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## Anglophone Cameroon literature 1959–90: A brief overview

### Anglophone Cameroon literature 1959–90: A brief overview

This article examines modern Anglophone Cameroon literature from 1959 to 1990. The article argues that like most literature emanating from the continent a proper understanding of Anglophone Cameroon literature must be predicated on an analysis of its specific socio-historical determinants. A careful analysis of the corpus of Anglophone Cameroon literature from its inception to the 1990s reveals two broad phases. The first phase covers the period from 1959 to about 1984. In the Republic of Cameroon, this period begins shortly before ‘the end’ of colonialism to the rise of Paul Biya as the second president of Cameroon. The writers during this period like their counterparts elsewhere in Africa, critique the ‘othering’ of formerly colonized people in texts written by the colonizers. To counteract this marginalization, and as a vital part of the process of decolonization, these texts seek to give voice to the ‘subaltern’ in order to expose the misrepresentation and ‘negativization’ so rampant in colonial writings. The second phase of Anglophone Cameroon literature started in the mid-eighties and reached its apex in the 1990s. The literature of this period is an imaginative response to the political, social, and economic climate of this time. The article concludes that the 1980s and 1990s were pivotal decades for Anglophone Cameroon literature. The lack of publishing opportunities abroad and at home led authors to be very industrious and ingenious. They tailored their literary style and genre to the taste of their home audience. The result was an engaging literature that responded directly to the political, social and economic climate of the time. **Keywords:** Anglophone Cameroon literature, book history, literary history, postcolonialism.

The hallmark of African literature lies in the social role of the African writer. This critical stance has been espoused by several African critics including, Chinua Achebe (*Morning Yet on Creation Day*, 1975), Wole Soyinka (*Myth, Literature and the African World*, 1976) and Chidi Amuta (*Towards a Sociology of African literature*, 1986). As the authors of the *Empire Writes Back* explain, “this insistence on the social role of the African artist and the denial of the European preoccupation with individual experience has been one of the most distinctive features in the assertion of a unique African aesthetic” (Ashcroft et al. 125). Consequently, there is a vital link between African literature and the society that produced it. An understanding of Anglophone Cameroon literature must therefore be predicated on an analysis of its specific socio-historical determinants. A careful analysis of the corpus of Anglophone Cameroon literature from its inception to the 1990s reveals two broad phases: a clash of cultures and a response to ‘horizontal’ colonialism. (I am conscious here of the limitations of

an automatic 'stagist' theory for a cultural product as polemical, complicated and diffuse as literature. Nonetheless, this is necessary if only as an organizational tool.)

### **The first phase: A clash of cultures**

The first phase covers the period from 1959 to about 1984. In the Republic of Cameroon, this period begins shortly before 'the end' of colonialism to the rise of Paul Biya as the second president of Cameroon. The writers during this period like their counterparts elsewhere in Africa, critique the othering of formerly colonized people in texts written by the colonizers. To counteract this marginalization, and as a vital part of the process of decolonization, these texts seek to give voice to the 'subaltern' in order to expose the misrepresentation and 'negativization' rampant in colonial writings. As a result, one major pre-occupation with texts of this period is a representation of the conflicts and tensions resulting from changes introduced by colonial rule and a new Christian world view.

When Sankie Maimo published *I am Vindicated* in 1959 in Ikenne, Nigeria, he must not have been aware that he was launching modern Anglophone Cameroon literature. Although *I am Vindicated* is a play, the master genre in Cameroon at the time was poetry, followed by the short story. Unfortunately, most writing then was published randomly in magazines and newspapers. There were no publishing or printing houses in the Southern Cameroons, so publishing full length books was quite challenging. The major texts of this period are Maimo's *Sov-Mbang the Soothsayer* (1968), Jedida Asheri's *Promise* (1969), Kenjo Jumbam's *The White Man of God*, (1980), Ngonwikuo's *Taboo Love* (1980), and Nsanda Eba's *The Good Foot* (1977). Linus Asong's novels, such as *A Stranger in his Homeland* (1994, 2010), *The Crown of Thorns* (1993, 2009), and *No Way to Die* (1993, 2009), fall in this first phase because they were written in the 1970s and only published twenty years later. Apart from Asong's *Crown of Thorns* and Asheri's *Promise*, most of the texts in the first phase have been amply written about in local and international journals.

*Crown of Thorns* is set in the late sixties and early seventies in the Anglophone part of Cameroon that was a British trust and mandate territory. The British used indirect rule to govern the local population through the Native Administration (N.A.) and a House of Chiefs. As the narrator explains: "The coming of the missionaries was not the people's worry; nevertheless, they found that fact alone unbearable. The Government too had arrived. Small Monje needed a District Officer to replace the defunct N. A. Office, the administrative body that had governed the tribes for generations. It was merely a more elevated title for the Council of Elders" (65). After Anglophone Cameroon gained independence by joining French Cameroon, the new nation-state dominated by Francophone Cameroon adopted a system of direct control and the Native Administration was not only replaced by a D.O., but the House of Chiefs was dissolved. The territory was divided into administrative

units with a government-appointed official responsible for each unit. The chiefdoms now came under government control and communities found themselves answering not only to government officials that knew nothing about their customs and traditions, but to remnants of French colonialism practiced by francophone officials who were often arrogant in dealing with the local population, leading to a breakdown in communication between the administration and the ruled. In the case of the people of Nkokonoko Small Monje, this led to the theft of their god. It is the response of the people to this tragic dislocation of their community from its spiritual base that forms the central focus of this novel.

In *Crown of Thorns*, Asong enters into dialogue with Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. This intertextuality is visible in his revision of Achebe's ending to his seminal novel. Even so, Asong's novel can effectively be discussed alongside the early novels of Francophone Cameroon writers like Ferdinand Oyono and Mongo Beti. The novel, divided into three parts, portrays a traditional community, Nkokonoko Small Monje, caught in the cataclysmic wheel of change. The first part opens with the revelation that the god of Small Monje has been stolen and sold to a white man. Suspicion is cast on Achiebefuo, the master carver, and the chief. To steal a people's god is a grievous crime with grave consequences. Part two is a flashback on how Chief Alexander Nchindia reluctantly became chief of Nkokonoko, although it was his brother Nkoaleck who had been raised to become the chief. This flashback reveals the machinations of the district officer, who uses his position to undermine the traditions of the people of Nkokonoko to the extent of forcing on them a chief who has not been trained for the job. The result is an anti-hero who hates his job, does not understand the nature of his office, and enjoys flouting the advice and suggestions of his Council of Elders. Finally, part three returns to the crisis at hand: an investigation to find the culprits who stole the god of Small Monje. Investigations reveal that the district officer, the representative of government in Small Monje, masterminded the sale with the complicity of a few elders and the chief. This is the high point of the people's exasperation with the changes affecting their land due to the activities of the priest, the D.O., and their own brainwashed chief. As Ngobefuo, the most senior member of the Council of Elders explains:

If ever we are to get another god in this tribe, the stump of the god that was left behind by these wicked brothers of ours must be watered with blood. If the blood of the sons of Nkokonoko Small Monje shall spill, then the man who led them, the man whose presence has caused the destruction of everything we were once proud of, shall not be spared. (37–8)

In the end, the people under the leadership of the 'Okonkwo-like' Ngangbe rise up and brutally kill all these perpetrators. This ending revises the ending of *Things Fall Apart* where the people of Umuofia seem helpless and do not join Okonkwo

to fight back. Okonkwo is then forced to commit suicide. This is a most welcome revision for readers who have always considered the ending of *Things Fall Apart* one of the novel's few flaws.

Asong's style is lucid. The dialogue exudes a certain freshness buttressed by the use of metaphors and proverbs. For example, in discussing the activities of the chief that are not in line with the traditions of the people, the elders explain the situation metaphorically:

Their chief was their house. Their house ought to remain clean always. If a house gets dirty, they clean it. If it gets so infested with vermin that no amount of cleaning will make it fit for human habitation, what do they do? They burn it down and build another one. They had good reason for burning down this particular house [...] they had thought that the excrement in the house was smelling and it had reached a point where they could no longer endure (117).

Asong's dialogue blends with his crisp characterization and plot, which shows that Asong is at ease in his literary imagination. Richard Bjornson in an unpublished review confirms this view when he states, "There is a certain assured confidence in Asong's handling of plot and characterization that usually goes with maturity and experience. We are not surprised by events and their outcome, we are carefully prepared and everything moves towards an almost inevitable climax of horror."

Another representative text of the first phase is Prudencia Chila's novel *Promise* written under the pen name of Jedida Asheri. *Promise* is the first novel published by an Anglophone Cameroonian woman. It was published in 1969 by Lagos African University Press, only three years after Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* and three years before Buchi Emecheta's first novel *In the Ditch*, yet this novel has remained invisible to the African literary world and beyond. The novel is set in the 1930s and 1940s in the Bansa area of the grass-field regions in the then British Southern Cameroons and written as an autobiography. In the preface to the story someone with the initials which match the names of the illustrator of the story, Shirley Ardener, claims that this is a real story but the writer never intended to publish it. Therefore, according to Ardener only the names of the characters have been changed. In *Promise*, Jedida Asheri covers the period of her life from seven years till she is in her early twenties. The stories of her childhood are many and deal with conflicting problems, but generally the stories detail a series of losses. Like the young female protagonists in Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*, Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb* or Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, Jedida's growth is marked by Christianity, colonialism and patriarchy.

As a child Jedida is brainwashed by Christian missionaries who convince her of the inferiority of indigenous people. This Christian indoctrination imposes a crisis of identity on Jedida who finds it difficult to relate to non-Christian members of her extended family. When she visits her aunt in Ropka, she explains that: "the water

supply at the village was very bad. Water was taken from a small, very muddy and dirty pond. It was so dirty that a queer smell surrounded it [...] the people themselves were dirty, and had no idea of civilization. Nature is very kind to people who are ignorant" (34). The irony here is that Jedida does not realize that she is the one who is ignorant of her cultural displacement and alienation caused by Christian/Western education. Due to this alienation, she finds people in Ropka 'uncivilized' as opposed to her home in Kimbaw because Rokpa does not yet show visible signs of Western influence. Again, in comparing girls in her school, she explains, "The girls in our school who came from Bamenda were more civilized than we were. We were attracted and made friends with them [...] They also spoke 'pidgin English,' a language we did not know. We learnt this kind of English" (55). Here, being 'civilized' also means giving up one's own indigenous language. Jedida's linguistic displacement becomes evident when she and her friend, Alice, are asked to teach after finishing standard four. They find themselves incapable of communicating with people with whom they speak the same language. As she puts it, "We had very difficult times teaching [...] we knew little English and could not write Lamsaw." Their Western education that only sanctions written languages cuts them off from Lamsaw; without a good knowledge of English, communication in the classroom breaks down among people who hitherto could communicate fluently. Again, because of this erosion of her traditional values, Jedida learns to put herself in a binary opposition with the other girls in her community whom she constantly refers to as 'pagan.' Her mother contributes to this Christian/pagan dichotomy by asking her children not to respect the instructions of the Shu Fai, the traditional head of their enlarged family, because of his non-Christian rituals. The tension generated by Jedida's Christian/Western training is thus further complicated by patriarchal institutions.

Therefore, in order for Jedida to enter the threshold of maturity, she must be able to assert herself and overcome the two institutions—Christianity (colonialism) and patriarchy—that seem to deny her an autonomous identity. First, she criticizes her father for neglecting her siblings who are clothed in rags. Her father takes all the money she earns from working at the mission, yet "nobody knew what he did with it" (21). She also begins to challenge religious authority; she refuses to go to night mass because it is very far and the weather is cold. Her mother, in a symbolic gesture of 'gender bonding,' acknowledges her growth as a woman. As Jedida confirms, "Mamma seemed to realize that I was now a big girl. She did not check on me when I came home in the evening. Of course, I went to the farm with her every day, but when I came back; I washed the dust from my face and feet, and went to see my friends, mostly in the compound" (95). With this acknowledgement of Jedida's growth, she is now ready to venture out into the world. Her story ends as she leaves for a teacher's college in Nigeria, a reminder of the neglect of educational needs in Anglophone Cameroon during British rule.

*Promise* is a very important text not only in Anglophone Cameroon literature but also in African literature in general. By narrating the female gender, Asheri confronts the marginal position inhabited by women in her community who are already forced to endure the margins as colonized entities. Her search for self-determination becomes a search for an autonomous identity and voice; an identity and voice heavily suppressed by the triple bind of Christianity, colonialism and patriarchy. The autobiographical stance of the novel confirms Yvonne Vera's assertion that "the woman writer in Africa is a witness; forgiving the evidence of the eyes, pronouncing her experience with insight, artistry and fertile dexterity" (53). Viewed within the frame work of postcolonial feminist discourse, *Promise* takes its place as one of the early pieces of literary resistance to female oppression by an African woman.

### **The second phase: A response to 'horizontal' colonialism**

The second phase of Anglophone Cameroon literature started in the mid-eighties and reached its apex in the 1990s. The literature of this period is an imaginative response to the political, social, and economic climate of this time. The economic crisis that hit Africa in the mid-eighties resulted in salary cuts in Cameroon. The bleak economic situation highlighted global political developments toward liberalization and regime changes.

Furthermore, the end of the cold war and the move toward more democratic governments in the former communist nations of Eastern Europe served as a springboard for Cameroonians to ask for reforms. The mood during this period was one of disillusionment, unrest, and a clamor for a people-centered government. This mood led to marginalized groups like Anglophones asking for more representation. Anglophone Cameroon writers, particularly dramatists, responded imaginatively to the events around them. Cameroon Anglophone literature during this period is thus marked by what Lyonga calls "aesthetics of victimization" ("Le Degré Zero" 158) directed at the Francophone leaders who have victimized the Anglophone minority, and to Anglophone leaders who have forgotten their origins and joined the Francophones in subjecting their own kind to second-class citizenship. For the most part, the writers in this second phase protest what Emmanuel Fru Doh calls "horizontal colonialism." As Doh argues, "Like African literature (in general) which had to combat colonialism, Anglophone Cameroon literature is faced with a descendant of this monster" (82). Some of these works include Butake's *And Palm-Wine Will Flow* (1990), *Shoes and Four Men in Arms* (1992), *Dance of Vampires* (1995); Bate Besong's *Beasts of No Nation* (1990) and *Requiem for the Last Kaiser* (1991), and Victor Epie Ngome's *What God has Put Asunder* (1992). During this protest period, the drama genre that was the last to bloom in the first phase became dominant. Bate Besong explains that, "With the wave of democracy that preceded multi-party politics in Cameroon, Anglophone dramatists found themselves face to face with

theater audience of thousands seeking answers to political questions" (14). Butake's *And Palm-Wine Will Flow* certainly answered one of those questions.

*And Palm-Wine Will Flow* is set in the Fondom of Ewawa. The Fondom is in the grips of a Fon and his council of elders who revel in corruption and alcoholism. Their activities have alienated Shey Ngong, the spiritual leader of the Fondom. The play, written in one movement, begins and ends at the grove of Shey Ngong where he performs rituals on behalf of the people of Ewawa. The play opens with Shey Ngong performing an incantation but he is interrupted by a voice which tells him that everyone in the village is heading towards the palace to witness Kibanya's red feather ceremony and as usual there will be a big celebration afterwards and palm wine will flow. The Fon has abused the traditional feather reserved for heroes of the clan by giving it to the highest bidder. Shey Ngong is exasperated with the corruption, drunkenness and greed that has pervaded the Fondom, so he refuses to join what he sees as the madness of the Fon. He tells the voice, "my obligation is to the gods of the land. My duty is to the gods. Not the Fon and the palm wine [...] the gorilla can do nothing to the Iroko tree" (10). Exasperated by Shey's refusal to join the celebration, the Fon seizes farms from Shey's wives and gives them to Kibayana's wives. As one of the Fon's messengers comes to announce the Fon's pronouncement to Shey, the Earth Goddess mask in the grove is animated and pronounces the coming of a drought, "the sun shines on hills/ the sun shines in the valleys/ the sun shines in the depths of the streams/ the sun shines" (20). Shey asks the messenger to take Earth Goddess's message back to the Fon.

Events reach a climax in Ewawa when the Fon's watchdogs beat Nsangong, a respectable elder of the Fondom because he is Shey's friend. The people abandon their usual drinking spree at the Fon's palace in protest over this beating. To cleanse the land from these excesses, the Kibaranko goes on a cleansing mission to rid the land of all evil forces including the Fon. He unleashes destruction as he heads for the palace but by the time he gets there the Fon is dragged into a room and the Kibaranko splits the Fon's throne in two, a symbol of the annihilation of the Fon. The Earth Goddess finally curses the Fon to death; the people vow they don't want a Fon anymore; and that power should not be in the hands of one man but given to a council of elders. All the people are summoned to the market place to discuss the best way to govern the Fondom.

Butake combines western theatrical idioms and different modes of orature-masks, incantation, and proverbs from his Noni tradition to create his dramatic vision. The natural and supernatural live in one continuum of reality. He broadens the scope of his characters by exploiting spirit possession. According to Firth, "Spirit possession is a form of trance in which the actions of a person are interpreted as evidence of control of his behaviour by a spirit normally external to him" (qtd. in Alembong 130). Consequently Kwengong is both the Earth goddess and Shey's first wife. The Tapper



also doubles as Kibaranko. As Bate Besong contends, “without coming to terms with Butake’s syncretic imagination using traditional Noni mythic pattern in an otherwise realistic mode, and how it influences his art, it is impossible to apprehend his potential as an Anglophone Cameroon artist” (7). Butake also makes use of proverbs in establishing conflict in the play. For example, the following set of proverbs pit the Fon against the Shey: “The cockroach does not call a fowl to a wrestling match” (10), “The gorilla can do nothing to the iroko tree” (10), “The stream never flows uphill. The leopard and the goat / Have never been bed fellows” (14) and “The rat does not play with the Cat” (18).

Shey Ngong’s refusal to be part of the Fon’s debauchery has put him in open conflict with the Fon. Shey is expected to lose in this conflict, for he is the cockroach who cannot defeat the fowl (the Fon) in a wrestling match. However, Shey is the spiritual leader of Ewawa, the chief priest of Nyombom, hence he has moral purity. With this spiritual superiority, he rightly claims to be the Iroko tree, the Leopard and the Cat. Shey is eventually vindicated because at the end, the Fon loses his throne and his life.

*And Palm-Wine Will Flow* predicts the wishes of Cameroonians. By the time the play was published in 1990, there was a clamor for a national conference symbolically presented in Butake’s play as a meeting in the market place. Butake projects the victory of the people in a liberation struggle against a government that has lost touch with the aspirations of the governed.

In *Dance of the Vampires*, Butake continues this time with a Fon who has become his own prisoner and is held hostage by his military whom he pays exorbitantly to keep them from revolting. The nuances on the name of the monarch, Psaul Roi, cannot be missed. If one takes out the “s,” it becomes Paul and if one takes out the “P” it becomes Saul. In the Bible, Saul was christened Paul. The last name “Roi” means “King” in French. It is easy to see this monarch as Cameroon’s own President Paul Biya.

Anglophone playwrights during this second phase use metaphor and metonymy as an interface to transmit their dissatisfaction with the political and socio-economic situation in Cameroon. These Anglophone dramatists like Brecht, make use of a distancing effect by using metaphors and metonymy in a way which at once creates a distance from their audience but at the same time, allows the audience to ask questions which link the theatrical events on stage to their real situations. Mbangwana equally makes this argument when he asserts that “like most writers in a repressive society, they [Anglophone Cameroon playwrights] use oblique techniques of communication in order to treat matters tabooed by the ruling class” (66). Butake makes it clear that for him this is a deliberate choice. In a 1989 interview with Eckhard Breiting, he states that, “You have to be very careful about what and how you are saying it, because this country is very unpredictable. So I’m not going to say things in a blunt



manner because I want to be politically committed” (qtd. in Breitinger 7). Therefore, for playwrights like Butake, Besong and Epie-Ngome, the use of artistic devices such as metaphor and metonymy serve as deliberate interfaces between the playwright and audience to facilitate communication.

Bate Besong’s *Beasts of No Nation*, is set in Ednuoay (an obvious anagram for Yaoundé), but Besong indicates clearly in the footnote of the opening page of the play that “Ednuoay is a fictional city.” Ednuoay remains a fictional city to the reader of the play but on stage the illusion is bridged as the audience links the actions on stage to those happening in Cameroon. As a result, Ednuoay becomes a metonymy for Cameroon. *Beasts* has no plot, but captures the plight of the night-soil men who work tirelessly escorting huge mounds of fetid waste and the narrator, a kind of maverick who prods the night-soil men into action. The climax of the play comes when the Night-soil men storm the office of Dealsham Aadindingin, the supreme commander of Ewawa, for their identity cards. In this regard, *Beasts* responds to Femi Osofisan’s play *Aringindin and the Night Watchmen*. The similarities in the names of the principal characters make this intertextual link fairly evident. In Osofisan’s play, Aringindin, a retired military official, with the community’s approval, organizes a group of local vigilante night watchmen to combat the growing nuisance of armed robbers. Aringindin however uses his power to unleash a reign of terror and eventually, the night watchmen become robbers under him and loot the community. The two voices of conscience in the play, Ayinde, the teacher and his friend Yobi die. Ayinde is shot by robbers and Yobi kills herself than be yoked in with her father, Kansilor, in Aringindin’s corrupt regime. Thus, Osofisan’s play ends with the victory of Aringindin over the people. This ending has displeased critics like Tejumola Olaniyan who believe that “it does matter that the masses be represented as active agents fashioning history rather than as passive surfaces on which history is inscribed [...] that especially when there is pervasive rot in the society it is crucial to foreground small acts of progressive heroism that will certainly be found here or there” (120). Therefore, in killing off Ayinde and Yobi, Osofisan seems to have betrayed the masses and it is this betrayal that Besong seems to correct in *Beasts*.

Besong’s dialogue is sparse and fragmented, yet one gets the gist that the Night-soil men want their freedom and the narrator’s repetition of a “Hero goes to war to die” intones the self-sacrifice that is needed to change the status quo. In the course of the play, when the Night-soil men, the cripple and blind man, enact many plays-within-a-play in which they lampoon state officials, they usually show their disgust with the state of things by turning their backs to fart at the audience. The stench from them further increases the imaginary stench. The “night-soil men,” carriers of “shit” are permanently “singing to the sound and rhythm of buckets of excrement being loaded on and off to trucks waiting off stage” (*Beasts* 41). Like Armah in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Bate Besong uses excrement and filth as a metaphor for

corruption, dictatorship, and human rights abuses. In fact, the excrement becomes a signifier for everything that has gone wrong in the nation state. As Lyonga points out, Besong's images of filth "constitute his views of Cameroon, as a country in a state of advanced degeneracy instead of the officially declared 'advanced democracy'" (162).

In Besong's play therefore, Ednuoay becomes a metonymy for the Republic of Cameroon echoing President Paul Biya's often quoted phrase of the nineties that *quand Yaoundé respire, le Cameroun vit* (when Yaoundé breathes, Cameroon is alive), by which Biya implied that the civil disobedience and "operation ghost towns" that brought activities in all major cities to a halt except Yaoundé had not crippled the nation, since Yaoundé was not affected. Yaoundé is not just the capital of Cameroon but also the president's ethnic stronghold. Through these metonymical references, Besong holds Cameroon up to a mirror for scrutiny. The night-soil men as the carriers of 'shit' become the lowliest of the low. The Yaoundé University Theater gave a historic performance of *Beasts of No Nation* at the University Amphi Theater 700 on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March, 1991, under the direction of Bole Butake. In Bole Butake's production of *Beasts*, the stage props were three wooden toilet bowls and very dirty buckets. These stage props invested the theater hall with a repellent stench. The night-soil men dressed in torn shorts and shirts that were heavily soiled marking their poverty. The 'excrement' around them further dehumanized them. In contrast, Aadingingin, the supreme leader of Ednuoay, was exorbitantly clad in a black suit and spotting a gun. Although he is a civilian, it was very clear to the audience that he retains the air of a military dictator. Besong blames the degeneration of Ednuoay to the ruling "frogs"—a derogatory name used for "Francophones" in response to their use of the word "Anglos" as an insult for Anglophones—represented here by Aadingingin that adhere to a secret cult of "greed, grab, and graft." They are "thieves of no nation" who form "a brainless and sensuous class, who someday will take the Ednuoay nation hostage as a result of their inexhaustible greed" (41). Because of the suffocating atmosphere created by Besong's metaphorical excrement, there is very little room for character growth. The characters are shadows that are better seen as metaphors for the oppressor or the oppressed depending on their actions. The Night-soil men, the cripple, Blindman and the narrator, despite his maverick statements, are the oppressed of society. According to Hilarious Ambe, "the fragmented and warped nature of the character drawing of this oppressed group reinforces the theme of slavery and dispossession contained in the central metaphor of shit and stench." Comrade Dealsham Aadingingin, the supreme leader of Ednuoay as a representative of the oppressor class can only speak torture, and his cacophonous name is meant to reveal his emptiness.

The metonymic references and metaphors in Besong's play were not lost on the government of Cameroon. When the play was staged in Yaoundé on March 26, 1991, the playwright was arrested and charged with subversion. The reaction of

the government representative in the audience is captured in his now often quoted infamous letter:

It is a clear political pamphlet directed at the regime in power that is held responsible for the economic crisis through corruption, favoritism 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 and embezzlers of public funds [...] the author equally affirms, and this is the central thesis of the play that “the Anglophones are marginalized and confined to undignified roles like that of “carriers of excrements”. They do not have any professional identity cards which they are asking for in vain [...] the play ends with an appeal for rebellion and the disregard of the present authority [...] I think in my opinion, that at the time when the government is exerting great and constant efforts to make Cameroon united where the two communities coexist in all brotherliness it is abnormal that intellectuals should promote divisions and conflicts. (Biatcha qtd. in Ambanasom 115)

While Butake and Bate Besong use metonymy in exploring setting, Victor Epie Ngome in *What God has Put Asunder* uses metonymy to explore characterization. However these metonymic references may not be very evident because Ngome uses the marriage metaphor to develop plot, creating two levels of meaning, one literary and the other allegorical.

The audience becomes aware of this allegorical level because of a shared history and cultural framework. In this reconstruction of shared history, Ngome questions the idea of the nation as defined by the hegemony in Cameroon. The audience immediately identifies what or who is being represented from the sound, the ethnic origin, the costumes or the actions of the characters. The character names become metonymies for country names and regions. For example, the character Emeka, with his identifiable Ibo name becomes a representation for Nigeria. In a similar way, Weka, the central character, becomes a compression of West Kamerun (the spelling used during the German occupation). Epie Ngome thus uses the metaphor of “marriage” between Francophone Cameroon, represented by the Moslem Garba and West Cameroon represented by Weka to assess the historical gains of Anglophone Cameroon and how the gains have affected the identity of Anglophones. The play revolves around Weka, an orphan raised by Rev. Gordon and Sister Sabeth (Britain) and Garba, brought up by Louis (France). Weka has two suitors vying for her hand in marriage, Emeka (Nigeria, particularly Eastern Nigeria) and Garba (East Cameroon). Weka reluctantly accepts Garba as the lesser of two evils. The characterization of Emeka in the Yaoundé Flame Player’s production of *What God Has Put Asunder* was particularly effective. The role played by Langmia Kehbuma got the audience to their feet. The way he staggered in church to argue his claim on Weka was hilarious. His use of pidgin, the Ibo accent, and his name, which is of Ibo origin immediately, gave his identity away.

However, Weka rejects Emeka because of his overbearing attitude while they were in the orphanage. This is in reference to the overbearing nature of the Ibos (Nigerians) when West Cameroon was administered as part of Nigeria under British colonization (Amaazee). Weka therefore reluctantly accepts Garba as the lesser of two evils. Because of Weka's reluctance in accepting Garba and Garba's objections to certain portions of the marriage vow, Rev. Unor (United Nations) solemnizes the marriage probationally. As such, the couple is given time to get to know each other. However, the marriage with Garba proves disastrous. Weka protests to Garba for treating her as a "concubine" and her children as "bastards" in spite of wealth that her marriage brought him. Weka, like West Cameroon, is the bread basket of the marriage union. As she points out, "By marrying me [...] if one can call this marriage you became Lord and master over the cocoa farms my father left me" (31). Moreover Weka and her children are forced to speak Garba's language (French) instead of their own (English). Weka becomes disillusioned and decides to abandon Garba. As a result Weka and her children return to her home (West Cameroon). Their focus is "to build this place back to a respectable home" (3). When Rev. Gordon learns of Weka's fate, he feels guilty for abandoning her. He should have "maintained a certain presence. Maybe not exactly like Louis but at least a dissuasive present [...] to deter him [Garba] from his excesses" (39).

Garba tries to force Weka to return with him, but he is rough handled and forced out of Weka's home by Weka's children with the sympathy of Rev. Gordon and Jim Rican (America). Garba resorts to the courts but he is informed that the marriage with Weka was not a real marriage. First, Weka was coerced into the marriage. Next, Garba had signed on for a monogamous marriage but had practiced polygamy; and lastly, he had forced Weka and her children to learn his own language and abide by the customs of his land. The terms of the marriage as stipulated on marriage number 001/UN of Feb. 11, 1961, which allowed the couple to live in physical separation in a "simulated wedlock," are upheld. As Bate Besong points out, "Weka in Epie Ngome's *What God Has put Asunder* captures the double colonization of the Anglophone Cameroonian. The heroine exists as a credible character stifled by an opponent who is a metaphorical husband. The metaphor of marriage helps to encode what is realistically portrayed as a human agony in an oppressive system" ("Who's Afraid"). It is this oppression that legitimizes Weka's separation from her husband. Garba's oppressive and exploitative nature becomes a representation of what Anglophone Cameroonians refer to as the Anglophone problem. The solution to this problem for Epie Ngome is a return to a federation instead of the present unitary state. This counterhegemonic discourse is based on the fact that the unitary state is not only illegal, Francophones and Anglophones represented by Weka and Garba are incompatible, hence his title *What God Has Put Asunder*. The title counters the biblical adage "what God has put together let no man put asunder" thus critiquing the role

missionaries played in Weka's re-colonization. It is within this perspective that Epie Ngome's play is acerbic because it dramatizes in a very poignant way the problems faced by the Anglophone minority within a francophone-dominated union. When the playwright intones "what God has put asunder," he expects the audience and Anglophone Cameroonians in general to answer, "No man should put together" and act on it. It is pertinent to note that Epie Ngome's original title for his play was "For Better or for Worse" which was written as a radio play many years before its revival in 1992 by the Flame Players of Cameroon, under the title "What God has put Asunder." The critical shift in title is a testimony to the changing consciousness of the Anglophone Cameroonian during this time.

Although *What God has put Asunder* functions as an allegory, it is still engaging at the literal level. Epie Ngome uses his creative genius to create realistic characters and situations that are exciting in their own right. He uses language, which is captivating, full of wit and humor. As a result, Ambanasom contends that Epie Ngome's language in *What God Has Put Asunder*, "consists of natural, spontaneous [...] exchanges that are a joy to listen to time and time again [...] His (Epie-Ngome) dialogues thus have a conversational value, the work of a stylist and a brilliant conversationalist versed in the art of talking, a dramatic attribute of great value. For it has the advantage of holding and sustaining the interest of both readers and audiences" (51).

The metonymic references were evident amongst Anglophones when *What God Has Put Asunder* was staged in the mid-nineties in different towns in Cameroon. The audiences recognized the characters and cheered the final judgment of the court which allows Weka to live separately in a simulated wedlock, thus asserting her own identity. They questioned why this theatrical verdict could not be translated to real life. As Eyoh points out, many of these playwrights (Butake, Epie Ngome, Besong), "See themselves in a role of developing the critical consciousness of their society, of mobilizing people for change through the destruction of the 'culture of silence', which has so far subjected them to years of oppression. Their role seems to be that of building the foundation of a new society in which social justice and a sense of communal belonging can prevail" (10). As a result, these plays, to use Abiola Irele's phrase created a "new realism," which reflected the disillusionment that had invaded Cameroonian minds.

While the Anglophone male writer during this phase was concerned with the plight of Anglophones in Cameroon, the women writers dealt with their double marginalization as Anglophones and as women. The 1995 Beijing Conference on Women greatly publicized the marginal status of women throughout the world. In Cameroon, this translated into women's pressure groups like the Association of Female Journalists and the Association of Female Jurists. This period also witnessed the proliferation of nonprofit organizations determined to fill the gaps left by the government in caring for marginalized groups like women and children. In addition,

women-centered programs in English, like *Women and Development* anchored by Anne Nsang on Cameroon Radio and Television network, became revolutionary in publicly discussing women's issues, which had been considered private matters. In each program, one or two women presented personal testimonies depending on the topic of the day. Topics included widowhood, divorce, polygamy, or problems of the girl-child. Then a panel of experts, including a legal expert, explained to the in-house and television audience the legal options open to women in the stated situation and where they could seek help. This was the first time that women's issues were given center stage in public, and it gave women the confidence to speak out. Consequently for the first time women appeared on television acknowledging various forms of abuse justified by tradition or sanctioned by the constitution. Furthermore, a Ministry of Women's Affairs was established in Cameroon. With the creation of this ministry, the International Women's Day, March 8, became a day to manifest "women power" and solidarity. On this day women wear a uniform designed by the Ministry of Women's Affairs, and there are rallies and parades in all major towns. Women literally take over the country: they can be spotted in their uniforms in every nook and cranny celebrating their freedom of being; there is usually a special edition of *Women and Development* that ends with a big party. These events of the day are later shown on television, further energizing women. Thus from the rural to the urban woman, the slogan "gender equality" became commonplace in Cameroon. To crown it all, a Women's Studies Department was created at the University of Buea. Here Nalova Lyonga founded a magazine of creative writing on women titled *That Rocky Place*. Some plays published in its second volume, like Asheri Kilo's *The Divorce*, were first performed as part of the activities marking International Women's Day.

It was in this social environment that Anne Tanyi-Tang wrote and published *Ewa and Other Plays* in 1999. *Ewa* brings to the fore problems facing the girl child, including lack of education and early marriage. The play also centers on Ewa's mother, who was severely abused by her late husband and ends up projecting this abuse on Ewa, continuously abusing her both verbally and physically. Ewa is starved, left unclothed, beaten, and has pepper thrown on her body. Nyango, Ewa's mother, explains the source of her actions in this angry speech directed at Ewa: "He abandoned me throughout the pregnancy and went out for a merrymaking trip with my mate when I was in labour. I almost died in childbirth. [...] In order to win back his love, I had to send you home to my mother. I hate you." (9) Although Ewa graduates brilliantly from primary school, Nyango refuses to send her to secondary school. She is subjected to an early marriage at thirteen to Ajoh, who continues the cycle of abuse. Fortunately, a concerned social worker intervenes and Ewa receives 30,000CFA to start a small business. She uses part of this money to go to one of her aunts, who welcomes her. She uses the rest of the money to start a restaurant where she sells food by day and attends evening classes to prepare for the GCE "O" Levels. Once she succeeds at the



“O” Levels, Ewa continues to prepare for the GCE “A” Levels. The play ends when Ewa’s name is announced on the radio as one of the successful candidates. Education is therefore seen by Tanyi-Tang as one way of improving the marginal status of women. The play also claims a girl’s right to education in place of an early marriage.

Makuchi’s *Your Madness, Not Mine*, a collection of short stories, is another text written by an Anglophone Cameroon woman during this period. The themes in Makuchi’s short stories are wide ranging, from the fragile relationships between Francophones and Anglophones, through the problems brought about by Western timber exploiters, to women’s social and domestic problems. Nonetheless, whatever her theme, her central characters are women who are strong and ready to battle for survival. As Eloise A. Brière (xiv) confirms, “The characters Makuchi creates are survivors; they are scrappy and they are strong, especially the women. [...] Makuchi uproots her people from silence and transplants them into new soil, staking out new possibilities for growth, for expression.”

The first story, “The Healer,” deals with the theme of infertility. Infertility is a recurrent theme in African literature by women authors since in most African societies the value of a woman is embedded in her ability to become a mother. Although science has proven the contrary, in the event that a couple is childless the blame is always placed on the woman and not on the man because she is supposed to physically carry the pregnancy. In “The Healer” the narrator tells the story of her aunt, who is in a childless marriage. The aunt has a vivacious and cheerful personality but the cheerfulness “was marred by something, something that lay hidden somewhere behind her eyeballs” (“Healer” 6). The narrator’s aunt visits every native doctor she can reach to make her fertile to no avail. Her brother determines to send her to the legendary Azembe. “Azembe was renowned all over the land. His name was on the lips of many people because it was claimed that he would succeed where other men had failed” (4). In fact, Azembe had made fertile the wives of a policeman who were having difficulties conceiving; as the narrator reports:

they both had children, one boy, and one girl. But something curious, something devious, revealed itself as the two children got older. When they stared into each other’s face, they seemed to reflect the same image, the same eyes staring into the same square face. The family had pretended to overlook the resemblance when the babies were younger, telling every visitor “Ooooooh, oooh! They look so much like their father.” The visitors would believe them if they did not know the policeman [...] those visitors who knew the truth, especially the women, admired the children, praised them, commented on how healthy they looked and reserved their laughter and mockery when they were out of sight and ear shot. (9)

Despite this, the narrator’s aunt is taken to Azembe by her brother. The medicines Azembe gives her make her drowsy. One day as she recovers from her drugged sleep



she notices semen on her underwear. Since only Azembe enters her room, she imagines what has happened. She then sets out to trap Azembe. The next time Azembe gives her medication she does not drink it but throws it under her bed. When Azembe later enters her room she pretends to be asleep and Azembe begins to disrobe her. As the aunt reveals, "At that precise moment [...] something had snapped in her head, invading her arteries, spreading through her entire body and she seemed possessed" (10). She goes on a rampage and sets the healer's complex of patients' huts ablaze. Azembe is finally taken to court and is given a three-year sentence, but dies of a heart attack in jail. The aunt cannot comprehend why "the stories of all those women were only worth a three-year sentence" (11). This story systematically reveals that some of the problems of infertility among couples originate with men. If Azembe can make the women pregnant there is nothing wrong with them; the problem lies with their husbands. Because in Cameroon, as in most African societies, infertility is associated with women, she is the one who goes in search of treatment. Charlatan healers like Azembe have capitalized on this to feed their greed and lust.

In "Market Scene," another story in *Your Madness, Not Mine*, Makuchi delves into bonding among women, especially in the marketplace where they have the opportunity to spend long hours "in the business of survival." The market scene is set in Yaoundé, the capital of Cameroon. The women in the central market come from different parts of Cameroon and bond in the marketplace by facing the same challenges, yet their different languages mark and identify them. Those from Anglophone Cameroon speak in Pidgin English and some broken French, while the Francophones speak a mixture of pidgin and broken French. As Brière (xvii) comments, "The linguistic mix spoken by Cameroonians in the capital is indeed the language of survival, the language of depopulation [...] monolingualism is a luxury few can afford in a world where survival requires more than one language." The daily occurrences in the market are like a theater ritual, punctuating normal life with glimpses of the diabolic nature of man. On this day a husband seeks revenge, cutting a young man with a knife because he has duped his wife into buying a worn-out pair of jeans instead of a brand-new one. This incident reminds Sibora, one of the market women of how she has been abandoned by her husband. As she puts it, "Well, this woman is lucky. At least she had someone to come and fight for her. [...] You all know how I've been struggling and suffering with my children since that man, that devil, that wicked...well he's not even a man...since he left and shacked up with that pute, that, that [...] bordel" (35). Sibora is overwhelmed with single parenthood. Her sixteen-year-old daughter is not only pregnant, she herself is sick. A trip to the doctor brings prescriptions for drugs that cost 17,000CFA. Her plea to the doctor that she is financially overburdened does not change the situation. As Sibora recounts her story to her fellow market women, she is overwhelmed and collapses. The others do not know whether she is joking or has actually died. Sibora

frequently tells stories like this. As one of the market women says, "Other people's troubles always raised the lid of the basket of problems that she had logged within her heart all these years" (35). Women as a group are a marginalized lot; therefore, when faced with problems of womanhood, women in Cameroon become one. There is no Anglophone or Francophone. Makuchi creates women who go through the same hardships. As one of them says, "We had all come a long way from home, we were all in the business of surviving" (28). They left their distant villages and towns grudgingly following their husbands to a strange city to eke out a living. In their quest for survival they find friendship, a friendship that helps them to fight against the economic depression that has devalued the currency and their existence.

In Makuchi's "Accidents are a Side Show," the central theme is the fragile relationship between Anglophone and Francophone. A roadside accident between a car driven by an Anglophone woman, Manda, and a taxi driven by a Francophone man quickly degenerates into issues of identity in the nation-state, Cameroon. The Francophone driver angrily tells Manda that driving is a privilege that has been given to women but women have yet to master the skill. Manda has just come from another fruitless visa interview at the American Embassy. Her request to join her husband has again been refused. In her frustration, she keeps quiet, but when her friend in the front seat, Manoji, responds to the taxi driver in English, the floodgates open. The Francophone driver leaves the subject of Manda's womanhood and attacks her "Anglophoneness." On hearing English, he responds, "Ah no be tok ... Ce sont les Anglos" (108). The quarrel soon degenerates as Manoji also abuses the driver as a "Frog." The Francophone goes on to abuse Manoji in French:

[I]mbecile ... Regarde-moi ça. Il fallait qu'on vous laisse avec le Nigeria, ces anglos. On a eu pitié de vous, on vous a accepté dans notre pays et au lieu de rester tranquille, vous venez nous cassez de pied pour rien. (109)

'Idiot ... Look at you. We should have left you "Anglos" with Nigeria. We took pity on you and accepted you in our country and instead of being grateful; you are here causing us pain'.

These words capture the way Francophones perceive Anglophones as second-class citizens. Anglophones are not supposed to have a voice in Cameroon. Recognizing the link of Anglophone Cameroon to Nigeria during the colonial days, Francophones refer to Anglophones provocatively as Nigerians who were saved by French Cameroon from the excesses of Nigeria. This quarrel exemplifies the fragile relationship between Anglophones and Francophones. The least provocation leads to insults on the lines of "Anglos" and "Frogs." Makuchi's characters display the language interplay in Cameroon. As Brière (xviii) notes, "Makuchi is one of the first African writers to not only allow us to hear the rich linguistic mosaic that characterizes modern Africa, but to show us how language, class, and power intersect in the postcolonial context." Makuchi's "Accidents

are a Roadside Show” successfully depicts Anglophone women as double victims, first as women, then as Anglophones.

Nevertheless, some critics believe that in order to establish an Anglophone literary tradition, Anglophone Cameroon literature must move beyond what they see as a literature of disillusionment and victimization. As Lyonga (102) contends, “The chronotype of nearly all existing Anglophone protest works multiplies the symbols of victimization, but this cannot be the force of the Anglophone literary tradition. Anglophone Cameroon literature has to move from deconstruction to a re-construction of a heritage that Anglophones are stringently clinging to in this pluralist era of Cameroon’s democratization.” Becker (259), however, rejects this view stating that, “As every society needs a literature of support to help it identify itself as a coherent culture, so every society needs a prophetic literature to rage against its injustices and its failures to live up to the ideals it proclaims to the world.”

It is interesting to note that the 1980s and 1990s turned out to be the most vibrant decades for Anglophone Cameroon literature since independence. The lack of publishing opportunities abroad and at home led authors to be very industrious and ingenuous. Although the quality of production was sometimes very problematic and writers did not benefit from rigorous editorial feedback, many Anglophone Cameroonian writers like Bole Butake, Bate Besong and Linus Asong, became household names for the first time in their country. They focused on the home audience and tailored their literary style and genre to the taste of their home audience. The result was a literature that responded directly to the political, social and economic climate of the time.

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