâtrale de l'épopée de Djeki.

Au terme de ce long regard sur les techniques de production de la pièce appert nécessaire dans cette étude sur la langue et les langages de la dramaturgie Djeki, d'exhumer un dernier langage, intellectuel celui-là.

II. Pertinence d'une telle Dramaturgie

A ce stade, il convient de revenir à notre problématique du début: pourquoi chercher à adapter au théâtre un mythe sans âge au lieu d'une œuvre actuelle dans le vécu quotidien des Camerounais? Pourquoi ne pas proposer à une jeune souvent en mal de vivre des solutions concrètes aux problèmes qui les interpellent, au lieu de leur suggérer par le truchement d'une fable, du merveilleux, une fuite avant? En fin de compte, quelle peut bien être la raison d'exister de ce genre de théâtre?

La culture d'un pays, à mon avis, bien qu'heureusement évolutive n'en demeure pas moins intégrative; j'entends, faite d'états de culture successifs. Le génie d'un peuple parce qu'éternel, offre, au fil des siècles et des générations, des arcanes complémentaires, perceptibles ou latentes, génératrices d'un épanouissement général et individuel. Il

appartient à la postérité de les découvrir pour en tirer profit. Les légendes africaines en sont riches et celle de Djeki n'échappant pas à cette règle,

propose de multiples codes de conduite car:

loin d'être un monument littéraire momifié dans la mémoire collective, Djeki nous a paru un principe actif pouvant avoir grande incidence sur la société en général, sur la jeunesse africaine en particulier. (Etonde-Ekoto 1990: 152)

Recréation du monde par la parole magique, Djeki renvoie à une culture qu'elle pérennise.

Tout art africain a une fonction sociale certes, mais celle du théâtre, attestée, lui permet de semer la graine à tout vent par une pédagogie de groupe. Djeki ne fait pas exception. L'œuvre suggère des axes de comportements, renvoie à un savoir-faire susceptible de soustraire de l'invisibilité(10) planétaire "les damnés de terre" (Fanon, 1969), invités, ici,

à renaître avec leur culture méconnue.

En réalité, sous le règne de la démesure épique et du rire, malgré son microcosme maintenant étroit au regard de la nation camerounaise, Djeki livre des enseignements.

Le premier est le retour aux sources. La connaissance de soi-même et de son environnement situe l'individu. Aussi, dans l'œuvre, les généalogies se déclinent-elles à merci et imposent-elles un concordat: le droit d'appartenance à une famille et au terroir avec pour corollaire le devoir d'intégration dans son milieu. Tous les personnages prêtent leurs voix à William Edward Burgardt DuBois pour clamer: "je crois en l'orgueil qu'on a de sa race, de son lignage et de soi-même"

Djeki s'avère aussi être un cours magistral sur le patriotisme. Une nation, nonobstant ses imperfections et ses tares se défend et, si nécessaire, au lourd prix du sang. Cependant, patriotisme ne saurait se confondre avec chauvinisme ou régionalisme. C'est pour cela que le Père François de Gastines, dans son introduction de l'épopée, parle de "victoire transformante" de Djeki. En effet, à chaque sortie du territoire, le héros s'enrichit un peu plus de connaissances, des apports étrangers; bien que tirant de lui-même, c'est-à-dire de ses amulettes, le meilleur de son dynamisme.

La préservation de l'unité nationale et de l'intégrité territoriale se trouve au cœur de la pédagogie de ce mythe. Djeki prouve que la majorité d'un pays s'évalue sa capacité de protéger la paix intérieure, seule vraie force de dissuasion des peuples. Pour ce faire, le respect de la communauté et de ses lois consensuelles fondamentales importe. Djeki n'hésite jamais à se réconcilier avec ses demi-frères et à se soumettre aux volontés de son père reconnu comme chef, bien qu'il soit, lui-même le champion national incontesté et envié.

Inique envers Djeki, Njambe l'est. Il se sait le cep autour duquel se greffent les branches de l'arbre familial et national. Jaloux de ses privilèges, il n'assimile cependant pas le pouvoir à l'intelligence ni l'autorité à la vertu. Lui-même et son fils surhommes pourtant, savent distinguer entre le cœur et la raison, l'intérêt privé et les exigences générales dès lors que la stabilité du groupe est mise en cause. L'épopée duala préconise le bon choix des hommes à la bonne place. Njambe déteste Djeki mais il en fait le champion national dès que pointe le danger.

La guerre des sexes n'a pas non plus lieu ici. Ils y sont complémentaires et même parfois interchangeables ("Nkongkang Nkong a Ndikang"). L'initiative et la décision n'apparaissent pas comme l'apanage d'un sexe et l'écoute et l'exécution comme celui de l'autre.

Le message épique apprend également que la vie est une chaîne où chacun fait un noeud pour paraphraser Jacques Roumain (11). Aussi faut-il que le souvenir entretienne dans les consciences, le respect des ancêtres, ces "morts [qui] ne sont pas morts" (Birago Diop, 1961) et qui demeurent codificateurs de la "maison commune".

A ce devoir de mémoire se juxtapose celui de la procréation garant des bras nécessaires à la survie de la nation. Njambe est père de douze enfants et partout se dénombre une progéniture significative.

L'hymne à l'effort s'entend à profusion dans le récit de Djeki. Sans minimiser l'innéisme le texte insiste sur le droit à la formation de la jeunesse. C'est un devoir familial et national et la pédagogie retenue doit être adaptée: pertinence des programmes et des méthodes, exploitation judicieuse des dons pour éviter le fourvoiement vocationnel. Les diverses armes du héros interviennent à propos, de même sa mère Ngrijo.

En contrepartie, Djeki exhorte la jeunesse à la disponibilité totale à l'endroit de la nation. Le dépassement de soi conduit à l'héroïsme certes, mais les deux versants formation/disponibilité suscitent l'excellence.

Pour finir, la conscience d'une transcendance frappe dans la fable de Djeki. Le légendaire champion avoue n'être ni un demi-dieu, ni, a fortiori, un dieu. Son univers surnaturel aux pouvoirs infinis se courbe devant une transcendance que le héros et son entourage nomment Dieu. Ainsi Djeki proscrit la déification de l'homme. Pour nos sociétés souvent sans foi, en quête d'idoles aux noms variés (leader, star, argent, sexe, drogue, secte. pouvoir etc. ...), le conte se pose comme un bel exemple de la conscience des limites de l'homme et de sa nécessaire humilité dans la société partant, dans la création.

En conclusion, l'adaptation théâtrale de *Les Merveilleux exploits de Djeki la Njambe*, à révéler; s'il en était encore besoin, le mariage éternel de la langue et des langages multiples dans le théâtre, africain en particulier: la parole, le chant, musique, la danse, la peinture, l'écologie, le corps, le vêtement et le dernier mais le moindre, la moindre, la pensée profonde de l'œuvre. Le décor et la mise en scène, attentifs à une culture précise, ont réussi à véhiculer un message symbiotique d'une le pérenne donne actuelle. Si l'œuvre divertit, (« le jeu étant bien à la base de civilisation valable »), comme le soutient Roger Caillois (1972), la méditatif trouve aussi un ferment et le mythe de Djeki cherche à établir le pont entre la connaissance et l'action.

C'est pourquoi l'interne; d'une telle manifestation culturelle, le théâtre épique, se situe pour l'essentiel dans la restitution à nos nations en dérive identitaire des rouages antiques pour la reconquête de leur personnalité culturelle soit perdue par excès d'occidentalisation, soit mise en veilleuse par paresse devant l'entreprise. Le retour au centre du mythe de Djeki ou à d'autres créations semblables, à l'instar du *Mvet* (12), peut faire d'un peuple dessouché par la pression de l'Histoire peuple re-souché, à même désormais d'apporter lui aussi sa contribution à l'Universel car pour revenir une fois de plus à l'académicien Roger Caillois: (1972:11)

C'est en effet dans le mythe que l'on saisit le mieux, à *vif* (author's emphasis), la collusion des postulations les plus secrètes, les plus

virulentes du psychisme individuel et des pressions les plus impératives et les plus troublantes de l'existence sociale.

Que vive par conséquent, le mythe antique dont l'efficacité, comme visait spirituelle, réside, il s'entend, dans son adaptabilité au temps et à l'espace:

Autrement dit, chaque fois que le schème de base est transporté dans le Temps et l'Espace, il se fait enrichir par d'autres faits sociaux propres à une nouvelle communauté contactée: (Ayoub. 1986:64)

Que naissent donc, de nos jours, d'autres mythes créateurs d'équilibre et d'épanouissement collectifs.

Notes

1. Pour le Festival des Arts et Culture de Douala en décembre 1988, un groupe de personnes dont je fis partie, décida de mettre en scène les exploits du légendaire Djeki la Njambe a Inono, la plus grande figure mythique du Littoral Camerounais.

L'initiative fut encouragée par la récente publication du premier tome de *Les Merveilleux exploits de Djeki la Njambe* (1987), Douala Editions Collège Libermann. La version en est de Tiki à Koulle a Penda. La pièce a remporté le premier prix de théâtre à ce Festac.

2. Désormais le titre de l'ouvrage sera repris sous la forme de *Djeki* à la différence du nom du personnage non italisé.

3. Si l'adaptation théâtrale de *Djeki* fut le fruit d'un travail d'équipe où artistes et hommes de culture ont participé, l'analyse proposé ici et les prises de position n'engagent que moi.

4. Les premiers missionnaires protestants dont John Clark, Dr. C.K. Prince, Joseph Merrick et Alfred Saker, qui abordent sur les côtes camerounaises entre 1840 et 1850 s'installent à Douala. Pour gagner d'autres régions de proche en proche, ils apprennent le duala qui devient ainsi une langue d'évangélisation et d'école, par conséquent, de culture. Joseph Merrick (1843-1849) implante une petite imprimerie; il imprime le premier vocabulaire en duala et des livres scolaires. A. Saker éditera la première Bible camerounaise en duala en 1872.

5. Il faudrait aussi mentionner, à ce niveau et à celui de la mise en scène, la participation de responsables du Ministère, jadis, de

l'Information et de la culture, d'enseignants, de critiques littéraires, des milieux d'affaires (SCOA Cameroun), de Club de service (Lions Orchidée).

6. Le conteur duala fut intransigeant sur la présence effective et dynamique de chacun des membres de sa troupe au complet; le succès de sa performance, d'après lui, en dépendait. Il estimait dévaloir fait une entorse à ses habitudes villageoises où tout arrivant trouvait place dans le cercle de jeu en plein air.

7. Depuis publiées: 1991.

8. Emily Saker est la fille du fameux missionnaire britannique Alfred Saker, personnage éponyme du Collège de Deido (Douala) qui porte son nom. Emily Saker a épaulé son père pasteur en encadrant et en formant des jeunes filles duala, l'élite de cette époque, Son "kaba" est le kaba duala originel.

9. Cité de mémoire (auteur oublié).

10. Invisibilité est pris ici dans l'acception de racisme du refus d'intégrer l'autre comme égal, stigmatisé par Ralph Waldo Ellison dans *Homme Invisible, pour qui chantes-tu?*, éd. Bernard Grasser, Paris, 1969.

11. Le romancier haïtien Jacques Roumain attribue, dans *Gouverneurs de la des rôles spécifiques*, aux individus membres d'une communauté. Il assimile la vie à un fil incassable où chaque rôle est un nœud particulier et nécessaire

12. *Le mvet*: vocable qui désigne au départ, un instrument de musique, une de harpe. Le terme sert aussi à référer aux poèmes épiques qui se chantent ou se psalmodient avec accompagnement de cet instrument. *Le Mvet* constitue un spectacle complet: le récit épique se développe par la parole, le chant, la danse, le mime à la fois.

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Folk Tales Tradition and the Modern Short Story in Anglophone Cameroon Writing: from Signifying to Moralizing

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Abstract

Oral tradition is a medium through which Africans have always expressed, cultures, Folktales were the first forms of literary expression used to transmit norms, traditions and general modes of life. Full of wisdom, the stories were meant convey a real philosophy of life and to teach moral lessons. Nowadays, modern short story writers in Anglophone Cameroon (as well as in Francophone Cameroon in Africa as a whole), seem to follow the tradition of folk tales in their attitudes, active techniques, style and structure as they tend to write stories based on real ,customs and traditions. Through proverbial wisdom, figurative language and fiction, they achieve their primary purposes which are to entertain, educate and moralize. In this respect, are didacticism and moralization compatible with the best quality of true art and the writer's creative power? Can he fulfil his prophetic visionary role which is to depict life not necessarily as it is, but as it should be?

However, it would appear that, as spokesman of his society, the short story terms warns people against the evil in the world. His work constitutes an appeal to science and a search of identity and authenticity with a strong attachment to fictional values.

Introduction

From the moment a short story practitioner sets about defining the genre, the prescribed principles are in accordance with his or her particular experience. Practice precedes theory. A static and clear-cut definition of the short story is ineffective; as P.S. Prescott would say, it is an “ad hoc means of narration with definition depends on the story at hand”. (1988: 14) The plurality of description shown in the flexibility and the dynamism with which such a literary form for expression has constantly been evolving from an unpolished shape to one of the refined and most modern types of narrative. Much of its elaborate form is indebted to Edgar Allan Poe’s practice and theory, and his review of Hawthorne’s *Twice Tales* (1842). Poe alludes to the short story as a “short prose narrative” whose beauty is intended to “elevate the soul”, in which invention, creation, imagination originality concurs to a unified impression, the main objective being the “totality effect”. (1984:572) Following Poe’s prescription in his essay entitled “The Philosophy, Science and the Art of the short Story”, Bernard Fonlon (1979:429-438) stresses compactness, isolation, intensity, verisimilitude and likelihood leading to “the effect” of a unique and dramatic incident composing the short story. Nevertheless African and particularly Cameroonian short stories are still to be defined separately or embracing other narrative forms in African literary tradition. African cultures are characterized by oral tradition, a medium through which Africans have always expressed their aspirations, apprehensions and values.

Folktales, for example, capture the general modes of life, traditions and moral codes, and are designed both to entertain and educate.

Short story writers in Cameroon seem to follow a similar tradition in narrative techniques, attitudes, styles, form and other literary devices; their stories are punctuated with wisdom which is meant to convey a real philosophy of life to inculcate morals. As a result, they depart from the modern definition of the short story as a short piece “of fiction” (a work of imagination), as they tend to depict facts, everyday life, making use of tradition and cultural traits so much that fiction is intertwined with reality; satire, irony and humour being the main

weapons u. to point out a moral. “Signifying”, the inclination to speak with innuendoes, “e punning, ever trooping, ever embodying the ambiguities of language” to use He Louis Gates (1984:285-321) words, is for them, more than a matter of survival with the Negro in America; indeed, it is a medium through which they moralize society. The main stream running through the lines is didactic, with the emerge of a moral vision primarily concerned with a man caught between opposing fore good and evil, tradition and modernity, family, society and true self. The depiction of moral flaws and goodness in man serves as an agent of social regulation.

Our argument is that didacticism might lead to the inhibition of the writ creative power and might also divert him from the prophetic and visionary role. if moralists, historians, sociologists, satirists and critics observe and draw conclusions founded on practical force, the visionary as opposed to them differs because not only does he observe facts, but he sees these through a prism which gives h’ necessarily a distorted image which he renders according to his sensibility and rational mode of thoughts. The impression that emerges is consequently subjective and poetic resulting from his desire to recreate things.

The aim of this paper is to study the influence of folk tales, namely the realistic, moral and formal aspects (exploitation of trickster figures and figures of speech), on Anglophone Cameroon short story.

The stories analysed were published in *The Mould (A Magazine of Creative Writing)*, in the years 1980-1985. Most well-known Anglophone Cameroon writers such as Bole Butake, Nol Alembong, Kenjo Jumban, Peter Abety, Bate Besong, to name a few, contributed to *The Mould* through various genres (poetry, drama and the short story). So far as our reading and observation have gone, we do not intend to the present corpus to be representative, instead the major trends characterizing the stories lay the foundations for further investigations which will include Francophone Cameroonian writers like Patrice Kayo, Guillaume Oyono-Mbia, Awouma Joseph Marie, Francis Bebey, and also African writers, both English and French speaking ‘such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Alex la Guma, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Sembene Ousmane, Tati Loutard, etc.

I. Realism and Moralization through the Short Story

The modern short story is described as a short prose narrative of indeterminate length, concentrated on one important situation (which may deal with a character, mood or an event, etc.) not necessarily based on real facts, but in which invention and imaginative creation contribute to its fundamental definition as “a piece of fiction”. In fiction, however, there exist many tendencies ranging from romance (love story, gothic story, science fiction, detective story, fantasy, etc.) to realistic social observation. Romance is a tendency in fiction opposite to that of realism; it idealizes, enchants, sentimentalizes, and plays with the verisimilitude of improbable and marvellous events, while avoiding serious satire and social criticism.

Realism in a work of fiction is therefore an attitude and method of writing, ‘that rejects idealization, escapism, fantasy, and other extravagant qualities of romance; it gives the impression of an accurate description of everyday life.

Realism developed in Europe chiefly with the nineteenth century novel of middle class proletarian life, in which the problems of ordinary people, their physical environment and social problems were depicted in great detail. The leading figures of realism included Honore de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert, George Eliot, Charles Dickens, among others. In the USA, realism permeated the literature of the second half of the nineteenth century, particularly the writings of Howells, Twain, Sarah ‘Ome Jewett, Hamlin Garland, who gave realistic pictures of American middle and lower-class life. Later on, realism developed into naturalism, wherein writers were no longer depicting facts of life, but the gloomiest and the most squalid sides of it related to harsh economic conditions. Emile Zola, Alphonse Daudet, Guy de Maupassant in France; Theodore Dreiser, Frank Norris in the United States; George Moore and George Gissing in England, were associated with naturalism.

Cameroonian realism seems to have developed out of the awareness that the writer has a role to play, that of a spokesman of his society, whose mission is to educate, moralize and entertain. His short stories, like folk tales, record traditions, actions of ordinary people that are observed and narrated un sentimentally, but with wit, satire and

humour. Taken as a whole, these stories appear as a development in an individual's life cycle from birth through childhood, adulthood, old age and death. Education, illiteracy, unemployment, injustice and rural exodus, are the recurrent themes treated. There is no space for escapism and illusion stories appear sometimes like news items in their faithful portraiture of incidental life; the most significant effects are achieved through the use of proverb maxims, metaphors, hyperbolic and onomatopoeic expressions mostly drawn from oral tradition. The persistent themes often treated in their works lead to stereotyped stories with stereotyped ideas, attitudes and characters, because writers are concerned with drawing types rather than individuals, using simple vernacular language based on everyday speech of uneducated people. The omniscient voice of the first person narrator breaks into the story; a device reminiscent of the traditional storyteller.

"A Midnight Sky" by Nol Alembong (Mould, 1983:50-76) is a satire of the Cameroon public services (ministries and police) where characters, such as an unnamed director, his two secretaries, police officers and other collaborators, are portrayed as types.

The secretaries, Mrs Zambo and Lilian are chatting, not caring the least about work or the insistent knock on the door by a visitor; instead, Mrs "twirling her fingers to enable the nail-varnish she had just used to dry up", her colleague, "what car are you going in for, now that petrol is coming?" (1983:51)

The image of arrogant and unfriendly secretaries, using their offices as beauty salons is familiar in Cameroon. Moreover, the allusion to petrol refers to the peri seventies, when Cameroon was expanding economically thanks to petrol exploitation.

The conversation over the telephone between the director and the Commissioner is typical of the abuse of power and the oppression of one on the other. The Director is asking the Police Commissioner to maltreat and humiliate a young Azongo, who having just graduated with a degree in Philosophy, sent with the Ministry of Education. With this qualification Azongo represents a threat to the director's eyes:

"I will not give you a job! Go elsewhere."

"this rascal out of here" (Mould, 1981 :60)

The story raises the problem of communication between two worlds and the of generations.

“I say you should handle the problem with the seriousness it deserves.”

“Oh, that’s a small problem. I will handle it for you.”

“Teach that small boy to behave well. How dare him think he can kick us out of office because he holds a University degree.”

“Youngsters are funny these days”, the Commissioner agreed.

“We must handle them with care or else they will unseat us.”

“I tell you what? Do you imagine a mere kid trying to show off because he has read philosophy?”

“What is philosophy, by the way? Isn’t it like any other subject on the school programme?”

“But the way those who have done it behave one would think we must put it out of our school programme. Just like mad men those chaps. Please have him well tortured in that cell of yours. He must not forget the day he leapt from the cliff into a pool because he thought himself a good swimmer”.

“Leave that to me, Bob. He will cry in the deep” the Commissioner assured the Director.

“Teach him that he must not play with fire, Jona. Teach him a lesson.” (Mould. 1983:70)

In fact, Philosophy was not taught for some time in Cameroonian schools. Philosophers were considered to be subversive and heretical. The story actually reflects such a view. It displays also a catalogue of disagreeable situations and manners, stressing the sluggishness of Cameroon administration and malevolence of workers from top to bottom.

“Files for examination?, the chief of service asked when Lilian walked in with the bundle in her arm-pit.”

“Yes”, she replied, “the Director wants them back this afternoon.”

He counted the files. “Ten files”, he said, heaving a sigh. “This means I will not go home for break?”

“If it means banding them in this afternoon, yes”, Lilian said.

“The files (the narrator comments), all ten in number, lay in the comfort of the chief of service’s drawers for two cold nights”. (Mould 1983:54)

The story is narrated with irony and humour, and a keen sense of observation in dialogue form which is exploited adds more verve to the narrative structure.

Most of the writers whose works were published in the Mould explored educational themes certainly because many of the writers were at the time students at the University of Yaounde. Many of them deal with students' interaction with other students and with the teachers in an atmosphere which is replete with bribery, corruption, cheating, favouritism, injustice, and promiscuity. Some of the stories which deal with these themes include Peter Abety's "Degree Orals" (1981 :60-71); . Tab Tawang's "The Night of the Act" (1981:90-104); Bole Butake's "The veils of Dan Tama" (1-80:11-23); Ngong Kum Ngong's "The Coming of Mr 'Bonaventure'" (1980:47-67).

The myth of the intellectual (or degree-worship) is central to these stories much in one way or the other, depict the Cameroonian society which has now come attached to materialism of which the university diploma is a symbol, although this invariably receives satiric treatment.

Peter Abety's "Degree Orals" recounts with wry humour, the preparation of Mbangong, a forty-year old university student, for an oral examination in English literature, which instead "takes place" in a beer-parlour owned by Ma-a-adeleine, "a doctor in love-making". Mr Mbangong gets himself thoroughly drunk mixing his drinks outrageously while listening to the amusing stories told by customers. In his inebriations, he forgets about his oral examination and loses his revision notes. The rather humour-filled story is an examination of the sensuousness that now prevails within the society, and this is achieved through counterpointing:

"Seen from afar, he looked more like a young school boy but as you came nearer, his slightly wrinkled face, bony cheeks and sunken eyes left you in no doubt that he was in his early forties ... They called him "teacher" for it was known that he had taught in the primary school for fifteen years before being admitted in the University and was actually in class with his [former] pupils, However, his official age was twenty-five. (Mould 1981 :60)

Not only does Abet highlight the drunkenness of Mr Mbangong, but the situation he creates to cast aspersions on the entire society:

Moreover, the teachers in our University are all of them very highly learned and, objective people will never allow their sentiments to overrule their reason. (Mould, 1981:63)

This is obviously sarcastic especially as we are soon told by one of the char Evina, that:

Our people say that if one finger is oiled it will soil the rest. Teacher don't you think that one teacher can influence the rest of the jury by merely touching them as L'm touching Atangana? (Mould, 1981:63)

The indictment intended is well anchored. Abety goes on to comment excessively centralized nature of the administrative set-up of the country:

Many friends usually come from all over the country to stay with me and follow up their documents in offices here in Yaounde. Some people have taken as long as six months to go through and some have never succeeded at all. But Koti took only two weeks to get his documents through and he has never come back here; I think he could easily get for himself a doctorate in pursuing documents! (Mould 1981:63)

The message does not go unnoticed and the reader is satisfied with the suave: adopted by the narrator.

Different in tone and attitude is Pitt Tah Tawang's "The Night of the Act" a naturalistic and pornographic representation of female students who fall prey to lecherous University lecturers, using their sexuality to pass examinations. Susan a pious and scrupulous girl, loses her virginity at twenty-two when she surrenders to the concupiscence of one of her lecturers, on the counsels of a less virtuous and more experienced friend, Vicky. Says Vicky:

I am in the University for two things. I want a degree by fair or foul means, let it be a degree. With it I'll get the rest of what I need. Open your eyes and you will see that everybody is doing so in one way or the other. Who are you and me to stay behind and watch? (Mould'1981:91-104).

It is evident that the sexual licentiousness demonstrated in this story is symptomatic with the generalized decadence that is to be seen

elsewhere. The lessons to be drawn are underscored by Susan's feeling of remorse after unwillingly subjugating herself to her teacher:

Happy in shame? I'm ashamed of myself. I'm ashamed of these kinds of lecturers. I am ashamed of people who know these things and let them be. Vicky. If I sit in the faculty, pass exams by offering myself to men, get money and service through sex, will I really be doing good or bad to myself or to my country (Mould 1981: 104).

The woman here is simply a sexual tool and no more. She is forced to expose herself to promiscuous men to obtain what, normally should be her due. The great majority of the women, it would seem succumb to the facile way of obtaining things, yet, like Susan, many of them question this and not only will resist, but simply reject their continual use as sex-objects.

In "The Travails of Dan Tama", Bole Butake's heroine, Mable, a pretty, egotist but unintelligent young lady is determined to gain access into the Queen of the Rosary College, Okoyong. The entrance examination has to be written for her by her "un-loved" boyfriend, Dan Tarna, disguised as a girl. Butake demonstrates a rather critical attitude of the female gender in this story, whom he sees as a temptress, and evil, and who leads to man's perdition. A similar image of woman is to be seen in Ngong Kum Ngong's "The Coming of Mr Bonaventure". Solange is involved in a triangular love-relationship with her school mate and boy-friend, Jean Paul, and her French Professor, Mr Bonaventure. This relationship results in the eventual drop in the performance at school of Jean -Paul and the commission of examination fraud by Mr Bonaventure who is determined to see her pass at all cost. In both stories, failure in fraudulent enterprises is in itself an indication of the possibility of retribution.

It is clear that what these writers try to do is to portray the aberrations with which their societies are fraught in the hope of changing these. The four stories we have seen so far deal with the academic situation with its bearing on the future of any country. If decadence has become anchored in these institutions, then there seems to be no hope for the society, unless there are profound changes.

The disintegration of the educational system is seen to be a corollary of the rural-urban dichotomy with its attendant escalation of violence, poverty, unemployment and depravity. In "The Way of the

City” (Mould 1891: 205-213), Bole Butake attempts a naturalistic description of the cruel and squalid life of the city where the individual is deprived of his own identity, dignity and humanity.

The way of the city was the way of hardship for the common man. In order to survive in the city you had to become a crook, a thief, a liar. (Mould 1991: 213)

The same theme of the individual wavering between tradition and modernity, receives full expression in Butake’s *Betrothal without Libation* (Mould 1983: 80- 86) and in Nol Alembong’s “Lost in the Labyrinth” (Mould 1985:3-13) . Both narrators inform us of the customs and mores of their societies using as examples marriage and religion. Both works are so replete with these that they read more like ethnographic studies rather than creative writing, especially with the constant recourse which is made to the use of the folk tale’s rhetorical devices, including proverbs, metaphors and interrogative forms.

At one point in “*Betrothal without Libation*”, the first person narrator stops the story and offers food to his friend who is visiting him:

My brother, I see you are tired. I will “tell you the rest of the story some other time ...I have asked Gregory to roast a huge cock and prepare us some rice, foo foo-corn. Just the way we do it at home, see? (Mould, 1983:83-84)

The constant use of “My brother”, “My friend”. “As I was telling you”, at the beginning of each paragraph is colloquial and reminiscent of the traditional storyteller. Furthermore, the numerous rhetorical questions of the narrator in “Lost in the Labyrinth” is also a device used by the traditional story-teller to keep his audience awake and attentive to the unravelling of the story.

II. Form and Meaning: From Signifying to Moralizing

If satire, irony, proverbial wisdom are used in the short story for didactic moralistic purposes, moralizing is also achieved through “signifying” for which refer to Louis Gates, Jr. (1984: 286-321) for ample definition:

Perhaps only *Tar Baby* is as enigmatic and compelling a figure from Afro-American mythic discourse as is that oxymoron, the

Signifying Monkey (I). The ironic reversal of a received racist image of black as simianlike, the Signifying Monkey - he who dwells at the margins of discourse - ever punning, ever trooping, every embodying the ambiguities of language - is our trope for repetition and revision, indeed, is our trope of chiasmus itself, repeating and simultaneously” reversing in one deft, discursive act ... signifying is a trope that subsumes other rhetorical tropes, including metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony (the “master” tropes), and also hyperbole, litotes and metalepsis .. In black discourse, “signifying” means modes of figuration itself. When one signifies, as Kimberley W. Benston puns, “one tropes-a-dope”. The Black rhetorical tropes subsumed under signifying would include “marking”, “loud-talking”, “specifying”, “testifying”, “calling out” (of one’s name), “sounding”, “rapping” and “playing the dozens”.

Signifying is a question of survival for African-Americans who were taught how “to signify” in order to avoid the master; for the Africans, particularly f Cameroon short story writers, signifying goes beyond the scope of mask wearing It is moralizing, using rhetorical tropes, hyperbolic expressions, proverbs, tricks what Abrahams calls a “technique of indirect argument or persuasion, a language implication” (Gates, 1984:286).

To illustrate our point, we shall turn to examples of signification in Cameroon short stories which point out morals and which appear as some of the device borrowed from folk tales. In the story “Fonki’s Plight” (Mould 1980: 78-85) b Makuchi Nfah, /Fonki’s father uses indirection, implication, analogy, allusion simile to urge his son to get married; he stresses an analogy between Fonki being able to “buy” himself a wife and to buy zinc to roof his parents’ house; apart from allusion to money, there is also an idea of responsibility behind the act of getting married which means being able to provide shelter to one’s wife and relatives, and to show consequently one’s adherence to the established laws. the father “signifies upon, his son’s laziness, establishing a whole structure of signification related to concept of education (good manners, observance of moral codes, respect of ancestry beliefs, hard work, et.). The father, being the signifier, appeals to the son through figurative language:

“If you cannot roof my house, then you better get yourself a wife”, his father had said looking mockingly at him”

“If you cannot put some hard white-man cloth here to protect me and my wife from rain wills you be able to buy a wife? Or you think we are still children who need rainfall for growth?”(Mould 1980:78)

“The children who need rainfall for growth” is a metaphorical concept in which children are compared to plants that need rain to grow. This image is persistent throughout the stories, and can be related to similar images of women compared to a piece of land. In Kenjo Jumban’s “Murder in Vekovi”, the twenty-year old heroine Jayo, is referred to as “a ploughed fertile field ready for planting”. (Mould 1981:8)

This metaphor is repeated in the hyperbolic description of a woman’s beauty and love provided by Butake in “The Travails of Dan Tama”: “to say that she was beautiful will be completely unsatisfactory because her beauty was that of a full moon in a cloudless sky in the open grassland at the beginning of the rains. A sublime beauty beyond any words” (Mould 1980: 13) A similar father-signifier figure is again represented in Nol Alembong’s “Lost in the Labyrinth” where the father uses figurative language for didactic purposes, to appeal to his son’s respect of traditional and ancestral beliefs.

Maybe you want to put an end to the small tree that is our family. How many branches do you think it has? One. You alone. Your mother and I were the roots and stem together. Now she is gone ahead. She has answered the call of her ancestors. I am now the roots and the stem alone. So I need many more branches. The tree must continue to grow, or we are finished. I want you to give me the branches. You must go home and see our fathers and ancestors. They are just beings. They will not eat you. You must go and see them. (Mould 1980:4)

The story is punctuated with many rhetorical questions asked by the third person narrator’s voice which convey wisdom and evoke folk tales’ storyteller who addresses his audience in interrogative form.

“Murder in Vekovi” (Mould 1980: 7-24) is a vehicle for the expression of jealousy, man’s vanity, and woman’s resistance to man’s domination as a culmination of human action which eventually results

to murder. There is an effective use of signification to attack the attitude of un submissive women and to highlight the dangers of feelings such as jealousy, pride, and lack of self-confidence. Jayo uses language of indirection and metonymic expressions to signify upon her husband's impotency; after two years of marriage, she has not been able to "send any news to her parents", (euphemism for pregnancy), and to "cook pepper soup for the child" (birth celebration). Accusing Shamka for being the cause of their barren union, she laughs at him:

My husband, hi, hi, hi! My husband, whose mother have you made me and whose father are you? (Mould 1981: 12)

In traditional African societies, the generally accepted view of sterility is to shift the responsibility onto women, whereas in "Murder in Vekovi", the blame is laid upon Shamka. The author gives her a feminist view to show that sterility is not sexist but natural. Similarly the series of murders perpetrated by Shamka, show the consequences of women's disobedience and the stupidity of masculine vanity and jealousy:

She was going to Vekovi to look for the opportunity I was unable to give her. Is there a greater insult to one's manhood? (Mould 1981:22)

Although the allusion to woman's tongue may sound misogynous, it can be interpreted as an appeal to women's submissiveness as a moral code of behaviour in African societies.

If she had given me the pipe to smoke and said nothing further, then this story might have had a different ending. But she refused me her pipe and went on to insult me." "A woman's tongue is a terrible thing". "I tell you that when the world will come to an end the cause will be a woman's tongue". (Mould 1981 :22)

In African societies, women's silence is much appreciated and is considered a virtue .

In Cameroon, the trickster figure of the Signifying Monkey represented folk tales by the King's (tortoise), Tangka'a (chameleon) (Mbangwana, 1985: 74). the witty monkey, the hare, among others, are transposed in the shortest characters such as the madman in George Atabong's "The Madman" (Mould 1983:71-74), which is a modernized version of a folk tale with an allegorical representation of madness variously by nakedness, wit, wisdom, rebirth, etc. The madman trick is

madness that he uses to “signify upon” apparent sanity: is the madman re mad and the sane man really sane? In the story, the madman reverses the role determining and controlling the actions of sane people. The revisionist theory madness is implied in this context and corresponds to traditional African ideology the madman. is said to possess more wit and Wisdom than folly, he belongs both natural and supernatural worlds, because he is already experiencing on earth, his “after-death life”.

Another aspect of moralization through signification is expressed in German Nchanji’s “A Bundle for Love” (Mould, 1983: 18-22) which is a representation love in a signifying text. The whole story is built on an iconographic representation of concepts, love, strength, conformity to traditional laws, by a bundle which pies an intermediary role between both the silent lovers, Mbatl and Paulina, between Mbatl and his in-laws, and Paulina and her parents.

A good suitor is judged by the bundle he brings ... A good suitor brings

heart-wood, strong and sturdy wood. (Mould 1983: 18)

The adjectives “strong” and “sturdy” refer to the robustness of Mbatl; to man’s muscles as well as to the relations with his in-laws and with Paulina; bundle stands for Mbatl’s love which keeps the room warm and cosy through night as would a lover.

Neither the lovers, nor the parents or in-laws need to speak, their actions

thoughts are determined by the “sign”, a bundle, which is to be read and interpret as would Esu, the Yoruba mythology, “the Black Interpreter” (Gates, 1984:287), the master in sign reading.

“A Bundle for love” centres around the story of bride-price, but the author uses the technique of indirect argument or persuasion, a language of implication gesture, metaphor, to approach the subject of traditional betrothal and to teach you people how to behave on such occasions. Everyone has a duty to fulfil: if the sui “is judged by the bundle he brings”, the fiancée should also give an example of go conduct; she should be alert, hard-working, self-effacing and respectful:

... And Paulina would spring up immediately from her sitting place come right out, smile and shy away from his hand as usual and simply

say in greeting, “Have you come?” and lead him in.” (Mould 1981 :22) “She had beautiful limbs and was well-known in the village for the large farms she owned and tilled single-hand ... A girl who kept at once many huts and bears loaded with com was the one that truly deserve to be his wife. “ (Mould, 1981:22).

Although “ A Bundle for Love” is highly didactic, there is no over moralizing but rather, a judicious use of traditions and customs to imply ethical values and good behaviour. The imagination is powerful. This is, indeed a perfect characterization of a “trickster-lover”.

Conclusion

We cannot presently bring an answer to the question raised in the introduction, namely the concern that Cameroon short story needs to be defined independently from existing traditions, since the corpus is not yet broad enough to be totally representative. However, we can say as preliminary results, that the Cameroon Anglophone short story illustrates the contemporary debate among critics involving the question whether works of art (fiction included) should be taken as evidence of culture and history due to the amount of traditions and customs pervading creative and fictional works.

In our view, art for art’s sake is incompatible with the state of disharmony, poverty, confusion and chaos characterizing African countries today. In such a situation, a writer in Africa can write nothing but protest, satire, perhaps educorated with humour, laughter because of the African penchant for laughing, especially in self-mockery. This is a means of “signifying” as he communicates-messages, relevant to himself and to his environment. Unfortunately, with this penchant, is the danger of excessive didacticism and an undue use of proverbs which may end up making their works sententious, solemn and rather pompously moralizing and excessively propagandist. The writer, as a visionary, should go beyond criticism to create new paradigms intended to redynamize his society, and this can only be achieved through aesthetic refinement of the medium used. If the short story writer in Cameroon continues to draw his material from tradition, customs and everyday life, this is justified by the writers’ role as spokesman for his society, his perennial search of identity and

authenticity, his expression of a communal angst, and his sometimes sentimental attachment to ancestral and cultural values.

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PROSE

Prisoner Without A Crime d'Albert Mukong: Une Etude De l'univers Carcéral

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Le livre d'Albert Mukong, *Prisoner without a crime* (1) n'est pas une œuvre fiction. C'est le témoignage d'un homme, l'histoire d'un destin. La nature autobiographique de ce texte ne lui dénie pas les inspirations annexes qu'il contient. Il peut apparaître tour à tour historique: il série alors des faits, des particule déictiques à valeur temporelle. Il s'octroie les allures d'un texte de nature démonstrative, didactique. Par moments l'autobiographie juxtapose des évènements à connotations fantastiques, le monde superstant intervient pour camper un atmosphère simultanément carcérale et ontologique. Le propos de la présente étude est de démontrer que sous la plume d'A. Mukong domine une représentation, une image. celle de la prison que connote le titre. Elle prolifère en une multitude d'évocations, de domaines:

1. Les évènements liés à l'histoire, c'est-à-dire au temps. et à l'espace et don la résultante est

2. la prison psychologique, le mal-être permanent. la guerre spirituelle qui aboutissent, par le biais du sentiment de rejet, à l'arrestation et à la découverte

3. des prisons concrètes et de leurs succursales,

Nous commencerons par jeter un coup d'œil au concours des circonstances liées à la vie de l'auteur et qu'il sélectionne lui-même comme les plus fondamentale dans l'explication de l'image mentale qu'il a développée, dans l'élucidation de la vision du monde que les évènements de l'histoire l'ont obligée à adopter.

Des signes onomastiques '(Nasser. Kenyatta, Nkrumah, Ahidjo), des faits historico-politiques (la crise du Canal de Suez de 1956. l'indépendance du Cameroun, la guerre froide) (2). Un de l'auteur (23

ans) aide à justifier le feu du nationalisme qui brûle dans les veines du jeune A. Mukong contre les injustices du colonialisme, et qui le décide à entrer dans la lutte (3). Associé au magazine *The Cameroon Voice* que fréquentaient des membres du KNDP (4) (sans être affilié un parti) A. Mukong révèle son choix politique et son échelle de valeurs en ce domaine: la réunification d'abord et l'indépendance du Cameroun ensuite. Cet ordre de valeurs politiques va constituer la première dissonance entre A. Mukong et l' élu qui avait bénéficié de son choix électoral de 1959. A. Mukong détecte dans les changements de visions politiques des élus des pays colonisés, la sempiternelle tactique du conquérant colonisateur le diviser pour régner qui assure simultanément sa domination et la pérennité de ses intérêts. C'est en partant de ce point de vue qu'A. Mukong justifie son option pour le programme de l'U.P.C. (l'Union des Populations du Cameroun) qui préconisait la réunification avant l'indépendance. Ce choix lui découvre les réticences de la Grande-Bretagne et des Etats-Unis, dans leur aveugle opposition au communisme de l'époque.

A. Mukong explique alors les appréhensions que les nationalistes nourrissaient vis – à - vis d'une indépendance de façade, octroyée par la puissance colonisatrice à ses supérieurs, avant la réunification. Craignant de se retrouver virtuellement "absorbé" (5) dans la République du Cameroun (6), A. Mukong relate alors sa vision du referendum constitutionnel de février 1960 au Cameroun et la même stratégie des élus colonisés à la solde d'intérêts étrangers à la cause du peuple: manipulations des suffrages, menaces d'arrestations résultant en la nécessité de l'exil.

Albert Mukong relate ensuite l'opposition des premiers élus à l'idée de l'indépendance du Cameroun qu'ils trouvaient appropriée à une époque ultérieure. A. Mukong écrit: "it needed ten years before such an issue could be examined." (p.14).

La dichotomie s'installe ainsi entre les vues des nationalistes et celles des élus contemporains, créant un climat de terrorisme étatique qui s'annonce avec l'arrestation et précise les contours de cette image de la prison, véritable métaphore obsédante sous la plume d'Albert Mukong. Nous découvrons la B.M.M. (Brigade Mixte Mobile) par le truchement du personnage délégué, La Brigade' de Recherche en

pleine opération, par un petit matin du 6 octobre 1970: “While honest citizens were still sleeping.” (p.12).

Les méthodes de torture et la bestialisation fort éloignées de toute organisation sociale policée et assimilant l'être de raison à la bête qui n'est pas créée à l'image de Dieu. D'image de la prison prend des connotations tragiques et nostalgiques lorsqu'A. Mukong évoque le développement de l'homme intérieur chez nos ancêtres immédiats, à-propos de nos traditions, par rapport au caractère déliquescents et corrompu des influences occidentales. L'image de la prison prend les proportions de l'aliénation du colonisé, coince entre la représentation idyllique, presque mythologique d'une Afrique ancestrale, et un présent colonial et postcolonial où la vie n'est pas la sœur du rêve.

L'image de la prison naît ainsi des luttes de l'histoire (7) qui installent l'être de raison dans le mal-être, incapable qu'il est de se départir de sa lucidité.

Observateur averti des événements, citoyen sourcilieux et jaloux de ses droits, A. Mukong nous raconte ce mal-être permanent, l'exil, la hantise de l'arrestation, le sentiment d'être la dupe d'épouvantails désuets dans le champ d'autrui, la censure.

Toutes ces évocations figurent la prison de l'accident historique, l'atmosphère carcérale du colonialisme. À côté de cet aspect “institutionnel”, socio-politique et psychologique de l'image de la prison, se dresse la panoplie de prisons concrètes qui font **partie de la relation du scripteur-témoin. L'antichambre de la prison ce sont les services de recherches et d'enquêtes.**

Leurs signes onomastiques (SEDOC, DIREDOC) (8) connotent le phénomène de rejet, la subversion, l'angoisse, l'arrestation subreptice, l'enquête, la torture, la “souffrance des familles, la peur, la douleur, autant des traits qui précisent les contours de cet espace symbolique, concrétise par l'évocation d'autres signes onomastiques, toponymes sinistres d'une époque localisable: Mantoum, Tchollire.

Notes

1. A. Mukong, *Prisoner without a crime*, Paris, Editions Nubia Press, 1989,

2. Ajouter aces évènements historiques le procès de Jomo Kenyatta, l'époque (1957-1961) pour L'histoire du Cameroun.

3. A. Mukong écrit a ce propos: "People were motivated by the love of country and not the mercenary turn politics took at independence and after." p. 4.

A. Mukong est soucieux de reveler le role du choix moral qu'il situe audela des choses qui appartiennent a Cesar: " I wonder whether we take note of the fact that there is a conscience issue in the act of voting and that when the conscience is called into play, Caesar has no more authority." (p. 67).

4. K.N.D.P Kamerun National Democratic Party.

5. A. Mukong ecrit: "Ahidjo had been nominated in the early fifties to represent Cameroun in the consultative Assembly in France and there he was found tube very willing tool in the hands of France." op.cit. p.13

A. Mukong perpétue le souci de veiller sur ses droits et sur ceux de sa communauté. Il relate, se referent a des evenements de 1972:

"I was very angry with the proposed change to the constitution. I considered it a further betrayal and enslavement of the Anglophone Cameroonians who had ever since 1961 lost the right to be consulted on his destiny". (ibid. p.80)

6. A. Mukong ecrit a ce propos en presentant les protagonistes de la guerre d'indépendance: "the struggle in the French colonies was between the nationalist forces and France or its representatives. In order to promote its assimilation policy France found puppets in its various colonies who were happy to be called French citizens and used to promote the programme of assimilation".

A. Mukong points un doigt accusateur: "Ahidjo was the first traitor who, had betrayed Cameroonian reunification". (ibid. p. 107)

7. A. Mukong. *ibid*, p.56. BMM: Brigade Mixte Mobile; DIRDOC: Direction Generate de la Documentation; SEDOC: Service des Etudes et de Documentation.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 69

The Black Condition: Material Wretchedness Versus Moral Integrity In Remy Gilbert Medou-Mvomo's *Le Journal De Faliou*

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Abstract

Few Cameroonian authors in search of self-fulfilment and wholesome have been so committed, penetrating and outspoken in depicting the wretched pathetic condition of the black man both at home and abroad, as Remy Gilbert Medou-Mvomo.

This paper sets out therefore to highlight and elucidate the wandering character of Medou-Mvomo's protagonist in *Le journal de Faliou* (1972) for whom self-fulfilment is hard to come because of the critical and desperate problems of unemployment that beset the modern African intellectual, who has become not only a misfit but also a "wanted" person in his decadent post-independent society.

Having been reduced to rootless individuals by a dehumanizing system Medou Mvomo's characters drift painfully and desperately in search of recognition love, identity, a means of livelihood or even mere shelter from the hostile environment, but thanks to their hard moral principles and optimism they still put on cheerful willing faces to contribute their honest share towards national construction and harmonious living.

Because of material wretchedness wrought upon them by a vile, unscrupulous, insensitive and inhuman system, they hardly ever fulfil themselves and' often than not, barely manage to sustain the delicate balance between life and The paper also attempts to unfold the regrettable "underworld" sub-human con of Medou-Mvomo's characters in *Le journal de Faliou* with the aim of see' equitable solution to the material and moral void that has plagued our beloved

naturally endowed nation today placing it visibly among the poorest on the African continent.

Introduction

The crucial problem of individual self-fulfilment and authenticity in post-independent African states has since been the concern of many African writers, critics, and political leaders alike. But few Cameroonian authors in search of wholesome being have been so committed, penetrating and outspoken in depicting the wretched and pathetic condition of the black man, both at home and abroad, as my Gilbert Medou-Mvomo. His three works to date: *Afrika Ba 'a* (1969), *Mon amour en noir et blanc*, (1971) and *Le journal de Faliou* (1972) are eloquent testimonies of this. The uprooted and wandering character of Medou-Mvomo's protagonists for whom self-fulfilment is hard to come by is, to a large extent, a reflection of the novelist's personal experiences (I) accounting for the near desperate but unbending and optimistic quest for personal and socio-political balance recorded in his works.

Afrika Ba'a is concerned with the multiple socio-political problems of rural/urban migration and the difficult choice between materialistic city tendencies and reliance on the natural potentialities of the soil in order to enhance the well-being of post-independence African rural communities. *Mon amour en noire et blanc* examines personal relations across the complex psycho-sociological character of black and white relationships and the problems of interracial love and marriage in a Western European context. *Le journal de Faliou* which will constitute the central focus of this paper, tackles the critical and desperate personal problems of unemployment and material wretchedness that beset the modern African intellectual, who has become not only a misfit but also a "wanted" person in this decadent post-independent society.

In our examination of material wretchedness versus moral or spiritual integrity in Medou Mvomo's *Le journal de Faliou*, room will also be provided for material from his other works and those of other authors whenever necessary and relevant to the discussion.

Medou-Mvomo is chiefly preoccupied with this deplorable and perilous subhuman condition of the post-independent African, the laissez-faire attitude of African leaders and the resulting dehumanizing psycho-sociological racial and economic perils that confront his black protagonists in their legitimate struggle to keep body and soul together.

Set in a world heavily afflicted by corruption, tribalism, nepotism, hatred, opportunism, ignorance and misery, Medou-Mvomo's characters are permanently used and torn by these social maladies. Having been reduced to rootless individuals, wandering from place to place, from one situation to another - drifting painfully desperately in search of recognition, love, identity, a means of livelihood or even mere shelter from the hostile environment, they still, thanks to their hard moral convictions and optimism put on cheerful willing faces to contribute their honest are towards national construction and harmonious living. But because of material wretchedness wrought on them by a vile, power drunk, unscrupulous, insensitive and inhuman system, they hardly ever fulfil themselves and, more often than not, barely manage to sustain the delicate balance between life and death.

Le journal de Faliou which adopts the diary form, like Ferdinand Oyono' *Une vie de boy* (date) records the daily activities of Faliou, the young protagonist who is unable to obtain a job in spite of his university aspirations. Uprooted a frustrated, he struggles on painfully but steadfastly to earn an honest living by using his talents as a musician in a society in which nepotism, venality, opportunism jealousy, fraud, hatred and ignorance still firmly remain an accepted way of life.

Faliou's migratory adventures in desperate quest for a living (away from warm atmosphere of his wife and children) during which he is exposed to the worst sordid misery co-existing with the most insolent luxury, stretch across the who length of the country reaching into the neighbouring Republic of Chad. Commenting on *Le journal de Faliou*, Emile Snyder (1976:75) remarks that :

Cette course sans fin pour survivre pourrit toutes les relations humaines. Les vieilles valeurs traditionnelles de L'Afrique telles que civilité, fierté, un sens des taches collectives, sont vite rejetées au profit de la vénalité et de l'apport l'opportunisme.

Taking off quite significantly from Yaounde (the hero's home and administrative capital) for Douala (the commercial seat), we witness and live the sub-hum condition of the railway system which links the two largest cities in the country, through the perceptive and penetrating eyes of Faliou:

J'attends l'autorail de 13h15 qui me trainera jusqu'à Douala. Trainer est bien le terme. Comment qualifier autrement le fait pour un train de mettre près de huit heures pour parcourir, à l'allure prétendue express, 307 km, dont 300 de descente et 7 de terrain plat? Trainer, je crois que c'est le mot.

This is the neglected laissez-faire condition of the railway system, a vital social and economic factor capable of enhancing or jeopardizing the socio-economic health of the nation. How can African nations progress without an efficient transport and communication system? It is this deplorable condition of the railway system which sparks off the heated debate in the train "si oui ou non le noir peut passer du blanc" (p. 8), since power which lies in the "barrel of the gun" is the exclusive monopoly of the white.

Meanwhile, back home in Yaounde, Faliou leaves behind an equally uncertain and lamentable family situation:

Je me suis séparé de ma femme ce matin. Elle a pris le car au lever du jour avec les enfants. Elle pleurait, J'ai bien failli en faire autant. Combien de temps va donc durer la séparation. Que fera-t-elle sans moi ... et moi, sans elle?

The almost complete absence of harmony in personal relations as a result of the unavailability of job opportunities or rather a conscious effort not to put the right persons in the places, is apparent right from the home base and administrative sea Yaounde. Faliou's first appointment in Douala with the Palm-Beach Night Club, however, offers him attractive conditions but the system expects and compels him to live in accordance with "les lois du milieu":

Un musicien autochtone qui débute dans cette ville doit se loger d'abord dans une cabane et de préférence a "Nkane", le quartier le plus mal famé de la ville. S'il veut, il peu coucher sur un lit avec matelas, mais s'il couche par terre sur une natte ou un matelas, il est bien vu du milieu et généralement on ne le dérange pas. De plus, il lui faut au plus vite choisir une "fille", Choisir ou bien se laisser choisir. La fille sera sa titulaire. La nourriture se limite strictement au pain de dix francs, pate de cinq francs bananes de dix francs par repas. On peut varier ou alterner avec le haricot de dix francs et des beignets de dix francs. Activités connexes a la musique: dormir, courir les filles, aller au cinéma, lires des roman-photo, assister aux répétitions. (JF: pp. 15-16).

Such stigmatization of people into social categories destroys both individual aspiration and healthy personal relations, thereby reinforcing the sub-standard conditions of the poor and widening the gap between the latter and the most materially endowed.

The situation is extremely awkward, cruel and humiliating for young Faliou, whose coming to the city has been motivated by the desire to forge ahead, make money and maintain his family left back home in the village, now finds himself settling in the midst of whores (most of whom have escaped from the misery of polygamous homes and seek the lucrative, comfortable shelter of the city), impatiently awaiting his monthly pay packet. And indeed "les lois du milieu" tap him financially, sexually and intellectually - reducing his academic aspirations to the level of picture magazines, contaminating him with venereal disease and subjecting him to an incomplete, monotonous but often scarce diet of "pain de dix francs: pate de cinq francs, bananes de dix francs [ou] haricot de dix francs et des beignets de dix francs (p.16).

The figure ten symbolizes the wretched material standard cut out for many Cameroonians of the underworld class like Faliou. This appears as hard to surmount as a wall. Faliou is contaminated physically (venereal disease); materially (ten 'francs); intellectually (picture magazines) and so on. Man or rather Cameroonian man becomes what his environment wants and makes him to be.

Faliou's perilous and unstable condition (always living on the fringe of experience tossed between life and death) mirrors that of the

author, who appears to have been set eternally “on the run” by a depraved society which refuses to come to terms, at least practically, with his ideals. His predicament is, in many ways, identical to Ambroise’s in *Mon amour en noir et blanc* and Kambara’s in *Afrika Ba’a*. Besides sharing the common experience of defending their ideals they also share the embittering solitary, frustrating but rewarding experience of city life away from home (Kambara from his fiancée Ada, Ambroise from parental affection and Faliou from the love and sexual comfort of his wife).

The socio-psychological tensions and the experience of the over-demanding nature of the city which subjects Faliou to the “protection ‘of a prostitute, away from his wife, culminate in his transformation into a wiser and more tolerant man. Thus, when he goes back to the village, it is to seek reconciliation (although in vain), with his wife, in spite of her infidelity which, in effect, can be pardonable because of his long absence from home. Thrown in and out of his Palm-Beach Night Club job Faliou, like Kambara in *Afrika Ba’a* tries the employment bureau, the sole office authorized to receive and process the applications of job-seekers. But the result is again intensified corruption, tribalism, and nepotism. Faliou’s internal revolt is a result of the disgust and frustration he experiences in the face of his predicament:

Le chômeur est d’une part obligé par la loi, et d’autre part livré pieds et poings liés au bon vouloir des fonctionnaires, chargés du placement ... C’est alors que) on fait connaissance avec la vraie signification du tribalisme, du népotisme, et de la cupidité. J’ai fait la queue deux semaines durant devant les grilles du bureau de placement avec des centaines d’autres chômeurs. J’ai finalement renoncé. Fatigue? Oui, peut-être mais écœure surtout ... Pourquoi ai-je donné la sottise d’aller me tuer sur les bancs universitaires? Où donc est l’avantage que donnent les études dans cette ville où, dit-on, on a tant besoin d’instruits? ... JF, p.28)

Medou-Mvomo is inspired from real life situations. He is here satirizing what has become common knowledge: in a corrupt political system in which merit is non-existent and nepotism rampant, “le

diplome appartient a l'individu et la fonction l'Etat" becomes a leitmotiv.

It is the cause of these unfortunate African intellectuals that Medou- Mvomo and his protagonist strive to defend and protect. By endowing Faliou with strong moral ideals by which he struggles to abide in his untiring, legitimate quest of authenticity, moral integrity and dignity, the novel is, in fact, calling for the triumph of merit over mediocrity and human dignity over material and other consideration.

Forced into an endless migratory existence, Faliou wanders painfully but perseveringly across the entire country and beyond. From Douala, he goes to Kribi where he takes up the post of principal of a private college, then followed by a brief return to Yaounde and back once more to Douala, this time to join a new orchestra, the 'Anges Bleu'. After playing at a wedding ceremony in Nkongsamba, Faliou and his group return to Douala to leave almost immediately for Fort-Lamy (today known as Ndjamena in Chad), where they are hired to play at the New Year's dance. Back in Douala with 40,000 francs from his Fort-Lamy trip, Faliou hurries to Yaounde to see his family, returns to his post as principal in Kribi for a while, then goes back to Douala to re-join his Palm-Beach Orchestra. Later, he forms his orchestra and seeks success in Edea, but is obliged to return to Douala. Reduced to a homeless pauper, he solicits financial assistance from the Red Cross Society, to enable him to embark on his return route to Yaounde.

This is the catalogue of events covering Faliou's seventeen months struggle for survival and search for identity during which he experiences inhuman as well as the human character in his relationships with the complex people of the diverse Cameroonian society, in its most sordid and its most luxurious conditions. There is a similarity between the Red Cross Movement in *Le journal de Faliou* and the Religious Group in Ferdinand Oyono's *Chemin d' Europe*, which offer financial assistance to Faliou and Aki Barnabas, respectively. Such benevolent institutions serve as relief agents to the misery in the novels providing the temporal moral respite necessary for the continuation of the struggle.

The saying that "a rolling stone gathers no moss" is significant in Faliou's case. His multiple wanderings in a desperate quest for equilibrium reduce him to rootless and penniless individual. These

wanderings are symbolic of the fleeting character of personal relations. Faliou's trip to Nkongsamba, however, is of special significance to his life because it provides the complete contrast to his wretched condition in that he is exposed to a town and people of a different kind from Douala, Edie, Kribi and Yaounde. The fact that the same musicians who, in Douala, are pushed into a proletariat class are given red carpet treatment, on the same level as the other guests elsewhere in the same country, stresses the importance which ought to be accorded to human dignity regardless of profession or class. It equally mirrors, as I mentioned earlier, the rich complex diversity of the Cameroonian people and points to the fact that their society is not completely demoralized. There is hope perhaps, of its rescue, in the not too distant future.

The reception of Faliou and his band of musicians in Fort-Lamy is even more glamorous and lavish. They, too, are able, through music to rise, at least for a moment, to the luxurious heights of the 'happy few':

Le directeur [de L'hôtel] lui-même se charge de nous conduire dans nos appartements: quatre chambres à deux lits sont à notre disposition: climatiseurs, téléphones, bain, douche, eau froide, chaude, bref tout le confort moderne. Pour nous, on s'en doute peut-être, nous sommes au Palais Présidentiel Je me dis mon petit Faliou, voilà où même quelquefois la musique: là où logent habituellement que des Ministres, des Diplomates, de grands industriels. JF: 57).

In the above excerpt, Medou-Mvomo contrasts the earthly heaven of the 'happy few' with the wretched and miserable condition of the destitute. He exposes the folly of those blacks who tend to see happiness only in terms of Western material comfort, food and drink, to the detriment of local food-stuffs. Many a critic has seen in Guillaume Oyono-Mbia's play, *Trois prétendants ... un mari* (1959), a satire of the Bulu and Ewondo predilection for imported Western food and drink. This attitude negates the widely preached "consommer camerounais". If Africa and Cameroon in particular has to depend on the West for everything, then white-black balance is doomed for ever to remain a utopia.

Another moral lesson, this time of a domestic and philosophical nature, evolves from Faliou's discovery of his wife's infidelity and flight:

Tu as encore beaucoup de choses à défendre, vieux, me fait [le garçon qui m'a guide jusqu'ici] s'interposant entre le type et moi. Malgré la perte de ta femme ne fais pas une bêtise qui te condamnerait définitivement, Pense aux enfants qui te restent, eux au moins ne te trahiront pas et ce serait peut-être ta meilleure revanche. Perdre une femme, après tout, c'est bien peu de chose et en d'autres circonstances et lieux. je t'aurais conseillé d'en rire à plein poumons. C'est bien peu dans l'existence d'un homme. Bien des hommes, et pas seulement de petits gens comme nous, en ont perdu ainsi deux, trois, quatre, dix. Ce qui ne les empêche pas de vivre, de rire, d'écraser avec le pied toutes ces vexations et de faire preuve de dignité en passant l'éponge sur ces souillures. (JF: 73).

This philosophy: the hardening of character in the face of the tribulations of life, explains the determinedly optimistic attitude of Medou-Mvomo's characters in their relentless struggle for survival. It reflects Mbella Sonne Dipoko's idea that the world is essentially tough and that, in order to survive in it, man must employ more toughness to combat and counter balance it. (Njinjoh, 1994) It is the struggle to keep up human dignity and abide by their moral standards that drives Faliou to seek reconciliation with his unfaithful runaway wife. His endless problems and sufferings arise from his acceptance of the principle of moral integrity or dignity in personal relations. Such a philosophy makes him a misfit in a depraved materialistic society for which material values are measuring norms that classify human beings by determining their status. Having therefore chosen the difficult route in life: that of honesty and dignity in personal relations, Faliou falls a victim of his own choice in that he is exploited persecuted, ridiculed and thrown into the gutters of the unfriendly night:

Il m'arrive de porter mon pantalon, une semaine durant. Jour et nuit sans le quitter. J'ai peu de barbe et mes cheveux sont de véritables crins à présent que je ne les peigne plus. (JF: 129)

The accusing finger here should not be directed at Faliou alone. It is the unscrupulous system that is largely responsible for his fate. His solitude and rejection by his black community, like that of Ambroise in the white society in *Mon amour en noir et blanc*, exposes the tragedy of the modern African intellectual who in many circumstances is considered as a misfit and rejected by both the African and Western worlds. It is the materially deprived characters, like the guide who directs Faliou to discover the infidelity of his runaway wife, who try to understand and appear truly sympathetic with Faliou's predicament, throwing in a word of advice where necessary:

Il baisse la tête avant d'ajouter. Mais penses-y c'est dans ton intérêt de faire agir la loi, et non de faire justice soi-même, c'est toi qui est universitaire. Tu dois comprendre ces choses-là. (JF: 73).

Faliou's struggle, like Kambara's in *Afrika Ba'a*, is a quest to regain his "lost" place in society, by uplifting his people from mediocrity to a state of excellence. The non-conformist and defiant attitudes he displays against the corrupt social system however, have their positive and negative sides. Although this individualist attitude leads him to profound self-discovery and a feeling of self-fulfilment and self-sufficiency, he is still seen as, and remains an uprooted alien in a society in which collectivity is of paramount significance.

Medou-Mvomo turns out to be a stout defender of hard moral principles: merit and the dignity of man. It is through these guidelines that he believes, his decadent society can renew itself and hope to attain authenticity and harmony. He advocates hard work sustained by a renewed scale of values. His moral appeal to the black community is often expressed through a chain of uninterrupted rhetorical questions:

Comment veut-on qu'il y ait du travail pour tous lorsque ceux qui sont pourvoyeurs d'emplois ne cherchent à recruter que des employés de telle tribu donnée, que seules les considérations tribales, familiales, sont mises en avant? Pourquoi constate-t-on aussi que les noirs qui font travailler d'autres noirs se croient souvent obligés de se montrer envers ces derniers d'une inhumanité et d'une mauvaise foi déconcertantes? Comment se fait-il que les

membres du groupe ethnique qui. ici. détient à peu près les trois quarts du pouvoir économique ne s'embauchent qu'entre eux, ou alors préfèrent embaucher des européens qu'ils sont obligés de payer deux fois plus cher que des compatriotes de même compétence? (JF: 149)

The answers to these questions will provide a solid foundation for the birth and harmonious growth of a new Cameroonian nation, like the ideal "nation within a nation", provided in Afrika Ba'a, free from corrupt and evil practices. Thus Medou-Mvomo does not content himself with posing unanswered questions. His heroes, other selected characters, groups of institutions, are living examples of the ideal. In *Le journal de Faliou*, the Red cross Society which is significantly styled "la société protectrice des hommes", as we earlier noted, and which is reminiscent of "La Renaissance spirituelle" in Oyono's *Chemin d'Europe*, symbolizes the moral institution the author would like to stand by to provide the positive medium of equilibrium that will permanently watch over and pass fair judgement upon his people.

Faliou's endless drift from place to place, from one situation to another (but always coming back to the starting point) is a reflection of the cynical conception of life which involves a departure, an arrival plus initiation and a return to 'roots'. It also underlines the novelist's concern with "roots" for the purpose of achieving balance and harmony in personal relations.

The protagonist's struggle for existence in *Le journal de Faliou* is similar to Medza's endless quest for authentic being in Mongo Beti's *Mission terminée*, (1957:250) "une vie d'errance à travers les êtres, les idées, les pays et les choses." But the difference between the first and second generation of Cameroonian writers is that, whereas Medza flees from the actual problem and therefore from his "root", Faliou looks optimistically forward to beginning the battle once more from Yaounde, the home base and administrative capital from where he started.

Through long endurance of the multiple tribulations which bring him in touch with a more sordid condition and the most luxurious heights across and beyond his diverse and complex country, Faliou acquires a world of experience and maturity. This qualifies him as a practical professor of man, society and personal relations. He asserts

that «je suis bien place tenez, pour donner des leçons, qui de plus sont des leçons de vie » (JF: 175).

Faliou's philosophy of endurance, hardness, moderation and reconciliation in the face of difficulties is epitomized in the attitude of the strange insect he encounters in Kribi during his continuing quest to make an honest living:

Durant mon séjour à Kribi j'ai découvert une sorte de petit insecte très coriace, j'avais beau appuyer mon talon de cuir avec force sur lui. Je ne parvenais pas à l'écraser et, dès que je levais le pied hop il faisait un bond de côté et allait retomber quelques mètres plus loin ... C'était exaspérant! Mais Best de cet insecte comme de certaines personnes ... jamais vous ne parvenez à les écraser sous votre pied ... Le ridicule petit insecte de Kribi? Quelle leçon! Oui, et je me suis empressé d'en faire mon profit après tout les vaincus sont bien des bon à rien. Parce qu'au fond dans cette lutte qu'est la vie, il faut vaincre, comme ça bêtement, froidement, c'est tout. Sinon, tant pis! Maintenant, si dans la lutte vous vacillez, ayez assez d'imagination pour changer d'arme. Ne craignez pas d'aller à terre dès le moment ou vous savez comment il vous sera possible de vous relever. UF: 173-175)

This art of adapting oneself to one's changing social conditions in order to best prepare oneself for a better take off in life is hard and painful, but plays a paramount role in the regulation of individual aspirations and healthy personal relations for "la vie, n'est-elle pas cela: la somme des mauvaises et des bonnes actions, le sucre et le quinquina?" (JF: 175).

A close examination of Medou-Mvomo's three novels reveals that the novelist's power of observation and description is more fully exploited in *Le journal de Faliou* than in his two earlier works. This is an indication that the novelist, in "his characters, has grown into maturity in this third work. But it is due in the main; to his adoption of the diary form as in Ferdinand Oyono's *Une vie de boy*. The "of the diary form allows the author to distance himself from the event in the novel and to look at the action in a way which may imply irony or a deeper reflection. phrase, we noted earlier, "je suis bien place, tenez, pour

donner des leçons qui de plus sont des leçons de vie”, underlines Faliou’s deep penetration into daily social problems through his varied and complex experiences, which arm him with a but yet deep insight for interpreting the multiple tensions in personal relations.

The use of the diary form accords the writer the possibility of exploring more aspects of the complex problems of personal relations left unmentioned in *Afrika Ba’a* which, in effect, is set between the author’s home village of Nkpwang an Yaounde, but which he keeps anonymous because of the difference in literary techniques. The contrary is the case in *Le journal de Faliou* in which concrete episodes and names of existing places and towns like Yaounde, Douala, Kribi, Ede “Nkongssamba are stated without any attempt to disguise them. The repetitive style in this third novel is neither accidental, nor is it a flaw. It mirrors the predominant ... of the corrupt nature of personal relations in depraved post-independence African societies.

The disappearance and re-appearance of the strange insect in Kribi, which we saw earlier, is symbolic of and stresses the cyclical conception of life - in spite of life’s extremely hard conditions, life goes on. It compares favourably with Faliou’s ability to endure in the face of difficulties. Through toughness and endurance. Faliou hopes perhaps to be reborn, like the strange insect, in a new society free from all caprices and vices.

Wandering and suffering appear to be obsessional preoccupations which reiterated in most of Medou-Mvomo’s characters from novel to novel. Thus, in *Afrika Ba’a*, Kambara drifts to Necroville, the city of death, but returns to his village a maturer and wiser man -. Ambroise in *Mon amour en noir et blanc* is “exiled” at early age to France where the traumatic effects of racism inspire and strengthen his love for Genevieve. In *Le journal de Faliou*, the dehumanizing effects which Faliou experiences in his countless adventures across the country only go to strengthen his determination to succeed in spite of his plight. In this light, suffering becomes necessary stimulant to success and the ingredient with which happiness is celebrated. “

Socio-political and personal relations as portrayed by Medou-Mvomo’s three novels go progressively from bad to worse in a chronological order. In *Afrika Ba’a*, Kambara undergoes suffering but succeeds at the end in achieving happiness for himself and his village.

At the end of *Mon amour en noir et blanc*, Ambroise is left with another long battle to fight before his love can be consummated. And, in addition to Faliou's broken home in *Le journal de Faliou* and his numerous sufferings, he is reduced to the state of a pauper and must start life all over again, from scratch:

Plus je réfléchissais à tout cela, plus il me devenait évident que j'avais été victime d'une machination généralisée, allant de ma famille. Jusqu'à mes amis et camarades, en passant par la médisance et les ragots tendancieux des gens de ma tribu et de ceux qui cherchent ma perte. Que de gachis, tout ça! (JF: 173).

Faliou is very much like the unfortunate juvenile Onana in *Afrika Ba 'a*. They both share a common destiny: the struggle for survival; and a common philosophy: the individual's right to existence through steady solid principles. Whereas Onana needs the courage and agility of Zoro to keep alive. Faliou requires the strong heart of Tarzan to pilot him and his ideals through the turbulent African jungle of "survival of the fittest". Here, the novelist makes use of the colonial myth (Tarzan, king of the jungle), which holds that Africa is a jungle which needs the presence of whites in order to conquer and tame IT.

The novelist does not content himself with attacking defenders of mediocrity. He offers knowledge, enlightenment, efficiency, merit and moral integrity as possible factors and qualities which will enhance the understanding of the complex character of socio-political and personal relations and eventually provide the essential balance and harmony.

But paradoxically, it is Medou-Mvomo's educated heroes who are reduced to the level of the neglected proletariat class of the Onanas. Quite significantly, too, it is Faliou, the undergraduate and the author's most educated protagonist, in *Le journal de Faliou*, who suffers most from the pangs of post-independence neo-colonial Africa and, perhaps will continue to suffer for a long time to come. Here again is the dilemma of the modern African intellectual who unable to conform to the corrupt practices of his decadent socio-political milieu becomes the inevitable victim of his own ideals.

Thus, instead of being engaged in the positive construction of his nation, he has become a misfit even in his own country and doomed

“to walk the night”, like Willie Boy in Alex la Guma’s *A Walk in the Night* (1967), although Willie Boy is not an intellectual. The tragic plight of the modern African intellectual carries more weight and becomes unbearable when he comes to think that the segregation here, unlike the white-black South African, has attained a black-black dimension.

The novelist’s moral perfectionism is conveyed through his educated protagonists who identify more with the proletariat than with the bourgeois class. Quite aware of the fact that the greatest strength of every nation lies in its human and spiritual resources, they strive steadfastly to re-establish the triumph of ideals in their wretched communities, so as to achieve equilibrium and harmony in socio-political and personal relations at all levels.

Their optimism is conveyed through the fact that the novelist leaves his characters open and dynamic, still struggling on at the end of his novels (with the possible exception of *Kambara in Afrika Ba ‘a*) without fully achieving balance or completely fulfilling themselves. This reflects all modern African societies which are still searching for solutions to their multiple socio-political and economic problems.

In our examination of material wretchedness versus moral integrity in *Le journal de Faliou*, we note that the society depicted by Medou-Mvomo in 19 mirrors, in many ways, what still pertains today in Cameroon more than two decades after. The system is still to be corrected positively so as to meet with the new aspirations of a veritable New Deal Cameroonian people. The November 19 *Projet de société* which was deeply rooted in the philosophy of rigour and moral station certainly took cognizance of the material and moral wretchedness of the Cameroonian people but the practical application of such lofty ideals has been buried alive and forgotten, placing a beloved and naturally endowed nation today visibly among the poorest on the African continent reminiscent of “pain de dix francs, pâte de cinq francs, bananes de dix francs or haricot de dix francs” recorded in *Le journal de Faliou*. The future of Cameroon and other African states will depend, in the main, on the material and moral ideals African leaders set out for their people and how well they strive to achieve them in concrete terms.

Notes

1. This information is contained in an interview the present author held with Rene Philombe, a close relative of Medou-Mvomo in Yaounde on 25 June 19. Although Medou-Mvomo lives in Cameroon (his birth place Nkwang is not far from Yaounde, the administrative capital), it is very difficult to meet him because like his characters, he is always on the move, going from one temporary situation to another punctuated by one-man musical shows here and there across the country reminiscent of Faliou in his *Le journal de Faliou* (1972) hereafter referred to as JF.

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A Sociolinguistic Appreciation Of Asong's The Crown Of Thorns

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to analyse Asong's first novel from a sociolinguistic perspective. Based on the theories enunciated by Saussure, Barthes, and Stubbs, *The Crown of Thorns* is read as a semiological system with a system of structures. It is the amalgamation of these language systems with a system or level of discourse manifested by the different but principal characters in the world of the novel such as Ngobefuo, the Divisional Officer and the mercurial Chief Alexander Nchindia 'Which makes the work so aesthetically appealing.

In our analysis, we examine the concept that the tragic events which culminate at the end of the novel, are due to the diverse language systems created, by the characters who are at variance with each other.

The sociological elements of *The Crown of Thorns* are also examined as cultural motifs which enhance the ideological values of Small Monje. Their artistic qualities are also underscored.

In *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction* Peter Trudgill reminds us that gauges emanate from a specific cultural milieu and as such they are shaped, nurtured and refined by the citizens of that culture. A work of art is a mosaic of different linguistic elements neatly interwoven by the artist so that it can be aesthetically appealing to the reader or audience. Jacques Derrida echoes Trudgill's ideas and states more emphatically in *Grammatology* that "the language is the property of the people. Each derives its unity from the other. For a language has a body system, they inhere in the people assembled and "bodily" united. It is a people body

that makes language ... A people is thus the absolute master of the spoken language and it is an empire they possess unawares” (1978: 169-170). A work is thus a reflection of the linguistic diversity or sophistication of a given society. From a sociological perspective, a work of art is an appreciation of the socio-political and religious institution in that community. In *The Crown of Thorns* the demise of the Chieftaincy institution, the rejection of traditional values by Chief Nchi and the sale of the Akeukeour lead to the total disintegration of the world of the novel

It is against these sociolinguistic notions that we shall analyse Asong's' Crown of Thorns. Even though the focus of the paper shall be on linguistic sys in the novel, we shall also explore the socio-cultural elements especially as they enhance the aesthetic and ideological dimensions of the work.

The Crown of Thorns is a semiological system. Borrowing from Saussure Roland Barthes defines semiology in *Mythologies* as a science of forms and since it studies significations apart from their content. He indicates that semiotics postulates a relation between two terms, a signifier and a signified. In a semiological “system - the language or langue - the signified is the concept, the signifier is acoustic image (which is mental), and the relations between concept and image is sign (the word). This semiological system is from all indications similar to linguistic systems inherent in any work of art. In this regard, it could be justifiably argued' a work of art could be divided into semiological systems.' In this context, a r could view a novel as comprised of a series of signs, or signifiers and signifiers, means that as the structuralists profess a good work of art consists of an amalgamation of an autonomous system of structures made of signifiers and signified. Ric and Fernande de George, in *Structuralists from Marx to Levi-Strauss* observe that the traditional dichotomy, content and form, was found unsatisfactory for the s of the work as an integrated aesthetic unity. Instead the early structuralists develop the concept of structure, ideas, plot etc. which together produce a given aesthetic effect and make it an integral whole ... The work itself is to be studied as a totality or system before it is to be related to other systems. In this regard, considering concepts of Saussure, Barthes and Richard and Fernande de George, a literary is regarded as a finite combinatory

system of language. Hence a literary text analysed the same way structural anthropology analyses myth. The emphasis then is on the “verbal essence” of literature. The analysis of the work must be on “inner structure” or the language system used to produce it. From this perspective *The Crown of Thorns* consists of several systems which we have identified, among as levels of discourse. There are several forms of discourses of authority ion, culture etc. The total absence of a religious or ethical discourse which in novels traditionally serves as the unifying force in the world of the novel is partially responsible for the demise which leads to the total disintegration of the in the world of Small Monje. It is necessary to emphasize that the religious at discourse manifested in *The Crown of Thorns* is European Christianity as zed by Reverend Father Preston and traditional African religions illustrated sacred role played by the Akeukeour, “the god of gods of the tribe of Nkokonoko Small Monje” (p.5).

From a structural perspective, the language systems or levels of discourse in *The Crown of Thorns* divide the novel into a system of structures each of which has its meanings which reflect the worldviews either of the architects of the or of the groups they represent. It is the amalgamation of these languages which makes *The Crown of Thorns* so aesthetically appealing. The novel begins in medias res with the “tragic disappearance” of Akeukeour “the god of the people of Nkokonoko Small Monje” (p.5) thanks to the complicity of Divisional Officer, the mercurial Chief Nchinda and the agent of Western ism, the flamboyant but crafty American Nichola, Virchow.

One of the major episodes in *The Crown of Thorns* in which Ngobefuo to his discourse, of rebellion par excellence is during the classic confrontation the arrogant and authoritative Divisional Officer at night in his residence, ,course Analysis Stubbs reminds us that “ ... much of the fascination of discourse ‘is comes from the realization that language, action and knowledge: are inseparable” (p.l). However, even though these three elements are inseparable, they constitute a deterministic relationship. Stubbs’ observations are very pertinent - appreciating Ngobefuo’s discourse of rebellion or language system in *The Crown of Thorns*. During the confrontational scene, Ngobefuo’s diatribes are, as a of the fact that he is fully conscious of the ignominious role played by the nal Officer in liquidating their god. It is

his knowledge of this state of affairs compels him to incite his fellow elders to take some form of concerted action, lively against the intransigent Divisional Officer. Rejecting the courtesies of 'visional Officer, Ngobefuo, overshadowing the dissident and impatient he starts his diatribe with "Tigers have become goats!" and adds "...Goment, we have come to see you at this time of night because of an affair which threatens existence" (p.31). Then he gives the administrator an ultimatum: "Will to listen to us? Or not" (p.31). Even though, the representative of the tradition does not cave in to the vitriolic attacks heaped on him. Again, the inept narrator remarks that "So when Ngobefuo called him an uncircumcised man, and the insults were echoed by the Chief and some three of the men cut and carried away the statue, he could no longer bear. .." (p.36). It is as a result of these diatribes couched in Ngobefuo's rebellious rhetoric that the Divisional Officer's inexplicable actions towards the unwanted visitors betray his complicity in the hideous crime.

The fact that Ngobefuo's language system or level of discourse is one of n does not necessarily mean that he is erratic or a villain. Far from it. On numerous occasions, he counsels the newly installed Chief Alexander Nevertheless; he wields the carrot and the stick especially in his close with the rebellious Chief. After the Chief's ill-fated and humiliating trip in total defiance of traditional conventions, Ngobefuo, like all who have the modes of eloquence is also very diplomatic. He wields his tremendous speech to rally his colleagues to strike a conciliatory note with the Chief to salvage the society of Nkokonoko Small Monje who had "come all the Texas to see and perhaps take some photographs of that very famous statue so often heard about back home in Texas" (p. II).It is the disappearance of gods", the embodiment of traditional religious values that provokes the discourse of rebellion and indignation so characteristic of the conservative Ng Chief Priest of the stolen and desecrated god of Small Monje. Ngobefuo; elder statesman Ndenwotio describes as the "caretaker of the tribe" conscious and overwhelmed by the repercussions of the hideous incident just taken place with the complicity of the administrative authorities. That' language system from the beginning to the end of the novel is chara strident and vitriolic rhetoric on the perpetrators of the crime. As the cu tradition which he so eloquently

defends in his first major discourse bewildered and stupefied Council of Elders, he displays his knowledge and tradition and underscores “the omnipotence and omnipresence of their and their continuous protective influence” (p.21) which were partially responsible for the successes of their military campaigns, peace and prosperity to the omnipotent role played also by Akeukeour.

Ironically, as a result of the gravity of the calamity which had befallen Biongong culture, Ngobefuo, the embodiment of traditional values in the world of the novel defies tradition by quarantining the council of Elders including intemperate Chief Alexander Nchindia. His language is threatening at best. In fact it is couched in veiled threats. He threatens “ ... His Highness, I beg in the name of all my brothers who run this tribe to say that nobody will leave this hall until known who have done this cut-throat act to the tribe” (p.23). Commenting speaker’s motives, the omniscient narrator in the novel notes that “... His charged with hate and there was every indication that if the Chief dared to would be restrained” (p.23). When Chief Nchindia, almost unwitting! exculpate himself by observing “Even me? I don’t know anything about completely innocent” (pp. 23-24), the diplomatic but eloquent Ngobefu caustic. He responds to the Chief’s innuendoes, “... we have not said his knows anything about it. We only said our god is stolen. Let his highness suspicion onto himself” (p.24). It is evident from the language system ado so skilfully utilized by Ngobefuo that he assumes his responsibility as the chief or spokesman for the beleaguered tribe of Small Monje.

Tzvetan Todorov reminds us that “... Literature uses language both of departure and point of arrival; language endows literature with its configuration of mediator and mediated ... “ (1979: 125- 126). Todorov’ sobs indicates the ambivalence of language especially if it is “simultaneously and mediated”. But it is this ambivalence in language which usually accounts for its richness and diversity. Exploring this aspect further Todorov argues those binary oppositions which constitute a major rhetorical device in many works of art contribute considerably to its beauty. This argument holds true for Ngobefuo’s language system in *The Crown of Thorns*. The speech he delivers towards the end of part II, in Chapter 18, is punctuated by several binary oppositions, but the most dominant one reconciliation/rejection.

While Ngobefuo strikes a reconciliatory note towards the embattled monarch, he indirectly threatens him at the time, with the consequences of the failure of the entire community Small Monje. This of course leaves the Chief in a catch 22 situation. In order to convey his message successfully, Ngobefuo's discourse of reconciliation/rejection is dramatized. It is punctuated by a series of pauses for dramatic effect. Ngobefuo, speaking on behalf of the Council Elders and thus of the whole community, addresses the Chief thus:

His highness, here we are again to talk to you about what to do. It is eight moons since we sat in this same room to vow that we shall never again sit in council to tell you to do this or that. We meant what we said. But today we are gathered here to break our word. Pause. 'We do not do that elten! Pause. "And whenever we do that we usually have a very good reason Pause again! This is the very good reason we have for breaking our word today ... We have given enough time to see and know it is not just the crown you wear on your head that makes you chief, but the people you have about you." He paused then pointing to the various personalities, beginning from himself said: "The people are us - Ngobefuo, Achiebefuo, Ndenwontio, Ajem-abeule, Ntogngtong, Nkenkwi, and the rest ... "People, he continued, his voice rising gradually to very high pitch and then subsiding again until it reached the level of a whisper before he began to raise it again, "who had always borne the Chief's horn, the Chief's stool, and the Chief's umbrella whenever the Chief was to go on a journey ... But the people whom his highness Nchindia has decided for the past years to lie down so that they can walk on him...But failing, you have let yourself to fall. You, our duly anointed Chief. We have refused. We the older trees that have grown around you have decided that you shall not touch the ground" (pp. 136-137).

It is this dramatized speech by Ngobefuo which underscores his use of language as a "the mediator mediated". The Chief is,

admonished for flouting traditional values by categorically rejecting the pivotal role by the Council of Elders but he is simultaneously lured to reconcile to avoid another calamity for the community. At the end of the encounter, Ngobefuo's discourse of reconciliation and rejection triumphs, even though temporarily.

As indicated above, Ngobefuo's language system or level of use is varied in the sense that it is rebellious, diplomatic, and conciliatory all neatly juxtaposed like different colours in a quilt. However, towards the end of *The Crown of Thorns*, Ngobefuo's discourse more aggressive and confrontational. It is his confrontational course which accelerates the tempo of the novel in part III so much that it culminates in the inevitable clash between the governor and governed. Towards the end, his discourse is uncompromising and squarely indicts the Divisional Officer as the root cause of the plight that has afflicted the people of Small Monje. His rhetoric is blunt and even defiant.

Before the tragic events which culminate in chaos and total disorder in Small Monje, Ngobefuo minces no words and holds the Divisional Officer responsible for the disintegration of the society by imposing a Chief and interfering with the administrative machinery. He reminds the Divisional Officer in very clear terms: "Goment is now talking! We want to tell him that whatever fire there is, it is own making" (p.160). It is partially due to Ngobefuo's discourse that he dies together with Father Preston and the appointed Chief. Even in the midst of these tragic episodes, Ngobefuo, true to himself is unrepentant as he remarks "the big goment is coming to take us from here, he will be told that it was not our fault that he left so many dried leaves lying so close to the tire of Nkokonoko Small We needed our god and our land, they took all from us, fooling our chief" (p.194)

If the legendary Ngobefuo's level of discourse or language system discussed above rebellious, diplomatic and confrontational, the Divisional Officer's is a contrast to that of his antithesis or mimesis. True to type, the Divisional Officer's language system in *The Crown of Thorns* is responsible for the discursive waves of contradictions and calamities which plague the community of Monje. His language system reflects total ignorance and indifference about the culture of the people he governs. His addresses to the delegations of Elders of Small Monje are arrogant, authoritative and uncompromising. In other words two

camps fail to communicate because each group has an entirely different in their inability to transcend their different language systems, both camps lead towards a major confrontation which ends in a tragedy.

In *Towards a Sociology of the Novel*, Lucien Goldman suggests a genetic structuralist approach which postulates a relationship between the “inner structures” of the work of art and the social factors that produce it. A work of art is the “literary expression” of social structures that have been formulated by historical economic circumstances. This relationship between circumstances, milieu an, in which the ‘work is produced is very pertinent to a sociolinguistic appreciation of, *The Crown of Thorns*. Goldmann’s linkage of the “inner structure” and the” that produce it” spells the umbilical cord between art and ideology. The Divisional Officer’s language system or level of discourse demonstrates this link between and ideology in *The Crown of Thorns*. It is evident that in comparison to the quence of Ngobefuo as manifested in his speeches, the Divisional Officer matches. Nevertheless, it is certain that in conformity with his administrative functions, his language system or level of discourse is political, manipulative authoritarian at best. Like most political discourses, his speeches are evasive, and full of empty promises which to his dismay fail to appease the aging inhabitants of Small Monje. However, the overwhelmingly ideological position of his discourse does not in any way diminish its aesthetic qualities.

The authoritarian and manipulative discourse exhibited by the Divisional Officer is manifested early in the novel. Conscious of his treacherous role in the fateful disappearance of the “god of gods” He cajoles and assures the imposed Alexander Nchindia. In a discussion with the beleaguered monarch which attempts to allay his fears about the consequences of the disappearance of their hero observes “... Then where is the fear? They will worship anything, so long as they do not know what it is. And even if they know that should be no problem as far as am concerned. I am the law (emphasis are ours). The discovery will not be in your own life time. Nor mine. Even till the end of this century. Assuming that they see it, simply tell them to shut up and that will close the matter” (p. 15). Like most political discourse, the

administrator's rhetorical posture is punctuated by manipulation and cajoling his target in order to achieve a certain objective.

Another fascinating episode in *The Crown of Thorns* which conveys the concept that the administrator's level of discourse or linguistic system is filled with intrigues and demagoguery characteristic of political parlance is when he attempts to pit the Elders against their Chief. After intercepting a letter written by Chief Alexander Nchindia to his brother Antony Nkoaleck, the only graduate so far from Small Monje indicating his difference about the Chieftaincy tide imposed on him. Divisional Officer blackmails his accomplice. He informs the bewildered Elders.

"He Says only Antony can be chief. This is the money he wants to send for him to use for his transport to come here after he leaves the hospital. It is written here in black and white. The chief said he will only go and live with Barlois in Sowa...A Chief who has a thing of this nature, a Chief who has contemplated something of this sort can do no more. If we are too rash, we shall lose. You as the elders of this tribe will do yourself a very great harm if you attack him. It is' too early. We shall only proceed step by step to frustrate his effort in that direction (pp.60-61)."

The above passage illustrates that the administrator's mode of discourse or language system is evidently that of an opportunistic individual to achieve his personal objectives at all costs. He spares no effort in exploiting the very sensitive Chieftaincy controversy to ridicule the Chief whom he ironically imposed on the people of Small Monje.

When the disappointed anef Alexander Nchindia foolishly attempts to exhume Antony Nkoaleck's body in order to give him a fitting burial against the traditions of the land, the Divisional Officer's strident, authoritative and vitriolic rhetoric is exhibited once more. He threatens "Antony Nkoaleck has been forgotten. Nothing of his will ever be seen on this soil. His name shall never be mentioned any more. I have spoken to the Chief as the Divisional Officer of Small Monje". "And did he agree Goment? Everybody asked at the same time. He had no choice. Nobody argues with the District Officer" (p. 107). Despite the administrator's authoritarian discourse like most political demagogues, he misreads the feelings of the people. His victory over

the Chief is short-lived because as the narrator informs us. “They are glad that the Chief was no longer going to reverse their decision on Nkoaleck? They were thankful to the Divisional Officer for anything to their tribe and its ways; the Divisional Officer must go back to where he came from” (p. 108). This demonstrates that despite his defiant rhetorical posture, the Divisional Officer lives in a world of illusions.

Throughout *The Crown of Thorns* the diverse language systems or levels of discourse reflect the ideologies of their authors. That is partially responsible for the numerous conflicts which plague the world of Small Monje. One of the most fascinating but controversial characters in the novel is the mercurial chief Alexander Nchindia. His controversial rhetorical postures throughout the novel evoke a lot of sympathy for the reader. At some moments his discourse portrays him as a sacrificial lamb, a Christ-like figure, still in a state of innocence as opposed to a state of experience. Occasionally, his rhetorical postures even, reflect this state of innocence vis-a-vis the tradition of his people of Small Monje.

Chief Nchindia’s language system is reflected in two major rhetorical devices namely his utterances or speeches and the letters he writes to his brother Antony Nkoaleck. Nevertheless, these devices illustrate that the chief the discourse of rebellion against the status-quo in general and tradition in His rebellious language system is different from that of Ngobefuo in the his language or discourse serves as a means of personal rebellion and Li the imposition of the Chieftaincy title which has been forced on him. Ngobefuo’s language system or discourse is communal in that it collective consciousness of the entire community of Small Monje. This as reflected in their language system is significant because they divergent systems which in essence are irreconcilable opposites from the beginning to the end of *The Crown of Thorns*.

Towards the end of part I, convinced of the treacherous role played by the Chief in liquidating their god. Ngobefuo echoes an aggressive which signals the ensuing confrontation between two foes. Ngobefuo declares

“In offering a bad sacrifice and a solemn prayer to a god who was we have made a mockery of the mystical powers of the spirit that and

this is Nchindia's fault. Even if this was the first and only thing ever did if he had never done anything before to offend us, this is bad and our custom cannot forgive him. So Nchindia Fuo-ndee will De be our Chief. The throne is therefore taken away from him today in shame (p.37).

Chief Nchindia of course remains undaunted because right from the beginning, he does not appreciate the new role entrusted on him. His objections are several confrontations which he has with the Council of Elders and manner in which he continuously flouts the traditions of Small Monje.

Chief Nchindia's language system as mentioned earlier is rebellion for his own liberation; this is clearly manifested in the sen sends to Antony Nkoaleck. In his first letter, he pleads thus:

“I am swearing to God who made heaven and earth that I do not took the crown from you and gave it to me. I ran away. Ire caught me and forced me to say yes. I refused but they forced me. I do? The Divisional Officer came and stood behind me with so guns. I told them “yest” But I knew I was doing you a great wrong” (pp.51-52).

This is evidently the discourse of s guilty person. It is this sense of guilt which characterizes the Chiefs relations with his brother so much so that w after an accident he holds himself partially responsible. The omniscient The Crown of Thorns underscores the condemned state in which he finds himself so much so that he is likened to a Christ-like figure. He obscenely forced a crown of thorns on his head and then had marched him through untold agonies onwards to his miserable death on the cross. In his tortured mind there began to develop an irresistible kinship with the suffering of Christ whose crown of thorns he thought was what they had prepared for him as chief? (p.91).

In addition to the various language systems used by the major characters in The Crown of Thorns, it is evident that a diagnostic situation exists in the world of Small Monje. Analysing the interrelationship between language and society in Sociolinguistics: An Introduction, Peter Trudgill alludes to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis which states inter-alia that man's view of his environment may be

conditioned by his language. Less controversial is their view about the effects of society on language and the way in which the society can be reflected in language in both the physical and social environments and as a result of that they can have a profound effect on the structure of vocabulary. Diaglossia, Peter Trudgill notes, is a particular kind of language standardization where two distinct varieties of a language exist side by side throughout the speech community” (p.117). He further ‘divides the two varieties into high and low.

The diaglossic situation is very evident in *The Crown of Thorns*. The language systems or levels of discourse used by the principal characters mentioned above constitute the “high” variety in the sense that they are more refined and sophisticated and closer to Standard English, whereas the uneducated characters, with the exception of the eloquent Ngobefuo, use the “low” variety of the language.

Their speech patterns are entirely different from those of the other characters. The variety of their language systems are evident in the vocabulary and even sentence structures occasionally, there is the juxtaposition of standard and pidgin-English. A case in point is in chapter 18 when the administrator discusses with his yard boy Kunzia. The inhabitants of Small Monje have organized a strike which is very successful. In attempting to assess the situation, the Divisional Officer interviews his servant who responds

“Goment. ...! We pipo very vex for you! Vex for me?” “Yes Goment” Why? What reason have they?” “Plenty tings Goment. Dem say mission tek dem land, dem talk for Goment, no helep. Road no pass for hos for all man. Anipoll all the farm. Ngangabe gib mission wan lan-mission take ten. Den talk for Goment, no helep. Achiebefuo die, I kill I skin, I sey Goment I killam. Chief take Akeukeour I sellam. Dem say dem no want Chief. Oem want for move Chief. Dem tell Goment. Goment I no gree. We people vely vex for you Goment” (p.158).

In “low language”, Kunzia summarizes the grievances of the people of Small Monje against the administration. The Divisional Officer is alluded to as “Goment” throughout the novel. In addition to this co-existence of two varieties of language in Small Monje, the

citizens have their forms of address which reflect the cultural codes of the community. They use a variety of figures of speech ranging from proverbs, parallelisms, to very sparingly, expressions in the local dialects such as Ku-ngang, Koko nteuh and of course Akeoukeour which illustrate the physical and social environment of Small Monje.

In conclusion, the different language systems or levels of discourse contribute enormously to the success of *The Crown of Thorns* artistically and ideologically.

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Isn't Woman Woman's Worst Enemy? An Appraisal of the Feminism Of Liking And Beyala

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In the past two decades Cameroonian women have moved from the margin to the centre of literary creation. Though for a long time they had played second fiddle in that area, as they still do in so many others in the mainstream society. the vibrancy of Rabiataou Njoya, Roselyn Jua, Calixthe Beyala and Were Were Liking (to name but a few), is now making male supremacy of the past suffer a severe blow in the unfolding national and international literary scene.

This paper falls into three parts in which I examine the evolution of the feminism of Liking and Beyala, from championing the disruption of the pillars of patriarchy, the depiction of women's own indulgence in self- and group-scapegoating and, finally, to the definition of new ways by which womenfolk in their various texts try to write themselves into being. In the conclusion their feminist discourse is overviewed so as to lay bare their fundamental divergence.

The focus on Liking and Beyala - who already monopolize the attention of feminist critics the world over - is debatable, given that Cameroon now boasts of some thirty women authors. The choice however, was dictated not only by the fact that both writers figure among the most vocal on the issue of feminism but by the availability of their works. Beyala has already published six novels since 1987 making her the most prolific Cameroonian female novelist with an impressive output of one novel a year. (1) As for the self-taught Liking, she has proved, in the seventeen years of her writing career, to be the most prolific and most versatile Cameroon author to date with a record of four novels and twelve plays not to mention her books of poetry • folk narratives and essays - though some of her maiden works were produced in collaboration with Marie-Jose Hourantier. (2)

It is worth emphasising that self-imposed exile for Liking and Beyala, respectively in Cote d'Ivoire and France, affords a conducive environment to create and publish at a pace which their counterparts at home have found difficult to match is worth emphasising. Their dynamism serves to highlight the many stumbling blocks (social, psychological, financial, material, etc.) that continue to hinder the creative mind in present-day Cameroon, obstacles which we critics must persistently denounce if our national literature must survive. The type of "national literature" that comes to mind is that which pulsates with the experiences lived by various peoples on a day-to-day basis. It is therefore a literature which the writers who live in our midst and brush shoulders with us, who share in our daily joys, pains and struggles are in a better position to produce.

1. Deconstructing the Father's Law

The works of Liking and Beyala tackle a wide array of themes ranging from the existential musings about woman's ultimate metaphysical condition - that is, the meaning of life and death, the nature of God, etc. - to the convulsive changes gripping post-colonial African societies and the tragedy of exile. However, their overriding theme is the crisis of gender relations. Their anxiety to set the sexist record straight leads to the woman's side of the story, disclosing herself as a severely oppressed group in Cameroon and in the French-based African diaspora. One word after another shows both suffragettes wielding mighty pens to do battle against the patriarchal system which holds sway woman's individual and collective destiny in the society.

Patriarchy defines and controls woman in our society through a) the custom of anonymous labelling (*La Puissance de Urn* [LPDU] (1979); b) the exploitation of her marketability as in *C'est le soleil qui m'a brulé* (1987) and *Seul le Diable savait* [SDS] (1990); c) the blame heaped on her head alone in case of infertility of the couple as in *Single Mum* [SM] (1990) and in *Maman a un amant* [MAA] (1993); d) the smothering of female talents through rape and forced prostitution as in *La Puissance de Urn* and *Tu t'appelleras Tanga* [TTT] (1988); e) double standards in enforcing faithfulness in the couple as in *La*.

Queue du diable [LQD] (1979), Maman a un amant and in *Le Petit prince de Bellevie* [PPBl (1993); and f) the compulsive perpetuation of man's lineage through the birth of male offspring (in most of the works cited). For lack of space only some of these social definitions and control mechanisms are examined in some detail below.

There is evidence in the practice of child naming in Bassaland, for example, that woman is considered a non-entity in the culture. A Bassa girl-child, unlike her, male counterpart, is not given a name of her own at birth. She is instead referred to by the unsubstantiating particle "Ngo" (a diminutive of Ngond meaning "daughter of") to which is affixed the father's surname. In other words, no sooner is woman born than the law of the father takes hold of her identity and relegates her to social invisibility. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the heroine of LPU though originating from a wealthy family, is called Ngond Libii (3) an opprobrious name which means the "daughter of a slave", thus clearly establishing the congruence between womanhood and servility in the reference culture. (4) In Liking's ritual medium which magically fuses reality and fiction, past and present, the decoding of Ngond Libil's name indicates that by virtue of her femaleness, woman is nothing both in the traditional society and in our distorted modern collective consciousness. (5)

In both authors' vision, it is the curse of femaleness which also degrades woman in our society to the status of a marketable commodity whose value is measured by the triple aulne of virginity, bride price importance and child-bearing capacity. It is not for the sake of preserving social morality in Awa's squalid slum of the wretched of the earth known as Q.G. or upholding woman's dignity as a person that Ateba submits 10 the egg test in Beyala's CSB (81-82). The *raison d'être* of this degrading rite is to force her deliver "untampered goods" to the first credible male consumer. (6) Relatedly, the bargaining which takes place during Megrl's bride wealth palaver in SDS (241-242) is nothing short of an auction sale where the heroine is parcelled off to her rightful owner, then the ordeal for her starts when she has to give proof of her fertility. Such is the traumatic experience undergone by the educated Singue Mura in Liking's play of that same title and by the migrant Maryam in Beyala's MAA (128). Though the former has reached a most influential ministerial position in her community and

the latter is the sole provider on whose purchasing power the survival of the family depends in the misery-stricken predominantly African, Parisian district of Belleville, the fact remains that both of them are still branded as failed women. Thus, from traditional society to contemporary times, childlessness in Africa continues to serve as a stigma of female exclusion.

The equation established in the collective mind between wifeness and bondage is also evident in the practice of widow victimization which, though firmly entrenched in the past, survives into our own day. On the death of her husband, Ntep Iliga, in LPDU, the widowed Ngond Libii becomes the first suspect, and a double Damocle's sword hangs over her head of either being buried alive or inherited as chattel. These oppressive customs are kept alive in today's Cameroon in the form of systematic ostracism of the widows of rich men in particular, widows who are ingloriously referred to as "femme joyeuse" ["merry wife"].

The perpetration of sexual abuses on teenage girls is patriarchy's ultimate assault on the dignity of women, for it is the supreme penalty which the latter must pay for being accursed with femaleness. In the texts of both authors rape and forced prostitution are the culmination of patriarchy's negation of African woman's humanity and as a subtle control mechanism of her social mobility. Like most teenage girls in Beyala's works, Tanga in ITT, is a marginal being whose body has completely escaped her control. (8) She has been turned into "a public ass" (19) by none other than her begetter who raped her at the age of twelve, impregnated her, and poisoned their monstrous offspring at birth. Similarly, Nguidjol in Liking's LQD conveniently ignores the universal taboo of incest strictly enforced in our societies. (9) Not only does he batter and rape six of his daughters - impregnating one of them - but he relentlessly controls their freedom of choice by denying them educational opportunities and exogamous dreams. As for the generalized forced prostitution of girls is portrayed as the stock-in-trade among poverty-stricken families. This practice which is shown as a new-found means of livelihood among the rejected in most African cities is chastised in Beyala's ITT and Liking's *Elle sera de Jaspe et de Corail* [EJC] (1983: 50).

2. Destructuring self

Ironically the unavowed objective of patriarchy, which is the objectification and total dehumanization of the weaker sex, is fostered by the most abused women themselves. This is evident, on the one hand, in the latter's indulgence in self victimization and, on the other, in her connivance with the male abusers in violating their own daughters' right to life, protection and respect. The many betrayals observed in the ranks of womenfolk mark the turning-point in Liking and Beyala's perception of women's plight in our society, for the central concern of their feminist discourse now shifts from the dichotomised approach which simplistically opposes man-the-victimizer to woman-the-eternal-victim in order to focus on the latter's own identity crisis.

On shedding its anti-male vehemence, the discourse of both authors c that though woman's recovery of selfhood in our society predicates the murder of man-the-monster as Ngond Libii merely dreams of doing thro LPDU, or as Ateba actually achieves at the end of ESB, the attainment of this is not aided by continued tension between the sexes, but by woman's identify and castigation of her ambivalent attitudes towards herself and her group.

In general, self-educated Liking gives primacy to the portrayal of women in her works. In Singue Mura, however, she depicts an educated woman in a position of authority and prestige who, in spite of her status, fails to bring analytical judgement to bear on the mechanisms of social reproduction ultimate aim is to level her down. The several abortions undergone by the minister in her youth were the recipe she had to pay for scholarly success and up mobility. Now barren, Singue Mura capitalizes on romantic love to gain monopoly of her husband's heart, and on her lavishness in order to remain on her in-laws' records. However, she takes her own life when a younger, virgin co-wife is imposed on her to perpetuate the husband's lineage as prescribed by tradition. Her consequent upon self-inflicted odds, begs the following topical question: why the likes of Singue Mura, that is, modem Cameroonian/African women who both economic and intellectual power not shake themselves free from patri constraints,

definitions and expectations which continue to dictate life's choices to them and, consequently, shape their destiny?

Women's inability to step outside the sphere of man's influence also explain the ambivalence characterizing the attitudes of mothers towards daughters in selected works of Liking and Beyala. In LQD and in TIT notably myth of the Cameroonian mother as the symbol of love, protection and reverend exploded, yielding' distorted images of a "leech" (TIT': 192) and a "vam. (LQD: 131). Indeed, the chronic irresponsibility and addictive bias of the Ngo Nga Taba tandem have transformed them into "devouring mothers" (TIT':64) feed on their kind.

In LQD, Ngonga's protectiveness and possessiveness over her lone offspring, in contrast to the desertion of eight daughters, betrays her compulsory valorisation of male supremacy and tacit acceptance of female worthlessness. II unsettling revelation of the girls' illegitimacy sets the countdown in motion, it exposes the latter to the deserted husband's vengefulness and lust. Worse s Ngonga further contributes to the demise of the six rape victims by refusing: confront the delinquent father, choosing instead the easier course of sacrificing innocent victims to her own mother's' witchcraft from which she shielded her lack of empathy for and ritual sacrifice of her daughters (which echoes mother-in-laws' duplicity in bringing about Singue Mura's ruin, in spite of mutually shared love) support the established fact that it always takes a woman monitor another woman's undoing and misfortune.

Similarly, Nga Taba's performance of excision on twelve-year old Tang' TIT implicitly acknowledges the reality of phallocracy in the society while already furthering its immutability. For, the mutilation is consciously inflicted so Tanga's sex will submit to the dictates of men's desires. Adding insult to injury, Nga Taba acquiesces in Tanga's rape and impregnation as another abortive means of keeping her ever truant husband at home. Excessive cultivation of male-dependency is also responsible for Nga Taba's regression to immaturity and inversion of roles with her daughter. Through blackmail, wanton violence, imprecation, etc. She divests Tanga of her childhood and throws her into the sex-business in order to ensure her own maintenance, sustenance and security.

The above examples are cumulative expressions of woman's callousness, exploitativeness and oppression of woman - an ambivalence originating from patriarchy's extreme polarization of the sexes in our societies which is bound to breed sado-masochistic trends in the subjugated element. As is evident above the internalized inferiority complex of patriarchal woman results in misdirected rebellion which fails to challenge age-old patterns of female exclusion but questions instead woman's claims to dignity and humanity.

The paradigms of sexual warfare developed here by Liking and Beyala are quite in line with other African female writings (12) in the way they show how the father's law is a powerful divisive force in the ranks of womenfolk. Woman's passive acceptance of the "culture of silence", (13) their self-imposed slavery, as well as their ambiguous relationship with male tyranny - which ranges from complicity to collusion - place them in the most uncomfortable position of being self-appointed relays in the maintenance and perpetuation of the common plight. (14)

3. Reinventing New Survival Strategies

The above change in the mode of articulation of the authors' discourse on woman does not however mean that their feminism gives little cause for optimism. For, some of their female characters, standing in contradiction to the self-enslavers and irrational accomplices examined above, have proved to be the upholders of genuine feminist ethos, committing themselves to breaking the bonds of sexist oppression and destroying the vicious circle of self- and group-scapegoating. Several strategies are used by these female writers in asserting themselves, redefining new spaces of interaction with the males, and setting new rules of the game so as to empower woman in the society.

Though the recurrence of wanton in-group violence amongst the womenfolk is higher in Beyala's works, the high degree of affinity of both writers' discourse on the issue is striking. This parallelism gives way, however, to a profound divergence when it comes to the most effective paradigm of woman's assertive actions. Indeed, in order to defy patriarchy and ground themselves into being, the Liking activist

draws inspiration from tradition while Beyala's uprooted heroine nourishes radical dreams culled from Western traditions.

The entire works of Liking can be read as an extended metaphor of the overwhelming power wielded by traditional woman. For, contrary to accepted stereotypes, the cultural model of woman which the author draws from her Bassa background is not submissive, but powerful. One example of this power is obtained in the centrality of female deities in the Bassa pantheon and the importance of the female principle in that culture. Indeed, in Bassa cosmogony equal importance is given to Um, the female deity, and Ngue, her male consort. During their theophany, it is with women (15) that these two godheads - who rank second only to Hilolombo the Supreme Being - first came into contact. Further evidence taken from oral tradition supports the primacy accorded woman in Bassaland. Manal ma Mban, the legendary civilizing hero in the culture, ranks woman higher than man both as the first initiator in the society and as the crucible in which the spirit is moulded into form. In contrast, he stresses the insignificance of man's contribution in the hatching of life. (16)

Understandably, then, the assertiveness of the Liking woman is inherited from models of woman's empowerment which are found in her traditional Bassa culture. In LPDU, Ngond Libii seizes the timely occasion of her husband's death to sound the knell on male prerogatives. (17) Erstwhile unassuming, unsophisticated and submissive, now she goes into open rebellion against phallocracy by rejecting widowhood rites as unromantic, and exposing the deceased as a failed husband and an inefficient public figure. Very much like current feminist activists, she voices strong criticisms against the existing social order which has subjected her to gender and class oppression. The mourning song in which she accepts responsibility for the "murder" of her tyrannical husband, thus marking the celebration of her new-found freedom, is an actual victory song of the Nding, a powerful, exclusively female secret cult in Bassaland. (18) So, also, does Soo in *Une nouvelle terre* [UNI] (1980) capitalize on her cultural image as primordial woman. And in that capacity, she dismisses the Chief's definition of womenfolk as "the ones responsible for [society's] misfortunes [with their] gossiping, plotting, agitating" (28). She in turn accuses all men for being the force of inertia impeding social change,

before deciding to lead the popular movement that sows the seeds of rebellion and eventually overthrows the ruling tyranny.

However, owing to the centrality of the spirit of reconciliation in Bassa worldview, the Liking woman's overt resistance to male domination always triggers the performance of a communal ritual which adroitly transposes the conflict on a higher plane. Thus, the rituals organized in most of her plays aim at consciousness raising through a psychodrama whose enactment serves as a projector screen for the initial crisis, a mirror for everyone, for the purgation of negative feelings, and a catalyst for recreating lost harmony. On an individual level, a ritual performance leads to a quest, an initiatory journey implying the probing of one's inner space in order to attain the seat of unity of being where all conflicts cease to exist and opposites are reconciled. (19)

Thanks to the extreme flexibility of Liking's ritual medium which constantly merges old beliefs and urbanity, the past - though deeply revered - is never romanticized in her writing. Instead, tradition is not only nourished by its own questioning, but it is also used as a narrative mode to inform and enrich the present. Thus, in spite of the author's obvious bias for traditional woman, the story of modern woman's potential to escape from the prison cell of restrictive conceptions of her identity does not go unrecorded in her works. Evidence of this is found in *Les mains veulent dire ...* (1987) and in *SM*, where both suppressed heroines are driven respectively to insanity and to suicide by marital conflicts. Read realistically, the ravings of the sick woman and the tragic end of Singue Mura are cumulative examples of modern Cameroonian woman's self-defeat and self-destruction resulting from deep-seated alienation and sado-masochistic self-indulgence. On a symbolic plane, however, these apparently escapist strategies represent woman's triumphant plunge into self to take fuller possession of the recesses of her consciousness and her metaphoric leap to freedom.

It is through this strategic use of ritual involving the confrontation of self with self whenever a crisis arises that the Liking woman, even without arms, is seen as a true revolutionary. (20) Rootedness in tradition reinstates her in her initial (but usurped) (21) position as the first initiate whose mission is to moralise the society. In this respect, *Soo*, in *UNT*, epitomizes the Liking woman. It is indeed through her

primordial encounter with God that woman in Liking's oeuvre - unlike the Christian Eve - has been empowered to sow the seed of survival. For, the key in her hand is symbolic of woman's recovery of selfhood, and - through her- of the attainment by the couple of a harmony based on newly-gained mutual respect and recognition of their complementarity; more importantly, however, it visualizes the attainment of a new social order in present-day Cameroon as well as in all other violence-prone, morally-bankrupt and spiritually rudderless African postcolonies.

By contrast, the reinvention of hope in Beyala's feminist discourse rests not on moral idealism, but on the judicious use of "bottom-power" and the building of new communities of women supportive of each other's needs.

"Bottom-power" is the weapon which not only Bertha Andela and Laetitia in SDS, but also Maryam in MAA, paradoxically use in order to end the Beyala woman's never-ending quest for her lost body. (22) By roping herself with two men in a polyandrous cluster where she comfortably assumes the male-identified dominant role, Bertha actually calls to question the right arrogated to African men in the still vibrant polygynous system. (23) The idea that woman is never more prized than when she is the object of male competition is taken up by career-prostitute Laetitia (p, 194), and the rebellious Moslem housewife Laryan (p. 119). Through dedication to prostitution as a life-choice, or provocative, overt infidelity, both of them reject domestic enclosure, preserve their independence and regain full control over their sex lives (SDS:196; MAA: 183, 280). In Beyala's works, then, freely chosen prostitution and indulgence in infidelity shed their stigma of deviant behaviour usually attached to them and become viable, assertive expressions of woman's coming of age. In the author's vision then there is no popular derogatory connotation of "bottom-power" as being woman's conscious objectification of her own body in order to attain what her supposedly "inferior" brain-power cannot achieve. Instead, it connotes woman's defiant subversion of male sexual domination.

The most radical strategy invented by the Beyala woman in her quest for genuine love and freedom is the creation by some characters of a counter-culture completely devoid of male presence and which

takes the form of woman-centred communities and lesbianism. The violence which the man, as fathers, lovers, and husbands have inflicted directly or indirectly upon the Beyalawo and has broken the communication line between the sexes, resulting in woman's decree of dispensability.

In SDS the two step-sisters, Megri and Magdalena, bond to overthrow the old male-centred view of Wuel society and rebuild woman's supportiveness and complicity. Significantly, the pair "elopes" on wedding day and soon after, when her baby girl is expertly midwived in the forest by the sister, the trio, as it were, recreates a harmonious family based on sharing and mutual nurturance (24) - all positive feelings and values which absent in (heterosexual) bondings as experienced by Beyala's characters. In CSB and TIT, this theme of mutually-rewarding female bonding expands in explosive acquiescence of lesbianism as African woman's extremist self-as action in our male-oriented, male-dominated society. Engaged in an exist quest which she can attain only by "abandoning man to human stupidity" (Ateba in CSB writes love letters to Woman (67) and evinces overt lesbian tend in the inverted Electra complex which she has towards Betty, her own prostitute mother (104). But it is with Irene, a childhood friend, that she experiences the deep sensuality of the mating of woman with woman - albeit disjointed state of mind where external reality and hallucination are merged. 173). Similarly, in TIT, Tanga's abusive contacts with the men and Anna-Cla down-trodden status as a Jewish child having grown up under French Nazism s the mutual attraction that will coalesce them into experiencing erotic, mutually fulfilling love in their shared prison cell (72-73).

Beyala's thematic venture into lesbianism has often been frowned upon signalling her alienation (and market-mongering) which dictate that she is essentially for target Western audiences. (25) Though the author's material mode of expression hardly draw from her cultural legacy, it is interesting to note select oral traditions condone a "controlled" form of lesbianism as the celebration of female power. In the Bassa Koo and the Beti Mengu esoteric cults, for exam in which older women initiate teenage girls into womanhood, the latter are tau among other things, all the techniques of love-making, including the art of pleasure giving and self-gratification. The principal rites of

passage of this sexual initiation even involve the lingering between initiands and their initiators in their eroticism through the manipulation of their clitoris. (26) Though in building alternative lesbian sub-culture the intent of Beyala's fictionalized females invariably link heterosexual love with violence and destruction is both exotic provocative, some consciousness-raising still occurs. For, these contemporary lesbians like the Mevungu initiands of old, have discovered that woman's sex independence and attainment of erotic self-gratification and fulfillment outside sphere of man's dictates is the most radical way of invalidating patriarchy's con of women. It follows that in their creator's variant of the "aesthetics of resistant 'clitoris-power matches Liking's spiritual dimension in coming to terms with fern suppression in the society. Indeed, through time and space sexual starvation - which extreme form lesbianism appears to the present writer - is the ultimate weapon whereby woman to bring down even the most coercive male authority, thus culminate in her empowerment in the society.

Conclusion

While there is no denying that many affinities exist in the feminist discourse of Liking and Beyala, it is important at this point to come back to their marked differences. Liking consistently dives into the collective consciousness of her people as spelled out in her oeuvre which always endeavours to uphold the quiet dignity of Africa's timeless cultures. By contrast, Beyala's entire landscape evinces the pernicious influence of Western points of reference, casting her in opposition with genuine African feminists.

Though it is passionately engaging, Beyala's rhetoric is encumbered with defiance, disrespect for traditional wisdom and detached Afro-pessimism, all of which brand her oeuvre as dilettante writing meant for the consumption of cosmopolitan African elites and target Western audiences. Her ingestion and regurgitation of hard-line Western feminist postulates, cannot escape mudslinging from most African feminist militants who have always rejected the imposition of extraneous visions and tenets on the movement. (27) For example, the feminisation of men and correlative masculinisation of women (as obtained in polyandrous triangles), the acquiescence in prostitution,

brazen infidelity and, above all, lesbianism will never be acceptable to African sensibilities as workable forms of women's organized resistance. Neither will they ever be considered as viable makeshifts for the existing domestic patterns, the never questioned natural male-female bonding and the desirability of constancy.

Also noteworthy is the fact that the dilemma posed to feminist movements by destructive female self- and in-group violence - (which lends its title to the present article) - has more far-reaching implications in the Beyala oeuvre. Interestingly, her women who create lesbian counter-cultures, end up jumping from the frying pan into the fire, when home is made hell for them by other women. Their unheroic end signals the futility of their struggle, for they either commit murder (Ateba in CSB), go insane (Kedjaba in SDS), or meet an untimely death (Tanga in 1TJ). One interpretation of the tragic outcome meted by Beyala herself on her fictionalized lesbians is her realization of the danger of losing touch altogether with the dreams and expectations of her African compatriots. Chinua Achebe's warning to Ghanaian novelist Ayi Kwei Armah that "one is never more defeated than when one tries to run away from self" rings a familiar note here.

In counterpoint, Liking who assumes a moral responsibility towards her people gives primacy to African views and experiences in her discourse. The worldview of her fictionalized feminist is not oppositional, but constructive and her concerns have social relevance for African audiences. In articulating her sense of identity, she does not pursue individual visions of happiness, but seeks instead to advance the cause of African feminism which will wrench some measure of success only insofar as it confronts the politics of male dominance constructively. It is because the aim of African-style feminism is positive change for the benefit of both women and men that Liking emphasizes dialogue between the sexes rather than hard-line reverse sexism. She insistently argues for the commonality of male- female destiny and for harmony in the couple as forming the basis for stability, welfare and peace in society.

The above divergence notwithstanding, the works of Liking and Beyala, in their various ways, argue for the valorisation of the female principle in our society. Their fictionalized women have come a long way from voicelessness and invisibility to the exhibition of their

tremendous power after passing through a transient stage of self-enslavement and in-group violence. They have been able to sow the seeds of individual and collective survival in our predominantly androgynous society by acquiring a heightened spiritual awareness as obtained in tradition which argues for the reconciliation of paradox, as well as by opting for radical perspectives bequeathed by Western-style feminism, but which is also ingrained in some oral traditions. In the feminist discourse of both authors, then, these are the two sources from which woman can draw inner strength and resilience in order to conceive of future visions that will put an end to sexist oppression in Cameroon/African society.

Notes

1. Beyala's recent arraignment on charges of plagiarism may tarnish her reputation as a prolific novelist whose innovative style is lauded by many critics of African literature. (cf. *Le Camard Enchaîné*, January II, 1995, p. 5).

2. For Liking incidentally, each name has a precise meaning which influences its carrier's destiny. In *L'Amour-cent-vies* (1988: 126) for instance, she writes:

“On ne porte jamais un nom au hasard”; and in *Orphée d'Afrique* (1981:9) “Traditionnellement, chaque nom voulait dire quelque chose; quelque chose qui était en rapport avec les circonstances de la naissance, le caractère et le destin de son porteur”; and in *LQD* (104): “N'est-ce pas étrange ce qu'un nom peut avoir comme influence sur celui qui le porte?”

3. Whether in the past or in contemporary society, African woman is actually subjected to both gender and Class oppression. She is therefore “the slave of a slave”, that is, “the wretched of the wretched” or in modern terminology, “the proletarian of the proletarian”. In line with Liking, Beyala profusely substantiates woman's double subjugation in her entire oeuvre, e.g.

In *Seul le Viable Savait*, *Maman a un amant*, and *Le Petit Prince de Belleville*. The first novel clearly states that” “marriage is a pact of slavery” (78). In the second, senior-wife Maryama rejects woman’s subordinate status under polygyny in these words: “Deux femmes, que dis-je? Deux esclaves nuancees comme un langage de captif” (145). But nowhere else than in this statement made in the third novel by ten-year old Loukoum does the sexist and class oppression endured by women appear so inescapable: “ ... d’ ailleurs, j’ ai pas besoins d’apprendre a cause que les femmes vont bosser pour moi” .(7).

4. Beyala, who in counterpoint to Liking, has chosen the realistic rendering of experience - albeit in the same surrealistic style - dwells heavily on this myopic perception of African womanhood throughout her oeuvre. In the social stratification of France, the migrant African woman ranks lower than the Whites, the rich and the black man as can be construed from Soumana’ s statement in *PPB* (166): “T’es noire, t’es pauvre et en plus t’es femme. T’es vraiment rien du tout”“ (my emphasis). At any rate, in Africa itself, femaleness has always rhymed with nothingness as borne out by the following lament of a father of daughters in *Wuel*: “Le loup avait trois enfants, trois filles qu’il adorait mais a qui il reprochait leur féministé. A qui voulait entendre il disait: “Les cieux m’ont puni, je n’ai que des filles qui ne me servent arien”. (SDS:145).

5. This virginity test is actually provoked by Aunt Ada’s apprehension that Ateba’ s life would be a remake of her mother, Betty, who became a prostitute after being seduced by a good-for-nothing instead of choosing a sugar-daddy (86). From age 8, all girls of *Wuel* must be subjected to the same virginity tests as the priestess conducts in *SDS* (60).

6. On the issue of the victimisation of modern widows, see Severin-Cécile Abega (1988): “La veuve moderne est une femme toujours soupçonnée de s’ être débarrassée de son mari pour s’ adonner au libertinage, d’ être captatrice d’héritage et de progéniture et de nager dans l’opulence grâce aux pensions que les différents organes de sécurité sociale peuvent lui verser.’

7. On this, see Beatrice Rangira Galimore (1995: 54-60).

8. Incest in most African societies is not necessarily determined by blood ties. This is the meaning of Ngonga's question: "Crois-tu que la paternité ne soit que de sang?" (LQD: 128).

9. cf. Eloise Briere (1995:66-71).

10. Beyala also articulates this idea of the uselessness of daughters in African social construct. In PPB (160) we hear: "Les anciens avaient raison de recouvrir de terre leur premier enfant femelle. Ils endiguèrent le malheur."

11. Mariama Ba of Senegal and Buchi Emecheta of Nigeria come readily to mind here especially in their novels, *Une si longue lettre* and *The Joys of Motherhood*.

12. This, in Beyala's coinage, is called "la loi de L'oublie, TIT: 24.

13. In a slightly different context, Beyala has remarked how woman easily reverts from the status of the oppressed to that of the oppressor. SDS: 185.

14. It is in the form of a ram that Ngué, the godhead of power and authority, appeared to Soo, primordial woman in the culture; while Urn, the goddess of fertility, purity, peace and art took the form of a silurid before appearing the housewife Kitchatchas in the course of her fishing. On this, see 1) Wonyou (1971:246-256) and 2) Liking (1981.EJC: 77-78) and (1991, LRAC: 123) ..

15. cf. Joseph Mboui cited by Pierre Titi Nwel (3'4) Ngo Maa dit: "de la fet de l'homme, qui pesé au front de l'éléphant? Manal dit: "le poids femme dépassé parce que l'homme est le gardien de la femme". "L'homme dépassé seulement la femme par l'âge, mais la femme d6 l'homme en honneur. Ngo Maa dit pourquoi? Son marl dit: "la femme palmier de vin, l'homme la liane qui la fait fainéanter, la liane ne peut commander le palmier".

16. Her song on p. 15: “Me Ngond Libii Ntep J1iga. me nnol inlo wem Nt. meaning literally, “I, the slave-woman of Ntep Illiga. [have killed my husband Ntep Illiga”, must be understood in this sense.

17. See the referenced song in the note above. On its religious origins, see Hourantier .

18. Says the conciliatory Ntep Illiga in the closing scene of *La Puissance de* “C’était au pays de la jouissance, c’était au pays de la mort. 11 y avait cieux, il y avait des lieux [...] Des visages jaunes et des visages couleur Ils étaient tous mon visage et c’était le visage de la pitié, Et ils entonne un hymne victorieux, un hymne à la gloire de L’ existence et il y avait pensée grosse comme une fleur, [...] une pensée de la pitié: j’ai fait un’ fantastique voyage ... “(51). .1

19. The Sick Woman’s husband in *Les Mains* veulent dire ... clearly established this commutativity between woman’s (simulated) madness and her restionary nature (p. 24).⁷

20. Although it is women who first discovered Ngue and Um(as mention note 14 above), it is significant that the celebration of the godheads in Bassaland gave rise to the establishment of all-male cults only. For obvious reason that the men, out of cunning and self-interest, used physical force to prevent women from exploiting their transcendental discovery EJC:80), RAC:123) and Wonyou (I 971),

21. As shown in Gallimore (1994) woman’s desire to reappropriate her by a constant leitmotiv in African women’s writing and in Beyala’s texts particular. For example, Bertha Andela states clearly that she wants to re full control of her confiscated self: “je veux mon corps”, SDS: 15.

22. Says the independent-minded Laetitia in SDS: 197: “II faudrait absolument interdire la polygamie. Un homme, aussi intelligent soit-il, ne devrait pas avoir plusieurs femmes. A mon avis, une c’est deja trop”.

The institution of polygamy is regarded in Beyala’s works as the main pillar “of patriarchy which has served to catalyse woman’s

disorientation dissolution and erosion of selfhood in our culture. This is particularly seen in MAA and PPB.

23. cf. Eloise Briere (1995:69).

24. Ndachi Tagne (1990:97). Nalova Lyonga in her address during a plenary session of the Conference on Cameroon Literature (1-3 December 1994) also highlighted Beyala's hard-line Western feminist trends. Throughout the Conference's panels on women's writing most reactions dealt with the émigré author's radical perspectives; the panellists emphasized in particular that her exotic representations of women are extraneous to the African context.

25. It is particularly noteworthy that the word koo in Bassa means "snai", signalling the resemblance between the terrestrial mollusk and the female erogenous organ. Significantly, during their seclusion, the intiands and their initiators constantly treat themselves to delicious snail dishes, a thing which is taboo under normal circumstances. Joseph Onkan-Evagle (forthcoming).

26. On this issue, see the introduction to *The Emancipation of Women: an African Perspective*. (cf. bibliography).

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Rectifications Et Infirmités: L'image De L'homme Chez Deux Romancières Camerounaises

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Qu'il soit père ou frère, époux ou amant, l'homme apparaît généralement dans l'émergente écriture féminine d'Afrique noire francophone comme la source consciente ou inconsciente des malheurs de sa congénère. L'inconstance, l'infidélité et la duplicité représentent les lieux des discours d'*Un chant éclate* (1981), *Fureurs et cris de femmes* (1989), *La Brise du jour* (1978) où des Don Juan contraignent leurs partenaires à la forclusion et Jour à la folie. Aussi, la libération de L'Africaine ne semble-t-elle se concevoir autrement qu'en terme d'humiliations et/ou de violences exercées à l'encontre des responsables désignés des souffrances de la femme. *Seul le Diable le savait* (1990) déroule l'aventure d'un ménage à trois qui voit deux soupirants subir la domination d'une femme. Le bannissement de la structure patriarcale du foyer dû à la polyandrie de fait propulse la femme au centre de l'univers domestique dont les amants occupent la périphérie. Bien plus, *C'est le soleil qui m'a brillée* (1987) dont le projet idéologique peut se réunir en 3 étapes "revendiquer la lumière, retrouver la femme et abandonner l'homme", célèbre la liquidation physique du mâle.

Cependant, cette écriture qui se veut une fonction de dévoilement et même de subversion d'une réalité perçue comme étouffante et injuste, trouve des accents dissonants dans deux textes camerounais que tout apparemment semble opposer: *Orphée-Dafric* (1979) de Were Were Liking et *Sous la cendre le feu* (1990) d'Evelyne Mpoudi Ngolle.

Il ne serait toutefois pas exact d'affirmer que les premiers romans de Were Were Liking ou d'Evelyne Mpoudi-Ngolle constituent les seules notes discordantes de la symphonie accusatrice de l'homme. En

effet, l'un des tout premiers écrits féminins Camerounais amorce la tendance. *Rencontres essentielles* (1989) de Thérèse Kuoh Moukoury est l'histoire d'un couple qui, après un mariage d'amour, est profondément ébranlé par la stérilité de la jeune femme. La singularité provient ici de ce que l'écrivaine déplace les accents. Contre toute attente, ce n'est pas le mari qui vit mal d'infertilité de son épouse. C'est cette dernière qui évoque des causes aussi insensées qu'absurdes pour justifier son comportement masochiste et asocial. Elle ira ainsi jusqu'à proposer une autre femme à son conjoint...

Cependant avec *Orphée-Dafric* et *Sous la cendre le feu*, c'est pour la première fois que dans le roman féminin camerounais francophone, plusieurs images de l'homme sont cadrées sous un angle plus ou moins favorable et même sous des couleurs réellement riantes, tant par leur contribution à l'accomplissement de l'intrigue que pour leur participation à la création de l'univers romanesque.

Sous la cendre le feu serait sans doute demeuré un roman juste capable de figurer au panthéon de la presse de cœur tel que savent bien produire les écrivaines noires francophones (Nkashama, 1994: 130), n'eut été le portrait particulier l'homme qu'il réfléchit. En effet, l'observation des protagonistes masculin roman d'Evelyne Mpoudi Ngolle, comme ceux de Were Were Liking fait apparaître deux classes exclusives d'actants mâles: les personnages référentiels et les personnages-embrayeurs (Hamon, 1977: 122).⁴

Dans la mesure où la seule référence à l'univers des romans de Liking et de Mpoudi Ngolle paraît indispensable à leur compréhension, le père de Mina d'Orphée, le Docteur Lobe ou les camarades anonymes d'Orphée sont des sondages-embrayeurs. Comme dans presque tous les romans féminins Camerounais d'expression française, le personnage d'un certain âge est, chez Liking et chez Mpoudi-Ngolle détenteur de la tradition.

Si l'on en croit l'auteur de *Pouvoir et sexualité dans le roman africain*, « Le personnage du père apparaît très peu dans le roman africain et le plus souvent la forme d'un mauvais père » (Comaton, 1990: 80). Pourtant, M. Elamé est le prototype même du père responsable qui tient absolument à ce que sa progéniture soit élevée selon les règles traditionnelles de la dignité, de l'hospitalité, du droit d'aînesse ... C'est sans doute pourquoi l'héroïne « s'était toujours sentie plus proche de

lui que de sa mère » (SCF:40). Passablement phalocrate, le père de Mina se veut “progressiste” (SCF: 15). Il réagit avec un paradoxe semblable à celui de la Grande Royale face à l’instruction de la fille. Bien qu’il affirme ne pas percevoir l’utilité des diplômes pour une femme, “il voudrait que [Mina] aille le plus loin possible dans [ses] études” (SCF: 15).

Malgré quelques hésitations compréhensibles dont il fait preuve à l’égard du mariage exogamique de sa fille, il finit par adopter son “gendre adorable” (SCF: 11) dont il prend parfois la défense contre sa propre fille.

L’ouverture d’esprit est encore plus remarquable chez le père d’Orphée. “Intelligent, ouvert et respecte de tous” (O.D.: 11), il représente aux yeux de ses concitoyens, le modèle que l’on doit suivre. Ainsi, son “village solitaire semblait n’attendre qu’un signe de lui pour se soulever” (O.D.: 11). En homme pondéré, il ne prendra jamais le risque d’entraîner ses compatriotes dans l’aventure d’une guerre civile dont l’issue est par essence inconnue de ses instigateurs. Son tact, son savoir et son savoir-faire généralement exprimés dans le code gnomique (proverbe adages ...) sont patiemment transmis aux jeunes générations qui en ont plus que besoin pour s’insérer dans une Afrique en pleine restructuration idéologique contrairement à nombre de textes africains ou la différence d’âges engendre des conflits, les personnages masculins de Liking vivent en parfaite synergie: Les vieillards ne se font jamais prier pour “transmettre leur savoir [...] aux jeunes attentifs qui les écoutent” (O.D.:12).

Empreints de “la sagesse et du savoir-faire d’un homme qui a passé son existence à côtoyer les hommes et leurs problèmes” (SCF: 205), les actes et paroles du vieil Okoumé, quant à eux, font de lui une bibliothèque vivante. C’est naturellement que Mina et Mohamadou se tournent vers lui quand le malheur s’abat sur leur couple.

En dépit de l’existence dans *Sous la cendre le feu* d’hommes présentés sous des jours hideux comme Edimo ou le jeune pasteur anonyme, les romans de Mpoudi-Ngolle et de Liking peignent des jeunes gens pleins de talents et de qualités. La décision spontanée de ses deux camarades anonymes (O.D.: 14) de suivre Orphée sous l’eau à la recherche de Nyango constitue un acte héroïque de courage et de mansuétude. En compagnie d’autres jeunes, ces derniers s’activent à

redonner espoir à un village sinistre par l'Indépendance. De même, "homme séduisant avec une carrure forte" (SCF: 89), le Docteur Lobè est quant à lui, le parfait émule d'Hypocrate qui a raison de la névrose de l'héroïne, permettant ainsi au couple de mener une vie conjugale normale.

L'ami de Mohamadou est plutôt l'archetype de l'intellectuel équilibré. Maurice a su s'intégrer dans la vie moderne sans s'aliéner la tradition. Doué d'un sens de l'humour qui fait de lui un homme agréable à vivre, il est aussi d'une forte personnalité. Libéré de stéréotypes et d'idées reçues, il s'offre régulièrement et sans complexe à assister Sylvie dans les tâches domestiques traditionnellement vouées aux femmes. Homme de parole, il épousera l'amie de Mina après une demi-douzaine d'années de fiançailles. En somme, jeunes ou moins jeunes, les protagonistes masculins "secondaires" d'*Orphee-Dafric* et de *Sous la cendre le feu* entretiennent plutôt de bons rapports avec le "beau sexe".

Alors que sur le plan narratif Orphée et Mohamadou rappellent à quelque égard les personnages analysés à l'instant, "l'étendue" de leur présence dans le discours en fait des éléments dont dépendant en grande partie la cohésion et l'organisation des récits respectifs. En tant que leur "lisibilité" précède respectivement du degré de la participation du lecteur à la mythologie grecque ou à la culture arabo-islamique, les conjoints respectifs...de Nyango et de Mina relèvent de ce que Philippe Hamon nomme "personnage-référentiels". (1977: 122).

En effet, Mohamadou (Muhammad en Arabe) est selon *Le Coran*, le créateur de cette religion qui prône entre autres vertus le renoncement à la vie égoïste et facile. Dans la réalité du roman de Mpoudi-Ngolle, l'ami de Maurice rappelle en plusieurs points le messager d'Allah. Mohamadou n'est pas seulement un avocat brillant dont les performances imposent respect et admiration. Il est aussi, aux yeux mêmes de ses clients, "un homme calme, réfléchi et d'une serviabilité à nulle autre pareille" (SCF, 7). En outre, contrairement à ses homologues antillais constamment "réfugiés dans des attitudes d'irresponsabilité" (Conde, 1979:36), il est un homme "présent" au foyer. Ses rapports avec ses enfants en font le "père merveilleux et très affectueux" (SCF. 100) dont rêve tout enfant. Le "père charmant" (SCF, 100) s'entend tant et si bien avec sa progéniture de tous âges que

Mina en est quelque peu jalouse. Homme au grand cœur, il voue une égale affection à ses enfants légitimes et à Fanny, fille naturelle de Mina.

Comme amant et/ou époux, ce chef-d'œuvre de la nature qui laisse la fille d'Elamé muette d'admiration dès la toute première rencontre paraît plus intéressant encore. Amoureux sincère, il n'a écouté que son cœur dans ses relations avec Mina. Le frère d'Hadja aura bravé toutes les appréhensions qu'auraient eues des hommes, mêmes des plus "libérés", pour épouser l'héroïne alors que celle-ci était enceinte d'un autre. Par ailleurs, bien que nanti de plusieurs diplômes de l'école occidentale, il apparaît comme un homme acquis au dialogue des cultures prôné dans *Muntu l'homme africain et la culture néo-africaine*, c'est à dire capable "d'intégrer tous les éléments européens qui répondent aux exigences de la vie contemporaine dans la tradition autochtone rationnellement thématifiée dont les valeurs auront fait l'objet d'une prise de conscience systématique et d'un renouvellement dynamique"..... (Jahn, 1966: 394).

Ainsi, il se soumet aux rites traditionnels du mariage en se rendant chez les parents de sa fiancée afin de "leur demander [sa] main" (SCF: 59). De même après l'acte malheureux sur Fanny, le père "envoûté" accepte de recourir à la bénédiction ancestrales pour conjurer "le démon qui est entré dans [sa] famille (SCF.: 20 I). Ayant visiblement assuré une synthèse assez heureuse des deux cultures dont il est héritier, il comprend aisément que le bonheur du couple se fait à deux ou il n'existe. Aussi, les décisions concernant l'avenir du couple sont-elles prises d'un commun accord. Le grand nombre de scènes dialoguées qui engagent les conjoints atteste besoin était, que l'époux de Mina est un être ouvert au dialogue, à la négociation même à la contradiction.

Pendant de longues années et nonobstant les "droits" que lui confère la tradition, "le bon mari" (SCF: 102) de Mina tiendra le ménage, alors que son épouse est occupée à ses études. Bien plus, quand celle-ci deviendra fonctionnaire, le mari attentionné ne manquera jamais, en tant que de besoin, de lui donner de vigoureux coups de mains dans les "taches exclusivement réservées chez nous à la gent féminine" (SCF:131-132). En fin de compte, Mohamadou dans ses rapports avec son épouse est plus qu'un amant dévoué. Il est tout

simplement “un compagnon gai, compréhensif et tendre” (SCF: 97), capable de descendre jusqu’aux enfers, s’il faut, afin que triomphe l’amour.

Orphée quant à lui, est le digne descendant de son père. Travailleur et modeste, il a un sens très aigu de responsabilité. Il aura ainsi décidé de sacrifier études afin de travailler pour aider son père à élever ses cadets. Jeune intellectuel engagé, le héros de Liking est aussi un amant persévérant qui croit que “l’amour vient à bout de tout” (O.D.: 14). Aidé de Nyango, il aura finalement raison réticences de ses parents et de ceux de sa fiancée. Bien plus, sa bravoure décuplée par l’amour le conduira jusqu’ aux enfers comme son modèle mythologique. Au nom de cet “amour-action” (O.D.: 47), il subira victorieusement toutes les épreuves. L’époux de Nyango paraît libéré “de toutes les formes-pensées égoïques et obserantistes” (O.D.: 47) qui ne peuvent qu’éloigner les amants véritables. L’amour pour lui ne se conçoit qu’en terme de partage, les amants ne constituant au bout du compte que les moitiés d’un être qui ne peut être un qu’en étant deux. Par conséquent, les actes de l’un et de l’autre ne se justifient que dans la mesure où ils contribuent à conforter l’union. Cette attitude est perceptible dans le choix du moment et du lieu de la construction de la demeure conjugale (O.D.: 17). C’est aussi tout naturellement que Nyango prend place auprès de son époux sur le Kayac initiatique.

Le rapport du personnage de Liking à la tradition paraît plus dynamique que celui de Mohamadou. En effet, sa synthèse des cultures occidentale et africaine est plus élaborée. A l’instar du protagoniste de *Sous la cendre le feu*, il se conforme aux différentes étapes des fiançailles traditionnelles. Mais en plus, il soumet son mariage à l’approbation des ancêtres, « La Voix du Ciel » (O.D.: 13), par la terrifiante traversée du Fleuve Blanc en crue sur le fragile Kayac. On se souvient que Mohamadou ne recourt à la bénédiction ancestrale qu’après la “malédiction”. Auparavant d’ ailleurs, le héros d’*Orphée-Dafric* aura observé, comme l’exige la coutume, une chaste abstinence pendant les trois années “réglementaires” qu’ont duré les fiançailles.

“Le seul jeune homme qui s’acharnait à suivre les voies de la tradition tout en vivant avec son temps” (O.D.: 43) passe pour marginal aux yeux de nombre de ses congénères, Cette attitude raisonnable et toute de singularité, dans ce bled où la déprivation des

mœurs consécutive au contact avec l'Occident s'installe peu à peu, fait de lui "celui qui dépouille, analyse; celui qui sélectionne, synthétise: celui qui réadapte et actualise" (O.D: 44) la culture africaine. En somme, l'époux de Nyango devra aider ses compatriotes à refléter l'Africain de demain dont parle Amadou Koné.

"L'homme Noir de demain se fait non pas par celui qui s'accroche désespérément au passé, ni par celui que l'Europe dans son intérêt a perdu en l'éblouissant, mais simplement celui qui est assez lucide pour avancer vers L'Europe tout en restant lui-même" (Koné, 1980:39).

Leur définition directe et/ou indirecte (Kenan. 1985:50) aura permis de constater que les personnages masculins qui selon le mot de Roland Barthes assurent l'« effet de réel » (Hamon, 1977: 122) chez les romancières camerounaises sont bien loin d'être les "méchants loups" décriés dans d'autres écrits féminins.

Dans *La Brise du jour* (1978) de Lydie Dooh-Bounya par exemple, Pat incarne l'amant inconstant et égoïste mais sûr de son charme qui ne se soucie guère de la passion dévorante de l'amante abandonnée. Quant à Delphine Zanga Tsogo, elle met invariablement en scène dans *Vie de femmes* (1989) et *L'Oiseau en cage* (1984) d'irréductibles "machos" qui ne recourent à la femme exploitée et méprisée que pour assouvir leurs "instincts de bête" (Vie, 35). Dans son deuxième roman, Calixthe Beyala dénonce "l'autorité incontournable qui s'abat sur l'enfant à sa naissance, imposant à la fille un nom et un destin" (Chemain, 162). Auteur de tous les maux de l'humanité selon l'auteur de *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée*, car "tout est sa faute" (Soleil, 6), l'homme est réduit à son sexe, ses obsessions, sa corruption et sa volonté constante de n'entrevoir en la femme qu'un instrument de plaisir.

Liking pour sa part précise plus tard dans *Elle sera de Jaspe et de corail* (1981) et *Amour cent-vies* (1988) son projet esquisse dans *Orphée-Dafric*. Tout en combattant ses concitoyens « incirconcis » (*Elle sera*, 118) représentés par "le couple prisonnier du temps", Babou et Grozi, elle entrevoit pour l'Afrique une nouvelle race d'hommes et de femmes, « misogynies » et « misovires » dont la rencontre engendrerait « les enfants de souffle et de feu, de jaspe et de corail » dont l'Afrique nouvelle a besoin.

Les “rôles” discursifs accordés aux personnages masculins d'*Orphée Dafric* et de *Sous la cendre le feu* ne manquent pas non plus d'intérêt.

Pour l'écrivain, écrit Henri Godard l'adoption [d'un] discours la place qu'il accorde aux autres et la lumière dans laquelle il les situe sont bien autant de moyens de prendre parti. A leur niveau et dans leur ordre les options linguistiques ont une dimension idéologique” (Godard. 1985: 183).

Le roman de Mpoudi-Ngolle est un récit-autobiographique dont le champ narratif est constamment occupé par l'héroïne. La narratrice y concède cependant beaucoup d'espace narratif aux autres acteurs de l'histoire, surtout à l'époux de Mina. Le récit est même alternativement focalisé sur la fille d'Elamé et Mohamadou. De même, beaucoup de dialogues engagent directement ou indirectement le cadet d'Hadja qui devient en maintes séquences le sujet même de la narration.

Autant que celle du roman de Mpoudi-Ngolle, l'étiquette du personnage central d'*Orphie-Dafric* jouit d'une aura consacrée par l'histoire et par l'histoire littéraire. En effet, le fils de Calliope symbolise des qualités indéniables. Les correspondances que l'auteur établit entre les caractères du personnage mythologique et sa créature révèlent le type de sentiment que la romancière nourrit à l'égard de la moitié masculine de la société. Bien plus, Liking fait de “son” Orphée, le héros d'une aventure où seul avec Nyango, il porte une étiquette. On l'a facilement constaté. La “qualification” de l'époux de Nyango procède par l'élimination de tout autre protagoniste qui pourrait lui faire ombrage. Ainsi, il demeure le seul et unique actant jouissant d'une consistance et d'un relief certains.

En outre, en accordant à Orphée le pouvoir, pendant trente-huit pages sur soixante que compte le roman, “le créateur mythique de l'univers” (Kayser, 80) l'auteure crée un précédent révolutionnaire. En effet, jusqu'à ce jour, aucun roman féminin camerounais de langue française n'a laissé le privilège à un personnage masculin d'être pendant si longtemps le sujet de la narration.

Au total, Orphée et Mohamadou ont hérité toutes les qualités de leurs référents aux quelles ils ont ajouté leurs propres. Le personnage de Mpoudi-Ngolle représente en plus des aspects positifs de la religion

musulmane dont est créateur son, modèle coranique, la générosité et la tolérance. Au contraire de celui de l'époux d'Eurydice, le manque du héros de Liking est comblé au terme de son aventure infernale. Orphée retrouve Nyango. La romancière camerounaise innove. Les, portraits plutôt attachants que les écrivaines font de leurs créatures « adamiques »: incitent le lecteur à chercher les obstacles éventuels au bonheur de leurs conjointes ailleurs.

Les faits et gestes de l'agent féminine chez Mpoudi-Ngolle semblent prouver qu'elle est plus ou moins à l'origine de ses propres difficultés, Simone de Beauvoir (1949: 305) constatait déjà dans le *Deuxième sexe* que l'

une des malédictions qui pèse sur la femme, c'est que dans son enfance, elle est abandonnée aux mains des femmes [...]. Ainsi, les femmes, quand une enfant leur est confiée, s'attachent avec un zèle ou l'arrogance se mélange à la rancœur à la transformer en une femme semblable à elle.

Cette affirmation se vérifie avec une implacable précision avec les personnages féminins de Mpoudi-Ngolle.

Qu'elle s'appelle Mme Elamé, Aïssatou ou Hadja, chacune contribue à sa manière à la survenance de la névrose de Mina. Rappelant par certaines de ses: attitudes Ma Médi du Fils d'Agatha Moudio (1967), la mère de l'héroïne est la, première à s'insurger contre le fait que Mohamadou participe aux travaux domestiques. Aïssatou, quant à elle, se présente comme Cassandre. C'est elle qui, pour la première fois, révèle au couple que l'absence du père du marié à la cérémonie nuptiale exposait les conjoints à la malédiction.

Plus que tout autre personnage féminin de *Sous la cendre le feu*, Hadja cristallise tous les "défauts". Qu'elle justifie sa conduite par la tradition ou par la religion musulmane dont elle incarne plutôt tous les aspects négatifs, la sœur de Mohamadou est Célie dont la seule présence dans le ménage de Mina aura failli faire basculer irrémédiablement le foyer. Intolérante et intrigante, elle apparaît comme "la mère dévorante" que décrit Denise Paulme. Son premier contact avec sa belle-sœur se solde par l'évanouissement de cette dernière, suivi d'un accouchement difficile. Quant à son séjour prolongé sous le toit de Mohamadou, il est

un cauchemar pour son frère, un malheur pour les enfants, la domestique et surtout Mina.

Contre toute logique évidente l'héroïne participe activement à ce masochisme féminin. Elle se confine dans le rôle stérile de plaignante et de pleureuse. "On a toujours décidé pour moi" (SCF: 20) relève-t-elle à longueur de pages, défaitiste. Pourtant la seule chose raisonnable à faire était, comme le lui font comprendre Sylvie et Essébé, de conquérir par les paroles et les actes les (nouveaux) espaces de liberté que peuvent/doivent concéder la société et le comportement plutôt libéral de son époux. S'exprimer ne revient-il pas à prendre le pouvoir pour se libérer comme le suggère l'auteur de *La Folie?* (Jaccard, 35).

À l'instar du *Baobab fou* (1992) de Ken Bugul, *d'Un chant éclate* (1981) de Mariama Bâ ou de *Fureurs et cris de femmes* (1989) d'Angèle Rawiri, *Sous la cendre le feu* met en évidence la haine parfois féroce qui imprègne souvent les relations entre femmes (ou de la femme à elle-même) en Afrique, et en font de véritables duels au féminin. Autant le dire. Le combat pour l'émancipation de l'Africaine doit affronter des adversaires les plus redoutables (plutôt) au sein même de la gent féminine. Il serait toutefois hâtif de conclure que, comme l'Afrique le développement, L'Africaine refuse l'émancipation.

Les femmes qui servent et même incarnent la loi des Pères sont le fait de "l'éducation de la servilité" (SCF: 174). Masculins ou féminins, tous les personnages sont, à des degrés divers, victimes de la vision patriarcale du monde. Aussi, l'émancipation véritable de l'Africaine semble devoir passer par la "formation" (Beauvoir, 279) de l'Africain tout court, à la liberté. Est par conséquent illusoire tout combat pour la libération de la femme qui ne prend pas en compte toutes les composantes de la société.

Tel semble être le message que Liking signifie, en refusant d'opposer les moitiés masculine et féminine de la société. L'initiation conjointe d'Orphée et de Nyango trouve ainsi sa signification profonde. L'auteure assigne équitablement à la femme et l'homme la mission de synthèse raisonnée du double héritage africain et occidental qui seule peut améliorer le sort des partenaires. Le dernier poème du texte qui est écrit conjointement par Orphée et Nyango atteste que l'Africaine et l'Africain sont embarqués ... dans le même Kayac et que le bonheur de l'une ne se fera jamais sans l'autre. La femme, semble

prophétiser Liking sera libérée avec L'homme ou elle ne s'émancipera jamais. Le combat pour L'adaptation des lois des Pères aux exigences du monde moderne se gagnera ensemble ou il est perdu d'avance, C'est de cette manière seulement que l'Africaine innovera.

Le regard de Liking et de Mpoudi-Ngolle révèle quelques portraits significatifs. Contrairement aux autres textes féminins camerounais, le poids des Pères n'est pas ici défendu à tout prix contre les intérêts féminins par des hommes. M. Elamé, le Pasteur Ekoumé et surtout le père d'Orphée sont loin d'incarner l'immobilisme. Epoux et/ou amant, le personnage de Liking ou de Mpoudi-Ngolle est « cadeau du ciel » (SCF: 137) pour sa « moitié ». Orphée ou Mohamadou, chacun à sa manière, donne la preuve d'un attachement et d'une fidélité sans faille à son époux. Joël Edimo ou le père de Nyango apparaissent comme des cas exceptionnels d'individus véreux. Mais il convient de relever que leur turpitude n'est pas expressément dirigée contre le « deuxième sexe ». Aussi serait-il excessif de conclure ici avec l'auteur de *Roman et réalités camerounaises*, « que l'homme est le malheur des femmes. » (Ndachi- Tagne, 1986: 250)

Liking et Mpoudi-Ngolle proposent donc une autre vérité de leurs compatriotes masculins. *Orphée-Dafric* et *Sous La cendre le feu* sont exempts des pontifes de mâles « machistes », de gérontocrates viscéraux ou de Don Juan inconsolable typifiés dans les autres écrits féminins camerounais. L'homme et la femme sont également victimes du poids des Pères qui paradoxalement est défendu acharnement chez Mpoudi-Ngolle par celles que Calixthe Bélyala nomme « les fées coutumières ». Nos écrivaines évitent ainsi soigneusement le manichéisme réducteur constaté chez leurs consœurs. En outre, leur rapport au passé paraît extrêmement conséquent et circonspect. Were Were Liking et Evelyne Mpoudi-Ngolle semble suggérer que la maîtrise des incertitudes présentes ou futures commence par ressourcement aux valeurs positives et dynamiques de ce qui reste des traditions largement sclérosées,

Tout en disqualifiant les valeurs dégradées, elles recherchent des repères susceptibles de favoriser la renaissance de l'Afrique et partant, de l'Africaine. L'ordre nouveau que les romancières semblent appeler de tous leurs vœux passe par l'endurance, l' action et le savoir incarnés

entre autre par Orphée, Mohamadou, mais aussi par Nyango, Essébé, Sylvie ...

Were Were Liking et Evelyne Mpoudi-Ngolle n'isolent pas le sort de la femme de celui de la composante masculine de la société. Cette vision plutôt globalisante de la lutte pour l'émancipation de la femme voudrait manifestement éviter que l'Africaine libérée de demain soit à l'image de l'Afrique des indépendances, c'est-à-dire, mal partie.

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A Psychoanalytical Reading of Asong's *No Way To Die*

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Psychoanalytic interpretation of African works of art in general and Cameroonian in particular are rare. Even though psychoanalytic criticism can be traced to Sigmund Freud or even earlier it has rarely been applied to elucidate or explicate works of art to illustrate the multiplicity of meanings which could be found in many of our artistically conceived masterpieces. Consequently, our study intends to convey and promote this school of criticism of Cameroonian works of art. Asong's *No Way to Die* (1993) is unquestionably a psychological novel in the sense that as Weliek and Waren (1949) remind us most of the themes and characters manifest behaviour patterns which are usually associated with schizophrenic characters -paranoids and obsessional neurotics. This does not in any way mean that all the characters in this fascinating novel could be classified into the categories mentioned above. Far from it. However, the majority of them are demented characters.

In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Jacques Lacan (1978) explicates the pillars of psychoanalytic criticism namely, the unconscious, repetition, the transference and the drive. For the purpose of this study, we shall limit ourselves to the unconscious as applicable to the major characters in the novel. We shall also examine the protagonist; Dennis Nunquam's divided self or split personality, the dreamlike atmosphere of the novel, oedipal themes, castration and or emasculation, and the relationship between the Id, the Ego and Super-ego or the Subject and the other. Finally, comparisons will be made with other psychological novels.

The psychological atmosphere which pervades the world of *No Way to Die* is essentially due to the divided self or split personality

demonstrated by the hero, Dennis Nunquam. In *The Divided Self*, the British psychoanalyst, R.D. Laing illustrates the characteristics of a patient suffering from schizophrenia. In such a patient's schizoid condition, there is persistently a scission between the self and the body. This state is usually found in persons who find themselves enclosed in a threatening situation in which there is usually no escape. The only way out is by a "psychical" (mental) withdrawal into one's self and out of the body. Consequently, the patient or character is usually imbued with feelings of estrangement, derealisation, and lives in a dreamlike world. Occasionally, the paranoid has specific persecutors, develops a defensive system around him and even develops sado-masochistic tendencies since love with another individual under such circumstances is totally absent. Consequently, the character or patient possesses two personalities, namely the Imaginary Self and the Real Self. Some psychoanalysts and scholars believe that schizophrenia, the illness afflicting Dennis Nunquam in *No Way to Die*, is as a result of breakdown in the family. However, others such as Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, believe that schizophrenia is partially caused by a process that undoes the family and engages the individual in a struggle with all the social forces that shape his environment. Both views are applicable to Dennis Nunquam in *No Way to Die*.

From the beginning of the novel, Dennis Nunquam exhibits all the qualities of a schizophrenic. In his schizoid condition, caused as a result of acute poverty, the disintegration of his family and his failure to study art abroad, the protagonist withdraws from society mentally. This psychotic state is aggravated by the fact that his childhood friend and school mate, Dr. Maximilian Essemio who has been more successful in life intends to transform him in existential terms from Nothing into Something. Even though Dennis Nunquam reluctantly accepts to be transformed towards the end of the novel, it is evident that this does not reconcile his Imaginary Self and the Real Self. In fact the transformation process which Dr. Essemio, his wife Manda and his ruthless uncle Pa Andre so desperately require for him aggravates his schizoid condition, ends in abysmal failure and leads him unfortunately to attempt suicide. He develops a defensive mechanism around him and also manifests sadomasochistic tendencies. Manda's narrative

voice underscores this condition of alienation and mental torture when she notes:

whether he was even hearing, I don't know. but what he did after that frightened me a lot. He just left the children behind the house and returning to the veranda ran a knife through the painting, cutting it into two. The way he treasured his paintings, I think he could even put the same knife into somebody's stomach without caring. Sometimes Dennis did things in a way only he alone understood. (p.20)

This distinctive or masochistic tendency directed towards the self by Dennis Nunquam is simply transference of his in-built frustrations. It confirms the fact that he is in a schizoid condition.

Another episode in the novel which illustrates the hero's schizophrenic, situation is when like many patients he engages in a series of monologues. In these, dramatic monologues, he attempts to reconcile his Imaginary Self and Real Self but the experiment is unsuccessful because the opposite effect is achieved. Frustrated and annoyed that Big Mama painted a glowing portrait of his classmate turned enemy who is partially responsible for his psychotic condition, he develops a contemptuous attitude towards Max, "a shining man" who had now become a God. His frustrations is also partly due to the fact that he had initially rejected Max's offer to transform him into Something but as he puts it "In fact, I had refused it in the only way possible. And there was Max, Dr. Maximilian Essemole Alekwieunchaa advertising his virtues to every passer-by, every Tom, Dick and Harry" (p. 43) In his demented state, Dennis Nunquam seeks redress from his former Headmaster who could testify that he was among the sheep that he is among the most intelligent goats among the dullest students in the class. He observes pathetically how he knelt in dusty veranda and invoked the image of his long dead Headmaster and begged:

My Dear Mr. Ayornba, I am sorry. I am very sorry. But it was not my fault that I was not able to do anything answerable to what you honestly thought about me. The sky was my limit. yes it was. But I had to jump from this earth to which something outside me chained me. I jumped, Sir, I jumped. But I always fell back. And I always fell back, farther back than I was before I tried to jump. I ran. dear sir. but only to remain in the same place ... (p. 44)

At first glance, Dennis Nunquam's justification for his failure in life as compared with his successful friend Max seems acceptable. Nevertheless, a closer examination reveals that his discourse is that of an obsessional neurotic. As R.D. Laing points out, most schizophrenics "find themselves enclosed within a threatening experience from which there is no physical escape" (p.78). In this case, Dennis Nunquam has attempted to "jump" on several occasions but he finds himself "chained", condemned and as such remains stagnant. This is the discourse of the paranoid who cannot find any alternative to his plight because of his psychotic state.

In addition to the schizophrenic elements of Dennis Nunquam's character another significant literary device which enhances the psychological atmosphere which pervades *No Way to Die* is the use of dreams or trance-like situations. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Sigmund Freud reminds us that each dream has a psychological structure. From classical antiquity scholars related dreams to the supernatural and prediction of the future. For Aristotle, dreams have a daemonic origin they are not supernatural revelations but psychic activities of the dreamer. The Ancients however, distinguish valuable from fraudulent dreams. Modern psychoanalysts such as Lacan see dreams as a romantic process which makes itself known to the psychic apparatus by means of symbols. In other words, dreams which are the property of the unconscious have structures of language is composed of signifiers and signified which are separable. Finally to Freud, a dream is a wish fulfilment which resides in the unconscious.

Several important dreams are found in *No Way to Die*. These dreams like those in many psychological novels such as Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1966) and Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* determine the thematic structure of the works. It is imperative to emphasize that the first letter Dennis receives from his classmate and friend whom he used to teach, now, Dr. Maximilian Essemio Alekieunchaa (M.D., Padua, Italy) throws him instantaneously into a dream which has devastating consequences on his unconscious or sub-conscious mind. The letter from Max thus lays the foundation for his psychotic state. An analysis of the dream will confirm this point. When he receives the letter from Max, ironically, it seems like a dream but eventually a dream actually takes place. He notes

“ ... The letter fell out of my trembling hands. I did not pick it up. I don't think I noticed that it had fallen. Before my eyes Closed my past, that bad dream (emphasis mine) began to rise like. I saw myself on the first day at school bare-footed jiggers all over my toes, my small jumpa cut and stitched from my mother's odd loin cloth. Otherwise I would be naked! (p.7)

In the ensuing dream, recollections of his school days at government School. Bonalikondo which span from January 15, 1945 to Friday, December 21, 1951, are vividly portrayed. In the dream, he sees his teacher Onaba who administers the Sheep and the Goat test to determine the intelligent from the not so intelligent students. Interestingly, Dennis Nunquam is classified among the sheep and Max who is now an Italian trained medical doctor is classified among as his Headmaster Ayomba announces the Primary School Provincial Dennis Nunquam tops his class and the last of the successful candida Maximilian Essemo.

This major structural device in the novel, that is the dream sequence, specifically the one mentioned above could be interpreted in psychoanalytic because as we mentioned earlier, it sows the seeds for Dennis Nunquam's di self or schizoid state. He observes:

.. I opened my eyes. They ached with sadness. I looked about me. There was no letter anywhere. Surely, I had just dreamt. I had not received anything from doctor called Maximilian. Maximilian was still a Goat. My senses had played me false. Or? ... I stretched out the letter, the entire upper half of my body rising and falling rapidly. I felt superstitious, but I thought that stranger reaction tot few words I had read was a very bad sign. Then I read the whole of it ... (pp. 10-11).

If in Freudian discourse, a dream is a wish fulfilment then the “bad dream alluded to by Dennis Nunquam is due to the fact that his original wish of excelling to the top by virtue of the fact that he was among the sheep and consequently intelligent in his class had not been fulfilled. Ironically, it is the not so into Max who graduated from the bottom of his class who had made it. Un circumstances, the dream has not predicted the future for him favourably reversal of roles between him and Max disturbs his mind and eventually leave insane, so much so that from this moment henceforth, Dennis Nunquam” regains his original, normal mental state, after all, his world had been com

shattered and as such things would never be the same again. It is also in this dis frame of mind that he finds it extremely difficult to appreciate Max's generosity.

Another possible explanation for Dennis Nunquam's schizoid state eventually leads him to the trance-like environment, in which he lives is of his failure to study art after he had won a government scholarship. Secondly imprisonment also kept him in a state of total depression. This failure to achieve objective in life is responsible for his state of abject poverty. Deleuze and Guattari remind us that economic factors are partially responsible for schizophrenic Dennis Nunquam's case, he wallows in abject poverty because his becoming a distinguished artist has not been realized. Consequently, because internalized the notion of distinguishing himself in art, he exhibits symptom schizoid personality in a dream world almost throughout the novel. Towards the of the novel, when Dennis Nunquam is finally enrolled in an evening school manifests symptoms of one who is absent-minded and lives perpetually in ad world. One of his lecturers observes to Dr. Maximilian Essemo that:

He has broken over 200 test tubes and a countless number of beakers within the last month. We have never seen damage at this frightful rate ... It is the cause of the damage that amazes me. You will find him tomorrow with a bandaged arm. He sustained the bum while pouring some acid into a beaker ... do you know how much absence of mind it takes to miss the mouth of a beaker? (pp.175-176).

While evaluating his work in school, his teacher is definitely of the opinion that not too intelligent student lives in a dream world. He informs Dr. Essemo:

Give him something to do, he begins quite well; but after a few lines what follows is as if he had written under duress. No relation to what came before. When you take up a paper he has written, it looks like after a careful commencement of a dream, the writer was interrupted and so could never find the threads again. (p. 177)

The different scenes of dream-like sequence which permeate *No Way to Die* serve as an essential aesthetic element which enhances the beauty and craftsmanship of Asong's novel. In addition, it equally enriches the psychological atmosphere of the work.

As mentioned earlier, Asong's use of some psychological motifs in *No Way to Die* enhances the aesthetic quality of the work. However, it is significant to indicate that in using traditional aesthetic devices Asong revalues some of the Freudian paradigms such as the Oedipus complex and castration. In this regard, Asong is exhibiting his aesthetic autonomy and carving new directions as Virginia Woolf does in her fascinating novels, *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs. Daloway*. In his introduction to *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Terry Eagleton reminds us that “.. It is this notion of autonomy or self-referentiality which the new discourse of aesthetics ‘, is centrally concerned to elaborate ...“(p.9). In other words, aesthetic autonomy as manifested in Asong's *No Way to Die* which revalues some of the traditional canons of Freudian paradigms enriches the work and is revolutionary at best. A case in point is the Oedipus Complex which traditionally is the love-hate relationship which revolves around the unholy trinity of “Father-Son-Mother” or as Juliet Mitchell notes in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* “Father-Daughter-Mother”. Consequently Asong's Oedipal complex has a different configuration in the sense that like Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, there is a defacto rivalry between father and son over absentee mother. Even when allusion is made to Dennis' mother it is done in tic Freudian discourse similar to the perception his erratic uncle Pa Andre has of him. Alluding to Dennis' mother, the narrator observes:

my argument that I was not rich enough to maintain a family could not convince anybody because it was said that my father had nothing when he married my mother ... one of the most embarrassing allegations was when my mother died. Pa Andre said my mother had died because I denied her the opportunity to wash my child's excrement. Meaning that I refused to get married and give her my child to take care of ... (p. 57).

Earlier, speaking of Dennis Nunquam, Pa Andre had remarked:

... it is better for a man to be childless than to have something like this with a penis and beard that you call a man, but which has the bones, blood and brains of a woman... It is not a curse to have a boy who will kill you with worries of why he I cannot take care of himself. (pp. 56-57; emphasis mine).

From the above quotation it is evident that Pa Andre unconsciously or consciously instils the castration complex in Dennis Nunquam and as such shatters his oedipal complex or his oedipal desires. Pa Andre's observation is devastating as it emasculates or castrates Dennis by seemingly depriving him of his "penis (phallus)" and 'beard' which are symbols of manhood and psychically transforms him into a woman. In this context, Asong's dissolution or revaluation of the traditional Oedipus complex is even more complicated when Dennis Nunquam is accused of killing his mother. This situation is complicated by the fact that even after his mother is "killed" in Freudian terms, Dennis is also accused of parricide. When his father dies under dubious circumstances, he decides against the norms of the society to bury him alone. Consequently, when he returns, his controversial Uncle, Pa An accuses him of having killed his brother. Referring to Dennis, Pa Andre observes succinctly: "You this mad thing, where have you kept my brother? You say who buried him- You have at last killed and buried my brother like a fowl, not as so, 'I this empty thing?" Interestingly, Dennis Nunquam, either by error or by des! retorts: "Yes, I have killed and thrown him away. So what?" (p. 89). This rival could be as a result of the conflict between the id and the super-ego, namely between Dennis and his father.

The repercussion of this revalued oedipal complex illustrated in *No Way to Die* is that it leads to a manifestation of the libido concept and three types masochism as detected in the behaviour patterns of Dennis Nunquam. The use of these psychological motifs also enhances the aesthetic quality of the work. General Psychological Theory. Sigmund Freud notes that libido is a term us the theory of the instincts for describing the dynamic manifestation of sexuality, 181). Quoting lung, Freud explores the relationship between primal libido, ob libido and narcissism and observes that " ... the slow process of psychoanalytic research was following in the steps of lung's speculation

about a primal lib' especially because the transformation of object-libido into narcissism necessary carries along with it a certain degree of desexualisation or abandonment of specifically sexual aims" (p. 182). He also draws comparisons between the instincts and erotic instincts emphasizing that death would mean for the individual the victory of the destructive instincts. Consequently, eros and Thanatos, the instinct, would have been working against each other early in life. As a result castration complex which shattered Dennis Nunquam's oedipal complex,' evident through *No Way to Die* that he is desexualized early in the novel consequently, he manifests death instincts as opposed to erotic ones on many occasion After he had lost his scholarship to study art in the United States, he notes: "that what wiped laughter from my face and my life. I would have killed myself. somebody saved me. One of the guests who had attended the exposition" (pp. 61). After the abysmal failure and disappointment he experienced in Dr. Maxim" Essemo house, Dennis Nunquam's death instinct overtakes him and he attempts suicide. His death instinct had overshadowed his erotic instinct.

The castration complex as a literary device used in *No Way to Die* is any way limited to Dennis Nunquam. The two principal female characters in novel, Manda who is Dennis' wife and Gertrude. Dr. Maximilian Essemo's also exhibit symptoms of the castration complex. Consequently as a result of behaviour, the psychological atmosphere in the novel is enriched. In this reg work is more aesthetically appealing. When Sigmund Freud first formulate castration complex in 1908 he attempted to explain the differences between the and especially how castration affected oedipal relations in both men and women. This of course led to the Freud-Jones and Freud-Abrahams controversies. However, as Juliet Mitchell succinctly observes in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* the wish for sexual parity ... is one of the manifestations of the castration complex in women ... at some time in their lives all women want to be men ... the castration complex need have no ultimately disturbing effect: non-neurotic femininity can be assumed by a cultivation of passive trends as a revenge for the absent penis. or the original bisexuality or "masculinity" can be re-attained in which case the woman will deny that there is any significant meaning to the difference between the sexes. If such conscious solutions are not

adopted then the problems of the repressed castration complex will return with the force of the unconscious - the wish for a penis for revenge against men and a refusal of a female role will be expressed in diverse symptoms” (pp. 123-124).

Abrahams like Freud also maintains that “extreme femininity” is a further neurotic non-resolution of the castration complex - wanting to be an adored beauty so as to be able to reject men. They equally maintain that if the castration complex is not resolved in women it could lead to “feminine narcissism”.

Manda Chabuele’ s behaviour in the world of *No Way to Die* clearly manifests the symptoms of a patient suffering from the castration complex in the sense that as indicated above, she assumes the role of a man in their home and manifests her new found “masculinity”. Occasionally, her very aggressive attitudes and overt complicity to transform Dennis from Nothing into something as Dr. Maximilian Essemó wishes indicates that she is unquestionably in charge of the family’s decisions contrary to the norms of the society in the world of the novel. Ironically, in her overzealousness to achieve her objectives and as such exert her new found “masculinity” because there is a “void” or a “lack of the phallus” in her life according to Freudian discourse, Manda Chabuele undertakes to write a letter to Dr. Essemó and she is very categorical. Writes she:

Doctor, I am just begging you in the name of God to try and come one day again. If you think that you can ever come again, please I beg you to try and reply this letter in the above address and tell me the day. I will not tell him. but I will make sure that he is at home. If you meet him at home like that and talk to him. I know he will not continue to deny to help himself ... (p. 72).

When Dr. Essemó finally replies to her letter, Manda Chabuele connives with Pa Andre to impose their will-and by doing so assert her newly found “masculinity” on Dennis. Manda’s narrative voice observes

... The two of us agreed that Dennis must not be informed about the visit. otherwise he would escape again. In the meantime,

we were going to buy drinks and preserve them in town. Then, at the end of the visit, whether he liked it or not. we were all going to force him to return with Dr. Essemo to Manako. Yes, that was our plan. We were not going to sit back and see our good luck just flyaway like that. (p. 74).

When Dennis Nunquam, the protagonist of *No Way to Die* finally accepts to go and live with his friend Dr. Maximilian Essemo, he runs into a series of confrontations with Gertrude, Dr. Essemo's wife. It seems as if Manda and Gertrude had conspired to emasculate Dennis. Gertrude's comportment is indicative of a kind of "lack" in her personal life in the sense that she transfers her frustrations to the poor Dennis Nunquam. Having noticed that her husband wants to treat him as a colleague and friend, Gertrude cannot understand how a wretched, poor, beggar, like Dennis Nunquam who receives everything free should be raised to the level of her distinguished medical doctor, husband. Gertrude's shocking behaviour towards her poor guest stems from the fact that she is a victim of the castration complex Juliet Mitchell observes in her book, her behaviour is due to the fact that women whose repressed castration complex have not been resolved, she choice but to manifest vengeance towards men for the lack of the phallus. In other words because Gertrude like Manda, has been desexualized, she is duty bound to transfer her frustrations to a third party, who, unfortunately happened to be Nunquam. Gertrude's newly found "masculinity" is manifested in her attempts on two occasions to emasculate Dennis. On the first occasion, she orders him her underpants. The narrator remarks: "she brought a heap of clothes w' dumped on the floor in my room as soon as Max went to work and asked me to wash them. When I carried them to the sink and started sorting them I found were four of her dirtiest underpants and two brassieres" (p. 170) Dennis' against such a despicable form of humiliation and castration clearly illustrates even in his schizophrenic state, he was definitely aware of Gertrude's evocations against him which was due to the absence of the phallus in her; another occasion, she accuses Dennis Nunquam of being a thief and humiliating him in front of the servants. Dr. Essemo had earlier authorized his friend Nunquam to select a jacket from his wardrobe in preparation for a

Christmas party While he is in the process of making the choice, Gertrude storms into the explodes: “If I didn’t see you searching these pockets ... nobody will ever you are the one who has been stealing money from this house” (p. 200-20 Dennis retorts: “I am not stealing any money; madam. I was just coats ... “(p.201). She lambasts him in the most strident and vituperative t you now a tailor? They give you simple ABC you can’t do it, you are measuring coats. Put them down before I call the police on you. Thief!’ This is the ultimate form of humiliation and emasculation which Dennis suffers in the hands of Gertrude whose oedipal desires have been repressed of the fact that like Manda, she is a victim of the castration complex, Nunquam’s plight is further underscored especially if we take into consideration fact that the other principal characters in *No Way to die*, Manda and his;’ Uncle, Pa Andre, had earlier attempted to castrate him. In this context, it that the negative attitudes exhibited by the two major female characters in the novel Manda and Gertrude, who are also victims of the castration complex Dennis Nunquam is a result of a lack in their lives. In addition, as a res, behaviour the classical confrontation between Eros and Thanatos so d Freudian discourse is clearly manifested in *No Way to Die*. Consequently evident that because of the repression of Eros in the novel, Thanatos (death drive) takes an upper hand. This partially accounts for the fact that Dennis Nunquam has no choice but to attempt suicide towards the end of the novel.

Besides the castration complex, another aesthetic element he revalues in *No Way to Die* is the relationship between Egos. Id and Commenting on Freud’s *The Ego and the Id*, Elizabeth Abel observes Woolf and the *Fictions of Psychoanalysis* that “the oedipal configuration key to explaining the complex relations among these divisions. Focusing for the first time on the dissolution of the complex, Freud argues that the (male) child succeeds in repressing his incestuous desire by strengthening his identification with his father. (p.5)

From a different perspective, Terry Eagleton in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, explicating Freud’s concept of the super-ego indicates that:

The super-ego had its origin in what Freud describes in *The Ego and the Id* as an individual’s first and most important identification, that with the father of his or her own personal prehistory ... the

superego is born of a splitting of the ego induced by the action of the id upon it... the superego is the heir to the Oedipus complex, a kind of hangover of this lurid drama; indeed it plays a decisive role in the repression of the complex, as the male child's hostility to the father modulates into an identification with his symbolic role. (p. 269).

Eagleton further remarks that:

the superego is thus a kind of aporia or impossibility, a conundrum or double-bind whose commandments are incapable of being obeyed. It is the source of all idealism. but also of all our guilt, it is at one high priest and police agent, positive and negative and the image of the desirable and the promulgator of taboos and prohibitions. (p, 269-270)

Finally examining the relationship between Ego, Id and Superego from the Lacanian perspective, the Martinician psychoanalyst, Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*. the relationship in terms of the subject and the Other.

In *No Way to Die*, Asong revalues the traditional Freudian relationship between the Id, Ego and the Superego and as such demonstrates a certain degree of aesthetic autonomy” and manifests his craftsmanship. Asong’s revaluation is on the fact that instead of the “child (Dennis, representing his incestuous and as such strengthening his identification with the father, it is Manda who consciously identifies Dennis with the superego, Dr. Maximilian Essemu. In words, Manda substitutes Dennis in her unconscious and immediately establishes a strong identification bond between Dennis and Dr. Maximilian Essemu. Consequently, she sees the subject (Dennis) in terms of the Other or the Ideal (Dr. Essemu), From the moment Manda is aware of the gesture made by Dr. Essemu to them of their sufferings, she is not only ecstatic but she sees him as a God psychoanalytic discourse as the Superego, the source of all idealism, “the high and police agent” and the “promulgator of taboos and prohibitions”. “I had looked at our condition as a misfortune from God ... Then, here was a letter which as I can say, came from Papa God himself’ .(p.9) She even recites a few phrases from Dr. Essemu’s letter such as “Money is not my problem ... Mercedes, Head of the University Teaching Hospital’. In addition,

Manda's perception of Dr. Essemo as the superego which Dennis must identify with is accentuated by Big Mama's impressions of the petty-bourgeois', arrogant, medical practitioner when she notes that Dr. Essemo is "A young shining man! You could put a morsel 'his face and swallow without asking for soup, and you will never be hungry again in your life. His car, like the whole of this town.'" (p: 43). It is imperative that in conformity with his character Dr. Essemo promotes this perceived self as a Superego striding over this small, impoverished town. Even the office workers in the Cooperative Society and particularly, their boss, the chief Clerk are stupefied by his remarkable patrician attitudes. That is on several occasions Manda chastises her husband, Dennis Nunquam whenever gives the impression that he does not want to identify with the superego occasion she rebukes him: "How can you be so wicked that you will not welcome somebody whom God has sent to come and save you and the whole family?" (p. 48).

When Dennis Nunquam finally succumbs and accepts to identify with imposed Superego, a kind of love-hate relationship and sense of guilt event emerges which is common in the lurid drama between the Id, Ego and Superego their way to Dr. Essemo's residence, Dennis laments: "But now I found myself up in the heavenly comfort and freshness of Max's car. The only smell was of air-fresheners, where the only sounds I heard were those of Beethoven and Ha To speak the truth, every inch away seemed to give me the feeling of a sharp cutting into and severing the umbilical cord of my very existence ... " (p. 116). When in the final analysis Dennis Nunquam fails to identify with his Superego as M and Pa Andre had wished, there is a feeling of loss and resentment, but his failure is in conformity with the structural relationships between the Id, Ego and Superego, in the sense that as Eagleton paraphrasing Freud reminds us, the Superego is "an aporia or impossibility whose commandments are incapable of being obeyed."

In retrospect, Asong's *No Way to Die* is a fascinating psychological novel illustrated by the analyses above. Consequently, it has contributed enormous carving new artistic directions for the Cameroonian novel in particular an African novel in general. In addition, aesthetically, *No Way to Die* is very innovative in several respects.

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The Impact Of Social And Cultural Change In The Novels Of Linus Asong

by

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Abstract

This paper sets out to examine the impact of social and cultural change on Cameroonians as reflected in *The Crown of Thorns* (1990) and its sequel, *A Legend of the Dead* (1993) by the Cameroonian writer, Linus Asong.

It is based on the assumption that adjusting to a changing situation is a matter choice. Thus people are free to accept or reject social and cultural change. But, since most people do not have the ability to perceive the real nature of the social and cultural change taking place in society, it follows, logically, that those who can should help those who cannot.

Linus Asong is of the opinion that social and cultural change failed in Africa because it came from the outside and also because the initiators of the change did not integrate the people in the planning and execution of the change. Consequently, the local people rejected the change because they did not help in bringing it about. The implication here therefore is that for social and cultural change to succeed the people who are likely to be affected by it must be made to identify with what is going on in their society.

Cameroonian society, like other African societies has been undergoing rapid social and cultural change. There are two main stages to this change: the colonial and post-colonial. Each of these stages has produced its own devastating impact on the behaviour of individuals

or groups of individuals and the values which condition this behaviour. But we may ask, what is social and cultural change all about?

Socio-cultural change is multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and continuous. It operates through individuals and, consequently, raises the problem of choice. The issue of choice is well illustrated in William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. In that play, one of the main characters, Marcus Brutus leads an army against Octavius Caesar. At one point in the battle, he discovers that it will be advantageous for his men to change their tactics from one of defence to one of offence that is, to attack the enemy. Hence the following exhortation:

There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which taken at the flood leads on to fortune
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat
and we must take the current when it serves,
or lose our ventures.

The sea analogy used by Brutus in the above excerpt offers interesting possibilities for instance; one can go with the tide as it rolls in or out. One can go with the tide occasionally or refuse to go at all.

Brutus weighs the situation and finds that it will be profitable for his men to take a particular action. That is, attack the enemy. But, he also knows that if his men are left to themselves, they will prefer to maintain their defensive position. That is why he takes the pains to help them understand the possibilities that are open to them. The analogy underlines the persuasive tone he uses to appeal to their good sense.

If we extend the above interpretation to the issue of social and cultural change, we can conclude that adjusting to a changing situation is a question choice. In other words, people are free to adjust to a changing situation if they desire or refuse to do so if they feel happier with the old ways. Whatever the case people should not change for the sake of change alone or simply because others around them are changing. Above all, they should not allow themselves to pressure into changing, especially if they are convinced that it is not in their interest

to do so. But there is a tendency in all human affairs to follow the path of least resistance. Consequently, some people tend to resist the need to leave familiar ground for that which is less familiar even if the latter option offers more possibilities of self-fulfilment. That is why it is necessary for change agents to explain to such persons the consequences of adjusting to changing situations.

Let us now examine the problem of adjusting to changing situations from a historical perspective. In Eighteenth century England, for example, social cultural change was endogenous. That is, it was dictated by factors within society. The requirements of life at the time necessitated a revolutionary change from an old feudal culture that had outlived its usefulness to a modern industrial one that held more promise - hence the Industrial Revolution. Thus we can say that the English people accepted the Industrial Revolution because they were convinced by prevailing circumstances that it was in their best interest to do so.

The situation in pre-colonial Africa was similar to that in pre-industrial England. Fundamental changes to the institutions of society did not take place. Internal Changes, when they occurred, were evolutionary in nature and had little impact on the stability of the established order. The similarity ended there. While social and cultural change in Eighteenth Century England was endogenous, the African situation in the late Nineteenth Century was exogenous; and while the Industrial Revolution in England was dictated by the felt needs of the people, social and cultural change in Africa was caused by the exigencies of colonialism. Since social and cultural change in Africa was imposed from the outside, Africans did not have the same opportunity as their English counterparts to appreciate the possibilities open to them/by the change. Hence the tensions and conflicts which Linus Asong relates in his novels under review. He also criticizes the central administration which arrogates unto itself the status of the ultimate authority in administrative matters and, consequently, the role of a change agent for mismanaging social and cultural change in Africa and thereby causing the disintegration of traditional values.

The impact of social and cultural change in *The Crown of Thorns* is felt mainly on three levels: land, religion and the patterns of authority. The fictional world of Nkokonoko Small Monje is a small

one with the village as the basic unit of social organisation. As in all such societies, the economy is predominantly agrarian and the society naturally subsists on land. But, land to the people is much more than an economic commodity. It is the basis of their social and cultural institutions. It is therefore not surprising that land becomes a primary source of conflict between the indigenous society which reveres it and the hostile intruders who treat it merely as an economic commodity.

The conflict first manifests itself when the missionaries approach the elders of Nkokonoko Small Monje for land on which to build their church.

When the first missionaries came to the area they naturally chose the most fertile and most convenient places for settlement - the plains ... It was said that Takala gave the mission a "Palm of ground" ... Three years afterwards the missionaries decided to have a permanent building for their worship ... the fathers suggested that the site should be chosen half a kilometre from the village. The church was built. As in the first case, the land between the church and the Father's house became disputed territory.

The Fathers disposed of this problem in their traditional tactful manner. The disputed territory became the site for the first mission primary school in the area. And so the mission proceeded inching its way year after year into Takala's lands until before his death he had already lost more than half of what he once possessed (CT:61-62).

Similarly, the new administration appropriates a sizeable portion of native land in order to build an infrastructure of roads to facilitate communication.

The author points out that the local people are likely to derive some benefits from the establishment of the Christian mission and the infrastructure of roads but the real beneficiaries are the missionaries and the colonial administrators. Asong feels that the tension generated by the appropriation of the land could have been reduced if the initiators of the change, that is, the Missionaries and the administrators took pains to explain to the people the necessity for a church, school, and a network of roads.

As in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Arrow of God* (1964) the missionaries impose Christianity on the people of Nkokonoko Small Monje and, by so doing, undermine "the ideological

matrix” that holds them together. As in Achebe in rural novels, the traditional and the Christian religions manage to co-exist until the truculent Father Preston arrives on the scene and provokes a clash with the traditionalists through his impetuosity:

Then came Father Preston whose loathsome presence was a ceaseless criticism of all that they had always believed in. The man condemned not only in the church as his predecessors did but also in the market places and down in the palace of the chief, their unshakable belief in witchcraft, idolatry and the use of herbs for curing the sick (CT: 63).

Father Preston also influences the tactless District Officer to steal Akeoukeour, the god of the tribe of Nkokonoko Small Monje with the complicity of the spineless Chief Nchindia and sells it to Nicholas Virchow, an American tourist. The discovery of the theft inevitably leads to the final confrontation between the District Officer, the Chief and Father Preston on the one hand and the aggrieved villagers on the other, a confrontation which sparks off the disaster which finally overtakes the society.

The communal mode of production in Nkokonoko Small Monje necessitates a broad-based political arrangement. As a result, traditional authority is (understandably) vested in the council of Elders under the Paramount Chief. Although the chief is Paramount and has the right to initiate and to take the final decision in all matters affecting the village, he is also responsible for and accountable to his people through the council of Elders.

When the colonial administrator arrives Nkokonoko Small Monje, he ignores the traditional authority and imposes on the people with impunity. His narrow-mindedness and his refusal to understand the workings of traditional authority not only help to intensify the political conflict in the novel but also exacerbate the pains of transition from the old to the new order. Commenting on the arrogance and ignorance of British administrators in colonial Africa, Malinowski has this to say:

The average British official tries to administer justice and to be a father of his wards. But is he from his point of view an integral part of the tribe? No. He is neither born nor bred to it, nor is he very conversant with any of its ideas; he is in fact, a servant of the British Empire. a schoolboy, an Englishman, a Scotsman. He has to safeguard

the interest of the empire first and foremost; He has to watch over European interests in the colony. as against native claims. To conceive of the part played by European political agents in Africa in terms of a fictitious well- integrated community would blind us to the very definition of the tasks, nature, and implications of colonial administration. (quoted by Obiechina. 1975: 230-231).

What Malinowski says about British colonial administrators applies equally to their African successors. Martin Ezeatabong, the District Officer of Nkokonoko Small Monje, like his British colonial counterparts. is an outsider and, just like them he is ignorant of the customs of his subjects. Like his counterparts again, he despises the people and their culture. As a result, he maintains a considerable physical and social distance from them. Finally, like the British colonial administrators, his main preoccupation is to protect the interests of the central administration by exploiting the local people and at the same time using the military might at his disposal to silence them and to make it impossible for them to defend their own interests. Thus, by placing himself above the traditional institutions of Nkokonoko Small Monje village, by falling victim to the seduction of greed and by appointing such unrepresentative people as Alexander Nchindia to positions of authority, the District Officer makes it extremely difficult for the local people to accept the social and cultural changes which he introduces into Nkokonoko Small Monje.

While the temporal dimension of *The Crown of Thorns* spans the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods, which of *A Legend of the Dead* is limited to the post-colonial period only. And while the action of the former revolves around Alexander Nchindia, a servile and pompous back-room boy who is imposed on his people as paramount Chief by the central administration, the action of the latter revolves around Kevin Beckongcho a beloved representative of his people who is confirmed as a successor to Alexander Nchindia by the same central administration. Nevertheless, the action in *A Legend of the Dead* is a continuation of that of *The Crown of Thorns*. But, at this point, only the political conflict remains in the forefront. It will be recalled that at the end of *The Crown of Thorns*, the people reject the social; and cultural changes introduced by both the Christian Missionaries and the central administration. They stage an uprising in which the District

Officer and the Paramount Chief dies. The central administration sees the violence which the local population unleash as proof of the people's primitivity and atavism. The people, for the central administration.

With the deaths of Martin Ezeatobong, the District Officer, Paramount Chief Nchindia and others at the end of *The Crown of Thorns*, it becomes imperative at the beginning of *A Legend of the Dead*, for the central administration to fill the vacancies created by the deaths. As is to be expected, the central administration neither consults nor involves the local people in the process of selection even though they are those to suffer the full impact of the new appointments. Rather, it precedes first with retributive justice by exterminating Ngobefuo, Ngangabe, Ntongtong and other elders who form the group of Kingmakers and who spear-head the uprising against the administration. Then it encourages its stooge and lackey, Anuse, to contend for the throne of Nkokonoko Small Monje. Finally, it transfers another outsider as District Officer to Small Monje. The impression we get here is that the refusal by the central administration to adopt an interactive approach with the local people who are those to be most affected by the changes naturally generates unnecessary anxiety in the local population.

The Minister of Territorial Administration who is the only rational and well-meaning agent of the central administration in *A Legend of the Dead* intervenes just in time to order the release from detention of Kevin Bekongcho and to have him appointed as the new Paramount chief of Nkokonoko Small Monje in an attempt to satisfy the irate population. Although the Minister's decision to appoint Beckongcho as Paramount Chief is the best under the circumstances, it is taken without consulting the people.

The patronising attitude of the Minister is a clear indication that the central administration does not have the interest of the people at heart. That explains why throughout the book it is portrayed as working against the interests of the villagers. A good example of this is the ridiculous appointment of Beckongcho to the two conflicting offices of traditional ruler and District Officer.

Unlike Nchindia in *The Crown of Thorns* who succumbs to the seduction of conformist degeneracy, Beckongcho is a man of sterling

principles. That explains his bold decision to take sides with his people in criticising the corrupt and mediocre administration for chicanery, intolerance and a flagrant disregard of the necessary moralities of human intercourse.

The central administration on its part, responds by systematically denigrating and intimidating the Paramount Chief and making him suffer great and unmerited tribulations before finally assassinating him.

In the two novels under review, Linus Asong joins the stream of African writers led by Chinua Achebe of Nigeria to examine the tensions and conflicts which result from social and cultural changes. Like them, he focuses on the effects of the conflicts on individual behaviour and social relationships. Like them again, he portrays most of his local characters as defenders of tradition and rebels who refuse to be integrated into the changing scene. But, unlike the other writers who explore similar themes, Asong does not attribute the failure of social and cultural changes mainly to the inability of his local characters to appreciate the immensity of the forces they oppose. Rather he puts the blame of the failure squarely on the shoulders of the central administration which initiates the changes but which ignores the human factor. He criticizes the central administration for not creating a conducive atmosphere in which the local people will feel secure and also receive the assurances that their interests will be well taken care of when changes affecting them occur. Finally, he condemns the refusal by the central administration to involve as many people as possible in the planning and execution of the changes. The implication here is that social and cultural changes in Africa would have succeeded if the central administration had taken the pains to convince the people that they would benefit from or at least that they would not be adversely affected by them.

If we apply Asong's ideological stance to the post-colonial situation in Africa we can understand why political independence failed on the continent. Thus, for social and cultural changes to succeed, we must go beyond the mere changing of individuals and change the system as a whole. Until that is understood and effected, humanity in these societies will remain enmeshed in a vicious circle and progress will continue to be an empty word.

DRAMA/THEATRE

Pedagogy of the Deprived: A Study of the Plays Of Victor Epie Ngome, Bole Butake And Bate Besong

by

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Matter

Marxist critics have convincingly established the fact that every literature is essentially socially-conditioned, and that every major literary work is a reflection of the spirit of the society of which it is a product. This principle is generally borne out by the plays of three Anglophone Cameroonian writers: Victor Epie Ngome's *What God Has Put Asunder* (1992), Bole Butake's *And Palm Wine Will Flow* (1990) and Bate Besong's *Requiem for the Last Kaiser* (1991).

For, treating cultural, economic and political issues pertinent to either Anglophone Cameroon in particular or all of Cameroon in general, these playwrights subtly educate, and side with, those who do not have enough access to the social product of their country, nor the material base for adequate development of their intellectual, cultural and economic potentials.

To know how they have done this we will examine the content of each author's work, beginning with that of Victor Epie Ngome. And we will adopt what I call the matter-and-manner approach in doing so. This means that the first part of the article will be concerned with issues and themes (Matter), and the second part with aspects relating to dramatic technique (Manner).

Victor Epie Ngome's *What God Has Put Asunder*

At the literal level, it is the story of Weka, a child brought up in an orphanage under Rev. Gordon and Sister Sabeth. When Weka reaches nubile age, two suitors ask her hand in marriage: one of them is Mr.

Miche Garba, and the other Mr. Emeka, who grew up in the orphanage together with Weka.

Despite Emeka's solid claims over Weka as a childhood friend, Mr. Garba has his way, but Weka accepts him reluctantly. Their marriage is solemnised by Rev.Unor, probationally, without the matrimonial rings. The couple will live together and study each other for ten years at the end of which period if they still desire to be husband and wife, then the official ceremonies of the wedding will be conducted.

But during the probational period Weka discovers that Miche Garba is in good. He maltreats and neglects her. He exploits the rich cocoa farms left by Weka's father and squanders the money on his concubines. He does not tolerate Weka's questioning attitude.

When she can no longer stand Garba, Weka escapes with her children back to her father's compound to rebuild his dilapidated house and their shattered lives. Garba pursues her there, threatening to forcefully take them back to his house. Once more the matter is brought to the court to take a decision. And the court's decision is that the couple will live in physical separation although united in a "simulated wedlock", and that the marriage remains subject to confirmation by husband and wife only, to the exclusion of any other parties; that the marriage will become null and void once any of the two parties objects to it; that until the confirmation is carried out under the supervision of the court, the couple will continue to live under physical separation but to show decency and decorum towards each other in order to avoid an unfortunate intervention by the court.

The main theme emerging from the play is the incompatibility of the couple Garba and Weka. Theirs is an uneasy union: at best it is a precarious marriage; at worst, an unworkable one. Weka cannot put up with Garba's philosophy and philandering life style.

The other theme is economic exploitation: Garba seems to have married Web largely out of economic interest. For he takes over and exploits the cocoa farms left by Weka's father, deriving enormous wealth from them without ploughing back some of the profit to develop the farms. At another level of economic exploitation we find Garba feeding fat on the wealth of the co-operative society, the wealth of the nation. He is the unconscionable General Director of the Co-operative Society. With cheques to this or that girl, with mounting

hotel bills to settle in support of his sensual life style, Garba dips his hands into the co-operative funds with reckless abandon, eventually draining them dry of cash.

There are also the themes of adultery and neglect. Garba's life style is a classic manifestation of adultery and total neglect of Weka, whether emotionally or financially. Yet it is thanks to the wealth brought in by Weka that this politician and general manager leads a comfortable but irresponsible life style. These then are some of the solid and valid issues embodied at the surface level of the play.

But within the Cameroonian context the play and its themes have a greater symbolic significance. For instance, the marriage metaphor relates to the political union of Anglophone Cameroon and the Francophone counterpart. Hence, Web stands for the former Southern Cameroons, and Garba for La Republique du Cameroun; Weka's parents represent the British Government that relinquished responsibility over Southern Cameroons; Rev. Gordon and the orphanage stand for the UN trusteeship mandate over Southern Cameroons; the Louis mentioned in the play is France; Emeka is Nigeria etc.

Garba's neglectful but exploitative attitude towards Weka represents the attitude of the Francophone leadership towards Anglophones in present day Cameroon, a behaviour that has come to represent the central grievance in what Anglophone Cameroonians have identified as the "Anglophone Problem in Cameroon". Now if one transfers the literal themes discussed above to the symbolic level, they will make an important aspect of the Anglophone problem as outlined at the All Anglophone Conference and enshrined in the famous Buea Declaration of 2nd and 3rd April 1993, a tiny section of which reads thus:

Within these thirty-two years, our Union accord has been violated. We have been disenfranchised, marginalized and treated with suspicion. Our interests have been disregarded. Our participation in national life has been limited to non-essential functions. Our natural resources have been ruthlessly exploited without any benefit accruing to our territory or to its people...

The ultimate social relevance of *What God Has Put Asunder* to the Anglophone community lies in the fact that it has contributed in no small way to the over education of the Anglophones. Of course, it may be too much of a claim to suggest that the present state of the critical consciousness of the Anglophones is the work a single play alone. The play is only part, albeit an important part, of a larger process that came in with the limited freedom of press.

The robust Anglophone private press and enlightened Anglophone politic opinion, together with literary works similar to those treated in this article, are equally partners in the whole process of the education of the Anglophone masses, in the pedagogy of the deprived. At the literal level, therefore, *What God Has Put Asunder* pleases while it teaches; but at the symbolic level it pleases and teaches even more. To some extent the play has given a clear sense of direction to Anglophone Cameroonians. It has helped bickering Anglophones, to use word similar to those of Jesse Jackson, to move from battle ground to higher ground and seek common ground. It has been part of the process that produced the historic All Anglophone Conference.

Our second play that also plays a major part in the education of not only Anglophone Cameroonians, but of Cameroonians as a whole, is Bole Butake's *And Palm Wine Will Flow* (1990). But in the sense that there is a story moving steadily and rising to a climax before subsiding to a gradual end as in Epie Ngome's *What God Has Put Asunder*, there is no such thing in *And Palm Wine Will Flow*. However a story of some sort there is, since there are people, ideas and action in the play. The setting is an imaginary fondom in the grassfields, and the dramatic situation involves two camps juxtaposed more or less; two different approaches to life.

On the one hand we have the Fon, the epitome of pleasure and hedonism, surrounded by stooges, bootlickers and flatterers. He dispenses favours generously' to fawners, promoting some to higher nobility, but tortures and brutalizes the dissenters. Palm-wine and drunkenness are worshipped. On the other hand there is' Shey Ngong, the chief Priest of Nyombom, the moral pillar and the epitome of spiritual values. He is critical of the Fon and strongly opposed to his life-style. He turns down scornfully appeals made to him to pay respects to the Fon.

The result of Shey Ngong's arrogance towards the Fon is the seizure of his wives' farm lands, which are now given to Kibanya, recently raised to higher nobility by the Fon. There is a plan under way by the Fon to destroy the sacred grove where Shey Ngong worships Nyombom. But the gods and ancestors of the land cannot sit by idly while the land is desecrated by immoral and mediocre elements.

The Earth-goddess makes a terrible pronouncement - there will be a drought and earthquake, including other unnatural occurrences. On his part Kibaranko, the destructive spiritual force, lays bare the Fon's Palace while the Fon takes to his heels. The women make a horrible concoction which they intend to force the Fon to drink, and later they pronounce death on him. His death puts an end to the tradition of Fons ruling the village single-handedly, in total disregard of their councillors. Henceforth the village will be ruled by a council of elders led by Shey Ngong who will be replaced as soon as he himself shows signs of not going by the people's wishes. From now onward power will come from the people, and not from any self-seeking, power-hungry, ambitious dictator. Power to the people.

From the point of view of themes the play deals with dictatorial rule in a local fendom, examining the use or misuse of power. It is a study of unconscionable leadership, with equal focus on the fostering of mediocrity and hedonism. But above all the play expresses the need for people with the moral conviction to keep up the fight against all the forces of evil in this world. A central thesis of the play is that if this fight is carried out with courage, conviction and determination the result will ultimately be victory for the forces of good, a victory in which the women play a very crucial role.

The social significance of *And Palm Wine will Flow* must be situated within the context of contemporary world politics with particular reference to developing countries following the wind of change from Eastern Europe in the late 1980's. For, with the coming of Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika there was a loosening up of dictatorial grip on power by dictators of mostly one-party regimes; there was a gradual liberalization of the press and a general goodwill to be more democratic, to open up to multi-party politics.

Yet in many African countries the external democratic pressure was not enough to force the political rulers to change. Internal

pressure was indispensable for any significant political change to be registered. Consequently in Cameroon, for instance, political parties were formed and some forcefully launched in the face of stiff government resistance; socio-cultural-pressure groups as well as local human rights organizations came into existence and out-spoken independent individuals emerged. All of these people had a common goal: force the hands of a reluctant government to yield to the wind of change; to embrace a more valid democratic process that will allow for the respect of human rights and social justice.

Among these pressure groups were committed creative writers like those discussed in this article, and when we talk of committed writers, we mean people who, by their natural disposition and upbringing, have come to write sensitively, showing great concern for the lot of suffering humanity; people who write with the intention of improving the human condition of contributing towards the general welfare of the greatest majority.

With regard to commitment in literature there are certain themes or burning issues which, when treated by a literary artist cannot leave such a writer indifferent. African societies are still to rid themselves of ills like neo-colonialism. Corruption, capital flight, capitalist exploitation, greed, torture of political enemies' tribalism, embezzlement of state funds etc. Now, a playwright or a novelist who writes with full conviction on any of these themes cannot help but take sides however indirectly. If he examines, explores, and develops these issues experientially and convincingly he will be seen in the final analysis to be advocating a certain line of behaviour to be propounding a certain ideology. He may side with the regime in place or with its victims. In most cases, however, such a writer's ideology is on the side of the victims of the social or political ills. Such is the case with Bole Butake and the other writers studied in this uncle.

Therefore the struggle in *And Palm-wine Will Flow* is not just a struggle between two individuals in isolation; it is a struggle between two approaches to Life the repressive, exploitative, unaccountable and irresponsible life style versus a just, moral and responsible governance. It is a struggle between a powerful minority that owns and controls nearly everything versus the suffering and power majority deprived of the comforts of life. That is why in the end the women and the people

take sides with the forces of good, symbolized by Shey Ngong, against the exploitative and arrogant Fon.

Nalova Lyonga once said that as a committed writer Bole Butake “is always a step ahead of reality.” (4) And this reality can best be seen within the context of contemporary political process in Cameroon. With reference to the wind of change mentioned above Bole Butake was writing in the broad context of a certain political climate. In Cameroon a certain questioning awareness and some subtle social trends were already emerging. There was a general feeling- that the dominant style governance that had kept Cameroonians subservient and docile for many years would sooner or later be intolerable. There was a feeling that the present pregnant, and likely to give birth to a child with a different outlook; that the past would no longer be the future.

Given the humane disposition of the playwright and the types of issues raised in his play and the forcefulness with which he explores them, the logic of the play’s ending does not surprise us. And to some extent-it is a prophetic ending in the sense that the play fore-shadowed the launching of the main opposition party in Cameroon the Social Democratic Front, (S.D.F.); a party that stands for social justice and equal opportunity, and whose motto is: Power to the People!

And *Palm Wine will flow* was published in 1990 and had its grand premiere on March 27, of that year. Two months later, on May 26, the SDF was launched in Bamenda in the face of stiff government resistance.

When this play *Was* performed in some parts of Cameroon to audiences that subscribe to the principles that political parties like the SDF believe in, it has been and still is, popular. Its popularity is largely due to the fact that it- heartens the disadvantaged or the deprived and gives them a sense of direction. It tells the people albeit artistically and thus subtly, what to do or how to go about bringing political change. The play therefore becomes a crucial weapon in the process of the pedagogy of the oppressed, in the education of the masses for critical consciousness. (5)

Physical torture of political enemies, a common theme in Bate Besong works is to be seen in *Beasts of No Nation*, which because of limitations of space cannot be discussed here. The play is so virulent in its

attack on Francophone Cameroonians that a senior Francophone government functionary who watched' premiere in Yaounde could not help but give an equally violent reaction quotation is a personal translation of the original French version of a letter addressed to the Chancellor of the University of Yaounde, where the play was performed:

It is a clear political pamphlet directed at the regime in power. that is held responsible for the economic crisis through corruption, favouritism and capital flight to foreign Banks. The author holds the thesis that Francophones in power are responsible for the economic crisis because they are producers of waste matter, and embezzlers of public funds. Among the Francophones (frogs) special emphasis is placed on the Betis. friends and brothers of President Biya, who are more responsible for the present state of Cameroon.

The author equally affirms. and this is the central thesis (philosophy) of the play, that the Anglophones of Cameroon are marginalized and confined to undignified roles like that of "carriers of excrement " . They do not have any good status and are even deprived of any professional identity cards. which they are asking for in vain.

According to Mr Besong, the Anglophone in Cameroon is considered a traitor and a slave. The play ends with an appeal for rebellion and the disregard of the present authority. At the end of the performance the playwright took to the stage to publicly declare that the future of Cameroon is uncertain and that chaos can set in at any time especially from the other side of the Mungo. Consequently he appealed to the audience, for the most part Anglophones, to get themselves ready to carry out their choices.

After putting up with this play, I had to get up, by way of protest, accompanied by the Chief of Service for Students' Associations and cultural Clubs, to quit the half just at the time when Mr Besong was concluding his fiery exhortations.

While we were leaving the hall I was booed in these words: "Man no run" and "Owona," "Owona." I think: in my opinion, that at the time when the government is exerting great and constant efforts to make Cameroon a united country in which the two communities co-exist in all brotherliness, it is abnormal and unacceptable that

intellectuals should promote divisions and conflict. In any case, the University ought not to be the forum for such ill-intentioned ventures.’

Unfortunately, the programme of theatre activities conceived by the Ministry of Information and Culture did not allow us to preview this play, a copy of which I bought at the exit of the hall.

On reading it (even discovered that some passages have been altered by Mr Bole Butake to make the play more current and critical. This experience which, must admit, is shocking and disappointing enough will help me to be more vigilant and diligent with regards to all other cultural manifestations that will take place on the University Campus,

“Jean Stephane Biatcha (6)

Though we will comment on the dramatic technique later on” it suffices to observe, in passing, that the “shit” imagery in *Beasts of No Nation* is a strong and significant symbol of the putrescence that has overwhelmed the society. The Bate Besong we find here is similar to Ayi Kwei Armah, the angry author of *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* whose overriding imagery is equally filth. Equally important is the image of carriers of shit, the Night-soil men, a metaphor for slavery.

In this play, unlike in *The Mast Cruel Death of the Talkative Zombie*, the oppressed are given a voice. They actively and constantly stand up for their rights, and at the end even carry the tight right into the office of the dreaded Mayor, storming it with their buckets of shit, an act of great significance: To get something from a reactionary regime you must fight for it; you must be ready to risk your life for it.

As for *Requiem for the Last Kaiser* consists, it consists of three scene fragments and two movements. The first fragment opens with a woman educating a student to take part in fighting the repressive forces in a fictional country of A.gidigidi, and the second reveals that Atangana, the clergyman collaborates with “; the reactionary regime of Akbikirikii. The flashback in this fragment also reveals Abessolo as the security boss of the regime and therefore one who controls the instruments of torture. He accuses the woman of subversion and of planning a coup d’etat. But the woman says “ours will be a popular uprising, not a coup “(p. 19). [Atangana, the Pastor, cautions her: “Be careful woman ... Don’t let the Devil Mario you ... Trust and obey.” In

the last fragment we see Akhikrikikii, the Head of State, in the company of his foreign friends and supporters: a Western ambassador and a Swiss Banker, all of whom flatter him.

In the first scene of the first movement we meet the progressive forces made up of unemployed academics like Akonchong and Garnbari, Poet as Mandela, workers, voice of Woman etc. There is a parody by the academics in which the regime is subtly satirized. The scene ends with Abessollo threatening the critics and enemies of the regime. In the second scene of the first movement we meet the progressive forces again, including the leader of the market women, the Woman and 1 soldiers. We notice the education of the soldiers by the Woman in the interest of the oppressed. There is the play within the play scene wherein the academics play the role of Head Porters, etc. Here, the cruel ways and weaknesses of the regime are subtly criticized and exposed. There is the reading of the revolutionary thesis off. Akonchong, and then Abessollo arrives in a threatening mood with a gun, but he is disarmed by the people.

In the second and last movement we find the people - the progressive forces the poet, former infantry men, women, workers etc., surrounding Akhikrikikii's Marble Palace. There is a general revolt, and Ngongo, the Chief Praise-singer of the regime confesses his crime against the people. Worst of all, Abessollo too, without, the army abandons Akhikrikikii. But the Ambassador and Swiss Banker still stick around him, However, deserted by his people, Akhikrikikii commits suicide and the people force their way into the Marble Palace.

The central theme of the play can be said to be the popular challenge to a reactionary regime, or a popular uprising against a dictatorship. The play is about the education of the deprived and their stand against a tyrant. In fact, this theme is already didactically summed up by the author in the play's sub-title "a drama of conscientization."

Conscientization implies the education of the masses, especially the oppressed masses, in such a way that they become imbued with a heightened sense of critical consciousness. When oppressed people become conscientized, they tend to know more about certain issues and situations than they did before. They become more familiar with

the inner structure of their society and the dynamics of the vicious: system that has held them captives. The knowledge of this produces a change in” behaviour in such a way as would make them now want to do away with the evil forces that have helped to cripple them. Thus for every vicious action, so to speak, by the oppressors, there is not only an equal and opposite, but, in radical terms, a superior opposite reaction by the oppressed, whose ultimate goal is the improved living condition of the masses.

This trend of reasoning reveals that Bate Besong has been influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by Marxist thought, at least as far as *Requiem for the Last Kaiser* is concerned. “Marxism’s goal is liberation of consciousness and freeing of praxis from bondage via revolutionary theory” (Solomon, 1973: 14).

It is this pedagogical mission which is essentially Bate Besong’s intention in *Requiem*, and the application of a Marxist critical approach to the study of this play becomes inevitable. The Russian Marxist, Plekhanov has said that no literary work is conceived in an ideological vacuum; that all art emanates from an ideological conception of the world” (Eaglelton, 1976: 17). The veracity of this statement can be clearly illustrated with *Requiem*, as we have already seen from the synopsis. In this play, two distinct ideologies are locked in a fierce confrontation, the one oppressive and exploitative, and the other, the pauperized masses.

Requiem becomes a product of its society, informed by the socio-political malaise that surrounds its creation. Making allowance for the playwright’s poetic licence and his fertile imagination, the picture he paints is a symbolic representation of contemporary society. He gives his work the force of topicality and sometimes uses direct and recognizable references. Bate Besong writes carrying the yoke of being an Anglophone and struggling for his identity and in the course of this, that of his people. In dealing with this issue as well as others including power politics and domination, Bate Besong evidently defines himself as a humanist, committed to the course of the suffering voices. He adopts a strident, even vituperative voice to castigate those who despoil the state, but he is never naive to think that the revolution is for tomorrow. He (Bate Besong, 1993: 18) is only too aware himself of the limitations on the writer, as he says:

the power of the writer is not always strong enough to change the political and social situation of his time but his art can become a fighting literature he can write works which are artistically profound and politically correct. He can write works that show how his world is and could be. .

However, it is evident that the committed writer alone may not have the power to bring about immediate political change, but he and the writers Of other forms of political literature. a buoyant private press, the appropriate political opinion leaders and parties can all, together, bring about effective political change. The committed artist need not be a wheel alone, but he is an essential spoke in the wheel of socio-political change. This is where the works of Victor Epie Ngome, Bole Butake and Bate Besong, become important in the emergence of an Anglophone and nationalist consciousness in contemporary Cameroonian Literature

Manner (7)

The danger however with these committed writers is that they may sacrifice their art for their message. In other words, are they not likely to sacrifice technique for sententiousness? To answer this question let us once again look at these works from the point of view of the exploitation of dramatic technique.”

Victor Epie Ngome’s *What God Has Put Asunder* is a five-act play, structured very much like Elizabethan drama, with the story-line gradually and steadily developing through scenes and acts towards a climax in act three before tapering off from act four and ending in act five. Structurally, therefore, this play follows traditional Western form with a well-constructed plot, fairly delineated characters who develop psychologically using realistic dialogue. The metaphor of marriage which is used by the playwright hammers home the message rather strong especially as it is seen from the point of incompatibility. But the greatest pleas, to be derived from this play is the shift in interpretation from the literal to symbolic level. Yet, Victor Epie Ngome does not allow the deceptively simple framework provided by contemporary Cameroonian history to cripple his p, Rather, he exploits this material creatively, imbuing it with an intimal logic which is forcefully his. His

characters are lively, natural and spontaneous even though it is evident that they represent types.

Like Epie Ngome, Bole Butake's *And Palm Wine Will Flow* can be examined at both the literal and symbolic levels, with his local setting being an excuse to make jibes at the micro system. According to H.N. Eyoh, the play's localized setting becomes a microcosm of the world. (1992:2". The Fon's extravagant life-style a; his heavy-handed governance become representative of that observed at the level of state.

Butake's *And Palm Wine Will Flow* however differs from Epie Ngome's *What God Has Put Asunder* in style because it integrates music, dance, and mas and rather than limit itself to well-flowing dialogue, exploits invocations, incantations and is replete with proverbs. *And Palm Wine will Flow* has a richer local flavour than *What God Has Put Asunder*. Eyoh (1992: 2), again, describes Bole Butake "a fine craftsman at once avant-garde and traditional, or traditionally avant-gardist,

Bate Besong is however more innovative stylistically, than Ngome and Butake. His plays can hardly fit within any given known form of dramatic literature" His plots are akin to Samuel Beckett's underscoring the inanity of human existence He provides us with an admixture of the realistic, the historical, the tragic, the comic all of this underlying a particular political ideology. His characters are drawn from amongst the lowest of the low, like the Night-soil men of *Beasts of No Nation* who are pitted against the highest of the land. The battle is one of political domination an; rebellion, yet nothing seems to happen in these shitologician's plays, other than their portrayal of "shit." Bate Besong has no respect for the three unities of time, place and action. These are not important. For him, it is the workings of the inner minds of the> masses which are in conflict with the oppressive forces that is essential. Bate Besong makes for difficult reading because of his abstruse style and rather adventurous use/' of dramatic technique, but this is exactly what makes him compulsive as we strive to discover what makes him tick. Gilbert Doho (1993: 98) has described Bate Besong's style as extremely militant - "style de guerre."

What is certain about the three dramatists under study in this paper, is their commitment to changing their societies and the urgency

with which they feel this need. They each bring into their dramaturgy stories which are at once ordinary and symbolic, but whose messages cannot escape us. They have become the spokes persons of a silenced people, fighting to seek an identity for their community.

Notes

1. Originally this article had examined Bate Besong's three published plays:

The Most Cruel Death of the Talkative Zombie (1986) Beasts of No Nation (1990) and Requiem for the Last Kaiser (1991). But because of limitations of space, I have had to cut out the portion on the first two plays, retaining only that on Requiem for the Last Kaiser.

2. Victor Epie Ngome, What God Has Put Asunder.

3. The Buea Declaration, 9. (3 April 1993).

4. Nalova Lyonga, Theatre Review: Bole Butake's And Palm-wine Will Flow, Production Programme. 1992.

5. The phrase "pedagogy of the oppressed" is borrowed from the title of Paulo Freire's Book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1983); New York, Continuum, (translated by Bergman Ramus).

6. Letter addressed to the Vice-chancellor of the University of Yaounde by Stephane Biatcha. c.f. Challenge Hebdo. no, 0045 of 31 October to 6 November 1991:11.

7. This part of the paper was abridged for reasons of space.

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The Cattle Of Lake God: Symbolism And Meaning

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Bole Butake is widely acclaimed as one of Cameroon's leading playwrights. The reason for this is to be sought both in the steadfastness with which he has maintained himself among his country's front-line artists and in the talent which reveals itself in his plays. This steadfastness, this talent, are fired by the playwright's commitment to the defining aesthetics of the drama form; aesthetics which within the specifically African world is an admixture of participation, conscientization and moral and ethical investigation.

Butake's thematic concerns are one with the concerns of the society in which he evolves. As observer and chronicler, he works into a symphonic blend the demands of art and the challenges of life. Already in 1984 with the publication of *The Rape of Michelle*, reviews of the play were unanimous in their recognition of Butake's artistic endowments. Especially, the reviews noted Butake's penchant for controversy and his delight in walking the tight rope of dramatic realism. This urge to give dramatic form to happenings prompted the writing in 1986 of *Lake God*. The unsuspecting mountain village of Nyos had just been visited that same year by a strange calamity which claimed the lives of one thousand seven hundred villagers.

In the introduction to the play Butake provides the twofold motive for the effort. The first is dramatic: "Lake God was composed with an eye on performance." (p. iv). The second is exploratory: "the Lake Nyos tragedy was only a launching pad for the exploration of the psyche of a community caught in the web of diverse religious and economic conflicts." (p. iv) These two considerations provide the play with its main ontological thrust and creative argument. *Lake God* is

not only a play; it is a vehicle for thought, an instrument for the analysis of dominant issues. In assigning this dual role to his text, Butake summons up the exactness of observation and intimate association with the subject matter to bring into sharp focus a problem of human conduct that has relevance beyond his own generation. As he states, "Up to the moment of writing it has not yet been established with certainty whether this calamity was caused by volcanic toxic gas emanating from the depths of Lake Nyos or by a chemical weapon." (p. iv). This statement indicts man and nature but it does not go beyond the threshold of speculative doubt. Later on in the introduction he states: "whether or not the catastrophe could have been avoided is a matter of deep thought. Man is a pawn in the hands of unknown and unfathomable forces." (p. iv), This philosophical reflection is of overriding import to the play's thematic design and dialectical colouring; for there is, couched in the play's action, a preoccupation whose roots reach back into the very stirrings of humanity: the relation between man and the gods, nature and the supernatural. The playwright invites us to share in his predicament while at the same time searching our innermost selves for the magic clue.

In a seminal contribution to the history of theatre, Thomas Dickinson (1925:109) states; "in so far as a play magnifies man, it places him above the values that are common to experiences of all men, those values that acquire force from the pressures of social life. "In an even more immediate way he reveals that the stage has so long lived under the myth-making convention that even when it presents little men it tends to show them magnified beyond their station by a greater dignity or under a greater ridicule" (128)] Both these statements move the logic of tragedy in *Lake God* from its Greco-classical matrix of fate and the supernatural to the modern plane which charges even the most trivial occurrence with lofty existential meaning.

If we search the universe of *Lake God* for larger-than-life figures, our reward, if any, will be very small indeed. The play is about little men grappling with the little circumstances of their existence. Because the text is fired by dramatic realism, the kinds of possibilities which operate in it appear consonant with the daily experiences within its social milieu. These experiences are etched in a certain number of

conflicts: Christianity and traditional belief, stasis and change, farming and grazing, fertility and sterility. Daily experience in this social microcosm thus takes on the nature of a triangular construct in which the religious, the personal and the societal blend to define action and ordain responses. In this complex design the ultimate initiative is not with men but with animals, more especially with cattle, important actors in the agricultural tradition of the Boyo people. In this play, cattle are worked into the central artistic symbol through which subject matter is explored, meaning conveyed. The cattle accumulate considerable expressive and organic significance in the ordering of the action, for they are at once the symbol of wealth, of regenerative force, of cultural imperialism, and of ultimate destruction. The play's structural pattern adheres closely, therefore, to the logic of animal determinism. Although the villagers appear to control events, they are indeed unwitting victims of a tragic design whose magnitude they do not quite fully apprehend.

Mention is first made of cattle in the prologue. The narrator whose role it is to light up the dramatic path tells of the near-total destruction of the village, of how man, woman, child, cattle, goats and pigs are swept away by the lake god of death into his kingdom. (p.1) The reference at this point is all-encompassing, but already the playwright's focal insistence on animals underlines the centrality of non-human causation to the logic and progress of the tragic-design.

At the same time as animals are elevated to the rank of important actors" western cynicism which here parades as civilizing humanism is garbed in ludicrous celebrity. Father Leo is the designated embodiment of this unholy fame. He says to Fon Joseph: "... you know we Europeans are always hungry for knowledge and more knowledge ... There is more progress coming to this village if they find what they want. " (p. 10) The "they" here refers to the two white men who arrived the previous day and set out for the lake very early in the morning. The white men's journey to the lake is not unconnected with the "foolish talk about toxic gas" (p. 3). In the characteristic manner of the self-anointed peddlers of civilisation Father Leo boasts:

"I sent my steward boy to show them the way" (p. 10). The figure of the African native playing agent to his own destruction is one of the pathetic stereotypes litter the continent's thought and practice. He is

ever there, the credulous African, fatally ready to show the white man the way to the life-essence of village. Here in Lake God as in the real African world whose dramatic mirror image the play is, fate of traditional values is indentured in a cruel connivance between human guile and human credulity. Against the backdrop of the houseboy's fateful innocence Father Leo's question to the villagers assumes the nature of a severe indictment: "Have you stopped to count the blessings which the Lord has showered on you of this village? Have you stopped to ask yourselves how we have been able to perform these miracles?" (p. 46) These questions, because of their rhetorical potential, alert response that are at once tragic, satiric, ironic and comic. Where put our responsive emphasis is in the final analysis a matter of individual sensitive and cultural allegiance. In the same vein of triumphant self-righteousness, Father Leo tells the villagers: "When I receive a little money from my country I give it to your father who invests it in the purchase of cattle. That is how we have been able to move mountains." (p. 46) Cattle are therefore central to the dynamics of civilization and pacification. And so Father Leo can warn the women that without cattle there will be no development (p, 46), an assumption which, placed within context of happenings in the village, seriously perverts the logic of development. As an agrarian community, the village must ensure that no damage is done to crops either by human or other agents. When therefore Nkufai warns: "all the women who have farms in Ngangba will starve this year. Dewa's cattle have ruined all corn." (p. 16), we know that the stage is set for a disintegrative process that will culminate in collective destruction.

The above two statements, one by a white priest and the other by a village peasant, are grounded in conflicting approaches to the element of survival. To white priest, the mere fact of cattle grazing on the village farmlands, even at great risk to crops, is proof enough that his attitude to development is the correct one is sufficiently in harmony with his convictions to dare the wrath of the outrage women who declare war on cattle rearers. He quips: "There is absolutely nothing these village women can do. If we could succeed in neutralizing the Kwifon, what more of a handful of village women?" (p. 53) As this statement indicates, good judgment is certainly not one of Father Leo's lasting endowments. Here is a serious misconception,

an error of judgment which, if anything, only steels the women's resolve to win the battle. To achieve their goal the womenfolk devise a complex strategy, one which leaves no aspect of female strength and ascendancy unexploited.

Nkufal's apocalyptic warning ushers in cattle as the central element of action. From now hence the cattle manipulate the strings - of causality and in the process subject certain social assumptions to a new test. The woman's place in society is one area that reveals itself to be in urgent want of revision. Until the cattle destroy crops, the village's world view is informed essentially by age-old male prejudices. Men are still the custodians of communal authority. Women, for their part, are still very much adjuncts, there basically to bring forth children, feed the home, and satisfy the men's sexual indulgences. The village woman is expected to keep her personality (where any is allowed her) strictly to herself. She is still very much a generic representation of the "graffi" wife and an abstraction of "graffi" womanhood.

The destruction of crops by the cattle provides the women with a fitting occasion to demonstrate their resourcefulness and so question the decay of male preposterousness. They drag Dewa, the cattle rearer, to the Fon and demand the immediate departure of all the cattle from the village. Like their Fibuen which had remained dormant for a considerable length of time but which had awoken to sudden activity, the women now seize and keep the initiative of action. They place their complacent Fon before his ritual responsibilities: he shall lead the people in sacrifice to the lake god and thereafter share the royal bed with the queen. As for the men, full scale, all-round starvation will be visited on them until such a time that all the cows depart from the village. A fundamental change has occurred in the structure of power in the village. The old structure started with the villagers and culminated in the Fon. As ultimate source of authority, the Fon symbolized collective welfare, a welfare nourished in the fount of tradition. But now the reversal of roles is complete. The women have become the real men. While the men burn their lives away in drink, idle talk and carnal speculations, the women, endowed with a nobler sense of mission, start and sustain the ultimate battle for collective survival. To them farming is vital, sex peripheral, even expendable. But since the men consider sex as a life-giving force, in fact precisely because

they view it as such, the women decide to deprive them of its enjoyment. They solemnly declare a ban on all contact with their men until such a time that all the cattle depart from the village.

The men's reaction to this sudden challenge provides one of the lighter moments of comic relief in an otherwise tightly controlled tragic build-up. We find it difficult to subdue our amusement as we watch them in Langham's raffia bush lamenting the suffering endured in the hands of their wives. Forgwei complains that his wife has not fed him for four days. Maimo suddenly realizes that his wife has starved him too for just as long. Collective male consciousness is suddenly alerted to the existence of a plan by the village's women to wrench power from them. But no constructive reaction meets this challenge. Instead, the men continue to hide behind feeble protestations and lame resolutions. Lake God's final statement is mediated through this reversal of roles; Man is no longer man in the fullest reaches of the idiom; he is an idler, a drunk. His dissolute existence forebodes a moral decay which leads inescapably to the demise of a way of life.

It is not only the womenfolk that are bathed in the symbolic energy of the cattle. The fundamental question of stasis and change, conservatism and positive evolution is addressed in a way that leaves little doubt as to the overall dialectical orientation. The Fon tells the angry women who come to him to demand the departure of all the rearers and their cattle: "I cannot do that. The law forbids. And progress here is tied to cattle." (p, 21) Progress is understood in this context as a departure from the traditional to the western, from primitivism to science, Christianity and technology. Symbolically, the acquisition and grazing of cattle is aided and encouraged by the white priest, Father Leo. The Fon himself exemplifies this qualitative transition; he is the most educated traditional authority in the region, and is noted for his "progressive rule and respect for the civilized world" (p. 11).

However, this positive picture loses much of its glitter when the lone surviving woman sums up the reasons for the calamity:

He sold the land to strangers
And made alliance with rearers of cattle
Which destroyed crops causing famine

And suffering the people had never known
He rejected tradition and denied
The women a good yield even though
They clamoured for a queen and the lake sacrifice
And now this,

Calamity is here laid at the doors of the Fon. He has offended against the basic secrets that held the village together. The land has been estranged, alliances struck with destructive forces. The result is a total break-down of the social edifice.

In mediating the passing away of traditional life through the Fon's divorce with his ritual mission, the play seems to posit an argument for modernise. However, one seems to see etched deeply in its philosophical orientation a statement that subsumes human survival in mutual human respect and understanding.

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L'exotisme Dans *Trois Prétendants ... Un Mari* De Guillaume Oyono Mbia

par

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Résumé

Guillaume Oyono Mbia est sans doute le plus grand dramaturge camerounais depuis l'Indépendance. *Trois prétendants ... un mari* (éditions de 1989) est sans conteste, son chef-d'œuvre et, en tant que sa première pièce, une œuvre matricielle. Il y fait voir entre autres sujets, le fait exotique. Il lui donne un traitement pluriel: exotisme des sources, exotisme littéraire, exotisme des personnages, exotisme de l'espace et exotisme des cultures.

Abstract

Guillaume Oyono Mbia is undoubtedly the best known Cameroonian dramatist since independence. *Three Suitors, One Husband*, although his very first, remains his best play. Besides other themes which he exploits, we take particular note of the exotic which he treats from several aspects: source, literary technics, characters, space, and culture.

Ecrivain pour la scène et non pour un traité de naturalisme, il est pratiquement naturel pour Oyono-Mbia que ce terme n'apparaisse nulle part dans le texte de *Trois prétendants... un mari* (édition de 1989), même dans ses synonymes et autres termes connexes. Ceci fait donc que cette pièce qui se trouve aussi être la première de Guillaume Oyono Mbia et son chef-d'œuvre pose avec une acuité matricielle le problème des modalités d'existence du phénomène. En effet, sans en utiliser le concept, Oyono Mbia fait un usage pluriel de la réalité elle-

même, Grâce à une lecture que *Les méthodes projectives* de Didier Anzieu pourraient rapporter à l'approche dite complémentaire, on peut observer que la pièce va au-delà du mythe de l'émancipation de la femme pour s'aventurer dans les sentiers parfois escarpés et rocaillieux de l'exotisme des sources, de l'exotisme des personnages et de l'exotisme de l'espace. A travers ce champ/chant, Guillaume Oyono Mbia postule un corps très riche de valeurs, tant sur le plan strictement matériel et esthétique que par rapport à la culture. C'est à se demander si, par son théâtre, l'écrivain ne tente pas de restituer à l'art ce que Basil Davidson appellerait "son caractère religieux", la fonction essentielle qu'a l'art africain en particulier d'esquisser une relation entre le connu et l'inconnu, le possible et l'impossible, la réalité et le rêve, le fait et le jeu, l'existent' et les lois de sa progression (Davidson, 1971: 19-27).

1. De la Société Traditionnelle de Mvoutessi: Exotisme des Sources

Paradigmatiquement, l'exigence d'étrangeté, l'appel d'un ailleurs, différent et contraire, impose un examen attentif et préalable de l'ici de la pièce. Comme le montre Jean Duvignaud dans sa *Sociologie du théâtre* (1965: 1), le théâtre est un art essentiellement enraciné. Son texte est ontologiquement lié à son contexte, entendu au sens préconisé et popularisé par *Le Dictionnaire de Linguistique* de Dubois. Il est capital d'explorer l'univers qui se trouve à la source de l'œuvre. Oyono Mbia permet au lecteur/spectateur français ou parlant français de s'éloigner des univers connus tant de l'Hexagone que de ses avatars africains que sont les villages. Il y fait toucher du doigt un village africain brûlant d'authenticité, dans la truculence de ses mœurs comme dans la turbulence de ses populations.

Le texte des didascalies se trouvant à l'entrée de la scène 1 de l'acte 1 l'indique expressément; toute la pièce se déroule à Mvoutessi, dans le village natal dramaturge, un petit coin perdu de la jungle africaine. Un effort de recherche géographique permet de savoir que ce village se trouve à 33 kilomètres de la ville de Sangmelima, sur la route actuellement bitumée qui relie cette dernière à la ville, carrefour de Mbalmayo. La matière dramatique est fournie par une sorte d'îlot humain dans un océan de verdure; le sens de l'œuvre semble nicher

parmi innombrables et majestueuses futaies de la grande forêt équatoriale qui, vue d'avion donne à L'Afrique Centrale un air d'unité et d'inpugnabilité sauvages. Dans l'environnement socio-structurel se trouvent non seulement des cités à vocation moderne comme Mbalmayo, Zoétele et Ngoulmakong, mais aussi des villages d'intérêt comme Ngoantet, Efôt et Mfouladja.

A partir du titre lui-même, le sujet est fourni par une cousine dénommée Juliette, mais de son vrai nom Rachel, actuellement enseignante à l'Ecole publique de Messa, Yaoundé. Il ne s'agit pas d'une pièce conçue en ville et prêtée au village, de la transposition scénique d'une situation proprement indigène, tout à fait étrangère et même bizarre pour le public de l'Hexagone comme pour le public strictement local. Le théâtre négro-africain est ainsi souvent bâti sur un exotisme relatif et ambigu: exotisme pour les uns, indigénité pour les autres.

La liste des personnages qui introduit le texte dramatique fait voir des personnages fortement teintés de localisme. Les noms qu'ils portent sont exactement ceux que l'on rencontre le plus fréquemment dans le village de référence; Abessolo. Meka, Mbia, Mbarga, Oyono. Même les protagonistes qui se contentent d'un nom venant de loin se veulent d'une africanité militante: Madeleine est tout simplement consommé à la sauce locale en "Maralina" et Marguerite en "Makrita". C'est à croire que l'auteur fait le maximum pour exclure et tenir à distance le public français et, par là, lui offrir une pièce strictement autochtone.

Le troisième élément de paratexte insiste dans le même sens et permet une accentuation du caractère exotique de la pièce. La préface de l'auteur dépeint jusque dans les détails le cadre original et originel de l'œuvre. Elle s'organise pour bien faire sentir la suavité de l'univers villageois, particulier et rustique, de Mvoutessi:

Sauf au début du troisième acte, le décor présentera la cour du village à Mvoutessi, devant la maison principale d'Atangana. Au fond, on distingue la cuisine où les femmes passent le plus clair de leur temps (...)

Pour faire encore plus couleur locale, on pourra faire entendre des aboiements de chien, des cris ou des chants de coq, etc.... Bref, l'atmosphère est celle d'un petit village de brousse (...) (p. 8-9)

Le public des villes, comme qui dirait, des "villages des Blancs", est ici comme celui d'Europe et de France, volontairement et résolument tenu à l'écart, à distance, dépaycé, confronté à un univers inhabituel et fruste, original et agreste. On baigne en plein exotisme des sources et retrouve dans toute sa saveur le Noir dépeint par *Le nègre romantique* de Léon- François Hoffmann (1973: 172-229).

Evidemment, au-delà de l'exotisme des sources que l'on peut déjà rencontrer dans les paratextes, Guillaume Oyono-Mbia sait pratiquer l'exotisme profond, au niveau plus essentiel du texte dramatique proprement dit.

2. Texte et Exotisme Littéraire

Il y a d'abord exotisme parce que sans le vouloir et bien des fois aussi sans s'en rendre compte, le dramaturge négro-africain francophone s'exprime dans une langue étrangère. Guillaume Oyono-Mbia ne fait aucun problème à écrire en français, alors même que son public de destination aurait pu être mieux servi en langue locale. En faisant délibérément le choix d'écrire dans la langue de Molière il opte pour un théâtre réservé, excluant une partie de son public véritable. Il pratique volontairement un théâtre tourné vers l'extérieur, préoccupé par l'étranger, donc "étranger", en tout cas destiné à la consommation d'autrui, donc "étrangère". Au surplus, malgré le niveau souvent élevé de leur maîtrise de l'instrument linguistique, les dramaturges ne parviennent pas toujours à exprimer à souhait leur pensée en français, à rendre les nuances des expressions et idiomes des populations locales qu'ils mettent en scène.

Il en résulte notamment que le texte de Guillaume Oyono-Mbia comporte une floraison quelque peu unique d'intrusions de la langue locale dans la française. Nombre de cris, d'interjections et d'onomatopées nourrissent ainsi le corps matériel des répliques et du dialogue (pp. 13, 15, 16, 81). Des morceaux importants en langue

ewondo interviennent dans le texte, spécialement sous forme de chansons (p. 34, 83, 84).

Certains mots subissent un déplacement de sens typiquement local. Le déterminant “Blanc” ne désigne plus simplement la couleur bien connue, ou l’Européen, mais toute personne dite “évoluée”. Même lorsque certains m ‘expressions sont utilisés à bon escient, ils en arrivent à être incongrus, étrangers, bizarres dans la bouche de certaines personnes: « Ecole d’Administration., « le Gouvernement », un « grand fonctionnaire » (pp. 16, 49,62). Quitte à ce qu’ils ne comprennent pas finalement quelque chose, les villageois se mettent à distance et deviennent étrangers de leur propre rôle, en adoptant une phraséologie nouvelle, inaccoutumée, bizarre, étrangère. Mbarga offre un morceau anthologique de ce phénomène (p. II).

Par rapport à la langue théâtrale donc, Guillaume Oyono-Mbia parvient à tourner tout le monde en bourrique. Il montre que les Blancs sont souvent à étrangers au français pratiqué en Afrique que les Africains eux-mêmes. Le théâtre semble renvoyer dos à dos les locuteurs francophones pour préconiser une politique de promotion des langues nationales, en vue d’une plus grande efficacité artistique. Si les parémies dont fleurit le texte permettent de relever l’exotisme de la pièce à la sagesse africaine, elles participent tout autant du caractère autochtone de l’oeuvre. Les principes de sagesse exprimés par les différents joyeux godelureaux qui croisent dans la pièce sont surprenants et parfois même effrayants pour le public des villes et d’Europe. Le bon sens villageois n’est pas souvent sans choquer les bonnes manières et la philosophie des “civilisés”, même à peau noire. L’originalité des mœurs est un paradigme esthétique emphatique de l’exotisme du texte. Nombre de spectateurs/lecteurs sont des illustrations brillantes de *Peau noire, masques blancs* de Fanon. Par la langue qu’ils pratiquent, la plupart des Africains singent le Blanc et très souvent se ridiculisent à coups de faux-sens, de contre sens, de barbarisme même. Les pièces de Guillaume Oyono-Mbia constituent un terrain privilégié d’observation de ce phénomène, jusqu’à la dernière, *Notre fille ne se mariera pas*, et avec une note particulière dans *Jusqu’à nouvel avis*.

Il est évident alors que cette pièce explose en exotisme des personnages.

3. Exotisme des Personnages

De fait, la population qui y grouille s'organise en sous-ensembles divers et nombreux qui s'excluent et se gèrent en unités étrangères. D'après le dramaturge lui-même, la liste des personnages est, de manière quasi inédite, un monde délibérément éclaté. Elle détermine trois groupes qui se rejettent et s'analysent réciproquement comme bizarres, étranges les uns par rapport aux autres: la génération des grands-parents, la génération des parents et la génération dite jeune. En appartenant tous au village de Mvoutessi, ils s'identifient, se repoussent. se rejettent, du moins distinguent les uns et les autres comme des "étrangers", des êtres différents, tel que le montrent Abessolo et Atangana qui par ailleurs semblent s'entendre sur le dos de Bella et de Makrita (...), exactement comme Abessolo va se heurter à sa petite-fille au sujet de la dot. (pp. 14-15)

Même à l'intérieur des sous-ensembles le sentiment et l'appel de l'extérieur et d'un ailleurs sont toujours présents et pressants. Matalina et Juliette se repoussent comme des êtres incompatibles, fortement étrangers l'un par rapport à l'autre: l'une jubile à l'idée d'épouser un riche et grand fonctionnaire de Sangmélima, tandis que l'autre, bizarrement, paradoxalement même, n'en veut rien savoir. La première n'a pas fait des études et est plutôt restée près de ses parents au village, l'autre est engagée dans des études brillantes à Dibamba, loin du village et de ses géniteurs. L'anormalité est ainsi synonyme de conflit interne de classes et réciproquement ressentie comme une base figurée de l'exotisme. Bien qu'étant toutes les deux jeunes et femmes, l'absence de solidarité les rend exotiques l'une pour l'autre. Il en va à peu près de même de Ndi et Tchétgen qui sont tous des hommes, mais qui, parce que de générations différentes, se combattent et s'excluent diamétralement en tant que rivaux irréductibles. Au surplus, ils sont totalement étrangers l'un pour l'autre, et même bizarres, parce que l'un est un cultivateur autochtone, pauvre et naïf; l'autre, un riche commerçant venant d'ailleurs, de l'Ouest du Cameroun.

Sur le plan horizontal des espèces, les personnages s'ignorent et se traitent comme des étrangers, exactement comme sur le plan vertical des comportements internes des différentes catégories de base. A ce taux-là, personne n'est pratiquement avec personne de la pièce: à

chaque moment, les alliés changent et se retournent pour se déconcerter. Les camps se font et se défont sur les motifs parfois les plus surprenants. La technique d'individuation s'ajoute à l'effort de sortir du modèle actantiel et structuraliste, avec notamment ses opposants et ses adjutants, pour faire aboutir *Trois prétendants ... un mari* à une pièce de l'étrangeté systématique. Chacun y joue à être suffisamment personnel pour déconcerter les autres et être sensible à un être venant d'ailleurs. Ce qui importe au dramaturge, c'est de ménager sans cesse la tension dramatique et le suspense. L'art dramatique est restitué à son objectif premier et étymologique qui est de savoir gérer l'action.

Même les espaces théâtraux développent amplement le phénomène de l'exotisme.

4. Exotisme de l'espace

A première vue, l'action se déroule intégralement à Mvoutessi et justifie pleinement sa prétention à un localisme pur. L'unité de lieu n'est pas simple artifice théâtral: elle exprime un choix socio-esthétique. A la vérité, la même action tire sa raison-d'être et l'essentiel de son tonus de l'appel d'un ailleurs différent, éloigné et surtout étrange par rapport à Mvoutessi. Si les parents de Juliette tiennent à son mariage avec le "grand fonctionnaire", c'est dans la perspective et l'espoir de pouvoir rendre visite à leur fille et bénéficier des bienfaits du "Village des Blancs", Abessolo, Ondoua et Atangana sont comme Bela, attirés et fascinés par la candidature de Mbia, uniquement à cause des avantages qu'ils caressent béatement au niveau de la ville (p. 16-17).

La grande opposition qui traduit avec force la réalité de l'exotisme est investie dans la confrontation Mvoutessi-Dibamba. Symbolisée par l'affrontement irréductible entre les études et le mariage obscurantiste, cette opposition est somatisée par les "professeurs blancs" de Juliette et ses parents (pp.19-27). Etre "noir" est diamétralement le contraire d'être "blanc", comme la poursuite des études exclut le mariage, la ville le village. Mbia ne parvient à terroir ses villageois de futurs beaux-parents qu'à cause des biens qu'il rapporte de la ville: bière, argent et perspectives de protection (pp 25-45). Enfin, l'action croît en intensité surtout quand l'affrontement Ville-Village gagne en intransigeance:

Zoétele et Sangmélina ne sont perçus que comme des lieux anormaux, bizarres, inhumains de répression, susceptibles de semer l'insécurité parmi les paisibles "buveurs d'arki" de Mvoutessi. Le mariage de leur fille avec un "grand homme de la ville apparaît aux populations comme le moyen de passer un pacte de non belligérance, donc un procédé de maîtrise de la ville par le village. La pièce est construite en fait sur un projet en forme de schisme: l'homme de la ville essaie de conquérir le village en conquérant la belle Juliette de Mvoutessi, tandis que les villageois tentent à conquérir la ville et ses forces de répression en conquérant Mbia, le haut fonctionnaire qui les protégerait.

Si Guillaume Oyono Mbia semble respecter la règle de l'unité de lieu, il lui réserve cependant un traitement esthétique très tendu qui lui permet de produire tous ses effets dramatiques. Le lieu n'est plus une passivité, un simple réceptacle, mais une occasion de confrontation, un véritable actant, une force essentielle d'action.

5. Exotisme Des Cultures

Au demeurant, la pièce se termine comme une sorte de triomphe du camp des modernes, par le mariage de Juliette avec celui qu'elle aime, Oko, son jeune et fringant camarade de Lycée. On peut même se féliciter à l'occasion de l'appui et de l'apport d'un autre jeune, Kouma, qui sait préserver la force et l'unité du camp en présence: c'est lui qui vole l'argent nécessaire au remboursement de la dot des premiers prétendants et au mariage normal du couple souhaité. Mais, il ne s'agit là que d'une lecture partielle et insuffisante. En réalité, le camp des jeunes et de la modernité ne gagne qu'en apparence, par rapport au fond. Il perd quant à la manière: il ne saurait être heureux et fier d'avoir gagné des suites d'un vol. On ne sert pas une bonne cause avec des mauvais moyens: la fin ne justifie pas les moyens. Une solution immorale ne saurait s'accommoder d'une issue souhaitable. Le machiavélisme triomphant souvent monnaie courante en Occident est ici rejeté dos à dos avec la cupidité niaise des populations indigènes. L'une et l'autre culture paraissent s'exclure comme incapables de résoudre convenablement les problèmes africains, comme similairement bizarres et étrangères à l'Afrique. Le complexe exotique s'affirme à la fin comme le refus par Guillaume Oyono-Mbia de

donner raison à l'un ou à l'autre camp; comme l'effort par lui déployé, du reste à travers tout son théâtre, de combattre avec une égale rigueur les turpitudes des deux cultures en confrontation. Au total, la manie de l'exotisme contracte souvent la forme d'un projet culturel en forme de point d'interrogation, dans lequel chaque œuvre constitue une interpellation simultanée des cultures en présence, une dénonciation systématique des faiblesses et des insuffisances de la tradition et de la modernité.

Conclusion

A partir d'une pièce apparemment sans projet exotique, Guillaume Oyono-Mbia apporte la preuve de son génie et permet d'identifier un investissement pluriel du phénomène de l'étrangeté et de la bizarrerie. Si l'œuvre ne grouille pas d'étrangers, elle en montre diverses occurrences qui illustrent que le complexe exotique pourrait être souvent et surtout une figure de style, soit une métonymie, soit une métaphore. Ce faisant, il apporte des arguments supplémentaires à un chef-d'œuvre d'une étrange richesse depuis 1962, *Trois prétendants ... un mari*.

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Théâtre Universitaire et Instances en Post Colonie

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Le théâtre, art populaire par excellence, pose problème quand il est abordé du point de vue de l'université, espace réservé à une infirme élite. Dans les ex-colonies où l'université est d'implantation récente, il reflète la confrontation en cette élite et le petit peuple, le raffinement et le commun, l'irréfléchi et le spontané, etc. Les sollicitations diffèrent suivant ces deux pôles à tel point qu'on pourrait ne les percevoir que sous l'angle du rejet, du divorce. Autrement dit, parler du théâtre universitaire participerait d'un suicide dans la mesure où l'on voudrait réduire l'élitisme au populaire.

Ce divorce est encore plus prononcé en post-colonie où l'université est aussi récente que les institutions mises en place par les anciennes colonies (1). Réservé avant tout à quelques rares Africains ayant eu accès à la culture importée, l'université, à son tour, connaît une autre confrontation entre les intellectuels libres-penseurs et leurs collègues placés à la tête de l'institution par l'autorité politique. Ces derniers doivent par conséquent totale allégeance à tous ces évolués qui, à l'aube indépendances, constituent la classe qui profitera du soleil des indépendances à l'Afrique octroyées par Les Français et les autres colons anglais, espagnols, etc. Dans un certain nombre de pays, cette classe politique a combattu, pendant près de trente ans, à la fois les universitaires libres penseurs et le petit peuple. En effet, parce qu'intellectuellement moins ouverte, la classe politique ne pouvait vivre en harmonie avec la horde de clercs formés en métropole. Par conséquent, le soupçon et la méfiance ont régulé le contexte, le comportement de ces groupes sociaux sous l'œil des masses embrigadées. Dans un tel contexte, le théâtre universitaire, parce que

entre les mains du libre: penseur, ne pouvait être perçu que comme une arme dangereuse.

Et dans bon nombre de pays, les universitaires n'ont nullement tu les ambitions politiques. Contrairement à ce qui se passe en post-colonie française, l'Etat n'a pas trop limité les champs de réflexion dans l'espace anglophone. On comprend pourquoi les combats d'idées sont fréquents dans cet espace et pourquoi il y a plus de Wole Soyinka, plus de Ngugi-wa-Thiongo que de Mongo Beti, ou Sembene Ousmane. Ce constat est aussi vrai pour le Cameroun où la communauté anglophone est politiquement plus activiste que les Francophones matés, de l'époque coloniale, par un système plus jacobin que démocratique. Ici en effet, les rapports entre un Etat castrateur piloté par d'irréductibles obscurantistes et les libres-penseurs anglophones et francophones ont parfois été marqués, au fil des années par des heurts regrettables (2).

En effet, il s'est installé, au fil des années, un malaise au sein de l'université camerounaise. Espace exempt de franchises universitaires, l'autorité administrative y est avant tout au service de l'homme politique qui l'y a placée. Le chancelier/recteur de l'université, nommé par le Président de la République, est plus un homme politique qu'un universitaire confirmé. Espace de méfiance et de soupçon, le campus n'est plus le lieu de déploiement du jeu intellectuel. Espace geôle, on y a infiltré une police politique brute et inhumaine sous le couvert de "Police campus" (3)

Notre propos consiste à démontrer que les troupes universitaires (4), au carrefour des instances politiques et populaires, sont constamment menacées dans leur existence. Si elles ne satisfont pas aux attentes des masses populaires, elles se dirigent inéluctablement vers des salles vides. Si elles se refusent de chanter les refrains des caciques et de servir d'instrument de propagande politique, si elles choisissent la libre pensée, elles sont sinon interdites, du moins condamnées à l'ostracisme. Un commentaire du répertoire de ces troupes à la lumière des faits sociaux permettra de vérifier notre propos.

a) Répertoires Des Troupes De L'université De Yaoundé (I)

Les troupes à l'université de Yaoundé ont l'âge de l'institution. Elles naissent et se développent dans un climat de soupçon, C'est en 1975 qu'une expatriée, Jacqueline Leloup fonde le Club d'Art dramatique de l'université de Yaoundé qui devient en 1980, le Théâtre Universitaire. Attachée au service de Liaison et Activités culturelles, Leloup eut le temps de convaincre et les services de Coopération de l'Ambassade de France et les autorités universitaires que toute culture de qualité est chère et que toute création théâtrale d'excellente facture nécessite un budget de taille. Nourri aux sources française et camerounaise, le Théâtre Universitaire de Yaoundé produisit alors des spectacles qui firent la renommée de l'institution tant en Europe qu'en Afrique. Leloup réussit, en effet, à passer douze années d'une activité théâtrale intense financée à coup de millions.

Pendant ces années, L'Expatriée évita de heurter de front un régime monolithique pointilleux sur les problèmes politiques. Les pièces mises en scène touchaient le moins le régime. En mettant en scène les tribulations d'un naïf maître d'école qui, frustré abandonne l'enseignement pour devenir un riche mais véreux homme d'affaires, la pièce de Marcel Pagnol se situait hors du champ circonscrit et intouchable. On peut en dire autant de *Monsieur Thogo Ngingni* de Bernard Dadié. Le commerçant qui profite du couvert de son parti pour s'enrichir encore davantage ne constitue aucun danger dans un pays où le Président de la République a tacitement incité ses concitoyens à s'enrichir. *Les Fourberies de Scapin* et autres *Jeu de la Miséricordieuse ou le Testament de chien* étaient des comédies visant essentiellement amuser la galerie. Bien qu'elle arrive à endormir totalement la méfiance de l'élite politique (Voir infra "les raisons de l'ostracisme") celle-ci la préféra ostensiblement à tout autre metteur en scène. L'attitude du pouvoir politique vis-à-vis d'autres universitaires à la tête des mêmes troupes l'atteste bien. Convoquons à ce propos le suivant témoignage:

While Leloup's Théâtre Universitaire has been the spoilt child of the Chancellery [of the University of Yaounde] Eyoh's Yaounde University Theatre has been "l'enfant pauvre". His productions

with the Barombi Player and then the Yaounde University Theatre (*The Lion and the Jewel* (1982), *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1981) *The Rape of Michelle* (1985), were done in the Grotowskian spirit” (5)

Autrement dit, pendant les années fastes du Théâtre universitaire, Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh fut forcé de faire du théâtre pauvre. Il en sera même pour Bole Butake lui-même et Gilbert Doho, lorsqu’ils prendront la direction de Yaoundé University Théâtre et du Théâtre Universitaire plus tard.

Pourquoi l’élite politique choisit-elle la politique de deux poids deux mesures? Pourquoi les universitaires camerounais n’ont-ils jamais eu les mêmes facilités que leurs collègues expatriés? N’est-ce pas parce que libres-penseurs, ces Camerounais portent en eux les germes de la dissidence? (6)

Disons tout de suite que les choses ne furent pas aussi aisées qu’elles paraissent avec Jacqueline Leloup. Bien qu’elle ait pratiqué l’autocensure pendant un temps en choisissant des pièces autres que camerounaises, Leloup va s’attirer les foudres de ceux-là même qui la cajolèrent pendant des années lorsqu’elle osa prendre pour matière dramatique la société camerounaise jetée dans le tourbillon du 6 Novembre 1982 (7). En d’autres termes, que ce soit sous le régime des “obscurantiste ou sous celui des “technocrates”, le théâtre à l’université du Cameroun a toujours été perçu comme un danger pour la survie des régimes mis en place à Yaoundé le colonat local et Paris.

REPERTOIRE DU THEATRE UNIVERSITAIRE

PIECES	NATURE	AUTEUR	METTEUR EN SCENE	ANNEE
<i>Monsieur Thogo Ngingi</i>	Social	B. Dadié	J.Leloup	1975
<i>Topaze</i>	Social	M. Pagnol	J. Leloup	1976
<i>Gouverneur de la Rosée</i>	Social	J. Roumain	J. Leloup	1977
<i>Les Fourberies de Scapin</i>	Social	Molière	J. Leloup	1978
<i>La Tragédie du Roi Christophe</i>	Politique	A. Césaire	J. Leloup	1979-84
<i>Le testament du chien</i>	Social	A. Suasuna	J. Leloup	1981
<i>Le Regard du Roi</i>	Philosophique	C. Laye	J. Leloup	1982
<i>Gueido</i>	Politique	J. Leloup et al	J.Leloup	1983
<i>Meyong Meyeme au royaume des morts</i>	Philosophique	J. Leloup	J.Leloup	1985
<i>Le médecin malgré lui</i>	Social	Molière	P. Thiery	1987
<i>Dormez je le veux</i>	Social	Feydeu	P. Thiery	1987
<i>Cannibalisme</i>	Social	K'ma Ndumbe	F. Bingono	1989
<i>Noces de Cendres</i>	Politique	G. Doho	S. Bonono	1989
<i>Le Crâne</i>	Politique	G. Doho	G. Doho	1990
<i>La Brouette du vinaigrier</i>	Social	L.S. Mercier	G. Doho	1991
<i>Le Destin glorieux du Maréchal Nnikon nniku</i>	Politique	T. U'Mtamsi	G. Doho	1993
<i>La confession publique adaptée de Manemba de Joseph Marie Essomba</i>	Socio-politique	G. Doho	G. Doho	1993
<i>Zintgraff and the Battle Mankon</i>	Hist-politique	G. Doho & B. Butake	G. Doho & B. Butake	1994
<i>Au-delà du lac de Nénuphars</i>	Politique	G. Doho	F. Ngasam	1994
<i>Africapolis</i>	Politique	R. Philombe	G. Doho	1994

A ce riche répertoire, il faudrait ajouter les travaux en atelier et les montagnes poétiques. C'est ainsi qu'en atelier, les discussions menées autour d'*Au-delà du lac de Nénuphars*, pièce politique dédiée aux "Parlementaires", mouvement étudiantin de l'université de Yaoundé qui, de concert avec les vendeurs à la sauvette et autres laissés-pour-compte, ébranlèrent le ciel camerounais dès mai 1990. Il y a aussi *Heures rouges* inspirée, du poème de Francesco Nditsouna qui dénonce

la politique inhumaine de la France coloniale, et met à nu sa complicité dans l'extermination nationalistes camerounais des années 1950.

REPertoire DU YAOUNDE UNIVERSITY THEATRE

PIECES	NATURE	AUTEUR	METTEUR EN SCENE	ANNEE
<i>The Trial of Brother Jero</i>	Social	W. Soyinka	H.N. Eyoh	1981
<i>The Swamp Dwellers</i>	Social	W. Soyinka	H.N. Eyoh	1981
<i>The Lion and the Jewel</i>	Social	W. Soyinka	H.N. Eyoh	1982
<i>The Island</i>	Politique	A. Fugard	H.N. Eyoh	1983
<i>Sizwe Bansi is Dead</i>	Politique	A. Fugard	H. N. Eyoh	1984
<i>The Rape of Michelle</i>	Social	B. Butake	H.N. Eyoh	1985
<i>Lake God</i>	Politique	B. Butake	B. Butake	1986
<i>The Survivors</i>	Politique	B. Butake	B. Butake	1987
<i>And Palm Wine Will Flow</i>	Politique	B. Butake	B. Butake	1988
<i>The Gods Are Not to Blame</i>	Politique	O. Rotimi	B. Butake	1989
<i>Beasts of no Nation</i>	Eco-politique	B. Besong	B. Butake	1991
<i>The Inheritance</i>	Politique	H.N. Eyoh	H.N. Eyoh	1992
<i>Zintgraff and the Battle of Mankon</i>	Hist-politique	B. Butake & G. Doho	B. Butake & G. Doho	1993
<i>The Courageous Cry</i>	Politique	Edet Epenyong	Edet Ekenyong & B. Butake	1994

B. Les Raisons de l'ostracisme

On pourrait, pour une lecture aisée de ces répertoires, les reprendre ainsi qu'il suit:

TROUPES	PIECES POLITIQUES	PIECES SOCIALES & PHILOSOPHIQUES	TOTAL
Théâtre Universitaire	9	11	20
Yaounde University Theatre	9	4	13

Une lecture de ces tableaux montre que sur 20 pièces créées par le Théâtre Universitaire, 9 seulement ont traité des problèmes politiques tandis qu'ils abordent de problèmes sociaux. De plus, on constate que la mise en scène des pièces politiques n'y prend de l'ampleur qu'à partir des années 1990. Il y a donc comme une démarche précautionneuse de la part des premiers directeurs du Théâtre Universitaire - tous des expatriés français - contrairement à ceux qui sont maintenant à la tête des deux troupes francophones et anglophone. Les problèmes politiques semblent être leurs préoccupations majeures. Sur 13 pièces créées au sein de Yaounde University Theatre depuis 1981, 9 traitent des problèmes politiques. Il n'est pas inutile de noter qu'à partir de cette date le contexte se prête mieux au théâtre de contestation.

Dans l'ensemble, on note que sur 18 pièces politiques mises en scène au sein des deux troupes universitaires, 7 traitent des problèmes spécifiquement camerounais, *Le Crâne* (1995), par exemple, aborde le problème de la conservation du pouvoir. Tatang est venu au pouvoir par des moyens illégitimes. Pour s'y maintenir, il élimine physiquement ses ennemis politiques, en exile d'autres, arrache les terres des plus démunis. Le retour d'un des exilés donne une bouffée d'oxygène aux contestataires. Beaucoup interpellent le tyran pour une réconciliation nationale. Mais le roi reste de marbre. La pièce s'achève par la mort de tous ceux, prétendants et détenteurs du pouvoir, qui se refusent à toute ouverture.

En 1983 éclate un conflit entre L'ancien Président, Ahmadou Ahidjo (Le père) et son remplaçant, Paul Biya (le fils). Le père qu'on croyait depuis 1982 en retraite politique reprend le devant de la scène. Commence alors le bicéphalisme alimente des coups d'Etat imaginaires pour les uns, réels pour les autres et qui culmina sur la condamnation à mort du père par le fils. Désormais, seul maître à bord du navire

camerounais, Biya va plutôt le conduire au bord du gouffre car dès 1987 commence la descente aux enfers que vit actuellement un peuple camerounais désemparé.

Quelques mois avant l'éclatement du conflit Ahidjo/Biya.; Jacqueline Leloup crée *Gueido*. Ce titre est assez significatif. "Gueido" en langue Bamiléké veut dire "enfant maudit", "courroie de transmission des malheurs" etc. Comme Biya, Gueido est perçu par tout le village comme le sauveur, celui qui vient délivrer des villages voisins mais aussi de maints maux qui le minent. Nanti des pouvoirs magiques que lui a donnés une déesse, la Mamiwata, Gueido comble les désirs des villageois. Mais au moment de prendre femme, il épouse sa sœur Mawa - autant dire sa mère. Pire, lors d'une campagne guerrière, Gueido tue le totem de son père. Dès cet instant commence la descente aux enfers. Les femmes ne procréent plus; la famine élit domicile au village. La situation est telle que les Notables proposent à Gueido la mort ou l'exil. Par amour pour ce peuple qui l'a adopté, Gueido choisit la mort. L'espace souillé est ainsi lessivé.

En 1991, au très fort des luttes démocratiques, le petit peuple brandit des cartons rouges à Paul Biya. Mais le Président camerounais, contrairement, au généreux Gueido, semble avoir opté pour le suicide collectif. Trois ans après ce succès retentissant (la pièce représente le Cameroun au festival de Limoges en 1984), l'adultée expatriée est traitée, même par ses compatriotes, avec une grande méfiance. On lui propose un poste au Congo quelques années après. Mais l'étape Congo ne fut qu'une transition. Aujourd'hui elle est enseignante dans un lycée de province en France.

Au-delà du lac de nénuphars est plus actuelle. Elle met en scène les "Parlementaires" et le groupe "d'auto-défense" qu'arma l'aile dure du régime de Paul Biya pour la répression, dans le sang, des revendications des étudiants. Un enseignant est arrêté par la police politique pour avoir incité les étudiants à la révolte. Ceux-ci organisent des marches et menacent de brûler l'université au cas où leur professeur n'est pas libéré. Le pouvoir recule devant la menace. Ce qui ragailardit les étudiants qui désormais réclament l'organisation d'une Conférence Nationale Souveraine. La pièce s'achève en apothéose avec la victoire des forces progressistes.

Le Yaounde University Theatre fut plus impitoyable avec le régime de Biya: *Lake God* attribuait déjà en 1986, la catastrophe du lac Nyos à celui qui prend la place d'Ahidjo en 1982. En faisant allusion au gaz toxique dans sa pièce, Butake reprenait les journaux américains qui accusaient les dirigeants camerounais d' avoir permis aux Israéliens d'essayer la bombe à neutron dans le Nord-Ouest du Cameroun. Ce qui coûta la vie à plus de deux mille innocents en 1986. Mais c'est surtout *Beats of No Nation* qui pointa le plus un doigt accusateur en direction de Paul Biya et de sa tribu comme responsables du pillage du pays. La représentation fit tellement de bruit et les menaces furent telles qu'on craignit un temps pour la vie du metteur en scène. *Zingraff and the Battle of Mankon*, *The Survivors*, and *Palm Wine Will Flow*, attestent de la vitalité de l'engagement du Yaounde University Theatre par rapport à la troupe francophone.

Les différents rapports à la police ainsi que la fronde entre un Butake et le pouvoir qu' il ridiculise dans une note "I refuse to be Lapiroed" (Lapiro de Mbanga étant le nom d'un musicien trop populaire qui a gaffé en s'associant au pouvoir en place et a chuté dans les hit-parades). - ont amené les autorités universitaires à interdire l'accès des amphithéâtres aux deux troupes universitaires. Cette interdiction de fait n'est signifiée par aucun acte écrit. Tout est entrepris subtilement pour que dure l'ostracisme.

Notons que les répertoires des deux troupes présentent des pièces d'une haute qualité littéraire, ce qui aurait pu les éloigner du public populaire qui, croit-on à tort n'aime que la basse comédie. Au contraire, les options de mise en scène ont conduit à populariser les productions de ces groupes. Cela tient au fait que la thématique, les systèmes signifiants scéniques sont pour la plupart puisés dans les manifestations spectaculaires communes au peuple et à l'élite intellectuelle.

En effet, ces signifiants puisés dans les rituels, les légendes, les mythes que vivent encore les masses d'arrière-pays et des villes rendent les textes corsés facilement digestibles. Les deux troupes ont ainsi séduit le public populaire à telle enseigne que vendeurs à la sauvette, ménagers, fonctionnaires, cadres moyens etc. se bousculent aux portes des théâtres, chaque fois que ces troupes se produisent. Polycarpe Oyié Ndzié (1988" écrit très justement à ce propos:

En effet, à tous les niveaux, même les décideurs apparemment les plus avertis de la chose culturelle sont nombreux, voire unanimes à penser que les Camerounais n'aiment et ne comprennent que la comédie, dit-on, plus facile d'accès que la tragédie. En réalité, il n'y a là qu'illusion: tout spectacle bien monté plaît et réussit, comme a déjà sans doute pu l'établir le Théâtre Universitaire de Yaoundé, de *Topaze* à *Gueido* en passant par *Les fourberies de Scapin*. *Monsieur Thogo Ngnigni*. *Le Testament du chien* sans oublier *Le regard du Roi* ...

Cette observation est le reflet de la réalité, Les deux troupes universitaires de Yaoundé ont réussi à se faire un fidèle public. Jacqueline Leloup (1990: 132) qui fonda le Théâtre Universitaire avoue:

m'a soutenue merveilleusement aussi la présence du public africain, un public qu'il a fallu gagner, spectacle par spectacle mais qui une fois convaincu, ne nous abandonnait pas. Se pressant en masse aux portes de notre théâtre, indiscipliné, bruyant mais tellement présent, chaleureux et tellement fidèle! Nous avons vu des spectateurs revenir cinq, six et même sept fois voir *Gueido*.

Comme on peut le constater, en même temps qu'ils se sont rapprochés de la masse, le Théâtre Universitaire et le Yaoundé University Théâtre ont vu se creuser un gouffre entre eux et l'élite politique. En choisissant de mettre en scène 18 pièces politiques sur une trentaine de créations, ces deux troupes ont délibérément violé une loi implicite de l'homme politique qui, depuis plus de trente ans a réussi à évacuer des débats les grands problèmes de l'Etat. Ce balisement du champ de réflexion a permis au régime que mettent en place au Cameroun Paris et le colonat local de violer les droits des citoyens allant de l'élimination physique à la privation des libertés.

On comprend pourquoi en 1987 une table ronde à l'Université de Yaoundé sur "La littérature politique au Cameroun" suivie d'un compte rendu dans le seul journal gouvernemental *Cameroon Tribune* conduisit non seulement un professeur et un journaliste dans les geôles de la B.M.M. (Brigade Mixte Mobile), mais aussi à des réactions du genre:

Cet article ... C'est la manifestation même de l'ethnofacisme qui vous caractérise vous les Bamilékés. Pourquoi ce compte rendu a-t-il été rédigé par un journaliste Bamiléké qui n'appartient même pas au service culturel? Voilà comment vous voulez prendre le pouvoir et comment vous utilisez le journal du gouvernement comme support de vos complots (Ndachi Tagne, 1987).

Comment imaginer que L'expression théâtrale de la vie politique de la nation ne conduirait pas sinon à l'embrigadement du moins à l'ostracisme que nous vivons actuellement? Depuis quelques années les deux troupes universitaires ont mis scène les problèmes les plus brûlants de la nation.

Ainsi donc, sans être inféodées à quelque tendance que ce soit, les deux troupes universitaires ont été à l'avant-garde des luttes populaires au Cameroun. En traitant des grands problèmes de l'Etat, en brandissant constamment aux uns et aux autres leurs images, elles ne se sont nullement éloignées des objectifs de l'université et de son théâtre dans les nations en développement. Espaces de constante remise en question de notre être au monde, l'université et son théâtre ne sauraient jouer le jeu réactionnaire. Instrument d'éveil des consciences, de la formation de l'esprit, critique, le Théâtre Universitaire et le Yaoundé University Théâtre se sont constitués, depuis quatre ans, en un espace d'expérimentation des recherches en art de spectacle

Notes

1. La plupart d'universités francophones d'Afrique sont implantées au lendemain des indépendances. L'Université Fédérale du Cameroun créée en 1961 est entièrement pilotée par la France jusqu'aux années 1970 ou on décide de la camerouniser.

2. Voir infra: Les raisons de l'ostracisme.

3. De 1990 à 1992, le Cameroun vit une période on ne plus cruciale de son histoire. Le pays est secoué par une vague de contestations. L'Université de Yaoundé connaît la naissance d'un mouvement

estudiantin dénommé “Le Parlement”. Comme les mouvements populaires, “Le Parlement” souhaite un profond changement dans l’institution et s’aligne naturellement aux cotes de ceux qui exigent une Conférence Nationale Souveraine. Le campus est assiégé par les forces de l’ordre. A plusieurs reprises les étudiants sont brutalisés, A certaines occasions on déploré des morts. Lorsque arrêtés, radies des Universités camerounaises, les “Parlementaires” sont contraints à l’exil, l’autorité universitaire rassemble des truands, qu’elle paie et infiltre sur le campus. Ces agents de renseignement et de répression, nommes “Police campus” jouent a de curieux étudiants; dénoncent tous ceux, enseignants et étudiants qui pensent différemment que le régime.

4. Voir infra: Le répertoire des deux troupes universitaires.

5. n est à noter que Bole Butake crée avec un groupe de fonctionnaires. Enseignants et étudiants de Yaoundé University Théâtre, The Flame Players et y met en scène des pièces à la thématique brûlante. What God Has Put Asunder (1993) de Victor Epie Ngome expose le calvaire de la minorité anglophone dans la République du Cameroun. Trente ans après la réunification des Cameroun francophone et anglophone, les Anglophones découvrent avec horreur, qu’ils ont été assimilés. Désormais, le langage commun à la communauté anglophone c’est soit le retour à la République fédérale soit la sécession. Before This Time Yesterday (1993) de Babila Mutia Quant à lui traite du génocide des militants et sympathisants de L’U.P.C. (Union des Populations du Cameroun), mouvement politique créée par Ruben Um Nyobe en 1948.]

6. Le 26 Mai 1990, John Fru Ndi lance son parti politique, le S.D.F. (Social Democratic Front) par une marche historique à Bamenda, marche écrasée dans le sang; tandis que Yondo Black Mandengue est incarcère pour avoir pris L’initiative de créer le sien. Ces actes osés en contexte monolithique donnent des ailes à beaucoup de Camerounais parmi lesquels Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh, universitaire et directeur a l’époque de Yaoundé University Théâtre. Dans *Cameroon Calling* (6 mai 1990), une émission radiophonique forte écoutée, Eyoh clame que seule multipartisme peut sauver un peuple camerounais meurtri par trente années de dictature. Il est aussitôt arrêté et jeté dans l’une de gèles de la B.M.M. (police politique ayant les mêmes méthodes que les Tonton Macoutes de Duvalier). Il n’aura la vie sauve que grâce à

L'intervention de ses acteurs et d'autres étudiants qui, marchant sur la chancellerie au rythme des airs de sa pièce *Munyenge* (1990), menacent de tout brûler au Zoua-Zoua (essence bon marché importée frauduleusement du Nigeria).

7. Le 4 novembre 1982, Ahmadou Ahidjo qui a gouverné le Cameroun pendant 25 ans se décide d'abandonner le pouvoir et de laisser sa place à Paul Biya qui évolue sous l'ombre du dictateur depuis 1961. Le petit peuple et les intellectuels vont voir en Biya comme une manière de messie, Mais des 1983 commence une ère de désenchantement, car le sauveur se révélera être la source des malheurs de la nation. C'est aussi en cette année que Jacqueline Leloup écrira *Gueido*, pièce qui dénonce cruellement le régime de Biya.

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The Literary Podium and the Political Pulpit: Medium and Message In Anglophone Cameroon Drama

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Abstract

The argument as to whether the primary purpose of literature is to teach or to please is probably as old as criticism itself but is still far from a definite conclusion. Those who are more inclined to art for art's sake hold that the primary goal of literature is to please. Critics who feel that the creative writer must show commitment to the cause of social change emphasize the didactic quality of literature. Those who seek to avoid the argument simply see the purpose of literature as 'placere et docere' - to please and to teach.

We set out in this paper to pursue the argument through an examination of the works of some Anglophone Cameroon playwrights including Sankie Maimo, Bate Besong and Bole Butake. We come up with the tentative conclusion that when the plays lean too heavily on the teaching side, they may appeal directly to the contemporary audience because they explicitly address issues of the people survival and identity but they are less successful from the aesthetic point of view and their survival as literary masterpieces is doubtful.

The argument as to whether the primary purpose of literature is to teach or to please is probably as old as criticism itself but is still far from a definite conclusion. Those who are more inclined to art for art's sake hold that the primordial goal of literature is to please. Critics who feel that the creative writer must show commitment to the cause of social change emphasize the didactic quality of literature. Those who

seek to avoid the argument simply see the purpose of literature as 'placere et docere' - to please and to teach.

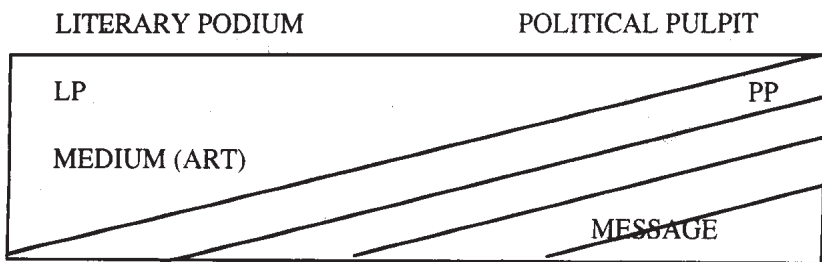
We set out in this paper to pursue the argument through an examination of the works of some Anglophone Cameroon playwrights, including Sankie Maimo, Bate Besong and Bole Butake.

Under the terminology of "literary podium" we are concerned with literary awareness, art or aesthetic qualities: those qualities that go to make a play what it is, such as contrast, or opposition of ideas or characters that create dramatic incidents. Without contrast, there can be no drama. We are also concerned with the form of dialogue and the use of language or, more generally, the style.

By "political pulpit" we are referring to social commitment with a view to examining the socio-cultural, political, economic, and religious issues that preoccupy the creative writer and surface in his work usually in the form of direct address. The "literary podium and the political pulpit" could therefore simply be stated as "literature and lecture".

It will almost be impossible to conceive of any genuine literary work that does not show both literary awareness and social commitment since literature is creative imaginative writing about the life of man in society. The creative writer will, while painting his picture of human lives, dignify or denigrate the society according to his own perception of it.

It is therefore usual to find in every work a rising or declining scale of both Literature and Lecture that could be visualized as in the following diagram:



At each extreme of the continuum LP and PP we have pure art and pure message. It will be impossible to situate any literary work at

the point of any of the two extremes. The work must fall somewhere between the two points ‘and will therefore contain both elements in varying degrees of importance.

What varies in each creative work, and what will pre-occupy us as we examine the plays, is the degree of emphasis on medium or message and the consequences of such emphasis on the play.

Sankie Maimo

In Sankie Maimo’s *The Mask* the message is so obviously on the surface to the play is the message. The play does not illustrate the message; it simply states it so literally that no one can miss it:

Baye: Believe me, appearances are deceitful.

Angeline: Why do you think such things? This is not a charitable outlook.

Baye: Angeline, dear, you don’t know. The times are treacherous and One has to be wary. You see the man who plants a dagger into your heart often sups with you and once you are not on your guard, he takes undue advantage. That is all.

Biola: Yeh! You’re right. (p. 4)

As if this were not clear enough Baye reiterates after a few utterances down the page: The man next to you may be wearing a mask to deceive you. You never can tell (p. 34).

The same message is repeated several times in different words throughout the text as if the author were afraid anyone could miss it. No one can disagree with it either. It is so true, so common place as to be undramatic. As Shakespeare put it, “There’s no art to read the minds construction in the face.” *Macbeth*.

Other aspects of social criticism are put in the same straightforward, lecture style. Of the political regime in place we read:

An oligarchy is now enthroned under our noses. It remains coldly indifferent to the true wishes of the people. Arise therefore in the name of socialism and install the true socialist. Resolve and change the course of history, now. *Awake!* (22)

No doubt that here we are in the political pulpit. Of Christian religious sects we are told:

These foreign religions weaken our spiritual strengths including complete psychic blindness towards African values and interests. (28)

From the literary point of view the play seems to be undramatic because it: lacks contrast. The ideas are the same; everyone agrees. The characters are of the same social rank, of the same political opinion; same likes and dislikes:

Baye: Deceit often shows the intellectual deficiency in a man.

To resort to deception is always a weakness; and one can see through it.

Binla: That's perfectly true, but Dr. Njilah.s dealings are above board. The general trend however is different. If something isn't done now, these fellows will plunge this country into chaos, with their brand of politics and jalap.

Baye: Exactly. I cannot agree with you more. (51)

The play is all ideas and no action. Binla summarizes our impression of it in one utterance: "We were locked in a combustion of words. Words, words, that's all. (13). The only scene where there is some form of action seems melodramatic. Having been complaining how she has been deserted by her lover, Ali, Paula says she and her family have been hungry for a week.

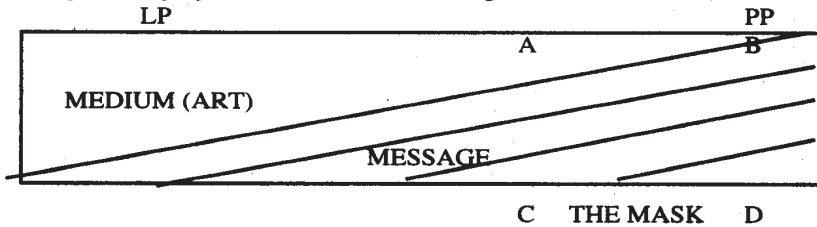
Paula: I even feel very exhausted now. I don't simply know what next to do. Please help us. (She faints. Baye rushes to her aid. All the others join in and help put her on the settee).

Baye: Help! lend me a hand please. She's gone all quite soft and cold.

Binla: She has fainted. Let us give her some air. (she helps to prop her up with a cushion) (43).

Any stage director will be at pains to put this play on stage in such a way as to retain the attention of the audience from start to finish. It seems likely that the audience will be bored with the monotony of dialogue with hardly any conflict even in the ideas.

Placed within our diagram of medium and message The Mask will fall close to the “political pulpit” end as follows in the figure ABCD:



Sov Mbang, the Soothsayer (1978) on the contrary bristles with action in comparison. There is the stark contrast between European and African values. This in itself already forms the basis of dramatic incidents.

In the negritude vein of the nineteen sixties, what is African is good and what is European is bad. The whites are so bad that only they can go to hell and only a few of them - indeed a chosen few - can qualify for heaven. On the contrary the marks are so good that all of them qualify for Heaven.

There is dramatic irony when Blunderblast, the white missionary, is refused entry into heaven while Sov-Mbang, the soothsayer, the heathen Priest; is comfortably seated in heaven. The reason for only Whites being admitted into Hell is simple. Only they have invented weapons of mass destruction and mass murder and can blow up the globe if they want:

2nd Angel: It is due to this destructiveness in a big way
 That the Emperor of Hell wants
 All these strong powers to join him
 Of course. they are all whites
 Niggers will be completely useless there
 They cannot encompass mass murder

On a grand scale like the whites (41)

In the contrast between African traditions and European values - between black and white, the latter wins. Symbolically Sov-Mbang, the embodiment of African values, is stabbed to death in the back, presumably by an agent of the white man, Blunderblast, his arch rival. Considering that the play was conceived and written a whole generation ago, the author's view was prophetic for it is amazing today just how much of the African's life is steeped in Western values: Western artefacts. Western ways of government and of worship; Western ways of wasting away in pursuit of wanton wealth. The African must acknowledge defeat and begin to fight back courageously as Fon Balon says at the end of his long peroration following the death of Sov-Mbang:

This blow is crushing; It is a painful loss
Fare thee well Sov-Mbang!
We will persevere and strive on
courageously. (69)

Though Sov-Mbang, the soothsayer is a more dramatic piece than *The Mask* the style is basically the same. It is forthright and clear with more emphasis on the message than on aesthetic colouring. As you watch/read the play, you are in for a serious lecture and Sov-Mbang, though a traditional African priest and soothsayer, is a university lecturer par excellence:

Sov Mbang: The people are now effeminate. credulous victims of foreign ideas - especially in the spiritual world - where the white man is a new arrival. Admittedly, in many fields say the sciences and space-exploration, they are wonderfully smart. But in religion and mysticism they are woefully lacking. These white men are extremely pretentious And have perfected deceit as a great Art Despite their dazzling achievement in many spheres They are still lingering in the vestitude of wisdom. (21)

Blunderblast condemns Blacks and their values in the same fortnight manner. You cannot miss the message :

Blunderblast: (looking curiously at the cowries)

What are these foolish cowries here on the floor?

This hotchpotch business again? (No reply.)

I hope someone has not been deceiving the Fon with some fortune-telling rubbish.

It is all NONESENSE. (24)

In many respects the language of the play is elevated and smacks of Shakespeare;¹ It is probably too elevated for the setting: a simple and unsophisticated African village still making its first contacts with Western civilization. In this light Sov-Mbang's elevated poetic speeches seem unrealistic:

Heaven! Show us your bounty.

Ye perfumed winds whistling through this grove

And brooding branches bowed in adoration

Animate the whole vegetation and animal life

To chant a solemn hymn to the Maker of life.

Ye forest flowers in elegiac attitudes

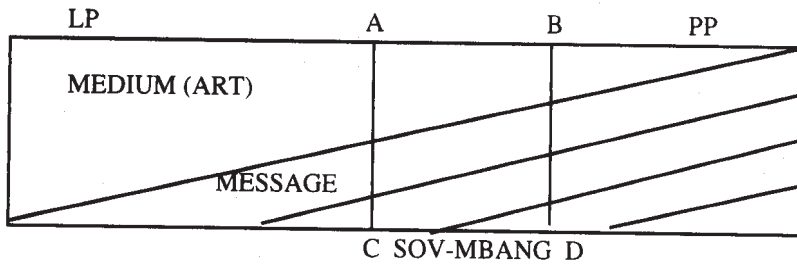
And dense thicket in moody silence

Swing in lively chorus to this orchestration

Of all living things in the air and under the earth, (36)

However, appreciated in their own right, these passages are poetic enough to deserve some credit and to raise the play into the realm of literature.

Presented within the framework of our diagram of medium and message, Sov-Mbang, the Soothsayer shows more art and less message than *The Mask*, but still to the side of the message.



Bate Besong

Unlike Sankie Maimo's *Sov Mbang, the Soothsayer*, Bate Besong's *Beasts of No Nation* (1990) has no linear plot nor clearly delineated characters. It is a series of grey, murky tabloids cast on a dark background. Though each of these pictures has a predominant significance, it remains open to various shades of interpretations depending on the angle from which it is viewed.

The characters, to use the conventional nomenclature, are fluid symbols of protean shapes and are therefore polysemous in meaning. To state anyone to one equation is doing injustice to the play. For example, to state categorically that the Nightsoil-men represent only Anglophones is false because they also stand generally for the down-trodden and under-privileged in the society at large. They also represent the workers without whom society will come to a standstill. Paradoxically the Nightsoil-men are a purifying force: they clean the mess of the society and it would be ridiculous for anyone to see the mess literally as the excrements so vividly described in the text, In a more general view the excrements symbolize all what is going wrong with the society and needs to be corrected.

Of course, like Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the filth and obnoxious miasmas in the play first of all signify the endemic corruption and mal-practices of the society. As we mentioned above, there is no story in the play; only a series of sharply disgusting pictures designed to shock and awaken everyone to the realisation of the corrupt and unjust nature of the society.

To understand the play, one must first realise that it is a dense poem built on paradox and a series of dramatic ironies. The rich

people in the play, and those who seem to understand the society more are ironically the Cripple and the Blindman

The author does not want the readers to miss the paradoxical nature of the play and he announces to them as the play opens: My prophets are dead men. Like Roman augurs, our visionaries wink to each other over last decade's profanities.

And Now:

Our scholars. in this landscape of noon's apocalypse,
like castrated iguanas, froth in moronic ignorance
about a renaissance boom.

These short, sharp, shocking contradictions initiate us into the play. In effect in this society there are neither prophets (visionaries) nor scholars; only those who feign prophecy and scholarship: a false Universe in which the sun sets at noon! Ednouay, is really Yaounde. the last letter comes first and there rest follow in like manner.

With the realization of the true setting of the play, the fiction seems to into reality and any casual reader may conclude that the play is simply a ltd drama” of the Anglophone problem in Cameroon. The direct and repeated men of “Anglos” (Anglophones” and “Frogs” (Francophones” makes the sin interpretation even more plausible: Francophones are responsible for the plight Anglophones whom they have enslaved and reduced to menial tasks. They shall therefore free themselves.

Such an interpretation is only the surface. base. skeletal meaning of the and. as we mentioned earlier. does not do justice to the dense. poetic drama. First of all a careful reading seems to reveal that the author does not merely condemn Francophones (Frogs) and exonerate Anglophones who do nothing dramatic better their situation except to arouse emotions of pity and disgust. It seems implied that in a large measure. Anglophones are responsible for their own plight:

Cripple: Your Excellency. the Mayor. we might goad them into writing their petitions.

Blindman: My dear fellow. I wish nothing that they themselves do not wish. Anglos will always write petitions. It is in their make-up. (24)

Notice that the Anglophones are not even bold enough to go forward and pre. their petitions to the Leader. They have to channel these through a Francophone is expected to plead on their behalf.

Otshama: They are peaceful and penitent. your eminence,

Aadingingin: They have as much to do with peace as I have to do with the Imam. Shah. QQM or Emperor Akihito of Japan.

Otshama: But they are truly sorry. Your Eminence.

Aadingingin: What does that matter? If they don't I'll beat the life out

of every one of them; I'll swallow each one of them the way a snake slowly swallows a juicy Ewondo frog - with money loot from the nation's bottomless hole. (49)

The feeble attempt by the Anglos to overthrow the leader only calls for contempt because they fall back at the single shot of the pistol. Ironically it is Francophone who gets killed. This is because he has some money which the Leader can recuperate. His greed is such that he cannot even share with his errand man.

Many other aspects of the Cameroon society are satirized and sometimes society widens to the whole African continent. For example with a single stroke' the brush the author blackens Houphouet Boigny's Basilica in Yamoussoukro:

Mockery of a National Basilica

The most expensive Dung-heap in Africa (33)

Only the dense poetic style of the play saves it from being crudely topical. author works hard at his language and weaves in a plethora of literary devices, both sound and sense. For example, there are several allusions to the Bible''

If I find in Ednouay

Two righteous Directors

Then I will spare
All the place for
Their sake (8)

But there is none. The situation is worse than that of Sodom and Ghomorrha, the Godlike narrator, Dr. Professor seems to say. But his symbolic, epileptic collapse towards the end shows that even he too is rotten.

There is the frequent use of alliteration and consonance, such as in the

following lines:

Open rebuke is better
Than secret love
Be not made a beggar
By banqueting
On borrowing.
We brought nothing
Into Ednouay (8)

The repeated use of the voiced biblical plosive [b] here connotes the explosive situation. Even the sound of the word 'Ednouay' in itself is a sharp cry of distress.

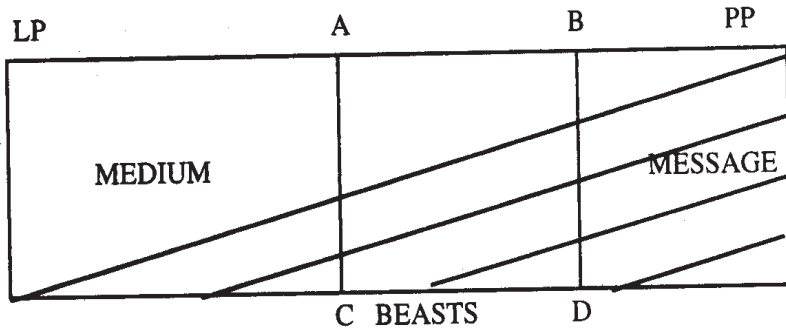
The author also uses personification and puns as in
Before
The miracle year 2 000 A.D.
When S.A.P. will sap slave-anglo? (p.)

The jibe here is on Structural Adjustment Plan (S.A.P.) which, in the author's view is obviously not working, and certainly not for the benefit of the Anglophones. There is caustic humour in such utterance as in when the Narrator says: "I don't want to boast, but I am the best shitologist here" (9)., and in frequent seemingly nonsense chants: "I shokolokobangosay ... with tumbutumbu rnatutu" (11) or "Belleh bos kalaba (18).

The overriding total impression is that here we find an artist at work. The topical issues that come up frequently - Amacam, Sonara,

Cellucam, Frogs, Anglos and so on- , flaw the fabric of the play a little because they quickly get at the audience and tend to drown the sad music of the poetry. On the whole, however, the play is a sustained hyperbole: a murky symbol of the total decay of the society presented in an exaggerated manner.

Placed within our diagram it shows an almost equal balance of medium(art) and message though still leaning more to the side of message.



When we move from *Beasts of No Nation* to *Requiem for the Last Kart* (1991) we descend from the celestial realms of poetic drama to the doldrums of me, agitation and cheap political propaganda. Here there is a straight forward lineal plot: an oppressed people move forward and overthrow a Dictator. Their task is very-easy for the Dictator, abandoned by his troops, commits suicide.

The setting again is Cameroon (of 1991) with Etoudi (1 doute in the play: being the main focus. The play documents the events of 1991 especially the wishful thinking of some political leaders and their followers who saw themselves moving straight into the Etoudi Palace unimpaired either through a popular uprising as in the play or through the short cut of the “National Conference”. Topical issues such as the hatred of the French as the sole cause of the misery in Cameroon swindling of money into Swiss Banks (which could be regained through the Nation Conference); the Anglophone problem and so on shoot out thread bare to the surf of the play reducing it almost to the level of a political tract. The stark use of name, such as Francois

Mitterrand, Chirac, Mandela, Botha and so on emphasizes this point of view.

The language is also straight-forward as we move from the dense poetry *Beasts of No Nation* with its symbolism to naked prose limited to referential

meaning:

The over concentration of power in the hands of one man.
in the hands of one tribe is the obvious reason for our
economic lac Nyos. (64)

And again the straight lecture:

A leader must ensure total and genuine independence for
his country! Our country must not be an appendage of
Chirac's mad colonial dreams, (p. 64)

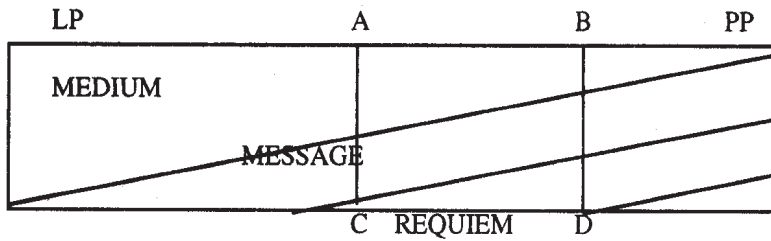
The characters are sharply divided into the "good" and the "bad" dichotomy black and white. The "bad" ones wallow in wealth, the toil and sweat of others. The good ones such as the student and the Woman, are the down-trodden who worry about the state of the nation and who in the end move to take over the Etoudi Palace

Woman: the people are under continual disquietudes,
never enjoying a minute's peace of mind, The nation is on
its knees

Student: (despairs). They are flamboyant even in their
disregard for human rights. The economy in ruins,
our people without food or hope.

Such utterances in the contemporary audience will immediately be rewarded by cheap applause: the writer says what the audience wants to hear. But such applause is ephemeral as the people may discover that it is not one man who puts the nation on its knees but the collective attitudes of everyone including themselves.

The play is therefore much on the side of the political pulpit.



Bole Butake

Playwright, producer, Professor of Literature, actor and critic, Bole Butake is very conscious of his art. It seems he visualizes his plays already on stage as he writes, and may be like Shakespeare, knows beforehand which roles will fit particular actors in his troupe - the University of Yaounde Theatre.

Lake God, inspired by the Lake Nyos natural gas disaster of 1986, opens with the end scene so that the beginning is also the end. It is a genuine reflection of the African philosophical view of life: cyclical with no genesis and no apocalypse.

On the surface, the play dramatizes the reason for the gas explosion in the lake. Simply, it is the anger of the Lake God who has been neglected by the Fon and his people. The Lake God has been angry before and kwifon saved the land:

Kibow: Two years after kwifon saved the land. two years after the fon banished

The Lake God was again hungry for sacrifice
 This time the lake generated landslides which
 Brought down whole hills destroying houses and farms
 But because no lives were lost and because kwifon was
 smarting from the treachery of the Fon,
 No one took any notice (60)

The Fon who bribed his way to the throne, has abandoned the traditional ways of his people in favour of Christian religion. The only person from whom he takes advice is Rev. Father Leo. In addition he favours the prospering of a foreign economy in his land from which he

benefits more: cattle rearing. The woman survivor summarises the reasons for the disaster:

Woman: He sold the land to strangers
And made alliance with the rearers of cattle
Which destroyed crops causing famine
And suffering the people had never known.
He rejected tradition and denied
The women a good yield even though
They clamoured for a queen and the lake sacrifice
And now this. (81)

This surface message of the play, especially given the setting, is convincing enough to stop the unwary critic from inquiring further. From our point of view, all that is clearly stated by the text of the play are only representative symbols of what the writer actually intends to pass on to his audience.

The Fon represents all African leaders who allow themselves to be directed by white men in foreign capitals. These leaders do not hearken to the aspirations of their people in the same way as the Fon ignores the women and the kwifon. The Fon's impotence is only a symbol of his personal bankruptcy.

Father Leo is an embodiment of all Western powers bent on having a full grip on independent African countries so as to continue to enjoy the advantages they had during the colonial era. In this way they reduce African leaders to mere puppets whose strings are pulled from foreign capitals.

The real subject matter of the play, therefore, is neo-colonialism which, the author implies, can only bring disaster not only to the leaders but to their nations.

The play, however, ends as it begins, on a note of hope. The survival of Shey-] Bonyo, the symbol of moral uprightness shows that good will triumph over evil. The survivors have learnt their lesson, as we all do by the end of the play, and will hopefully follow the right path. l'

Notice 'that unlike Bate Besong's Requiem for the Last Kaiser, there is no: direct mention of neo-colonialism, Paris, London,

Washington, Chirac and so all But in the play the Fon is the “last Kaiser” for his impotence makes him the last of his line. We learn of no survivors from the royal family; only the people. The dialogue is crisp, clear and colloquial. It smacks of simplicity all’ sincerity. The lucidity of the diction reflects the speech of village folk:

Man: Yes. We met in the market

But ... after ... our talk ...

Woman: But that’s far!

Almost half a day’s journey.

Man: For a man it takes less than half a day.

I had to honour an invitation.

Woman: From a man. From a man of course

Man: No.

Woman: From a woman, then?

Man: Yes.

Woman: I was right then.

That talk in the market place

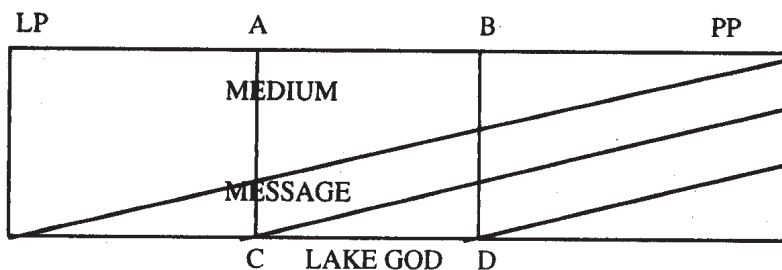
Came from your mouth only.

Man: No. From the heart

From the depths of my heart. (83)

Notice that through this moving love scene towards the end of the play, the author evokes and builds on a universal human sentiment that cannot be overcome by time or place or circumstance. In the macabre scene of corpses strewn all over begging to be buried, the new found couple are jealous. Single strokes of the brush such as this raise the play to the realm of imperishable art.

The concern with art and message in this play places it at the middle of our diagram



If the logical sequel to Lake God is The Survivors (1987) , And Palm Wine Will Flow (1990) is the other side of the same coin. In the latter play the bold Bole Butake blasts brazen praise singers.

The Fon this time is no stooge of the Whiteman. Rather he is a dictator who has surrounded himself with courtiers whose nobility lies only in doing his will and drinking palm wine. Shey Ngong, the Priest, reminiscent of Shey- Bonyo in Lake God challenges the Fon's authority and the fight begins.

Butake is a little more direct and more poignant this time as if more eager to pass on his message to the audience:

Shey Ngong: Who owns the land? Because he takes what belongs to

the land and no one lifts a finger!

Voice: Swallow your words. Shey. I say swallow your words.

Shey Ngong: I will not. I am the cockroach.

A gorilla can do nothing to an iroko tree.

Voice: Shey Ngong, you will be hearing from the palace before the sun goes down.

Shey Ngong: Away you fawning, stooging dog! Away to your lord and

throw down yourselves in palm wine. What a land! (10-11)

Shey Ngong's prayer puts the situation more clearly:

Grant me strength and wisdom

To weather the surging storm

The fon has lost vision

The noble men and elders of this land

Now listen only to the inner voice

Of greed and fear of a man who has
Surrounded himself with listeners
And watch-dogs to do his bidding. (12)

In the fight that ensues, Shey Ngong, with the help of the women's secret society - the febuin (which we also find in Lake God) - kills the Fon and bums down the palace thereby terminating the rule of Fons. The people will rule themselves through the council of elders who can be changed at any time if they falter. Decisions as to who runs the land will be taken at the market place. It is implied here that such decisions will be taken democratically through voting.

The message here is only thinly veiled and scarcely anyone can miss who the Fon represents and who the stooges are. The swift movement from despotism to democracy is clear evidence of what the author is driving at. But the village setting of the play makes it so realistic that its surface presentation could stand without removing the veil. There are despotic Fons who do not choose their councillors of merit and some Fons have been overthrown in a manner similar to that described in the play. It is this verisimilitude that raises the play from the obnoxious level a political tract to a work of art.

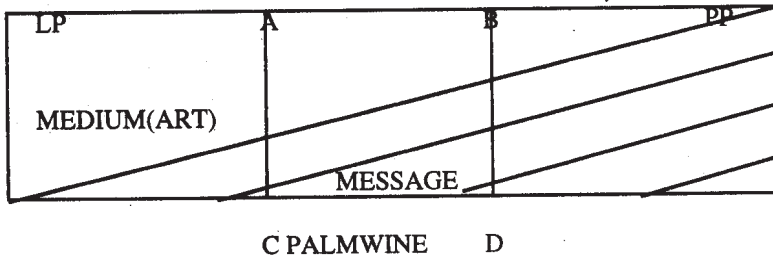
Evidence of real craftsmanship, however, lies more in the presentation of play. The action moves as swiftly as a whirlwind in one compact act and one seen' to use conventional terms. The swiftness and complete swing of the pendulum in one go spells out revolution without any mention of the term.

The careful interplay of song and dance as well as occasionally well chisel poetic passages add a distinctive flavour characteristic of Butake's style"

The eagle flies and flies,
But always returns home.
The prowling lion comes back to its den for rest!
After devastating the forest
The elephant goes down the river for a drink!
The farmer spent all day in the fields
But returned home at dusk, and went to sleep. (51)

The use of proverbial language here is refreshing and genuinely African. H indeed, we are centuries away from Shakespeare. The majestic cadences in the rhythm of these lines manifest the confidence and satisfaction of the speaker. rhythm is built on carefully measured pauses that lend grandeur to the lines.

Placed within our framework the play tilts a little to the side of message:



In conclusion we could say that what we have attempted to show through brief examination of these six plays is that once a work can be read literally , it is likely to be of low literary quality. You take it in at once and never need to return to it. B when a it lends itself to one or more interpretations, it is rich and you can only t it in piece meal. All the time you want to return to it and each time it is fresh because you discover something new in the symbolism of the images it conjures to the mi eye; in the turn of phrase or choice of words; in the rhythmic flow of the utterances and so on.

At this point we need to emphasize that though we have said that form direct address or straightforward speech in some of the plays take us into the political pulpit, we do not mean that speeches in general do not have literary quality Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address and his Second Inaugural Speech masterpieces of literary discourse and sit comfortably in the treasury of American literature:

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent. a new nation. conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure ...

We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live ...

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate - we cannot consecrate - we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract ...

It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far nobly advanced ... that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom and that the government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth. (Gettysburg Address, 19 November 1863).

Here indeed is literary style: a conscious manipulation of language to achieve effects or as Bernard Fonlon puts it “the voluntary and conscious use of language with an aesthetic intention; the creation of beauty with words by a writer” (1977: 161). Lincoln creates music and rhythm through an effective use of pauses. There are several other literary devices in the speech all geared towards arousing the emotions of the audience. The speech contrasts sharply with the straightforward, objective address (or scientific discourse) which we have seen in some parts of *The Mask and Requiem for the Last Kaiser*.

We have also considered the use of indigenous cultural elements - song, dance, costumes, customs, beliefs and practices, proverbial language, and so on - as adding a special aesthetic dimension to the plays and placing them on the African literary podium. Butake is especially gifted in this respect.

Commitment, of course, has its own merit because creative writers must remain the gadflies of society continually pricking the social conscience, reminding both the rulers and the ruled that there is always need for improvements of institutions ‘as well as personal attitudes towards the running of these institutions.

If we stress that plays in which the message overrides the medium are less successful, it is because we do not go to the theatre to get solutions to social or political problems. (In fact no textbook solutions are good enough. Those proposed by Karl Marx in *Das Kapital* came crashing 73 years after their implementation.) We go to the theatre to be entertained. The primary purpose of literature, therefore is to please, and when we go to the theatre we want to be in the literary

podium and only sink into the political pulpit long afterwards in quiet reflection.

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LANGUAGE

The English Language In Cameroon The Pre- Colonial Period

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Abstract

The history and development of the English language in Cameroon may be divided into several periods, prominent among which is the pre-colonial period. It spans from the first possible mention of the Cameroon coast in 500 BC to 12 July 1884, the date when Cameroon was made a German protectorate.

The author shows that the development of the English Language during that period may be characterized by two factors. Firstly, the language did not have any profound impact on the indigenous populations, since it was limited to the coastal region. Secondly, its use was almost restricted to the registers of trade, religion, the court, and politics. To give a comprehensive picture of the linguistic situation during that early period, the author also discusses, where relevant, the role of Pidgin English, indigenous languages and their respective interactions with English.

1. Introduction

A meaningful discussion of the variety of English in any part of the world entails some consideration of how the language was first introduced in that geographical area. This article deals with the introduction of English to what is now the Republic of Cameroon. It focuses on the pre-colonial period which spans from the first possible mention of the Cameroon coast in 500 B.C. by the Carthaginian seafarer Hannon (I) to 12 July 1884, the date when the German

Gustav Nachtigal and Kings Bell and Akwa of Douala signed the treaty making Cameroon a German protectorate.

On the whole, the development of the English language during that period may be characterised by the fact that the language did not have any profound impact as such on the indigenous populations, limited as it was on the coastal region. Furthermore, its use was almost restricted to the registers of trade, religion, the court, and politics. These four registers will be discussed' in sections 2 to 5 below, respectively.

In order to give a comprehensive picture of the linguistic situation in which the development of English took place during that period, we shall also discuss, where relevant, the role of Pidgin English, that of indigenous languages, and their respective interactions with English.

2. English in Trade

With the paucity of evidence available, it is not possible to determine with certainty when the English language ~as heard along the Cameroon coast for the first time. What is generally admitted by historians is that the first contact that Cameroon had with the Western world was with the Portuguese. (e.g. Mveng, 1963; Le Vine, 1964; Fanson, 1975).

In fact, the coastal region of Cameroon entered history near the end of the 15th Century, possibly in 1472 when Portuguese seafarers arrived the Bight of Biafra and visited the island of Fernando Po. As they sailed into the estuary of the Wouri River they were so struck by the presence of innumerable prawns that they named the river "Rio dos Cameroes"; a label that became "Rio dos Cameroes" in Spanish. It is from this appellation that the country derived its name: Kamerun in German, initially" The Cameroons" then "Cameroon" in English, and Cameroun in French. During the whole of the pre-colonial period, the name "Cameroon District" (2) was used to refer to the entire Cameroon coast from Rio del Rey on the Cameroon-Nigeria boundary in the west to the Campo River on the boundary between Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea, then Rio Muni in the south.

But the Portuguese never had any foothold on the land since they never established any fixed station on the Cameroon coast. Their base

of operations remained Sao Tome Island, from which they sent their ships to visit their trade points at the mouths of various coastal rivers. Lured by the predominant slave trade, other European adventurers followed, including the Dutch, the Swedes, the Danes, the French, the British, and the Germans. (3).

It is not clear what language was used in these various transactions. However, owing to the heterogeneous linguistic situation that prevailed during that period on the one hand, and the restricted communication needs imposed by trade on hand, there are indications that the means of communication must have been a sort of pidgin - probably Pidgin English. (4) But despite the numerous transactions none of the European languages involved - not even English - had any real influence on the people of Cameroon up to the middle of the 19th Century.

During their early commercial transactions, most Europeans preferred to remain on board, dealing only with the coastal tribes that served as middle British soon outnumbered all the other Europeans and were fast becoming dominant power along the Nigeria and Cameroon coast. In 1807, the British declared their own slave trade illegal and began to take active steps to suppress slavery Gulf of Guinea. The base of their operations was Fernando Po, which they occupied in 1827 with permission from the Spanish who themselves had taken the island from the Portuguese in 1777. (Le Vine, 1964: 1). The British also took advantage of their settlement on the island to encourage several Bristol and Liverpool enterprises to set up floating hulks as trading posts on the Wouri River. These trading posts were probably at the origin of the use and spread of Pidgin English as a lingua franca on the Cameroon coastal region.

In 1842, the British signed a treaty with two native kings in the District to encourage the legitimate trade in palm oil and ivory on condition trade should cease. Because of this latter commerce, the town of Douala became the main trading centre along the German coast as early as 1842. It may therefore be said, that trade was the activity which first brought English to Cameroon. Consequently owing to the informal nature of trade, it is no surprise if at this early period, no attention was devoted to the language as such, the most important

preoccupation being the profits derived from these commercial transactions. (5)

In addition to their commercial activities, the early trading companies also got involved in education. But their action was not far-reaching because their education was limited to a selected few who were to assist the traders in their various transactions, including slavery. As Le Vine puts it, "European thoughts in "17th and 18th Centuries saw no incompatibility between establishing "forts" to regulate the slave trade and educating a very limited number of Africans to assist them in their enterprises. (Le Vine, 1964: 71). The education offered by those traders implied conversion to Christianity, a prerequisite which for all intents and purposes paved the way to the work of the missionaries in Cameroon. But owing to the rather small number of intermediaries needed by the traders, such practices did not have any serious impact on the spread of the English language. However, the spread and development of the language received an additional impetus with the installations of the first mission stations in Cameroon.

3. English in Religion

The introduction of Christianity was certainly one of the factors which contributed most to the spread of the English language in Cameroon, both directly and indirectly. Contrary to trade which was basically impersonal and tended to lay emphasis on the immediate profits derived from each commercial transaction religion appealed to the soul of each individual and did not rely so heavily on the immediate benefits which could be derived from each of the actions performed by the Christian. Its influence was therefore deeper since it could be looked upon as a long-term investment the outcome of which was most uncertain.

Furthermore, religion also appealed to the masses since its strength was naturally a function of the number of its converts. Hence the rather fierce rivalry and lack of tolerance demonstrated by the first missionaries who came in contact with the Cameroon coast. To illustrate this point, it may be recalled that when the British came to settle in Fernando Po in 1827, they brought with them a number of

manumitted slaves from Freetown, the centre of their anti-slave activities in West Africa. In 1844 the Jamaican branch of the English Baptist Missionary Society landed 42 volunteers at Clarence (Santa Isabel in Fernando Po). However, Spanish Jesuits already established on the island were outraged by the presence of Protestants on Spanish soil; so, they started putting pressure on the Governor for their expulsion. It was in fact under protest that Alfred Saker, who had taken over at Clarence, left the island and purchased from the native king of Bimbia, King William, a strip of land besides Ambas Bay at the foot of Mount Cameroon and along the coast opposite Fernando Po. It was on that strip of land that in 1858 he established Victoria, the first permanent settlement on the Cameroon coast. (6)

Early in 1884, under the leadership of Joseph Merrick, a black Jamaican, and the English Baptist Missionary Society founded at Bimbia on the coast of Cameroon the first Christian mission in the country. A year later, the first European settlement was started at Douala, still by the English Baptist Missionaries on the initiative of Rev. Alfred Saker.

Through religion, American missionaries also continued the spread of English. In the 1870s, English speaking American Presbyterian Missionaries established themselves at Batanga on the coast south of Douala. From that settlement, they pushed inland as far as Ebolowa in the Bulu country. Through their action, the population of the hinterland came in contact with the English language for the first time.

An important feature which needs special mention in the spread of English by the missionaries is the close attention paid to the language as such. Because it was vital for the missionaries to ensure that the Good News was well understood and assimilated by the local populations, they had to attempt quite a systematic analysis of the language in order to make their explanations as easily accessible as possible. They also had to bring the populations to pay close attention to the language. This was, in fact, the beginning of formal education in English.

To make their action even more penetrating, the missionaries also embarked on a systematic study of indigenous languages. It was through relentless efforts that they devised writing systems for Douala

and Bulu. These languages were eventually taught in schools in order to be used in evangelising. However, it is reported that some English was also taught in schools (cf., Fonlon, 1975-76: 191), although we found no reliable data on those early schools. The children were indeed most directly concerned by the teaching of English at school, but it may be said that the whole population also came under the influence of the language, although indirectly and to a lesser degree.

Just as in the restricted type of education offered by the traders, education by missionaries also implied, as a rule, conversion to Christianity. As Le Vine puts it. “the missionary societies came not only to effect conversions, but also to provide the “civilised” context within which the varied values of Christianity (as interpreted by each sect) could best be propagated. (Le Vine, 1964). Since language may be considered as the key to civilisation, the spread of religion was linked to a large extent to that of English. The classic trilogy of mission house, church and school was, fast becoming a symbol not only of missionary presence, but also of the spread of the English language.

The contribution made by the Baptist missionaries in the spread of the English language was enormous. In fact, they were the most prominent and influential group of Europeans in the Cameroon District throughout this period, especially in the Douala and Victoria regions. Their efforts were particularly noticeable in the field of education. By 1875, they had opened more than ten mission stations in the towns and villages, nine of them with schools. Consequently, the number of converts and literate natives was growing steadily.

An interesting development which helped promote English among chiefs, and elders was the fact that many chiefs were beginning to rely heavily on missionaries and white traders for advice, abandoning their own headmen and traditional councils. To this effect, Consul Burton reported that by April 1864, each of the five native kings of the villages of Douala had an English trader as adviser and a missionary as a consultant. “While his English trader must support him at all, ‘palavers’, he also consulted the missionary when legal defence against the violence, and arrogance of the Europeans was required”. (Consul Burton to Earl Russel, 15 April 1864, in Fanso, 1975:242).

It was therefore important for chiefs and their collaborators to master the English language in order to derive maximum benefits from

their European advisers. “ However, the language most widely used was pidgin English which had become a’ lingua franca for the whole of the region. It was used even for preaching in the church, although some Europeans considered it “not suitable for expressing deep: religious thoughts”. (Lewis, 1930: 51).

In addition to trade and religion, the court was another domain which, favoured the development of the English language in the Cameroon District.

4. English in the Court

In this early period, the spread of English among the adult population.’ especially the kings, chiefs and their elders in the Douala area was greatly favoured by the use of the language in the court. As early as 1882, Douala was already enjoying the status of a cosmopolitan town and was undoubtedly the most important trading centre and political centre along the Cameroon coast.

Because of this cosmopolitan nature, and owing to the highly competitive commercial activities in the region, the relations between the Europeans and the natives of Douala were not always harmonious. It is reported that at times, the relations became so strained that all compromise seemed impossible. The British and German traders and native kings and chiefs then agreed on the institution of “Court of Equity” (a sort of international court) to settle all outstanding and future disagreements between them. The court was also to maintain peace and establish law and order in the region.

It is interesting to note that despite the fierce rivalry between the German and British commercial houses, the only language used in the Court of Equity was English. Cases that could not be settled in the Court were referred to the British Consul who resided in Fernando Po and visited Douala sporadically. He was the final authority. Although the Court sat monthly, it could be summoned at any time in special cases. It was not a governing body as such, but through its regular meetings, British influence in the region was prominent. Because of this influence, the Court house which was built by community efforts and contributions was regarded by all concerned as British property according to clause II of the treaty of 14 January 1856. (cf. Fanso,

1975: 283). Surprisingly enough, the German traders cooperated fruitfully with the British and participated in the Court of Equity without complaints. In fact, up to 1880, they displayed no inclination in wanting to challenge British supremacy in the Gulf of Guinea. The British saw as their main rivals the French who were active along the coast from the Oil Rivers (the Niger Delta) to Campo. Such considerations lead us to the discussion of the last domain which contributed to the development of English in Cameroon, namely, politics.

5. English in Politics

In the domain of politics, it may be said that both British traders and native authorities were anxious to secure an official British protectorate over the Cameroon coast, although for different reasons. While the British traders needed greater security for their business to prosper, the native kings and chiefs needed to consolidate their positions. It appears that during that period, “the importance of kings and chiefs amongst their people was determined by their wealth, their role in the local trade, and the support they obtained from local traders and European officials”. (Fanso, 1975: 234). Furthermore, most of the native kings preferred to do business with the British because they had become accustomed to them and found it easier to deal with them than with the French.

Several coastal chiefs went as far as to direct petitions to Her Majesty’s Government, requesting British protectorate. Illustrative to this effect is King Akwa’s letter to Queen Victoria, dated 7 August 1879.

Dearest Madam - We your servants have join together and thoughts its better to write you a nice loving letter which will tell you about all our wishes. We wish to have your laws in our towns. We want to have every fashioned altered, also we will do according to your Consul’s word. Plenty wars here in our country. Plenty murder and idol worshippers. Perhaps these lines of our writing will look to you as an idle tale.

We have spoken to the English Consul plenty times about an English government here. We have never answer from you. so we wish to write you ourselves.

When we hear about Calabar River. how they have all English laws in their towns, and how they have put away all their superstitions. oh, we shall be very glad to be like Calabar now. (Le Vine. 1964: 20).

It is not clear whether the king wrote the letter on his own free will or whet he was persuaded to do so by missionaries, English traders, or even both. Furthermore, we cannot ascertain that it was indeed written by King Akwa himself (or h' scribe), or that it was edited by a third party before its onward transmission to the Queen. What is certain is that since the letter was addressed to the Queen, it did provide an authentic specimen of the type of formal English that was expected to written by a native king during that period.

A close analysis of the text reveals that there are indeed grammatical, idiomatic. and other types of errors. However, a noticeable influence of pidgin English may also be detected. Expressions such as “plenty wars here”, “plenty murder”, “plenty times”, could be considered as cases of interference from pidgin English. However, just as in the case of most errors, their origin cannot . determined with absolute certainty. In fact, since pidgin English borrowed from bot . European and African languages, some of those errors may find their deep-root origin in interference from Cameroonian languages.

For the indigenous populations, the ability to read and write was the first sign of civilisation and was considered as a matter of prestige. Furthermore, they w quick to discover that those of them who could read and write could conduct the trade easily with Europeans, and could also keep record of their debts, debtors, ‘ creditors. From this point of view, it could be said that even if people accepted to baptised before entering mission schools, they did so not only for religious reasons. but also (if not mainly) for the material benefits and social advancement attached to education.

Another letter was written by Kings Bell and Akwa in 1881. The Foreign Office replied in 1882, thanking them for “begging” that their country be taken un British protection, but letting them know that the Government was not yet prep to undertake the protectorate of their country, but would further examine the matter and write to them again.

British missionaries were also writing to their home government in favour annexation. For example, George Grenfell, a young missionary who arrived Cameroon in 1875 in the company of Alfred Saker reported that rivalries between tribes and between whites and traders were causing instability in the district, making it difficult for chiefs to rule their people. As a result, rulers were making “frequent overtures to British representatives to annex the country”. (George Grenfell, “The Cameroon District, West Africa” p. 591, in Fanso, 1975: 246).

One of the reasons why Britain did not feel the need to speed up its process of annexation of Cameroon was that “British interests were deemed sufficiently well served by the periodic visits of the British Consul for Fernando Po and the Oil River (the Niger Delta), who had at his disposal several small gunboats that patrolled nearby coastal waters”. (cf. Le Vine, 1964: 19).

In May 1884, Consul Edward Hyde Hewett, then on leave in England was instructed to return to his post “without delay” to implement arrangements for strengthening the consular staff in Niger and Oil River Districts express to the king and chiefs “the desire of Her Majesty to maintain and strengthen the relations peace and friendship which have for a long time existed”, and to inform them that the Queen was willing to extend her favour of protection over them if requested. (Fanso, 1975: 269). Hewett arrived Cameroon on 19 July 1884, but it was too late since Dr. Gustav Nachtigal, Bismarck’s plenipotentiary, had arrived Douala on 11 July 1884 and by the following day (12 July 1884) had signed a treaty with kings ‘Bell and Akwa, establishing German rule. Fortunately for Hewett, all was not lost. In fact two days before arriving Douala, he had stopped at Victoria and officially declared it a British possession. However, as Le Vine puts it, “the big prize, though, had eluded him”. (Le Vine, 1964: 22).

On Monday, 9 July 1884, Nachtigal officially annexed Cameroon and hoisted the German flag on the right bank of the Wouri river. On 15 July, he abolished the Court of Equity, and established the “Cameroon Council’ under the authority of a German representative. (7)

After the annexation of Cameroon by Germany, more correspondences were exchanged between the British government

traditional authorities in Cameroon. For example, Consul Hewett is said to have written to natives referring to them as “great fools for selling themselves to Germany” and warning that “they would find out later that they would have done better to accept English rather than German protection”. (Memorandum by Mr Meade, December 14. 1884, Command Paper C - 4290 in Fanso 1975: 274). Lord Granville addressed a reproof to Bismarck for not having divulged the nature of the errand upon which Nachtigal had been sent and the incident of annexation was diplomatically closed. (Calvert. 1917: viii).

In January 1885, the Foreign Office replied to King Bell’s letter, regretting his acceptance of German annexation of Cameroon, but advising him to remain loyal to the country under whose protectorate he had placed himself. The Ambassador to Berlin advised his home government to instruct the British Consul in Cameroon to use “whatever influence he may possess with the natives to ‘accept . their new masters”, and the English traders “to keep quiet and not raise difficulties”. (Command Papers C - 4290 pp. 3-7, in Fanso, 1975: 278).

A discussion of English in politics during this early period would be incomplete without at least a cursory mention of the role played by Stephen S. Rogozinski, a Polish national, in the scramble of Cameroon. He arrived Cameroon in 1883 on an expedition he organised as an independent undertaking. Initially, he acquired a stretch of territory on the Cameroon Mountain. Through treaties, he was able to obtain the whole mountain and the whole coast stretching from the mouth of the Niger to the German settlement of the Cameroon River. To frustrate Germany’s efforts in the annexation of Cameroon, he declared his land a British possession. After some hesitation, the British government refused to have any territorial claims based on the treaties signed by Rogozinski, letting the Germans have all the territories in question.

Furthermore, the British Missionaries who anticipated the Germans’ intention to expel them began to withdraw peacefully from Cameroon. They, however, advised that the British and German Governments should negotiate for the sale of both the land and settlement in Victoria. By the end of 1884, it was undoubtedly clear that Germany had won the scramble for Cameroon and that Germans would soon be the only European power in possession of the whole Cameroon District and its hinterland.

This section on English in politics has shown, among other things, that from a purely linguistic point of view, the intense political activity that took place in Cameroon District during the pre-colonial period had two main implications. On one hand, it put a sudden end to the informal supremacy which the English language had been enjoying for the whole of the pre-colonial period. On the other hand, it conferred the legal status of official language of Cameroon to German. by the fact that the treaty signed between Nachtigal and kings Bell and Akwa made Cameroon (Kamerun) a German protectorate.

6. Conclusion

Sections 2 to 5 above have shown that up to the annexation of Cameroon Germany on 12 July 1884, Britain was undoubtedly the most predominant European influence along the Cameroon coast. Her supremacy was justified by various factors such as commercial enterprises, efforts by missionaries, legal and political activities. Since she was the most important in the region, English also became the dominant and most widely used European language. In fact, it was the language of commerce, the church, the school, the Court of Equity, and politics.

By the same token, pidgin English also acquired noticeable importance. and because of its informal character, it is likely to have spread even further afield than English. This spread of pidgin English is believed to account for the fact that the',. largest number of words of European origin to have been assimilated into Cameroonian languages such as Douala, Bulu, and Ewondo are derived not from German or French, but from English.

Section 5 above shows, among other things, that the success recorded by the Germans in their annexation of Cameroon came as a surprise to the British. The latter' . were all the more embarrassed as they considered France their main rival. and did not think that Germany had even the slightest colonial ambitions over Cameroon: (cf. Fonlon, 1975-76: 192). However, it was later discovered that as early as 1883' the German Government had decided to start taking quiet steps to effect the occupation of Cameroon. This decision was dictated mainly by economic considerations. In fact, various

assessments of British and German commerce confirmed that as from 1883, the Germans had taken over the first place from the British in both the import and export trade of the Cameroon District. (cf. Rudin, 1938; Fanso. 1975 .. 1986). Consequently, Germans no longer felt comfortable leaving their interests in Cameroon in the hands of the British. Moreover, the relationship between British and German traders began to weaken, and English opposition to German traders generally and especially in the Court of Equity in Douala began to grow. (Rudin. 1938, in Fanso 1975: 266). German annexation of Cameroon on 12 July 1884 was therefore the logical outcome of a long process.

British missionaries, traders and officials together with some natives had rather unfriendly and even violent reactions to the German annexation. To put an immediate end to all anti-German activities in Cameroon, German authorities decided to take a series of measures. On the one hand, they were ruthless with the natives; on the other, they threatened to banish all those missionaries and traders who sided in any way with the hostile natives. It may therefore be said that the signing of the annexation treaty and the hoisting of the German flag in the Cameroon District on 14 July 1884 marked the birth of the entity known today as Cameroon and constituted, by the same token, a major turning point in the history and development of the English language in the country.

Notes

1. According to some texts by Greek and Latin historians in the 15th Century B.C., the Carthaginian, Hannon, claimed to have sailed the coast of the “Libic lands beyond the Pillars of Hercules”. Hannon wrote of seeing a large volcano, which he named “The Chariot of the Gods” and “which later commentators sought to identify as Mount Cameroon”. (Le Vine, 1964: 16).

2. For the use of the term “Cameroon District”, see for example, G. Grenfell “The Cameroon District, West Africa”, quoted in Fanso. 1975: 246.

3. Until the end of the 16th Century, the Portuguese were the most important suppliers of slaves for the New World, but the Dutch finally broke the Portuguese monopoly towards the beginning of the 17th Century. (Le Vine, 1964: 17).

4. Following Todd, a pidgin may be defined as a simple form of language which arises to fulfil certain restricted communication needs among people who have no common language. (Todd, 1974: I)

5. A hundred varieties of English-based pidgin around the world attest to the willingness of Englishmen to focus their attention on their ultimate purposes - trade and the conditions most favourable to it - using whatever bits of language were available and necessary to establish and maintain trading contacts. (cf. Johnson, 1970: 78-79).

6. The said strip of land was ten miles long and five miles deep. Alfred Saker became de facto governor of the new colony in the absence of an officially appointed administrator. Saker is said to have used Victoria both as an example of how a Christian community lived, and a magnet with which to draw the natives. (Le Vine, 1964: 70)

7. Nachtigal stayed long enough to install his assistant. Dr. Buchner, as a temporary imperial representative on 19 July 1884, to greet Hewett when he arrived that same day and to assure British traders that their interests would be safe-guarded. He sailed on 20 July, and between 21 and 26 had raised the German flag at five other trading posts along the Cameroon coast. (Le Vine, 1964: 23).

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La Littérature Camerounaise D'expression Anglaise: Usage et Influence Du Français

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Résumé

La littérature camerounaise d'expression anglaise se caractérise entre autres par l'usage et l'influence du français.

L'usage du français se ressent notamment à travers l'emploi des mots français, des noms de lieux, des noms de personnes et de dialogues énoncé en français. Quant à l'influence du français, soulignons les cas d'interférence linguistique et l'emploi des faux équivalents anglais des termes français.

De tels usages et influences peuvent se justifier sur le plan de l'identification des personnages, le repérage du cadre énonciatif, la nécessité de bien s'exprimer. etc. De surcroît, ils trahissent le caractère biculturel du Cameroun.

Cependant, le recours au français dans cette littérature n'est pas toujours un phénomène positif; il peut dans certaines circonstances entraver la communication.

Cette étude se propose d'analyser l'usage et l'influence du français tel que manifeste dans la littérature camerounaise d'expression anglaise, en se servant d'exemples tirés des œuvres précises, Mais avant de s'engager dans l'étude proprement dite, quelques clarifications s'avèrent nécessaires. Premièrement, qu'entendons-nous par "littérature camerounaise d'expression anglaise"? Et, deuxièmement, quels sont les usages et influences que nous nous nous proposons d'examiner?

Par “littérature camerounaise d’expression anglaise”, nous faisons allusion aux œuvres littéraires de tout genre qui ont été initialement publiées en anglais par des Camerounais. Cette précision s’impose dans la mesure où elle exclut toutes les œuvres traduites en anglais comme *Le vieux nègre et la médaille* (1967) et *Une vie de boy* (1966) de Ferdinand Oyono, ainsi que *Mission terminée* (1967) de Mongo Beti. (1) En parlant donc de la littérature camerounaise d’expression anglaise, nous pensons comme Butake (1989) aux œuvres littéraires écrites par des Camerounais anglophones en anglais dont les pionniers sont *I am Vindicated* (1958) de Sankie Maimo, *A Few Nights and Days* (1966) et *Because of Women* (1968) de Mbela Sonne Dipoko, pour ne citer que ceux-là. Ces travaux marquent les débuts de ce que l’on peut considérer comme la littérature camerounaise d’expression anglaise(2).

Toutefois, beaucoup a été écrit en anglais depuis lors, surtout à partir des années 70. L’existence de quelques revues et magazines littéraires a sans doute été d’un appui significatif. *The Mould*, l’un de ces magazines, créé par Bole Butake en 1976, s’est montré extrêmement fécond pour les jeunes écrivains. Curieusement, toutes les nouvelles que nous examinerons dans le cadre de cette étude ont été publiées pour la première fois dans ce magazine (3). En tout, nos analyses, s’appuyent sur neuf textes dont sept nouvelles et deux pièces de théâtre. Elles comportent “Ringway Baby” (1979) et “Degree Orals” (1981) de Peter Abety, “Here where we live” (1979) et “Midnight Sky” (1983) de Nol Alembong, *Beast of No Nation* (1990) et *Requiem for the Last Kaiser* (1991) de Bate Besong, “The Visiting Card” (1979) de Juliana Nfah, “The Coming of Mr Bonaventure” (1980) de Kum Ngong, et enfin, “The Fish and the Bait” (1979) de Pitt Tah Tawang.

Tous ces ouvrages furent publiés après l’unification de 1972 lorsque les deux Etats fédérés du Cameroun Occidental et du Cameroun Oriental décidèrent par referendum d’adopter le système unitaire. L’importance de la période d’après 1972 dans notre étude provient du fait qu’avant cette période les Camerounais anglophones ne ressentaient pas encore l’impact de la langue et de la culture française. Malgré l’institutionnalisation du bilinguisme officiel en 1961 (4), l’existence de deux Etats fédérés - l’un d’expression anglaise et l’autre d’expression française - a considérablement limité tout contact entre le français et l’anglais. Mais l’avènement du système unitaire

signifiait que les deux cultures et langues étaient de ce fait appelées à coexister. Les Camerounais anglophones ne pouvaient plus se passer de leurs compatriotes francophones et vice-versa.

Deuxièmement, l'emplacement géographique de Yaoundé, la capitale, dans la région francophone signifiait que les Camerounais anglophones étaient en quelque sorte obligés de se rapprocher de leurs compatriotes francophones. Le troisième facteur est sans doute l'existence à Yaoundé de l'unique Université du pays de 1961 à 1993, date à laquelle on assiste à la création de cinq autres institutions. Par conséquent, plusieurs intellectuels anglophones ambitieux devaient par nécessité se rendre à Yaoundé pour poursuivre des études supérieures ou encore pour y faire carrière. Il n'est donc pas surprenant de constater que beaucoup de la créativité littéraire anglophone ait été soit menée soit publiée à Yaoundé (5). Notons ici que tous les six écrivains dont les travaux font l'objet de nos analyses ont habité Yaoundé ou autres localités en région francophone. Ils ont donc été en contact avec la culture et la langue françaises.

Ainsi l'usage du français se ressent à plusieurs niveaux. Nous avons en premier lieu l'usage du lexique français ou du lexique appartenant à l'univers francophone parmi lesquels figurent les noms de personnes (surtout au niveau de l'utilisation des prénoms), les noms des lieux qui évoquent le monde francophone et les cas d'emprunt lexical. Deuxièmement, soulignons la présence du lexique français, cette fois-ci à l'intérieur des énoncés en pidgin débités par des personnages francophones. Pour ce qui est de l'influence du français, les exemples d'interférence linguistique et les cas des faux équivalents anglais des concepts français retiendront particulièrement notre attention.

En effet, notre intérêt principal ne réside pas simplement dans l'identification de ces emplois et influences, mais comptenant aussi le rôle qu'ils jouent dans les contextes de leur emploi, et plus généralement, leur impact sur la littérature camerounaise d'expression anglaise d'un côté, et sur la qualité de l'anglais camerounais de l'autre.

Dans l'emploi du lexique appartenant au monde francophone, l'utilisation des noms propres joue un rôle non-négligeable. Ici, nous pensons aux prénoms de personnes qui évoquent la culture française. Tel est le cas des noms comme "Marie" dans "The Fish and the Bait",

“Bonaventure”, “Jean-Paul”, “André-Marie”, “Marie Solange”, “Jean-Marie”, “Bienvenu”, “Jean-Claude”, “Marie-Paul”, “Marie-Thérèse”, “Sophie”, “Chantal-Claire”, “Jean de Dieu” abondamment utilisés dans “The Coming of Mr. Bonaventure”. Ces noms permettent de situer la nouvelle dans le contexte culturel français. Aussi intéressant est l’emploi de certains titres comme “Etat-Major”, “Chef” et “Patron”, le premier étant porté par le personnage Andze Abessolo dans *Requiem for the Last Kaiser* et les deux derniers par Gaston Lazare Otsama dans *Beasts of No Nation*. De façon générale, l’emploi de ces prénoms et titres nous aide à identifier les personnages comme ayant un background culturel français, ce qui s’avère un indice essentiel dans l’étude de ceux-ci.

Aussi convient-il de souligner l’emploi des noms de lieux qui permet d’imprégner le récit dans un contexte culturel français, l’exemple de “Lycée de l’Indépendance” dans “The Coming of Mr. Bonaventure” permet d’inscrire le récit dans un milieu français, l’idée de Lycée évoquant en soi la culture française. Puis, le nom du cinéma “Les Portiques”, salle de cinéma ayant existée à Yaoundé face à l’Immeuble Shell jusqu’aux années 1980, évoque orthographiquement la civilisation française, Dans “Here, where we live”, les noms de lieux comme “Avenue du 27 Août” et “Quartier Latin” permettent de localiser le récit. Ils conduisent à la conclusion selon laquelle l’histoire se déroule dans un milieu d’expression française, même si l’auteur refuse délibérément d’indiquer le nom de la ville. Cependant, certains auteurs tels que Peter Abety dans “Degree Orals” “ fournissent toutes les précisions quant au lieu où se déroule l’action du récit,

En somme, la plupart des œuvres étudiées se situent dans des milieux d’expression française, bien que les écrivains comme Bate Besong, pour des raisons politiques évidentes, évitent d’utiliser les vrais noms de lieux. Dans *Beast of No Nation*, Besong recourt à l’emploi du nom ‘Ednouay’, une anagramme de Yaoundé, la capitale politique et administrative du Cameroun. En définitive, les noms de lieux en permettant de localiser les lieux, contribuent à situer le récit sur le plan spatial.

Pour ce qui est de l’emploi du lexique français à travers l’emprunt provisoire, cette dimension est également d’une importance indéniable dans la littérature camerounaise d’expression anglaise. Par “emprunt

provisoire”, nous entendons les cas d’emprunt qui ne sont pas encore acceptés comme faisant partie de la langue dans laquelle ils sont utilisés - en l’occurrence, la langue anglaise.

Ainsi, dans “The Fish and the Bait”, les lexèmes français “planton” et, “indemnité” qui sont tous du jargon administratif, sont employés. Ce qui est frappant ici c’est que l’écrivain (souvent à travers ses personnages) emploie ces termes même lorsqu’il existe des équivalents appropriés en anglais. L’une des explications possibles d’une telle attitude réside dans le fait que la fonction publique camerounaise étant essentiellement française, la plupart des réalités y afférents ne sont mieux exprimées et comprises qu’en français. Bref, les équivalents anglais de “planton” et “indemnité” ci-dessus (“orderly” et “allowance” respectivement) n’auraient pas facilement transporté avec eux les connotations exprimées par les termes français, Une autre explication justifiant ce type d’attitude linguistique est que le groupe linguistique minoritaire adopte très souvent ce que le groupe majoritaire emploie - c’est-à-dire, ce qui peut être considéré comme usage populaire parmi les locuteurs du groupe majoritaire. Cette observation s’applique aux expressions populaires comme “radio-trottoir”, “vieux-capable”, “petite-amie”, utilisées dans “The Visiting Card” de Juliana Nfah. Notons que leurs équivalents anglais, (“rumours”, “dynamic old man”, et “girl-friend”) sont dénués de la dimension figurative que les mots français évoquent. Par conséquent, ils n’auraient pas pu exprimer avec éclat les idées que l’auteur voulait transmettre.

Un autre domaine d’intérêt relatif à l’usage du lexique français est le cas des acronymes français se rapportant à certaines institutions camerounaises, Dans *Requiem for the Last Kaiser* de Bate Besong, “CENER” et “SONARA” sont les plus usités (6). Si L’auteur évite manifestement les équivalents anglais, c’est parce que son public anglophone est plus habitué aux appellations françaises originales qu’à leurs équivalents anglais. Et aussi, faut-il noter que lorsque les équivalents anglais sont utilisés, ils risquent plutôt d’entraver la communication,

En dehors de ces emplois isolés des mots français, l’usage du français par certains personnages dans les œuvres étudiées constituent également un aspect intéressant de notre travail. Ceci va des énoncés

relativement courts au dialogue d'une certaine étendue. *Requiem for the Last Kaiser* de Bate Besong, par exemple, révèle l'usage des slogans politiques et des locutions démagogiques populaires par différents personnages dans des contextes politiques:

- Je vous ai compris (1991: I)
- La vraie Eglise de Politique d'Agigigidi (1991 :8)
- La démocratie aux couleurs d'Agigigidi (1991 :8).

En préférant le français à l'anglais pour exprimer ces idées politiques, le dramaturge, en quelque sorte, semble aussi suggérer que le français domine le paysage politique camerounais.

Dans "Here, where we live" d'Alembong, les voyageurs qui débarquent à la gare sont accueillis par des amis et parents qui les attendent au quai. Ces derniers s'expriment en français et en anglais:

Bienvenu. Mama est venue!..

Bienvenu, ici cheri! ... Welcome dear,
the train has arrived late, all the same, I am glad you came ...

Ma chérie n'est pas venue encore aujourd'hui! (1979:26)

Tout en soulignant que l'emploi du français et de l'anglais à la gare ferroviaire reflète le bilinguisme de la société décrite dans l'œuvre. L'usage dominant du français dans l'exemple ci-dessus - car il y a plus d'énoncés en français qu'en anglais - est évocateur du fait que l'histoire se déroule dans la partie francophone du pays. Par conséquent, il va sans dire que l'usage du français permet de situer le récit sur le plan spatial.

En situation de dialogue, l'emploi des énoncés français caractérisent le discours des personnages d'expression française. C'est ce que l'on constate dans "Here, where we live" où les personnages francophones sont identifiés à travers l'utilisation du français. Outre les amis et parents qui attendent à la gare, les contrôleurs, à travers leurs énoncés, sont identifiés comme étant d'expression française:

"Quoi?" the man thundered contemptuously. On attempting to repeat what he had said the Controller jeered back at the youth.

"Je ne comprends pas ton anglais".

“Qu’ est-ce que tu veux, Monsieur?” asked one of the controllers who had moved up to the youth.

“Laisse lui tranquille”, another broke in violently. “S’il ne veut pas parler en français il n’a qu’à laisser”. (1979:27)

Les contrôleurs se montrent ici hostiles à l’endroit du jeune Atem qui se renseigne sur l’emplacement de la salle d’attente de la gare. Au lieu de lui répondre comme il le faut, ils refusent de communiquer. En présentant cet épisode, l’auteur fait allusion au conflit linguistique qui caractérise la société camerounaise: “S’il ne veut pas parler en français, il n’a qu’à laisser”. Il ne fait aucun doute ici que l’hostilité linguistique est à son comble. En un mot, les personnages francophones sont indirectement en train d’imposer à Atem l’utilisation du français qu’il semble ne pas comprendre. Les implications de cela sont évidentes: parce qu’il ne peut pas s’exprimer en français et les contrôleurs ne sont pas disposés à parler anglais, la communication n’est pas possible. Par conséquent, il y a un vide tragique de communication observé à travers le manque de dialogue entre interlocuteurs, et plus globalement, entre Camerounais anglophones et francophones.

Les personnages francophones s’exprimant en pidgin sont facilement identifiés lorsqu’ils emploient des mots français. Contrairement aux personnages anglophones, leur pidgin contient des mots et expressions français. C’est le cas de Marie, la prostituée dans “The Fish and the Bait”. Après avoir dupé Tringler, elle le traite d’espiègle:

You don bring *bandit* for ma maison. after you start ask me wati?
Lukot-eh!

I go *appeler* you police-eh! (1979:23)

Et quand Tringler, constatant son embarras, quemande des vêtements pour partir, Marie se montre impitoyable:

“No, I no wantam; komot, komot for *ma maison*. You don bring *bandit*

for *ma maison*. I no talk, carry you *malchance* go ... *allez*. (1979: 24)

A travers les deux exemples ci-dessus, Marie trahit ses origines francophones grâce, aux mots français *bandit*, *ma*, *maison*, *appeler*, *malchance* et *allez*. La preuve est que les énoncés pidgin de Tringler ne contiennent pas de tels usages: « I beg, I go komot but I no get clothes to wear ... » (1979:24). Ceci nous amène à conclure que l’emploi du

français-dans le contexte ci-dessus permet l'identification des personnages et révèle entre autres la nature du pidgin camerounais - le fait que les Camerounais d'expression française utilisent des mots français lorsqu'ils parlent pidgin.

Toutefois, ceci ne signifie pas que seuls les personnages francophones utilisent des énoncés français dans leurs interactions. Les personnages anglophones recourent aussi à l'emploi du français. Un tel usage se justifie aussi bien par nécessité que par les exigences contextuelles d'expression. Dans "Degree Orals" d'Abety, Mbangong utilise le français afin de mieux exprimer ses pensées: "Excellent, Atangana, Excellent. Mention Très Bien". (1981:68). Quoique Anglophone de culture, il sait très bien qu'en matière d'évaluation, les expressions françaises ("Passable", "Assez-Bien", "Bien", et "Très Bien") sont en général plus populaires tant chez les Francophones que chez les Anglophones évoluant en milieu universitaire à Yaoundé. En effet, s'il n'utilise pas les équivalents anglais de ces expressions, c'est aussi parce que ses interlocuteurs dans le contexte de la nouvelle sont des Francophones.

Un autre exemple intéressant de l'emploi du français par des personnages anglophones s'observe dans "Ringway Baby", à travers le dialogue entre la prostituée et l'un de ses amants, René. En dépit de sa culture anglophone, la prostituée utilise le français avec ses connaissances francophones et l'anglais avec ses visiteurs d'origine anglophone. Elle va même jusqu'à changer son prénom afin de se rapprocher du background culturel de ses invités: son amant d'expression française l'appelle Marie tandis que celui d'expression anglaise la connaît sous le nom de Helen. Tout en justifiant une telle attitude sur le plan purement professionnel, l'on ne devrait pas perdre de vue le fait que cela n'est qu'un exemple représentatif du comportement de la minorité. Comme nous l'avons noté plus haut, il y a une tendance générale pour les personnes du groupe linguistique minoritaire à se rapprocher du groupe majoritaire, et ceci, tant sur le plan linguistique que sur le plan culturel (7).

Parmi les multiples influences du français observées dans les œuvres étudiées, il importe de signaler les cas d'interférence Linguistique et l'utilisation des faux équivalents anglais des termes français.

Par interférence linguistique, nous faisons allusions à la présence d'éléments linguistiques d'une langue dans l'autre. Contrairement à l'emprunt qui est un processus conscient, l'interférence est inconscient (cf. Darbelnet, 1976: 16). L'exemple ci-après tiré de "The Fish and the Bait" illustre clairement cette présence:

In his heart, Mr Tringler promised her a bonus if she performed well through the night: after all, he said to himself, my salary has an *allocation* called "indemnité" for such relaxation on mission.(1979:20)

Le mot "allocation" souligné ci-dessus, est utilisé dans son contexte français pour renvoyer à l'équivalent anglais "allowance"(8). En anglais, "allocation" a un sens différent de celui employé dans le récit; c'est donc un cas de faux-amis. Cette situation d'interférence sémantique est sans doute due au contact de langues, car l'écrivain semble considérer ces homographes comme signifiant la même chose alors qu'ils ont des sens différents dans les deux langues.

Pour ce qui est des cas des faux équivalents anglais des termes français, plusieurs exemples ont été observés dans le corpus étudié. Dans "Midnight Sky" d'Alembong, "The Fish and the Bait" de Pitt Tawang et *Beasts of No Nation* de Bate Besong, nous constatons l'emploi du syntagme nominal "Chief of Service" au lieu de "Service Head", ce dernier étant plus acceptable en anglais. Aussi les titres "Commissionner of Police" et "Principal Commissionner" sont usités à la place de "Superintendent of Police" et "Senior Superintendent of Police". Dans de telles situations, il est clair que les écrivains utilisent des titres populaires employés par des locuteurs de l'anglais au Cameroun, bien que ces titres ne soient que des traductions littérales inappropriées des concepts français. Il faut cependant souligner que si les écrivains évitent manifestement les vrais équivalents anglais, c'est sans doute parce que la majorité des locuteurs de l'anglais au Cameroun ne sont pas habitués aux mots comme "Service Head", "Superintendent of Police" et "Senior Superintendent of Police". Ainsi donc, les formules populaires bien qu'inappropriées, frapperont mieux le lecteur que les termes exacts qui demeurent malheureusement très recherchés dans le contexte camerounais.

Lorsque les écrivains anglophones se servent des mots français, que ce soit à travers l'utilisation des noms de lieux, des noms de personnes, d'emprunt provisoire ou encore de dialogue d'une certaine

étendue, cela permet au lecteur de déterminer le cadre énonciatif du récit.

Deuxièmement, la présence des mots français tout comme l'emploi des prénoms de personnes permet l'identification des personnages. Très souvent, l'on reconnaît les personnages d'expression française par leur prénoms. (9)

Troisièmement, l'emploi des mots français permet aussi à l'écrivain de bien s'exprimer, et surtout, d'être compris de tous. C'est le cas notamment de la Fonction Publique camerounaise beaucoup de termes et concepts y afférents ne sont mieux exprimés et compris par des Camerounais qu'en français; il n'est donc pas étonnant de constater que les écrivains anglophones recourent à la terminologie administrative française pour exprimer certaines réalités dans ce domaine. Après tout, ils seront bien compris du lectorat.

Plus précisément, on peut affirmer que l'emploi du français facilite la communication dans la mesure où les mots français renvoient aux réalités auxquelles les Camerounais anglophones sont bien habitués.

Toutefois, l'emploi du français peut aussi entraver la communication, surtout dans des situations de dialogue entre personnages anglophone et francophone et les premiers ne comprennent pas le langage des seconds. Inutile de signaler ici que dans de telles circonstances, l'absence de communication linguistique peut entraîner des conséquences fâcheuses tant sur le plan psychologique que socio-politique.

Enfin, tout en affirmant que l'emploi des mots français dans la littérature camerounaise d'expression anglaise révèle le caractère biculturel du Cameroun L'on peut à juste titre souligner qu'un tel emploi traduit l'influence dominatrice de la culture française sur la culture minoritaire anglo-saxonne.

Pour ce qui est de l'impact global du français sur l'anglais camerounais, l'emploi des mots français n'est pas à proprement dit un phénomène négatif. Même les cas d'emprunt provisoire peuvent à long terme enrichir la langue anglaise qu'ils intègrent cette langue. Cependant, l'emploi redondant de certaines influences examinées comme dans le cas de faux équivalents anglais des mots français est à décourager. En tant que gardien de la langue, il incombe à l'écrivain de veiller au bon usage. même si ces influences sont représentatives des

particularités de l'anglais camerounais. Néanmoins, tout en étant le gardien de la langue, l'écrivain ne devrait pas recourir aux formes auxquelles son public n'est habituées juste parce qu'elles sont recherchées. Après tout, la littérature n'est-elle pas par excellence l'expression de certaines idées et d'une certaine manière?

Notes

1. Les dates qui figurent ici correspondent aux éditions anglaises de ces œuvres initialement publiées en français.

2. Si nous avons préféré la désignation de "littérature camerounaise d'expression anglaise" au concept plus idéologique de "littérature camerounaise anglophone" c'est pour des raisons évidentes.

Premièrement, comme l'affirment Doh (1993) et Alobwed'Epie (1993), le concept de "littérature camerounaise anglophone" ne peut se définir de façon satisfaisante en dehors des considérations idéologiques.

Deuxièmement, en préférant la désignation moins engagée de "littérature camerounaise d'expression anglaise". nous avons tenu compte non seulement de la neutralité de celle-ci, mais aussi de la facilité avec laquelle l'on peut définir un tel phénomène.

3. Certaines de ces nouvelles ont parus plus tard dans d'autres revues. Signalons à titre d'exemple "Here, where we live" de Nol Alembong parue dans *Callalo* (3,1-3: 123-133), une revue noire des arts et lettres publiée l'Université de Kentucky en 1980.

4. La Constitution de la République Fédérale du Cameroun de 1961 est claire à ce sujet. Dans son article 1, paragraphe 4. il est stipulé ce qui suit: les langues officielles de la République Fédérale du Cameroun sont: le français et l'anglais".

5. Outre les revues et magazines littéraires tels que *Abbia*, *The Mould*, *New Horizons*, *African Theatre Review* et *Cameroon Literary Journal* publiés à Yaoundé. les maisons d'éditions comme Sopecam, Bet & Co, et CEPER. situées à Yaoundé, ont largement œuvré dans la publication des œuvres littéraires d'expression anglaise.

6. CENER, qui signifie "Centre National d'Etudes et de Recherche, est une branche du Service Secret. SONARA, qui signifie, quant à lui,

“Société Nationale de Raffinage” est connue en anglais comme “National Oil Refinery Corporation”. Ces deux institutions sont mieux connues au Cameroun par leurs acronymes français, ce qui explique pourquoi les écrivains anglophones préfèrent les appellations françaises à leurs équivalents anglais.

7. Il a été observé qu’au Cameroun beaucoup d’Anglophones et plus particulièrement ceux qui habitent les provinces francophones ne veulent pas toujours être identifiés comme étant anglophones. Pour eux, le moyen le plus sûr d’éviter la marginalisation est de passer pour des Francophones.

8. Nous considérons cet usage comme étant inconscient parce que l’emploi dans l’exemple suscité du mot français “indemnité” se fait avec l’aide des guillemets, ce qui nous permet de savoir que c’est un mot d’origine étrangère.

9. Toutefois, précisons qu’à l’heure actuelle au Cameroun, ce genre de classification peut induire en erreur, car il existe un type de “métissage culturel” quant à l’utilisation des prénoms - les Camerounais anglophones portent des prénoms français tout comme les Francophones prennent des prénoms anglais.

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La Littérature Africaine A La Conquête De Son Identité Culturelle: Itinéraire Linguistique Des Ecrivains Camerounais A La Recherche D'une Parole Autochtone

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Introduction: L'enjeu culturel du texte littéraire africain, hier et aujourd'hui

La création littéraire africaine repose sur trois principes qui ont pratiquement valeur d'axiomes: l'utilisation des langues européennes héritées de la colonisation comme mode de médiation linguistique, l'inféodation du discours littéraire dans les cultures négro-africaines, le désir pour tout écrivain de produire des œuvres modernes authentiquement africaines.

Il s'agit, pour nos auteurs, de restituer à travers un langage moderne, mais à la sensibilité toute africaine, la dimension spirituelle profonde de l'homme africain dans ses échanges, ses rapports, ses aspirations, ses angoisses, ses enthousiasmes. ses fantasmes.

L'œuvre littéraire apparaît ainsi comme un produit à valeur éminemment culturelle, et le texte comme lieu par excellence de l'éclosion de l'identité négro-africaine, ou tout au moins, comme instrument révélateur de cette identité.

Après une cinquantaine d'années de pratique d'écriture dont plus de trente après les indépendances africaines, quel bilan dresser sur les rapports que les écrivains africains en général, et camerounais en particulier, entretiennent avec les langues européennes qu'ils utilisent: rapport d'allégeance, d'imitation servile des modelées du passé, d'assimilation colonialiste et donc d'aliénation culturelle? Ou bien, au contraire, rapports d'instrumentalisation responsable et libre de la

langue européenne, d'autonomie expressive, de libre créativité verbale, et donc de décolonisation culturelle?

Poser ainsi et ici le problème de l'enjeu linguistique des textes littéraires africains produits en langues européennes, c'est moins se préoccuper de l'état de la langue de tel ou tel écrivain en particulier, comme cela a été fait jusqu'ici, que chercher à élucider la problématique de la production littéraire, qui est d'abord une problématique du langage.

Il y va, et de la nature esthétique du texte négro-africain, et de la théorie littéraire africaine, préalable à toute critique littéraire motivée et crédible. Bien plus, il y va de l'intelligibilité de nos œuvres, de leur pertinence aussi. Car, en fin de compte, la question est de savoir s'il s'agit d'un langage de la normalisation et de la mystification, deux dangers majeurs qui guettent l'Afrique moderne, ou de l'explosion du génie et du talent africains, de l'éclosion d'une parole négro-africain autochtone.

1. Les Contextes Linguistiques De Production De Littérature Camerounaise

La production littéraire camerounaise plonge ses racines linguistiques dans un triple héritage historique qui désormais fait partie intégrante du patrimoine culturel national: l'héritage négro-africain, l'héritage colonial, l'héritage "moderniste" et "post-moderniste".

1.1. L'héritage négro-africain

Il est d'existence séculaire. Il comprend plusieurs volets culturels solidaires qui sont les us et coutumes, les traditions africaines, l'oralité, la rhétorique africaine, la littérature orale africaine.

C'est l'Afrique millénaire s'extériorisant, se disant, s'exprimant à travers sa propre parole légitime: parole du peuple, par le peuple, sur le peuple. Parole ancillaire par excellence, textualité dans les mythes ou récits mythiques, dans les légendes, généalogies, contes, proverbes, chants, rituels sacrés et profanes, discours formulaires. Elle n'est pas soumise à l'expérience coloniale, elle n'est contaminée par les langues

hégémoniques occidentales, elle est legs and transmission et retransmission d'une génération, d'une descendance à l'autre.

Maurice Houis définit les caractéristiques culturelles de cette parole séculaire négro-africaine dans son Anthropologie linguistique de l'Afrique noire en tant qu'elle régit toute la civilisation de l'oralité africaine.

Elle est tour à tour communication authentique dans les relations communautaires, mémoire institutionnalisée, reflet de l'identité culturelle africaine. Elle n'a en tant que parole proférée, d'existence que vers le public et par le public.

1.2. L'héritage colonial.

Il est issu de la triple expérience douloureuse de la colonisation vécue par le Cameroun.

Colonisation allemande, de 1884 à 1916, soit 32 ans, sur une superficie territoriale de 750.000 km² au départ, réduite plus tard à 478.000 km². Période anglaise, de 1916 à 1960, soit 44 ans, sur une partie du territoire, dit Cameroun britannique, de 86.000 km². Période française, de 1916 à 1960, soit 44 ans, sur une partie du territoire, dit Cameroun français, de 430.000 km².

Ce qui caractérise le contexte colonial au plan de la production littéraire, c'est le dualisme culturel: d'un côté, l'adoption des langues européennes imposées par les autorités coloniales, avec le statut apparent de langues officielles, mais en fonctionnant comme langues de culture moderne, dans l'Administration, la justice, la communication publique, l'enseignement, la recherche scientifique et, bien sûr dans la production de la littérature africaine moderne; de l'autre, les langues africaines, dites "vernaculaires", coexistant avec les langues européennes y compris dans la production intellectuelle, comme l'attestent les textes de littérature orale et quelques récits ou poèmes ou pièces de théâtre de cette époque,

Au total, le dualisme culturel de la période coloniale est vécu comme frustration par le peuple camerounais, face au statut impérialiste et hégémonique langues européennes d'emprunt: l'allemand, le français, l'anglais.

Voilà pourquoi naît et se développe dès cette époque un discours africains postulant l'altérité négro-africaine, même dans le cadre de l'utilisation des langues européennes dans la production littéraire. Il s'agit, pour la presque totalité des auteurs camerounais de l'époque, dont Mongo Beti, François Sengat-Kuo, Joseph Owono, René Philombe, de revendiquer et de conquérir, dans le discours littéraire, une parole - autre, c'est-à-dire une parole-sans-l'Autre, un discours autrement. C'est ce que Bernard Mouralis appelle à tort ou à raison "les contre-littératures"

1.3. L'héritage moderne

On pourrait davantage qualifier cet héritage de "moderniste" et de "post-moderniste", en tant qu'il intègre tous les acquis de l'esthétique contemporaine et négro-africaine et la prodigieuse pratique des textes et de l'écriture depuis la fin de la seconde guerre mondiale.

En effet, il n'est pas possible aujourd'hui de s'interroger sur l'identité littéraire africaine, fut-elle linguistique, sans prendre en compte les grands bouleversements qui ont marqué la création littéraire sinon culturelle du XXème siècle, et qui ont entraîné l'ébranlement des conventions, des normes, des usages séculaires, des certitudes, des pratiques antérieures.

L'on assiste ainsi, depuis les années 20 en réalité, avec une accélération soutenue, à la caducité des formes traditionnelles occidentales, à la création de nouvelles formes d'œuvres modélisées sur la poétique et reposant avant tout sur la créativité linguistique: ludisme, maniérisme, créationnisme, en un mot invention, sont les concepts opératoires de l'art poétique moderniste et post-moderniste. l'art devient un jeu, et le sens de ce jeu ou sens de l'œuvre, un donner à traquer, à démontrer, à découvrir et non à lire. Le critique littéraire troque le manteau de détective du sens contre celui de théologien ou d'idéologue.

Avec la révolution technologique, avec les mouvements littéraires du XXème siècle dont le surréalisme, avec la révolution informatique et l'apport des media, l'héritage postmoderne comporte ce que Umberto Eco appelle "la nouvelle donne culturelle" du XXème siècle, qui selon le sémioticien italien, se définit en termes de "polyglottisme".

Fort heureusement, et comme nous le verrons plus loin, la production littéraire camerounaise n'est pas restée à l'écart de cette pratique postmoderniste. Mongo Beti, Francis Bebey, Paul Dakeyo, Yodi Carone, Werewere Liking vibrent désormais au diapason de ce créationnisme et de ce polyglottisme.

2. Langues Camerounaises, Langues Européennes Et Typologie Du Texte Littéraire Camerounais.

2.1. La situation Linguistique du Cameroun

Le Cameroun compte à ce jour, selon des estimations de *l'Atlas linguistique* 248 langues, dont 6 langues régionales; auxquelles il faut ajouter deux langues étrangères européennes qui ont le statut de langues officielles: l'Anglais et le Français. D'aucuns souhaiteront que l'on mentionne, ne serait-ce qu'au passage, deux parlars populaires hybrides pratiqués au Cameroun et dans les pays voisins: le pidgin English et le français-petit-nègre, qui servent de véhicules pour la communication surtout dans les grandes métropoles urbaines.

Comme l'on devait s'y attendre, les deux langues étrangères héritées de la colonisation survivent avec leur statut identique. Et c'est donc naturel qu'elles sont utilisées par nos écrivains pour produire une littérature camerounaise moderne.

2.2. Typologie Linguistique de la Littérature Camerounaise

La littérature camerounaise est diffusée sous la double forme de textes oraux et de textes écrits. Ces deux formes textuelles donnent naissance à une pluralité types de textes littéraires dont les plus courants sont les suivants:

a) Textes oraux traditionnels en langues nationales

Ce sont les textes de littérature orale ou traditionnelle. Outre les nombreux contes, nous pouvons citer en priorité les grandes épopées camerounaises, dont entre autres: *Batum ba bilung* de Ngo Oum; *Mongo Djam*; *le Mvet* d' Angon Mana; Akom Mba ou Mvet épique du Centre et du Sud; Moneblum ou l'Homme bleu, épopée du barde Daniel Osom:

les Merveilleux exploits de Djeki la Njambé a Inono, de Tiki Koulle Penda, etc.

b) Textes oraux traditionnels et traduits en français ou en anglais

On y retrouve des versions bilingues, avec le texte original en langue nationale et la traduction en français ou en anglais (cas de Moneblum et de Djeki Njambe, par exemple); ou des versions monolingues avec texte de traduction non accompagné du texte original.

c) Textes oraux traditionnels transcrit en langue nationale sans traduction.

C'est le cas par exemple de la série des Mvet: Owona - Bomba, Messi me Koto Endono, Atana Enyegue, etc,

d) Textes de littérature écrite moderne en langues nationales.

Comme dans les cas précédant, l'on rencontre tantôt des versions bilingues: cas de *Nanga Kon*, roman en langue bulu de Njemba Medou (1939) traduit français en 1989 par Jacques Fame Ndongo en réédition SOPECAM; tantôt des versions monolingues.

e) Textes de littérature écrite moderne en langues européennes: français et anglais

Ce sont ces textes qui constituent l'essentiel de la production littéraire moderne du Cameroun.

On y dénombre un millier d'œuvres, dont près de 100 romans, plus de 700 pièces de théâtre et de nombreux recueils de poèmes.

Ce qui, sur le plan linguistique, mérite d'être signalé, c'est la diversité de contextes de production de cette littérature moderne. Diversité dans le temps correspondant aux périodes coloniale et postcoloniale: diversité dans l'espace géoculturel: textes produits au Cameroun, textes produit à l'étranger dont la plupart en Europe (France, Allemagne, Grande-Bretagne...)

f) Textes en pidgin English ou en français-petit-nègre

Il s'agit beaucoup plus de la paralittérature populaire: bandes dessinées, feuilletons, romans policiers, etc.

3. L'Aventure Linguistique des Ecrivains Camerounais de Langue Française

3.1. Le discours théorique des écrivains camerounais sur la langue française

Que pensent les écrivains eux-mêmes de la pratique de la langue française dans leurs textes?

D'entrée de jeu, les écrivains camerounais reconnaissent que la langue française est un véritable défi, voire un obstacle majeur à leur expression. C'est donc un objet de conquête, qui commence avec le cursus scolaire, mais qui se prolonge et se vit à travers la phase ascétique de la production littéraire.

Bien plus, pour l'écrivain camerounais de tous les temps, les questions relatives à la forme littéraire en général ont toujours été inséparables du fond ou message de l'écrivain. L'écrivain camerounais se veut démiurge, créateur de monde, d'histoire, de langage, en un mot de l'Homme. René Philombe intitule ses poèmes : *Petites gouttes de chant pour créer l'homme* et Mongo Beti se prononce explicitement sur cet idéal prométhéen dans la bouche de Bitamfombo, personnage du *Roi miraculé*.

N'as-tu pas ressenti, toi, cette chose bizarre? Voilà: on est là sur cette foutue planète; on est noir, mais on a beau chercher autour de soi, lire dans les livres, scruter le visage des hommes célèbres, eh bien, rien à faire. Alors, tu te sens bizarrement solitaire, tu voudrais inventer les hommes qui soient Noirs comme toi, que tu puisses voir autour de toi, des gens qui existent vraiment, quoi. Tu te ferais Dieu, juste en vue de cela.

Pendant que Ferdinand Oyono s'assigne la mission de corriger et de rectifier dans ses œuvres la vision mythique et fantasmagorique jetée sur le Cameroun par la littérature coloniale et par le colonialisme triomphant, Werewere Liking, quarante ans plus tard, définit la

nouvelle mission historique de l'écrivain négro-africain des temps nouveaux. Nous avons décelé cinq objectifs essentiels de ce nouvel art poétique, dans *Elle sera de jaspe et de corail*.

“Inventer des mots pour dire L’Afrique gangrenée et prédire le temps.”

- Initiation vraie.

“Initiation virile qui: ôterait les sangles abdominales et empêcherait les hommes de s’aplatir comme les crachats, de s’écraser comme des papayes pourries.”

- Instruction:

“Esprit critique et de discernement.” -

Sagesse:

“Sens de la vie, nouvel art de vivre fondé sur l’amitié, sur le culte du gratuit et du sublime.”

- Conscience historique:

“Culte du rêve qui consiste à regarder plus loin que les ventres et les sexes.”

D’une manière générale, il s’agit de produire une littérature authentique, synonyme d’un art vrai contre l’art exotique où triomphe le culte du sensationnel et la recherche des traits de curiosité et de l’extravagance au détriment de la vérité humaine.

Dans sa “Lettre à un Camerounais” publiée en 1954 et qui se veut un abrégé d’Art poétique, Sengat-Kuo explicite les options des écrivains camerounais sur ce qui devrait être le langage de l’œuvre littéraire:

Le problème de la forme est autrement plus délicat Le contenu même, c’est-à-dire le fond détermine en grande partie sa forme. Il y a là un exemple typique de rapports dialectiques... il suffira au futur poète camerounais d’exprimer “totalement le contenu de l’âme camerounaise de son temps, de son époque, pour trouver ou retrouver du même coup, une forme typiquement camerounaise... Avec un peu de bonne volonté, de patience et de sens critique (étudier) notre folklore. Toutes fables, proverbes, chants, danses, musiques arts autant de pans de notre âme ... C’est certainement à travers eux et uniquement à travers eux que les futurs (poètes) du Cameroun trouveront la forme à la fois originale authentique et authentique.

3.2. Du Défi Linguistique à l'aventure Poétique

Cette étude ne se veut ni linguistique, ni stylistique, ni grammaticale, simplement une poétique textuelle. Elle se propose donc de suivre l'itinéraire intellectuel (et non chronologique) de créativité linguistique chez les écrivains camerounais. C'est donc une véritable prospection de l'aventure poétique des talents et du génie créateur déployé dans les textes. Lire le paysage linguistique, définir le profil et les aspects pertinents quant à l'originalité, à l'inventivité, à l'innovation s'y inscrivent; mesurer le degré de liberté créatrice pris par l'auteur vis-à-vis des normes et des conventions, telle est l'unique ambition de ce travail. Parlons plutôt de bilan. Et c'est un bilan d'investissement intellectuel, dans la mesure où la création littéraire est la rencontre entre une intelligence et une forme. C'est ce que Roland Barthes appelle l'histoire littéraire, "le bilan des formes de création."

Nous avons retenu, parmi les aspects les plus pertinents de notre pèlerinage poétique: le discours mimétique, la parole bilingue, l'expressivité négro-africaine, l'écriture de l'innovation et du ludisme.

3.3. Le discours mimétique: auteur ou scripteur?

Le métier d'écrivain suppose originalité, invention, voire créativité innovatrice de la part de l'auteur, C'est le sens premier du terme même d'auteur: auctor philologiquement signifie celui qui augmente, qui produit, le maître, par opposition à celui qui reçoit, consomme, l'imitateur. Le contraire de auctor c'est scriptor; le scripteur qui se contente de recopier sans y ajouter (du nouveau); ou, dans la limite des cas, le compiler, celui qui ne fait que rassembler des textes.

Chez les auteurs camerounais nous rencontrons cette tendance à l'imitation servile des modèles linguistiques occidentaux. Pratique scripturaire que nous avons appelée "mimétisme linguistique". Elle va du plagiat le plus évident aux calques; passant par les pastiches, les clichés ou les poncifs littéraires.

Le cas le plus flagrant parce que le plus systématique de mimétisme linguistique est illustre par le poète camerounais, Louis-Marie Pouka, auteur d'une dizaine de recueils publiés depuis 1943. Pratiquant la versification classique en général, Pouka est un romantique et un parnassien attarde; par son inspiration et thématique

centrées sur les thèmes romantiques bien connus: l'Amour, la Mort, la brièveté de la vie, les méditations philosophiques: par sa vision du poète comme Mage et Prophète de la société; par la tonalité générale de ses poèmes reposant sur le lyrisme, la rêverie et la veine moralisante; par les actants et personnages puisés dans les sources bibliques, dans la civilisation judéo-chrétienne occidentale, dans l'histoire contemporaine, dans la vie intime du poète.

Tout cela fait de Louis-Marie Pouka le parfait imitateur de Victor Hugo (*Les châtiments*), de Baudelaire (*Correspondances*), de Vigny (*Les Destinées*), de Lamartine (*Les Méditations philosophiques*), de Verlaine (*Sagesse*) etc.

Voici, sur le modèle hugolien d'« Océan Nox », le « Désert Nox » de Pouka, dédié aux soldats camerounais morts pendant la 2ème guerre mondiale:

Oh Combien de chauffeurs, combien de tirailleurs
Qui sont partis joyeux dans de grandes voitures,
Dans l'immense désert, sans eau, sans nourriture
Ont péri, délaissés, sous de fortes chaleurs ...

Citons encore cet autre pastiche des correspondances de Baudelaire:

La nature est un parc où des chacails hideux
Prennent parfois l'aspect de blancs agneaux candides
L'homme y vit au milieu des cabales sordides
Et ses propres instincts le partagent en deux.
Il est de sombres cœurs ou bout une rancœur
D'autres francs comme un son, mais incompris toujours ...

L'on devine aisément les critiques acerbes dont Pouka a pu être l'objet. De la part même de ses compatriotes qui l'ont traité de tous les noms: «hypéroplante apatride» pour René Philombe ; «talent caméléoniste» pour Mongo Beti, en 1961: «traître à la patrie» pour Patrice Kayo, en 1973.

Quant au poète lui-même, il se défend de toutes ces accusations par sa conscience de Mage et de sage Africain:

Je ne suis pas l'écho des révoltes vaines
Ni l'apôtre d'un racisme désuet.

Je suis la grande voix des réformes saines,
Des accords locaux, équitables, concrets ...
Puisse le Cameroun entendre ces paroles
D'un poète-prophète au cœur vraiment épris
Du calme constructeur pour jouer un beau rôle
Parmi les bons esprits.

Comme on le constate, Pouka est séduit par la langue française qu'il idolâtre et par les grands maîtres français à qui il rend véritable culte en les plagiant sans jamais s'en affranchir, en bon scriptor.

3.4. La Parole Bilingue et le Dualisme Linguistique

Comment rendre, c'est-à-dire traduire en langue française toute la réalité africaine? C'est la pierre d'achoppement de nos écrivains. Il existerait ainsi un divorce entre le capital linguistique français, le lexique surtout, et les réalités socioculturelles africaines. Il faudrait même y ajouter la syntaxe, mère d'une certaine logique, elle-même génératrice d'une certaine sémantique. Quels codes utiliser pour exprimer la culture africaine, quelle logique: analogique, de causalité, de parenté? Voilà tout le drame dans cette rencontre entre deux civilisations, deux cultures, deux visions du monde, l'africaine et l'européenne.

Ce problème de la quasi irréductibilité des visions du monde dans la communication linguistique interculturelle atteint son acuité maximale dans des textes à forte inspiration anthropologique.

Le poète malgache Rabearivelo témoigne de ce handicap linguistique quand il s'exclame:

“Qui donc me donnera de pouvoir fiancer,
L'Esprit de mes aïeux et ma langue adoptive?”

Pour résoudre cet épineux problème, nos écrivains rejettent la pratique unilingue du texte et du discours littéraires, pour une pratique bilingue. Il s'agit de juxtaposer langue(s) africaine(s) et langue(s) européenne dans un même discours.

C'est le cas de *Tante Bella* de Joseph Owono, véritable somme ethnographique africaine. Le projet intellectuel de L' auteur est de créer un espace de parole authentique, sans trahir ni l'ego négro-africain, ni

la vision du monde africaine, ni l'outil linguistique utilisé en l'occurrence le français. Comme il l'avoue lui-même, Joseph Owono se propose, dans le récit de *Tante Bella*: “de peindre les sentiments, les scènes vécues, la campagne des villages de brousse entourés d'histoires mystérieuses de sorciers et de fantômes. (I>B>, 118)

Récit de l'Afrique ancillaire s'il en fut, *Tante Bella* constitue le prototype même de la pratique du bilinguisme textuel.

L'auteur y utilise systématiquement, à des fins de communication, deux langues: sa langue maternelle, l'ewondo, et la langue d'emprunt, le français.

Ainsi, pour faire défiler devant nos yeux toute la richesse ethnographique bété, Joseph Owono recourt à une double fonction dans la production linguistique: celle d'auteur qui crée un langage, Célie d'interprete-traducteur qui, au-delà du code, réajuste son canal pour établir le contact avec le lecteur.

Tante Bella est ainsi un discours dualiste qui nomme en ewondo et bi-nomme en français. Le comble de l'originalité, c'est lorsque l'auteur y ajoute un troisième code, et comme une troisième fonction, à savoir, donner l'équivalent scientifique de la chose nommée.

Quelques exemples de ce bilinguisme ou tri-linguisme suffisent à l'appui de notre démonstration.

- Sur les jeux traditionnels africains:

(Les enfants) passaient entre les jambes un bâton lisse, généralement la tige d'une tiliacée ... ce bâton s'appelait, “ékabli” le cheval.” (Bella jouait à) préparer ses différents aliments: le “kpem”, ou soupe de feuilles de manioc. (TB: 14)

- Sur les rites et coutumes:

“Jusqu' à sa mort. (Bella) ne mangea jamais la viande d'antilope “So” (céphalophes dorsales Gray), animal sacré, réservé seulement aux hommes ... La viande de tous les singes était interdite, à l'exception du petit singe Moustar “ossok” (cercopithecus cephus)... En somme toute la faune des forêts devenait interdite de cette manière:

L'Emvul' ou Guib d'eau (*Limotragus spekei*), le “Nkok” ou Guib harnaché... le Zib ou céphalophe des forêts (céphalophes

ylviculture . . . le “Nnom” était le chef du “Nnom-Ngui”, redoutable association ultra mystérieuse qui n’admettait dans son sein que des hommes âgés. (TB:220-221).

Tante Bella est un cas expérimental de désacralisation, de démystification de la langue française. Joseph Owono, en quelque sorte, proclame ici, pendant la période coloniale (nous sommes en 1959) non seulement la primauté du discours et du texte sur la langue, mais l’égalité de toutes les langues devant l’écrivain africain qui en use à sa guise.

3.5. La Conquête de l’expressivité Négro-africaine

S’affranchir du carcan de la langue européenne pour produire des textes et discours dans une expression toute africaine, telle semble être désormais l’option de tout écrivain camerounais, y compris Mongo Béti qui l’affirmait en 1978 lors d’un entretien avec Omoghene Biakolo]. Récemment en 1994, il revenait sur cette affirmation à Yaoundé, en promettant d’africaniser davantage son langage, en profitant de son retour en terre natale.

La plupart de nos auteurs s’attellent à cette tâche ardue en recourant à maints précédés de pratiques sociolinguistique et socio stylistique qui ont été amplement explicités dans le cadre des travaux et publications de haut niveau: emprunts, écarts, calques, dialogisme, polylinguisme, intertextualité, Nous n’y reviendrons pas ici.

Le plus pertinent pour nous, c’est d’examiner les aspects du fonctionnement et de la nature de ce texte de l’altérité négro-africaine,

C’est un discours où l’auteur (auctor) dit le monde ou se dit, non pas avec les mots de la langue mais avec ses propres mots du texte; qu’il choisit, ordonne, combine, pour en faire ces réserves de formes qui attendent un sens, dont parlait le poète,

Le poète François Sengat-Kuo témoigne de ce travail de créativité linguistique de l’écrivain, comme d’une véritable cosmogonie esthétique du sens:

Mis côte à côte les mots ont l’insipidité de la vie quotidienne disposés en arc-en-ciel traversés par l’éclair de l’orage enfilés comme un collier de cauris au fil des joies et des peines portés par les vagues de la mer ils sont un poème, (Liminaire à *Collier de cauris*.)

L'on ne peut que se féliciter de ce processus non de restitution mais de digestion, de domestication, d' appropriation, en un mot d'africanisation du langage que pratiquent désormais poètes, romanciers, dramaturges et autres hommes de plume camerounais. Ils contribuent ainsi à promouvoir cette "nouvelle saison de sensibilité africaine" que souhaitait le poète.

Deux voies semblent caractériser cette pratique du texte à l'expression négro-africaine, que d'aucuns appelleraient "le texte de francophonie africaine". Il s'agit de la voie que nous pouvons qualifier de "savante" et de la voie que nous appelons "populaire".

a) La voie savante ou érudite s'illustre par une expression à dominance académique. Elle exploite les ressources lexicales, grammaticales, rhétoriques, stylistiques de la langue française en les appliquant à la sensibilité propre de chaque texte, pour créer un pathos et un ethos à la limite de la sensibilité africaine.

C'est la voie que suit par exemple Mongo Béti (latiniste s'il en fut) depuis *Perpétue* (1974) jusqu'à son dernier titre: *L'histoire du fou* (1994).

Ce dernier roman est comparable dans son inspiration et sa sensibilité au *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* d'Aime Césaire 1939) sur les Antilles.

Discours d'évaluation des indépendances africaines, *L'histoire du fou* est bâti sur le registre esthétique de la caractérisation. Une véritable "mise en adjectif du monde", pour emprunter le mot de Claude Roy. D'où défilent:

- des images fortes « L'indépendance ressemble fort à la mort (de l'Afrique) »

- des portraits vivants et réalistes:

"Zoaételeu ... n'était plus maintenant qu'un vieillard cachexique auquel une fracture la colonne vertébrale, consécutive aux cruels traitements du bagne, donnait un pas déréglé et un port déjeté, comme asymétrique." (LHF:p 15)

- l'accumulation inflationnelle des mots:

"L'Afrique, minée par le népotisme ... était de surcroît saignée à blanc par l'évasion massive des capitaux, rongée par l'abjection ... dévorée par le gaspillage des ressources. (LHF: 17)

- parodie ironique du discours cite par le discours citant:

“J’ai rencontré par hasard des gars ... ils disaient que l’ami disait que les détenteurs des armes ... disaient que. pour les rendre, on disait qu’une petite gratification ... était la bienvenue.” (LHF: 37)

b) La seconde voie en termes d’africanisation de l’expression est la voie populaire, telle que François Sengat-Kuo l’a décrite plus haut.

C’est la voie que semble suivre désormais Francis Bebey, depuis ses deux derniers romans: *Le Ministre et le griot* (1992) et *L’Enfant-pluie* (1994).

L’on note un usage systématique de la parodie du parler populaire, tout à fait différent des calques ou transferts linguistiques. On pourrait même parler d’une réécriture du style populaire issu de la rhétorique et de l’oralité négro-africaine. Il y aurait lieu de se demander, à la suite de Pouka qui pratique un mimétisme européen, si Francis Bebey, à son tour, ne pratique pas un mimétisme africain, mais cette fois, au sens positif. En effet, Francis Bebey entend ainsi, non seulement soumettre la langue française au service de la communication africaine, mais aussi et surtout restituer le texte négro-africain au public négro-africain en priorité,

Qui pourrait le lui reprocher? Mais qui pourrait s’étonner par exemple qu’un russe écrive en russe pour les lecteurs russes?

Nous voyons surgir ici une mutation socio-historique profonde, celle de la naissance de ce que nous pourrions appeler “les lettres africaines”, destinées aux Africains ou aux lettres étrangers.

Pour nous limiter à quelques exemples pris au hasard des pages du roman *Le Ministre et le griot*, voici comment, au-delà de la langue, Francis Bebey restitue son discours, l’âme, la sensibilité du peuple.

Ainsi Madiana, tenancière d’un Bar en ville, rabroue l’un de ses clients qui court après une fille avec laquelle il vient de bagarrer:

“Voyez-moi cette espèce de morveux! Et moi qui perds mon temps et ma salive à lui adresser la parole! Il ne sait même pas ce qu’il fait! Une femme l’a traité de ver de terre, de mille-pattes, de tout et de tout et voilà il court encore après la même femme.” (MG: 101)

Voici les paroles caballistiques du chant du griot Djéli, à l’adresse de sa clientèle admiratrice, toujours dans le Bar de Madiana:

Il est grand. Il a été grand. Il sera toujours grand ... Ce qui passe ne passe pas. Vous voyez le jour aujourd'hui. Il passe, mais il n'est pas passé, car vous le reverrez demain. Ce qui est passé restera, foi de Djéli - griot - fils - de griot-père-de-griot." (MG: 104)

3.6. De l'écriture de L'innovation à l'écriture ludique

Avec cette dernière section, nous découvrons que le problème du langage que nous examinons ici ne se pose plus seulement en termes d'africanisation, mais en termes de communication moderne et contemporaine.

Ainsi, les écrivains camerounais, à l'instar de leurs homologues européens ou latino-américains, veulent à leur tour parler aux hommes de notre temps avec et dans le langage de notre temps.

Cette perspective correspond bien aux conceptions de la langue aujourd'hui telles que définies par les linguistes et sociolinguistes: un instrument et non un objet de culte, un moyen et non une fin, un système d'échange vivant qui se crée en permanence par le corps social et pour le corps social, et qui ne saurait s'ériger en une superstructure dictatoriale.

Les écrivains camerounais innovateurs rejettent donc un langage tendant à se figer dans des formes conventionnelles obsolètes, pour au contraire pratiquer un langage nouveau en tant que saisie de l'homme africain dans sa civilisation, dans sa culture, dans l'histoire, dans sa sensibilité.

Encore faut-il s'interroger également sur le sens profond de ce renouvellement: ces nouvelles formes véhiculent-elles un nouveau sens? Une nouvelle vision du monde? –*Aliud verbis, aliud sensu ... Aliud dicere, aliud intelligi velie.* (Quintilien)

Deux tendances se dégagent avec force au sein des textes camerounais de ces dernières années: l'écriture de l'innovation et l'écriture ludique.

a) L'Écriture de l'innovation.

Le concept d'écriture est un concept englobant, qui s'applique à la langue et à la parole, au discours et au texte en tant que lieu de

convergence d'instances, d'indices, de signes du texte, l'écriture supporterait mal un découpage par niveau ou registres.

L'écriture de l'innovation se lirait alors simultanément, dans la totalité du texte qui est présentation matérielle, graphisme, champs lexicaux et champs sémantiques, configurations thématiques, codes culturels et sociaux, temporalité, etc.

Ce qui caractérise l'innovation, d'une manière générale, c'est la spatialisation du discours, contre l'illusion chronologique ou la linéarité du texte.

Cette spatialisation fait naître une nouvelle conception de la parole négro-africaine: elle est signe, geste, mouvement. Silence, présence, absence, rythme. C'est le langage rituel, le langage-espace-scénique, le langage-espace-d'énergie ou de puissance.

Parmi les nombreux précédés utilisés par les auteurs, citons la textualisation, le non-dit, l'anaphore, l'ellipse, l'ironie, la parodie, l'aphorisme.

Il s'agit en tout cas d'une parole libérée, sevrée de la norme, de la forme au profit de la figuration, de l'usage au profit de la pratique textuelle. C'est la priorité à la singularité, à l'insolite, à l'idiolecte.

Parmi les écrivains camerounais qui utilisent à profusion cette écriture post-moderniste, citons Calixthe Beyala, auteur de dix romans publiés en 1987, 1988, 1990, 1992, 1993 et 1994. Soit pratiquement une œuvre par an. Ce qui ne manque pas de susciter une vive polémique sur la pa (rn) ternité astérité de cette product'

L'étude des textes de Beyala permet de qualifier cette dernière d'« Artisan-posateur », sans aucune connotation péjorative. Son roman ressemble en effet à un véritable atelier d'écriture: jeux, combinaison, séries, transtextualité, réseaux formels et thématiques etc.

On dénombre ainsi toutes les formes d'écriture dans *Tu t'appelleras Tanga* ([TAT] 1988).

_ Ecriture-Ouest ion. Voici l'entretien entre Tanga et sa mère:

_ D'où viens-tu comme ça?

- Sortie.

- Tu as ramené quelque chose?

- Rien.

_ Il y a des jours avec et des jours sans.

_ II n'y aura pas de demain. J'arrête." (TAT: 59)

_ Ecriture - Colère - Crue: Expression de la révolte de Tanga contre le sort amertume contre sa chosification.

<de suis incapable d'un regard en moi... Qui suis-je? Ou sont passés mes rêves?

Fou le camp Camilla ... Je suis bien (...) assise sur ma morve et rna merde ... je ne suis pas une pute. “ (TAT: 120-121). .

-Ecriture – Absence – Silence: Expression de l'impuissance, des faiblesses, du désarroi:

« Moi la femme-fillette j'ai un trou dans la tête. Il n'y a rien à comprendre, sinon suivre le chemin... Je hurle, séparée de moi-même ... Laisse ton cœur se taire. Se faire taire. Il n'y a plus que cela à faire, laisser le cœur se taire, se taire. » (TAT: 199-200)

- Ecriture - Etrangeté: Expression ou découverte de l'ombre, de l'écart contre la norme, de l'insolite, de la loi de l'éphémère, du fantastique moderne, du règne de l'irrationnel et de la bêtise humaine. C'est tout le drame même de Tanga, qui est utilisée par ses parents comme un objet commercial: le commerce de son jeune corps de fille-femme-précoce.

- Ecriture -Intention - d'une - langue: *Tu t'appelleras Tanga* est un vaste champ (espace) expérimental de mots, de paroles, de voix, autour du drame de Tanga. Un champ infini,

« Je devais continuer mon œuvre. Comploter mon charme. De l'argent, de l'argent pour la vieille. Plaire. Plaire. Plaire. » (TAT: 110).

b) L'Écriture Ludique

Dans L'Avant-Verbe de son roman *Elle sera de jaspe et de Corail*, Were Were Liking définit en quoi consiste l'écriture ludique, que par ailleurs elle met en pratique dans cette œuvre:

« Dans ce texte jouons.

Jouons à accumuler toutes les faiblesses les blocages les placages les laideurs et les vellétés,

Supposons, Entassons. Mélangeons. Ça ne va pas loin certes. Mais c'est un jeu. Voilà: la parole n'a plus de sens. » (J.C.: 7)

L'Écriture ludique est essentiellement subversion du monde. Elle est jeu, c'est-à-dire simulation ou dissimulation. Elle est dérision, ironie, « l'écho du rire des dieux » dont parlait Kundera Milan. Elle n'a pour

fin qu'elle-même, et son sens immanent, parce que ses mots sont vides: « la parole n'a plus de sens. »

Voilà pourquoi l'écriture ludique a une valeur, non d'échange, mais cosmogoniques, c'est-à-dire fondatrice, initiatrice ou prospective.

C'est le sens d'*Elle sera jaspe et de corail*. Roman-projet pour inventer la littérature africaine nouvelle, elle-même créatrice d'une nouvelle Afrique, ou plutôt d'un nouvel ordre social où:

« L'homme ne jouera plus au porc.

La femme ne sera plus chienne en chaleur.

Il n'y aura plus que des Etres en quête d'un mieux devenir
et d'un mieux Etre

Parce que l'avoir absolu ne peut pas devenir tout

Et que L'Etre Absolu tout avoir. » (EJC: 153)

Conclusion: Qu'est-Ce Qu'un Texte Négro-Africain?

L'ambition avouée de ce travail était de parvenir à l'élucidation de la problématique de la production littéraire négro-africaine par le biais de la problématique du langage. Nous entendions ainsi pouvoir augmenter les chances de crédibilité du discours critique africaniste, pour une meilleure et profonde intelligibilité du texte négro-africain.

Quelle langue parlent nos écrivains africains dans leurs œuvres? Comment articulent-ils leurs discours par rapport aux exigences linguistiques et socioculturelles? Quel statut pour la langue française de nos écrivains et pour le langage africain de nos œuvres? Quelles expériences pour la communication avec le lecteur de l'ère contemporaine, qu'il soit africain ou non?

Autant de questions qui se sont posées à l'occasion de cette réflexion, et auxquelles nous n'avons pas pu répondre en totalité, ni même en profondeur. Des pistes au moins sont ainsi ouvertes pour la recherche "africaniste",

Au terme de notre pèlerinage poétique, où nous avons surtout découvert le pluralisme du texte négro-africain, contre une certaine vision monocorde appauvrissante, nous avons cru pouvoir proposer

une typologie du Texte qui comprenait ainsi, sur la base de la poétique linguistique, et en guise de typologie:

- le modèle mimétique
- le modèle bilingue ou plurilingue et/ou dualiste
- le modèle d'expression moderne à détermination savante
- le modèle d'expression moderne à détermination populaire
- le modèle d'écriture innovatrice
- le modèle d'écriture ludique.

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**CHILDREN'S LITERATURE/
LITTERATURE POUR ENFANT**

Children's Literature In Cameroon: A Partnership Model For Its Development And Promotion

by

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Good literature written by Cameroonians for the Cameroonian child can be described as best as still in its infancy and at worst as non-existing. A review of the few existing works largely in poetry will be the subject of a separate paper. Adult literature, however, is being given considerable attention by Cameroon writers.

Teachers of English, notably those of literature to undergraduates in Cameroon are known to deplore and decry their students' inability to cope with their assigned readings. Some teachers consider such students at best as lazy and at worst as students not qualified for university education if they have to get this in English, especially literature. On the other hand, students generally do not hold in high esteem teachers who assign them a lot of readings. Some of them feel 'and say teachers, having attained their present educational status, do not want them to get there as well. Others believe that such teachers are simply wicked, selfish, unreasonable and unrealistic in their academic standards. This state of affairs inevitably results in open hostility.

Attempts to understand and find an appropriate solution to this essentially reading problem, emanate usually, and unfortunately, from a parochial cross-sectional approach which, in the main, consists in looking at the issue only from the secondary-university angle (Tenjoh-Okwen, 1994). This approach which discards the need to look at the child's longitudinal development in reading skill in general and literature in particular certainly falls flat. As far as these students are concerned, the problem, in fact, the fundamental problem, it seems, is that' they lack the required competence in reading to enable them to

cope with readings in the humanities as a whole and literature in particular, a problem particularly grounded on difficulties intimately linked with the transition from an oral culture to a literary one. Literature teachers in our setting at both secondary and university levels tend to ignore or simply play down the role played by the “reading” gulf that exists between orature and literature. For a teacher who is interested in longitudinal development of reading as a whole, considered as an indispensable skill for academic work beyond the primary school, the solution to the problem resides in developing this skill in the child from primary school, through well-written, well-presented, and well taught children’s literature.

This paper’s main purpose is to propose a partnership model for the development and promotion of children’s literature in Cameroon, which, from a pedagogic standpoint, is perhaps, the most logical approach capable of providing, in the long run, a solution to the rather bigger problem of a small adult readership in our Cameroonian institutions of higher learning and among our adult population. Before doing so, I will, first of all, make a case for the development and promotion of children’s literature; next I will present and discuss the model highlighting the roles of the various partners; finally, I will summarize and conclude.

A Case for the Development and Promotion of Children’s Literature In Cameroon

In a country like ours whose culture is essentially oral, the development and promotion of literature for the child, drawn from its rich and diverse folklore is certainly a cultural asset, for children’s literature, if well developed and well taught in its oral and written forms will inculcate in the child cultural values that cannot be acquired otherwise. Besides, children’s literature will, in many ways, nurture the child’s intellect and enhance its rapid development. It will, among other things, increase the child’s thinking, imaginative, and creative capacity.

From a purely literary perspective, children’s literature drawn largely from Cameroon folklore, will give the child initial literary experience serving as a sound spring-board for the acquisition of a

subsequently much wider, richer and deeper literary experience. Moreover, good and relevant literature meant for the Cameroonian child serves as a logical liaison between orature and literature thereby equipping the child with the necessary reading tools and hence with the psycho linguistic audacity badly needed subsequently by the older child and the adult to undertake the study of the humanities as a whole and written literature in particular both at the secondary and university levels, for it is this want of psycholinguistic audacity, it must be emphasized, that makes the Cameroonian adult the literary coward that we find in our classrooms today, always afraid to accept or even face simple challenges that are proper to the literary culture of the academic world. (I)

From a strictly linguistic standpoint children's literature, well written and well taught, will introduce the child to the written word, its complexity, its richness, its possibilities and limitations. If well taught, children's literature will through good reading strategies, equip the child with the reading skills absolutely indispensable for success in the academic world. Furthermore, good children's literature will facilitate the accommodation of the reading skill by the already-strongly-established listening and speaking skills in the child acquired in the oral culture thus making the child psycho linguistically ready and fit to discover other world literatures, Finally, the Cameroonian child is in dire need of this literature as it is an invaluable source of enjoyment and entertainment, in a world where entertainment opportunities are in very high demand.

Having thus far made a case forth development and promotion of children's literature in-Cameroon, I will now present the partnership model itself.

A Partnership Model for the Development and Promotion of Children's Literature In Cameroon

In a country where there is a lamentable lack of resources for education, where mismanagement of the few available ones is commonplace, where politicians senselessly vie with one another for power in total disregard for the people's needs, concerted efforts on the part of educators and those directly or indirectly involved

in education, seem absolutely necessary for the development and prom' children's literature in Cameroon. These Cameroonians will unquestionably unprecedented and unqualified results; it seems to me, if they work to partnership, a partnership model that brings together people drawn from the community, namely, the writer, and the publisher/printer, bookseller, reading the parent-teacher association municipality and the child (cf. next page). now turn our attention in defining their different roles.

Partners and their Roles

1. The role of the Cameroonian writer

The role of the writer is mainly to produce literature for the chi contents of his/her works (e.g. tales, stories, fables, legends, etc.) are to bit largely but not exclusively from Cameroon folklore and should be chosen and written in such a way that the themes and style should appeal to the Came child. In this respect, the writer should give top priority to themes that overtly teach cultural values (e.g. morality, togetherness, family values, reward, etc.) as those exciting adventures that have the potential of positively nurturing and enhancing the development of the young mind. The writer should ensure content is wrapped up in the appropriate form and style consisting, among things, of usable, simple, clear, clean everyday language with extensive." dialogue, plenty of repetition of lexical items, grammatical forms and s patterns, pleasant sounds, and interesting songs. Furthermore, the writer ensure that such works are short, motivating and captivating, thus permitting the child to read readily and speedily to the end so as to experience a sense of achievement and so encourage the child to read more.

In addition, the Cameroonian writer has the responsibility of ensuring that children's literature he/she writes must be well illustrated. In this regard, large, lush, richly-textured illustrations are to be preferred to dismal ones (2) and should be placed as close to the text as possible (e.g. on the same or opposite page of and should lucidly summarize the substance of the printed work on the relevant To facilitate reading, especially reading with a purpose, the writer

should include questions of a pedagogic nature and answers at the end of the chapters or page, case may be (or at the beginning of the text to enable children to read with a purpose) . Here, the Reading Teacher can be called upon to read the works and build, questions and provide the answers.

2. The role of the publisher, printer and bookseller

To be a writer, publisher/printer and distributor of one's own work is to be a "jack of all trades" and a meddler with professional excellence. It is not uncommon these days to find in the academic market in Cameroon, works written and by unqualified, uninformed, money-minded authors under the pretext that publishers are difficult to come by. The result is that academic material in print (e.g., of art, texts for the G.C.E. syllabuses and examinations, etc.) full of incredible academic and professional aberrations now abound in the market. These books consumed by readers with dangerous results. Many would never have been published, at least in their present form, if they had been submitted to professional publishers. But this is not to say that some of the works published by the authors themselves do not meet the most stringent professional standards. With the advent of desk-top publishing facilities we hope that the quality of self-published works will improve, if only the writers can take time to have their works edited and the typeset material properly proof-read before printing.

It is of course a fact that the limitation of the market is a primary course for the quality of the books released or the lack of interest by foreign publishing houses to get themselves involved with Cameroonian writing, especially in English. The problems of publishing are compounded with that of distribution and eventually, of sales. Our partnership model suggests that all these people - the writer, the publisher, the printer, the distributor and finally, the bookseller, should work in concert to improve on the production and marketing of children's literature in Cameroon.

3. The role of the Ministry of National Education

In this framework, the Ministry of National Education has the responsibility of properly training the Reading teacher. In addition, it has to include children's literature in the primary school curriculum and to see to it that it is properly taught and examined by regularly observing and counselling the Reading teacher and updating the curriculum. It has to be interested in the professional development of the Reading teacher by providing the ways and means for his/her professional development both at home and abroad. Besides and above all, it is the Ministry of National Education that should encourage the creation and running of school libraries by providing the schools with the technical expertise and financial support. The libraries thus created are to be stocked with appropriate literature books for children carefully and pedagogically selected and graded by the Reading teacher in accordance with the junior and senior primary levels of the two school systems in the country. Finally, it controls the quality of works produced. Unfortunately, the present economic situation does not seem to augur well for all this to take place.

4. The Role of the Reading teacher

The Reading teacher is a specialist teacher whose main role is to teach children's literature at the primary school level. He/she teaches reading as a skill to enable pupils to read other subjects. To this end, he/she teaches literature as a means to an end - to help the Cameroon child transit from orature to literature, i.e. from an oral culture to a literary one. In his/her effort to achieve this objective, the Reading teacher has, among other things, to draw up terminal schemes of work and daily lesson plans with short and long term objectives lucidly expressed in behavioural terms. Besides, the Reading teacher, as part of his commitment to the profession, has to acquaint himself/herself with developments in reading especially with up-to-date methodologies and techniques that will enable him/her to achieve maximum success with regard to individualized and cooperative learning.

From the academic market, the Reading teacher. selects, grades, sequences/ orders children's literature according to psycholinguistic

principles (e.g. from the simple to the complex, from the known to the unknown etc.) while taking into account the interest of the urban as well as the rural school child. For each work selected and for each level, the Reading teacher establishes reading cards containing well-graded comprehension questions (e.g. low-level questions followed by high level ones) as well as well-devised vocabulary exercises. The aim here is to check children's comprehension of the texts and to help them acquire a reasonable stock of active vocabulary. On the basis of sound pedagogic judgment, the Reading teacher decides on how to go about doing this. The Reading teacher allows pupils on individual basis, to proceed to the next level/stage when they have given him/her pedagogic evidence to show successful completion of the assigned readings. Finally, the Reading teacher examines the pupils individually and collectively (i.e. pupils are awarded marks for individual achievement as well as for cooperative group effort).

5. The role of the Parent-Teacher Association and the Municipality

In our partnership model, parent-teacher associations (PTAs) and municipalities will have to play a vital role. PTAs which exist in all primary and secondary schools in Cameroon, known for their enormous financial contribution in the building and up-keeping of schools, notably government run schools, have an important role to play in that they and the municipalities can build and equip school libraries in their localities with appropriate children's books recommended by the Reading teacher. Although the Reading teacher is not a municipal worker (nothing prevents him/her from being one, though), he is first and foremost a primary school teacher in the locality and should be consulted so that the right texts can be purchased for the libraries. This will ensure that the pupil's immediate needs are taken care of.

In addition to the collective effort of the PTAs, parents and teachers should stock their bookshelves with children's literature books and should see to it that their children read them. Furthermore, they should read to their children who cannot yet read. It is extremely

rewarding when a good story is well read (4) to a child with simple-carefully-devised questions for the child to answer orally after listening.

6. The Role of the Child

The child, in this model, is the main focus of interest. Every effort is directed to making him/her acquire the reading skill. The main role of the child is therefore to read the literature provided by the academic market, the school, municipal and home libraries if he/she wants to progress in education, to transit from orature to literature and to cope with reading demands in the arts, science and technology as well as gain access into world literatures.

Summary And Conclusion

The problem of poor readers at the university level in Cameroon is due principally to the fact that the Cameroonian child is essentially born into and nurtured by an oral culture and it is not being helped in a systematic and pedagogic manner to transit smoothly from his/her oral culture to a literary one. In order to help the child to bridge this gap, it is suggested that children's literature written by Cameroonians for the Cameroonian child, be included in the primary school curriculum and taught by the Reading teacher. The form and presentation of this literature are described and its pedagogic import outlined. It is also asserted that this literature, if well written and taught, should equip the child with the psychological audacity, the spring board absolutely needed by the child to undertake the study of the humanities as a whole and literature in particular as the child moves up the academic ladder.

The literature meant for the Cameroonian child is best developed and promoted by concerted efforts of those directly or indirectly involved in the education of the child. In this regard, a partnership model showing how this literature can be developed and promoted highlighting the role of each partner has been proposed.

In conclusion, it seems to me that the development and promotion of children's literature in Cameroon is in line with the longitudinal approach to solving the problem of poor readers at the

secondary and university levels by developing the reading skill in our children, a skill which is a sine qua non condition for a smooth transition from orature to literature and is as vital to the academic ladder as the base is to the pyramid, without which the apex cannot stand or simply will not exist.

Failure to develop and promote this literature and to provide the Cameroonian child with the literature that befits the child's psychology will continue to make the recently-much-talked of Cameroonian adult literature inaccessible to a large number of adults operating notably at the secondary and university levels.

Nobody, therefore, has the right either by omission or design to deny the Cameroonian child the invaluable tool to accede to the world of knowledge particularly that of the humanities, science and technology, which, it must be emphasized, can only be penetrated through efficient-steadfast-reading habits. Cameroonian writers, publishers, booksellers, Reading teachers, PT As, municipalities, and children, full partners in this exalting educational enterprise, should take up the challenge.

Notes

1. A survey of reading habits among 1,500 sixth formers in the South West Province carried out in 1994 by the present author, reveals that about 70% of those who choose to read science subjects do so because they hate the "much reading" in the humanities.

2. Examples of dismal illustrations bound in the hurriedly-written, hurriedly poorly-printed works by several authors.

3. A later study will look at the children's literature existing.

4. Good reading includes, among other things, reading with expression, good voice, good stress and intonation, facial expression.

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Children's Literature In Cameroon: A Review Essay

by

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I came to realise as soon as I had a child of my own growing up, that the question of education for children in Africa was really very complex. Especially for those of us you might call the middle class. who are not in the villages? We are at cosmopolitan centres. and the predominant culture of those centres are from Europe. And so. whatever your own political or ideological position might be. you very soon discover that your child is inheriting all kinds of nefarious ideas about race, about colour and so on. (Chinua Achebe. Okike, 20: December 1981. p.21)

Children's literature, it has been generally acknowledged, is something of a new; phenomenon in Africa. Even when a few texts do exist, they are generally ill suited for the African child and do not fulfil the role such literature is meant to fulfil. A number of writers in the African continent are fully aware of the value of this literature and are making an effort to fill the void. Some critics are also lending a hand to the birth of this literary genre by critically evaluating the works which are already available.

One such critic is the Nigerian Mabel D. Segun. In her article "Children's Literature in Africa: Problems and Prospects," she quotes Nancy Schmidt who comments on the twenty years of African children's literature from Ghana's independence to 1987. Schmidt's comments run thus:

In 1987 the typical children's book is markedly different from the typical children's book in 1957. It is written by an African artist. edited and published by an African in Africa. The context is almost always African, usually specific to the African country or geographical region

in which it is published. Folklore includes stylistic features of oral literature to the extent that this is possible in print.

Illustrations depict African people in African settings and are more often in colour than they were in 1957. Although most books are didactic, as they were in 1957, they are not single-mindedly didactic to the point of excluding creativity and stimulating writing for pleasure.

Although some Europeans still write, illustrate, edit and publish books for African children, most of them live or have lived in Africa and are familiar with contemporary African life. (*Children's Literature in Africa*, p.27)

Still along the lines of the evolution and growth of this literature, Segun again adds:

“Most of the books published in Africa come from four countries: Nigeria with about one hundred publishers, followed by Kenya, then Ghana and Cameroon” *ibid.* 27).

In her essay, she makes no reference to any work of children's literature in Cameroon. The present essay should therefore be regarded as an attempt to throw light on literature for children in Cameroon, although limited to the literature of English-expression, in the three genres: the novel, poetry and drama.

But before discussing the genres, a few words need to be said about the value of children's literature. At the beginning of this essay, we cited Chinua Achebe's statement in which he explains how and why he got interested in writing for children. In his article “Children's Literature in Africa: Myth or Reality” Ajuhana (1989:48) argues that this kind of literature could be “one of the powerful tools that the school could use to inculcate values, develop skills, influence attitudes and affect physical, social, emotional, intellectual and moral development. “ Mabel Segun (*ibid.*:32) makes the same point when she states that “work ethics, selfishness, loving relationships, acceptance of responsibility, are a few of the values which can be taught through literature, not in a didactic off-putting manner, but with subtlety so that children can be mobilised towards national and international development. In the following discussion, we shall see to what extent the various texts fulfil some of these requirements.

Prose

Comparatively speaking, children's literature first manifested itself through the medium of prose with Sankie Maimo's *Adventuring with Jaja* (1962). Patterned after Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer*, it deals with the adventures of a group of young men playing at grown-ups, always talking of "the days of yore" or of "glorious times now lost". The characters, which belong to a kind of world-wide youth movement, are mainly from Nigeria and Cameroon as their names testify: Aduba, Jaja, and Kayode. Tita, Kefi, Tundem Baye, Awo and Ako. The work has no clear-cut plot as such; what holds it together is the various episodes. From the outset of the novel, the author clearly states that his objective is to "provide the young at heart with a work of adventure with a strictly local background. As I pointed out earlier, *Adventuring with Jaja* is *Tom Sawyer* in tropical clothes.

If youth is a necessary stage in everyone's life, one must nevertheless learn to make the transition from childhood and adolescence, to manhood. Kayode, the main narrator like Voltaire's *Candide*, realises that one must cultivate one's garden. And so, he realises that to continue "adventuring ... was to ask for unnecessary and untold troubles" (p. 87) Consequently, the following morning "he sat up in bed in wonder. With the song of birds outside and light screaming into the room, it looked all very pleasant. The light caressed me with its kindly glow. This was an invitation to an active life, now my adventures were over" (p.87).

It was well over a decade that the next prose work was to appear. This was Kenjo Jumbam's *Lukong and the Leopard and The White Man of Cattle* (1975). From the point of view of craftsmanship, Jumbam's novel is probably the best prose work produced for children. It lays emphasis on the values held dear by the Nso people: manhood, the pride of being Nso, the importance of obeying one's parents among other values. The author no doubt expects the work to serve as a vehicle for the tradition; the hot drinks could not be taken without informing the ancestors using 0 of the bottles of whisky. There was no doubt that Ta- Tarh knew what was expected of him. He opened the bottle and carried:

it in his left hand to the entrance of the house. He poured the drink on the ground and at the same time called on his ancestors. “Ta Mbeng, Ta Ndip, Ta Mbu, Ta Agbor and all other personalities in your world of the dead. I call on you to share in the cup that we are about to drink. We are gathered here to send off Ayuk’s first son who has been accepted at a secondary school far away from home. We call on you to share in our discussions as you share in our drinks. and we ask for wisdom, prosperity and more children. (22)

Joseph Ngongwikwo’s three prose works: *The Lost Child* (n.d.), *Taboo Love* (1980) and *Taboo Kingdom* (n.d.) are marred by poor editorial work. Still, like the other works, it tries to pass on aspects of Cameroonian culture, in this particular case, Kom culture, to the young. Curiously, though, they are a kind of apology for both western civilization and especially, of the Catholic Church. As concerns cultural values, the opening page of *The Taboo Kingdom* gets the reader right into the heart of the matter. When Bobe Su helps Nawain Bi with her basket of com and a big bundle of firewood, she tells him:

Since I became pregnant no one has helped me the way you did today.

I do not know. This is my last month. If I get a girl. she is your wife; but if a boy. you will come down to the house and eat your meal of foo-foo corn and egusi soup, when the child is born. Now you know the house. It is your house. Before we see the next moon. this stomach should be empty.

And the narrator adds:

Bobe Su knew the tradition of the people of the tribe. He had helped a pregnant mother and this favour had earned him a future wife (I).

Poetry

Along with prose, poetry is one of the other areas in which the literary production for children is quite promising. Besides Kenjo Jumbam and Comfort Ashu, Takere Messack, Jacob A. Ndifon and

Bitame Lucia Bikaku have produced collections of poetry for children. Of these five, we shall discuss the works of the last three.

If others came into writing poetry for children by accident or simply as a passing fancy, Takere Messack had a very clear idea of what he was after. His *Kingfisher Poetry: Junior Verse* (1982) is so well illustrated with bright colours that it automatically catches a child's attention. Besides paying attention to the aesthetics of the text, the author announces from the outset the educational value of his work for young children. In his dedication, he writes:

This offer I make in true dedication.

For moral formation of springing tender young

And reformation of some adults in daily life.

Who, for reasons far beyond my own scope.

Were victims of some ill-process of growing-up? (I)

Though some of the poems in the collection are important mainly because of their rhythmic pattern which makes it easy to commit them to memory most of them deal with important issues. In "Pom-Pumkin-Pom" the repetition of the verse in each of the five stanzas as well as the refrain, make the poem easy to recite.

We saw the lovely pumpkin
In round and greenish gray
Fresh from mother's own farm
Worked behind the hills.
Angum, Abit, Anin and I,
In joyful song we sang
Pom-Pumpkin-Pom.
We saw our lovely pumpkin
In round and greenish gray
Mother sliced him in pieces
To cook him in the pot
Angum, Abit, Anim and I
In joyful song we sang
Pom-Pumkin-Pom (4)

In such poems as “These Things”, “My Country”, and “Devotion”, the poet extols the love of fatherland. In “My country” we hear the chant:

I pledge to you my country
A faith strong in loyalty
To uphold truth and unity
In honour and responsibility

I pledge to you my country
My precious blood to even spill
In defence of green, red and yellow
And the star that forever shines (p.41)

Determination and hard work are emphasized in the poem “Laziness”. Using the well-known story of the lizard to illustrate his point, he states:

There once lived a lizard,
In gay and happy mood,
Sprawling upon each rock
To spend his day in warmth.
He loved this luxury life
And forgot his other problem.
When night did fall at last,
He felt so awfully cold.

He wished he'd gathered twigs
To kindle a fire at night
This he swore to do at dawn,
But the sun soon rose again.

And, of course, the lizard never learnt his lesson. And then the admonition:

You see lizard in a predicament,
In luxury warmth and misery cold.
Ever putting off till tomorrow
What we ought to do today. (p, 25)

As Takere Messack's Kingfisher Poetry, Book I, Jacob A.

Ndifon's Integrated Rhymes (1984) pays a lot of attention to the aesthetics of the text. More attention is paid to the mnemonic nature of the poems, than to the need to teach any moral lessons. Of those writing poetry for children, he is

probably the only one with an ear for rhythm.

In "The Baby", the poet writes:

Akwi, the baby
Plays with atoy
She's bouncing
And laughing
And shouting
With joy (7)

In "The Fish", the use of alternating rhymes, assonance and alliteration, make the poem a real pleasure for children. It goes thus:

Rise little fish
Swim swim to see me
Dive little fish
Down under the sea (9)

In "Moonlight Dance" the poet once more shows his skill at the use of poetic devices. The sound of the drum seems to rise from the pages:

In a moon-lit night we clap
As we run about and shout
Jumping high to touch the sky
Running into the house and out
Twisting, dancing on our toes
While the drummer's music flows. (40).

Of the three collections of poetry under discussion, Bitame Lucia Bekaku's Environmental Poems and Nursery Rhymes for Primary Schools, exhibits ambition rather than talent. Most of the poems in the anthology actually deal with the Cameroonian environment and are meant to help the young Cameroonian master his ' history and culture;

the effort does not quite pay off since she does not seem to have a firm grasp of her chosen medium of expression.

Drama

In the area of theatre, only Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh has, so far, tried to use this medium of literary expression for children. His “Yaounde Children’s Theatre Collective” was founded in October 1989, “more by accident than by design, following an invitation received from the organizers of the First World Festival of Children’s Theatre which was held in Lingen Germany, in April 1990.”(Eyoh, 1994 :) The two plays the theatre group has performed to date are *Munyenge* (1990) and *The Magic Fruit* (1990).

Though the author got to be interested in theatre for children by accident, once he got started, things became clear in his mind. As a child, he states that he had not “read children’s literature beyond the Cinderella stories” (ibid.) He adds: “I found these inadequate for the children I was working with and decided to choose Cameroonian lore for the starting point, and this perhaps because of the need for a cultural identity of our own”. (ibid.) Besides the entertainment, he saw this kind of literature as something very useful and important. He states his case thus:

The child is said to be father of the man. If literature must grow, if enjoyment of literature should develop, if new creators of literature have to be born, then literature should begin with the child ... it expands the child’s linguistic competence, develops his creativity, provides him with entertainment, and provides him with a perception of his world.” (Interview with Eyoh, p.l).

His first play, *Munyenge*, draws its inspiration from a well-known folk-tale: that of the self-willed young girl who stubbornly insists on picking a husband of her choice and who ends up marrying a skull. The author weaves his tale in such a way that the young girl, *Munyenge*, is rescued at the last minute and ends up marrying her childhood love.

In *Munyenge*, the author does more than just retell a well-known tale. The other issues raised in the play are those of the conflict between generations, the battle of the sexes and oppression. Thus,

though the play is meant for children, it appeals also to adults. Munyenge's father, who is also the chief of the village, muses out loud: "In our days, men were men ... and children were children. Just look at them now. Foolish, stupid, rebellious, noisy... yes ... and irresponsible!"

In pushing his daughter to pick a husband, the Chief claims that he simply wants her to select a husband in "a democratic manner". In spite of this, the Chief seems to be everything except a democrat. Of him, the 1st Villager says: "He has his ears and eyes everywhere. I cannot even speak about him in the presence of my wife".

If Munyenge is dismissed by her father as belonging to the new generation of irresponsible children, she on her part does not think much of him and of his sex. To her, men are "unreliable, fake, dishonest, and hypocritical" (12).

And if the Chief, Munyenge and his brother, Mukete, are made of the same stuff, Mukete distances himself from his sister, by placing the mountain of sex between them. He says to his sister: "Your problem is that you think too much for a woman" (12). To which she later retorts ironically: "They command, the rest of us obey" (14).

Eyoh's other play for children, *The Magic Fruit*, like *Munyenge*, also draws its inspiration from folklore. The play deals with the problems of a polygamous home in which each of the mothers tries to place her son in a position to inherit the father's property. The play functions as a musical comedy, the popular children's songs interspersed throughout the play clearly show that the author has a keen ear and the ability to enter into the inner being of his characters, whatever their ages.

In the work, *Mother II*, who abandoned her husband-and children, returns after his death to get his son back to their own village because "getting my son back means that he can inherit his father's throne" (10). But because there is a curse in *Mother II*'s family, only the son of *Mother I* can aspire to the throne.

Throughout the play, the children express the desire to return home, but above all to be good, for

... goodness, not badness

Will take you to the heights (p, 9).

The idea of goodness, and along with it, kindness and fairness, is reiterated in the story the Uncle tells at the end of the play, and from which the play its title. The story concerns a village which was blighted and whose inhabitant was plunged into misery and hunger. The children, in search of food, saw a squirrel eating a nut. They ran after it; it disappeared into a hole in the trunk of a tree. They followed it and found themselves in a “beautiful city of squirrels”.

They ate a lot and wanted to carry some of the food home. The Chief Squirrel thought of something else. He gave them “a magic fruit and a magic wand”. At this, the villagers had enough food for everyone for many years. Then one day, the magic wand and the magic fruit disappeared. On investigation, it was found out that it was the village Chief who had stolen the wand and the fruit. And so, the people collected their fruit and their wand and chased the Chief out of their village” (p.27).

The intent of the story becomes very clear. The newly installed Chief must think of the overall welfare of his people rather than just that of his immediate family. Given what is going on in most of the African continent today, this message this message needs to be driven into the heads of today’s children who are, after all, tomorrow’s leaders.

This survey shows that those writers who have chosen to write for children intend, among other things, to educate and to inculcate certain cultural values in these children. They do this with varying degrees of success and commitment. It is up to critics to seek out and to give this budding literature, the attention it deserves.

Notes

1. This essay is concerned with children’s literature in Cameroon, written English. The works written in French will be the subject of a separate study

2. The Cameroon edition of Sankie Maimo’s *Adventuring with Jaja* appeared in 1974. Though the work is set in Nigeria and most of the characters are Yorubas, it does not figure in any discussion of children’s literature in Nigeria.

3. To show the extent to which children's literature has been ignored, Richard Bjornson's authoritative *The African Quest for Freedom and Identity: Cameroonian Writing and the National Experience* (1993) makes no reference whatsoever to children's literature.

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**HISTORY & JOURNALISM/
HISTOIRE ET JOURNALISME**

A Survey of Cameroon's New English Language Newspaper

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Abstract

After more than 30 years of existence. Cameroon's English I newspaper has come through a number of changes. There have been periods of newspaper proliferation and periods when newspapers were rare to find. going boom in newspaper publication started after 1990 and promises to c face of the Cameroon English language newspaper. More titles appear in the as the months and years go by. The quality of information and the language in it is delivered have improved. But the English language newspaper may gain quite as much in terms of objectivity.

1. Origins and Landmarks

The maiden issue of the first English language newspaper published in Cameroon appeared in Victoria on December 9, 1960. According to Gwellem (n.d.), seven patriotic Cameroonians joined hands to start a printing and publishing company which undertook this venture. They were V.E Muteke, V.C Nchami, A.W. Njikam, D.A. Nangoh, E.M. Kemcha, V.A. Ngu and Lifio Carr. The newspaper first appeared under the name Kamerun Times and had Sammy Chumfong as its founding editor. About this historic event, V.C Nchami (1972) writes:

As early as 5 a.m. on the morning of the 9th of December 1960, an anxious crowd waited in front of a small wooden structure in Church

street to read for the first time a newspaper printed in Cameroon by Cameroonians.

The paper later came to be known as Cameroon Times and shortly after its finding, on January 20 1961, Simon Dikuba replaced Sammy Chumfong as editor of the paper.

That historic date in 1960 saw the birth of an English language press in Cameroon. In 1994, more than 30 years later, the Cameroon English Language newspaper seems to be doing fairly well, with some eight newspapers appearing once or twice a week. The semi-official Cameroon Tribune appears almost daily, while a number of news magazines and newsletters appear sporadically. Between 1960 and 1994, the English Language press has witnessed ups and downs occasionally going through critical periods during which it was threatened with extinction for various reasons; the principal ones being poor funding and severe censorship regulations. Thus newspapers after newspapers sprung up and, after a few years of seemingly prosperity, disappeared from kiosks. At this early stage, a few newspapers survived for up to four years. Among the exceptions then were Cameroon Times and Cameroon Outlook which was founded in 1969. Unfortunately, both newspapers have ceased appearing for several years now, after having survived, against all odds, for 20 to 25 years.

The English language newspaper press in Cameroon has witnessed two periods of boom. The first occurred between 1965 and 1975, a period which saw the launching of about 20 different newspapers. After 1975, these papers began to disappear one after the other under the weight of poor funding, excessive censorship and amateurism on the part of the publishers and editors. In 1981 when a presidential decree ordered newspaper publishers to re-apply for authorization to continue to publish, only four papers, the semi-official Cameroon Tribune launched in 1974 and three private ones, were granted this authorization. The private newspapers were Cameroon Times and Cameroon Outlook published in Victoria and Cameroon Post published in Bamenda.

The second boom started in 1990 when a series of new laws not only <liberalized> newspapers. Today, Cameroon counts some of eight weekly or bi-weekly (appearing twice a week) English newspaper of which the oldest is Cameroon Post. The Herald is most prominent

among the papers that have sprung up within the last two years. The semi-official Cameroon Tribune today publishes a daily bilingual (English-French) edition. It has considerably shrunk in size as a result of an acute financial crisis.

A publishers, editors and writers have left their mark on the Cameroon English language newspaper press since its founding in 1960. After founding Cameroon Times in 1960, Sammy Chumfong stepped aside and allowed the first two decades to be dominated by publishers, editors and writers such as S.N. Dikuba, J.F. Gwellem, Tataw Obenson, Wem Mwambo, E.M.A. Epie, A.W. Mukong, and Peter Mabu. Dikuba took over Cameroon Times from Chumfong in January 1961. He was later joined by Gwellem and both of them ran the paper, often together and sometimes separately, for many years. Both of them left Cameroon Times in 1969 to start Cameroon Express, but soon abandoned the latter to return to the Times. Dikuba again left the paper for brief periods to take over the New Standard from Paddy Tambe in 1969 and to start Daily Life and Black Express in 1970 and 1971 respectively. Gwellem spent most his time with Cameroon Times until he withdrew into book publishing in the eighties.

Tataw Obenson, a most outspoken editor, founded Cameroon Outlook in 1969 and steadily built the reputation of the paper until it became one of the most popular in the country. When Mwambo was the founding editor of the country's second English language newspaper, Cameroon Champion, in 1961 and later took over Cameroon Mirror from E.M.A. Epie for a brief while in 1966. In the same year, Wem Mwambo collaborated with A.W. Mukong in founding Iroko. E.M.A Epie co-founded Cameroon Observers with Wem Mwambo in 1963. Although A.W Mukong has been described more as a political writer than as a journalist, he helped launch Iroko in 1966 and later managed Cameroon Times for a while in 1968. As for Peter Mabu, he was first editor of the English language Cameroon Tribune when it was launched in 1974. He ran the paper during the most of the years when it was considered the most prominent and the most stable of English language newspaper in the country.

Among the second generation of Cameroon's English language newspaper, men feature editors like Richard Shu Nyamboli, who took

over the Cameroon Tribune from Mabu, and Ebokem Fomenky, who is presently the paper's English language editor. A.Y. Ngalim founded the country's longest surviving English language newspaper, the Cameroon Post in 1969, but the paper came into prominence only later, when it was edited by Paddy Mbawa after the 1990 reforms. Boniface Forbin, the editor of the Herald is one of those who have made a recent impact on the English language press in Cameroon. Together with him are numerous young editors and writers such as Boh Herbert, Tenfack Ofege, Julius Wamey, Rotcod Gobata [Geoffrey Tangwa] and others whom we cannot mention here.

2. The Shape of the Cameroon English Language Newspaper

After more than 30 years of existence, the Cameroon English language newspaper can be said to be taking a certain shape which is determined not only by the writers and editors who have built it, but also by the special environment in which it has developed. This environment is determined partly by the fact that English exists in Cameroon, not as a native but as a non-native or adopted language and partly by the fact that the newspaper medium itself found its way into Cameroon more than three centuries after the first newspaper, Butter's Weekly News, appeared in England in 1622 (I). The development of the newspaper medium in England and the other native-English countries has taken place under conditions different from those that have existed in Cameroon since 1960. For this reason, the Cameroon English newspaper is being termed "Cameroon's New English Newspaper".

Over the years, Cameroon's New English newspaper has developed a character of its own which can be identified and described. It is marked, not only by the "non-native" or "new" English in which it is written, but also by its content and the shape of its stories.

2.1 Recent Trends

A study² completed in 1988 and focusing on the Cameroon Tribune, the country's then principal English-language newspaper',

revealed that the Cameroon English language newspaper was in the process of developing a character of its own. It established certain characteristic features in terms of newspaper content and story formal and linguistic/stylistic features. These features may be outlined as follows:

2.1.1 Newspaper Content

Discussing the goals and the content of Cameroon Tribune, one-time editor of the English-language edition, Richard Suh Nyamboli said that what went into the paper was largely determined by a statement contained in a speech delivered by President Ahidjo shortly after the founding of the paper in 1974. The statement could be summarized as follows: the mission of the paper was “to inform and educate within and to explain and convince abroad”. Broad as these goals may appear, in real practice it meant that the paper was called upon to inform and educate Cameroonians on what was actually the official stand. This same stand had to be explained to Cameroon’s foreign friends in a bid to convince them and obtain their support for the said stand.

Practically, an issue of the Cameroon Tribune contained five main “page” or “sections”. A front page carried the top stories, both national and international. The top stories contained reports on the activities of the country’s political leaders and administrative officials and the focus was on the achievements or efforts of these leaders and officials. International events in the area of bilateral and multilateral cooperation between Cameroon and the rest of the world were also highlighted. A second section dealt with “Home Affairs” and contained stories about the activities of cabinet ministers, and other top government and administrative officials. Once again the focus was on their achievements or on the efforts they were making to solve the country’s problems. The third section, under the title “Culture and Entertainment”, carried stories about activities of a cultural nature such as art exhibitions, seminars and workshops, and music and theatre shows. The handling of such information could be described as fairly objective. This was followed by a fourth section:

“African and World News”. It carried news briefs from Africa and the world. These were usually short despatches received from international wire services and they were reproduced with little or no comment. Finally came the sports page which carried reports of sporting activities both national and international. Unlike any other news, sports news was usually followed by unrestricted comments prepared by the reporters. This was certainly not the case with political news, the newspaper usually paid less attention to incidental or accidental occurrences as normally make news in the ordinary sense, of the word. Occasionally also, the paper carried special “information reports”, which were feature stories, on a range of socio-cultural topics. Editorials were usually rare, and when they appear, they carried, not the independent opinions of the writers, but official opinion the issue in question. In this manner, Cameroon Tribune successfully fulfils the mission assigned to it by its founders. As the principal English-language newspaper, it gave the Cameroon newspaper press a certain character which lasted almost two decades.

2.1.2 Formal/Linguistic/Stylistic Features

Fox (1977) and Hough (1980) have discussed five formal story types found in native English language newspapers. The first is the “inverted pyramid” story type which contains a summary lead and is used for reporting hard news. The second is the “lead-plus-equal facts” story with a multiple focus summary lead. It is used reporting a series of related news events. The third is the “chronological order” story which recounts how an event occurred using typical narrative style. It usually does not have a summary lead. The fourth is the “suspended interest” story which follows a climactic order and is used to create suspense in the readers. This type also does not employ the summary lead. The last is the “organic structure” story which has formal introduction, a body and a formal conclusion. This one is the traditional story structure.

The 1988 study revealed that Cameroon Tribune writers made use of all five, story structures but with slight modifications intended to make the story structure suit the material they were using. Innovations were thus observed in the “lead-plus equal-facts” structure which was

adapted to form what was described as the “speech summary structure”. Instead of presenting a series of equal facts after a multiple focus summary lead. Cameroon Tribune writers presented summaries of speeches made by different speakers on a given occasion which was announced in a summary lead. They went further to rearrange the order in which the speeches were made, making sure that statements made by important personalities appeared first in the news story. Hence it was described as the “hierarchical speech summary structure”, Innovations were also observed in the handling of sport stories. Cameroon Tribune sports stories usually contained a story lead which announced the results of one or several sporting encounters. This was usually followed by a chronological account or “film” of the highlights of the action. The writer’s personal appraisal of the sports event, usually in the form of commentary, closed the sports story. These innovations were seen to give the Cameroon newspaper story certain formal characteristics which were peculiar to the newspaper in its new setting.

Headline and lead features in Cameroon Tribune were usually the same as observed in native-English newspapers. Occasionally, however, Cameroon Tribune headlines were clumsily structured, lacked economy and sometimes failed to focus on the new point. Interpretive leads were also quite rare considering that little room was given the journalist for commenting the news. Finally, Cameroon Tribune writers tended to use high-sounding language and worn-out expressions in an attempt to impress rather than simply inform their readers.

A decade later, and with the on-going mutations in the socio-cultural and political environment, the Cameroon new English newspaper has certainly evolved.

2.2 Current Trends

A study of a representative sample of English language newspapers published since 1990 has revealed some changes in the character and form of this medium. The study focuses on four of the eight or so English language newspapers in circulation today. Each of these four has appeared, regularly for at least two years. The others,

not considered, are either quite recent or have not appeared regularly. The four newspapers chosen are the semi-official Cameroon Tribune, Cameroon Post, Weekly Post, and The Herald. The three last papers are privately run. Each of these papers was studied in terms of its content, the focus of its stories and its style. The purpose of the study was to determine the extent to which the English language newspaper in general had evolved after the 1990 press reforms, find out what traits the papers had in common and what traits they did not share. The findings of the study revealed some current trends which may be summarized as follows:

2.2.1 Newspaper Content

Two features were considered under content: the number of “pages” or “sections” the papers contained and the focus each paper gave to its stories. Each paper was divided into several “specialized” sections, the number of which varied, from paper to paper. Apart from the cover or front page, each of the papers had a section reserved for national or home news, a section for foreign news, a section for sports news and a special feature section. With the exception of Cameroon Tribune, all the papers had a section, sometimes more, for opinion stories labelled either as editorials, commentaries, opinions, interviews or essays. Opinions in the forms of “Editorials” and “Letters to the Editor” were a constant feature in The Herald. Occasionally Cameroon Post and Weekly Post published an editorial, but these papers were usually full of other opinion stories in the form of commentaries. Cameroon Post ran three special columns in which opinions were expressed namely; “Post Focus”, “No Trifling Matter” and “Postman”. A “Culture and Society” page was found in Cameroon Post and Weekly Post while advertisements appeared in all but Cameroon Tribune.

Of all four newspapers, The Herald appeared to be well arranged and predictable. It maintained the same number of sections, usually arranged in the same order. Probably because of their bulk, stories were less well arranged in Cameroon Post and Weekly Post. The number of sections and their labels varied from one issue to the next, so also did their ordering.

Considering the subject matter of the stories, each of the papers was marked by considerable variety. All the papers handled national political news in their front page. In addition to political news, The Herald handled economic news in their front page. Like The Herald, Cameroon Post devoted most of its front page to political news, and a little part to the economy and education. Cameroon Tribune and We Post were more liberal, handling a wide range of topics in their front page.

The “National News” pages were dominated in all the papers by politics, usually carried over from the front page. In addition, one found stories the economy, health, education, labour and miscellaneous news briefs. Opinion pages were devoted in most papers to politics and occasionally to the economy, education and health. Special features focused on political issues but also on economy and matters of scientific or general interest. Sports stories contained reports and commentaries on national and international sporting events, while the foreign news pages handled news briefs from all over the world.

The handling of information was seen to vary from paper to paper. All Cameroon Tribune tended to be critical of government policies, decisions measures, whether political, economic or otherwise. Weekly Post alone occasionally attempted “objective” reporting or analyses of issues. The Herald, more of than not, drew attention not only to national issues in general, but particularly to inefficiency and inconsistencies of government action. Cameroon Post on its part highlighted what it saw as confusion in government ranks and also economic mismanagement, police brutality and the misuse of the army and of civil servants. The “Anglophone Minority” issue received much attention from The Herald Cameroon Post. These papers particularly highlighted francophone injustices towards Anglophones and the legitimacy of the Anglophone cause. Weekly Post, on its part, rather highlighted differences and disagreements between Anglophone people of the Northwest and Southwest Provinces.

2.2.2. Newspaper Style

Most stylistic features of the Cameroon English newspaper could not be analysed in their detail. Attention was thus focused principally on story structure headline and lead features and language use.

The typical “inverted pyramid” structure tended to dominate in most new stories. Each newspaper made considerable use of it, particularly in the reporting of “hard news”. Speech summaries, such as those described by the 1988 study as being peculiar to Cameroon’s new context, were found in The Herald, Weekly Post and Cameroon Tribune. They were rather rare in Cameroon Post. Organic structure stories, with a formal introduction and a conclusion, were found in Cameroon Post, Weekly Post and The Herald; The much reduced size of Cameroon Tribune seemed to have forced this elaborate story type out of the paper’s repertoire. Interviews or “question and answer” structure stories and letters to the editor, which were rare before 1990, had already become quite popular. Interviews were found in all papers while letters appeared in all but Cameroon Tribune. Cameroon Post and Weekly Post were found to contain numerous rambling and poorly structured commentaries and opinion stories, most of them contributed by readers.

Nothing turned out to be so striking about headline and lead features apart from the fact that Cameroon Post and The Herald occasionally announced guesses, predictions, projections and even wishes as if they were factual news. When this occurred, it produced rather misleading headlines and news leads.

A general improvement was noticed in the quality of language used in all four newspapers. On the whole, the papers were readable in spite of occasional slips and clumsiness. The Herald appeared to be the most trim in its use of language in both its editorials and stories. Cameroon Post editorials and special columns also contained terse and tidy language, but many of its opinions stories were full of idiosyncrasies and clichés. Weekly Post in this respect resembled Cameroon Post. As for Cameroon Tribune, it was rather disappointing to notice that in spite of its greatly reduced size; this paper still contained numerous language improprieties.

Conclusion

One general conclusion to be drawn from this study is that Cameroon English-language newspaper has come a long way since its founding in 1960. Indeed, it is still evolving under the country's changing economic and sociocultural environment. More specifically, there has been an obvious shift from a press dominated by the state to one largely controlled by private publishers. There has also been a tilt in content, as much less emphasis is being laid on explaining and justifying government positions, and much more on exposing the shortcomings and weaknesses within the system. Government officials have also ceased to be the main focus

of the newspapers' attention. More attention is now being turned to issues and to other national figures. There has equally been a shift from simply reporting the news to interpreting it. This came with the development of a more liberal press which followed the 1990 Press law. The interpretations of course provide more insight into what lies behind the news events. But writers give very personal and often misleading interpretations particularly to political news events. This is indeed a disquieting trend as certain papers consistently focus on scandals and gossip when these involve political "opponents", while at the same time withholding facts that

might harm political favourites.

Finally, the Cameroon English language newspapers have become more readable than in the past. On the whole, much has been gained in terms of the richness of subject matter and quality of language used, but not quite as much has been gained in terms of objectivity. Indeed, excessive enthusiasm on the one hand and downright cynicism on the other, more than objectivity, seem to dominate the press scene for now. As the political situation becomes more stable, and as passions outside subside, it is hoped that there will be a gradual return to objectivity.

Notes

1. Cited in Grant (1871)

2. Unpublished doctorate thesis presented at the University of Yaounde (1990)
3. Circulation figure of 26,000 per issue in the mid-eighties.
4. Information gathered in the course of an interview with the editor.

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The Emergence and Strengthening of Democratic Pluralism In Cameroon

by

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Abstract

The remarkable resurgence of democracy in Cameroon conveys two lessons.

In the first place it has made it plain for all to see that the most urgent issues facing the Third World countries today are political in nature. Second, there is no longer any ambiguity about the meaning of democracy. The demand for democratic pluralism emerged rather suddenly and was voiced simultaneously in several parts of Cameroon because of

- 1) the failure of the one party system
- 2). the failure of democracy by consensus
- 3). the failure of the “African conception of human rights”

Three things are to ensure that progress toward democracy can be perpetuated in Cameroon. The first of these is the presence of a democratic state, the second is a free and vibrant civil society, and the third is the existence of other democratic states in the region.

Introduction

The irruption of democracy, which may be considered one of the events of the past years in Cameroon terms, confirms two patently obvious developments.

Firstly, it has become impossible to overlook the fact that the priority issues with which Cameroon is attempting to come to grips are problems of a political nature. Until recently they were mistakenly held to be technical problems such as disease control, illiteracy, or lack of funds, calling for an increase in financial material aid. It has now become apparent that a financial, economic or technical approach to these problems addresses only the consequences of the handicaps besetting Cameroon and fails to tackle their true causes. In point of fact, the only solutions are political ones, and they always bring us back to the same basic question. i.e. the type of government running the country and the nature of the authority responsible for taking the final decisions, which are necessarily politically oriented

Secondly, it is striking these days to see that there is no longer any ambiguity about the meaning assigned to the word democracy. Although it appeared to have become a hackneyed term applicable to any situation, to the extent that notorious dictatorships would take advantage of this ambiguity to pass themselves off as democracies, today there is no longer any room for doubt as to the type of democratic government that Cameroonians are demanding. They no longer speak of democracy in general but specifically refer to pluralistic democracy. In general, and if calls for a multiparty system are being voiced in many quarters, it is because this is the most manifest criterion of a pluralistic democracy. Two questions must be answered. How did democratic revolution emerge in Cameroon? What should be the guiding principles of a democratic state? An attempt to answer both questions is made in this paper.

The Origins of the “Democratic Revolution”

Many researchers have rightly established a link between the irruption democracy in Africa and the far-reaching changes that have occurred in Eastern Europe. The changes in the Eastern bloc may indeed have influenced development in Africa and the dwindling rivalry between the two superpowers may have dissuaded certain states from pursuing their policy of diplomatic blackmail, threatening to ask from one power what they could not obtain from the other. As the Eastern European countries can no longer serve as a model for

socialism, the collapse of their system may have discouraged the Marxist orientated African countries. Conversely, the African countries coming under Western influence may have taken advantage of the upheavals occurring in Eastern Europe to call for political pluralism, being convinced that the Western countries could not simultaneously approve of the advent of such a regime in the Eastern bloc and repudiate it in Africa.

However, the link, which is at the very least circumstantial, between the changes in Eastern Europe and the irruption of democracy into Cameroon must be seen in its proper light. First of all, it only concerns recent changes and merely shows that the changes in Eastern Europe speeded up a process that was already under way in Cameroon. The opposition movements existed well before the collapse of the Eastern bloc regimes.

We must therefore look elsewhere for a full explanation. Although our study cannot claim to be exhaustive, it may be said that three sets of factors are furthering the emergence of democratic pluralism in Cameroon.

The Failure of Democracy by Consensus

One of these factors is undeniably the failure of democracy by consensus. A vision of Cameroon based largely on myths, and symbolized by the legendary palaver tree prevailed for years among many people and still does today. Conflicts were meant to be resolved by palaver and discussion. Those discussions were supposed to continue for as long as necessary, until such time that the parties reached a consensus. The justification for this practice was the principle of collective participation since every individual was meant to participate actively in the community, all individual differences being taken into account.

Democracy by consensus undoubtedly takes a charitable view of society and is based on optimistic assumptions concerning human nature. It may therefore be considered a long-term aim to be attained in the distant future. It is in addition, an honour for Africa to be perceived, rightly or wrongly, as a cradle of democracy by consensus. Unfortunately, consensual democracy seeks inexorably to achieve its

goal of unanimity. It assumes either that people are perfect, very much aware of their rights and obligations and capable of discriminating between private interest and the public interest, or, on the contrary, that they are bereft of willpower and without freedom. In other words, consensual democracy can only exist in a society of gods or among slaves.

This idea was clearly put by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his social contract, where he wrote:

If a godlike people were to exist, it would be democratically governed... The greater the consensus at meetings, in other words the more the opinions expressed approached unanimity, the more the general will prevails; however, lengthy discussions, dissensions and commotion signal the ascendancy of private interest ... At the other extreme unanimity prevails once again; in this cast the people have been reduced to bondage and have lost both their freedom and their will. (in Eisenmann, 1977:73)

Consensual democracy has failed in Cameroon. Those who continue to stand up for it are simply perpetuating the moral and political servitude of the Cameroonian state. Conversely, democracy based on majority rule will prepare the ground for the establishment of representative institutions, a process which will, of course, call for unceasing effort.

The Failure of the One-Party System

Another idea that gained currency was that since “transitional African democracy is based on consensus, the most suitable political form for it to take is the single party. Such a system appeared to have several advantages. Firstly, paraphrasing Jean-Jacques Rousseau, it made it possible to avoid, lengthy discussion dissension and commotion that were merely obstacles to national unity and social Further argument in its favour seemed to be of capital importance, namely that the single party was supposed to further economic development on account capacity to reduce social tension and mobilize people’s energy.

Disillusion is setting in after three decades of independence in Cameroon. The single party has turned out to be the main obstacle to

national unity owing to the fact that it imposes a monolithic ideology on the country, claims to' individual personality in accordance with a pre-established ideal and task of telling people what to think. It teaches them to conceal the ill preferences behind hollow formulae and clichés purporting to reflect the "people". Instead of educating the individual and making of him or her citizen, the single party tramples the population underfoot. It teaches them to act deceitfully, conceal his or her true feelings and to use stereotyped and conventional jargon so as to toe the party line and escape repression. In short, the individual becomes traumatized and frustrated in such an environment. By paradox, the single party has thus become the main cause of the development and strengthening of tribalism, as individuals who are rendered distraught by life in a totalitarian society tum to the tribe as their last refuge.

Unsuccessful efforts have been made to save the single party by what has been called "the Democratic single party". Here the single party is retained but the principle of free elections is introduced and the candidates are, appointed nor backed by the party machinery. In point of fact, this variant of the one party system is only outwardly democratic and serves to eliminate political who have become embarrassing to the party, were formerly elected with its and are no longer wanted. Under these circumstances it is hardly surprising democratic revolution in Cameroon has espoused the multiparty system, which recognises and genuinely organises free competition with regard to planning and objectives.

The Failure of the "Cameroonian" Conception of Human Rights

Thirdly, it cannot be denied. that frequent large-scale violations of human rights have played a considerable part in discrediting the authoritarian Cameroon. Torture, arbitrary arrest and imprisonment. unacceptable restrict people's freedom of movement and the severe oppression of the slightest expression of freedom are part and parcel of political life in Cameroon.

In this connection, we should note the recent emergence of schools of aiming to justify certain restrictions on freedom in Cameroon in the name of so-called "Cameroonian" conception of

human rights. These doctrines consider in Cameroon freedom should not be construed as it is elsewhere. Thus certain freedoms are held to be applicable in the West but are inappropriate in Cameroon. For instance, in Cameroon only the one party system is appropriate as veneration of the chief is one of the “traditional values” that must be maintained. Likewise communal living is the norm in Cameroon. Cameroonians should not” guarantees of individual rights in the same way as Westerners. In short, the’ mutual aid and “third generation rights” are more Cameroonian than the other rights and better suited to the Cameroonian life-style, whereas other values, including the democratic political system - dubbed “Western democracy” for the occasion - are imported values or systems.

In reality, this “Cameroonian” conception of human rights, part of which are rashly sanctioned by the African charter of Human Rights of Peoples, is an implicit form of racism and a means of justifying the worst anti-democratic practices. Human rights do not stop at frontiers; they are indivisible, and freedom cannot be appropriate in the West and inapplicable in Cameroon. The alleged “Cameroonian” human rights, as well as the African Charter itself, whose authors appeared more concerned about the number of ratifications than about the efficiency of the machinery that was set up, simply gave authoritarian regimes a clear conscience for they could henceforth justify their anti-democratic practices’ on the basis of African “wisdom” and an international treaty.

Finally, the argument that certain democratic values are of foreign origin demonstrates considerable cynicism. Nobody reproaches Cameroon for importing its official languages, its main religions, its foodstuffs or its durable goods (household appliances, cars, computers, etc.), and yet all of a sudden people are offended by the idea of importing individual freedoms and democratic pluralism. A movement based on such unsound foundations could not fail.

The Principles of a Democratic State

The democratic state is the institutional structure that enables democracy to develop. The construction of such a structure is a logical and historical priority. Indeed, as long as society is based on a

hierarchical power structure, the limits of freedom will be confined within the state.

The Democratic state is not a neutral but an ideological framework. It does not by any means tolerate all values. On the contrary, it can even be said to be intolerant in certain respects - precisely with regard to anti-democratic values for otherwise it could not survive. Under conditions of extreme tension between the ruling power and the population it is possible that the people might succeed in destroying the structure of the state and as a result, the existing ideological framework, in the name of human rights or their conception of them. Yet even this process, which is known as revolution, brings about changes in the name of an ideology. A democratic revolution can only succeed if it is immediately put to use to further the purpose of a new state, which will provide the ideological framework that will protect the new values and will safeguard their development. This framework should be based on certain principles and specific rules pertaining to the functioning of democracy.

The Principle of Democratic Pluralism

In the nascent reinstated democracies, such as the one in Cameroon. the state must recognize and guarantee five basic principles. which are essential to the development of any democracy worthy of the name.

1. The existence of several political parties representing different ideologies. thereby implying recognition of a lawful opposition and guaranteeing its existence.

2. Freedom of the press and of information. which assumes that there is government censorship, that official backing is not required in order to launch ne press organs and that there is no virtual monopoly in the sources of funds available to the press that would give one individual or one financial group a dominant position: in this field. This freedom also presupposes that the tax and criminal laws should not hamper the development of a press that is independent of the regime in power.

3. The independence of the judiciary, which should not be subjected to any pressure by the executive and the members of which should not fear cancers or fear their lives as a result of the sentences they pass.

4. The organisation of free elections of regular and reasonable intervals, These should be elections by secret ballot. the results of which are unknown prior: to the counting of the votes. These elections would furthermore place not only different political formations but also individual candidates who are independent of political parties in competition with one another. When such elections are held, both nationally and locally, the participation of the population in the decision making process, which is the basic feature of democracy. is guaranteed. Under these! conditions, the distinction between the legitimacy and legality of a regime becomes meaningless: a legitimate government is one that is periodically elected by universal suffrage and by the majority of the population of the country.

5. The alternation of power, which means that a government that has lost an election held in accordance with the rules, must agree to resign and leave the new': majority, i.e. the former opposition, to govern.

These five principles must all be present for a state to be considered as having' democratic foundations. The power structure of the democratic state functions in:' such a way as to guarantee individual liberties. Three conditions need to be satisfied in this respect:

1. The separation of powers. The legislature must not be a tool of the executive. In the 'case of a parliamentary regime, the legislature must have power over the government and be able to overthrow it if need be, it being understood that in such an event, the government itself has the power to dissolve the Assembly. In the case “ of a presidential regime, the legislature's independence vis-a-vis the executive requires not merely that there be a multi-party system but also for the parties to be on an equal footing. In a multi-party system. a

dominant party could obtain control over the legislature. The candidates put forward by the dominant party would necessarily be “elected”, and a chamber constituted in this way cannot play its due role as a counterweight.

This separation of legislature and executive is all the more essential because in Cameroon, the laws enacted by parliament, rather than judicial decisions, are the guarantors of public freedom? Yet parliamentary law can only fulfil this function if it originates from free individuals elected according to the regulations, who are consequently representative of the population.

The judiciary, for its part, must be separate from the legislature and the executive. The status of the magistracy must not make it a state within the state. It is more important that it should give judges guarantees concerning their material circumstances and their careers, in order for them to be fully independent when discharging their duties.

2. The separation of state and religious institutions and movements: in a democratic state, the taking of political decisions must be a matter for the state alone, and the religious institutions and movements should not be allowed to interfere with this process. It may thus be said that a democracy, especially in Cameroon, must be a secular state.

However, we are not talking about secularism as it was understood in the nineteenth century Europe, i.e. as a conflict between the state and the religious institutions. On the contrary, secularism seeks to regulate the existence of the state and all beliefs. A secular state does not discriminate between believers and nonbelievers, nor does it grade the different religious beliefs. African states being heterogeneous, multiracial and multi-ethnic and tolerating both traditional religions and the imported religions, it is secularism that provides the structure within which the different social groups coexist, and enables each individual to develop his or her abilities to the full.

3. The separation of state and the political parties: although the democratic state is not neutral in absolute terms, its task being to impose a democratic ideology, it must arbitrate between the different political groups. Cameroon’s political experience shows that the non-separation of the state and the majority party has always been

detrimental to individual freedom. In such cases, the resources at the disposal of the state are frequently misused for the sole benefit of the party in power. Ministers who also discharge political duties in the party in power are thus strongly tempted to use the state's resources to further their political activities.

Whereas the principle of separating the state and the political parties would appear to be an obvious requirement for democracy, its application nonetheless raises many difficulties. First of all, it is the fact that the parties may have a monopoly on the presentation of candidates at elections. The possibility of independent candidates ought to be recognized.

Other difficulties vary depending on the regime. In a presidential system, the elected head of state ought not to be the leader of the political party. In all logic, it should also be decided that leaders or high ranking officials of political parties should not be allowed to become ministers. However, this theoretical solution would have many disadvantages in practice since the government would then be made up exclusively of technocrats, and that is not necessarily a good idea. In a parliamentary system, the situation is even more complicated in so far as the government is dependent on the party or coalition of parties which is triumphed in the elections. It would be impracticable to ask those who govern to sever links with their parties.

The separation of the state and the political parties should not be seen in the same way as the formal and fundamental separation of the legislature and the executive. The former separation has a functional value: political leaders must draw a distinction between their responsibilities as statesmen and their duties as members of political parties. Until such time as civic habits bring them to do so spontaneously, appropriate legislation could be useful. For instance, it could cover the issue of state-owned vehicles (and those belonging to other public bodies), and the state media, as well as the use of governmental premises and property.

The Development of a Civic Society

However sophisticated it might be, the democratic state would rapidly if it were not sustained by democratic values. These values are built up within the framework of a democratic society.

The development of a democratic society is an unceasing task requiring daily attention. The values that it has fought to acquire are not perpetuated automatically and they regress if they are not kept alive. Therefore any references to achievement should be treated with caution. In point of fact nothing can be said irreversibly acquired in a democracy.

Society must take advantage of the guardians provided by the state if it is to progress. This is why the construction of the democratic state is top priority, which even takes precedence over the fundamental discussion concerning democratic values. These values are infinite in number. No list or can claim to be exhaustive as the essence of democracy consists in discovering new values and questioning old ones, or the very least of reviewing and improving. Consequently, the earlier Cameroon becomes a democratic state, the likelihood that democratic societies will come into being. There are the conducts that appear to encourage the emergence of such societies.

The Recognition and Safeguarding of the Universal Nature of Human Rights

Supporters of the “Cameroonian conception” of human rights probably even without realizing it, also uphold the doctrines of those who wish to create among human beings. Joseph de Maistre, a nineteenth-century French the following famous remark:

The 1795 Constitution, just like the previous ones, was made for human beings. However there are no human beings in the world. During the course of my life I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians, etc., and thanks to Montesquieu know that it is possible to be a Persian. But as for human beings, I affirm that I have never encountered one in life; if such creatures exist they do so unbeknown to me. (in Imbert et al. 1969:33 1-332)

These quite simply Racist doctrines. coined in order to justify diclamisled even honest people who were flattered to see their habits “given the force of respectable institutions as well as forming part of a new universal sort of problems pertaining to human rights. The idea of being able set the (African state the “Western state” and their communal customs” against <Western individualism”, gave them the illusion that even though they had invented neither mathematics nor physics, nor the computer; they at least had a card to play in the encounter with their civilizations.

In actual fact, this dangerous illusion makes it possible to perpetuate the colonization of Africa by other means. The generation that is now calling for democratic pluralism has realized this. There is no such thing as white, black, yellow, Eastern or Western human rights; there are universal rights applicable to human beings and to their unique and universal characteristics; It is for reasons such as these that the people from different countries are motivated to defend them. It is in the name of universality that one part of the world feels involved when these rights are violated elsewhere. Their recognition and safeguarding is a matter of urgency for Cameroon.

The Struggle Against Tribalism and the Organization of Cultural Pluralism

It is paradoxical that the ethnic and linguistic diversity that should have been Cameroon’s greatest asset should have backfired on it, to the extent of becoming one of the main obstacles to its development. This paradox may be attributed among other reasons to tribalism, which takes many different forms: favouritism, patronage, nepotism, the accentuation of social inequality etc. Democracy cannot function in a tribalistic society and any common attitude or policy is bound. to fail in such a context. However, although it is hard not to condemn and not to oppose tribalism. the ways in which it can be eradicated are divergent.

Up until now there has virtually only been talk of its repression. There have been legal measures banning tribalism, coercive measures against tribalistic practices, political measures such as compelling ministers to choose their cabinet members from different ethnic

groups etc. The ineffectiveness of such measures may be accounted for by the fact that they only concern certain aspects of tribalism. and do not strike at the underlying causes. Furthermore, under the pretext of combating tribalism, one party system in particular. conduct policies aiming at imposing the customs of one ethnic group on the others. The tribalistic practices of the other ethnic groups then become a defensive reaction against an attack on their culture by the ethnic group in power, which is, in addition perpetuated with public resources.

In view of these failures, all policies designed to counter tribalism must be based on the organization of cultural pluralism in order to be effective. In many cases, tribalism originates from the frustration caused by contempt for other cultures., the refusal to recognise the specific characteristics of others and the propensity to discriminate against others in all sorts of ways from the stand point of one's own culture. Cultural pluralism may be defined as an effort to acknowledge the specific characteristics of the different cultures of a nation, avoid grading them. and give them equal opportunity to develop. Admittedly, the political evolutions that led to the establishment of pluralistic democracy in Western Europe were not accompanied by a comparable effort in cultural matters. In point of fact. this accounts for the difficulties encountered by certain old movements. Without cultural pluralism, political pluralism will never cease to be called into question and will only survive by force.

The Institutionalisation of Political Power

One of the adverse consequences of the myth of the chief was to make political power hereditary. Political leaders behave as if power is their personal property and part of their heritage, and can be handed down to their heirs.

Although monarchies put up with such practices to a greater or lesser extent within the limits of their constitutions or basic laws, they are inadmissible in republican systems. This point has not always been grasped, as a result of which certain constitutions have been "tailor-made" in favour of an irremovable "chiefs" and others revised so as to ensure the durability of the regime in power and make it practically

impossible for power to change hands. In this context, the institutionalization of political power ensures that leaders conform to the pre-established laws and are not tempted to make alternations to suit their personal political ambitions. They are thus compelled to recognise that they are only representatives of the nation that sovereignty is not something that belongs to them.

Conclusion

Democratic regimes are frail and cannot survive for long in a hostile environment. In Africa the regionalization of pluralism could help to strengthen them by bringing them out of their isolation. Political pluralism may be consolidated all the more easily when it extends to several neighbouring and adjacent states. It may be strengthened by the emergence of politically homogenous areas, initially formed of two or three democratic states and subsequently expanding gradually includes neighbouring states.

The attainment of this goal can draw on the support of international ° instruments guaranteeing human rights. The universality of human rights does not preclude the setting up of regional instruments for their protection. These instruments would be less ambitious in terms of their geographical scope, but this would make them all the more acceptable to Africans and therefore more effective,’, establishment of regional or sub-regional bodies bringing together pluralistic and; one party regimes could also be contemplated, with a view to persuading such governments to undertake the transition towards democratic pluralism on a step-by-step basis.

The renewed interest that is being shown by many African countries in ° pluralistic democracy in any case marks a turning-point in the history of the continent. Pluralistic democracy will set them on the path enabling them to modernize their political systems and make them competitive in international terms, and at long last give their people an opportunity to participate in economic and technological progress.

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John Ngu Foncha And The Saga Of Southern Cameroons' Quest For Reunification, 1956-196b. A Reappraisal

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Introduction

The history of Cameroon has, of late, come under severe re-examination. Although the re-writing of Cameroon's history, intentionally or not, has been a slow and painful exercise, it however gathered momentum after 1990 following the reintroduction of multiparty politics, albeit characterized by sentimentalism. This has especially been the case with the writing of the history of the former Southern Cameroons, more so as Anglophones perceive themselves, and are perceived in certain quarters, as the most marginalized Cameroonians.

Since 1990, one of the topics of Cameroon history that has attracted immense attention, given its degree of controversy and the deliberate manipulation of its facts, has been the conduct and culmination of the Reunification process between the Republic of Cameroon and the British Southern Cameroons (Mukong ed.: 1994: 3. 30). In an attempt to re-interpret the reunification saga, most Anglophone-: writers-historians, politicians, journalists and apostles of 'Jack-of-all-trades' -have caught the fever and feed the Anglophone public and those sympathetic to the; Anglophone plight with what they think the public wants to be told. In certain quarters, it is almost treasonable not to join the chorus.

The reunification bandwagon in Southern Cameroons was driven by the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) with John Ngu Foncha on the driver's seat. The KNDP and its disciples have argued

that Foncha was not really for reunification. The Foncharians argue that he was forced into accepting reunification as one of the alternatives by UN members in October 1959 after unsuccessfully championing Southern Cameroons' independence as a separate entity.

The aim of this paper is two-fold: attempt an analysis of Foncha's quest for reunification and his support for the territory's independence as a separate entity and secondly review the allegation that British colonial authorities, the Administering Authority, abandoned the territory during the Foncha-Ahidjo negotiations for reunification. In the process, it shall be seen if Foncha was well disposed to make good use of British colonial authorities or not.

Foncha and the Reunification Question

In British Southern Cameroons politics, the first indigenous political party was the Kamerun National Congress (KNC) which was formed in 1953 as a direct consequence of the Eastern Nigerian Regional Crisis of January-May 1953 (Ngoh, 1990: 95-108; Ezera, 1964: 157-178). With Dr. E.M.L. Endeley as President and Robert Jabea K. Dibongue as the Patron, the KNC included Southern Cameroonians of diverse political colorations: the autonomists who wanted an autonomous region for Southern Cameroons were led by Endeley; the secessionists who wanted the territory to break with Nigeria were led by the traditional rulers; the re-unificationists were led by Dibongue and finally, those who refused to take a clear-cut position were led by Foncha. (Ngoh, *ibid*: 105-106).

The existence of several 'groups within the KNC with conflicting political aspirations vis-a-vis the form of a future Southern Cameroons eventually led to a split within the party. This was largely dictated by Dr. Endeley's pro-Action Group leanings (Kale, 1967:58-59) which ran counter to the *raison d'être* of the KNC. In 1955, Foncha and Augustine Ngom Jua bolted away from the KNC and founded the KNDP with Foncha as the President-General. The KNDP preached secession of British Cameroons from Nigeria and it counted on the support of the Natural Rulers and Native' Authorities.

In a Fourteen-point memorandum, the KNDP, in its Seventh Point, pronounced its support for the reunification between British

Cameroons and the Cameroons under the French Administration. The KNDP expressed its political platform on March 1, 1956 in a petition to the Secretary General of the UN in which it emphasized that Cameroonians wanted nothing but the reunification of all sections of the Cameroons. In all the conferences which were convened between 1956 and 1961 to negotiate Southern Cameroons political future, the KNDP preached secession from Nigeria and its ultimate reunification with French Cameroon.

Mr. Foncha's position of secession from Nigeria and ultimate reunification with French Cameroon was diametrically opposed to that of Dr. Endeley. While Endeley emphasized and re-emphasized his unshakeable position of independence for Southern Cameroons in association with Nigeria, Foncha was adept at tailoring his political platform according to the wishes of his audience. He employed the phrase ultimate reunification as his escape valve to qualify his call for secession; Foncha's public vacillations led Endeley to insist on nailing down the former to the alternative question of Southern Cameroons achieving "independence by joining the independent Republic of Cameroon.

Knowledge of Endeley's political frame of mind, between 1956 to 1961 is indispensable for an understanding of his refusal to compromise with Foncha's dilly-dallying political postures. Foncha unsuccessfully tried to conceal his reunification option in the following ways:

1. At the Bamenda Conference of May-June 1956, the KNDP called for the secession of Southern Cameroons from the Nigerian Federation without qualifying it;

2. During the May-June 1957 London Constitutional Conference, Foncha requested the secession of Southern Cameroons and requested that it should assume direct management of its affairs;

3. In the KNDP petition to the Fourth UN Visiting Mission in 1958, Foncha advocated the secession of Southern Cameroons from Nigeria and its ultimate reunification with French Cameroon on mutually acceptable terms;

4. At the UN in February 1959, Foncha said that reunification would not arise until separation was effective;

5. At the Mamfe Plebiscite Conference of August 1959, Foncha intimated that reunification would be embarked on only when the mandate has been given to him by Southern Cameroonians;

6. During a debate in the Southern Cameroons House of Assembly on September 9, 1959, Foncha argued that Southern Cameroons should secede from Nigeria and determine her future at a later date;

7. At the UN trusteeship council in September-October 1959, the KNDP leader advocated separation from Nigeria and continued trusteeship until Southern Cameroons were in a better position to decide her future.

Foncha's manoeuvres, however, did not alter Endeley's approach to the territory's political future. At the UN General Assembly's Trusteeship Council in September 1959, Endeley rejected Foncha's vacillating strategy because he did not want the latter to take Southern Cameroonians "on a joy ride to an unknown destination ... [and he wanted] to indicate somehow that reunification is the ultimate policy towards which ... [Foncha's government] shall work after separation."

Whereas Foncha had tied Southern Cameroons' political future to "an unknown destination" because of his wobbling attitude, Premier Ahmadu Ahidjo of French Cameroon was not particularly 'interested in reunification even as late as October 1959. In a confidential note from Mr. Durand, Delegate to the French High Commissioner in French Cameroon, to his British counterpart, E. Haworth, dated May 1959, it was revealed that Ahidjo was more concerned" in putting a new country on its feet and [his] intention .. [is] to preserve a properly independent state of the Cameroon outside any union or federation." Durand went on to assert that according to Ahidjo, the question of reunification was "not one of urgency."

Durand's analysis of Ahidjo's view on reunification was corroborated by a secret note from Eastwood of the Colonial Office to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Rt. Hon. A.T. Lennox-Boyd, on October 20, 1959. In the note, Eastwood wrote:

Some people in French Cameroon including Ahidjo] do not really want the Southern Cameroons to join them whatever they may have said in public. On the other hand, equally they might (as Dr. Endeley

fears) promise the moon to attract them in and then the promises not be fulfilled thereafter.

In spite of this, Foncha was unable to abandon his reunification option. He was unable to extricate himself from the reunification cobweb he had constructed essentially because of his undertakings with pro-reunification forces in French Cameroon. These secret undertakings blinded him from correctly interpreting and translating the wishes of the populace into political reality. Both the KNDP and the KNC-KPP alliance which was formed in December 1957 knew that secession alone was the most popular option in Southern Cameroons; followed by association with Nigeria while reunification with French Cameroon was the least popular. (Chern-Langee. 1984: 55-160). This point was abundantly emphasized by Fon Achirimbi II of Bafut when he said that the traditional rulers and their people rejected both association and reunification in favour of secession without reunification. A majority of KNDP officials also wanted secession without reunification. (Kale, 1967: 69; Benjamin, 1972: 101).

Endeley's uncompromising attitude towards Foncha's position was dictated by a profound knowledge of Foncha's hidden agenda and the deal he had cut with pro-reunification groups in French Cameroon. In effect, Endeley was in possession of a copy of a confidential letter which Foncha had written to Paul Soppo Priso, the leader of the National Union of French Cameroon which, with the exception of the Union des Populations du Cameroun, was the most pro-reunification a force in French. Cameroon.

In the confidential letter to Soppo Priso dated October 30, 1956, Foncha requested, on behalf of the KNDP, financial assistance from "our brothers in Eastern Kamerun "to counter the KNC/KPP alliance which, unlike the KNDP, was against reunification. The letter revealed that "the KNDP is determined to pursue its plan of separation quickly from Nigeria but cautiously and tenaciously ... [and assures the National Union] of our confidence "[in] unification." (ibid: p.6). Foncha went on to outline the KNDP programme for reunification in five steps:

a) 'separation from Nigeria in order to have direct dealings with the British Government as the Administering Authority;

- b) autonomous legislative House in the Southern Cameroons;
- c) direct negotiations for unification with the Administering Authority and the UNO;
- d) Unification;
- e) independence. (ibid.p. 7)

It is interesting to bear in mind that in the letter, the KNDP indicated that independence would be achieved after reunification. Whereas the Southern Cameroons population was unaware of Foncha's hidden agenda, Endeley, who was privy to it, was adamant in his refusal to be distracted by Foncha's vacillating tactics. In a move to reinforce its reunification option, the KNDP, in 1958, created a branch in French Cameroon and also associated itself with a non-political organisation, the Committee for the Reunification of the Cameroon (COREC), which was based in Douala. Later, in 1958, Foncha and Solomon Tandeng Muna visited French Cameroon and were received by Paul Soppo Priso and "probably received by the PM Ahidjo".

As events unfolded, Foncha established a record for "double-speak. " For instance, whereas Jua, Muna and P.M. Kemcha were emphatic that they would not accept reunification until Southern Cameroons had reached a more advanced stage of development, thus permitting them to strike a better bargain, Foncha, in March 1959, declared that "he would accept reunification as an alternative question if the General Assembly were to insist upon it". Foncha's flip-flop attitude with regard to the reunification issue led the Commissioner of the Southern Cameroons to complain in April 1959 that "Foncha wobbles from attitude to attitude so quickly that I am a little breathless keeping pace."

Foncha, nevertheless, was later presented with the golden opportunity to banish the reunification alternative in whatever form once and for all in May 1959. In effect, during a meeting held at Ikeja, Lagos, on May 20, 1959 between the British Secretary of State for the Colonies and Foncha, Muna and Jua, the Secretary of State on Jua's prodding, made it known that the British Government was prepared to drop the reunification alternative if the Southern Cameroons Government firmly rejected it.

In the words of the Secretary of State, the KNDP Government had “only to state firmly that such and such a question is unacceptable (supported, perhaps, by a motion in the House of Assembly).” With a firm rejection “Her Majesty’s Government will then decline to agree to the question being posed and the UN will meekly give way.”

Jua, who believed in the inspiration of demonstration, following his successful mobilisation of the Anlu in the Kom area, was quite ready to organize similar demonstrations against the UN should it sponsor an unpalatable choice.” In a move that was in accordance with the counsel of the Secretary of State for the Colonies the KNC-KPP alliance - during a debate in the Southern Cameroons House of Assembly on September 9, 1959 - intimated that if the KNDP dropped the phrase ultimate reunification from their political platform the KNC- KPP alliance would settle for secession without any strings attached. 13 Foncha and the KNDP failed to exploit these opportunities.

It is, therefore, significant to note that the alternative of Southern Cameroons seceding and achieving independence as a separate political entity was very low on Foncha’s political programme. This view is supported by the outcome of a meeting between Eastwood and Foncha during which the latter readily acknowledged that should his reunification option fail the only alternative would be to join Nigeria. (14) Consequently, it is wrong, based on available facts, for historians to infer that Foncha reluctantly accepted the reunification alternative at the UN in September-October 1959 after he had unsuccessfully “fought” for the secession and independence of Southern Cameroons as a separate political entity. He never believed in Southern Cameroons being a separate independent political entity. He “did not consider independence as a separate entity to be a possible permanent solution.”

In spite of Foncha’s view, mounting pressure from Southern Cameroonians forced him to agree to request the UN to grant the territory a separate entity although he had accepted the UN General Assembly Resolution 1352 (XIV) of October 16, 1959 which defined the two plebiscite questions. A conference was subsequently held in London in November 1960 to get the approval of the British Government. The British Government, however, after having assured

itself that the UN would reject this eleventh hour request, turned down the Southern Cameroons request.

According to the British Secretary of State for Colonies, Sir. Lain Macleod. “ ... the UN adopting the two alternatives of joining Nigeria or the Cameroon Republic, clearly ruled out a period of continuing Trusteeship or separate independence for the Southern Cameroons”.

Foncha reaffirmed his earlier position on reunification during a meeting with Ahidjo from December 1-2, 1960. At the meeting, both leaders expressed their complete agreement with the UN General Assembly which stated “with clarity the two questions which will be put in the same time of the plebiscite on February 11, 1961.”

It is evident from the analysis that Foncha, in accepting the reunification question as one of the two alternatives at the plebiscite, was merely executing his long-programmed objective and not that of a majority of the KNDP supporters much less a majority of Southern Cameroonians. He was offered the opportunity by both the KNC-KPP alliance and the British authorities to reject reunification and opt for the independence of Southern Cameroons as a separate political entity and he refused to grasp it.

The historiography of Foncha’s quest for reunification has been so mutilated to the extent that it is also fashionable to explain Foncha’s failure to extract a good deal for Southern Cameroons on grounds that the British abandoned the territory especially the KNDP, during the critical period of its search for independence and reunification. This explanation, which is dictated by the Pontius Pilate principle, is not tenable.

The British were aware of the very poor quality of the KNDP Government and saw the need for expert political, constitutional and economic counsel. The British Government also knew that: “... [the] inexperienced Southern Cameroons Government may fail to make a .good case for satisfactory terms or may fail to understand the full implication of the terms for reunification proposed by the French Government” .17 According to Tilner, a British Member of Parliament, the KNDP did not only lack experience, but lacked it in an incredible degree which may prove dangerous to the British Cameroons.”

In view of the dire need for expert counsel, Her Majesty's Government proposed a "guide, philosopher and friend" to Foncha to give him impartial advice and to assist him in any discussion with Ahidjo. In spite of the British diagnosis, Foncha was reluctant to make good use of British-recommended experts. In mid 1959, Foncha, on more than one occasion, publicly said that "Nigerians [for instance] are not wanted in Southern Cameroons and that only Southern Cameroonians or possibly expatriate Europeans will be made welcome. "He naively believed that Southern Cameroonians can be trained "in intensive six weeks' course to do any of the duties at present carried out by expatriates."

Nonetheless, the British finally convinced him to accept Sir Sydney Phillipson as the British "guide, philosopher and friend" to Southern Cameroons. The "guide" was expected to counsel Southern Cameroons on the plebiscite alternatives and during the territory's negotiations for its political future with either Nigeria or the French Cameroons. This was especially so because UN Trusteeship Council Resolution No. 2013 XXIV of May 31, 1960 of the Twenty-sixth Session of the trusteeship council requested the Administrative Authority to make appropriate steps in consultation with the authorities concerned, to ensure that the people of the territory are fully informed, before the plebiscite of the constitutional arrangements that would have to be made, at the appropriate time, for the implementation of the decisions at the plebiscite.

In the execution of the above resolution, Her Majesty's Government urged that negotiations on the arrangements for reunification with the Republic of Cameroon should be undertaken before the plebiscite date. In the opinion of Her Majesty's Government, it was important that a clear statement should be made on the form of reunification and when and how it would be implemented. It was on this statement" that Foncha ran into problems with the British Colonial a wanted to extract firm commitment from the KNDP Government Government. In the absence of this, Britain was prepared "to make people of the British Cameroons that those who vote to join the Cameroon Republic were voting for the unknown."

It is against this background that the alleged British abandonment of the Southern Cameroons during its negotiations with the Republic of Cameroon from 1959 to 1961 should be viewed. Foncha developed a subtle dislike for the British officials in Buea and went out of his way to ignore them during his negotiations with the Ahidjo Government.

Several areas of differences cropped up between Foncha and the British officials especially when the latter insisted on the correct interpretation and explanation of the plebiscite alternatives, a frank presentation of the negotiations between Foncha and Ahidjo and the draft constitution as accepted by Foncha. With regard to the plebiscite alternatives, the population posed questions such as: “What is the difference between a Republic and a Federation? “Why is the British us?”“ and called on “the British to stay.” In response to such q statements, the KNDP politicians, in order to quieten the apprehension of the population, generally explained that a vote for reunification with the Cameroon “means the British will stay.”?’

Regarding the negotiations between Foncha and Ahidjo and the question of a constitution, the KNDP issued a pamphlet in 1960 entitled “United Cameroon Federal Constitution.” It indicated the broad outline of the provisions of constitution and the KNDP purported that “the Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroons have agreed” on it. This misinformation was pointed out by British officials in Buea because both Britain and the Republic of Cameroon were not parties to it as asserted by the KNDP” Furthermore the British colonial authorities felt that Foncha did not strike a fair deal for Southern Cameroons in his October 1960 Talks with Ahidjo.

The British insistence on a clear, frank and correct interpretation of the plebiscite alternatives and the Foncha-Ahidjo negotiations attracted Foncha’s wrath against British officials in Southern Cameroons. In a scathing letter to H.N Milne, the Acting Commissioner of the Southern Cameroons, dated December 8, 1960, Foncha informed Milne that he had failed to execute his duties in an unbiased manner. According to Foncha, Milne was determined “to do everything possible to misinform the people as to the interpretation of the second question to be put at the plebiscite. 2,

Milne's "crimes" against Foncha and the KNDP centred on the former's criticism of the draft constitution proposals for a future United Federal Republic of Cameroon allegedly agreed to by Foncha and Ahidjo. Milne believed that proposals were not fair to Southern Cameroons and doubted if all the Southern Cameroons' Ministers had approved it. Secondly, Milne insisted that a full constitution should be elaborated before the plebiscite date. Thirdly, Foncha objected to Milne's willingness to discuss the proposals of the constitution with the Opposition. Finally Foncha condemned a reconciliation attempt between the KNDP and the Opposition which was proposed by Milne.

In effect, Milne was in favour of the formation of a coalition government in Southern Cameroons and the achievement of independence within the British Commonwealth. He also suggested that Foncha should continue as the premier with the opposition leader as the governor. 25 Foncha objected to Milne's suggestions and castigated him "as one with a dangerous approach" and called on the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Secretary General of the UN and the UN Plebiscite Commissioner to replace him before the plebiscite."

It is within reason to assert that the mild engagement of British colonial authorities in guiding the KNDP in its negotiations with the Yaoundé Government was dictated by Foncha's refusal to listen to and/or accept counsel from them. This was especially so if the advice was either contrary to his mapped-out reunification chart or threatened to destroy it. In fact, although Foncha included Sir Sydney Phillipson as Special Adviser in some of the delegations that met with Ahidjo, it was clear that Phillipson waste be consulted only when necessary. 27 It was left to the all- KNDP delegation to determine when it was necessary. In any case, Foncha met several times with Ahidjo in the absence of British representatives. (Benjamin: 105)

While Ahidjo relied on his French advisers, Foncha re-emphasized his rejection of British counsel on July 17, 1961 when, in Fouban, he lucidly stated that "the drawing up of this Constitution is a matter for Cameroonians themselves and it will be foolish to look to anyone else for help. "(emphasis added.)" The British could not, therefore, in such an atmosphere, actively assist the KNDP.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to show that contrary to popular opinion, Foncha accepted the “reunification alternative” because it fitted well into his grand design for Southern Cameroons. He was offered opportunities by both the British Administering authority and the KNC-KPP alliance in 1959 to settle for Southern Cameroons achieving independence as a separate political entity, but he rejected them. It should, however, be borne in mind that Foncha, who played the role of the lone ranger, was not reflecting the views of the majority of the KNDP supporters and sympathizers. Secondly, this paper has also attempted to show that the British were relatively disengaged in the Foncha-Ahidjo negotiations between 1959 and 1961 because Foncha refused to effectively associate them.

It is imperative, in conclusion, to recall that at the Fourth Committee of the UN on September 24, 1959, Foncha intimated it was: “nothing short of treason that anyone for selfish motives should want his country to be engulfed by another. No peace can be expected in a federation where the various units which form it are held by might”.²⁹

Thirty-five years later, by historical design or accident, it is hard to refrain from accusing Foncha for doing exactly what he had condemned because he took Southern Cameroons into reunification, in the words of Stark (1980: 110), like “lambs to the slaughter.”

Notes

1. The Cameroons under French Administration will henceforth be referred as French Cameroon until 1960 when it became the Republic of Cameroons on attainment of independence.

2. Movement for the unification of the two Trust Territories of the-Cameroon KNDP Petition to the UNO Secretary General, C0554/1011, File No. 33178172, Public Records Office, (PROL, London).

3. Southern Cameroons Information Service, Buea, (SC/SB), Premier I Opposition Leader Disagree at UN Renters, Press Release No. 485, September 29, 1959.

4. Administration of the Cameroons CO 554/ 1744, File No. WAF 33

PRO.

5. *ibid.*

6. Vc/b/ (1959) b. No. Comm. S. 94/Bol, II 1959, "Statement to the F Committee on 24th September 1959 by Dr. E.M.L. Endeley", National Archives, Buea.

7. *ibid.*

8. Movement for the Unification of the Two Trust Territories of the Cameroons

CO. 554/1745, File No. WAF 33178/02, PRO.

9. Administration of the Cameroons. 554/1744. File No. WAF 33178/01, PRO.

10. *ibid.*

II. *ibid.*

12. SCIS, B. "House of Assembly Debates: Motion on Plebiscite Questions

Qualifications, 9th September 1959." Press Release No. 469.

13. *ibid.*

14. Southern Cameroons Plebiscite, 1961: The Two Alternatives, p.4.

15. *ibid.*

16. Report on Separation of the Southern Cameroons from Nigeria, CO.554/ 1661, file No. WAF 16/440/02, PRP.

17. *ibid.*

18. Vb/n/1960/5 Administrative Department. Premier Correspondence, Southern Cameroons, NAB.

19. *ibid.*

20. Vc/9/1960 (b) First Public Enlightenment Campaign; KNDP "United Cameroons Federal Constitution, "mimeo. 1960. SCIS. B, "Plebiscite," Press Release No. 1250. 9th January 1961.

21. *ibid.*

22. Vblb/1960/5. Administrative Department. Premier's Correspondence, Southern Cameroons. NAB.

23. *ibid.*

24. During this period, the KNDP and the CPNC had equal number of seats, 13 each way, in the Southern Cameroons House of Assembly, following the defection of the KNDP Parliamentarian. J.M. Boja of Wum, to the CPNC. The Cameroon People National Congress (CPNC) was the result of the merger between the KPP and the KNC.

25. Vb/b/1960/5, Administrative Department, Premier Correspondence, Southern Cameroons, NAB.

26. *ibid.*

27. Vclb (1961)2, Foumban Conference, 17- 21 July 1961, File No. None (Dr. No. 194, 197) NAB.

28. Vc/b (1959) b No. Comm. S. 19Nol. IT 1959, Foncha's statement to the Fourth Committee on 24th September 1959, NAB.

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Protest Journalism As a Literary Genre: The Case of Anglophone Cameroon Journalism Today

by

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As the title suggests, this paper argues that protest or liberation journalism has a lot in common with creative or imaginative writing, and that it could be considered a form of literature. The paper takes Anglophone journalism example of how journalists can perpetuate myths, legends, and fairy tales with the same creative imagination, provoking the same strength of emotion in there and viewers, as would a novelist or playwright with his fantasies and stereotypes.

I am neither a literary critic nor an expert in any form of literature, but I do know that the creative writer is someone with a world view, with a value system, an idea of what is good or bad, wrong or right. He has a dream, a fantasy, and an order that he cherishes, and that he would like to translate into reality. The creative, has his opinions on how various aspects of society could and should be or P re-arranged or conducted so as to render life more comfortable and attractive; he writes he is either inventing the world of his drama or trying to reorganize reality to suit his fantasies and aspirations. The creative writer is very attached, emotionally to his idea of what things ought to be, and spends his time either trying to ignore to tinker with the way things really are. He is a day-dreamer in whom current frustrations awaken a strong nostalgia for a golden past, imagined or real, and creates an obsession for the re-invention of that past.

In Cameroon, while some creative Anglophone writers feel that the present order (economic, political and cultural) is not so bad and that only a reform is' necessary, others feel that the order is too unjust and needs overthrowing. Besong, for example, a playwrights whose

recurrent theme is the Anglo predicament in post-Foumban Cameroon, has called on fellow Anglophone writers to define and identify themselves as essentially concerned with a “fighting literature”, The Anglophone creative writer, he maintains, “must arouse his Anglophone Cameroonian constituency from the apathy and despair into which it has sunk and transform his writing into “hand-grenades” to be used against the oppressors tragic story he must tell from their own perspective. His writing “must depict the conditions of his people, expressing their spontaneous feelings of betrayal, protest and anger. It must challenge. It must indict head on, “ and it “must convey’ remarkable force the moods of the Anglophone Cameroonian caught in the as assimilation-nightmare of Sisyphian existence. (I)

A cursory overview of his own writings leaves one in no doubt that Besong has lived up to his own prescription. His *Beasts of No Nation* (1990) is bitter indictment of the exploitation of the Anglophones who are reduced to “night men” by corrupt, overbearing Francophones. His bitterness is so great that he abandons all metaphors and ironies, except with the name Yaoundé which is reversed to Ednaouy. Bole Butake, in *And Palm wine Will Flow* (\990), uses the grass fields Fon as a metaphor, an epitome of institutionalized corruption, greed, and dictatorship in the country. He predicts participatory democracy for his people through a grassroots revolution. The presence of pro-democracy forces and imagery from the North West, an Anglophone province, leaves the audience in doubt about where Butake believes his revolution shall start from. On his part, Epie Ngome, in *What God Has Put Asunder*, uses an extended metaphor, the marriage of Weka and Garba, to denounce the unitary state system and to uphold the idea of a two-state federation for Anglophones and Francophones. Many other Anglophones and Francophones, Many other predicament, and what is mentioned here is only illustrative.

Harsh experiences of post-Foumban Cameroon have also awakened’ in the Anglophone journalists memories of an earlier experience by their community - the golden age of public responsibility and accountability that only the thorough bred Anglo-Saxon heritage in Cameroon know something about. The wish to re-invent this golden age in the face of present frustrations, has given rise to a journalism of

liberation championed by journalists such as Charlie Ndichia, Boh Herbert, Julius Wamey, Paddy Mbawa, Francis Wache, Ntenfack Ofega, Lary Eyong Echaw, Sam Nuvala Fonkem, Joseph Bannavti and Hilary Kebila Fokum, or columnists such as Rotcod Gobata (Geoffrey Tangwa), ling Thomas Aye, Hilary B. Fohung, Taadom Sultan and the Postman. Their journalism is very similar in language, style, themes and value assumptions to the creative writings of Bate Besong, Bole Butake and Epie Ngome whom I have briefly referred to above: This journalism, like the plays and novels of the creative writers, deals with present frustrations as well as memories of a glorious past. Myths, legends and fairy tales abound of the good old days when the Southern Cameroons was still under British colonial rule. The impression is given of a community where all was virtue, now corrupted by unification with francophones, an essentially dishonest lot.

At the Second Anglophone Writers Workshop that held in Yaoundé, 3-5 November 1994, I presented a paper in proxy entitled "Journalism of Disillusionment and National Deconstruction in Cameroon: "The Anglophone Journalist at the Centre of an Identity Crisis." In that paper, I made the distinction between PR journalism and Liberation journalism, and argued that while some Anglophone journalists had, in the face of overwhelming public disaffection with the government opted to stay on as the mouthpiece of the powerful, others from the private press in the main, had decided to champion the cause of Anglophone liberation.

The liberation journalists, I argued have re-channelled their energies in the service of the Anglophone community which they see as marginalized by government and by the Francophones. These journalists are eager to expose the contradictions and inconsistencies in the policies and actions of the Francophone-dominated leadership of Cameroon and do not hesitate to invoke memories of a golden age in Southern Cameroons when there was transparency, accountability and selflessness in the management of public affairs. They see it as their duty to articulate the Anglophone problem and to make all Anglophones conscious of the fact that much can be achieved through involvement and the common experience of struggle. Anglophone must therefore understand that it is in the interest of the Francophone desire for cultural synchronisation in Cameroon to fan the flames of

imagined cleavages within the Anglophone community. They are critical of their counterparts both in the official media and the private press, who allow it to be used by the Francophone oppressors in sowing the seeds of discord among Anglophones.

To emphasize their point, they often publish well-researched features and comment on how the governments of Ahidjo and Biya have disappointed the Anglophones by falling victims to France's assimilationist drive, and by having spent thirty years excluding Anglophones from active participation in national life in the name of nation-building. The media have served as active colluders with the government in the alienation of the Anglophones. Thus the need for a journalism of liberation capable of conscientizing and mobilising the people to overthrow a system of oppression sustained by dominant Francophone interests.

Such journalism, no matter how attractive it may be to the people for change, is little informed by the professional canons of honesty, accuracy and fairness that are supposed to make of every news-story a value-free product accessible to all, irrespective of language group, sex, religion or ethnic origin. The ability of liberation journalists to give all sides of the story, to avoid biased language comment and opinion in their news-stories and reports, has been crippled by the need to present the Anglophones as a righteous community struggling to stay upright in a country turned into a Sodom and Gomorrah by sensuous, irresponsible squander-maniacs and degenerates called Francophones. The liberation journalist's love of honour, power and fame with the people often blinds him to his professional beliefs and ethics.

The observation and interpretation of facts are the primary cone journalists. In schools or institutions of journalists, they are taught to do their two separate their own opinions about an issue from their reporting of that issue. And are told that unless they can detach themselves from their prior values and beliefs in this way, their prejudices and personal biases (wishes, motives, emotions) lead to the misinterpretation or distortions of the very phenomena they want to clarify. But the liberation journalists approach their news-gathering with an attitudes and opinions which have often biased their news-reporting in favour Anglophone community and the myth of Anglophone superiority. Such a myth should last for as long as

Anglophone academics and journalists are willing to perpetuate the self-deception and delusions of southern Cameroonians as a superior breed and as a people united in culture and aspirations.

Much as the Anglophone community would like its journalists to see things their way, it is in the interest of both the journalists and the community to face up to reality. For social truth is a matter of consensus between competing perspectives especially in a plural context like Cameroon where how one perceives a phenomenon is contingent on one's cultural or ideological standpoint.

Those who know and practise professional journalism, where truth as consensus is supposed to be sacred and honesty, accuracy and fairness, the ideal, are bound to feel alienated by liberation journalism. And if theirs is journalism, then liberation journalism must be something else; a literary genre as suggested at the beginning of this paper. And so may all the creative writers in the hall rise and welcome aboard their forgotten brothers and sisters the liberation journalists.

It is would have been expected that the Anglophone media should operate against the need for Cameroonians to live together in peace, harmony and tolerance within the confines of their national triangle. Do these media promote such togetherliness, peace, harmony and tolerance? Or do they exacerbate the tensions, cleavages and xenophobia that have poisoned relations among Cameroonian and stifled the search for national consensus? What factors account for the role the media actually play? By encouraging the blame on Francophones of all the woes Anglophones have suffered since re-unification, the Anglophone media have succeeded in painting a picture of Francophones as an essentially dishonest lot, a sort of illness or contagion that every Anglophone of value and dignity must shun. Conviviality or nationhood in Cameroon is thus, sociologically speaking, yet a dream; and if the media are to begin playing an active and positive role in the "convivialisation" of society, everything must be done to promote professionalism, discourage sectarianism and depoliticizes the media in favour of a consensus freely arrived at by all and sundry.

Those Anglophone journalists and media that have opted for liberation, see it as their duty to articulate the Anglophone problem and to make all Anglophones conscious of the fact that much can be

achieved through involvement and the common experience of struggle. Every Anglophone must therefore understand that it is the interest of the Francophone desire for cultural synchronisation in Cameroon to fan the flames of imagined cleavages within the Anglophone community. They are critical of their Anglophone counterparts both in the official media and the private press, who allow themselves to be used by the Francophone oppressors in sowing the seeds of discord among Anglophones.

To emphasize their point, they often publish well-researched features on how the governments of Ahidjo and Biya have disappointed the Anglophones by falling victim to France's assimilationist drive, and by having spent over thirty years excluding Anglophones from active participation in national life in the name of nation-building. The official media, the Francophone press and some opportunists in the Anglophone leadership have served as active colluders with the government in the alienation of the Anglophones. Thus the need for a journalism of liberation capable of conscientizing and mobilising the people to overthrow a system of oppression sustained by dominant Francophone interests.

The post-colonial state in Cameroon has retained most of what it inherited from its French colonisers, while actively seeking to minimise or obliterate its Anglo-Saxon colonial heritage. Despite declarations and statements recognising the bi-cultural status of Cameroon, and emphasising the need to authenticate and institutionalise bilingualism, the country is overwhelmed by its Francophone colonial heritage. The Anglophone see themselves as second-class citizens far removed from the centres of real decision-making and action, expected to enforce decisions taken neither with their participation nor consent. Political power is firmly centralised in the hands of the Francophones, who, by limiting the author influence of the Anglophone leadership, have destroyed the only real link that could have kept them in touch with 30% of the people they govern and claim to forge a nation-state with. Anglophones participating or collaborating present government are seen and treated as honorary Francophones, and therefore willing colluders with the forces of oppression.

Culturally, although the Francophone leadership has shown some awareness of a cultural problem in Cameroon, especially through their

declarations and statements, they have made little concrete effort to resolve it. They have failed, and encourage the initiative towards reducing the dominance of Francophone cultural values, albeit they are in a position to do so. Despite much official r there has been little real harmonisation of the French and English heritages, and little real institutionalisation of bilingualism. French is given prominence over despite the fact that they are both official languages and should in normal circumstances, be given equal status in a bicultural setting.

The Anglophones have come to develop so much suspicion of government designs that their first instinct is always to disbelieve that government can act in God's faith. The examples of lost faith are legion. To Anglophones, it is clear from the content and language of programmes, that television is preponderant Francophones. French is the dominant language and French interests seem not more important than English interests, but are even superior to Cameroonian concerns and priorities. Thus faced with such resistance, critical Anglo journalists in the official media have thanks to the new Freedom of Mass communication law of December 1990, used the English private newspapers, some of under pen names, to insert Anglophone problems, concerns and aspirations' national political, cultural and economic agendas. Even the government polices of planned liberalism and self-reliant and balanced regional development has continued to remain bogus and have added to the kind of frustration which the Anglophone journalists highlight.

The Francophones continue to a large extent, to remain the sole beneficiary of the country's natural resources, even those found and exploited in the Anglophone region. Instead of a change for the better, the situation has worsened as the dominance of the Francophone colonial political, cultural and socio-economic heritage has been compounded by new inequalities, injustices and insensitivities, the Anglophones.

The liberation journalists see nation-building as so far practised in Cameroon as an attempt by the Francophones to impose their culture and values on Anglophone minority. Such nationalism, they argue, is false, because it excludes popular participation and thrives on force and fear instead of democracy. To pursue their version of national unity and integration, the Francophone dominated leadership has

preferred to rely on civil servants and the army as their power base, rather than on mass movements and popular participation. These leaders have created political institutions not to mobilise and conscientize the masses for collective interests, but to curb mass involvement, to control and strengthen their omnipotence on national life; with the result being widespread passivity and cynicism in the mass in general, and the Anglophones in particular.

By distancing themselves from pro-establishment public relations-type journalism, the Anglophone journalists of liberation are aware of the importance of having media policy defined by an independent collectivity, and not simply by one individual, minority or linguistic group, no matter how justifiable the latter's claims to the custodianship of the state might be.

The political, cultural and economic marginalisation of the Anglophones, together with the pervasive presence of French and Francophones, has failed to inspire Anglophones to wholeheartedly jump on the bandwagon of national unity and integration. Instead of seeking congruence between polity and consensual version of the French and English colonial heritages, successive Francophone dominated governments have, official declarations and statements of intent on the importance of bi-culturalism notwithstanding, embarked on a secret agenda aimed at the cultural asphyxiation of Anglophones. Thus making nation-building seem to most Anglophones as nothing other than a systematic attempt by their Francophone counterparts to assimilate them.

The fact that the nation-state is an illusion (Smith, 1986; Nyamnjoh, 1989), calls for possible alternatives, especially in Cameroon when its pursuit has meant the exclusion of Anglophones from significant political and cultural participation, and from the benefits of economic 'development'. The "superior attitude" on the part of the government and Francophones has only alienated the Anglophones further. Unity and integration arise not through an attempt by the state to suppress ethnic, cultural or linguistic differences, but by allowing the people the freedom to live their similarities while negotiating the way possible out of their differences. This implies neither rejecting nor legitimating certain possibilities a priority but letting the people decide which form of cultural and

political existence unites or integrates them best. Anglophones reject an idea of nation-building based on cultural assimilation and glaring tribalism of those in high office. For any nation-building project predicated on such shaky foundations can only lead to further disintegration of the type witnessed in Eastern Europe from 1989. Meaningful nation-building can only be one that takes into account the cultural differences in a given polity, and judiciously seeks to negotiate a middle ground from competing value systems. It should be founded on consensus, not imposition or assimilation.

The current Anglophone journalism of liberation is a journalism of anger and disillusionment. Such journalism, no matter how attractive it may be to people desperate for change, is little informed by the professional canons of honesty, accuracy and fairness that are supposed to make every news-story a value free product accessible to all, irrespective of language group, sex, religion, or ethnic origin. The ability of liberation journalists to give all sides of the story, to avoid biased language, comment and opinion in their news-stories and reports, has been crippled by the need to present the Anglophones as a righteous community struggling to stay good and upright in a country turned into a Sodom and Gomorrah by sensuous, irresponsible squander-maniacs and degenerates called Francophones. The liberation journalists' love of honour, power and fame with his people often blinds him to his professional beliefs and ethics.

The observation and interpretation of facts should be the primary concerns of journalists. In schools or institutions of journalism, they are taught to do their utmost to separate their own opinions about an issue from their reporting of are told that unless they can detach themselves from their prior values this way, their prejudices and Personal biases (wishes, motives, emotions) might lead to the misinterpretation or distortion of the very phenomena they want to clarify. But the liberation journalists approach their news-gathering with a set of attitudes and opinions which have often biased their news-reporting in favour of the Anglophone community and the myth of Anglophone superiority. Anglophone community would like its journalists to see things their way; it is in the interest of both the journalists and the community to face up to the reality truth is a matter of consensus between competing perspectives, especially in a plural

context like Cameroon where how one perceives a phenomenon is contingent on one's cultural or ideological standpoint.

If our journalists and media are to make an active and positive contribution to conviviality in Cameroon, their focus must be on the common denominators, and not on what puts them asunder. The journalist, to paraphrase Kunczik (18 must not be aggressive and negative, but critically distant and fair. He m ask himself: Is my report fair?; and must avoid sensationalism _ that is, impression that there is an individual, a group (ethnic, linguistic, religious, etc.) or a section of society that is responsible for all the problems in that society.

The Francophone media must show much more interest in the predicament of Anglophone Cameroonians; they must not give the Anglophone media any reason to suppose that the Anglophone Problem in Cameroon is much less an is Francophone media. For, only a journalism that guarantees cultural continuity for the Anglophones, ensures popular participation and horizontal communication denounces government high-handedness and impatience with competing vices and alternative outlooks, and that is ready to criticise the government's failure to assert itself and defend Cameroonian economic and cultural interests vis-a-vis could harness Anglophone support for conviviality with Francophones.

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Press And National Liberation: Historical and Contemporary Cameroon Perspectives

by

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Introduction:

Facts are stubborn things and journalism is a profession which generates debates about facts, opinions and claims. Such role makes the journalists and government natural adversaries with entirely different functions.

Even government journalists understand that the press and government should not become institutional partners. The reason is that a journalist who rewards his boss and friends with unwarranted, flattering stories of fawning editorials immediately loses respect.

This fear of losing respect compels the journalist to serve two masters, the public and government with opposing interests. The task of attempting to ride two horses running in opposite directions is part and parcel of the search for truth

Historically truth sometimes has many sides. Even in the dedicated pursuit of truth, journalists commit frequent errors which make innocent persons to suffer. And when a journalist attempts to play the role of watch dog he is looked upon with suspicion even by his close friends.

This is the dilemma of a normal journalist operating within Africa. And in the case of the Cameroonian journalist the dilemma is frustrating because independence has brought more misery, injustice, tyranny, poverty and underdevelopment. There was even a widespread and unspoken assumption during the struggle for freedom from colonial rule that Independence could bring with it, almost automatically the solution to all the ills Cameroonians were suffering.

Political independence has created no utopia in Cameroon nor is there peace. This bleak situation compels the raising of some exploratory questions. First, what is liberation? Second, what role has the Cameroonian Press played in this historical process? And, finally, what is the future of this struggle by the Cameroonian press for national liberation?

Liberation means setting free from something which serves as an obstacle to thought and action. It is relative to an experience. In fact, Nyerere (1979:249), reflecting on the Tanzanian experience, has stressed that Liberation is not a single action which can be completed and have that completion celebrated annually. And for Tanzania Liberation has four aspects or stages: first is freedom from colonialism racist minority rule: second is freedom from poverty and from injustice and oppress:: imposed upon (Tanzanians by Tanzanians)/ And third is mental freedom - an end to the me \ subjugation which makes (Tanzanians) look upon other peoples or other nations as inherently superior and their experiences as being automatically transferable to (Tanzanian's) needs and aspirations. Nyerere's view certainly holds true for Cameroon and any other African country at odds with the vestiges of colonialism and forging genuine political independence.

Press and Liberation from European Colonialism:

The whole wisdom behind the struggle against colonialism and racism was that it was better to be ruled oppressively within a free nation than be part of a colonial empire. Colonialism, accordingly to Fanon, implied the inferiority of the colonised that were denied the right to membership of the world communities of mankind.

This infectious thinking stimulated the ideals and aspirations of colonised Africans to tie up with the vocal struggle for independence. However, it was clear (Legun 1871) that "all the colonial governments without exception, maintained severe forms of censorship either directly, as in Francophone colonies, or directly through sedition and other laws."

In French colonies, the press was subjected to the press acts of 1891 and 1893.

French colonial policy was hostile to the development of an indigenous press with restrictions on starting newspapers, importation of newsprint and printing equipment. The French Bill of rights acknowledges that “the free communication of thoughts and opinions is one of the most precious rights of mankind. Each citizen may therefore speak, write, print in liberty, except in abusing this freedom in cases set forth by the law” (Art. XI emphasis). However, this Bill of Rights was never for the colonies.

The primary aim of the press during the colonial era was to serve the Europeans, that is, the colonial administrators and the missionaries. Most Cameroonians were at the time, illiterate and ignorant. However, when some Cameroonians became enlightened, and educated, they started forming political associations and used the press to protest against European rule in Cameroon. They sought to show indigenes how they were being exploited by the whites, and how free they would be if they were independent.

The emergence of the indigenous press, however, only came with the struggle for independence. Prior to this, the press in Cameroon was virtually the preserve of the colonialists. The first news publications were initiated by the German missionaries, who wrote mainly for their European public about Cameroon and Africa. The press, under German rule, had no indigenous readership, due to the illiteracy of the Cameroonians.

Even after colonial power shifted from the Germans to the French and British at the close of the First World War, the press continued to rest in the hands of white missionaries.

The *L’Eveil des Camerounais*, described by Harold Nelson as “the only newspaper of consequence in Cameroon after World War I”, was started in 1919 by settlers in French-administered East Cameroon. Again, readership was limited to the small community of French traders and civil servants. Another notable publication, *l’Echo du Cameroun* was published in 1938. And as indigenes gradually acquired reading and writing ability, there was shift to a Cameroonian audience with the appearance of *Nlebbe Kristen*, published in a local language, Ewondo.

Across in the British-administered territory, *Cameroon News Sheets*, administrative newsletter for the colonial community was first

published in 1930' Buea. Alongside this government press, which also included the Official Gazette, was the private press owned by missionaries. In the 1940s missionaries of the B Mission published The Cameroon Chronicle in English and La Semaine Camerounaise in French. News publications of the Roman Catholic Mission included Tam-Tam, Engages Ensemble and La Voix Defence.

The editorial objectives of these missionary publications were essentially evangelical. The papers were virtually part of the missionary drive to spread Christian teachings. Hence missionary publications reached out for indigenous readership.

Newspapers of the colonial administration sought to keep personnel abreast with administrative news in the form of regulations, appointments, and transfers. Basically; these publications were more information-oriented and less newsy, as they published little on the happenings of the civil society.

As noted, up to this point the press in Cameroon, both as a German colony and later as a trusteeship under France and Britain, was the exclusive domain of the colonialists. But the last decade to independence was to witness a remarkable effervescence of indigenous newspapers, and between 1950 and 1959, as many as 11 (eleven) papers were created. Their contents varied from small-time gossip, columns to critical discussions on political issues of the day. While some of the: papers were short-lived, others survived to whip up the mobilisation for independence in-the late 50s, shaping public opinion against imperialism, economic exploitation and repression. On the eve of independence the indigenous protest press was in full bloom.

The indigenous press had quickly established itself as a veritable weapon in the struggle for independence as various political platforms turned to the press for the propagation of their propaganda or ideologies. Anti-colonial sentiments rang me across the news publications of some 91 political parties in the French-administered territory. A formidable force at the time, the Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC) ran a number of newspapers, notably La Voix des Peuples Camerounais, La Nation camerounaise, L'Eraile, Lumiere, La Verite and Crab Noire. Another leading political movement the l'Union Camerounaise (UC) published Opinion au Cameroun and Revue Camerounaise,

In British-administered Cameroon, the political struggle for independence was equally spear-headed by political parties through the press, The Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) propagated its ideas through Kamerun Times a paper which, ironically, professed political neutrality and service to the people. Its first edition on a December 1960 morning carried an editorial stating that the paper would neither vilify nor antagonise any section of the community in order that the Times may effectively serve the public interest. It is essential that it must be independent...

Its independence means that it will not ally itself with any political affairs....”

The Cameroon Peoples’ National Congress (CPNC) vehicled its propaganda through Cameroon Champion. Other newspapers at the time included Cameroon Express, Cameroon Workman, Newspot, Iroko, etc.

We note, overall then, that the local press was also at the forefront of political debate and movement to freedom from colonial overlords. Interestingly, though, the press would, after independence, come under severe restrictions in independent Cameroon.

Press and Liberation from Domestic Colonialism

Liberation from domestic colonialism involves the struggle for civil rights from political oppression, from arbitrary arrest) from unnecessary restrictions on liberty of expression, movement, association, religion and worship.

These freedoms must be accompanied by the one to work against starvation, disease and ignorance.

Cameroonian leaders have merely been playing hide and seek with these principles. They are humbled and ruined by being “adhered to” in constitutional preambles. The vibrant press is apparently conscious of the fact that domestic liberty is extended by its abolition not by its legalization.

Press control was institutionalised in Cameroon following the 1962 subversion law that prescribed heavy punishment against anyone who spoke or wrote ill of any public figure or institution. The censorship law came up in 1966 and all this was to fight back terrorist

activities and those 'of their supporters. Law 66/LF/18 of 21 December 1966 required that two copies or two sets of proofs signed by the publisher of the publication be submitted to the Prefecture at least two hours before the distribution-sale, circulation or exhibition of the newspaper or periodical.

This law was modified in 1969 by Law No. 69/LF/13 which increased the deposit time lapse to four hours before publication. Also, the 1966 law empowered the Minister in charge of the Federal Territorial Administration and later in 1976 the Minister of Territorial Administration to seize newspapers. The law provided that:

The Minister in charge of Federal Territorial Administration and the Prefect may order the administrative confiscation of all copies contrary to public order.

The law which still applies to date also provides for detention and court action.

With these laws in force, many newspapers like Cameroon Outlook, Day Dawn, New Times, etc. went out of circulation. The law also provided for the Centre National de Documentation (CND) (the Secret Police) to swoop in press establishments, arrest and detain journalists as well as seize publications it judges detrimental to public order.

The flow of information was also tightly controlled. A Presidential circular in April 1976 prohibited government officials from talking to the press without authorisation from the minister of the service concerned or the Presidency. So strict was the control that the New African, in its September issue of 1978 noted:

The private press in Cameroon is undergoing a big squeeze and unless a miracle happens, sooner or later, there will be no private newspaper in the country.

Besides retarding the growth of the press business in the country and not allowing for better information of the public, censorship of the press stimulated sales of foreign publications in Cameroon. An example is *Jeune Afrique* of February 1985 which carried a story of the arrest of one Pascal Blaise Tala. Ten thousand copies were sold in Cameroon.

When power changed hands in Cameroon in 1982 and Mr. Paul Biya replaced late Ahmadu Ahidjo as President of the Republic, the

same censorship laws were still enforced. Two things, however, ushered in a sight change. The power quarrel between Paul Biya and Ahmadu Ahidjo revived the verve of the private press with many publications on the problem. The second incident was Mr. Biya's promise press freedom. Taking the clue, many newspapers saw the light of the unfortunately the same censorship laws of the Ahidjo government remained in force, calling to question the pretensions of the new administration.

If the number of publications in a country was an indicator as to say whether or not freedom of press exists, it could be said that Cameroon is freer today was under Ahidjo, although not exactly as free as it was between 1955 and 1953. But to limit oneself to numbers alone, is to be myopic, since almost the same repressive laws that stifled the press in the past are still in use. It is true that when President Biya came to power in 1982, the number of publications was not many, and that since, over 55 publications have been registered at the Ministry of Territorial Administration. But the private press remains stilted by the old repressive press and censorship system, on the grounds that they belong to the civil service.

According to Biya, civil servants have the right to benefit from the democratic opening-up, the Liberalization of the regime; but again be careful civil servants precisely because they are servants of the state ... Of course, if people absolutely insist on total freedom, they are not obliged to remain in public office. But if they do stay, they must accept the post's obligation constraints.

Declarations by President Biya and his various ministers of information culture have tended to confirm the contention that in their proclamation of freedom of the press, they have meant nothing more than the freedom to criticise Ahidjo and the critics of their New Deal government. Even journalists of the public media have been detained for questioning, or recalled to the Ministry of communication, or lost their jobs. In other words, when in 1988 President Biya reassured Cameroonians that they need not go underground or into exile or desert their families to be able to express their opinions he did not really mean all Cameroonians, least of all, civil servants.

The amendment of the 1980 laws only saw the light in 1990 after lots of agitation from media practitioners. Even with this breakthrough

in the repressive press laws, Cameroonians still rely heavily on international broadcasters (RFI, VOA, Deutsche Weille etc.) and Western Publications, which despite their foreignness remain the “uncensored” alternatives for information about the world and about Cameroon itself.

The strength of Ahidjo lay in the balancing of regional and ethnic pluralism in an integrative system of co-optive politics. This heritage set the rules for Biya who continued the regime under a state of emergency, an undeclared but eminent war against his enemies. Coercion in the Biya regime was not only really entrenched, but became institutionalised as well. In other words, Biya “the student” not only mastered his “Ahidjo lessons” but bettered the instructions as well.

Perhaps nervousness is what drives the regime to want everything for itself, nothing against it and nothing outside it. Internal security responsibilities now become the responsibility of the national police, the National Intelligence Police, CENER, the Gendarmerie, the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Military Intelligence (SEMIL), the Armed forces and the Presidential Security.

In continuation of the state of emergency, Law No. 90-47 of December 19, 1990, relating to the state of emergency referred to “a series of disturbances undermining public order or the security of the state”, section I also continues to permit the authorities to organise the control of the press and of all kinds of publications, audio-visual broadcasting and theatrical artistic productions.

No sooner was this law promulgated than there was the registration of its casualties. For example, 144 editions of various newspapers were seized in Cameroon between 1991 and 1993 for the sake of “public order”.

Press and Liberation from Neo-colonialism

Neo-colonialism simply means the existence in Cameroon of various economic activities owned by foreign people (especially French) outside the jurisdiction of the government, directed at external needs, and run in the interests of external economic powers.

Hence, at independence the Cameroon government inherited the powers to make laws, to direct the civil service, to treat with foreign governments but external economic forces continued to determine the nature of the economy, investments to be undertaken and where, and the degree of national sovereignty to be envisaged by the new state.

The press thus had as a twin obligation: -

a) To fight against the grasp of French neo-colonialism on Cameroon's internal affairs

b) To deal with the effects of French neo-colonialism on Cameroon's international economic activities.

Conscious of the exploitative phenomenon, Ahidjo preferred to point to statistics of Cameroon's Gross National Product (GNP) as an example of what can be gained from French neo-colonialism - rather in the manner of a high class prostitute glorying in her furs and jewels.

Ahidjo moved swiftly against the press to restore peace and arrest his government's fast crumbling legitimacy to please his French masters. In the case of Paul Biya, he revelled in the squander mania brandishing the inherited 7% economic growth rate till the end of 1986.

As the economy wobbled, Biya's government, like a frail reed in a storm went under, losing control, sense of direction and credibility.

The vacuum created by the absence of an effective government was quickly filled by a combination of groups as the armed forces and tribal cliques jockeying for power and those primarily interested in building temporary islands of order and peace in Cameroon's warring sea of anarchy and violent blood-baths.

Under these circumstances of sagging economic fortunes further steps into chaos as a torrent of strikes and riots sweep through Cameroon, the Biya government meets the prevailing air of forced press freedom with the predictable hard boiled authoritarianism.

Press and Mental Liberation

Friends and foes in the process of mental liberation cannot be identified by the colour of their skin, ethnic origin, or ideological label. There are friends of rights and economic justice among the rich as well

as there are also detractors to the liberalisation struggle among the poor and among the exploited and oppressed.

The press, as teacher can concentrate on people's democratic and personal advancement and individual freedom from restraint. This is service rendered to economic and social justice, with emphasis on the needs of the underprivileged and deprived, who now constitute the majority of fellow citizens.

The participation of Cameroon's press (newspapers, radio and television) in whatever democratic process the country boasts of today, has been, to say the least, tumultuous, exalting and trying. And true to the Berelson, Lazarsfeld, Mcphee (1974:655-670) qualification of the press as the "essential hallmark of democracy", the present state of the Cameroonian press can be said to be a barometer of democracy, debate, mass and political communication existing in the country.

Cameroon chose its camp within the spectrum of media types (libertarian and authoritarian, Marxist-Leninist and socially responsible press systems) on 1, 1966, the date when the one-party state was officially instituted by regime. By a series of "legal" means, former President Ahidjo succeeded" framework of apparently democratic institutions (Parliament, etc.) in enacting laws instituting an authoritarian system and proscribing the opposition.

The notorious 1962 Ordinance on the "expression of subversion", for example made sure that uniformity obtained as no one was allowed to breathe about the activities of government. The 1962 Ordinance, Article 2 states:

Any person who acts in any manner likely to bring to contempt or ridicule any public authority or who incites hatred against the government of the Federal Republic or any of tile States or who takes part in any subversive enterprise against the laws of the said. Federated States or who abets any such enterprise shall be guilty of misdemeanour to be liable to a fine of 200.000 to 2 million CFA or to imprisonment for a period of 1-5 years or both imprisonment and fine.

The 1.962 Ordinance also tried to create a uniform press. Article 3:

Any person who publishes or reproduces any false statement, rumour or report or any tendentious comment or any true statement or report if such publications or reproduction is likely to bring any

public authority into hatred contempt or ridicule faces, five years imprisonment plus a fine.

Persons charged with the violation of articles of the above ordinance were arraigned to military courts created to judge these “subversive elements” most of whom were only people with deviant voices. The epithets “subverts, terrorists, rebels” have since then been used to describe individuals who only have a different vision of government business. Those guilty of subversion sometimes received a speedy and summary execution. At best, they were deported to any of the political prisons (Kondengui, Tcholire, Mantoum, Yoko) equipped then and now with fancy gadgets for torture (cement tank, balançoire etc.). There are cases of journalists whisked off for so much as asking “subversive” questions to public officials during press conferences (Joseph 1978: 183).

Despite the sonorous claims by the Biya regime that the instrumentalities of authoritarianism have been scrapped in favour of an “advanced democracy” wherein deviant political voices can be heard, the enforcement wing of the “exceptional laws”, CENER (Centre National de Re-education), is still existing while entire articles of the 1962 Ordinance have simply been moved into the Penal Code, Article 113, 134 especially. Article 154(2) and 157 of the Penal code are mere renditions of the 1962 Ordinance.

The fact of the matter is that Cameroon still maintains attitudes, statutes and institutions which do not foster participatory democracy by reinforcing political debate and the’ genesis of a democratic political culture .. Rather, the present disposition enhances what I call “political terrorism” (Mentan, 1993:2) by either being very hostile to the opposition and those with dissenting voices or by trying to terrorize them to silence.

How can it be otherwise when legislation governing the existence of political parties does not seem to guarantee their total functioning? Rather Law No. 90/033 of the 19th of December 1990 comes along with a grudging admission of the existence of opposition parties with the presence of articles like “may take part in elections”, “freely carry out activities within the framework of the law” and the said law is applied by auxiliaries of the ruling party like District Officers (DOs),

Senior Divisional Officers (SDOs) or Governors, whose sense of the partisan and parochial is famous.

Despite the legal claims that “nobody shall be harassed for belonging to a political party” recorded in Law No. 90/053 or of having a dissident opinion, the reality is much different. The arrests of opposition figures like Dr. Nja Kwa, Andrew Akonteh, and Hameni Bieuleu etc, are eloquent testimony of government’s intolerance to contradiction: the spices of the political communication process. Again, Decree No. 92/030 of 12 February 1992, awarding airtime to political parties has a clear discrimination against parties not present in the National Assembly.

The above certainly justifies the fact that a country- with 103 odd political parties would display such paucity in political debate, ideological contradiction and communication. It also justifies the difficulties of the Biya regime in selling whatever ideals it stands for.

What obtains in Cameroon today seems to be a plain justification of the observation by the late President Adams that: “The press is open to those who would praise the threats of the law hang over those who blame the conduct of the man in power”. Whereas there is universal awareness that the governing process must by necessity involve the other voices especially in a plural democratic setting. U.S constitutional scholar Alexander Meokiegoh captures this when he writes:

No one can deny that the writing of the truth is important for the purpose of government... if men are to be their own rulers ... whatever truths may be available must be placed at the disposal of the citizenry.” This again ties in with the argument of the 1648 English parliament that:

When the truth is suppressed and the people kept ignorant this ignorance is to serve only unjust ends of tyrants and oppressors. For a government to be just in its constitution and equal in its distribution, it must hear all the other voices and judgement.

Conclusion

The difficulty in pointing out a clear media liberation policy in Cameroon begins with the existence of a Ministry of Communication - whose role is strictly propaganda, and the rationale of civil service journalists whose role, it is becoming clear, is to “soigner l’image de marque du regime”. Proof of that is the fact that, in as much as the necessity to offer “information experts” (trained journalists) jobs makes it imperative for their deployment to the districts and divisions as “special, communication advisers” to Divisional Officers, one would quarrel with the policy because it is at variance with the best tenets of journalism. There is more than a, simple misuse of personnel here. There is a clear desire to prevent debate by transforming the watchdogs of society into public relations hands for government. A ministry of communication as a propaganda machine is anachronistic in a plural democracy.

I would also argue that the observed political lethargy imposed on Cameroon today is created by the impossibility of the opposition to communicate the other ideals to the masses, thanks to government’s cynical hold on the instrumentalities of mass communication (Cameroon Radio/Television- CRTV) and political rallies which are zoned out according to the whims and caprices of government auxiliaries like Divisional and Senior Divisional Officers and Governors. At the same time, the same government, whose political base is anchored on a given ethnic group, maintains a vicious ethnic control of the public actors, events, resources and outcomes in the said public media. One would pick a long quarrel with media expert, Dr. Tjade Eone, who argued at a recent UNESCO seminar (August 6-11, 1994) on the media, that there is need to depoliticize the media - the public media especially.

The question to ask is, which remains a priority between “de-ethnicising the public media and depoliticising the public media?” The observation is that a given ethnic group (the Betis) are operating a hold-up of the public media since they control all the power positions. And from this foundation this politico-social unit is making the rest of Cameroon sitting ducks as it dispenses its ideology.

The attitudes and monopoly of the one-party state are still very much inherent in those who, so far, define media policy in Cameroon and until that monopoly is broken one can hardly talk of communication in the press let alone political communication.

Opposition figure and Alliance for Democracy and Development, Garga Haman Adjii, captures the syndrome beautifully when he declares: le multipartisme est bloqué par le pouvoir, vous êtes dans L'opposition ou vous indexe comme si vous étiez une charogne, alors que les charognes se trouvent peut-être de l'autre cote. La loi autorise L'opposition d'organiser des manifestations, mais elle est sous menace permanent d'arrestations, de tortures, d'injures grossières. Dès lors on constate qu'on n'a pas enlevé de la tête de nos autorités les comportements du système de parti unique, Elles monopolisent honteusement les mass media publiques.

The political lethargy is also due to the impossibility of those with voices, to use the private press efficiently since government not only maintains statutory censorship of the press but government goes ahead to use the instrumentalities of legitimate coercion, - army, police, gendarmerie- to exorcise printing houses that print newspapers carrying deviant voices.

The difficulty to set down any meaningful pluralist liberation policy is also tied to government hijack of public service journalists, trained to serve the state and not the ruling political party, and the transformation of the said journalists into government information officials (griots).

The press can play a decisive role in the liberation of Cameroon in future if some conditions are fulfilled:-

- a) It becomes the guardian of Cameroon's national soil
- b). The press and Cameroonians fight to expunge the archaic laws which impede the practise of journalism from the statute book.
- c) Cameroonians understand that a government that cannot guarantee freedom of press cannot guarantee freedom to the individual.
- d) That social or cultural continuity (acculturation) take the form of inculcating values and value systems of unity, peace and development which Cameroon needs in order to preserve and perpetuate itself; and

e) That social discontinuity (Acculturation) is assured by assimilating Cameroon ethnic groups into progressive values.

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TRANSLATION/TRADUCTION

Translation Or Transcreation: to What Extent Is Translating Creative Writing A Creative Activity

by

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Background

As the years elapse, more and more Cameroonians seem to be taking to creative writing, especially those of English-speaking expression, as we are wont to call them. A number of us have grown up to enjoy great classics a good many of which, even if we sometimes do not realise it, are indeed translations. You would all understand that, with my professional bias, it occurs to me pretty regularly to ask myself what I could do to get a reader to either receive the message as accurately and faithfully as possible or enjoy the way the message is expressed. I was struck by the fact that, sometimes, the translation of apparently simple facts or literary devices was not as easy as one would think. Naturally, I started asking myself how much of translation was creation, and whether I should not write about it. Furthermore, when I raised the issue with Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh, himself a writer and critic, who had given me a proposed translated version of his play *The Inheritance* (L 'Heritier) to read and criticise, he in turn talked of a translator of a literary work suggesting, to use a mild expression, that he should have part of the copyright. You can guess what his stand was: go on and write the paper. I also thought that with the impressive and distinguished array of creative writers and panellists that you are the paper would be thought-provoking enough.

Creative Writing: A Translator's Perspective

Creative writing generally serves two principal purposes: putting across a message and entertaining the reader or audience. The author's creativity is manifested both at the level of conception of the message to be transmitted and that of devising the means of effectively and/or entertainingly passing on the message. But it should immediately be borne in mind that, in addition to the writer's intelligence or genius, he uses his entire cultural background, albeit unconsciously, to achieve his objective. The case is even a little more complicated in a setting like ours in Cameroon where there are many mini-cultures and where, in the case of an author who grew up either in a particular area or culture where his national language was the main language or in a number of areas or cultures where different national languages were spoken, it is of utmost importance to be able to understand the language or culture or languages or cultures, as the case may be, in order to understand the author's work and even enjoy the literary or creative devices he employs. In fact, there are cases where either the author or, later on, a critic has to provide explanatory notes to guide the reader as he explores the author's new world.

Creative writing has no prescribed ways of expressing ideas. The genius socio-cultural customs of any people gives them a peculiar means of expressing ideas and it is obvious that an author who has lived through a number of cultures, invariably and sometimes unconsciously reflects this fact in his writings. In our own context, I could mention songs, short stories, proverbs, epics ... and so on. These genres are so culture-bound that any attempt to interpret them or, worse still, translate them without taking due account of the socio-cultural context is tantamount to courting futility.

Let us take the example of a North American author who, at a certain point, decides to write about ice hockey or baseball or American football, for that matter. If a translator were faced with a scene like that to render, he would definitely have problems. If we assume that the text has to be translated into French for Cameroonian public, then the translator is bound, if he opts to maintain the North American sport, to provide a whole handbook on it.

But then, if it is not important to highlight the fact that the sport is foreign, depending on the purpose of the translation, the translator may opt to transform ice-hockey or baseball into another more familiar game. This would be the obvious solution in case what is important is to refer to a popular sport, for example.

People tend to believe that what is easy to understand is necessarily easy to translate. This may be true, depending on what exactly we are talking about. In fact,)” as Tancock (in Smith, 1958:35) states:

The text that looks hard at first glance because it is packed with rare and technical words is comparatively simple to translate satisfactorily. It may be a wearisome task, involving much grubbing in dictionaries and works of reference and, possibly even direct investigation in the field. But that is not the difficulty; it is a matter of diligence.

When it comes to translating creative writing, it is quite a different matter. In fact, even if we suppose that we are using a perfect translator as defined by Gogol in the following words:

One who becomes a pane of glass which is so transparent that the reader does not notice that there is any glass this ideal is never reached; there are always little flaws or ridges in the glass, and even the clearest glass has an index of refraction. (Foster in Smith, 1958: 19).

The clear glass is the sort of translation which Rieue favours. The coloured glass is a translation which aims at communicating the exotic quality of the original and how far removed it is from us either in time or spirit or in cultural settings. The “clear glass” translation ought to convey the impression that the text before the reader was thought and expressed directly in his contemporary language and employs the normal resources of that language to deal with matters remote from us in time and space.

Where this is not achieved, we are apt to say derogatively, that the text reads like a translation. The coloured glass version is intended to read like a translation; the reader must not be allowed to forget that what he is reading is foreign in origin. This can be exemplified by translating a work that is basically exotic and clearly talks of traditions and practices which are totally foreign to the reader’s immediate context. It might be necessary, and it should indeed be, to make it

sound foreign. Tancock also gives the example of a sentence which basically does not seem to pose any translation problem. Depending on the particular context, the sentence “I saw a white horse, “ could be translated in several ways with completely different meanings:

I saw a white horse ---> J’ai vu un cheval blanc.

I saw a white horse---> C’est moi qui a vu un cheval blanc.

I saw a white horse---> Mais, j’ai bien vu un cheval blanc.

I saw a white horse ---> C’est un cheval blanc que j’ ai vu.

I saw a white horse >J’ai vu un seul cheval blanc.

In a case like the above, there a number of possible interpretations depending on the particular context which the writer invokes. This especially happens in poetry where a poet might as well intend any or sometimes all of the above meanings. The translator has to make a choice:

What is the purpose expressed in the source language?

What means does the author employ to convey the purpose?

Can the translator use the same means, within the framework of the target language?

If not, what to do?

As we know, texts range from straightforward texts, where the main and only business is the message, to aesthetic texts where extremely complex means are used. The translator has to consider content, language and artistic formation and decide exactly what value to attach to each in the translation process. In the case of poetry, it might sometimes be necessary to determine the importance of rhyme and decide what to do about it. In the case of drama, it may be important to re-adapt whole sections.

The particular blend of content and form in the expression of the source language is very important. Where there is greater emphasis on content, the result sounds or reads more like an explanation and is bound to be flat and not tasteful; If the form is more important, and this is very often the case in creative writing then the translator must consider language. But then, a certain value still has to be attached to the translation attempt.

Translation, a Creative Exercise?

Leonard Forster holds that the translation is a new product, “the result of a recreative process”.

Let us take the example of proper names, especially names of people and things in creative writing. It is true that a name is a linguistic element like any other one and can be used for its associative value. Charles Dickens or, much closer to us, Linus Asong is examples of writers whose names of characters are very meaningful. But we all know that names resist translation and as such their evocative value are lost.

Sometimes, it will be necessary to innovate and bend steadfast rules that names should not be translated, to give the target language reader a true picture of the original. In fact, sometimes the meaning of the names actually adds to the content of the message.

It is true that there are other means like using notes to explain but the translator again has to understand the cultural background of the writer and determine the exact purpose of the translation.

The translator of literature has to convey not only the exact meaning but also overtones, which means that the text with least flavour is the easiest to translate accurately. Tancock talks about the range from the business letter or report of a scientific experiment to a mystical account of spiritual experience, from the completely factual to the wholly allusive and metaphorical.

The more emotional, suggestive and allusive the text, the harder it is to render it convincingly simply because the half-conscious memories and ever-changing emotions of human beings are elusive. Yes, that is what art is all about.

A translator with a creative genius is naturally going to be a better translator of creative writing because of the creator in him. Lamy Poubom recently did something quite interesting. He took a number of excerpts from Mongo L' histoire dufou (1994) and decided to rewrite them in verse, using the original text. I can imagine a situation where depending on the particular literary and cultural inclinations of a target readership, the translator as a creator comes up with a poem to “translate” prose or vice-versa for that matter.

Mr. Poubom's exercise was the exception because fewer people prefer verse to prose. For most people, it would be preferable to read prose. Now, if we take a situation where somebody translates interesting poems in English or French into short stories in Bafut, for instance, it is obvious that more people in Bafut would be interested in, and enjoy the work. It should be left to the translator to determine what means to use after his basic analysis of the source text and after asking and answering the questions raised earlier.

Conclusion

Translating creative writing is definitely a creative exercise. The extent of the creativity is a direct function of the considerations mentioned in this paper. It depends most of all on the target text, the creativity embedded in the subject matter or content itself and then the means through which the purpose is expressed. After a careful exegesis of the above and a good understanding of the direct and not-so-direct socio-cultural reference in the work and then an analysis of the genius of the target language to determine the various available avenues the translator then sets out to create or should I say "transcribe".

The whole situation of a writer presenting his work to a translator for translation (or transcription) can be compared to a person who comes and poses his problem to a consultant who is left to see just how the idea and the clothing of the idea can be put across most effectively and most entertainingly. And in the process the translator definitely transcribes.

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Survival and Identity Of African Literature: A Perspective of The Role of Translation

by

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Abstract

This paper seeks to discuss the importance of translation at a time when African literature, especially in European languages of colonisation, is struggling maintain its identity and ensure its survival in a world dominated by the Western civilizations whose languages it uses. Analysis and conclusions will focus on translation of Francophone African literature south of the Sahara into English. A examining how translators have so far coped with the rendition of aspects that portray its identity, suggestions are made as to the role that could be played translation in the effort to preserve such identity and contribute to the survival of the literature.

Introduction

The twentieth century has witnessed the emergence and rapid development of African literature, especially in European languages such as French, English and Portuguese. This literature, like other postcolonial literatures, has tended to be regarded merely as an extension of the literatures of the corresponding European languages. However, although it could be argued that the use of European languages ultimately affects. the world view, cultural values, and experiences that are communicated, African literature in these languages presents certain features that give it an identity different from European literatures of corresponding languages. Abiola Irele has touched on some of these features:

The striking feature that gives interest to the Literature is a noticeable preoccupation not only with the African experience as the central subject of their works but also with the problem of a proper and adequate reflection of that experience, which involves in formal terms a reworking of their means of expression for that purpose (Jahn, 1960).

Given that one of the major reasons that motivated African writers before the independence of most African countries was to assert the identity of Africans in the face of European colonisation and assimilation, the need to maintain this identity and enable the literature to survive in its own right has been of abiding preoccupation. This is the more so especially as concerns the literature in European languages since these languages seem to be considered by some critics as grounds for disqualifying certain literary works as African.

This paper seeks to present a perspective of the role that has been and could be, played by translation in preserving and perpetuating the identity of African literature in European languages, especially English and French. Analysis and conclusions will relate primarily to the translation of Francophone African literature south of the Sahara into English. Emphasis will also be laid on certain features that could be considered as distinctive of the literature.

1. Translated African Literature and Efforts at Identity and Survival

Broadly speaking, a translation usually represents the translator's interpretation of a text. Such translation is the result of a selection process since a translation will convey only some of the multiple levels of the source text (often at the expense of others). The translator develops an overall strategy for rendering what he or she considers significant in a text and needs to be conveyed, and then makes subsequent specific decisions in the course of translation. As concerns the translation of African literary works from French into English, translators have often given priority to certain aspects of the texts, adopting strategies which help to convey what they deem to be invariant or significant. From among such significant aspects of these texts translators have sometimes tried to incorporate what might be

considered as contributing to the identity or cultural and stylistic distinctive features of the literature.

Given the wide scope and diversity of African literature (2), an attempt to survey some of the cultural and stylistic features typical of the literature in English and French will focus on a body of writing that could be considered as forming a unified corpus. Various similarities in viewpoints, content, language, and style of certain works will serve as basis for grouping them together for my analysis.

Broadly speaking, African literature in French is produced in the former French colonies. However, the literature is not usually deemed to be homogenous throughout the continent. In fact, some researchers would divide African literature in French into two categories: Maghrebien (North Africa) and sub-Saharan (West and Central Africa) (3). Although such division seems merely to split Africa into regions, it is primarily based on certain cultural and linguistic affinities shared by the writers of each category. Despite the fact that writers of the two categories had the same colonial masters and experience, the differences between them have been underscored by Hedi Boursoui in the following terms:

The [Francophone] literatures of the Maghreb and of sub-Saharan Africa show distinctive differences as well as similarities. Generally speaking, the similarities are on the thematic level whereas the sharpest differences are linguistic (1985: 257-258).

It could also be argued that the differences are often evident at the cultural and spiritual levels too. For these reasons therefore, it would be problematic to treat the two categories together as if they formed one homogenous unit, especially at the cultural and linguistic levels which play a significant role in translation (*ibid.* p. 265).

Taking into account the above argument, I have selected and focused on sub-Saharan Francophone literature; this choice is dictated primarily by the fact that I am familiar with the literature on account of my education and research. As I decide to orientate my analysis on the literature of this region, however, I am well aware of arguments that even within sub-Saharan Africa there are national literatures (in national and colonial languages) which could be distinguished from each other. Admittedly, differences could even be stretched to the level of individual writers within national literatures; nevertheless, these

differences are significantly outweighed by the cultural and linguistic similarities that militate in favour of literature in the region being considered as an entity. This idea has also been emphasized by O.R. Dathorne (1975:307), who says:

... the corpus [of Francophone sub-Saharan literature] presents an interesting body of literature, unified not merely by the French language or even by a common set of experiences and privations within the French colonial structure; it represents a whole, along with the literature in African languages, English and Portuguese, because it charts the course of concern away from the group to personal affiliations.

As for African literature in English, while most of the literature is produced in sub-Saharan Africa, the content and style of West and East African writing are often different in certain aspects from those of South Africa. Most Anglophone West and East African writers draw on their traditional culture and oral lore, whereas South Africans have “shown little interest in cultural salesmanship” (Simon, 1992: 159) in their portrayal of urbanization and the social effects of apartheid.

Thus given the similar thematic concerns and influence of cultural and traditional setting in works by Anglophone and Francophone African writers south of the Sahara, with the exception of South African writers, this category of writing will serve as basis for my analysis of how certain African literary works translated so far from French into English have contributed to sustaining the identity and survival of African literature, especially in terms of the culture portrayed and the peculiar use of the European language.

Rendition of Culture-Bound Words and Expressions

Many translators have sought to maintain the cultural environment of African literary works. The names of places, geographical features, and characters are often retained in the local language; for example, in the translation of Ferdinand Oyono’s *Le vieux negre et La medaille* into English under the title *The Old Man and the Medal*, John Reed retains the local names of characters (Meka, Evina, Ondoua, Engamba, Nti, Kelara, etc.) and places (Yaounde), etc. which indicate that the novel is set in Cameroon. So also Irene D’

Almeida maintains the names of characters (Oduche, Ezeulu, Edogo, Nwaka, etc.), places (Umuaru, Okperi, Umuachala, etc.), and days of the week (Oye, Afo, Know, etc.) of Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* (1964) in her translation *La Fleche de Dieu*. (1978).

Furthermore, the names of local objects, flora, dishes, drinks, dress, and institutions which have no suitable equivalents in English or French as the case may be, and reinforce the African cultural identity, are maintained in some translated literary works; for instance, in his English version of Ferdinand Oyono's *Une vie de boy*, John Reed retained such terms as "aba", "bilaba", "arki", etc. for which he could not find English equivalents, given that the words are specific to the cultural setting of the novel: "La masse de l'aba se detachait dans la nuit. (p.11) is rendered as "The dark: mass of the aba stood out against the night" (Houseboy, 1966:6) - he subsequently translated the footnote which defines "aba- in English. Similarly, Katherine Woods maintained "tabala", "chahada", etc. in her translation of Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *L'Aventure ambigu* (1961) into English: "tabala- in "Alors, au dehors, le grand tabala funebre rententit (194-195) is retained in the translation: "Then, outside, the great funeral tabala sounded. (Ambiguous Adventure, /972: 169). Such borrowing of African terms enables translators to preserve the setting or local colour of the source text (ST) and "permits communication without eliminating the grounds of specificity" (Simon, 1992: 159). Furthermore, borrowing can thus serve stylistic and authenticity purposes since it attempts to respect the choices of the ST author. Although many translators accompany borrowed terms with definitions and explanations in the footnotes and glossaries as the original authors or provide footnotes in certain cases, some translators ignore footnotes and expect readers to understand the terms within their contexts; for example, Katherine Woods provides a footnote for "griot" in her English translation of Cheikh Aminou Kane's *L'Aventure ambigu* probably because even though she wants to convey the cultural identity portrayed in the ST. she does not want to define the word within the translation for her target readers whom she feels do not know the meaning of the word: "On avait remarque aussi Dialtobe, le maitre des pecheurs, Farba le maitre des griots, le chef de la corporation des forgerons, celui des cordonniers, et bien d'autres

encore., (p, 103) is rendered as “Also to be noticed among them were Dialtobe, the master of the fishermen, Farba, the teacher of the griots, the chief of the guild of smiths, that of the, shoemakers, and many besides” (p.83), with the added footnote* “The griots certain African countries, a special class of musicians, poets, historians, sorcerers and the like.” Len Ortzen, for his part, provides definitions and explanation which he feels his readers need in a glossary at the end of *Tribal Scars and Other* (1974).

On the other hand, where a cultural equivalent term is proposed, the ensuing acculturation rids the text of its different cultural identify even though the target readers will likely produce a response similar to that of the ST readers. However, a proposed equivalent may sometimes result in distortion of meaning; for example “vin de palme” in “L’oeil pétillant de malice comme du vin de palme assai dans un verre de cristal’ (*Mission terminée*, 1957: 55) rendered by “vintage in “... his eyes glittered with crystalline malice, like vintage wine in a go (*Mission to Kala*. 1958:33). In Africa, “vin de palme” is wine obtained from the palm tree whereas vintage wine in Europe is wine obtained from grapes; give difference as well as the cultural significance of the palm wine which is distorted, the use of a cultural equivalent here, while maintaining other clues that point to African culture in the translation (e.g. bamboo beds, etc.), fails to give a con’ picture of the cultural setting. Indeed, the use of a cultural equivalent will depend on the value the translator attaches to the ST culture-bound terms a degree of similarity with the concept or object in the target language (TL).

In addition to African words and expressions, there are certain French that designate objects and concepts peculiar to Africa or used with specific a meanings or connotations. These include “dot”, “co-epouse”, “concessions. The ring of familiarity around these words hides certain considerations pertinent to the African context. For example, one of the definitions of “dot” in *Dictionnaire Petit Robert* is “bien qu’une femme apporte en se mariant”: it means “dowry” underscores the French or European practice of the bride bringing property into marriage. Although “dot” is used in francophone African literary works, how the word refers to the property or money given by the bridegroom and his family to the bride’s family, usually in

appreciation for their daughter. Consequently, translator would need to understand the word within the African context be attempting to render it. This is what Modupe Bode-Thomas failed to do when rendered “Notre mariage se fit sans dot, sans faste ... “(Une si longue lettre. 1976:’ as “Our marriage was celebrated without dowry without pomp ... “ (So Long a Le 1981: 16). The word “dowry” here or “bride wealth” used by Adrian Adam “However, since bride wealth has been paid and the marriage duly celebrated Salima ... “ (The Suns of Independence, 1981. p. 26) is likely to have the Euro, meaning for many European readers instead of the African practice intended; Anglophone African countries, the money or property is usually referred to as “b price”, and the word is used by writers such as Chinua Achebe, Elechi Arnadi, particularly Buchi Emecheta one of whose works is entitled The Bride Price (1976).

Furthermore, although “co-epouse” is a French word, it has been coined to designate one of the wives of a polygamist, a concept common in Africa and other areas where polygamy is permitted. Unfortunately, since polygamy is not practised in Britain, the English language has no word for the concept. Anglophone countries in Africa have therefore coined the word “co-wife” which has been used by several writers. Certain translators have taken this into account; “La presence a mes cotes de rna co-epouse m’enerve” (Une si longue lettre: 10) and a descriptive phrase is used when Len Ortzen rendered “Volontairement elle avait fait devier la conversation sur un autre theme, afin d’eviter un longue palabre sur les “veudieux” co-epouses” (Voltal’que, 1962:49) as “She deliberately changed the conversation in order to avoid a long discussion about the other three wives” (Tribal Scars and Other Stories: 42)

Peculiar Use of Language

As Abiola Irele (1983:33) points out:

Despite the fact that our writers use the European language to express themselves, the most original of them do so with the conscious purpose of presenting an African experience and the best among them

reflect in their works a specific mode of imagination which derives from the African background.

The original writers use oral literary forms such as proverbs, songs, folktales, riddles, etc. in their works. In fact, since many African writers are very often influenced by the thought patterns of their native tongues, they sometimes translate the languages into the European language. This idea is underscored by Makouta M'Boukou (1980:270) (3):

“L'écrivain négro-africain, dans la plupart des cas, pense en sa langue. et s'exprime en français. De sorte qu'il faut considérer sa langue d'expression comme une traduction très soignée de sa langue maternelle.

The writing is therefore a form of translation for which there is no original: the text also has a double language and could be considered a palimpsest because “behind the scriptural authority of the target European language, the earlier, imperfectly erased remnants of the source language are still visible” (Zabus, 1991: 103). Such translation and special use of language are evident at various levels (lexical, syntactic, sentence, discourse) as well as in the imagery, proverbs, dialogue, oral literary genres and other rhetorical devices used. While some writers like Chinua Achebe (*Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God* etc.) seek to respect the TL idiom, others like Gabriel Okara (*The Voice*) impose the syntax of their mother tongue on the language since Okara believes that “the only way to use (African ideas) effectively is to translate them literally from the African language native to the writer into whatever European language he is using as the medium of expression”. (quoted by Gasama, 1978: 237). Ahmadou Kourouma also recasts French sentence structures in *Les Soleils des indépendances* in order to use the speech patterns of his mother tongue (Malinke) in expressing his ideas; he describes his use of French as follows: *Qu'avais-je donc fait? simplement donne libre cours a mon temperament en distordant une langue classique trop rigide pour que ma pensee s'y meuve. J'ai donc traduit le malinke en francais en cassant le francais pour retrouver et restituer le rythme africain.* (quoted in Kuma. 978:237)

Thus the structure of the European language is often brought as close as possible to the speech patterns of the indigenous languages, especially in drama when the playwright wants to give the impression that he or she has translated the speech of certain uneducated characters who are in fact expressing themselves in their own mother tongues (e.g. Guillaume Oyono-Mbia and Wole Soyinka).

Many translators of Francophone sub-Saharan African literature into English retain the African-based imagery and proverbs in translation. John Reed in his translation of *Une vie de boy* renders proverbs literally; for example, “Nos ancetres disaient qu’il faut savoir se sauver lorsque l’eau n’arrive encore qu’au genou” (p. 151) is translated as “our ancestors used to say that you must escape when the water’ is still only up to the knees” (p. 115). He also maintains the image in “Les jambs de Mme Gosier-d’Oiseau etaient empaquetees dans son pantalon comme du manioc dans une feuille de bananier, “ (p. 76) rendered as “Madame Gullet was stuffed into her slacks like cassava in a banana leaf” (p. 57).

The use of the oral style and repetition in certain literary works has been rendered by some translators in such a way as to retain its peculiarity. Taking for instance Dorothy Blair’s attempt to convey African storytelling techniques as depicted in *Les Comes d’Amadou Koumba* the direct conversational style in “Khary etait bossue. Oh! une toute bosse de rien de tout, une bosse qu’une camisole empesee ou un boubou ample aux larges plis pouvait aisement cacher is rendered as “Khary was a hunchback. Mind you, it was a small insignificant little hump, a hump that could easily be hidden under a well-starched camisole or a full, pleated boubou.” Sometimes, such oral style of story-telling is also found in novels; Adrian Adams tries to convey Karouma’s direct conversational style as he addresses the reader in “Vous paraissez sceptique: Eh bien, moi, je vous le jure, et l’ajoute: si le defunt etait de caste forgeron, si l’ on n’ etait pas dans L’ ere des Independances, (Les Soleils des independences, disent les Malinkes), je vous le jure, on n’aurait jamais ose l’inhumer dans une terre lointaine et etrangere” (*Les Soleils des independences*. 7-8) as follows: “You seem sceptical! Well, I swear it’s true, and what’s more. I swear that if the deceased were a blacksmith caste, and if we weren’t living the era of Independence (the suns of independence, say the Malinke) no one

would have dared bury him far away in foreign soil' (The Suns of Independence: 8). As for repetition, Brenda Packman points out that "this is not always straight forward repetition but frequently the elaboration of an idea by a series of words or phrases almost, but not quite synonymous. " (1975:64-77). Again Dorothy Blair renders the repetition in "il faut decide que la reine Fari et des courtisanes s' en iraient a la recherche de terres mains desolees, de regions plus hospitalieres, de pays plus nourriciers" by "Queen Fari should set out with her court ladies in search of less desolate lands more hospitable regions more nutritive areas." Although Blair's intensifying repetition of lands, regions and areas do not seem to be as clear as in Diop's ("de terres ... de regions ... de pays") since "areas" is vague (perhaps "countries" would have brought out the idea of increasing expanse) the repetition in "Un soir, Samba ne rentra pas, ni le lendemain, ni le surlendemain, ni plus jamais" is reflected in "One evening, Samba did not return home; nor the next day, nor the day after, nor ever." Certain translators, however, do not always convey the repetitions in the ST; in fact repetitions in Francophone African literary works are sometimes viewed as stylistic flaws which need to be edited in English. Thus James Kirkup in his English version of Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir* (1953) (*The African Child* (1959) sometimes leaves out or alters words, whole sentences, and even paragraphs in his effort to improve on the author's style, especially where he feels that repetition is unnecessary and clumsy. Such editing, however, ignores the significance of repetition in African oral literature and deprives the text of its oral quality or identity.

The use of "français petit nègre" or broken ungrammatical French has been rendered in certain cases by ungrammatical English to reflect the social status of the character; John Reed attempts to render the guard's bad French using ungrammatical English: "Movie! s'exclama le garde, Zeuil-de-Panthere cogner comme Gosier d'Oiseau! Lui donner moi coup de pied qui en fait comme soufat'soud ... Zeuil y en a pas rire" (*Une vie de boy*, p. 40) is rendered as "Man, said the sentry, "Panther Eye beat like Gullet. Him kick me bam! Go like dynamite. Panther Eye no joke" (*Houseboy*, p. 30). On the other hand, where pidgin English is used in certain Anglophone African literary works, some translators render this lingua-franca using "français petit nègre";

for example, D' Almeida in her translation of Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* (*La Fleche de Dieu*).

Generally speaking therefore, while many translators have tried to reflect the ST identity in their translations, some have opted to adapt certain terms to the experience and expectations of non-African target readers. For instance, in Peter Green's translation of Mongo Beti's *Mission terminée*, "noix de cola" (p, 58) is rendered by "chewing gum" (*Mission to Kala*: 64). Even though "chewing gum" is probably used by the translator as a way of adapting an African text to his target readership (Europeans), it is in fact a misrepresentation of "noix de cola" which represents quite a different reality (kola nut). Again, the symbolic importance of the nut in the novel and in the African society as a whole has been lost in the translation especially as the nut is eaten mainly by adults and in ceremonies, while chewing gum is mostly for children and adolescents and scarcely has any significance in the European society comparable to that of Africa. Other examples include John Reed's rendition of "baton de manioc" (*Une vie de boy*, p. 7) as "cassava sticks" (*Houseboy*. p.3) and James Kirkup's translation of "griot" (*Dramous* p. 80) by "witch doctor" (*A Dream of Africa*, p. 127) and by "praise singer" (*The African Child*, p.80).

Furthermore, some translators have gone to the extent of adapting the translations of literary works to the knowledge and experience of the target readers: for example Dorothy Blair in her English version of *Falioum Fantoures Le Cercle des Tropiques* (1972) had changed the names of characters, places, etc. and: transposed the setting - indeed, the publishers have stated clearly that the work is "adapted into English" rather than the usual "translated from the French". In the introduction, Blair explains why she opted for adaptation:

It is indisputable that the political machinations and election rigging on the eve of independence, described by the author, with the wooing of international organizations and the multinational monopolies by cynical governments, and ruthless tyrants who rule over newly independent states, are not the prerogative of ex-French colonies alone. That is why, in course of translating *Le Cercle des tropiques* into English. I decided with Alioum Fantoure' approval, to transpose it into an English-speaking setting anglicising all the proper names", places and people, and adapting all references to French-or

French-African social, politic institutions, In order to enhance the universal applications of the satire. (1981: ix). Thus the overall strategies of translation have varied, although the main trend has been to recognize and attempt to transfer the peculiarities or identity of the ST.

2. Possible Role of the Translator in the Preservation of the Identity of African Literature

While it is evident that the preservation of the cultural setting and identity of, the ST is only one of the options available to the translator of African literary texts and that translators will often adopt overall strategies and make choices taking into account the purpose of translation as well as the intended audience, my suggestions here as to how translation could contribute to the preservation of the identity of African literature and to its survival will apply mainly to translators who would like: to see themselves as cultural agents. Such translators will translate “for the sake of re-affirmation, re-appropriation, and re-examination of the national cultural identity, and as a means of differentiating one’s self from the other. “ (Jacquemond, 1992, p.151).

In the attempt to introduce foreign readers to the specific identity of the African literary text, the translator could adopt certain approaches. The overall strategy would be to constantly remind the reader that he or she is reading about a specific cultural environment with a specific identity. This could be done, as many translators have already done, by borrowing culture-bound terms, attempting to reflect African thought patterns (especially in proverbs, imagery, oral literary devices, etc.), in translation and much more. Since the translator is dealing with a linguistic and cultural audience different from that of the ST, he or she might have to make certain adjustments to facilitate understanding. Given that many Francophone authors frequently provide footnotes and glossaries for cultural definitions and explanations they assume are needed by their readers for comprehension, it facilitates, to some extent, the translator’s task, since the footnotes and glossaries are usually merely translated and there is practically little need, if any, for further information, Where no information is provided in the original text, the translator could provide supplementary information either within or outside the

translation. Caught between the desire to capture the ST local colour and the need to be understood by an audience outside the specific African cultural and linguistic situation, the translator of African literature often realizes that cultural transference involves much more than linguistic expression; it also depends on the relationship between the translator and his or her target readers. The attempt to recontextualize ST setting and culture in the target text (IT) might require extra information: perhaps a detailed introduction which places the work within its geographical, historical, cultural and literary contexts, gives pertinent biographical and other information about the author, and discusses some of the themes in the work. Where the target audience are Africans rather than non-Africans, the supplementary information might be limited to aspects that distinguish one African ethnic or cultural group from the others; features common to or that can be understood in most African cultures (e.g. polygamy, extended family, sacrifice to ancestors, etc.) might not need to be explained. Consequently, the translator would have to be acquainted with the extra linguistic information that gives the text its full meaning. Such information would, to a large extent, serve as the basis for suitable non-linguistic choices in translation.

The special use of the European language in the ST to reflect African thought patterns and linguistic features would require that the translators analyse and interpret such use so as to adequately render the characteristic features of the indigenous language which influenced the writing (imagery, dialogue, proverbs, repetitions, ideophones, switches in language use by the same character, etc.).

Ade Ojo (1986:296) aptly summarizes the task that awaits the translator who strives to reflect the identity of the African literary text:

Not only is he to be faced with the African version of the European language that he is to translate from but he has to do a very thorough study of the socio-cultural backgrounds against which the source text is written and where the target text will be read. The translated version of the source text must therefore have a tinge of Africanness; it must also possess the style of the original text and express very appropriately the mind of the writer.

Faced with such a formidable task requiring enormous linguistic and extra linguistic competence, the translator could gain from team

work or collaboration between translators of African and European backgrounds. Collaboration might provide checks and balances among those involved widen translation possibilities by allowing for more than one perspective, as well as reduce the likelihood of unintentional omissions, alterations and additions.

Thus the translator would emphasize the “otherness” or “foreignness” of the ST in, the translation and project African culture and identity. Indeed the distinctive features of Europhone African literature and the “bilingual” nature of its texts as well as their political, cultural and literary implications may well call into question the validity of “fluent” or “transparent” translations of African literary works in European languages. Although it can be tempting to “Europeanize” the African literary text in translation, especially where the target readers are primarily Europeans, the linguistic peculiarity of the ST European language would need to be reflected in one way or another. Suppression of the distinctive features risks defeating the intentions of the writer; in fact, the translator could appropriate or manipulate the European language to express and sustain the identity of African literature.

Finally, the importance of translation to the survival of African literature cannot be over emphasized. Translation gives the ST an “after life” as it goes to another environment and is received by another linguistic and/or cultural group. The more a work is translated the longer its life; translation is thus situated within the time-frame of the original’s “afterlife” as Walter Benjamin (1970:71) has pointed out:

For a translation comes later than the original and since the important works of world literature never find their chosen translators at the time of their origin their translation marks their stage of continued life.

So also in the case of African literature, the works need to be translated not only between European languages themselves but also between African, European and other world languages, if possible, to ensure their survival and continued existence.

Conclusion

The role of translation schools in Africa such as the Advanced School of Translators and Interpreters (ASTI) of the University of Buea (Cameroon) in the promotion of the identity and survival of African Literature is very significant. Africans do not need to let foreigners continue to translate their literature for them; I believe they are in a better position to understand and propagate their cultures which give their literature its specific identity. After all factors like who translates and what gets published are critical in the moulding of the perception of African literature. Indeed, I feel that translators of postcolonial literatures in general and African literature in particular, need to have priorities different from those of their Western counterparts.

Notes

1. Janheinz Jahn (1965:MVII) has also underscored the presence of “certain stylistic elements which stem from negro-African oral traditions Jahn suggested the term “neo-African literature” to describe modern literary works produced in European languages by blacks on both sides of the Atlantic, as distinguished from “African literature” which is expressed in African languages.

Some of those distinctive features have been amply discussed in my article “African Literature in European Languages: Major Features and Implications for Translators” (1993).

2. “African literature” will be used in this paper as a blanket term for all national and ethnic literatures of Africa. In this respect, Abiola Irele’s comment ties in with my perception: “... the notion of Africa as a geo-political concept serves as the primary validation for the continued application of a term whose all-inclusive character does not seem to impair its efficacy of references (1990:51). He further points out that the term has continued to be used despite categorization of African literature in terms of indigenous languages. The idea of national literatures in European languages has not been widely adopted

since the languages are neither indigenous to the countries nor national in their use.

3. Frederic Michelman has noted the constant separate treatment of literatures in French from sub-Saharan and Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and sometimes Libya) regions precisely for these reasons: "Most critical works on African literature limit themselves to one area or the other on the assumption that the geographical separation of the Maghreb from the rest of Africa as well as its ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic unity set it apart from the rest of Africa in such a way as to justify the independent treatment of the literature from each region." (1993: 139).

4. Oyekan Owomoyela (1979:98) notes that "the language of the South African writer also reflects his urbanization (or cosmopolitanism), being free, for example, of ostentatious proverbializing and showing instead close kinship with the language of American Blacks."

5. Indeed, Olympe Bhely-Quenum, a writer from Benin, confirms Makouta M'Boukou's assertion by noting that he basically follows this method in writing: "Je suis obligé d'écrire en fon ou en Yoruba en deux ou trois lignes. et plus tard je développe et je traduis ..." (1982: 14).

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The Translation of Stylistic Devices In Rene Philombe's Short Stories

by

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Abstract

Cameroon is a bi-cultural and bilingual country whose official languages are English and French. Translation of literary works of French expression into English and vice versa could contribute a great deal not only in exposing the country's bicultural and bilingual population to each other's literary traditions but also in integrating the works into their respective literary traditions. Unfortunately translations of Cameroonian literary works from French into English and vice-versa have remained very insignificant.

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the translation of Cameroonian literary works of French expression into English by suggesting ways of handling some of the stylistic devices in Rene Philombe's short stories entitled *Histoire Queue-de-chat*. These suggestions could equally be applied to short stories by other French speaking authors with a style similar to that of Philombe.

Cameroon is a bi-cultural and bilingual country whose official languages are English and French and today the country can be said to possess a rich written literary heritage in both languages as evidenced by the impressive number of writers. most of them prolific (I) Translation of literary works of French expression into English and vice-versa could contribute a great deal not only in exposing the country's bi-cultural and bilingual population to each other's literary traditions but also in integrating the works into their respective literary traditions. Works on the early Cameroonian writers of French expression such as Mongo Beti (cf... *Mission Terminee* (1957) and *Le*

roi miracle (1958) and Ferdinand D'Oyono (d. Une vie de boy (1956) and Le vieux negre et La medaille (1967" were translated into English and subsequently became integrated into the literary tradition of the English-speaking part of the country. (2) They were included in the list of literary works of English expression prescribed in the syllabuses of Anglophone Schools.

Unfortunately, translations of Cameroonian works from French into English and vice-versa have remained very insignificant. This may be attributed to the fact that translating a literary work is a very demanding task. In literary translation there is always interaction between literary criticism and translation. The literary translator must possess the ability to carry out literary appreciation or criticism. In addition to having a good knowledge of the setting of the work he must be sensitive to figures of speech such as imagery, metaphors and similes. He must be sensitive to the use of other various stylistic devices and possess the ability to analyse connotation.

The purpose of this paper therefore is to contribute to the translation of Cameroonian literary works of French expression into English by suggesting ways of handling some of the stylistic devices in Rene Philombe's short stories entitled *Histoire queue-de-chat*. (1971).

Apart from the problem of conveying Philombe's message the translator is also faced with the difficulty of rendering the style used by the author to convey his message. Since most of the stylistic devices used by Philombe are typically African, it is important to place the literary conventions used in the stories in their literary context - that of oral African literature. By literary conventions I mean mainly such devices as expressiveness of tone, gesture, facial expression, various uses of pause, parenthesis, repetitions, ideophones, rhetorical questions and the kinds of introductions and conclusions that is satisfying or attractive to the culture in which the stories are set. In short, the art of story-telling in Cameroon in general, and the Beti tribe, in which Philombe's stories are set in particular. Stories are often "acted out" in the sense that to a greater or lesser degree, the speech patterns and gestures of the story's characters are brought alive by the narrator and the action is largely presented through dialogue between various characters portrayed vividly by the story-teller. This may be illustrated by the following passage:

Son visage s'anime de tics de grimaces et de rides indignes d'un homme illustre. Ses lèvres, tantôt s'allongent, tantôt se retrecissent hideusement comme celles d'un gorille bavant de terreur.

_ Qu'y a-t-il, qu'y a-t-il donc Monsieur le Commandant?

_ Il y a que tu dois mieux nous raconter tout ce que tu as vu au pays des

- A plat ventre par terre, et vite! (pp. 25-26)

Like an orator, the story-teller usually makes personal appeals to members of audience and makes sure of their participation; he expects murmurs of support and agreement, muttered rejoinders of his rhetorical questions, laughter when he purposely brings in something amusing or exaggerated.

However, story-telling while having certain dramatic characteristics, is not "drama" in the full sense. While, in a Cameroonian setting and for a Cameroonian public, performance is very important, one may say that in stories there is only one real "actor" involved - the story-teller, who either speaks directly through his own voice (as the narrator) or through the voices of each of the characters he brings to life.

Philombe makes use, at least to some extent, of all the above-mentioned devices, but he makes more abundant use of some of them, particularly personal appeals to his audience, idiophones, repetitions and effective pause.

Personal appeals to the audience, directly involving the listeners in the stories, are an essential feature of story-telling in Cameroon in order to hold the audience's attention. In his short stories, Philombe engages his audience (i.e. reader) by often addressing them directly through the use of the second person plural form of the personal pronoun "vous" or by the use of the imperative. This is illustrated by the following examples, which are only a few of the many found throughout the stories:

Il faut vous dire que dans nos petits coins de brousse, les histoires les plus far-feleues sont monnaie courante (p.IO)

Est-il besoin de vous apprendre que les femmes sont les personnes au monde les plus soucieuses de leur bonheur? (p. 22)

Allez à n'importe quel établissement de santé, vous y rencontrerez des femmes ... (p.22)

Pénétrez dans n'importe quelle "Maison de Dieu ... " (p.22)

Hasardez vos pas sous le cagibi d'un sorcier ... (p.22)

Et puis, dites-moi (p.22)

Obviously, English has similar forms that can be used to translate them. And in certain cases these personal addresses could be translated directly into English. However, such abundant use as Philombe makes of direct addresses is not typical of English story-telling style. It is therefore incumbent on the translator to bring out the "tic" of African story-telling - that of personal address. This means that the translator should retain statistically in the English version all the instances of personal address used in the source text. But, given that abundant use of direct address is not typical of English story-telling style, the translator is immediately faced with the problem of ensuring naturalness of expression in the English version. In order to overcome such a problem the translator should not hesitate to render the forms of direct address by other forms which seem more natural in the context. However, after doing so he must strive to statistically compensate for those instances where the personal address in the original is dropped by adding such an address at other suitable points. Thus the phrase "Il faut vous dire que dans nos petits coins de brousse les histoires les plus far-felues sont monnaie courante ... " (p.18) could be rendered as "It should be noted dual in remote areas of our country there are many weird stories in circulation ... " The personal address left out in this rendering could conveniently be introduced elsewhere in the story. Thus, the sentence "Non ce d'état pas facile de reconnaître Bekamba Adzi, fils unique d' Adzi Manga" (p.17L could be rendered as "To tell you the truth, it was not easy to recognize Bekamba Adzi, Adzi Manga's only son".

Besides engaging the audience in the story-telling by addressing them directly, Philombe further uses ideophones to sustain and heighten their interest. An ideophone is a special type of word which conveys an idea through sound, TQ some extent it resembles an adverb of manner. In certain cases the verb it modifies may be implicit in the structure. For example, in the sentence "Mais, plouf! le courant

emporta au loin Edongo Kounou” (p. 27) the verb modified by the ideophone” plouf! ... (describing the manner in which Edongo Kounou got pulled to the bottom of the river before he eventually got drowned) is omitted. Similarly, the ideophone “Ekye, ekye! (p.17) modifies the omitted but implicit verb “s’exclamer”. In other cases, the verb the ideophone modifies is explicitly stated, for example, the ideophones “Oooh” (cf. Oooh, Monsieur Le Commandant! p.28) and “Haaa ... “(cf. Haaaa! ... Bien malin, ces petits bambins d’aujourd’hui (p, 35) modify the verb “s’écria” and “declare” respectively. However, while ideophones are often considered to act as adverbs of manner in actual use the ideophone seems more like an interjection as the above examples also show.

Ideophones are commonly used by Philombe in his stories to add emotion or vividness to a description or recitation. They are the key to native descriptive oratory. It is difficult to imagine a native (African) speaking in public with intense feeling without using them. They enable the story-teller to express through short simple words, movements, sounds, expressions of fear joy or amazement. In Philombe’s stories, the word “plouf” (p.27) makes us actually hear the sound and see the movements of Edongo Kounou drowning’ the ideophone “gbo-gbo-gbo ... “ (p. 10) makes us hear the outburst of yaps grunts and growls of dogs; the cry “Ekye, ekye” (p, 17) makes us feel the apprehension of fear in the villagers when they are threatened by Bekamba. Through the use of these ideophones and many others, Philombe, like any other skilful African story-teller dramatizes the action. The ideophone in African languages is a rhetorical and emotive tool whose effectiveness cannot be overemphasized. We may even assert without exaggeration that. in vivid and dramatic-passages, to use it is to be graphic and to omit it is to be prosaic.

Ideophones resemble to some extent the literary device known as onomatopoeia. While, therefore a translator could in principle resort to onomatopoeia to translate the African ideophones he would in practice be faced with a major problem given that onomatopoeic formations are not necessarily similar from one language to another. As Stephen Ullmann (1967:86) says “even where there is a genuine similarity of perception, there are also marked differences, due to the fact that the imitation is only partial and that each language has conventionalized it

in its own way”. In Philombe’s stories therefore each ideophone would need to be analysed to discover precisely what impression it was intended to convey before it could be translated. Even then, errors of interpretation could arise given that there is a very subjective element in the analysis of phonetic motivation.

Considering the above problem, an appropriate option to translate Philombe’s ideophones could be for the translator to integrate them directly into the target language text. Such an option could be justified by the fact that Philombe learned French as a second language after his Beti mother-tongue and is describing Beti realities in French. The ideophones in his French text are” foreign bodies” borrowed from his Beti language because most of them describe experiences peculiar to the Beti culture with no direct equivalents in French. The option to integrate the ideophones directly into the target language obliges or compels the translator to ensure that the linguistic context in which they are used (as borrowings) provides enough information for the target readers to guess what they mean. Also at the phonological level, it would not be appropriate to adapt them to the phonology of the English language. In this respect, it is worth noting that in integrating them from the Beti into the French language, Philombe himself did not adapt them to the phonology of the French language.

Repetition is another literary device which Philombe, like most other African story-tellers, uses abundantly for rhetorical effect. Often, a word is repeated at the beginning or at the end of two or more successive clauses or sentences as illustrated by the following passages:

1. Quelques succès? “Oui, il y en eu, puisque des bestioles horribles sortaient des ventres; puisque des rhumatismes hargneux se tassaient dans des articulations; puisque des grossesses impossibles se signalaient; puisque, enfin ... (p.20)

2. Ils invoquaient Maria ils louaient Maria, ils imploraient Maria! ... Pas n’importe quelle Maria! .. (p.21)

To a large extent, the rhetorical effect produced by word repetitions occurring at the beginning, at the end, or both at the beginning and at the end of successive clauses could be maintained in the translation since in most, cases these repetitions could be carried

over into the translation without affecting considerably the natural flow of the English version.

However, Philombe's stories contain yet another type of repetition that is harder to retain in the translation without drawing too much attention to the form and making the English version seem unnatural. This type consists of a full phrase or clause which is repeated, often in immediate succession:

Son arrivée fut saluée ... par des voix qui chuchotaient, qui chuchotaient, qui chuchotaient, respectueusement... (p.23)

Qu'y a-t-il, qu'y a-t-il donc Monsieur le Commandant? (p.26)

In such cases, the repetition could be left out in the translation so as to make the translation read more naturally. Such an option could be justified by the fact that instances of this third type of repetition are very few compared to those of the first two types and the overall rhetorical effect produced by the various repetitions could largely be maintained in the translation by the relatively high proportion of the first two types which can conveniently be transferred into the translation.

A fourth literary device Philombe makes abundant use of is effective pause. Such pauses are introduced into the story by the use of exclamations which automatically interrupt the normal flow of the narrative and by deliberate pausing at various points in the story. Like repetitions, these two types of pause are used by African story-tellers for rhetorical effect. When the oral device of the pause is transferred into written literature, it is marked by the use of the exclamation mark and suspension points.

The first type of pause, that created by the exclamation, is used not only in dialogue but also in the narrative. Exclamations take on several forms: Cries: "Hey!" (p.14); Oaths: "Mille tombes!" (p.14); expressions of self-pity: "Pauvre de moi!"(10p); ironical comments: "Bekamba qui ressuscite après six lunes entières, c'est du 'jamais vu'" et du "jamais oui!" (p.14). as these examples and numerous others in the stories show, the exclamation is used to indicate not only forceful utterances but also strong feelings.

The other type of pause - deliberate pausing, marked in writing by the use of suspension points - creates a different type of rhetorical effect. As mentioned earlier, a typical traditional African story-teller is an orator who addresses his audience directly and expects their direct and active participation in the story-telling; he expects his listeners to laugh when he purposely brings in something amusing or exaggerated; he makes statements and expects murmurs of support and agreement from them. He asks rhetorical questions and expects muttered rejoinders from them, and so on. Thus, a skilful story-teller often interrupts his narrative with pregnant pauses during which the audience is expected to respond suitably. When the author verbalizes old Adzi Manga's thoughts in the rhetorical question "L'appeler ainsi, lui dont tout le pays sait ou sejourne desormais son fils unique..." (p. II) and then pauses, he expects muttered rejoinders from the audience, expressing wonder, surprise or disbelief; when he asks "Quelques succes? Et comment! (p. 20) and pauses, he expects the audience to enumerate the various successes Bekamba has had, before he continues with "oui, il en eut, puisque des bestioles horribles sortaient des ventres;" etc; after the rhetorical question "Quoi? Etre fier dans un poste de Gendarmerie. " (p. 24), he pauses and expects the audience, who are familiar with the Gendarmerie, to shout "no" or to shake their heads in negative response, before he again cuts in with "Eh oui, pourquoi pas, surtout quand on porte le titre tabou de "revenant?" (P. 24).

These examples illustrate only a few of the very many ways the author makes use of pauses in his stories. Because exclamation marks and suspension points come at the end of a clause or sentence, most (if not all) of them could be easily and conveniently transferred into the translation without any need to modify the structure of the clause or sentence. But if the pauses in the translation are to have the same effect on the target readers as on the source text readers, the former must try to figure out for themselves the type of response the story-teller (the author) expects from his audience each time he introduces a pause.

From the above analysis and suggestions we could say that literary translation may be viewed as a type of "reading" in which the translator performs a two phase operation. In the first phase of the

operation, he reads the text and comprehends it. Such comprehension is realised in the form of criticism, commentary or paraphrase. In the second phase, he produces in the target language a text embodying his reading.

Notes

1. Today, Cameroon totals more than 200 writers of both English and French expression whose literary works covering all literary genres have been published cf. Arnaud Michel, *Notre Libraire*: 1990.

2. *Mission terminée* and *Le roi miracle* were translated by Peter Green under the titles *Mission to Kala* (1958) and *King Lazarus* (1960) respectively. *Une vie de boy* and *Le vieux negre et la medaille* were translated by John Reed under the titles *Houseboy* (1966) and *The Old Man and the Medal* (1967) respectively.

3. It is interesting to note to what extent the author makes use of these two types of pause. Every other page of the stories contains several exclamation marks and/or suspension points.

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Recommendations of the Conference on Cameroon Literature

At the end of the Conference, the participants made the following recommendations: Writers, teachers and scholars of Cameroonian literature from the Universities of Yaoundé I, Douala, Ngaoundere, and Buea, meeting at the University of Buea from 1-3 December 1994, for the 2nd Conference on Cameroonian Literature,

-Considering the interest and primordial importance of literature as a factor for the emergence and consolidation of a national conscience;

- Considering the primary role in the development of a qualitative national cultural policy;

- Considering the interest of everyone for a literary and artistic education which meets the legitimate ambitions of the Cameroonian people;

- Considering the immense success of the Conference organized by the University of Buea, success characterized by the participation of all the Universities of Cameroon as well as the many contributions of a high scientific nature:

1. Thank Dr. Dorothy L. Njeuma, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Buea for authorizing the holding of the Conference at the University of Buea and for having provided all the logistics to ascertain its total success.

2. Congratulate the Conference organizers for the devotedness and commitment with which they ran the Conference thereby contributing to its marvellous success;

Recommend

1. The creation of an Association of Cameroon Literary Studies.

2. The creation at the University of Buea of a documentation centre for Cameroon literature as well as a Centre for the translation of Cameroonian Literature, taking advantage of the presence at the University of Buea of the Advanced School of Translators and Interpreters (ASTI);

3. The creation within all of Cameroon's Universities of professorial chairs in Cameroon Literature;

4. Media publicity of Cameroonian literary and artistic production;

5. The revision of all school programmes to give a privileged place to Cameroonian writing;

6. The creation of University Publishing Houses within each University;

7. The holding, once every two years in one of Cameroon's Universities, of a Conference on Cameroon Literature.

Done in Buea, 3 December 1994

Recommandations du Colloque sur la Littérature Camerounaise

A la fin du colloque, les participants ont fait les recommandations suivantes:

Réunis du 1 au 3 Décembre 1994 à Buea dans le cadre du Deuxième Colloque sur la littérature camerounaise, les écrivains, enseignants et spécialistes de littérature camerounaise venus des Universités de Yaoundé I, Douala, Ngaoundéré et Buea, -considérant l'intérêt et l'importance majeurs de la littérature comme facteur d'émergence de consolidation d'une conscience nationale;

- considérant le rôle primordial de l'Université dans la mise en œuvre d'une politique culturelle de qualité;

-considérant l'intérêt de tous pour une éducation littéraire et artistique à la hauteur des ambitions légitimes du peuple camerounais,

-considérant enfin le succès reconnu du Colloque organisé à l'Université de Buea, succès marqué par une participation massive de l'ensemble du système de l'Enseignement Supérieur du Cameroun ainsi que par de nombreuses contributions de qualité scientifique certaine,

1. Remercient Mme Dorothy Njeuma, Vice-Chancellor de l'Université de Buea d'avoir bien voulu autoriser la tenue du Deuxième Colloque sur la littérature camerounaise, et de lui avoir aménagé toutes les facilités nécessaires à son plein succès;

2. Félicitent les organisateurs du dit Colloque pour le dévouement et l'ardeur au travail dont ils ont fait montre en la circonstance ainsi que l'excellente conduite de toutes les activités.

Recommandent

1. La création d'une Association des études littéraires camerounaises (A.E.L.C.);

2. La création à l'Université de Buea d'un Centre de documentation et de traduction des œuvres, compte tenu des facilités offertes par l'Ecole Supérieure des Traducteurs et Interprètes (ASTI);

3. La création dans toutes les Universités du Cameroun d'une chaire de littérature camerounaise;

4. La médiatisation conséquente de la production littéraire et artistique camerounaise;

5. La révision des programmes scolaires afin d'accorder la priorité à la littérature camerounaise dans notre système éducatif;

6. La création de Presses Universitaires directement rattachées à chaque université;

7. La tenue une fois tous les deux ans d'un Colloque sur la littérature camerounaise dans une université du Cameroun.

Fait à Buea, le 3 décembre 1994.

This landmark volume brings together a very rich harvest of forty critical essays on Cameroon literature by Cameroon literary scholars. The book is the result of the Second Conference on Cameroon Literature which took place at the University of Buea in 1994. The Buea conference was motivated by a determination to look at Cameroon literature straight into its face and criticize it using literary criteria of the strictest kind. Gone were the times when the criticism was complacent because it was believed that a nascent literature could easily be stifled by application of rather strict canons of literary criticism. Both writers and critics had a lot to say. Subjects dealt with ranged from general topics on literature, survival and national identity, through specialized articles on prose, poetry, drama, translation, language, folklore, children's literature, Journalism and politics. It is the hope of the volume editors that the publication of these papers will instigate the kind of actions that were recommended and that the prolific nature of Cameroon literature will equally give rise to a prolific and robust criticism.



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