POLITICS IN SELECTED HOVELS OF FERDINAND OYONO AND MONGO BETI

BY

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has been written by me and that it is a record of my own research work. It has not been presented in any previous application for a higher degree. All quotations are indicated and the sources of information are specifically acknowledged by means of references.

Nguma Mary-Priscilla Musoh

CERTIFICATION

The thesis entitled "Politics in Selected Novels of Ferdinand Oyono and Mongo Beti" by NGUMA, Mary-Priscilla Musoh meets the regulations governing the award of the degree of MA (Literature) of Ahmadu Bello University, and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my late father

NGUMA B. KFUTWAH;

and

beloved aunty Mrs Helen Funwi

who has been more than a parent to me.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores both the colonial and post-colonial political situations in the Cameroons as expressed in some of the novels of Ferdinand Oyono and Mongo Beti.

For a broad understanding of the basis of power and the necessity for change, the works are looked at from a socio-political point of view.

Chapter One, which is the introduction, gives a brief historical background to the political order in Cameroon up to the attainment of independence. The literature review outlines the justification for this study.

Chapters Two and Three examine the colonial political set up with reference to Houseboy and The Old Man and the medal. Emphasis is laid on administration while the church and other social aspects are used to bring out the ills of the colonial administration.

Chapter Four explores other aspects of colonialism, gives us a general idea of the nature of the physical revolt in the struggle for independence and how finally power is wrongly handed over to the friends of the French colonists. Remember Ruben is used as our book of reference in this chapter.

In Chapter Five, Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness is used to show the disillusionment of the post-independence political elite as perceived by the Cameroonian novelist.

The conclusion shows that in contesting for a better political option, both Oyono and Beti provide such an interpretation of history as to bring out the truth as the African in the colonial and the masses in the post-colonial society see it. They at the same time implicitly or explicitly state possible solutions to their society's problems.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Literature has been noted for its quality of performing different roles. African literature in particular, has the re-shaping of Africa's political history as one of its important roles. According to Klerius, for example:

> West African writers in their commitment to the pursuit of truth and justice have neither remained indifferent to politics nor refused to harbour political convictions. Some of them are passionately attached to portraying sensitive issues of freedom even in communities governed by vice and marked by insensitivity and intolerance of holders of power.[1]

Politics, as Aristotle defines it, constitutes the simultaneous existence of different groups with different interests and traditions, within a territorial unit and under a common rule. What matters according to him, is that the "social structure is sufficiently complex and divided to make politics a plausible response to the problem of governing it."[2]

The African looks at politics from his own point of view which Za-Ayem Agye summarizes in the following terms:

> In its institutionalised form, politics deals with power and its management; how power is shared and wielded through its apparatus and institutions. State power controls all other human activities within its domain. Therefore, how that power is achieved and maintained, who controls it for whom are a basic concern for all classes.[3]

The concern for the control of power as expressed by the Cameroonian novelists Mongo Beti and Ferdinand Oyono shows the centrality of politics in the lives of their people.

Historical Background

Cameroon stands out among other African countries with its varied historical experiences. Once a German protectorate, Cameroon became divided into two as League of Nations mandates and later United Nations trust territories before its final unification (1961) after independence.

July 12th 1884 saw the signing of a treaty between Nachtigal and two Douala kings. This German protectorate was to last until the outbreak of World War One (1914) where Cameroon was partitioned into two as French and British colonies respectively.

The Germans, unlike the British and French, did not conceal their intentions in the Cameroons. Their main objective was economic benefit. After his research, Le Vine concludes that:

> informed commentary seems to agree that, on the whole, German rule in the Kamerun was strict, often harsh but usually just. The Germans did not try to conceal the fact that their primary purpose in the colony was to exploit it; yet in the process they brought intelligent, often enlightened administration.[4]

Such aim and attitude accounts for no substantial German cultural legacy in the Cameroons as cultural considerations were not in the list of their priorities.

Though lacking in the cultural scene, the German effect was considerable not only in the economic and infrastructural development but also in the evolution of colonial administration in the territory. The value of the many plantations (which

still dominate the economy of West Cameroon), numerous roads, bridges, telephone and telegraph wires and some branches of the railway, many of which are still in use today, testify to German industriousness in the Cameroons.

Of all the legacies, however, the building of "Kamerun" into a single unit was perhaps more significant. The alleged unity of the Cameroons under the Germans was later to be used by nationalists in their struggle for independence and re-unification. Accordingly, the situation could be "argued with some justice that, for many Cameroonians the Germans shone in the distorted light of retrospection, their administration seemed that much the better for being past, and hence that much more available for disparaging comparisons with the current regime"[5] (the French colonial regime). In this light, the later creation of a Federal Republic was a kind of re-unification.

Mandates and Trusteeship

The outbreak of World War One in 1914 brought an abrupt end to the German protectorate and a joint control of the Cameroons by the British and French. By 1916, the territory became provisionally divided into two equal parts by British and French, the French having the larger part. In 1922, these two territories became mandates of the Leage under the control of Britain and France. There, however, existed diversity of colonial rule between the two, that is, separate economic and administrative life for each territory. Indirect rule prevailed

in British Cameroon with development mainly based in the once German plantation which constituted the main source of revenue.

French policy was rather based on two axes: "politique de protectorat" (protective policy) and the policy of "mise en valeur" (development).

The protectorate policy was to ensure a slow but steady development of the indigenous people towards eventual integration into the French political, social and economic life. This policy through the "indigenat" stressed on separation between African and European communities as well as presented a comprehensive list of violations and penalties which French administrators could invoke at will against native subjects (indigenes).

Though the policy of "mise en valeur" was successful in bringing some economic development, its serious demerit was the fact that it depended on conscript labour or "corvée" as re-enforced by the indigenat - a system that was to generate much ill-feeling towards the French and their administration. As would be discovered in the course of the work, one would not be wrong to conclude that amongst the resentment that was later to be translated into nationalist agitation after World War Two, the "corvée" and the "indigenat" were the most pronounced.

In 1946, the Cameroon mandates were converted into trust territories under the United Nation trusteeship system. The period was marked by a series of reforms and changes brought

about by political militancy. In French Cameroon, a political party like the Union des Populations du Cameroon (UPC) under the leadership of Reuben Un Nyobe, made its agitation to be internationally felt with the aim of independence and complete unification. Louis Aujoulat led the Bloc Democratique Camerounais, Dr Endeley and John Ngu Foncha led the Cameroon's Federal Union (FCU) and Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) respectively in British Cameroon.

By 1956 a reform like "Loi cadre" gave French Cameroon the right to complete internal control. The first Cameroonian government was, however, formed the following year (1957) with Andre-Marie Mbida as premier. Mbida was forced to resign the next year (1958) following a ministerial crisis that earlier took place in February of that same year. He was then replaced by Ahmadou Ahidjo as premier, who carried on further negotiations for greater autonomy and the setting of a date for complete independence.

Independence and Reunification

Independence in French Cameroon finally took place on January 1st 1960 but unification of the two territories could only come some twenty-one months later.

While the United Republic of Cameroon was born on October 1st 1961, the Northern part of former British Cameroon became attached to Nigeria as the Sardauna Province of the Northern Region. With the end of trusteeship, the former British

Cameroon became known as West Cameroon while the former French territory became East Cameroon.

The Cameroonian history to this point is basically that of colonization. In fact it did provoke constant struggles of the people for justice, the rise of nationalist movements and militant agitation for independence. Such experiences were all over the African continent. Thus most African writers reacted to the situation and events by reflecting in their novels how their age was marked by socio-political conflicts. They realized the essential role of politics in the cultural rebirth of the blackman.

Alexandre Biyidi who took off as a writer under the pen name of Eza Boto and later Mongo Beti, together with Ferdinand Oyono are amongst the prominent writers in Cameroon. Commenting on both authors, for example, Edet John says:

> Critics of African Literature in French are all agreed on the unique place that Mongo Beti and Ferdinand Oyono occupy in the African Literary scene. They have recognized the immitable irony and satire which characterize their novels; they have praised their vigorous humour, brilliance of observation and noted with satisfaction the role that both of them have played as precursors in African Literature.[6]

Exposed not only to catholicism and Western Education but the fact that they have also lived the colonial experience, both novelists were sufficiently furnished or fit to observe and dictate the grievious problems of cross-cultural misunderstanding that characterized the attitude of colonial masters. They, however, did not hesitate to use the best opportunity open

to them (through their art), to show the extent to which they could be good enough representatives of their time. They like the rest of African writers were able through their art to prove that literature could play a major role in reshaping history.

While Beti has nine novels to his credit, Oyono has three. But the fact remains that both novelists have been able to prove to the Cameroonians that their responsibility as artists rests on their reaction to the crucial need of their time - that of liberating the Cameroonians not only from the chains of colonialism but (as seen in Beti's later novels) also from that of neo-colonialism.

By standing astride the colonial and postcolonial periods, Beti has the credit as the first, if not the most successful and perhaps the most talented of the Cameroonian novelists. He goes a step further than Oyono to consider carefully the rewards of independence and to see to what extent its acquisition since 1960 has justified the many years of political militancy and struggle in guaranteeing liberty, justice and freedom in the Federal Republic. Beti is thus an outspoken opponent of the Ahidjo and even Paul Biya regimes.

As for most African novelists, commitment in literature tends to be the watch word for Beti and Oyono. Their interest in the socio-economic and politico-administrative conflicts of their time is not disputable if one should go through the history of French colonialism in Africa. Their art brings out the nature of this colonialism and attempts an explanation of

the socio-economic disorder and at the same time exposes the irony of the French civilizing mission in Africa.

With independence, there was a shift or modification in the basic goals and values of Beti's art as he came to grip with the new political situation. His post-independent novels reveal that contrary to liberty, equality and justice expected to come with independence, corruption, political disintegration, oppression and injustice exist all over. To crown everything, the ex-colonial master - France - still has a great say in its ancient colony.

Beti stresses with practical experience the bitter truth about the new political class proving incapable of providing moral and civic leadership as well as proving unequal to the challenge of nation-building.

Despite the disillusionment expressed by Beti, he does not leave the reader in despair. He suggests or proposes his own kind of ideal leader - honest, talented, intelligent, duty-conscious, guided by the politics of participation and altruistic.

Oyono in his novels Houseboy (1966) and The Old Man and the Medal (1967) uses the agents of colonialism (the administrators and missionaries and merchants) to express his disgust at colonial diplomacy. He concerns himself in his works with the spiritual and cultural isolation of the individual. This spiritual and cultural isolation can thus be attributed to the break-down of traditional order under the effect of colonialism.

The colonial master does not only alienate the individual from his people and culture but is unable to offer another possible foundation on which the alienated native could base his life. In Houseboy Toundi rejects his family and culture for the ways of the European. He is, however, unable to fit himself into the white society because of his race and consequent social position. He escapes to Spanish Guinea where he meets his death. He thus finds himself in the same position like Meka in the later book The Old Man and the Medal, who after giving all he has to the service of colonialism is seen in the "white-wash circle", neither belonging to his own people nor the French.

The quest for cultural equilibrium and consequent political freedom reflected in the works of most Cameroonian novelists certainly came about as a consequence of the initial void created by colonialism and its attendant ills. Such quest can be comparable to that existing in South Africa today. Through Xuma's experiences in Peter Abraham's Mine Boy for example, one realizes that the policy of apartheid exists on the same basis like colonialism did. Apartheid is created, applied and developed on the basis of economic and political domination of the South Africans by a racist minority, with all the terribly unbelievable crimes against humanity which that involves.

Beti and Oyono, by stressing the value of personal, socio-political, economic and cultural awareness of the individual, make clear their intention to handle not only a literary theme but also a political option expressing the need to build a

united and strong Cameroon after the fragmentation by colonial rule.

Mongo Beti's post-colonial novels employ fictional techniques to examine the meaning of the dreadful political struggle that persisted in Cameroon in the fifties and early sixties. Remember Ruben (1980) gives an account of the bitter Cameroonian political experience over some forty years. Beti shows the reader through the Rubenists action that at one stage, Africa was no longer a harvesting farm. The author sees that it does not suffice to only talk about political independence, one has to work for it. It was past the time to sit and wait for perfection.

Beti's political ideology can therefore be deduced from his two novels. Even though the agitation or yearning for political independence seems to have come to an end in 1960, it was just yet the beginning of a more serious revolution that would produce a truly independent society. The Cameroonian novel as seen in Beti's example at this stage becomes openly political, presenting us with an insight into the problems and dilemmas of the new political and social order as could be recognized even before independence. The political and social orders are to be questioned in a corruption-ridden society where the person you know and not what you know matters, or where you obtain a job not based on qualification or experience as noted in Perpetua and the Habits of Unhappiness (1978). Beti's works are important for their deep philosophical questioning of this new political and social order.

Different writers use different approaches in attempting to reshape history. While Achebe for example in Things Fall Apart (1958), or Camara Laye in L'Enfant Noir (1953), goes back to pre-colonial African political set up to challenge the colonial system, Oyono and Beti to a larger extent tend to expose the ills that dominate the colonial and even post-independent organized society. Achebe presents a structurally organized Ibo society where age and hard work matter as far as administration is concerned. That is to say, the old rule the society and any hard working young person is allowed to join this group of the "wise" old people (wisdom comes with age).

Laye presents a smaller organized community of the family with the father as the head. Respect for the individual marks these communities. Oyono and Beti stress the adverse effect of colonialism on African traditional (culture), political and social life style.

Colonialism in almost all African colonial novels is presented as succeeding to alienate individuals not only from traditional political structure, but also to replace it with the capitalistic individualism of the Western world. By rendering the traditional chiefs redundant, for example, colonialism has the basis for a fight for political domination with its associated privileges which later became a major problem in independent Africa.

Beti and Oyono quest for political freedom and equilibrium by exploring the void created in the socio-political relations

resulting from the embittering and alienating character of French colonial and post-independent Cameroon.

Not much critical attention has been given to the Cameroonian writers on a comparative basis, particularly the colonial and post-colonial Cameroonian novels. Dorothy Blair is an exception. She compares Oyono's novels to Beti's post-colonial novels. Blaire's limitation is however noted where she considers them from a subjective, Euro-centric perspective that does injustice to these two writers. Arguing that the novels of Beti and Oyono do not present an "objective documentary" of the colonial period, Blair suggests that "Oyono writes with more acerbity, his humour is more sarcastically lacerating than Beti's; his first and third novels include more violence, more melodramatic incidents and demonstrate less fundemantel compassion."[7] With such conception, she refuses to see Toundi's naivety as genuine. She interpretes it as rather opportunistic. That is, she claims that Toundi is aware of the full implications of trying to follow the ways of the whites and still chooses to do so because of the benefits he thinks he will get.

Blair, like Milbury[8] and McCarthy, sees the presentation of the white personalities as "stereotyped" or caricatures; and so she views as unconvincing Oyono's satire against these characters. Following her line of thought, she wrongly concludes that:

> The satire of The Old Man and the Medal is directed partly against the colonial authorities for their obtuseness and lack of human understanding, rather than for the

> brutality that Oyono attacks in Une Vie de Boy, and partly against the Africans who cling blindly to meaningless tradition[9] (Blair, p 226).

In analysing Mongo Beti's post-colonial novels Remember Ruben and Perpetua and the Habits of Unhappiness, Dorothy Blair's racial attitude comes to the surface more pointedly, as when she regards the work as a novel where "the vicissitudes of a simple peasant are pretext for an indictment of the poliitcal intrigues, election-rigging and manoeuvring for power surrounding the granting of independence" (Blair, p 281). Faulting Remember Ruben on formal grounds, she concludes that Beti's deep involvement with the political issues and his own personal bitterness did not allow him sufficient distance from his subject to compose a work of art.

Refusing to see Beti as a committed writer who is out to defend a cause, she wrongly judges Mor-Zamba's revoluationary activities as accidental rather than convictional. Hence, she does not sympathise with Mor-Zamba. His misfortunes, according to Blair, are "the pretext for a political tract". Though Blair rates Perpetua as superior to Remember Ruben, she misses the political thrust of the novel and reads it as a work dealing with the wretched marriage and death of an intelligent independent girl. This reading is what leads to the claim that Perpetua does not substantially add to Mongo Beti's reputation as a novelist, gained by his three pre-independepence works.

What almost all critics of Oyono do not fail to mention in their works is colonial prejudice. That is, the unfair treatment of blacks by whites.

It is Eustace Palmer, who in The Growth of the Novel (1979) best articulates Oyono's achievement in handling colonial prejudice. Classifying Oyono among Africa's most brilliant comic writers, Palmer claims that "where Beti's humour is boisterous, Oyono's is elegant, but also has a sharp cutting edge. Underneath the placid urbane, comic exterior there is a real anger and moral concern."[9] Palmer takes issues with Kamara and Mukotani; while he regards the former's assessments of The Old Man and the Medal as a work that is geared towards entertainment rather than one concerned with serious political criticism as an overstatement, he describes as extremist the latter's claim that Oyono's intention is purely political. For Palmer, Oyono's humour and other techniques are inseparable from his moral, polititcal and social concern. Oyono, like Ngugi, Palmer reasons, is concerned with the social and the political rather than the cultural implications of imperialism, such that his attack on the catholic church merely prepares the way for his main butt of attack, which is political administration.

Comparing The Old Man and the Medal to Gulliver's Travels, Palmer argues that "both are gloriously comic works, but it is not so much that the tragedy does not obscure the charm and gaiety as that the gaiety does not obscure their essential seriousness."[10] Comedy might relieve tension, but Palmer does not think that it can wipe out black antagonism against the whites. His comments on the existing unity among whites as depicted in Oyono's novels, a unity among whites in their hatred of the Africans, certainly can be extended to the analysis of

Mongo Beti's novels which Palmer unfortunately did not include in his perceptive study.

In her study "Anticolonial Themes in the Novels of Ferdinand Oyono", Kashimana takes a look at the theme of the evils of colonialism as depicted in Oyono's novels but similarly makes no detailed reference to Beti's. She observes the different ways in which Oyono seeks to highlight how the colonized was brutalized and exploited by the various colonial institutions like the administration and the church,

> Many Africans despise and distrust christianity, white missionaries and westernization in all its ramifications due. to the ruthlessness and hypocrisy of colonizer. On the other hand others are afriad of whites or spontaneously become obsequious to them. Still others bath in an air of superiority when they are in the midst of their white associates.[11]

Unfortunatley, she refuses to see the social, economic and political problems of today as partly the fault of the "greed and power drunkenness of black leaders". Greed and self-centredness play a major role in Africa's current problems and Oyono gives this due consideration. Consequently, it would be incorrect to read Oyono's novels simply as attacks on the white colonialists.

Leonard Kibera's article "Colonial Contact and Language in Ferdinand Oyono's Houseboy" does attempt to redress this picture but unfortunately, goes to the other extreme. He argues that by not showing Toundi as a child of two worlds who comes back to his people, for better or worse, after his experiences in the

white world, Oyono intends to prove how the African in trying to recreate himself, actually signs himself into bondage under colonialism. It is not just a matter of leaving traditional Africa and accepting the white world. In accepting this white world to which he is blindly and absolutely attracted, Toundi's past no longer exists, his traditional society must be completely rejected; it must be humiliated and seen as worthless. Such is the reason, Kibera says, for which Father Gilbert does not encourage reconciliation between father and son when Toundi escapes from home a day to his traditional initiation into manhood. "It is not his business to create an atmosphere of love or understanding (he does not have the language for it), but rather hatred between father and son."[12] Kibera points out that Toundi never regrets for once the way his father is treated even when he (Toundi) suffers under the physical and psychological pain under the whites. Rather, he strikes out hard to identify with them.

Toundi's ambition to identify with whites is no more than to be treated kindly which Kibera sees as not a substantial ambition in life - "Oyono has clearly not chosen an African character with substantial ambitions in life. Throughout the novel Toundi's only real wish is to be treated kindly" (Kibera, p 82).

To further his argument on the African being an easy victim in the deadly game of colonialism, Kibera notes that Oyono's black characters are passive and not interested in working out

their own language to counter the priest whose incoherent chatter does not only carry a message of violence but actually succeeds in separating Africans. He establishes an almost fatal misunderstanding between two African families who never had such quarrel. In fact, on this level, Oyono's black characters remain consistent. Kibera senses that unlike some black characters who struggle with a consciousness that life could be lived better, they are defeatist even on the surface. While Kalisia lives without a sense of the future, for example, Ondoua resigns or enslaves himself in carrying the white man's huge clock.

For Kibera, therefore, every African in the novel thinks colonialism a trivial matter. The deeper Toundi gets into trouble, the more funny he finds his colonial situation;

> On the day he is arrested and after being beaten unconscious, he feels "a terrible urge to laugh", actually teases Gullet, spends the day playing cards, and generally finds his captors not at all disagreeable.[13]

Kibera notes that Oyono himself approaches the tragic moments without any seriousness. His African characters will never use their rest period or social contact to reflect on their situation but to joke about colonialism as seen in the scene where Toundi, Baklu and the sentry talk and laugh about little rubber bags.

However, why Kibera implicitly blames the author for not presenting struggling black characters under the colonial system is not clear:-

> ... the author's vision is not one that allows for the possibility of the African mastering his colonial situation or even confronting the colonialist, we find that all his black characters use language explicitly or implicitly to accept colonialism.[14]

The main trouble with Kibera's argument is that he blames Oyono for being too faithful to historical reality, and regards verisimilitude as an expression of lack of patriotism. Surely, Oyono's presentation of the seeming ignorance of his black characters is an effective ploy in uncovering the deceit in French civilizing mission. Put differently, his black characters expose the evil in the colonial system all the more dramatically because they show lack of awareness of the deeper implications of the French brutality whose surface they report. Brilliant as Kibera's article is, it is limited to Houseboy. An attempt therefore would be made to extend the argument to the other works under review.

Ironically when the critics cover all the books, they tend to end up with over-views that fail to do justice to the layered complexity of the texts. Gerald Moore in his work Twelve African Writers (1980) is an example. Professor Moore covers quite a handsome number of texts in his book, focusing on the post-colonial novel in particular. Included in his analysis is Beti's Remember Ruben, which Moore describes as very original and praises the novel's multi episodic nature. Commenting on the novel's epic sweep, he concludes that "a powerful new element in the structure of this novel is its vision of destiny."[15] According to Moore, Abena's and Mor-Zamba's

diverging and converging characters are central to the structure of the novel.

Nevertheless, Moore concentrates too much on the individual qualities possessed by characters like Abena and Mor-Zamba that he overlooks other important issues like the activities of the Rubenists, the position of blacks in the war as well as the corrupt nature of the French colonists as noted in the rigging of elections, all of which are of vital importance to the political context of the novel.

The same summary effect is noticed in Moore's analysis of Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness. Moore says "the object of the novel ... is to discover what has poisoned the springs of independence" (Moore, p 214). Contrasting it with Remember Ruben which he says is naturalistic, Moore sees Perpetua as having a "slightly dream-like atmosphere of the quest" (Moore, p 214). As such Beti's characters are portrayed as types rather than filled out in detail. Gerald Moore claims that the novel has startling innovations of style and technique which marked Beti's career as a novelist. He regards Perpetua to be inferior in power and scope to Remember Ruben but he never fully discusses them. Moore argues that:

> ... the publication of two novels of this calibre and contrasted quality in a single year finally confirms Beti as a master; one who, unlike many of his contemporaries, can make the transition from the relatively innocent "protest" novel of the 1950's to the harsh realities of contemporary Africa.[16]

The point here is that Moore does not in his analysis give us details of the drawbacks of the society as portrayed by Beti.

When compared with his critical work on Camara Laye, Adele King's article on Remember Ruben and Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness is a very brief summary of the above two novels by Beti. She mentions some of the most important aspects of the novels but gives no details. She concludes that Remember Ruben is an attack on colonial and traditional values. Another important point King raises is about the Rubenists. She sees them as Beti's most positive heroes. That they are able to create a new world for the Cameroonian, King reasons, is in itself enough. What this argument misses is that the Rubenists only initiate a change but themselves do not control this changed society; consequently their victory is a nominal one. As King herself recognizes, Beti is not yet satisfied that the victory of the Rubenists represents victory of the masses, hence in Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness, Beti makes a plea to his fellow Cameroonians to overthrow the reigning oppressive post-independence dictatorship.

We need to study the works of Oyono and Beti as works of art that address the political situation in the Cameroon specifically, and Africa in general. In the process of bringing out the political struggle in the novels, I would attempt to show how the socio-political and economic forces work to isolate the African in the colonial society and the masses in post-independence Africa.

NOTES

1. Klerius, Edet John, Topics in AFrican Literature: Literature and Development. The West African Experience, Lagos, PAICO Ltd (Press and Books) 1986, p 37.

2. Crick, Bernard, In Defence of Politics, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962, p 14.

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4. (Le) Vine, Victor, The Cameroons: From Mandate to Independence, California: University of California Press, 1964, p 37.

5. (Le) Vine, Victor, p 37.

6. Klerius, Edet J., Topics in African Literature, Creative Responses of Mongo Beti and Ferdinand Oyono to Historical Realities in Cameroon, Vol 1, Lagos, PAICO Ltd (Press and Books) 1986, p vi.

7. Dorothy, Blair, African Literature in French, London, Cambridge University Press, 1976, p 222.

8. Sarah Milbury-Steen reasons along the same lines. See European and African Stereotypes in Twentieth-Century Fiction, London, Macmillan, 1980, p 136. For her, Oyono takes pleasure merely in portraying stereotypes:

> Oyono preserves African stereotypes of Europeans in his treatment of his white characters, fixing each of them except Madame Le Commandant in an unchanging set of "European traits".

9. Eustace Palmer, The Growth of the African Novel, London, Heinemann, 1979, p 160.

10. Eustace Palmer, The Growth, p 162.

11. Kashimana, P. Nyikwagh, "Anticolonial Themes in the Novels of Ferdinand Oyono", Unpublished MA Thesis, French Department, ABU Zaria, 1982, p 3.

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13. Kibera, P. Nyikwagh, "Colonial Contact", p 92.

14. Kibera, P. Nyikwagh, "Colonial Contact", p 88.

15. Gerald Moore, Twelve African Writers, Malbourne and London, Hutchinson and Co. Ltd, 1980, p 210.

16. Gerald Moore, Twelve African Writers, Malbourne and London, Hutchinson and Co. Ltd., 1980, p 215.

COLONIAL ERA

HOUSE BOY

CHAPTER TWO

HOUSEBOY

As a system of relations colonialism was carried through a channel of structures, foremost amongst which structures is Administration. In the Cameroons, as in other colonized parts of the world, the administrative set up of the colonial regime condemned both the native population and the local chiefs to a state of silence while the white administrators, usually under the leadership of a commandant, dominated the colonial political scene. Attempts after the independence of many African states to change the situation has not met with any significant success, as the African rulers who took over largely returned to the system of relations inherited from colonialism. Nevertheless, the use of force to make and enforce policies that would apply to the rest of the society by a particular class was at no time in African history more pervasive than during the colonial era.

In the Cameroons colonial domination took the form of the well-known policy of assimilation. One of the distinguishing features of French assimilation policy was that in theory it recognized the colonies as part of French territory with equal political and economic rights like that of the metropole, but in practice, did not make a distinction between assimilated blacks and the rest of the masses. In effect, what assimilation meant was a total denial of the rights of citizenship to blacks. This disenfranchisement of the black majority was carried out under

the supposed French "mission civilisatrice" (civilizing mission). The French failed to translate into reality their declared objective of bringing peace, order and good government, as well as economic development to their overseas dependencies.

What Oyono is out to do in Houseboy is to criticize the French policy of "politique de protectorat". He not only uncovers the evil in the system of administrative separatism whereby different policies and standards were applied to the colonial inhabitants depending on the extent to which they had evolved towards French social ideal, but also draws our attention to the fact that the French mission of bringing colonial subjects enlightenment might be a noble idea, but its practice left much to be desired. In fact, as Oyono saw it, "French colonial rule was often actually more oppressive than that of other colonials which had no such elevated goals."[1]

In Houseboy, the injustice embedded in the discriminatory policies of the French is illustrated by the experiences of Toundi. Although he desires to live peacefully with whites, the French do not regard and treat him as a "citoyen" (citizen) or "assimile" (assimilated person), his ambition is circumscribed by the values which the colonial system presupposed and the way of thinking or acting fixed by the system. As it turns out, Africans like Toundi are deceived by the promise that in order to be accepted by the white man as an equal, they needed to be culturally assimilated. Such is the high degree of Toundi's infatuation with the whites that all he

wants is "to get close to the whiteman with hair like the beard on a maize cob." The glimmering straight hair represents the unattainable white level that Toundi aims at. He had been taught to hate himself as well as his colour. Charmed by the glamour that the city promises, Toundi begins to day-dream and sees himself as "one of the wild parrots we used to attract to the village with grains of maize" (HB, p 13).

The image of the parrot appropriately summarizes Toundi's situation because, like the parrot, he "seems hypnotized by the promise of a new life which colonialism holds out for him."[3] Colonialism has deprived Toundi of a culture and consequently his humanity, such that he behaves like an animal. Thus unable to understand the seamy and deceptive essence of Europeans' mask at this stage, he readily accepts the degrading position to which colonialism assigns him and struggles to meet expectations of the whites. When Toundi begins to see his ancestors as cannibals, and to see himself as a pet animal of the white priest - a specimen for his "civilizing" experiment - his psychological transformation is complete.

One of the ironies of colonialism to which Oyono's attention is attracted is the fact that christianity which should kick against colonialism and its racial prejudice because of the brotherly love it preaches operates instead unshamedly as another arm of colonialism in French Cameroons. This is reflected in the way the white priest exploits Toundi. His service under the French fails to lead Toundi toward the desired status but rather to his death. The more Toundi tries to climb

up the social ladder, the more he is exposed to exploitation, as the gap between black and white in a colonial society widened.

The fact that the death of Father Gilbert does not put an end to Toundi's suffering further shows that it is not whites as individuals who are inherently oppressive: it is the structure of colonialism which is inherently oppressive. It testifies to Oyono's deep understanding of the phenomenon of colonial subjugation that he allows Toundi's experiences to unfold resulting in his growing awareness of himself. The general African situation within the framework of the colonial relationship is explored through Toundi's suffering in the hands of the commandant, the highest placed colonial officer of that locality. Despite the pride with which Toundi regards his new appointment as houseboy to this great personality of his community, and the idea of his being "the chief European's boy, "the dog of the king" who should be "the king of dogs" Toundi is ironically maltreated. He is no longer a pet animal but an animal that can be kicked around and brutalized at will. Fear and insecurity dominate his life:

> I was nearly dead with fear... I took a step towards him then I came black towards the refrigerator. I could feel the commandant near me, the smell of him getting stronger and stronger.
>
> "Pick up your cap". Feebly I bent to pick it up. The commandant grabbed me by the hair, swung me round and peered into my eyes. With that he shot out a kick to my shins that sent me sprawling under the table (HB, p 23).

The commandant's habitually authoritative and oppressive comportment shows pointedly that whites do not see anything wrong or unsual in treating blacks as sub-humans. Like Gullet, the commandant cannot go anywhere without a black servant behind his car. This is just to portray white superiority, and to show that by nature the whites are meant to be masters and the Africans servants. The adverse effect of such a relationship on the personality of the African is demonstrated clearly by Toundi, who is brainwashed to the extent that he questions his own humanity. In their attempt to exercise power in the Cameroons the French habitually resorted tc violence and brutality. Oyono focuses attention on this aspect of French brutality. Toundi, for example, is used to stress the psychological effect left by the sadistic tendencies of French colonialism. The commandant seems always pleased with his efforts whenever he shoots out a kick at him or intentionally tramples on his fingers whenever Toundi tries to polish his shoes. The initiating kick of the commandant during Toundi's first meeting with him, is even more painful than that of the late Father Gilbert. Little things like not informing his houseboy to get ready for the tour they are to undertake are all examples of the commandant's sadistic tendencies that dehumanize Toundi. This is why Bede Ssensalo is right in seeing the theme of violence as the over-riding theme in the novel:

> The amount of attention Oyono pays to the theme of violence seems to make it the major subject of the novel. Oyono seems to agree with Kofi Awoonor who argues that French, unlike British, inflicted upon their subjects a senseless type of brutality that defies explanation.[4]

The biting satire that Oyono directs at the violence in the master-servant relationship that exists between the French and Africans exposes the ills of French colonialism. The master-servant relationship between Toundi and the Commandant is a miniature of white-black relations in general. The irony of the situation is that the colonialist who should fill the colonized African with uttermost revulsion and even contempt because of his inhumanity and despicable meanness instead comes to represent for him the symbol of dignity and humanity for which the African aspires, to the extent that ordinary nearness to him is seen as a privilege. It is this attitude, which inspires fear, respect and terror in the mentality of the colonized that opens the colonized person to further exploitation and brutalization by the whites. In Toundi's case, he even ends up dying.

The assimilation policy was used to support France's indivisibility with her colonies, a policy that was designed to prevent Africans from agitating for eventual independence. The most resented aspect of this type of treatment became the policy of "indigenat". This was a system of summary disciplinary punishment by the administrators from which the "citoyen" or "évolués" were exempted. The indigenat exposes most vividly the practical distinctions between the two types of status - "citoyen" and "sujets" (subjects). Punishment for the "sujets" for example usually takes place without trial. The system for the Cameroonian, became a means of restricting civil liberties, including rights of association and movement, to enforce conscripted labour to build roads and other public works.

as a colonial subject, Toundi is given no legal right to defend himself before the law.

Monsieur Moreau, like Gullet and the Commandant, is another colonial villain who uses excessive force to prevent any form of threat to his position. His actions further widen the gap between "citoyens" and "sujets" or whites and blacks. The way he summarily punishes the two Africans who are being accused of having stolen from Monsieur Janopoulous, reveals him to be no different from Gullet or the Commandant. The cruelty which the director manifests in his relationship with the two African suspects therefore reveals the whole secret behind French paternalism which Oyono holds up to merciless ridicule. The Prison Director seeks to humiliate the African, under the pretext of teaching the two suspects "how to behave" (p 76). The way the Africans are made to brutalize their own brothers in this scene is another evidence of cruelty. Apart from Medim me Tit, the other African constables are always very prepared to bring down their hard riffle butts upon other Africans in case they themselves bear the cross if they do not do it to the satisfaction of the white man. Through Toundi, Oyono criticizes this colonial brutality. When Toundi witnesses the wicked beating dished out by the Prison Director to Africans, he:

> ... thought of the priest, all the pastors, all the whitemen, who came to save our souls and preach love of our neighbours. Is the white man's neighbour only other whitemen? Who can go on believing the stuff we are served up in the churches when things happen like I saw today ... (HB, p 76).

Such situations in the novel give no room for much hope for a better human relation between the two classes (black and white) of the colonial society. Every action of the white is rather ironic or contradictory to the prescription of assimilation policy. Apart from Toundi and the suspects, there are others in the novel (Sophie for example) whose experiences are used to uncover the mask of colonial regime in Cameroon. That is, where Oyono shows the realities about French rule in Africa is to be questioned.

Colonial Church and Politics

The early missionaries were able to justify their presence in Africa. They proclaimed that the African - the "noble" savage - needed Christ if he was to enter the kingdom of God. They thus took upon themselves to preach the gospel with emphasis on the doctrine of equality. Nothing, however, compelled them to put theory into practice and thus like the other Europeans in Dangan, the priests were out to defend the French colonial intentions. Cameroon with its double primary colonialism has always faced missions with contradictory rules. Thus no matter how the European missionaries in general (German or French and British) may have proclaimed the non-political nature of their operations in Cameroon, one fact belies this argument: Each change in the colonial reign brought with it a change in the missionary corp. The societé des Missions Evengélique de Paris for example, took over stations of the German Basler and Berlin Baptist Mission with its own self-contradictory directives to its missionaries:

> ... while remaining ardently patriotic, while always acting in association with the normal administration of the country and rendering homage in public as well as private, to the justice of the cause defended by France and the nobility of its liberating efforts you must abstain from all direct incursions in the political domain and keep your ministry in the moral and religious spheres.[5]

With such diplomatic instructions, the church could not help taking sides in the politics of the day. The Parisian Catholic Church like the other denominations that had existed in colonial Cameroon never defined its mission in clearly national and colonialist terms.

In the course of keenly supporting the administration of the country as stated above, the missionaries became politically inclined to the upper class (the whites). By every means, they had to express and show their devotion to justice of the cause defended by France. The contradiction of the equality and neighbourly love preached in church became very pronounced. Oyono's satire and bitter criticism lies in Toundi's question - "Is the white man's neighbour only other white men?" (p 76). Even when it comes to breaking off of family ties, Father Gilbert makes no effort to reconcile father and son (Toundi and his father). This upholds Kibera's idea that "it is not his (father Gilbert's) business to create an atmosphere of love or understanding."[6]

The church which should propagate the human feeling and brotherly love in the people irrespective of colour or race was instead used as a tool of French colonial segregation policy in Cameroon. The church thus started off with the policy of

"indigenat" that restricted the rights of association. This lent considerable support to the suppression of blacks by whites.

One manifestation of such discrimination in Dangan is how whites and blacks enter the church through separate doors. Furthermore, while whites are given separate and comfortable seats around the altar, the natives storm through the one door into the nave of the church.

> In the church of Saint Peter at Dangan the whites have their seats in the transept beside the altar. They can follow the mass comfortably seated in cane armchairs covered with velvet cushions. Men and women seat shoulder to shoulder... The nave of the church is completely reserved for Africans. They sit on tree trunks instead of benches and these are arranged in two rows. (HB, p 30).

The white missionaries tend to be forceful over minute issues like taking communion and having burial grounds separately. The actions of missionaries were more controlled in line with colonial politics than the doctrines of the catholic church.

As its regulation states, the church had abstained from all direct incursions into the political domain and kept their ministry in the abstract moral and religious spheres. Maintaining moral and religious standards too was to be an affair for blacks only since the whites are supposedly perfect. While the whites sit shoulder to shoulder irrespective of sex, the blacks, because of their supposed amorous nature, are made to sit male separate from female. Oyono's anger at the duplicity of the whites rises to the surface in his criticism of

the priest who refuses to notice, let alone comment on, the recklessness with which the Commandant and Madame Salvain, and Gullet and the agricultural engineer and the two demoiselles Dubois, stroke each other in church. The scene of their amorous advances is a savage mockery of whites' pretence about spiritual cleanliness.

The case of Madam Decazy's adulterous relation with Monsieu Moreau, in fact, shows that it is the white community, more than the African people, which needs moral instruction. And yet, after mass every Sunday, the priest loves to beat the native christians who have committed adultery. He makes them undress in his office while he repeats in bad Ndjem, "when you were kissing, weren't you ashamed before God?" (HB, p 15). His action is a punitive measure meant to humiliate the blacks rather than to correct them. Since the policy of "indigenat" which ought to be applicable in church exempts citoyens from summary disciplinary punishment, Madam Decazy and the rest of the whites can only be judged by their consciences, which apparently they do not have.

The stiff opposition which the blacks pose to the "reforming" efforts by the churchmen derives from the fact that the policies were designed to erode deep-rooted African traditional values like polygamy. Blacks have every reason to be skeptical about the social intervention of the churchmen, which is a clear case of cultural imperialism. Efforts by the administration to be an impartial referee as could be imagined under colonialism could not be successful because the church

took upon itself to build santuaries - the "sixas", to which wives of polygamists could seek refuge. One would have thought that church politics was beginning to differ from that of the administration. The authority, however, interpreted the missionaries action as a means of re-enforcing morality which can come along only under monogamy. In that way, administration and the church supplemented each others' work unknowingly to the discredit of the blacks, in their attempt to enforce their different interpretations of the concept of the civilizing mission.

As already noted above, colonialism means a separatist society. Fanon summarizes the colonial world as:

> a world divided into compartments. It is probably unnecesary to recall the existence of native quarters and European quarters, of schools for natives and schools for Europeans.[7]

The colonial world of Dangan is no exception. Divided into a superior but minority white community, with a corresponding inferior black community, the arrangement meets the classical requirement of a colonialist segregated society. Separate quarters for whites and blacks in Dangan mean that whites are provided better facilities, like the Monsieur Janopoulous club which is exclusively for whites. Only black houseboys are permitted to come to hang around, as they too serve as objects for the amusement of the whites in their hours of leisure. The great stampede caused by M. Janopoulous who releases his alsatian against a group of black boys, to the amusement of the white ladies, reminds us of the South African situation - a

separatist society with luxurious facilities exclusively for whites, while the blacks are condemned to live in squalor and poverty in their (black) own homeland that is literally flowing with milk and honey. This sad state of affairs provides an occasion for Oyono's bitter satire against the colonial situation in the Cameroons.

In A Passage to India, E.M. Forster presents a similar picture of Indians in a colonial situation. Like the Cameroons, Indians "are not allowed into the Chandrapore club even as guest" (p 24). The British are seen in this novel to practice a similar kind of separatist policy. Forster pointedly uses the case of Doctor Aziz to illustrate the fact that education does not in any way change his social position of the native. Thus little things like disturbing the Indians during times of meals, are used by the British to show their superiority over them. Aziz's comment confirms this - "He (old Callendar) has found out our dinner hour, that's all and chooses to interrupt us every time in order to show his power." (p 17).

In Oyono's Houseboy, we see how French propaganda stresses the promotion of French culture, but the picture of social segregation of black and white tended to work against the objective of assimilation. It is clear therefore, that the French did not really mean to make French men of blacks, as this of course would mean a threat to their position. The French with the idea of French colonies being part of France, had to keep the blacks at a distance if blacks were to remain perpetually in bondage. This, they did in everyway possible, until black nationalism could no longer be contained.

The case of Sophie illuminates another aspect of the social exploitation of blacks by whites. Monsieur Magnol sleeps with her but prefers not to identify with her in public. The idea that a sexual relationship exists between a white and a black would be frowned at in the white community. What the agricultural engineer does, as a means to cover up his hideous relationship with the black girl, is to introduce her to the Commandant as his cook. Oyono presents the insincerety of white relationship in the following terms:

> Sophie, don't come today. I've got a European coming to visit me at the house. Sophie, you can come, the European has gone." Sophie, when you see me with a white lady don't look at me, don't greet me... (HB, p 27).

The fact that the agricultural engineer associates with Sophie in hiding might be evidence that the whites learn to cultivate hatred for the blacks to put them at a distance in case of any eventual equality.

On just arriving from France for example, Madam Decazy is indifferent towards blacks; she even allows a hand shake by Toundi. But later, she cultivates the habit, like those who had been longer in the colony, of not tolerating blacks. Her action recalls Fanon's words when he argues that:

> Hate is not inborn, it has to be constantly cultivated, to be brought into being, in conflict with more or less recognized guilt complexes. Hate demands existence and he who hates has to show his hatred in appropriate actions and behaviour...[8]

The irony is that the whites in Houseboy cultivate and show hatred towards the blacks in a way that appears natural.

In questioning the colonialists' dominance, Oyono shows the reader the various conditions and manner in which the blacks are suppressed and exploited. By so doing his criticism seems to be directed more at the circumstances of colonialism.

The language is simple and appropriate to the subject matter. While the Commandant speaks with the voice of the colonial system he represents,Toundi's language as seen from the start is marked by a certain level of uncertainty. This uncertainty represents his position in society. The Commandment's language, like the rest of the administrators, is characteristic of its hard realism. Toundi registers the Commandant's first comment to him: "he asked me point-blank if I were a thief." Kibera sees it rather to mean that as a colonial subject he has to be humiliated into a psychological dependency and not necessarily that Toundi as a houseboy must steal.

Oyono's satire is sad and very touching, reflecting the sad situation of the black under colonialism. One might be tempted like Kamara did to rush to the conclusion that the novel is very humorous. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that what Oyono presents, is a desperate situation, using macabre humour. His aim is to enable the blacks to realize the condition under which colonial politics has placed them. In Africa, for example, it is a taboo for men to wash women's underpants, but Madam Decazy comes to complain that the laundary man never washed hers clean.

It becomes a laughable thing amongst the house servants, but the message has been passed to the reader.

The whole political system is seen to be an irony. The equality prescribed in the assimilation policy is never put into practice. The more the blacks try to be assimilated, the more they are exposed to exploitation and the social gap thus widens.

NOTES

1. Richard, Joseph ed, Guallist Africa: Cameroon Under Ahmadu Ahidjo, Enugu, Fourth Dimension Publishers, Ibadan, 1978, p 9.

2. Oyono, Ferdinand, Houseboy, trans. by John Reed, London, Heinemann, 1966, p 9.

   Subsequent quotations in the thesis will depend on this Heinemann's edition.

3. Simon Gikandi, Reading the African Novel, London, James Currey, 1987, p 56.

4. Ssensalo, Bede, "The Black Pseudo-Autobirographical Novel: Miss Jane Pittman and Houseboy" in ALT No 14, 1984, p 103.

5. Richard, A. Joseph, "Church, State and Society in Colonial Cameroon", Unpublished Seminar Paper, Department of History, ABU Zaria, April 1977, p 7.

6. Kibera, Leonard, Colonial Contact and Language in Ferdinand Oyono's Houseboy, African Literature Today No 13, p 80.

7. Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, trans. by Constance Farrignton, London, Penguin, 1985, p 29.

8. Frantz Fanon, Black Skin White Masks, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann. Granada Publishing Ltd, 1970, p 39.

THE OLD MAN AND THE MEDAL

CHAPTER THREE

THE OLD MAN AND THE MEDAL

In Oyono's second novel The Old Man and the Medal (1956), his satire focuses on the crisis of identiy suffered by blacks under the French colonial regime. Through the French policy of "indigenat" as earlier seen, the colonial administrators empowered themselves to impose such rigorous and severe measures on the indigenous black population such as: no right of association, liable to summary disciplinary punishment, no right of movement, restricted civil liberties and many other such regulations which led to a separatist French colonial rule in Africa.

The black's loss of identity as a result of this kind of colonial situation is what Oyono stresses in detail in this novel. The novel thus recounts the experiences of a man who by all standards of Doum is a respectable and responsible elder as seen both in his family line and wealth, but who ultimately amounts to nothing by French standards. Meka's "tragedy" in the colonial world re-enacts, on a higher plane, the plight of Toundi in the earlier novel.

In addition to giving his land to the catholic church, Meka pays a great sacrifice : his two sons died in the war between France and Germany and thus expects a conciliation with the colonialists in the hope of or belief in finding in the colonial order a parallel position to the one he holds within the

indigenous system. However, what he gets in return when Meka is singled out for honour by French administration is absurd, to say the least. It is around Meka's great expectation that Oyono builds up and exposes to the reader, the physical and psychological destruction of the native African's life and property; in short, the ruin of his mode of being by the French colonial government and politics.

The French colonial rule depicted in The Old Man and the Medal even more than in Houseboy, places the African in a position or level of the underdog or second-class citizen. In the latter novel, also, more than in the earlier one, Oyono is primarily concerned to show black resistance to colonization. In Meka's case, resistance takes the form of taking refuge in tradition.

Plight of the Colonized

The African population and the colonial administration

The colonial policies necessarily had to depend for their implementation on administration which itself was rested on the grand doctrine of assimilation and association. What Oyono highlights in his novels is the black ignorance concerning the ideas on which the colonial order is based. Oyono sees colonialism in the Cameroons as the French maintaining the natives at a lower status in society, not giving them a chance of partaking in decision making even in matters that directly

concerned them. In the words of Jeanette Kamara, Oyono depicts the colonial situation as a world typified by:

> The social gap between whites and blacks, coloniser and colonised, with the exploitation of the latter by the former, the African mistress carefully kept out of sight, and adequate criticism of a powerful and hypocritical church.[1]

Although her summary of the image of the colonial world in Oyono's novel is apt, it is surprising that she then goes ahead to describe the above qualities as materials "etched in to provide sufficient background to a funny story." The fact is that Oyono's portrayal of the negative consequences of French colonialism cannot be reduced to mere entertainment, because his savage attacks on it conveys the bitterness of a patriot who desires to awaken the blacks to a full awareness of the colonial situation so that they can destroy the evil system which dehumanizes them.

Indeed what we see in the novel is an emphasis on colonial politics which has placed the blackman in constant fear and tension right in his own land. The whole idea in this psychology therefore, is making the black understand and believe in white superiority over them (blacks). This, the French were very successful in doing in Cameroon to the extent that the mere idea of meeting a white administrator was enough to cause tension and even sleeplessness. This accounts for why the villagers of Doum and Zouri are perpetually under threats of ubiquitous summons by the commandant who acts the role of a demi-God in the society. A summon by the commandant normally

indicates some trouble; this explains the reason why Meka is not able to find sleep on the night when he is informed that he has been summoned to appear before the commandant. Such is the terror instilled in the blacks by colonialism that:

> he had hardly slept at all. He felt irritated that his wife was still snoring. How could she sleep so soundly with a summons from the commandant there, under the bed inside a shoe. "How could you sleep when your husband had troubles?" "Wake up! How can you sleep when I have troubles?... You know I have to see the commandant early this morning."[2]

Here we witness the way in which colonial intimidation suppresses the traditional attributes of the native. The Meka family line is noted for its capabilities and wealth as the case of Meka's land and cocoa show, but the white or rather French culture does not permit this. Meka's personality is thus shattered to an alarming level as Oyono so tells us.

Black servants in Houseboy like Toundi, Baklu, the sentry and others get so nervous when they come in contact with their white masters. The nervousness then gives their white masters the opportunity to punish the black further, as we see Toundi who gets a kick after his nervousness makes him confused regarding whether to pick up his hat or serve the commandant. And yet the actions which the blacks (in The Old Man and the Medal) take in the effort to avoid such nervousness, especially those that go to work in the European quarters, who pass through mammy Titi to fortify themselves with the locally brewed drink, pushes them to a more serious problem: alcoholism and the

attendant social problem of a colonized people. The physical beating that they (the natives) get further increases their fear for the whites and a consequent false identity as prescribed by the dictates of colonialism.

At first sight, the proposed award seems to be an obvious expression of friendship, and love of the French colonial administration for the black who has given so much to further the cause of the colonialist. Meka who accepts the award with gratitude, little considering that a mean piece of medal too minute a compensation for the lives of his two sons and his land, indeed, is further ennobled by the promise of the possibility that the medal award would draw him closer in friendship with the white. Similarly, it is because they believed that the medal would render him invulnerable to the usual brutality and severe or censorious condition that the French subjected the natives to, that the proposed award sets a commotion amongst his relations. They too could not resist the supposed advantages that might result from Meka's closeness (intimacy) to the whites. By the end of the day, however, the award turns out to be one of those colonial manipulations to exploit and debase the blackman. And Oyono uncovers the merciless irony involved in the naivete of the villagers who allowed themselves to be duped.

Not only is Meka's medal inferior to those awarded some whites at the same occasion, the degrading conditions to which he is subjected during the ceremony further compounded his identity problems. Where the white recipients are comfortably

seated under a shade, Meka is made to stand all day in the hot sun:

> Meka stood bareheaded and quite still, his arms to his sides, inside the circle painted with whitewash where he had been placed to wait for the arrival of the white chief.
>
> Meka peered around him cautiously like an animal that feels watched. He realized what a strange situation he was in. Neither his grandfather nor his father nor any member of his family had ever been placed as he was inside a whitewash circle, between two worlds, his own world and the world of those others who had been called ghosts when they first came into the land. He was not with his own people, and he was not with the others. He wondered what he was doing out there (OMM p 85).

One notices here the underlying cause of Meka's identity crisis as he, torn between two worlds of white and black, and belonging to neither. Njinjoh thus concludes the drama about the medal which enhances the black's position in a colonized Dangan society:

> The "colonial merit" for which old Meka is to be awarded the medal does not lie so much in promoting his "mission civilisatrice", as in the dramatic and wretched condition to which this blind collaboration has reduce the collaborator.[3]

The black collaborator in the supposed assimilated colonial situation, misinterpretes his society and ends up no where other than in disillusionment and despair as seen in Meka's case. His naive interpretation of the realities of colonial diplomacy isolates him from society. The deceit wrapped around the medal award like in other things (his supposed religious superiority, for example), becomes a replica of the sightless effect of the Western or French values and influence over the black mind.

Meka's award might be seen, therefore, as just an encouragement to the other blacks who never understood that the assimilation policy would never give room for practical equality with the French. The assimilated native was always still liable to penalties if and when the commissioner or commandant so deemed it. Meka becomes a prey to this policy.

Meka's plight is, therefore, tactfully presented to bring out the nature of the predicament of the African in a colonized society. Throughout the novel until the very last stage, the novelist pinpoints the rather severe and exploitative ways of the colonial administrators. At the reception, for example, the whites as usual sit up the platform looking down at the blacks, and when it comes to touching glasses (a sign of friendship and togetherness) they do so only amongst themselves. Ironically, it is in this same hall and at that very moment that friendship and the beginning of a new era is being preached by the high commissioner.

One can, therefore, correctly conclude that there is no redeeming virtues in the brutal, hypocritical and racialist characteristics of the French colonial administration apart from turning away from assimilation and the whiteman in general. Oyono suggests a turn back to the traditional way of life. This is what he sets out to say but he does so in a rather roundabout and humorous way, to add an element of entertainment or delight. The black or traditional dignatories who come to see the truth about colonial exploit, do not hesitate to criticize and

Oyono paints Meka under terribly humorous situations; which still he makes the black reader to sympathize with Meka. The irony is that Meka's zazou and cassock-like jacket is just out of place when compared with the coats ever worn in Doum. To further ridicule the white or rather French culture Oyono's black character who tries to become like one of them (whites) is further held to ridicule. Meka has to take practice on how to move or walk with the leather shoes to which he is so allergic, in spite of the extra large size to make do for his outstanding two little toes... "Meka's feet had not been made to go into the white man's shoes" (OMM p 76) just like he will not be able to fit in their society.

Oyono is noted in his novels to furnish the reader with meticulous portraits of events of the French colonialists' inability to understand the black other than through diminishing rationalizations. Their behaviour towards blacks remains insulting and most of the time brutally reductive. Just like the commandant in Houseboy, who for example, cannot make out his own houseboy among other Africans for the simple reason that they all seem the same to him, so too Gullet cannot recognize Meka when he is imprisoned. It becomes even more ridiculous when one comes to think that Meka is supposed to be the most distinguished of the blacks in Doum especially as he just received a medal of friendship with the whites the previous day. Such reactions from the administrators confirm the fact that the two like the rest of the Africans are just usable fools and tools to be exploited by the colonial agents.

question the whole system. Such questioning is noted in their sarcastic statements and questions even though they do not do it to the face of the whites themselves:

> ... all these whites, like their great chief, say we are more than friends to each other. But has anyone here ever come across a white hand in the same dish of food? How could they say they were more than brothers to the natives? The High Commissioner and all the Frenchmen in Doum had had seats up on the dais along with the Greeks who were people who kept the Africans from getting rich. There was no African on the platform with them. The High Commissioner hadn't talked as man to man with any African. How could they talk of friendship if you could only talk to the High Commissioner as if you were addressing a tribunal? Couldn't friendship have any other basis except a formal reception, a drink party? And even when they drank, the whites touched glasses among themselves. Where did this friendship come in? (pp 110-112).

Many more of such sarcastic statements are noticed from this stage of the novel. In this respect, Meka's closing statement that "I'm an old man now..." (p 167) cannot but be seen as an expression of his disillusionment, following his eventual realization of his own inability to do anything tangible in the direction of arresting the ugly situations, that is, putting an end to the French domination. His generation wants to put an end to the exploitation of the blacks by whites but finds itself unable to escape the predicament. Placing his hope on the younger generation to take the challenge and achieve what their parents could not - their true identity - Meka resigns to his fate.

The Church and Politics

Like in Houseboy Oyono singles out the church in The Old Man and the Medal for criticism. The Catholic Church in French colonial Cameroon as seen before, with its ill-defined intentions had to support the French policy of administration in the colony. Collaboration between the two was then inevitable if any successes were to be registered. In this wise, the church becomes one of the contributory factors to the social tragedy that occurs in Doum. Rugyenda notices this phenomenon when he observes that "the church has been used as a propaganda tool to enhance colonial administration."[4] Oyono's most pointed attack on the church is on its materialism. He shows the church to be no more than any other agent of colonial domination. Stealthily but steadily, the French colonial churchmen came in the guise of being men of God to do His task, only to turn out to be thieves. Sofola sees this hypocrisy as the act of:

> a man of a gluttonic culture to who food and material are the most important values and who, is lacking in moral fibre would have no qualms about disguising himself as agent of the God and the preacher of the gospel, a half-hearted gospel, in order to achieve his exploiting role.[5]

Oyono directs his savage attach on the callousness of the colonial European church which even robs an old African of his land. The robbing of an old man of his land draws a special significance from the fact that land occupies a special position in the lives of Africans. A man's inheritance from his forebears, his land only, is a piece of property on which he

must wrest out a living, but a precious possession which he must never be deprived of. However, the French through the church, not only take Meka's land from him but have the visciousness to declare that the act of the robbery of the land was, in itself, an act of godly benevolence toward the black heathen, who is undeserving of the blessing:

> Meka had had the special grace to be the owner of a piece of land, which one fine morning, had proved pleasing to the eye of the Lord. How could he go against the will of the Lord - who giveth (p 10).

Not until Meka gets an insight into the inner motives of the French in Africa, does he realize that the "Lord" was the white man himself.

We see the extent of Meka's suffering in the contempt with which his African neighbours regard him. Having given the larger portion of his land to the church, Meka is forced to live in a small wretched hut. His neighbours's reaction is to see him as "a stupid sod", who loses all he has just to gain the name of "a model christian in the catholic mission at Doum". Showing more vision than Meka, they are little surprised that the land had been taken from Meka. "If they'd taken away from you that wouldn't have surprised me", said someone else (p 78). This suggests Oyono's resentment at the French duplicity in the Cameroon. The whiteman's lack of consideration, his exploitative and supressive attitude thus finds expression in several ways and forms.

Satisfied with their self-proclaimed cultural superiority, which was backed by their ethnocentric and racially arrogant attitude, they went ahead to impose their culture on the Africans. The duplicity of the priest is self-evident. Although they forbid the Africans to distil and drink the locally produced and cheap alcohol, they are not actually interested in stopping them from drinking per se. As a result, the banning of the local gin indirectly promotes the European spirits and red wines that flood the city centre and which the Africans are forced to drink in large quantities.

On the matter of enforcing the ban on the drinking of the local gin itself, the whites show more evidence of duplicity if not outright dishonesty. While Gullet and his constables watch out for any culprit who might violate this colonial rule, Gullet goes to see Father Vandermayer who then condemns the consumption of this drink by christians, as a "mortal sin". One can therefore agree with Russel when he observes that Oyono "depicts that institution (the church) as the one that covers the political domination and economic chicanery of colonialism with a blanket of moral authority".[6]

In the same way that the administrators hide their political shortcomings under their "civilizing mission", their religious counterparts also employ religion as a cover for moral shortcomings. Religion becomes an institution where the whites find comfort and relief for their moral drawback. Oyono presents the colonial churchmen, administrator, doctor, or

merchant, as separate parts of a colossal plot, contrived not purely to civilize the African but to exploit him mercilessly in the process.

As an agent of colonialism, the priest is then another target for Oyono's satire. Meka's consolatory statement about Father Vandermayer when he leaves for the Commandant's office, for example, shows his trust in their relationship. Ambiguously, it is this same Father Vandermayer whom Meka relies on that treats him scornfully. Vandermayer dismisses him by merely glancing and shaking off his (Meka's) touch at a critical point in Meka's life where he most needs consolation. Meka here, finds himself in the same position like Toundi who believes in the protection of the Commandant until the very last moment when he is picked up by Gullet under the Commandant's very nose.

Even though Meka manages a treacherous smile at the priest, after this incidence, his reaction at the mention of the Lord's name shows his total rejection of the whiteman's God and religion. Meka has taken a major step in the direction of total rejection of colonialism in general when he says:

> The whites have just been taking it out of me and killing me, and what do you do? You start talking to me about the Lord... Since you started sprinkling yourself with holy water your wrinkles haven't disappeared. And he comes talking to me about the Lord... (p 147).

Such is the extent of the frustration that Meka has suffered in the hands of the colonial agents that he gets to reject the

colonial relationship entirely. Oyono, thus, effectively uses Meka in this situation to further show his disapproval at French colonialism in the Cameroons.

The Merchants

Although the French justified their presence in Africa as a mission to civilize the African, Oyono shows that far from being a civilizing mission, French colonialism was motivated by self-interest, the desire to exploit the vast human and material resources of Africa. The French politicians intimidated, exploited and brutalized the blacks. As a result, the blackman's personality was shattered in his own land.

Like the administrator and the missionary, the merchant does not escape Oyono's criticism. Monsieur Janopoulous, the richest white Merchant in Dangan is actually a thief who hates Africans. In his relationship with Africans his racial arrogance is evident and sums up the general attitude of whites towards black subjects . Janopoulous cultivates and shows this hatred for the blacks in every way possible. He himself becomes an embodiment of hate as Fanon would put it. It never crosses Janopoulous' mind that a black can enter his club. He even sends his dogs after the houseboys, who come to hang around. The assistance given him by the administrators in exploiting the Africans in miniature illustrates the symbolic relationship between the white merchants or traders and the colonial administrators and the missionaries.

Nkolo and Meka symbolically represent the plight of the native trader in colonial Cameroon. Though they are both aware of the fact that the Greek merchants cheat them, they have no option but to sell their cocoa beans at the reduced price offered by these Greeks. The villagers are therefore very surprised to hear that Kobbingolom gives a pack of sardine to Meka for free. But Meka sees it as a way of paying for the cocoa beans that Kobbingolom has stolen from him all the while:

> Perhaps his heart told him to do it... I don't know, but I am sure he has stolen enough from me (p 20).

The Cameroonians are not only intelligently forced to drink the European wine but the European traders also manipulate them to buy articles which might not be useful to them (Cameroonians). Meka is a victim as he ends up with items in his house for which he has no use as he confirms:

> However the white woman did persuade him to buy a pair of socks, a tin of polish, two spare pairs of laces and a shoe horn which he did not know what he was supposed to do with... (p 77)

Oyono portrays the colonized as people without a decisive will or power of their own. Their lifestyle tends to be directed by the white colonizers through their dubious attitude.

No matter what aspect of colonialism he handles, Oyono does not hide the depth of his dissatisfaction with the colonialism in the Cameroons. It might have been unpardonable for Oyono had the French presence in Africa not been criticized as he depicts the plight of the Africans in the colonial milieu.

NOTES

1. Kamara, Jeannette, "Ferdinand Oyono, The Old Man and the Medal (translation of Le Vieu Négre et la Médaille"), ALT No 3, 1985, p 51.

2. Oyono, Ferdinand, The Old Man and the Medal, a translation from French by John Reed, London, Heinemann, 1967, p 3.

   All subsequent reference from this text will directly be quoted in the work.

3. Abima, D. Njinjoh, "Personal and Socio-Political Relations in the Works of Three Cameroonian Novelists", Unpublished PhD Thesis, Kent, 1986, p 55.

4. Mukotani, Rugyenda, "Ferdinand Oyono: A Dissenting View", Eldred, Jones (ed): ALT No 6, 1982, p 153.

5. Sofola, J.A., African Culture and the African Personality, Ibadan, African Resources Publishers, 1973, p 74.

6. Russell Linnemann, "The Anticolonialism of Ferdinand Oyono" in Tradition and Contemporary African Literature, Spain, Yale French Studies, 1976, p 65.

THE TRANSITIONAL ERA

REMEMBER RUBEN

CHAPTER FOUR

REMEMBER RUBEN

Remember Ruben (1980) falls among the transitional novels in Cameroon. A progress in the political theme is noticed in Beti's novels. Contrasting the achievements of Oyono and Beti for example, Abiola Irele has argued that whereas Oyono turned his satire "against colonialism with intense virulence and showed how it had alienated the people of Africa from themselves", Beti directed his satire "against both Africa and Europe, showing both societies in a state of corruption, and the final result is a distaste for the human condition which transcends the immediately African subject matter."[1] This is to say that while like Oyono, Beti picks on colonialism, he goes further to attack the self-seeking nature of the average Cameroonian. Beti attacks the politicians of independent Cameroon whose tyrannical disposition and tendency to depend on the ex-colonial masters for protection Beti exposes.

Beti shows that the very fact that Cameroon was once ruled by a people other than the French is enough evidence that France's supposed permanency would one day be questioned. The second world war was therefore to bring about the questioning of the French political dominance of Cameroon and other African countries under the French in general. The psychological effect on the African soldiers after experiencing the resistance put up by a European country against attempted colonization by its neighbours, was so great that they had to question the

continued French dominance in Africa. Beti decides to go back, in his novel, to the pre-war situation to give the reader an insight into the French colonial situation and its consequent effects on the Cameroonian.

War Situation

The use of colonial troops in European wars has been a point of criticism by many African writers. In The Old Man and the Medal, Oyono refers to the Africans participation in the war in passing. It is Mongo Beti who, in Remember Ruben, gives details as concerns the part Cameroonians played in the second world war. Oyono, however, takes credit for calling attention to the war and thus for enabling Beti to elaborate on the nature of the suffering of the Africans during the war.

Having been drawn into a war that never concerned them, Africans suffered untold hardships under the policy of the indigenat, through which the colonialists introduced a system of compulsory duties that made it mandatory for Africans to enter the service. Also known as "forced labour", this system has remained a target of attack or criticism by African writers and Beti is no exception.

Beti's newest contribution is to use a small village Ekoumdoum and its surrounding towns - to illustrate the condition of a vast majority of blacks who were forced to contribute in one way or the other to the war effort- It is in the raid for this goal that Mor-Zamba amongst others in

ruthlessly beaten and forcefully taken captive to the labour camp at Oyolo Camp Gouverneur Leclerc. The inevitability of war thus heightened political repression in Cameroon as Beti shows us through the raids and forced labour.

By the policy of forced labour therefore, Beti gives us an introspection into the nature of colonial exploitation of the ill-fated masses. The life in the camp shows that what the black captives go through is nothing but slavery. In God's Bits of Wood, Sembene Ousmane uses the plight of the railway workers to present a similar picture of Africans who are made to work under severe conditions under French colonial rule. Where Ousmane emphasizes the economic exploitation of the Africans who are paid no family allowances, no pension and very minimal compensation, Beti uses Meka to emphasize the physical toll caused by forced labour. In Remember Ruben, Beti stresses the physical indignity of forced labour. He underlies the injustice in a situation in which Africans are forced to build on their own land (Oyolo) a military base in preparation for a European war. The case of Meka is particularly pathetic as he not only gives up his land and children for a French cause, but also has to join others to dig roads, clear land, build bridges and houses for whites with absolutely no compensation for his sacrifices. This is what French colonization entails. What this suggests is the insidious nature of colonialism which is so successful in brainwashing Africans, that it makes the natives instruments of their own exploitation.

Concurring with Fanon, Beti is suggesting that there is no need for the whiteman to show his face; his black slave will carry on the work on his behalf. Beti's vivid and detailed description of the war situation and other social situations, thus leaves no one in doubt that the novelist is out to criticize the social and political disparity between blacks and whites created by colonialism. Furthermore, like other African writers such as Ousmane, Armah and others, Beti is concerned about this colonial situation. Obiechina correctly summarizes the whole process in the following way:

> A direct result of the European colonization of Africa was the stereotyped image of Africa and Africans in the popular European immagination. The imposition of political control also involved a conscious or unconscious devaluation of the African culture. Furthermore, African "primitiveness" essentially a product of political domination, received, in the second part of the nineteenth century an almost authoritative stamp from anthropological Darwinism, which in the evolutionary scheme of culture hierarchy placed African culture at the bottom and Western culture at the top of the scale. The popular image of Africa in the European mind was a plcae with the primitive institutions, inhabited by primitive, irrational people on who the civilizing will of Europe needed to be imposed.[2]

Like the other African writers, Beti emphasizes the fact that the white colonizers (in this case the French) mission of colonization is merely a cover for the ulterior motives of the whites to dominate and exploit their subject peoples. Colonial dominance, Beti also stresses, meant a differential or separatist government in the colony. The gap was to be very distinct with the whites at the top of the scale. Thus while

the captives at home like Mor-Zamba and the African population in general, faced such discriminatory treatment, their brothers at the war front experienced equivalent discriminatory treatment. The Africans were made to understand that fighting was to be the job of Africans while the Europeans (the French) celebrated whatever victory they made:

> Brothers, between those people and us nothing can be done. Perhaps you've been told that we led a fine life down there? I'll tell you, it was more a dog's life, a life fit for dogs of niggers yes! We kept confined, in quarantine like the sick, never going out except to fight but always excluded from the victory parades. That was our fine life for you...[3]

Such bitter sarcasm is used by Beti throughout the novel to criticize the discriminatory and consequent exploitative tendencies embedded in colonialism. Beti stresses the fact, too, that even though the Cameroonian contribution to the war on the side of France was not acknowledged by the French, whites could not have achieved much without the role played by Cameroonian soldiers and workers who built roads and worked at ports and military bases. And yet, for all the hardships faced by the Cameroonians during the war, all they had in return was a rapacious colonial link with France which ensured their continual exploitation by the French.

Perhaps, the most beneficial development during the war was the destruction of white invincibility. In The Beautyful Ones are not Yet Born, Armah presents a similar account of what happened when the soldiers who had fought side by side with whites, saw whites die, suffer like themselves. The experience

opened their eyes and they realized that whites were human afterall like themselves.

In Remember Ruben, Beti explores another dimension of the suffering of blacks. Not only were they not allowed to return home with their families, they were denied the demobilization bonus promised them at the start of the war. They desparately needed to restart a new life after the long period of absence. Worse still, those who managed to pay back their passage home had their property seized aboard ships on their return journey. Added to this was the pain of unemployment at home. Thus with the betrayal of the promises which had motivated blacks to fight without reservation in a war that never concerned them, depression within the black population deepened. The new-comers "let all expressions full of disillusionment, bitterness and vengance", and the political turn they took was to culminate with a more radical political movement - Popular Progressive Party (PPP) to fight colonialism in the Cameroons.

Beti uses Abena's extreme radicalism to stress the strong need for a political awareness, and consequent change. Abena refuses to return home after the war in Europe. He goes out to search and possess a "gun". The "gun" in Beti's work stands for "power", power that has been taken away from the blacks by the whites. A gun for Abena therefore suggests a means by which he will be able to become master of the future. He therefore represents the militant black who goes in search of his "identity", that is, for independence. Through Abena, Beti

criticizes the villagers of Ekoumdoum for not making any effort to take their own destiny into their own hands. This is thus a call by Beti for the Africans to work out their own destiny. Conscious of the practice in Ekoumdoum and its surroundings, Abena sets out to look for ways of liberating them from the tyranny of the past.

A Step Forward in the Political Situation

In the works of Oyono, the colonists used a fascinating but successful strategy of intimidation through which the consqueror was able to make the black first to be aware and ashamed not only of his culture but also of the very fact that he was black. Through this means, the colonialists were able to exploit and rob the blacks of everything, and the system of indoctrination became so effective that it actually made the blacks to despise themselves and all that they represent. The colonial period after the second world war was to be a period of exasperation before the consequent change of the political situation. Rebellion took place in the Cameroons like in other parts of Africa. With the realization of the psychological deceit of colonization, the Cameroonian had come to understand the empty, immense and arbitrary powers associated with the French administrators. Beti implies here the necessity of change, and the ex-service men, like the young and even the old, who became militant activists, serve as his examples of patriotic ideal.

In Remember Ruben, as in Ousmane's Gods Bits of Wood, therefore, one notices how this age of realization promotes a more determined agitative black population. But while the railway workers in Ousmane's novel succeed in improving their working conditions, frustration might have set in (but it never discouraged their struggle), in the Rubenist's movement - that is, the Rubenists acted as catalyst to independence but power was never handed to them. The colonialists succeeded in shaping the post-independence politics to their taste. What Beti satirizes is the well known and documented phenomenon of French political tradition of engineering the defeat of undesirable political forces. In fact, it became very impossible for any PPP candidate to win an election during post-war colonial period for the simple reason that the French would not permit it. By this phenomenon, therefore, the colonial administrators immediately put into operation a campaign to sabotage the elections, making sure they install as leader, a person they could easily manipulate. Beti's satire again rises to the surface against this development.

For most African countries independence was to be in theory. In Cameroon, the cultural and economic influence of France was still to be felt even long after independence. Baba Toura - a man of limited intelligence - became the French principal "interlecuteur vadabe" when the time finally came to devolve some measures of political autonomy on to Cameroon. The novelist satirizes not only the illiteracy of this man, but also his ignorance of his rights to self-determination which can best be safe-guarded in an independent and free society.

By anticipating and warning against what the adverse effect of such power would be on the future post-colonial politics of the nation, Beti demonstrates his commitment to seeing a stable Cameroonian nation that is ruled by a just and fair Popular Progressive Party. Beti makes a call on the readers to see the way in which independence in Cameroon was to be a mere slipping on of the dresses of the white predecessors instead of being a fundamental change in the structure of society. For Beti, political independence has failed to end the indignities brought about by colonialism. This line of reasoning is supported by Baba Toura's political action. From the very beginning, Beti does not avoid any obstacle in exposing Baba Toura's abuses.

In satirizing Baba Toura's ignorance, and his illiteracy which make him to be totally dependent on the colonial administration, Beti presents a scene in which Baba Toura, a "docile" creature:

> wishing to acknowledge the honour which his peers had done him in electing him president... had meandering through a long address prepared by the governor's office; but at the end, unable to contain his joy and exaltation, Baba Toura had forgotten his text and cried out ecstatically. "Thank you, France, thank you, thank you, thank you, yet again thank you.' France think of us (RR 164).

Beti attracts the reader's attention to Baba Toura's ecstatic and repetitive cries of "thank you France" and "think of us poor little Africans" to emphasize the complete reliance of the would-be government on France. The Rubenists were given no chance to complain. Rather their grievances, that is, their

verifying and numerating in their news spartacus a "series of irregularities and often gross frauds indicating that the governor had intended to impose a corrupt solution by force", fell on deaf ears.

Instead the governor issued a decree ordering the arrest of Ruben and a dissolving of the PPP. The use of the indigenat at this very last moment (that is the summary punishment of the blacks) is clear evidence of the fact that complete decolonization was to be difficult. This policy was to be adopted by the post-independence successors and applied on the less favoured masses. This way, Beti makes us understand that with the strong roots of colonialism, the PPP militants were only persistent in speeding up political transfer but were not powerful enough to ensure this transfer got into their own hands.

With Baba Toura as leader, independence in Cameroon was to be more theoretical than practical. The French colonialist policy in Cameroon, as seen in the novel, was to continue as the French were to "use" Baba Toura as "the perfect screen", "behind him, they will continue to govern and everything will go on as before" (RR 217).

> With Baba Toura, that black Gauleiter of de Gaulle, independence will be nothing but the pursuit of colonization by the same means, though perhaps under other forms. This is an independence which corresponds in no way with the objectives pursued by the PPP since its foundation... Instead of being an instrument indispensable to the full development of the people it will reveal itself, every day more clearly, as the

> collar by means of which the agents of colonialism and imperialism hiding behind Baba Toura, a new type of chief, will continue to hold him prisoner in his own land. The people will continue to walk naked and to die of hunger in a country bulging with resources (RR 218).

Revolt in the Novel

Revolt in the novel is mostly political and takes the form of constant struggles between the Rubenists on the one hand and the colonial administration in collaboration with the would-be puppet regime on the other. The general policy of the administration as noted in the novel during the mid post-war colonial politics, therefore, was the containment of the PPP.

Beti criticizes the unholy alliance between the colonial administration and Baba Toura, an alliance which halted the penetration of the PPP among the citizenry. For sometime, therefore, persistent campaigning by the PPP was matched by an equivalent unwillingness by the French administration to concede any grounds to it.

Cameroon thus becomes the scene of an increasing tense political situation with two unyielding forces, the colonial administration and the PPP competing within the same body politic. Significantly, Baba Toura's government from its very inception was marked by the same colonial harshness, a phenomenon that Beti has throughout the novel denounced. By stressing the fact that while the French were erecting the

pillars of their neo-colonial establishment, they were simultaneously involved in suppressing a rebellious nationalist movement (the PPP) which stood for the immediate and complete independence of Cameroon, Beti shows how such brutality against political opposition will remain indefinitely, as the French presence is still felt in Cameroon.

In the novel, the party militants become more of "trouble-makers', who were willing to exploit every local grievance for their political ends. To an extent, they did respond to French repression by devoting much of their energies in publicizing all forms of discontent - an example of such protest can be seen in the public struggles with the "Saringalas" against the banning of the production, sale and consumption of the locally produced drink. While Beti regards identification with one's culture a necessary prelude to independence, he exposes the harm done on the African culture by the French in the Cameroons.

Claiming to be a party of the masses, that is, the section of the colonized society in Cameroon (the exploited class), the PPP constantly or repeatedly instructed its militants to involve themselves with the local conflicts of the people. In practice, the PPP advocated the recognition of those indigenous groups which it considered the "exploited", as opposed to those who collaborated with and benefitted from colonial rule. Jean-Louis, like Diara, in Sembene's novel, becomes the scapegoat of the latter group. He is judged and disgraced accordingly. For Beti, people like Jean Louis and Diara represent opportunists,

who pose a danger to the future independence Africa. Beti satirizes the materialistic tendencies of such people and advocates for the creation of a new society where the values of humanism take precedence over materialism.

What Beti seriously kicks against is the use of corrupt measures, and police force and other brutal measures in quelling the PPP activities. Apart from the administration's efforts of sabotaging elections, other measures like courts, spy networks, the torture of prisoners, attacks on internal and exiled opponents, were dominant in post-war colonial Cameroon. Beti sees such evidences as a means to demonstrate his distaste for the French harsh but continuous efforts at maintaining their dominance in post-colonial Africa.

Politics and the Church

It has always been Beti's business to attack the colonial missionaries and politics in the church. Like Oyono, he ridicules the ill-defined rules of the catholic church, whose agents end up collaborating with the colonial administration in exploiting and suppressing the African. The non-intervention of Father Van den Rütter in Mor-Zamba's arrest might be evidence to support the fact that he,like the administrators, sees the black as an instrument to be manipulated and used at will. Beti questions the brotherly love preached in the church if the priest's heart could not be softened by Mor-Zamba's piteous looks.

A coordination of ideas is also noted between Oyono and Beti concerning the locally produced drink and the church. They both ridicule the fact that the church's political and selfish inclinations give the priest room to preach against this drink.

While Mor-Zamba represents a search for or recognition of the traditional way of life in this novel, Abena represents the future. By making the two to separate and meet finally in good faith, Beti suggests that for a better future, a reconciliation of the past and the present is necessary. One must be able to identify the ills of tradition and colonialism to hope for a better future society.

In conclusion, one would notice in the analysis that Beti does not only advocate a radical change. According to him, alteration should come after a cross examination of both the European and African communities, as well as past and present. By portraying the colonialists and their successors as almost one and the same person, Beti calls for a complete metamorphosis, without which the purpose of political independence would be defeated. Beti, however, suggests that if exposing the colonialists does not achieve its aim, physical confrontation should be used in gaining independence, as happened to most African countries during the post-war years.

NOTES

1. Abiola Irele: The African Experience in Literature and Ideology, London, Heinemann, 1987, p 158.

2. Obiechina Emmanuel: Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel, Cambridge University Press, 1976, p 15.

3. Mongo Beti: Remember Ruben, translated by Gerald Moore, New Horn Press, Ibadan, 1980, p 133.

   Subequent quotations from this text are directly indicated in the work.

POST-COLONIAL ERA

PERPETUA AND THE HABIT OF UNHAPPINESS

CHAPTER FIVE

PERPETUA AND THE HABIT OF UNHAPPINESS

Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness (1974) is a socio-political and historical sequel to Remember Ruben (1980) in terms of recreating or re-enacting Cameroonian history. Ngugi concludes out of experience that:

> A writer responds, with his total personality to a social environment which changes all the time. Being a kind of sensitive needle, he registers, with varying degrees of accuracy and success, the conflicts and tensions in his changing society.[1]

In Perpetua, Beti recounts and assesses the political situation and its resulting social consequences. After the official, though unjustly handing over of power by the French colonial masters to the Cameroonians, what we see in Perpetua is the ruling black elites of post-independence Cameroon playing out the old game of their erstwhile white colonial masters.

Consolidation of Power

Fabricated and placed over the Cameroonians by the French colonists, Baba Toura (Beti's pseudonym for the former president of Cameroon Ahmadu Ahidjo) who, in Zeyang's words only yesterday "was selling peanuts in the streets", merely takes on the dress of his colonial predecessors. In a press conference in November 1961, "the head of state announced his opposition to the plurality of political parties in Cameroon."[2] By adopting such

a policy of "public order" which actually meant "the maintenance of the political status quo" and "retention in power of Elhadji Ahmadu Ahidjo, the privileged intermediary of the colonialists,"[3] the black elites show that they are not yet ready to do away with the system of brutalization, exploitation and suppression of the masses fashioned by the white colonialists. Beti satirizes the neo-colonial arrangement that had its expression in various forms.

Baba Toura started by banning any form of political opposition, especially Rubenists who bore the grievance of betrayal against the colonialists for displacing or misdirecting the truthful leadership of independent Cameroon away from Ruben - a man who could have according to his followers, totally liberated the Cameroonians. The unnecessary introduction of the identity card does not only set the pace of artificiality of day to day life, but is seen as the neo-colonist's own way of implementing restriction of movement - that is, limiting the rights of association. Thus the usual noisy tailors, dress-makers, and their customers could not be seen around the market again. Essola rightly judges that:

> Perhaps they had uncovered a support network for the Rubenists among the tailors and dressmakers and rather than attempt the impossible task of separating the wheat from the tares, the government always after quick results had simply banned all their activities. The same thing had happened to many trades and crafts.[4]

Beti's satirical attack focuses on the terror that reigned in immediate post-independence Cameroon - a situation comparable

to, if not worse than that during colonialism. While the French intimidated the natives by brutalizing and dehumanizing scape-goats like Toundi, the two suspects and Meka, Baba Toura succeeds tremendously to intimidate the whole society by the treatment he gives the arrested supporters of Ruben. The best way Baba Toura could and did get a grip at his society was by preventing public discussions of politics (limited or no freedom of speech which was to last for a long time). Even at village level, Amugu makes sure Essola and himself are far into the woods before talking on political issues.

In A Man of the People, Achebe handles a similar situation. He exposes the evil of press censorship, whereby the national broadcasting system and the newspapers are censored to speak only good about the leading government officials. As the information given in newspapers or even in the news after Chief Nanga's visit to the Anata Primary School, shows such cenrsorship inevitably results in distortion of truth.

In Beti's novel Baba Toura employs harsh and crude methods in suppressing the people, whom he enjoins to keep "clear of politics as if it were a kind of curse" (PP p 3). The case of Nlemeu and Nsizou who were arrested without reason, beaten overnight as examples for anybody "who thinks he can get his own back against the with-craft of Baba Toura" can be compared to Oyono's colonial African suspects or even Toundi's innocence when he is picked up as accomplice to Sophie's theft. Beti is angered by the fact that:

> after the euphoria of independence, it gradually becomes obvious that the expectation that independence would inaugurate a utopian era worthy of vaunted African humanism was merely chimeric.[5]

Intimidation and consequent suppression was carried out at several levels. By giving details about such dehumanization of the African by his own brother, Beti wants to show the reader how the very purpose of independence has been defeated as the effects of colonialism have persisted even after the physical shackles placed on the Africans by the whites are supposed to have been thrown off by independence. Thus not until one accepts to become a member of Baba Tura's party, that is to take out a party card and if possible act as organizer for Baba Tura wherever one is resident, will he be allowed as a free citizen or released if he were imprisoned. Rebel leaders, prisoners in the underground prisons, politicians, as well as top officials in possession of recent official secrets usually are given a "shorter shrift" and most of the time shot before they even reached the camp. M'Barga Onana becomes a good example of such top officials and he finds himself in the same position like Ruben, in Remember Ruben, just before he is rescued by the students.

Anti-Intellectualism

The plot of Beti's novel, Perpetua, moves from colonial to post-colonial politics and administration and even back to the pre-colonial era. Anti-intellectualism of post-independence political elite in Cameron becomes one of the ills of society

that Beti would want to call attention to and correct in his society. The very educated nature and hence their more enlightened reasoning has resulted, as Obiechina says, to "the alienation of the intellectuals, especially writers and artists from the politicians and bureacratic class which run the post-independence political and administrative machinery."[6]

Baba Tura's government is marked by such an illiterate group of officials. Norbert's brother, a qualified medical doctor whose services are most needed back in his own country (proof being that patients do die without having the mere chance of meeting a doctor - Perpetua's and other cases for examples), finds it impossible getting a job in this same country. On the contrary, however, it is a party member and a northerner (Baba Tura is from the north) who even though an illiterate comparatively, easily secures a job as chief forestry officer with better qualified people - Stephano for example - under him. Just like Beti would condemn the fact that racialism played a major role in colonial politics, so too he condemns and satirizes the fact that not only party patriotism but also tribalism tend to play a major role and thus adversely affect African post-independence politics in general.

Frustrated by the system, Stephano finds himself in such a ridiculous situation where he is afraid to talk in case he will be badly treated. He watches the egoistical forestry officer who is ignorant about aforestation, device crude means in getting money without putting a thought to the effect of his

action in the rest of the society. Beti here criticizes the self-centredness or self-interest that dominates this illiterate ruling class of post-independence Africa.

By presenting Zeyang as a character who prefers death to corruption, Beti wants to bring out his point that the literate stand a better chance of not easily falling into corruption. Zeyang and Odili thus stand out as Achebe and Beti's educated ideals, on whom the salvation of the independent states can rely. But Odili's case becomes complicated when he is later affected by the evil that so disgusted him. While Zeyang prefers to labour and sweat to get money to buy out Perpetua, Odili turns round to use the Common Peoples Convention (CPC) funds that were still under his control to pay his bride price. Beti's intention, however, is to show the bizarre nature of the post-independence government in Cameroon where intellectuals who normally would have been the rightful leaders, now have their place but in concentration camps - "the people who know book are flung into the accursed pit, as if they were unclean" (PP p 41). Thus the killing of people like Bifanda, Zeyang, and the torments received by others, Essola for example, all ways of discouraging the intervention of intellectual in the corrupt society, are draw backs to African progress and development noticed by Beti.

Political Leadership

Post-independence political leadership in the Cameroons is one area of life that provides Beti the greatest target for criticism. In Perpetua, he tries to prove that things go wrong because the political system itself is wrong, a system that leaves room for misappropriation of funds, corruption, sexual abuse, etc etc.

Beti proves to the reader that the game of politics which has as prize "a share of the national cake", as Chief Nanga would put it, has dirty and uncompromising rules. Personal gain becomes the very first rule as Odili's father observes:

> The mainspring of political action was personal gain, a view which I might say was much more in line with the general feeling on the country.[7]

Materialism and self-interest as seen above, chief aims of colonialism, are what Beti disagrees with in post-independence ruling elites of Cameroon. The quest for personal and physical satisfaction, an adopted culture from the colonialists which is now one of the aims of life, is questioned by Beti. This quest for personal satisfaction common with post-independence leaders is what Beti and his contemporaries criticize. Baba Tura remains indifferent to the plight of his people; he owes no obligations to them (especially as his coming to powers was not through their efforts). Thus after having a grip over the masses, Baba Tura and his ministers portray or display an exaggerated and greedy lifestyle that sharply contrasts with the wretched conditions of the masses. The physical description of

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subjected independence, Beti uses Zeyang to suggest that necessities like medical facilities should be given preference (in the country) to personal greed - that is, villas, mercedes cars. Beti uses a rhetorical question to press home his point: "a black government building factories with black money to give better medicine to their black brothers, isn't that what independence ought to be?" (p 52).

Corruption

Official irresponsibility normally breeds bribery and corruption which tend to be one of the rules of the African post-independence political game. Apart from Baba Tura and his ministers, Beti points an accusing finger also at those individuals in his society whose main purpose in controlling the economic resources of the country is for their own personal aggrandizement, as well as that of their friends and relations. Dishonest practices by public servants like the chief forestry officer, M'Barga Onana and later Edward, show the loss of proper moral bearing in society that Beti criticizes. The chief forestry officer exploits his position to allow the illegal cutting down and consequent destruction of the forest by the former French colonist, while he (the chief forest officer), side-tracks the payment for this timber for his private use.

Edward, another "get-rich-quick", exploits his "political patriotism" to make fast money by forming a branch of Baba Tura's party in his locality. Beti exposes this post-

independence administrator and politician whose materialism causes him to lose his moral bearing. While the nation continues to wallow in abject poverty and backwardness, Beti makes the administrators like Baba Tura use their positions and political patronage to enrich themselves and further their interest at the expense of the masses. To continue having a larger share of the national cake, the ruling elite must continue to be the sharers. This desire by the elites to have exclusive control of power because of its material attractions, is the cause of the intimidation, violence and brutalization that characterize the national politics. Beti condemns such ills in society; he advocates for a desirable change which implies a return to the integrated humanism, a sense of sharing and harmonization in economic, political and social matters which characterized traditional Africa.

Sexual abuse

In the Cameroons, sexual abuse is one of the commonest soial malpractices amongst the succeeding African politicians and their highly placed associates. If Oyono in his colonial novels presents the whites as those who need moral instruction the most, Beti shows the reader that their successors, that is, the black neo-colonialists did not only slip on the colonial dress in economic matters but in almost every other aspect. Baba Tura is once again a good example of these neo-colonialists. He does not only discourage intellectual work or misuses public funds as already seen, his day-to-day social life

is sordid. Through Baba Tura Beti criticizes the moral decadence of post-independence leadership and the society in general. Baba Tura as president, disgracefully goes round with the "two penny girl" who "stretched out her career as a prostitute in Baba Tura's bed when she was twelve years old" (PP p 108).

The very fact that this girl becomes a commonly used article between the president, his ministers and the other top officials, is used by Beti to stress the moral bankruptcy of the society or leadership. He makes a strong appeal for a change in the attitude of Cameroonian leaders. Undoubtedly exaggeration features in Beti's presentation of Baba Tura's sexual misdemeanor but it is none the less effective in exposing the moral squalor of the politicians:

> He [Baba Tura] was already suffering from his notorious and growing obsession for very young girls. Papa Baba would have half a dozen of them served up each evening, like oysters on a plate. At Fort-Negre they were called biotouries because Le Bitruré, the Glutton never had them again - like a surgeon who uses each bistoury or lancet to cut flesh once only. After the great man, the ministers and top officials and their clients passed them on like so many footballs on a sports ground (p 108).

Baba Tura's lechery is emphasised by the use of "bistouries". This word is seen at two different levels. Le Biture (glutton) indicates Baba Tura's sexual appetite while the fact that he uses them as "bistouries" - that is, a medical instrument which a surgeon uses to cut flesh only once - shows the number of girls at his disposal and perhaps the brutality

with which he goes about this business. Beti succeeds in convincing the reader that Baba Tura and his ministers use their exalted offices to seduce these girls. In this context, one recalls Chief Nanga's similar position. Chief Nanga's seduction of Edna, Odili's girl friend during their brief visit to his home illutrates the callousness and greed of black leaders who take a casual attitude toward a serious issue like sex which ideally should be treated as a person's privacy.

Such disrespect for privacy becomes very common in post-independence Cameroon. It promotes a negative attitude to sex. M'Barga Onana openly shows his desire to go to bed with Edward's wife. In his case, sex becomes a means to an end as Edward shamelessly sells out his wife to his superior to gain promotion in his [Edward's] job. Beti here ridicules some of such complexities of post-independence city life. Disrespect for sex and consequently privacy, is interpreted by some Africans (Edward for example) as social modernity or civilization.

That Anna Maria - a respectable elderly woman - would advice Perpetua to inquire if going to bed with her husband's boss would better his position, shows that anything is possible in this society under the guise of independence. The moral degeneration of the independent era is a continuation from the colonial days when under the guise of the civilizing mission, the white overlords never questioned adultery or fornication among whites as demonstrated in Oyono's Houseboy as in the case of Madam Le Commandant and the Prison Director. However, as

Edward's response shows, Beti is angry that the masses themselves do not resist their exploitation but instead have acquisced in their deplorable situation. Edward even convinces his wife to go to bed with M'Barga:

> How behind the times you are, my poor Perpetua said Edward, with a calm disarming smile. You really are behind the times. What I asked you to do in a rather round about way, I admit, is nothing terrible. This sort of thing goes on all over the country and especially in the capital since independence. They say the same sort of thing goes on every where in the world. Why should it be any different here? Why are we so special that we should be exceptions to the general rule? Any wife who isn't a complete fool would be only too pleased if she could get a job for her husband as easily as that (PP p 150).

Beti regards materialism as partially responsible for the social decadence. For him the basic struggle in the supposed modern Africa now should be the opposition to exploitation and domination - a situation in which the masses should be aware that man is no longer:

> "the African" but the exploiter and the exploited, the rich and the poor, the literate and the illiterate, the hungry and the overfed.[8]

Beti's point of attack in the novel is shifted from political leadership to the masses. "Beti felt a strong need to communicate with his countrymen as the political situation in the Cameroon, from his perspective, deteriorated."[9] Beti notices that the people have abandoned their responsibility of fighting against the neo-colonialists attitudes and taken to alcoholism. One realizes that the degree of drunkenness among

the poor is alarming. The Greek driver, for example, remarks on how these people idle on the roads, caring about nothing: "They go drinking, first to one man's place then to another's. That's how they spend practically their whole lives" (p 5).

The contrast in the idea of production and consumption of the locally produced drink between the colonial and neo-colonial Cameroon, is evidence of the escalating malaise.

While the colonialists abolished production and consumption to encourage the purchase of the European wines, Baba Tura allows it to be brewed in the market place. The consumption is allowed as Baba Tura knows the drunken African will not occupy his mind with the liberation struggle. Beti, therefore, calls the attention of his countrymen to the destructive effect of alcohol:

> What the hell does your government think its up to? It seems to want to have the entire population drinking this poison. It must be so convenient to have only drunks to govern Your well-Beloved Excellency Sheikh Baba Tura (p 10).

Through Martin, who represents these drunkards, one gets to see the level to which alcohol has reduced the common man. He is now a bundle of stupidity. Martin cannot reason again and finds a ditch a comfortable bed. Such people as Beti concludes through Essola, are a hinderance to the struggle: "If we are still where we've always been us Africans, it's because of people like Martin" (p 13). Ironically Martin takes pride in drinking and sees it as an achievement. Thus if Beti allows

Essola to kill Martin and go free, he might be suggesting that it might not be unwise to do away with such totally useless persons who are more of a hinderance to development. From yet another perspective, he might want to say that for higher and better standards to be maintained, brotherliness or rather filial relation should not come into play.

Essola faces the same problems with his mother. While Beti craves for the dignity of the woman - by abolishing the bride price in his society, Perpetua's state becomes an example and symbol of the degradation of her society. The negative portrayal of Perpetua's mother serves as Beti's attack not on traditional custom of arranged marriages per se but on its adoption in a modern context. Even the traditional African mother who is supposed to be loving and caring, has become materialistic. Maria is rather a self-centred tyrant who imposes herself on her children; she forces and sells her daughters to men she thinks are rich and not to men that her daughters love. As a consequence, Perpetua's education automatically comes to a stop, a few months to her final examinations. Beti, thus, contrasts Perpetua with her mother. Despite her half education, she is intelligent and loved by everybody around. Beti might therefore want to say that an educated woman in modern Africa is preferred to the illiterate mothers of the past. The fact that he presents Essola to fall out with the rest of the family because they contribute in putting an end to Perpetua's education and her consequent death supports this idea.

Conclusively, therefore, Beti employs satire in making a call for a change in his society. Instead of improved standards as expected, things have deteriorated after independence. The general tone in the novel is that of disatisfaction as reflected even in the title of the novel. Beti creates frustrated and disgruntled characters like Stephano, Norbert, Zeyang and even the villagers who complain about employment, medication and the political system as a whole. This group of people stands as a strong contrast to the president, his ministers and other top officials. Zeyang becomes Beti's ideal character. His strong will power as seen in his refusal to join the corrupt political party meeting in Zombo town, his criticism at misleading government officials as well as his capability to stand his grounds for a change until his execution, are what Beti advocates. Beti thus presents him as a character to be admired.

CONCLUSION

This study of the Cameroonian politics depicted in two novels each by Ferdinand Oyono and Mongo Beti has proven that the creation of a new world order with unconditional privileges has always been the main concern of the authors. A comparism of the two authors has been made, highlighting their pursuit of socio-economic and political freedom of the nation. While Oyono's works cover the colonial period, Beti's cover the transitional and post-independent periods to enable us to assess chronologically the major events characterizing Cameroon's political history.

Oyono and Beti are both committed writers who feel duty-bound to champion the cause of the ordinary Cameroonian. They undertake the mission of fighting colonialism, neocolonialism, political persecution and injustice. Both writers deal with real life experiences, which they interprete imaginatively into literary creations. That is to say, they have both made names as satirists. Apart from directing his satire against colonialism in his novels, Oyono also directs his humourous but biting satire against those Africans who readily accept European values without examination. In satirizing the policy of the indigénat which renders the existence of African political activity in Cameroon, Oyono portrays to the reader the irony involved in the whole idea of "mission civilisatrice" - civilizing mission by the French in Africa. The African is condemned to perpetual bondage throughout colonization.

Unlike the colonial novels, Beti's post-independent novels assume a more revolutionary dimension. His bold satire is directed against political injustice and misrule. One clearly notices his strong support for PPP (People's Progressive Party" in Remember Ruben. He satires and exposes the irony of the fact that the political party that struggled for independence of Cameroon becomes the one persecuted after independence. A change of rulers does not necessarily affect the circumstances of the governed, there is still a continuity of oppression. Politicians and some civil servants sell out their conscience and patriotic feelings for material wealth.

In defending their cause, however, Oyono and Beti successfully present the Cameroonian fully embedded in reality - political, social and economic. The colonial period was marked by a political and social distance that created a gap between Blacks and Whites. Treated as a social group rather than individuals therefore, Oyono's black characters come to identify themselves as no more than servants used by whites to satisfy their selfish interest. Oyono uses the missionaries and merchants apart from the administrators to show the deplorable state of the life of the African in colonial Cameroon which virtually controlled by the indigénat, deprives him (African) of liberties of criticism, association or movement of any kind. Thus there exists no form of social security for blacks as far as colonial administration is concerned. Ferdinand Oyono uses this argument - the ill-treatment and exploitation of the native African - as a weapon to fight for the political freedom of the Cameroonian.

Though Oyono concentrates on the ills of the whites to bring out his revolt against colonial injustice, he does not fail to show the inactivity of the Africans (Meka and Toundi for example), who take refuge in tradition and the younger generation. Not withstanding, Oyono succeeds or takes a step forward by identifying that void created in the lives of the colonized African.

Mongo Beti does not rely on tradition as noted in his post-colonial publications. Considering the role of literature as an

instrument of revolution, Beti pays much attention to the serious socio-political issues of the Cameroons. The study notes that Beti does not only fight colonialism but neo-colonialism as well. In fact, Beti saw physical revolution as the only solution to political independence as portrayed in Remember Ruben. He like Oyono shows the exploitation of blacks by whites to convince his readers to take a positive action. But he goes further than Oyono to advocate for a more determined and radical revolt that would not only involve individuals but would cover a large geographical area and would involve physical strength.

Beti's disillusionment with post-independence politics shows that he sees the administration of independent Cameroon as following neocolonialist lines. Oppression reigns, privileges and corruption multiply while morality disappears. By exposing these evils in society, Beti sees a strong link between morality and politics. To him a political action is that which involves the choosing among competing values in order to improve human conditions. By criticising the wrong policy option of our political class, Beti suggests that the welfare of individual citizens is hardly the concern of this political class. The important point he wants to make is that the interest and needs of some particular individuals should not be given preference to that of the general society. It is in this line that Beti pleads with the suppressed class of his society to awake to the existing political realities of this society. Turning to alcoholism Beti insists, does not solve their problems.

The works of Beti and Oyono therefore go beyond portraying the various ways in which the lower or inferior groups in society are brutalized. One of their recommendations is that the law including social institutions must be made taking into consideration the impact on the general society and not a particular class of individuals. They see political freedom as where everybody is socially treated fairly. As such, they react and attempt to find solutions to such evils as poverty, exploitation, in short, man's inhumanity to man.

NOTES

1. Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Homecoming, Nairobi, Heinemann, 1972, p 47.

2. J.F. Bajart, "The Birth of the Ahidjo Regime" in Guallist Africa - Cameroon Under Ahmadu Ahidjo, ed Richard Joseph, Enugu, Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1978, p 60.

3. Abel Eyanga, "Government by State of Emergency" in Guallist Africa: Cameroon Under Ahmadu Ahidjo, ed Richard Joseph, Enugu, Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1978, p 101.

4. Mongo Beti, Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness, a translation by John Reed and Clive Wake, London, Heinemann, 1978, p 3.

   All subsequent quotations from this text will be directly indicated.

5. Oyekan Owomoyela, African Literature: An Introduction, African Studies Association, Brandeis University Massachusett, 1978, p 104.

6. Obiechina Emmanuel, "Post-Independence Disillusionment in Three African Novels", Neo-African Literature and Culture, Bernth Lindfors and Ulla Schild eds, Heymann Verlag,1976, p 120.

7. Chinua Achebe, A Man of the People, Ibadan, Heinemann, 1966, p 128.

8. Chidi Amuta, The Theory of African Literature, London, Zed Books Ltd, 1989, p 42.

9. Adele King, "Audience and Exile: Camara Laye and Mongo Beti", Artist and Audience: African Literature as a Shared Experience, eds Richard Priebe and Thomas Hale, Washington DC, Three Continents Press, 1979, p 146.

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