

Power Dialectics and Resistance in The Postcolony: A Reading of the Poetry of Emmanuel Fru Doh and Bill F Ndi

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Abstract

This paper discusses the complex nuances of power in the postcolony. By focusing on the poetry of two Anglophone Cameroon poets: Emmanuel Fru Doh, *Wading the Tide* (2009), *Not Yet Damascus* (2007), Bill F Ndi's *Bleeding Red: Cameroon in Black and White* (2010) and *K'cracy, Trees in the Storm and Other Poems* (2008), the paper examines how political power manifests itself in ways that the post colonial scholar, Achille Mbembe has described as "banal." That way, the paper situates itself within the context of postcolonial studies of state repression and resistance.

Keywords: Power, postcolony, repression, resistance.

Introduction

This paper studies the poetry of two leading Anglophone Cameroonian poets, Emmanuel Fru Doh and Bill F. Ndi by focusing on the "banality of power in the postcolony" (Mbembe: 102). The paper draws from Marxist as well as postcolonial ideas of how political power is gotten, how and who maintains it and for whom. Achille Mbembe, the reputed postcolonial scholar, has theorized extensively on power dynamics in the postcolony using Cameroon as his source of reference. Aware that Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin and Gareth Griffiths have submitted that "post colonialism is a continuous moment of resistance and reconstruction" (2), the paper draws from Mbembe's theoretical insights especially when he submits that understanding the dynamics of political power means going beyond traditional notions of resistance. To him, one must understand, also, that the postcolonial power machinery seeks always to legitimize itself through a formulation of ideas that it builds into the collective psyche of the governed. Mbembe writes that in order to prevent any challenge, "the champions of state power invent entire constellations of ideas; they adopt a distinct set of cultural repertoires and powerfully evocative concepts; but they also resort, if necessary, to the

systematic application of pain (103). In the light of the quotation above, this paper examines how state power formulates the “constellation of ideas” that Mbembe names above, how these ideas are normalized through institutions of state, failure which there is an overt “systematic application of pain” in order to bring the ruled to subordination. It is this application of pain at best, or death at worst that Mbembe describes elsewhere as “necropolitics”. The body as a site of pain and death then becomes one of the systematic strategies in the exercise of power.

The Marxist critic, George Thompson, in his book *Marxism and Poetry* argues that “the poet speaks not for himself but for his fellow men, his cry is their cry which only he can utter...but if he is to speak for them, he must suffer with them, rejoice with them, work with them, fight with them” (65). The two poets, Doh and Ndi, have elected, through the medium of their poetry and from the backdrop of their Anglophone Cameroonian consciousness, to register the dilemmas, tribulations, hopes and fears of their people and of the broader Cameroonian nation. Theirs is a representation, through the power of imagery, how voices of dissent either gain currency or are diminished by state political power machinery.

In espousing the ideas of vulgar Marxist criticism, the Marxist critic, Terry Eagleton submits that

“...even those only slightly acquainted with Marxist criticism know that it calls on the writer to commit his art to the cause of the proletariat” (35). Doh and Ndi’s poetry issue first, from the perspective of the “common man” and even more so from the perspective of Anglophone Cameroon minority question with the perennial issues of assimilation and marginalization. Of this perspective, Fru Doh contends that writers of Anglophone orientation are a “...patriotic minority trying to set right a hypocritical system. (They write) literature which is largely protest and iconoclastic in nature” (81). From the backdrop of these views, one shall argue in this chapter that Doh and Ndi are extremely sensitive to the nature of state power, how it is exercised and legitimized, but also how voices, discordant to state political music,(in what constitutes resistance) are systematically brought to submission using what Charles Teke has described as “mechanisms of state disability...” (1).The analysis shall be done in two thematic clusters, namely: *State Power Machinery and the notion of Subordination*, “*Necropolitics*” as a *Parameter of Power*.

State Power Machinery and the notion of Subordination

A nation, as a political entity, seeks always to ensure its survival. Power, in all its ramifications, then, becomes central to this survival. How this power is gotten, how it is maintained, whether it becomes a source of obsession for those who wield it, often largely affects the lives of those less

powerful than those who exercise it. In understanding the nature of power in postcolonial settings, Mbembe has provided profound theoretical insights of its trimmings and trappings. He contextualizes the postcolony as those political entities just emerging from the colonial encounter where violence, the hangover of the decolonization struggle, has remained internalized in the minds of the people. He writes that

The postcolony is characterized by a distinctive style of political improvisation, by a tendency to excess and lack of proportion, as well as by distinctive ways identities are multiplied, transformed, and put into circulation. But the postcolony is also made up of a series of corporate institutions and a political machinery that, once in place, constitute a distinctive regime of violence. (103)

From this quotation, one can observe that the postcolonial state, with its “political machinery”, does everything within its power to subvert voices of dissent in order to ensure permanent subordination from the governed. This is where resistance sets in. In the face of economic, political and social repression, the citizens are bound to register their discontent. The poet, for the most part, soon finds himself summoned to articulate this discontent on behalf of the people. The poetry of Doh and Ndi in many ways reflects this dissatisfaction with the “power machinery” of post-independent Cameroon.

Doh’s *Wading the Tide* is replete with images of a (dis)functional state where images of impunity, looting and generalized eating reign supreme. As Bate Besong observed, the blame for this picture must be placed on the ruling class which has rendered the nation “invincibly tactless” (33). The poems in *Uprising* are particularly radical and partisan. The poem with the cryptic title “Kwashiorkor Graveyard” strikes an image of physical exhaustion, of complete dysfunction and breakdown. How come it is a graveyard that has kwashiorkor and not a child, one may ask? Has the otherwise beautiful landscape been reduced to a vast cemetery? Who should be held to account for this paralysis? These are the questions that spring to mind immediately one encounters such a title. Doh writes:

“Kwashiorkor Graveyard”

Thou graveyard of my pre-natal chair,

Thou preserver of my navel

Gifted in all to make me happy:

Fertility, fruitfulness.

Yet today thou art accused-

A kwashiorkor patient-lacking

In vital vitamins: minerals, oils/agricultural products/foreign exchange

Treason! It is the tapper who squanders the wine and says

bad weather

Affected the raffia palms; he drinks the oil and says the kernel were barren

Grey beards beginning to lie? (*Wading the Tide*:5)

The title of the poem is cryptic. The poet writes of his country as though it were a kwashiorkor patient. He laments that this beautiful country of his bears the metaphorical semblance of an abandoned graveyard. In the first four lines of the poem, he endears the country as “the preserver of my navel/gifted to make me happy.” Unfortunately for him, the highly endowed country, rich in “minerals, oils/agricultural products” has been sapped and rendered barren. This is “treason.” The “grey beards” who wield economic power have failed to show accountability. They are the metaphorical bad tappers who “squander the wine and say bad weather/affected the raffia palms. (ibid)”

The poet banks on his knowledge and mastery of local imagery to weave a threnody for his country. His country, a land of fertility and fruitfulness, has been reduced to the image of a kwashiorkor patient. The state is at the mercy of bad tappers who squander the wine and complain of bad weather. The poet, while expressing this discontent, is in many ways voicing the collective dissatisfaction of a vast majority of the people. In denouncing this economic/political injustice for instance, the reputed Cameroonian novelist, Mongo Beti, in a speech delivered to the Association of Nigerian Authors in 1991 stated that “Anglophones are victims of Biya. Do you know that it is thanks to the recent publication of the confidential report by the World Bank that Cameroonians now have a rough idea of the amount of petroleum extracted from their soil?...the dictatorship forces people to keep quiet” (21). The picture of lavish life style as opposed to the “kwashiorkor” of the country is at the very center of the exercise of power in the postcolony. Numerous ceremonies where there is lavish display of pomp institutionalizes the “fetish” nature of power and makes the poor masses see this as “natural” even as their children go without food and basic medical care. This is the view Mbembe holds when he asserts that “... the actions that signal sovereignty must be carried through with style and an adequately harsh firmness, otherwise the splendor of those exercising the trappings of authority is dimmed” (110).

The poem evokes deep seated economic disparity and the resultant anger characteristic of power relations in post-colonial Cameroon. The poverty stricken base looks on to those who hold the reins of power as demi-gods and must not complain of their poverty out of a feeling of fear. The leadership has turned itself into something that must be worshipped. In a view corroborated by Mbembe in *On the Postcolony*, there is a display of “fetish power” in the postcolony. That is to say, there is a belief that those in the exercise of state power are somehow powered by totemic strength and other forces of the supernatural realm. Hence they inspire an aura of fear. Mbembe’s

view is echoed when he writes that "...a fetish is, among other things, an object that aspires to be made sacred. In the postcolony, fetishistic power is invested... in the person of the autocrat" (112). Picking up this party image, in *Not Yet Damascus*, notably in the section titled *Persecution* Doh writes about a nation he describes is in lethargy. He writes:

"Their Turn to Party"

(For Linus T. Asong)

After raising our hopes/with Mosaic strides
 Defying bullets, cannons and all/trekking ghost town streets
 Even pointing out the Promised Land /what is this lethargy?

 Who are we now to trust?/ who indeed God's messenger?
 Pharaoh's magician at work/Moses and Aaron at War
 And God's people marooned/what is this lethargy? (11-12)

The poet laments the excesses of a system that thrives on intimidation, torture and subjugation. The display of affluence is not the only weapon that psychologically subjugates the masses. The speaker, in a somber tone, which speaks of defiance and resistance, speaks of the endurance of torture experienced by many risking their lives, dreaming for a politically inclusive society. In defying the "bullets and cannons" (line 3), the poet, like the people, hoped for a promised land and is sad that this only turned into lethargy. The picture of lethargy is woven into a repetitive refrain and rhetorical question. Noted for what Linus T. Asong has described as "deceptive simplicity (xi)" of semantic and syntactic closeness to the ordeal of the "common man", Doh's poetry periscopes the political trajectory of his Anglophone Cameroon constituency in particular and the Cameroonian experiment in nationhood in general. The biblical image of the Promised Land is turned, paradoxically, to one of Babylonian captivity. However, such captivity is contrasted by "echoes of laughter from Mvomeka'a" (line 35). The poem, one may argue, depicts a picture of frustration on one portion of the country as opposed to the other, symbolically represented by Mvomeka'a, the native land of the seating Head of State of Cameroon, Paul Biya. On the one hand, there is laughter, on the other there is a "sullenness of a betrayed proletariat (line 36)". The Lion and Tiger images, one may argue, are a representation of the major political acrimony registered by the major players, Paul Biya and Ni John Fru Ndi, since the beginning of political pluralism in the early 90s in Cameroon. In his article "Interrogating the Union: Anglophone Cameroon Poetry in the Postcolonial Matrix", the ace Anglophone Cameroon writer and scholar, John Nkemngong Nkengasong examines the trajectory of Cameroon's socio-historical and political power. He writes that

Inspired by the urge to check dictatorship and the disintegration of national life that began with Biya's accession to power, and also wishing to show

Anglophones' abhorrence for Francophone governance, John Fru Ndi, one of the most notable Anglophone heroes in recent times, was the first to break through the hegemony by forcefully launching an opposition party called the Social Democratic Front (SDF) in 1990. Fru Ndi's daring move, as Konings and Nyamnjoh explain, was outrageously condemned by the Biya regime, which reacted with torture, shootings and incarceration, leading to the death of six young Anglophones. (214)

His article studies the poetry of Bate Besong and John Ngong Kum. The quotation above depicts what Doh writes above as the Lion and Tiger in struggle. Ni John Fru Ndi's support drew from grassroots charisma, complete in his vociferous attack of the image of eating, monolithic power in contrast with the collective pain of the people. This is a similar image that Ndi picks up in his poetry. His collection, *K'racy, Trees in the Storm and Other Poems* is remarkable for its versatile nature in that the poet wrestles with issues that one can describe, by sharing the opinion of Charles Teke, when he asserts that Anglophone Cameroon literature "...emanates from a postcolonial space and engages a wide range of issues with regard national, continental and global awareness" (128). However, the poet also focuses on the parameters of power and the resultant images of resistance to subordination. In the poem "Assassinating Democracy (Insurgence)", Ndi evokes the image of pain and suffering in the people's quest for democratic space. He writes:

Place: Bamenda

Day: 26th of May

Year: 1990

And six of ours/Went down!

And for the convictions/and gunned down

By the forces of regression/I know not what official history says

of them

But, May, the month we screamed out/ "Mayday"

In quest for liberation from the chains of tyranny

Deserves that attention worthy of any victory. (79)

The poem recounts the painful execution of fellow citizens by the powers that be simply because they held views contrary to the nation's central power command. The speaker gives details of place, historical time and the reason for the murder of these six young men. Those responsible for their murder are labeled as the "forces of regression" (line 9) Their crime: "the quest for liberation from the chains of tyranny" (line 13). But the official account of their death is a complete obliteration of historical reality. The poem depicts the disproportionate use of force against the harmless people. By giving a specific date, location and overall atmosphere, the poet evokes the period in the early 90s when, in Bamenda, the people stood up against monolithic power. Though inspired by that period, one finds similar occurrences playing

out all too often as the people continue to aspire for greater socio-political and economic freedom. The quotation from Nkengasong's article above clearly adumbrates this view. The poet gives the painful picture of "six of ours...gunned down", a reference to the six young men killed during the launching of the SDF in May, 1990. This unfortunate scenario has formed the subject matter of many Anglophone Cameroon poets. Poems like "Ntarikon Massacre (After Blood River Day)" by Bate Besong, Nkengasong's "On the Bamenda Massacre", Emmanuel Fru Doh's "Bamenda Chop Fire" all depict this struggle.

"Necropolitics" as a Parameter of Power

In his extensive study of the exercise of power, Mbembe argues that the systematic application of pain on the body is the cornerstone of power dynamics in the postcolony. The "fetish," aided by his "*commandement* and of its agents—the party, policemen, soldiers, administrators and officials, middlemen, and dealers" (111), often have the power to choose who lives and who dies, who to exact pain and who to sooth. This is often carried through so publicly in a way as to instill fear, build up a constellation of ideas to legitimize itself in the minds of the ruled. The postcolony, he further asserts, is characterized by "the economy of death." (114). The concept of "necropolitics", Mbembe's coinage, in which he defined politics as "the work of death" (12) is an extension of "biopolitics", a concept popularized by Michel Foucault. Of this politics of pain and death, Mbembe writes that the postcolony is characterized by

...an undisciplined army of dishonest police, informers, identity-card inspectors, gendarmes, men in khaki, and impoverished soldiery coerce the common people blatantly, seizing what they have no right to seize. They practice raw violence. Strictly speaking, it is no longer a question of forcing bodies to be docile or of maintaining order. It is not simply a matter of whippings and beatings, which, as discussed, are the lot of ordinary people in the prisons, police stations, and other houses of detention. There is, rather, simply the administration of a summary, barren violence for purposes of appropriation and extortion.... (124)

The picture painted here is as dire as it is gruesome. It resonates the Althusserian Marxist concept that agents of state power like Police, Party members and courts, are squarely on the side of the oppressor. The power of the state seeks to tire out bodies, to coerce and very often to kill. Charles Teke's article "Metaphors of State Disability in Anglophone Cameroon Literature: Assessing the Body in Bate Besong's *Beasts of No Nation* and John Nkengasong's *Black Caps Red Feathers*" expounds this concept in his study of the radical dramaturgy of two of Anglophone Cameroon's ace writers and critics, Besong and Nkengasong. From the outset of his article, he submits

that “the body... is a representational metaphor; it is a site of exaction/violence (179). Some of the poems in the collections depict the politics of the body. In “The Bloody Caps” for instance, Fru Doh writes:

The Bloody Caps are a shame/bastardized children of a green
And blue-black parentage/To help their father, a paramilitary gang
They claim to be/yet they distort their mother’s image
Whenever like dogs they are/unleashed to raid, rape and plunder
A disgrace they are, /effeminate bulls bellowing with
Excitement as they spew bullets/at our unarmed fathers, mothers
Sons and daughters. Security! (*Wading the Tide*: 8)

The speaker portrays men in uniform who, for the most part, are trigger happy. The blood metaphor captioned in the title of the poem, “The Bloody Caps”, reveals much about this group of law enforcement, the gendarmes, whose caps incidentally are red. They treat fellow citizens as though it were a captured people. Their concept of policing is to subject citizens to constant beatings and torture. No doubt then, the poet presents them as a “paramilitary gang”, whose job performance is a total disgrace to the nation because it distorts the “mother’s image”, the mother being symbol of the country. The poem, one will argue, depicts a mismatch between the ostensible professional calling of the men in uniform and what often obtains. The “bloody caps” is a symbol of the agents of the *commandement*, namely, the forces of law and order. They are compared to dogs that blunder and plunder. They rape and “spew bullets at unarmed fathers, mothers and daughters” in the name of security. Paradoxically they fail in the duties they are often legitimately invited to perform as the poet further remarks: “their answers to citizens in distress:/we are only two at the station/we can’t come; there is no vehicle here...wasted taxes” (ibid). The poet adopts a satirical tone in his denunciation of brutality and thereby echoes the themes of oppression and exploitation. It is this horrible pain inflicted on the citizens through rape and spewing of bullets that one considers the body as an object, a subhuman, known in postcolonial realities as the “thingfication of the subject”. Rape often leaves permanent psychological damage on the victim; consequently, it will be a miscarriage of social justice for such crimes to go unpunished. Yet it is extremely rare, in the context of postcolonial Cameroon, that alleged rape crimes perpetuated by Security Forces have been heard. Of course, this is a weapon of biopower and biopolitical control, intimidation and command.

In what Teke further enumerates as “...Strategies of Implementing Authoritarian Rule”, the scholar argues that one of the ways employed is “Confinement in claustrophobic space smaller than the body–incarceration and stifling conditions” (187). One can get graphic images of body destruction and death in Doh’s poem “And they Killed Che-Ngwa Ghandi”. The poem

recounts, in very horrific terms, the kidnap, brutal torture and subsequent death of a fellow citizen. The only crime the citizen is thought to have committed is to have raised his voice against incivility of the forces of law and order. Torture mechanisms include physical beating, psychological attacks with the intention of maiming or killing. That is what obtains in the poem. The poet writes:

At best a smile
And a soft spoken word of greeting
Was all he could give to friends/and foe alike

Politics was not his game/but church going
Then suddenly his office is raided/the State of Emergency-
An Enemy had named Ghandi one of the “vandals”/ But this
is a lie

And she the whore knew she had lied

Without questions, like a common criminal/Ghandi was
whisked
Off in handcuffs up the station/we hear they hung him upside
down
We hear they beat him upside down/we hear with strange
instruments they tore
Out his toe-nails with chunks of flesh/to make him confess a
lie
We hear they beat the soles of his feet/we hear they urinated
on his wounds
We hear they refused him medical attention.../and Ghandi
died. (27)

In the poem, the speaker mourns the fate of a fellow citizen, Che-Ngwa Ghandi, a victim of the repressive and authoritarian rule. The victim is described as a soft spoken person, who, even in the politically sensitive climate of his day, notably in 1990 Cameroon, was not much of a man of politics but became a victim. The speaker underscores this fact when he remarks that “politics was not his game/but church going” (line 6). Unfortunately, someone names Ghandi as a dissident voice, a “vandal”, and the agents of state power give him not much of a chance to defend himself. He is whisked off and subjected to the most degrading and brutal treatment imaginable.

In the second stanza of the poem, one gets the impression that politics is a “game,” often a dirty one. It is a game Che-Ngwa Ghandi did not get involved in, yet he was tipped as a vandal during the “State of Emergency” and whisked off. The image of torture comes home in the third stanza in particularly very graphic terms. Chunks of flesh are extracted from the victim,

he is beaten “upside down” and his torturers, agents of state power, urinate on his wounds. Their victim finally dies. The picture is as gruesome as it is harrowing. One must observe that the victim in the poem above is just an exemplification of an institutionalized network of torture, oppression and the culture of death. He is more than an individual. His case can be associated to maiming and killing that became routine during the struggle for political pluralism in the early the 90s in Cameroon in which play out each time the people register their discontent against social injustice. This brutality underscores Mbembe’s point in the section of his book, *On the Postcolony*, titled “Out of this World” in which he writes that

Where power has a carnivorous aspect, killing a human being and killing an animal proceed from the same logic. Like that of the animal whose throat is cut, the death inflicted on a human being is perceived as embracing nothing. It is a death of a purely negative essence without substance, the emptying of a hollow, unsubstantial object that, falling back into loss, “finds itself only as a lost soul. (200)

In the scholar’s view, power is considered “carnivorous.” Human life becomes worthless; consequently killing a human being is as similar to killing an animal. This is the unfortunate experience of Ghandi like many innocent citizens, victims of state repression.

The State of Emergency that the poet raises was imposed on the then North West Province of Cameroon after the Presidential elections of 1992 which was alleged to have been won by Ni John Fru Ndi of the Social Democratic Front. Nkengasong has submitted that in the politically turbulent 90s, “Dictatorship and execution were common...especially with the regime’s attempt to crush the Social Democratic Front, which was gaining ground across the country” (58). The calculated silencing of voices of dissent, Teke Charles has observed, “is a continuation of what earlier systems like slavery and colonialism instituted” (187). However, the difference is that “Colonialism was, to a large extent, a way of disciplining bodies with the aim of making better use of them, docility and productivity going hand in hand. In the postcolony, however, the primary objective of the right to punish (as represented by the execution of the condemned) is not to create useful individuals or increase their productive efficiency” (113). Seen in this light, the terrible pain the victim is subjected to in the poem above is not meant to make him a better (productive) individual. His body, which is subsequently thrown on the garbage heap, establishes a chilling memory on the governed and in the chain of command that forms the postcolonial exercise of power.

The “Claustrophobic existence” that Teke highlights above is much a physical aspect as it is a psychological one. For once the mind-set is psychologically maimed, the governed is automatically coerced to fear the invisible presence of the leader (autocrat) whose wishes his agents carry out

daily. The title of Doh's poem "Claustrophobia" speaks for itself. In the poem, the speaker finds himself a victim everywhere he turns. He writes:

Whenever I am in this vast world/I feel pressure encroaching
Violating my right to life/one of God's own creations
The persecution, rock solid, palpable/even as hypocrites smile with

me

From their lips instead of their belly
At one place I am Anglo-minority/And so I do not belong
And could very well go elsewhere/My responsibility it is to survive
Amidst the chosen ones/of the malnourished Francophonie assembly

Pray Lord, led Heaven be different/Bigger and free, free of race, colour and gender. (23)

The poem is about the ordeal of an individual as it is about the people of his homeland. The title suggests a feeling of angst as the speaker feels the yoke of socio-political and economic existence all combining to crush him. Hypocrites are all around him in strange political masks and garments. They smile with him from their lips instead of their "belly." At once, he has to bear the burden even of his area of origin as he remarks: "At one place I am Anglo-minority...so I do not belong." He can only hope that when his earthly existence is over, he may find rest. Sounds like resigning himself to his fate, but beneath this is an iron clad determination to change the prevailing mindset. In the poem one finds an existentialist threat to the very essence of life. The speaker feels "persecuted" wherever he turns. His persecution is borne of his ethnic origin, gender and race. He can only submit himself to the ordeal of waiting for his earthly existence to get through so that he may find peace in heaven, "Lord, let Heaven be different," he prays. It is perhaps from this backdrop that Ngeh Andrew takes the unique experience of the speaker to a generalized picture of the human condition in postcolonial Cameroon. He argues that the relationship between the ruler and ruled could best be described in the paradox of claustrophobia and agoraphobia. From the outset of his article, the scholar submits that

...the leaders used the political powers legitimized by the masses to amass wealth for themselves, oppress and subjugate the people. As a consequence, the masses are excluded from the socio-political and economic affairs of the respective nations that they govern...The leaders on the other hand who have indulged in socio-political misdemeanors like election rigging, muzzling and stifling of their opponents, corruption and embezzlement, the elimination of those with dissenting voices and the siphoning of state's funds are also afraid to go out. (83)

The social injustices raised in Ngeh's article are legion. There is a picture of rigging, stifling opponents, corruption, embezzlement and

elimination of voices of dissent (as discussed earlier in the poem, “And they Killed Che-Ngwa Ghandi”). However, apart from the fear to go out that Ngeh raises in his article, one may bring an alternative charge to bear on the leader(s) as to why they don’t seem to be in the constant presence of the masses, namely, the establishment of personality cult and thereby instill a constant feeling of fear in the masses. Whenever the leader(s) does/do appear, his/their cheer presence paradoxically creates applause at times from the same people who are being exploited. This applause is caused by the sense of fear and wonder with which the leader is held. Herein lies the paradox in the exercise of state power. Espousing this paradox, Mbembe, making extensive reference to the Cameroonian situation, writes about an occasion where the seating President of the Republic, Paul Biya, returned from a trip abroad and the then Mayor of Yaoundé, Emah Basil, invited the entire public to come applaud the President. The scholar writes:

It is part of the permanent public demonstration of grandeur that Cameroon shares with the other postcolonies of sub-Saharan Africa. In this sense, the return of Paul Biya was in no way unusual. The accompanying staging marked simply one instance of the dramatization of a specific mode of domination that dates back to the 1960s. This mode has had time to routinize itself, to invent its own rules—the aim, on each occasion, being to use an event in itself banal and anodine, in light of how such events are seen by the rest of the world, and turn it into a source of prestige, illusion and magic. (116-117)

In the light of this observation, one can submit that there are systematic strategies in the exercise of power that end up creating the same effect-psychological and physical claustrophobia. In this case the appearance of the President is meant to create “illusion and magic”, the citizens are marveled by his sheer presence.

One remarkable aspect that the poet raises in the poem above is the Anglophone minority question which forms his preoccupation in the second stanza when he remarks that “At one place I am Anglo-minority/And so I do not belong/I could as well go elsewhere.” This question has constituted a major preoccupation in Anglophone Cameroon literary circles. Many Anglophone creative writers, historians and sociologists have argued that the Anglophones’ complaints of marginalization, authoritarian command and assimilation are self evident and indeed the body of creative writing on this subject has been substantial. Ngeh and Jick, have asserted that Anglophone writers are essentially writing in an “unjust setting”, a consequence of the historical trend and the institutionalization of strategies that have provoked protests and resistance by Anglophone Cameroonians. For example, the concept of regional integration has been challenged as an attempt at assimilation, penetration and command. It is perhaps on such basis that Besong once wrote that

The foundation on which the Cameroonian Federation was built in 1961, was a power arrangement contoured to deal with a sociologically complex polity as presented in our multi ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversities. It was a type of national integration that recognized the two separate but equal parts and the central government in Amadou Ahidjo's Yaoundé as mutually coordinate and not as subordinate one to the other. (1/6)

Anglophone writers have challenged, as evident above, the centralization of power and command and have articulated this in the poetic medium. In the poem above, the speaker makes mention of him "going elsewhere" on account of his Anglophoiness. One may recall that for the numerous agitations Anglophones have registered against the system, (Often asking for a return to the 1961 Federal Structure), they have been met with iron resolve and at times arrogance. For example, one time mayor of Yaoundé, Emah Basil, is noted to have referred to Anglophones as enemies in the house while the Sultan of the Bamoums, Sultan Mbombo Njoya asked Anglophones to go elsewhere if they don't like it here. It is from the backdrop of this view that Besong once observed that Anglophone writers are "...writing within a society that does not even attempt to mask the mechanisms of occupation and social injustice, and where democracy has become a circus"(10). The statement above affirms Ngeh's view that writers of Anglophone extraction are essentially angry. Ndi affirms this view when he examines the problem of oppression and assimilation from an historical perspective. In his poem "Forced-Lock", one gets a perspective that is akin to Victor Epie Ngome's dramatic piece, *What God Has Put Asunder*. The poet writes that

It was nineteen sixty/Years have since passed near fifty
When we got married/with joy we're carried
Before the celebrant United Nations/they swore to witness us on all occasions

And then you cheated on me/ Before these torn nations that be
When at the door knocks divorce/Arm Merchants desiring force
Behind you run/Supplying arms

Lets recall the facts with dates/starting with card games as baits
On 11 February you deceived me/ In 72 May 20 you tricked me
Today, I am the enemy/whereas you are slimy
Wanting to tear down our home/You shall always hear me groan
Given that my request is not unreasonable/I am not an object so undesirable. (47)

The marriage metaphor is predominant in the poem. However, the marriage is not sanctioned on equal terms. One partner feels jilted and slighted. The jilted partner of the so-called marriage is no longer treated as a subject but

as object evident when the speaker observes that “I am not an object so undesirable”. The poet gets down to dates and cites the 11th of February, (1961) and 20th May of 1972 as the days she was “tricked” in the union. As George Nyamndi has observed “since the death of the Federal Republic in 1972, Anglophone Cameroonians have become unsure and insecure, restive and justifiably irritable...it is not a social problem between one Cameroonian and his next door neighbor, rather, it is a matter of governance, of political games playing (x)”. The first President of Cameroon, President Ahmadou Ahidjo referred to 20th May 1972, the day the United Republic was born, as a Glorious Revolution. Since that date however, the Anglophone community has registered aspects of assimilation, marginalization and exploitation as Piet Konings and Francis Nyamnjoh observe in their article “The Anglophone Problem in Cameroon”:

The political agenda in Cameroon has become increasingly dominated by what is known as the Anglophone problem', which poses a major challenge to the efforts of the post-colonial state to forge national unity and integration, and has led to the reintroduction of forceful arguments and actions in favour of 'federalism' or even secession. (207)

The scholars examine the genealogy of the problem, its manifestations, international/diplomatic implications and Government response to the issues raised. As evident above, the more moderate voices to the resistance was/is registered in the form of demands for a return to the Federal system as was the case at Re-unification in 1961. However, “...the persistent refusal of the Government headed by President Paul Biya to discuss any related constitutional reforms forced some to adopt a secessionist stand” (ibid, 207). One would note that the political system in place has often denied the existence of the problem, arguing rather, as it were, that whatever socio-economic challenges are faced in the English speaking section are equally evident in other parts of the country. This has in turn generated outrage and resistance against the centralized authoritarian system. As observed earlier, and with reference to Mbembe’s scholarly convictions, the postcolonial nature of power does not solely anchor itself on physical intimidation of dissent. It also relies on the “formation of a constellation of ideas” (106). These ideas are worked into the mindset of the citizens in ways that one can only consider as official propaganda. With its ownership of some of the major avenues of the dissemination of information such as the media, state ideology is used to water down dissent and “normalize” its strategies of perpetuating power. While this finds resignation in some quarters, it courts violence in others.

Conclusion

This paper has examined how the poets, Doh and Ndi, have given treatment to the mechanisms of power in the postcolony. Achille Mbembe’s

intriguing book *On the Postcolony* with its insightful analysis of power dynamics in the postcolony provides an understanding of its complex nuances. Their poetry is a bold testament against institutionalized injustice, repression and marginalization.

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