SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CRITICISM IN MONGO BETI'S NOVELS

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CERTIFICATION

This thesis entitled "**Social and Political Criticism in Mongo Beti's Novels**" by **Ifeoma Mabel Onyemelukwe** meets the regulations governing the award of **the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in French** of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

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TO

Geoffrey, Onyekachi, Obiageli,

Chidimma and Ogochukwu.

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Psalm 127[1]

This work could not have been completed without the help of many people all of whom I cannot mention here. But I am grateful to all. I wish to express my deep gratitude to Prof. Kwabena Britwum for patiently supervising this work. His criticism and useful suggestions helped to bring this work to its present form. I am very thankful to Dr. Yusuf Maiangwa, the Head of French Department, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, who critically read this thesis. My gratitude goes to Dr. Tar Adejir for making useful suggestions.

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ABSTRACT

This Study is a critical survey of social and political criticism in Beti's novels to date (1954-1984). It tries among other things, to examine the basis of Beti's criticism. It is part of the object of this investigation to discuss Beti's social and political criticism in the light of the novels' external reference.

Beti's novels often serve as a protest against the social and political ills of Africa, in general, and Cameroonian society in particular. Beti's concern with socio-political problems of contemporary Africa links him with other committed African writers.

Although a good many critics have made several references to Beti's social and political criticism, none has brought it up to date or gone into detail as we have attempted to do in this work. However, our investigation could not be claimed to be exhaustive. A further study might expound the findings if this investigation. Nevertheless, it, probably, would contribute to the understanding of Beti's.

Beti's novels, among other things, denounce the abuses of the Catholic Church and attack the missionary for playing a complementary or identical role with the colonial administrators. They condemn the economic exploitation of the Erican and the negative effects of colonial rule in Africa. Mongo Beti deplores the tyranny and conservatism of the elders. He

denounces the exploitation and oppression of the African woman. The fact that he is a Beti-Pahouin does not stop him from criticizing the Imperfections of his people's moral codes of conduct. Jeti's novels show his indictment of neo-colonialism. Beti denounces the imposition of Ahidjo on the Cameroonians as well as the Franco-African Cooperation Arrangement. He sees

these as methods of enhancing neo-colonial subjugation

independent Cameroon. Mongo Beti highlights the socio-economic problems prevalent in independent Cameroon.

To Beti, the progressive, evangelism, colonialism, traditional gerontocracy, neo-colonialism and dictatorship of African despots are forces of oppression and exploitation of the African. They are inimical to progress in Africa in terms of more benefits for the generality of the people.

it would seem that Mongo Beti, the idealist, advocates an egalitarian society.

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ABBREVIATIONS

1.	VC	-	Ville cruelle.
2.	PC	-	Le pauvre Christ de Bomba.
3.	MT	-	Mission terminée.
4.	RM	-	Le roi miraculé.
5.	RR	-	Remember Ruben.
6.	P	-	Perpétue et l'habitude du malheur.
7.	RP	-	La ruine presque cocasse d'un polichinelle.
8.	DM	-	Les deux mères de Guillaume Ismaël Dzewatama.
9.	RG	-	La revanche de Guillaume Ismaël Dzewatama.

INTRODUCTION

This research aims to focus on social and political criticism in Beti's novels. It will, among other things, attempt to study the basis of Beti's criticism. It is part of the object of this study to discuss Beti's social and political criticism in relation to the novels' social and historical reference.

Ville cruelle (1954)[1] which has been rated a bad novel by critics like Gerald Moore,[2] denounces the injustices of colonial rule. Beti's second novel, Le pauvre Christ de Bomba (1956)[3], confirms Moore's view that, although Ville cruelle is a bad novel, it is not the work of a bad writer.[4] This is because Le pauvre Christ de Bomba shows Beti as a satirist of the first order. Beti's third novel, Mission terminée (1957)[5] which has the following blurb: "voici enfin un roman africain qui n'a pas d'arrière pensée politique", is not devoid of a political dimension.[6] In a sense, it is also an anti-colonial novel. In Le roi miraculé (1958)[7], Beti's fourth novel, Beti shows once again that he is an acute social critic. An interval of 14 years elapsed before Beti could break into print again, first with the publication in 1972 of his essay, Main basse sur le Cameroun and in 1974 of his fifth novel, Remember Ruben[8] which serves as a link between his anti-colonial novels and his post-colonial novels. In quick succession, Beti wrote four other novels: Perpétue et l'habitude du malheur (1974), La ruine presque cocasse d'un polichinelle (1979), Les deux mères de Guillaume Ismaël Dzewatama (1982) and La revanche

de Guillaume Ismaël Dzewatama (1984).[9] In these later novels, one notices that Beti has turned more or less into a polemic writer. Beti reflects on the social and political problems of Africa and in particular those of Cameroon in such a manner that the reader often wonders whether he is reading a novel or a work of political propaganda. Beti's recent novels are aesthetically less successful than his earlier novels. Abiola Irele has noted that African fiction in the post-colonial period is "one of open dissidence."[10] He observes that the failure of Perpétue.... arises from Beti's "difficulty in giving to the world of his fiction the proper measure of impersonality which it required to achieve a representative significance."[11] Dorothy Blair makes a similar remark about Perpétue.... Blair observes that Beti denounces in Perpétue... the politics of the fictional decolonized African state in a "ponderous" and "laboured manner."[12] Blair adds that Remember Ruben

> gives the impression that Mongo 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. The polemical contingencies have overshadowed imaginative creativity as, in part two, we are continually reminded of his pamphlet Main basse sur le Cameroun, published two years previously, in which he vituperates against President Ahidjo.13

Beti's novels often serve as a protest against the social and political ills of Cameroonian society. Beti's concern with social and political problems of contemporary Africa links him with other committed African writers like Sembene, Dadié, Oyono, Achebe, Soyinka and Armah.

Beti, like these writers, is primarily a social critic.

Mongo Beti and Charles Dickens have something in common. Like Charles Dickens, Beti is not satisfied with the depiction of social realities of his time; he attacks the injustices of contemporary African society. Beti, like Dickens, is not just what Achebe calls a teacher or what Soyinka refers to as the conscience of his society but also a social critic and a reformer. As literary artists, Dickens and Beti champion the cause of the poor, the oppressed and the down-trodden.

The term social and political criticism needs to be defined. Criticism according to Webster's New International Dictionary means fault-finding, critical observation, judgement or review.[14] "Social" refers to all areas of life in society, including the political. Politics permeates all areas of life in society. Politics is inevitable in any community no matter how small. Politics is essentially a struggle, a conflict between individuals and groups for the acquisition of power. Politics refers too to the internal contradictions which arise in the quest to set up a social order profitable to all.[15] Gottfried Keller in the 19th century was, probably, highlighting the predominant role played by politics in our daily lives when he asserted that "Everything is Politics."[16] Georg Lukács also observes that:

> Every action, thought and emotion of human beings is inseparably bound up with the life and struggle of the community i.e. with politics; whether the humans themselves are conscious of this, unconscious of it or even trying to escape from it, objectively their actions, thoughts and emotions nevertheless spring from and run into politics.17

To another writer, Adereth, "there are hardly any aspects of our private lives that are not tangled with the political battle in one way or another."[18] Similarly to Ngugi, every writer is a writer in politics "because literature cannot escape from the class power structures that shape our everyday life."[19] Despite the fact that our social life is enmeshed in politics, there is still the need to spell out "social and political" in the title of this work for the sake of clarity. A phrase such as "social criticism" though it embraces the political is not sufficiently self-explanatory. As this study shows, the social critic aims to denounce injustices prevailing in society. Social and political criticism, therefore, refers to the writer's satirical attack on, or his denunciation of abuses of institutions of his time, whether social, economic or political.

Ideally, the social critic, after diagnosing and condemning social ills moves a step further to prescribe remedies. By implication, he desires to diminish or where possible eliminate injustices in society. In this sense, the social critic is also a reformer, as the case of Beti shows.

The main problem is how to identify the various mouthpieces of the author as a social critic. Here, there is no room for assumption. The literary critic must examine the remark in question in the light of the writer's views in general and with reference to all his works. The implications conveyed by the remark should tally with the author's views before the character in question could be considered as the author's surrogate.

Whether the social critic uses satire or engages in open criticism, once the object of his attack is the state or a political system, he may be liable to repression or prosecution by the powers that be. Consequently, some social critics are forced to go into exile. Some contemporary African writers such as Nkosi, Abraham and Beti have had problems with their home governments and have sought political refuge abroad.

To understand Beti's social and political criticism in his novels, there is the need to interpret them with reference to their historical contexts.[20] Cameroon has changed a lot since Beti first started writing his novels. Thus, a knowledge of the socio-political reality of the time is relevant to the understanding of the novels of that period. For example, since Ville cruelle is set in the colonial period we need to take into consideration the history of Cameroon under colonial rule.

Cameroon had a particularly traumatic experience with its colonization by three world powers. It was a German Protectorate from 1884 to 1914 when it came under the trusteeship, firstly of the League of Nations and subsequently of the United Nations Organizations. West Cameroon and East Cameroon were governed respectively through indirect and direct rule by Great Britain and France.[21] This situation lasted for about forty years. It is significant that the Germans were extremely harsh in their treatment of the colonized. There is hardly any region of Cameroon where a particular German administrator is not remembered today for the savage brutality he meted out to the so-called backward men in an attempt to civilize them.[22]

The French colonial administrators were no less severe. The picturesque German colonial buildings dotted along the Douala-Yaoundé railway line as well as other infrastructures scattered over the country belie a brutal period when the German colonial authorities exacted forced labour, porterage and the like to achieve these ends.[23] The British were, probably, the least brutal.[24]

East Cameroon became independent on first January, 1960. On 5 May, 1960, Ahidjo was elected the president of East Cameroon. But before then, East Cameroon was for a time self-governing with Ahidjo as the prime-minister from first January 1959.[25] At that time, West Cameroon was attached to Nigeria. On first October 1961, the two sections of Cameroon became united. The unification of the two Cameroons was partly intended to destabilize the U.P.C. activists. This unification helped to bring relative stability to Cameroon. On 20 May 1972, the Federal Republic of Cameroon became a one-party state. The one-party was known as the Cameroon National Union (CNU). Ahidjo emerged as a dictator and ruled the Cameroonians with an iron hand for more than two decades.

Cameroon comprises about 201 tribes, 136 of which are scattered in the Ex-Republic of Cameroon and 65 in the Ex-British Cameroons. These include the Bantu in the South, the non-Bantu — the Bamileke, Bamun and Tikar peoples — in the South West, the Semitic and Sudanese peoples, Kirdi Animists, Fulbe or Fulani peoples in the North. The main ethnic groups in Beti's novels are the Bantu, the Bamileke

and the Bamun. We take exception to the view advanced by Jacques Chevrier that the first four novels of Beti are set only in the Mbalmayo region in Southern Cameroon.[26]

The Bantu refers to a host of ethnic groups who have much in common in terms of history, culture and language. The Bantu people comprise the following ethnic groups - the Beti which consist mainly of the Ewondo people occupying the land around the capital city of Yaoundé, the Bulu who live further South in places like Ebolowa, Sangmelima and Djoun; the Douala and finally the Fang. The Beti, the Bulu and the Fang are referred to as the Pahouin, the Beti-Pahouin or simply the Fang.[27]

The Beti-Pahouin are probably the people Mongo Beti had in mind when he stated that the real Bantu had no chiefs but that it was colonialism that introduced canton chiefs into their area.[28] The Beti, especially the Ewondo, were notorious for their collaboration with the German and later the French administrators.[29] The Essazam tribe comprises mainly the Ewondo. The Catholic Mission flourished most among the Ewondo. This calls to mind the Bomba Catholic Mission in Le pauvre Christ... where the evangelization of the Africans initially met with great success. Colonialism helped the Beti-Pahouin area to develop cash-crop agriculture especially cocoa farming. The Beti-Pahouin comprises the Tala and Essazam regions in Nyong and Sanaga Administrative Division which constitutes the geographical setting of Ville cruelle, Le pauvre Christ... and Le roi miraculé....[30] Ongola (the old name for Yaoundé), Ebolowa, Sangmelima and

Fort-Nègre, these towns mentioned variously in Remember Ruben, Perpétue... and La ruine... are real towns located in the region occupied by the Beti-Pahouin or the Fang. Since Vimili, Medza's village is only about 60 kilometres from Ongola, (MT, 14), and Kala would seem to refer to a village in the Tala District of this cocoa-farming region, it is possible that Mission terminée is set in the Fang area. The Kala, judging from their culture are typically Fang people. Alexandre Biyidi was born in Akométan, a village near Mbalmayo in this same region.[31] It is not surprising that he took up the pseudonym, Mongo Beti, which means "son of the Beti."

The Bassa and Bakoko peoples live in the South West Area, along the Sanaga river. The Bassa have an independent spirit and were the most hostile to the colonial administration. In short, they resent all forms of authority including that of their traditional chiefs. It is noteworthy that Um Nyobé, the founding father of the U.P.C. whose heroic achievements were commemorated by Beti in Remember Ruben was a Bassa. Many of the U.P.C. activists who resisted the regime of Ahidjo were Bassa. Jean-François's independent spirit and opposition to the head of state in Les deux mères... tend to portray him as a fictional representative of the Bassa. Niagara in Les deux mères... and La revanche... is said to be a suburb of the capital of the imaginary independent African state. Since this state appears to be Cameroon, Niagara is likely to represent a suburb of Yaoundé. Thus, it would seem that Les deux mères... and La revanche... are set partly in the Bassa region and partly in the Fang region.

Historically, the Douala were the first to accept European contact. The first schools, commercial banks and missions were set up in Douala.[32] The Douala are very wealthy. They are regarded as the most europeanized of the Cameroonian peoples. The early contact of the Douala with Europeans explains, to a large extent, their early literacy and their continuous pursuit of their interests even when they ran counter to the aims of the colonial administration. Their combativeness posed a serious threat to the German and French colonial administrators. Oyolo, which appears recurrently in Remember Ruben, Perpétue... and La ruine ... would seem to be indicative of Douala. In view of the fact that Ntermelen, Essola's village, lies just after Oyolo (P, 9), it is possible that this fictional village belongs to the Douala ethnic group. Essola's combative spirit and penchant for protest against abuses and injustices coupled with his relatively high educational background tend to portray him as a fictional representative of the Douala. One may say that Remember Ruben, Perpétue... and La ruine... are also partly set in the Douala region of Southern Cameroon.

Some critics like Thomas Melone have suggested that Beti is a regional writer,[33] because they felt that the geographical setting of his novels is the Bantu region of Cameroon. Given the wave of migration amongst these ethnic groups, one cannot rightly say that Beti is writing about only one section of the country. This is because the ethnic groups have, in most cases, moved to new parts of the country and sometimes outside the country. The Fang, in

particular, are found not only in Southern Cameroon but also in Gabon and Guinea.[34] Even the Bamileke in West Cameroon resemble the Abriba people in Nigeria who share the border with them. In short, as July pointed out, a third of Africa is occupied by the Bantu. The Bantu were said to have been a single people inhabiting the then Eastern Nigeria before migrating to various parts of Africa like Cameroon, Gabon and Guinea.[35] Beti, therefore, is not in any way a regional writer. Chevrier has noted:

> Ce serait une grave erreur de ne voir en Beti qu'un romancier régionaliste, car, à bien des égards, son oeuvre dépasse la dimension spatio-temporelle qui lui sert de cadre pour prendre une valeur exemplaire et témoigner du drame qu'a été la colonisation pour des générations d'hommes et de femmes.[36]

But the significance of Beti's criticism transcends the ethnic barriers to project the image of Africa.

Though scholars have studied social themes in Beti's novels, we feel there is the need to discuss in detail Beti's social and political criticism. There are a number of studies of Beti's treatment of social and political issues relating to colonial and independent Cameroon.

While examining the first four novels of Mongo Beti, Jacques Chevrier observes that "l'oeuvre de Mongo Beti ne se borne pas à décrire, elle est aussi un témoignage accablant sur la condition faite aux hommes de la colonie."[37] Gisèle Smith-Bestman sees Mongo Beti as a committed writer for whom the novel is an instrument of combat and denunciation.[38]

Abiola Irele groups Beti with Ferdinand Oyono and Sembene Ousmane as writers whose works are dominated by a pronounced social consciousness. In Irele's words, "theirs is a literature of open revolt, which Oyono and Beti express through critical satire."[39]

Many critics have discussed the socio-political reality in Beti's novels. However, none has studied all of Beti's novels to date. The majority of them have treated only the anti-colonial novels.[40] Some scholars have, in addition to Beti's anti-colonial novels, treated some of his post-colonial novels.[41] Others have focused on one or more of Beti's post-independence novels.[42] With the exception of Thomas Mpoyi-Buatu, none has written on Beti's latest novels, Les deux mères... and La revanche....

A considerable number of critics, generally speaking, make references to Beti's use of satire in his novels but do not try to show how Beti applies satire to indict whatever he contests.[43] For example, Abiola Irele observes that:

> Mission terminée is undoubtedly Mongo Beti's most accomplished work. His satire is at its most cutting in this novel in which the verve and exuberance of the writing are given the fullest play in an unrelenting interrogation of the traumas and frustrations of the colonial experience.[44]

On the other hand, Kwabena Britwum has studied the interplay between Beti's irony and the paradox of Drumont's idealism in Le pauvre Christ...[45] But irony here is not strictly used to decipher Beti's criticism as we intend to do in this study.

Although a great number of scholars have discussed the works of Beti, he deserves more than the few lines or pages usually devoted to him by the majority of the critics of Beti.

There are two major published works on Mongo Beti. In 1971, Thomas Melone analysed in detail Beti's anti-colonial novels. Despite the misrepresentation of Beti's views in Melone's work (for example, Melone claimed that Beti idealized the traditional past and was nostalgic about the lost purity of pre-colonial Africa),[46] it still stands out as the most detailed study of Beti's anti-colonial novels. However, Beti has several times spoken unfavourably about Melone's book on him. For example, Beti has pointed out:

> N'y a-t-on pas vu dans une thèse récente un critique qui est aussi le dignitaire d'un parti unique africain d'extrême-droite Monsieur Thomas Melone proposer de mon oeuvre, et singulièrement, du Pauvre Christ de Bomba, une lecture étonnante, ni analytique et objective, ni véritablement freudienne non plus, en vérité d'un subjectivisme arbitrairement éclectique et surtout propice à la mobilisation de tous les claviers de la guerre psychologique tous azimuts: tripatouillant le texte à son gré le plus souvent, notre homme en joue comme un prestidigitateur tirant de sa manche toutes sortes d'objets plus inattendus les uns que les autres.[47]

In 1981, appeared Comprendre l'oeuvre de Mongo Beti by Bernard Mouralis. Mouralis's book covers Beti's works from "Sans haine et sans amour" (1953) to La ruine.... Thus, Mouralis's book is more comprehensive and up to date. Nevertheless, Comprendre l'oeuvre de Mongo Beti, like Melone's book, does not focus on Beti's social and political criticism.

Among the numerous unpublished works on Beti are "La physionomie des jeunes et leurs problèmes dans les romans de Mongo Beti" by C. Agba and "Le procès de la colonisation dans l'oeuvre de Mongo Beti" by Joseph Bakala Kaya both presented at the University of Brazzaville in 1973. These two unpublished M.A. theses concentrate on Beti's anti-colonial novels. Another unpublished work on Beti is Anthony Biakolo's Doctoral thesis, presented at the University of Paris in 1980. This is a comparative analysis of the social realities depicted in the novels of Beti and Achebe. In an unpublished M.A. thesis entitled "Exil et retour dans l'univers romanesque de Mongo Beti", presented at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, in 1981, Tunji Adegboye traces the evolution of the main characters in Beti's novels from Ville cruelle to Remember Ruben.

Beti as a social critic is a "progressive." In other words, Beti thinks that society should undergo a qualitative transformation in the sense that it should improve the lot of the majority of the people. He resents all forms of oppression, exploitation and injustice. Mongo Beti admitted somewhere that he had been greatly influenced by his father. As he himself puts it:

> toute mon attitude politique s'explique par la référence du subconscient à mon père. Que je fasse consciemment ou non, je me pose souvent la question: 'Qu'est-ce que mon papa, aurait fait à ma place?'.... J'essaie toute ma vie de ne pas démentir cette image que j'ai de mon père.[48]

Beti, therefore, takes his cue from his late father, "un homme extrêmement courageux",[49] who contested social abuses

and injustices and died while fighting on behalf of the oppressed. Mongo Beti agrees with Soyinka that the writer "doit abandonner la plume pour l'action."[50] However, he does not feel that he can, as Soyinka, seize a radio station or commit any other type of violent action because he is not by nature prone to violence.[51] Beti is convinced that the writer should embark on positive actions. Beti is a radical in the sense that he advocates, in his novels, radical changes such as the overthrow of an oppressive government. Also, Mongo Beti is an idealist because, in his novels, he is constantly searching for ideal conditions in every area of life in society.

Our study is divided into three main parts. Part I will focus on Mongo Beti's satire of the colonial regime. The first part comprises two chapters. One chapter is devoted to Beti's anticlerical satire. In Beti's novels, one finds that Beti tends to focus more on anticlerical satire in the anti-colonial novels than in the post-colonial novels. Apart from La ruine.... which contains a considerable amount of anticlerical satire, the other post-independence novels of Beti show that Beti is more concerned with the problems of the post-independence era in Cameroon. This explains the relatively little importance given to anticlerical satire in Beti's post-independence novels. Chapter II deals with Beti's anti-colonial satire. In Part I, we shall concentrate mainly on the first four novels of Mongo Beti which are essentially anti-colonial.

In Part II we intend to discuss Beti's indictment of traditional Cameroonian society during the colonial and post-colonial eras. All novels of Beti will, therefore, be considered. Here, more illustrations may be drawn from the earlier novels of Beti. This is because Beti's first four novels offer more material relevant to our discussion in this chapter.

In Part III, we shall examine Beti's criticism of the post-independence regime. This part is sub-divided into three small chapters. The first section deals with Beti's denunciation of neo-colonialism, the second section with Beti's attack on Ahidjo's regime, and the third part with Beti's treatment of socio-economic problems of the contemporary era. Here, we focus naturally on Beti's post-independence novels. Finally, we shall try to discuss Beti's social and political criticism at the three levels - colonial, traditional and post-colonial.

CATEGORIZATION OF BETI'S NOVELS

NOVEL	DATE OF PUBLICATION	GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING	HISTORICAL SETTING	CATEGORY
Ville cruelle	1954	Tanga (Mbalmayo), Nyong and Sanaga in the Southern Cameroons.	In the 1930s, during the colonial regime.	Anti-colonial.
Le pauvre Christ de Bomba	1956	Bomba and Tala regions of the Southern Cameroons.	Around 1938 in the colonial regime.	Anti-colonial.
Mission terminée	1957	Vimili and Kala in the Southern Cameroons	Around 1940 in the colonial era.	Anti-colonial.
Le roi miraculé	1958	The Essazam tribe in Nyong and Sanaga in the Southern Cameroons.	Around 1948 in the colonial era.	Anti-colonial.
Remember Ruben	1974	Ekoumdoum representing independent Cameroon. Towns like Kola-Kola, Fort-Nègre.	During the colonial regime from about 1937 - 1960.	Anti-colonial and Post-independence.
Perpétue	1974	Towns like Mimbo, Zombo-town, Ongola (Yaoundé) Oyolo, Fort-Nègre, all in Southern Cameroon.	From about 1962 to 1968.	Post-independence.

NOVEL	DATE OF PUBLICATION	GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING	HISTORICAL SETTING	CATEGORY
La ruine presque cocasse d'un polichinelle	1979	Kola-Kola, Fort-Nègre, Ongola, Ekoumdoum representing independent Cameroon.	From 1 January, 1960 - 31 January, 1961.	Post-independence.
Les deux mères de Guillaume Ismaël Dzewatama	1982	Independent Cameroon.	In the 1970s after the independence of Cameroon.	Post-independence.
La revanche de Guillaume Ismaël Dzewatama	1984	Cameroon and France.	In the 1960s in the post-colonial era.	Post-independence.

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

1. Mongo Beti, Ville cruelle (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1971). References to this work will be incorporated into the text and indicated by the abbreviation, VC.

2. See Gerald Moore, Seven African Writers (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp.74-77. See also Michael Popkin (ed.), A Library of Literary Criticism: Modern Black Writers (New York: Frederick Ungar Publ. Co., 1978), p.80

3. Mongo Beti, Le pauvre Christ de Bomba (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1976). References to this novel will be incorporated into the text and indicated by the abbreviation, PC.

4. Moore, op.cit.

5. Mongo Beti, Mission terminée (Paris: Eds. Buchet/Chastel, 1957). References to this work will be incorporated into the text and indicated by the abbreviation, MT.

6. David Diop, in an article, reacted against this editor's note. See David Diop, "Mission terminée de Mongo Beti," Présence Africaine, xvi, Oct-Nov. 1959, p.42.

7. Mongo Beti, Le roi miraculé (Paris: Eds. Buchet/Chastel, 1958). References to this work will be incorporated into the text and indicated by the abbreviation, RM.

8. Mongo Beti, Remember Ruben (Paris: Eds. L'Harmattan, 1982). References to this work will be incorporated into the text and indicated by the abbreviation, RR.

9. Mongo Beti, Perpétue et l'habitude du malheur (Paris: Eds. Buchet/Chastel, 1974).

_____, La ruine presque cocasse d'un polichinelle (Paris: Eds. des peuples noirs, 1979).

_____, Les deux mères de Guillaume Ismaël Dzewatama (Paris: Eds. Buchet/Chastel, 1982).

_____, La revanche de Guillaume Ismaël Dzewatama (Paris: Eds. Buchet/Chastel, 1984). References to these works will be incorporated into the text and indicated respectively by P, RP, DM and RG.

10. Abiola Irele, "Parables of the African Condition: A Comparative Study of Three Post-Colonial Novels", Journal of Africa and Comparative Literature No.1, March 1981, p.81.

11. Ibid, p.76.

12. Dorothy S. Blair, African Literature in French (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p.285.

13. Ibid, p.281.

14. Webster's New International Dictionary, Vol.I. Cambridge: G&C. Merriam Co., 1953, 1st print 1909), p.628.

15. Maurice Duverger, Sociologie politique 3rd ed. (Paris: Presses Univ. de France, 1968); English version, The Study of Politics, Transl. by Robert Wagoner (London: Thomas Y. Cromwell Co. Inc., 1972), p.19.

16. Quoted by Lukács in Studies in European Realism (New York: Grosset Dunlop, 1964), p.9.

17. Ibid.

18. M. Adereth, Commitment in Modern French Literature: Politics and Society in Peguy, Aragon and Sartre (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), p.17.

19. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Writers in Politics (London: Heinemann, 1981), np.

20. See Categorization of Mongo Beti's Novels, pp. 16-17.

21. For more details, see A.P.J. Vanrensburg, Contemporary Leaders of Africa (Landsdonne : Citadel Press, 1975), pp.33-34; CNEP, Cameroon (Paris: Innovente, 1968), pp.7-8; Michel Prouzet, Le Cameroun: Comment ils sont gouvernés (Paris: Librairie Générale de Droit et de Jurisprudence, 1974), pp.12-20.

22. Richard A. Joseph, Radical Nationalism in Cameroun: Social Origins of the U.P.C. Rebellion (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1977), p.21.

23. Ibid, pp.21-25.

24. Ibid, p.24.

25. For more details see Jacques Benjamin, Les Camerounais occidentaux: La minorité dans un état bicommunautaire (Montréal: Les presses de l'univ. de Montréal, 1972), pp.208-209.

26. Jacques Chevrier, Littérature nègre, (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1974), p.137.

27. Joseph, Radical Nationalism in Cameroun, p.11, See also Georges Balandier, Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire: dynamique sociale en Afrique centrale (Paris: Presses Univ. de France, 1955), pp.75-76.

28. See Tunji Adegboye,"Entretien avec Mongo Beti", in the Appendix to "Exil et retour dans l'univers romanesque de Mongo Beti," unpublished M.A. thesis, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, April 1981, p.34.

29. However, the Bulu displayed great valour during their war against the Germans between 1899 and 1901 (15 years after the inception of the German colonial rule). Joseph, Radical Nationalism in Cameroun, p.12.

30. Thomas Melone tried to show that all the villages in the Bomba parish are real villages in the Tala region of Cameroon. See the Map of Nyong and Sanaga in the Appendix of Mongo Beti: L'homme et le destin (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1971).

31. See Melone, Mongo Beti: L'homme et le destin, p.44.

32. For more details see Prouzet, Le Cameroun... , p.34.

33. See Melone, Mongo Beti: L'homme et le destin, p.46.

34. See Balandier, Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire, pp.75-76.

35. Robert W. July, Precolonial Africa: An Economic History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), p.123.

36. Chevrier, Littérature nègre, p.136.

37. Ibid, p.137.

38. Gisèle Smith-Beatman, "Signification des sujets dans Mission terminée et Le pauvre Christ de Bomba de Mongo Beti", Peuples noirs peuples africains, xxiii, sept - oct., 1981, pp.109-119.

39. Abiola Irele, The African Experience in Literature and Ideology (London: Heinemann, 1981), p.154.

40. See, for example, A.G. Brench, The Novelists' Inheritance in West Africa (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967); Wilfred Cartey, Whispers from a continent (London: Heinemann, 1971); Charles Larson, The Emergence of African Fiction (London: Indiana Univ. Press, 1971); Eustace Palmer, An Introduction to the African Novel (London: Heinemann, 1972) and Eustace Palmer, The Growth of the African Novel (London: Heinemann, 1979).

41. Take, for example, Dorothy S. Blair, African Literature in French(London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976); Claude Wauthier, L'Afrique des Africains: Inventaire de la négritude (Paris: Eds. du Seuil, 1977); Gerald Moore, Twelve African Writers (London: Heinemann, 1980);

Martin T. Bestman, "Le roman africain comme expression d'une prise de conscience critique et révolutionnaire," Peuples noirs peuples africains, no.22, juillet-août, 1981, pp.104-121.

42. For example, Eloïse A. Brière, "Remember Ruben étude spatio-temporelle," Présence Francophone, no.15, automne 1977, pp. 31-46, Laure Hesbois, "Perpétue et l'habitude du malheur ou Mongo Beti et la révolution avortée," Présence Francophone, no.14, printemps 1977, pp. 57-71; G. Spackey, "African Novels in French: The Period since Independence," The Benin Review, no.2, 1980, pp. 96-110; Abiola Irele, "Parables of the African Condition: A Comparative Study of three Post-Colonial Novels," Journal of African and Comparative Literature, No.1, March, 1981, pp.69-91.

43. Such critics as Dorothy Blair, African Literature in French, p.211; Gerald Moore, Seven African Writers (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962), pp. 74-77; David Diop quoted in Michael Popkin (ed.), A Library of Literary Criticism: Modern Black Writers (New York: Frederick Ungar publ. Co., 1978), p.80; Eustace Palmer, "An Interpretation: Mongo Beti's Mission to Kala," African Literature Today nos. 1.2.3.4., 1968-72, p.29.

44. Irele, The African Experience in Literature and Ideology, p.155.

45. Kwabena Britwum, "Irony and the Paradox of Idealism in Mongo Beti's Le pauvre Christ de Bomba," Re: Arts and Letters, Fall 1972, Vol. VI, no.2, Austin State Univ., Texas, pp.48-63.

46. Melone, Mongo Beti: L'homme et le destin, pp. 237, 274.

47. Mongo Beti, "Le pauvre Christ de Bomba expliqué," Peuples noirs peuples africains, no.19, jan-févr. 1981, pp.110-111. Elsewhere, Beti has asserted: "Mais il faut formuler une réserve non seulement générale mais spécifique sur la critique de Melone. D'une manière générale la critique de Melone est un peu creuse, un peu vide." See Tunji Adegboye, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," p.8.

48. Anthony Biakolo, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," Peuples noirs peuples africains, no.10, juillet-août 1979, p.107.

49. Ibid., p.106.

50. Adegboye, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," p.17.

51. Ibid., p.18.

PART I

SATIRE OF THE COLONIAL REGIME

CHAPTER I

ANTICLERICAL SATIRE

In the early 1950s one discerns a tendency among African writers to attack missionaries. African writers tend to criticize the equivocal role played by Christian missionaries in Africa. They denounce the missionaries' hypocrisy and the devious methods employed in their missionary activity among Africans. African writers whose works contain anticlerical themes include Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Mongo Beti and Jean Malonga. Others are Benjamin Matip and Ferdinand Oyono, both Cameroonian writers like Mongo Beti.

Mongo Beti who spent part of his childhood with missionaries, and was even at one time a Seminarian[1] is adept at attacking Christian missionaries. He attacks in almost all his novels the hypocrisy of the Roman Catholic Church, the priests in the colonial and post-independence eras, and sometimes the so-called African converts. The axe of this satirist falls on the missionary in his pre-independence novels. If in Ville cruelle the young Eza Boto decries the hypocrisy of the missionary with an uncertain hand, the more mature Mongo Beti comes up with a masterly anticlerical satire in Le pauvre Christ de Bomba. In spite of the outcry raised by his second novel, he does not jettison his anticlerical penchant but conceals it somewhat in Mission terminée. However, his satire of the missionary emerges once more in Le roi miraculé. The white missionary and the Roman Catholic Church are still subjected to Beti's criticism in his recent novels:

Remember Ruben, Perpétue... and La ruine... ; although in none of these is his attack as fierce as in Le pauvre Christ....[2]

Mouralis has this to say about Le pauvre Christ de Bomba:

> Comment se fait-il que ce récit, écrit par le truchement d'un jeune adolescent visiblement favorable à l'action des missionaires et qui se contente de dire ce qu'il voit sans jamais condamner, soit apparu d'emblée comme une satire mordante, une dénonciation partisane, voire un tissu de calomnies? 3

Satiric devices help us to know that the satirist is at work, and that the butt of his satire is, above all, the white priest. Denis's childish perception of the episodes he reports in his diary, his calm tone of narration, and his transparent frankness all help to expose the Catholic Mission in Bomba.

Our study limits itself, in this first part, to Beti's criticism of the church, the missionary and the Christian, as they appear in his novels set completely or partially in the colonial era.

THE CHURCH

The object of Beti's criticism is, above all, the Roman Catholic Church in the Cameroons under French colonial rule. The church was a bureaucratic pyramid with few bishops and Superior Reverend Fathers at the top and numerous poor clergymen at the bottom. This can be inferred from the set-up of the Bomba Catholic Mission in Le pauvre Christ... with its headquarters in Bomba, and smaller parish churches scattered over villages like Timbo, Kota, Biti and Evindi. The Roman Catholic Church in this region owed its success to the

determination of Bishops Vieter, Vogt and Graffin.[4] Usually, once the Catholic Mission had become well implanted, the tendency was for it to seek to protect its property, buttress its mission and silence those who oppose it. Inevitably, the Catholic Church became involved with the colonial administration to the point where it was accused of complicity with the latter.

Although the missionaries arrived in Africa before the colonial masters,[5] the former found themselves more or less obliged to work with the colonial administration. This is inevitable where both hail from the same country of origin as happened in East Cameroon when it was colonised by the French from 1916 - 1960.[6] Thus the missionaries were, in some respects, not very different from the colonial administrators , in spite of the apparently honourable role they were supposed to play as evangelists concerned with saving the Africans' souls.

Religious Form and Structure

By religious form and structure we refer to dogmas, rituals, policies, traditions and organisations of the church. Mongo Beti, in his novels, satirizes the form and structure of the Roman Catholic Church.

Mongo Beti attacks the religious practices of the Roman Catholic Church. Take, for example, the protagonist's reflection in Ville cruelle:

> Qu'était-il besoin d'aller se mouiller la tête d'un peu d'eau, d'aller s'agenouiller aux pieds d'un prêtre, d'aller avaler une miette de pain sans la mâcher, pour croire en Dieu, il [Banda] le demandait? (VC, 154).

Baptism and Holy Communion are here presented as if baptism were simply wetting the head with a few drops of water; and as if communion were simply a matter of swallowing a crumb of bread. In fact, baptism symbolises the act of identification with Christ while Holy Communion is a celebration of the Lord's Supper, the bread symbolising the body of Christ and the wine His blood shed on the Cross of Calvary to save mankind. Nevertheless, the manner in which Banda pictures these sacraments seems to suggest that Beti's aim is to contest the symbolical meaning of these rituals.

Tonga acts as a surrogate of the author when he condemns baptism outright:

> Et nos ancêtres qui croyaient pourtant en Dieu, quel baptême avaient-ils reçu ceux-là,.... Ils croyaient pourtant en Dieu.... Non, le baptême n'a aucune importance.... (VC, 121).

In le roi miraculé, baptism is ridiculed when Yosifa offers his niece, the dying Chief Essomba Fondougou, an extreme unction by pouring bowls upon bowls of water on him, and repeating comically the words that accompany the Catholic baptism. As the narrator notes:

> ... la vieille se saisit d'un gobelet... le remplit d'eau avec une fiévreuse hâte, le brandit et le déversa sur la tête grisonnante du malade, tremblant, répétant plusieurs fois la formule rituelle, comme pour bien se convaincre qu'elle l'avait vraiment baptisé. Après avoir vidé le premier gobelet d'eau,

> elle en remplit un autre et, derechef, le déversa sur le malade, déclarant sans s'arrêter: - Je te baptise au nom.....La vieille femme continuait fébrilement de remplir et déverser gobelet d'eau sur gobelet d'eau criant toujours la formule sacramentelle.... (RM, 62-63).

The old Yosifa, perhaps without knowing it, has only succeeded in making a caricature of baptism. She does not need bowls of water to perform the baptism. Beti reduces the object of his attack (here baptism) to extreme grotesque limits. The catholic teaching which demands that for baptism "tout homme peut baptiser par nécessité, sinon le prêtre," (MF, 57) is here exposed to ridicule. The fact that this baptism is subjected to Beti's satire becomes more evident when Le Guen in Le roi miraculé ironically observes:

> Je me suis aperçu que notre Yosifa, cette grande Chrétienne, cette incomparable mère, cette femme au grand coeur, en baptisant son fils, notre Chef à tous, avait oublié de lui donner un nom chrétien... (RM, 181).

It is ironical that after all her struggles, Yosifa forgets to give the chief a Christian name. Once no name has been given, no baptism has, in fact, been accomplished. Her "Au moins je l'aurai baptisé... " (RM, 63) is, therefore, ironical. It is only later does Le Guen give the Christian name - Lazarus - to the chief.

In Ville cruelle, Beti satirizes the idea among Catholics of confessing their sins to the priest, holding catechism sessions, praying with the rosary, as well as the tradition of praying morning and evening. Beti is, apparently, in

support of Banda when the latter dismisses these practices:

> Mais le catéchisme, la messe, le chapelet, la confesse, les prières du matin et du soir, et les autres lubies, à quoi diantre cela rimait-il? (VC, 154).

The term "lubies" actually devalues these sacred acts. By referring to these practices as "lubies" Beti is, in fact, questioning their relevance to the worship of God.

Confession is subjected to Beti's satire in Le pauvre Christ de Bomba. After twenty years' stay as a missionary in Bomba, Father Drumont is ignorant of the illicit sexual activities ravaging the sins set up by him. And yet he presides over confession. It is clear, therefore, that the converts fail to confess sincerely before receiving the Holy Communion. Through Denis's naïve and ironic remarks we perceive Beti's derision of confession. Denis observes, for instance:

> ... je peux bien communier sans m'être confessé, qu'est-ce qui empêche? Dieu qui sait tout et qui voit mon repentir me pardonnera bien. (PC,142).

Denis appears to argue that since God is omniscient he is capable of knowing when an individual has repented and grant him remission of his sins. Thus, it is not necessary for the person to confess to a fellow human being. Beti condemns confession, probably, because he recognizes the missionary's ulterior motive in all this: he, the missionary, uses such religious practices to hoodwink and subjugate the naïve African. Beti states this idea clearly in his essay, "Le pauvre Christ de Bomba expliqué":

> ... je montrai de la répugnance à l'égard de la confession, de la direction, et de toutes les méthodes de viol des consciences qui avilissaient manifestement les adolescents noirs, mes camarades.[7]

The narrator's parody of Latin liturgy in Ville cruelle reveals Beti's attack on the Christian mode of worship:

> Ils récitaient le chapelet, tous ensemble, hommes et femmes. On n'entendait que les mots... Mâârria... Grââtia... Yésus... Maria... Gratia... Yésus; on ne pouvait pas percevoir ce qu'ils disaient au milieu. C'est seulement sur les mots Maria, Gratia, Yésus, qu'ils prenaient plaisir à appuyer. Ils n'articulaient pas le reste. (VC, 156).

Probably, the worshippers' incomprehension of the Latin liturgy is responsible for their comic articulation of the prayer. It is ironic that an alien language - Latin - unknown to the natives here serves as the medium of prayer. Beti appears to question the validity of such a practice when one does not even understand what one is trying to say to God. In other words, no communication actually takes place. The narrator further observes:

> Cette prière, ainsi récitée, ressemblait à un chant étrange, une mélopée funèbre, ennuyeuse et triste où la même phrase musicale reviendrait indéfiniment: cela créait une ambiance propice au sommeil. (VC, 156).

The caricature of the prayer is patent in "cela créait une ambiance propice au sommeil." Sleep is tantamount to lack of concentration and participation. And yet according to the narrator, here and there is found "un homme assoupi." (VC, 156). Many in the church are sleeping while Latin liturgy is being recited. The Latin prayer is, thus, shown as a useless exercise since it seems to be devoid of any purpose. The fact

that Beti makes a mockery of Latin liturgy emerges in Banda's parody of Latin choruses sung in the church (VC, 158). From Banda's remark, even the catechist admitted "qu'il ne le savait pas," and added that "ça n'avait aucune importance." (VC, 158). There is a clear intention on the part of Beti to strip the Roman Catholic method of worship of its raison d'être and, thus, make it appear comic and useless.

Mongo Beti is not alone in decrying the manner and medium of worship in the Catholic Church as established in the colonial era. Claude Wauthier observed that in the early 60s many Africans were raising the problem of liturgy and alien liturgical language. For example, Marc Ela, in a text published in 1963 felt that the dilemma facing Christianity in Africa was due to the missionaries' obstinate desire to Europeanise the Africans. He stressed the need to indigenize the liturgy and theology. Engelbert Mveng contended like Ela that "l'Afrique chrétienne devenue adulte doit s'adresser à Dieu dans un langage qui est le sien."[8] It is possible that such protest voices including Beti's provoked the changes effected in the manner and medium of worship in the Catholic Church in the post-independence Cameroon and other emergent African states. Indigenous languages have long replaced Latin, French or English as the language of worship in many Catholic Churches in Africa thanks to the constitution on Liturgy promulgated in December, 1963 which allows the Africans to worship in their own language "dans les messes célébrées avec le concours du peuple."[9]

The Roman Catholic Church is attacked for using its religious teachings to hoodwink the Africans, instil fear into them, and subsequently subjugate them. Thus, the doctrine of chastity, the awakening of a sense of guilt, and the idea of eternal damnation influence Denis's behaviour in Le pauvre Christ.... Take, for example, the mental torture Denis undergoes because of his fear of damnation as a result of his fornication with Catherine. The guilt-ridden Denis cannot have his peace of mind till he finally confesses this "sin" to Father Drumont, and is granted absolution. Like Denis, Banda in Ville cruelle suffers mental torture. But unlike Denis, Banda's arises more because of his self-pride than because of moral guilt. As the narrator remarks: "C'était beaucoup moins une question de morale que d'amour-propre." (VC, 172). While contemplating to steal the late Koumé's money, "deux voix parlaient en lui." (VC, 180). He recognises one of the voices as his own dissuading him from stealing the money, and instead to struggle bravely to get his own. The other voice is the missionary's and that of Banda's mother, who believes in the missionary. The Christian doctrine, "thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's property" as well as the fear of sinning cannot restrain the anticlerical Banda, unlike the gullible Denis. The narrator notes: "Mais Banda ne l'écoutait pas, cette voix, il ne voulait pas l'entendre." (VC, 180). He succumbs to his own voice which appears to give him a sense of human dignity as opposed to the missionary's voice which does nothing but intimidate and subdue the African, stripping him of his identity. While in Ville cruelle the satire of the dehumanization of Africans by means

of the religious teaching of the Roman Catholic Church is achieved through the use of conflicting thoughts in Banda, in Le pauvre Christ... , it is achieved through the use of ironic contrasts. It is ironical that Zacharie, Father Drumont's cook, lives in immorality and filth, and never for one moment does he think of the consequences of sinning which is eternal damnation, according to the missionary teaching; whereas the naïve Denis is beside himself because of the fact that he has committed the sin of fornication. His naive fear of damnation enables the reader to perceive Mongo Beti's intention to attack the negative impact of Christian teaching on the innocent Denis, who appears to represent Africa paralysed by the fear of Hell. The fear of damnation inculcated in Denis prevents him from seeing things as they really are. When his beloved master, Father Drumont, suddenly decides to abandon his mission in Africa, he goes back to Europe without caring to rehibilitate his devoted servant, Denis, or to ensure a promising future for him. In this way, he condemns Denis to an uncertain future (Denis contemplates, at the end of the novel, taking refuge in a Greek merchant's house as a houseboy).

Banda's criticism of Father Kolmann's sermon in Ville cruelle stems probably from his perception of the latter's ulterior motive, as a missionary, which is to facilitate the work of the colonial authorities. The parable of the Good Samaritan is analysed and discredited by Banda, who acts as the author's surrogate. Whereas, from the Christian standpoint, credit is given to the Good Samaritan, as far as Banda is concerned,

> c'est plutôt l'homme qui avait été agressé et blessé par les bandits qui présentait le plus grand intérêt dramatique, le plus de possibilités émotionnelles. (VJ, 161).

Banda scorns this parable because he thinks there is nothing extraordinary in rendering help to the injured in his own culture. We tend not to endorse Banda's criticism here when we consider that Father Kolmann quotes this Biblical lesson to illustrate the Christian doctrine of showing love to one's neighbour, in which case, the credit rightly goes to the Good Samaritan who demonstrates practical and sincere love to the victim of robbers. However, in a sense, Banda's criticism is relevant. Beti makes us see through Banda's eyes the church's use of religious teaching to soften the African people and render them manipulable. In fact, by preaching this sermon, Father Kolmann is only preparing the ground to turn these Africans into colonial agents to betray their compatriot, Koumé.

In Mission terminée, Zambo and his friends make fun of Christian precepts. For example, although the Bible does not recommend excessive drinking of alcohol these young men of Kala claim that the right way to Heaven is by encouraging your fellow man to get more or less intoxicated. (MT, 59). A parody of Christian teaching and precepts emerges in the dialogue between Pétrus Fils-de-Dieu and Yohannès le Palmipède:

> Saint Yohannès de Kala, reprit le gigolo en écho. que-/sic/ me commandes - tu de faire si je veux aller au ciel?
> - Très bien, Pétrus Fils-de-Dieu....Voici deux ordres que tu devras exécuter scrupuleusement si tu veux mériter le ciel. Premièrement...Dis:

> 'Premièrement'...
> - Premièrement'
> - Accourir chaque fois que tu m'appelles... Deuxièmement.... Remplir le verre de notre hôte chaque fois qu'il sera vide... Amen...
>
> Comme au catéchisme, Fils-de-Dieu répétait docilement chaque phrase. Je te bénis mon fils au nom du père et du Fils-termina Yohannès le Palmipède avec une satisfaction emphatique et en esquissant le geste de la bénédiction, apportant une drôlerie irrésistible dans la parodie du missionnaire. (MP, 56-57).

Through mimicry the original version is distorted or caricatured. Therefore, the dialogue offers a poor imitation of the missionary and his teaching, the object of Beti's satire.

Beti condemns also church wedding. Whereas church wedding is supposed to be "le seul sacrement" that renders "l'union solide et respectable" (PC, 140), and presupposes a monogamous marriage, what obtains in Le pauvre Christ... is that the converted Africans readily consent to wed in the church, and thereafter, turn polygamous. In this way, church wedding is indirectly discredited.

In Le roi miraculé, Beti sneers at church wedding through Bitama's frank but cynical remark. Bitama, having witnessed Medzo defiled by Kris denounces the vanity of church wedding especially as his friend, Palmieri, describes Nekanda's wedding to Medzo as "le sacrifice qu'une jeune vierge fera cette nuit à son amant de son plus beau trésor. (RM, 250). The term "vierge" is ironical because Medzo is no virgin, and this implicitly devalues the whole pomp and ceremony of church wedding as Bitama tells Palmieri:

> Je n'aimerais pas mêler tant de gens à une chose qui ne devrait concerner que mon épouse et moi. (RM, 250).

Bitama here seems to be Beti's spokesman. He condemns, by implication, the whole idea of getting other people involved in a marriage that should concern just the man and his wife. Beti does not see the need for wedding ceremonies.

Even white wedding gowns meant for virgin brides are shown in Le pauvre Christ... to be worn indiscriminately. In the words of Father Drumont, "ici elles portent toutes des traînes blanches en se mariant, même celles qui ont fait une série de gosses avant de venir à la sixa." (PC, 140). The fact that Drumont is aware that some of these young Christian women have already had children before entering the sixa and still agree that they be wedded even in white wedding gowns, contrary to the church rites, highlights the moral confusion of the Roman Catholic Church in the colonial era. Through self-revelation, Drumont divulges the hypocrisy of the church and the fact that the white wedding gown has lost its significance.

Beti's condemnation of sacraments like baptism and Holy Communion appears to be destructive. We feel that a church should have its way of doing things, an order, an organisation. Others might argue like Beti that doctrines, rituals and tradition are not relevant to any form of religious worship. Some of the sects which emanated from the traditional churches belong to this school of thought.

Beti's disregard for religious form and structure clearly emerges in his condemnation of religious symbols such as baptism, his parody of Latin liturgy and his denunciation of church wedding.

Christianity and Animism

Christian evangelism in Africa has been envisaged as a refuge for Africans rated spiritually empty by the Whites. Beti denounces this fallacy.

Beti's novels point to the existence of African traditional region long before the advent of the missionary. For example, Banda remarks:

> Sa soeur [The tailor's sister and Banda's mother] se comportait comme si la religion avait été une chose nouvelle... Et leurs ancêtres, ceux qui vivaient dans un pays où il n'y avait pas encore de Blancs, ni de Bonnes Sœurs, ni d'églises, ni de cloches; leurs ancêtres avant l'arrivée des Blancs, est-ce qu'ils ne croyaient pas en Dieu, eux?.... (VC, 154).

Here, Banda appears to be echoing Beti's view while stressing that the African, prior to his contact with the whiteman, believed in God and had his own way of communicating with the Divine.

Drumont in one of his moments of self-knowledge admits the existence of African traditional religion long before the introduction of Christianity into Africa:

> Ces braves gens ont bien adoré Dieu sans nous. Qu'importe s'ils l'ont adoré à leur manière... en mangeant de l'homme, ou en dansant au clair de lune, ou en portant au cou des gris-gris d'écorce d'arbre. Pourquoi nous obstiner à leur imposer notre manière à nous? (PC, 196-197).

This revelation from Drumont shocks his interlocutor. Given Drumont's determination to convert the Africans to Christianity, one would hardly expect him to be conscious of the Africans' possession of their own religion. This, probably, explains Vidal's shock. Before Drumont's resounding failure in Bomba, he gauges the futility of his missionary enterprise in Africa: "Pourquoi nous obstiner à leur imposer notre manière à nous?" underlines the worthlessness of Christian evangelical mission in Africa. Drumont goes on:

> Je ne m'étais jamais posé la question auparavant. Pourquoi les Chinois ne s'acharnent-ils pas à convertir les Parisiens au confucianisme ou au bouddhisme.... (PC, 197).

Here, Drumont is unwittingly expressing Beti's view: it is not necessary to impose Christianity on Africans since they have their own ancestral religion comparable to other religions of the world. Drumont is indirectly admitting that Christianity is not superior to animism. This is also implied in his dialogue with Vidal:

> Vidal: Mais qu'est-ce qui correspondait chez eux à notre christianisme?
> Drumont: Je n'en sais foutre rien; mais il y a sûrement quelque chose.
> Vidal: L'animisme!
> Drumont: Appelez cela comme vous voudrez.
> Vidal: Et ça pourrait mener au ciel?
> Drumont: Ne mélangeons pas les problèmes. Ce qui importe, c'est de savoir non si la chose peut mener au ciel, mais si elle existe. (PC, 50-51).

Drumont contends here that animism is to Africans what Christianity is to Europeans. Thus, in Beti's eyes, there is no need trying to Christianise the Africans.

The dwindling number of African converts in the Bomba Parish testifies to the Africans' abandonment of Christianity after having tested it and seen that it is not superior to their ancestral religion. The significance of the decline in the number of Christians in the Bomba Parish is to be seen at several levels. First, contrary to the whiteman's expectation, the African was, in fact, very religious before the coming of the missionary. Second, the Africans' adherence to Christianity might have been, as Drumont himself reveals, a defence reaction. "Leur adhésion, toute formelle, au Christianisme, ne serait-elle pas une réaction de défense....?" (PC, 202). Drumont, probably, refers here to the way the African takes refuge in the Christian mission so as not to be conscripted, for instance, into the colonial forced labour. When, however, he is safe from colonial oppression, he abandons the church. Zacharia puts it bluntly:

> Ici [at Zibi], ce n'est pas comme sur la route. Ici les gens s'en moquent parce qu'ils ont la belle vie: la paix, le vin de palme, le cacao, etc. Pas de corvée à effectuer sur la route, pas de taxes, pas d'impôts, pas de miliciens ni de gardes; alors, eux, ils s'en foutent.... Sur la route, les gens espèrent que le R.P.S. peut les protéger dans certaines circonstances; mais ici, ils n'ont pas besoin de lui. Ils se moquent bien de la religion, ici.... (PC, 132).

Zacharie's frank remark, which echoes Beti's position, emphasizes that the African does not really need Christianity. Third, many Blacks were initially converted, probably, because they wanted to gain access to the whiteman's secret. This is evident in Zacharie's remark to Drumont:

> Les premiers d'entre nous qui sont accourus à la religion, à votre religion, y sont venus comme à... une révélation, une école où ils acquerraient la révélation de votre secret, le secret de votre force, la force de vos avions, de vos chemins de fer,.... le secret de votre mystère, quoi! Au lieu de cela vous vous êtes mis à leur parler de Dieu, de l'âme, de la vie éternelle etc. Est-ce que vous vous imaginez qu'ils ne connaissaient pas déjà tout cela avant, bien avant votre arrivée? (PC, 46).

The point Zacharie is making here is amplified by the narrator in Remember Ruben when he observes that Abéna becomes a friend to Father Van den Rietter and that what attracts him to this missionary

> n'était pas sa religion ni ce héros, Jésus-Christ, dont Van den Rietter parlait si souvent et si chaleureusement dans ses sermons mais parce qu'il aimait voir de près son fusil. (RR, 80).

The emphasis is on gaining access to Western technology as represented here by the missionary's gun. Furthermore, the narrator tells us that Van den Rietter's church members comprise mainly old women and young children, whose families sent to him "autant pour les initier à sa religion que pour leur montrer l'alphabet et d'autres secrets des Blancs." (RR, 81).

Mbiti and Gorer have rightly observed that the Africans agreed to conversion essentially for material reasons - fear, bribery and desire to learn the whiteman's secret.[10] Mongo Beti's quarrel with the missionary is the latter's failure to recognise the blackman's major interest in accepting the Christian religion: to gain access to the secret of the whiteman. This is defined in terms of the technology. This is put quite explicitly by Mongo Beti in "Le pauvre Christ de Bomba expliqué":

> Mais l'instruction n'est pas le seul profit ainsi payé en monnaie de singe: l'évangelisation est un grand diffuseur de techniques occidentales relatives autant à la maçonnerie, au creusement des puits, et même à l'agriculture sans compter les techniques de domination. Le missionnaire ignore et doit ignorer que c'est surtout cet enrichissement-là que nous attendons de lui. 11

This oversight on the part of the missionary is denounced by Beti. Zacharie serves as an effective instrument of Beti's satire when he points out:

> Et cependant, les gens changent. Il y a dix ans, même dans un pays de brousse comme ici, les gens se laissaient faire. Ils se laissaient tous baptiser et traiter comme ci ou comme ça: ils voulaient voir ce que c'était. Maintenant ça ne les intéresse plus.... (PC, 133).

Zacharie repeats this point to the catechist at Zibi. When the fail to attain their primary objective, many of them desert the church. "Ils abandonnent la religion, ils courent... vers l'argent... " affirms Zacharie. They desert the church because the Africans, in Beti's words, dream "de n'être plus des vaincus."[12] This explains partly the Africans' return to animism. Beti somewhere challenges those who give false statistics as to the large number of Christians in the Cameroons and points out that many "sont restés fidèles aux antiques croyances."[13]

Beti argues that many of the early Christians have gone back to the ancestral religion, probably, because they cannot see the wisdom in abandoning their traditional religion for an imported one which is in no way superior.

Denunciation of the Idea of the Universality of Christian Principles

Beti, in his novels particularly Le pauvre Christ... and Le roi miraculé, criticizes the whole idea of missionaries trying to evangelize the Africans without respecting the culture and traditional beliefs of those they seek to convert to Christianity. Beti's aim in Le pauvre Christ... according to Soyinka "is the demolition of pretenders to cultural and spiritual superiority."[14] The mission of Father Drumont in Bomba, of Le Guen in Essazam and of Van den Rietter in Ekoumdoum, seems to be to strip the African of what he stands for, and impose on him a foreign culture rated superior. Here, we find what Beti objects to in missionary activity in Africa.

Beti exposes the incompatibility of Christian precepts and practice and the African way of life. This is symbolised by the clash of two worlds - Europe and Africa - whose dramatic outcome is Father Drumont's departure back to Europe, the expulsion of Father Le Guen from Essazam, and Van den Rietter's exit from Ekoumdoum and his sudden death. This is more or less the point made by Thomas Melone:

> Le pauvre Christ de Bomba et Le roi miraculé marqués respectivement par la retraite de Drumont et l'expulsion de Leguen [sic], symbolisent de leur côté l'impossible association de l'Afrique et de l'Occident.[15]

Beti himself has remarked:

> Le mur du malentendu dressé entre le missionnaire et ses néophytes noirs les sépare en deux mondes qui se juxtaposent, mais ne se mêlent point.16

Beti's attack is directed at the alien moral standards, imported by the church, which are antithetical to African traditions. For the bantu people, as opposed to the Europeans, there is nothing outrageous in a married man having a mistress. And yet Africans are forced, though without success, to adopt the Christian principles of chastity and monogamy. Drumont reflects:

> Comment faire admettre sincèrement le principe de la monogamie à un homme d'ici? La pureté sexuelle, l'abstinence sexuelle leur sont totalement inconnues. (PC, 203).

Also, fornication is not frowned at by the Fang people. For the Fang, "la jeune fille est libre de son corps tant qu'elle n'a pas d'époux."[17] Thus, Denis realises how inappropriate is Father Drumont's fury and crusade against having "illegitimate" babies in the context of the Fang traditional society. Denis notes:

> Mon père, par exemple, est catéchiste. Pourtant, je suis certain qu'il serait l'homme le plus heureux si ma soeur Anne faisait un enfant avant d'aller en mariage, surtout un garçon. Ça serait toujours un garçon de plus à la maison. (PC, 18).

It is clear from Denis's remark that the Fang people see nothing wrong with unmarried girls having babies. This is partly because they love to have many children and partly because the concept of illegitimacy is unknown in their cultural milieu. Drumont fails to appreciate this and becomes enraged by such a

practice considered "sinful" in the eyes of the church but perfectly acceptable to the natives. This is obvious in Drumont's admission:

> ... il me souvient d'une chose contre laquelle je me suis battu ici et usé inutilement: les filles-mères... les filles se mettent à fréquenter les garçons toutes jeunes encore.... Naturellement, il arrive... des enfants. Eh bien, je n'ai jamais réussi à mettre dans l'esprit des gens qu'il y eût une honte pour la famille dans une telle situation. (PC, 203).

Drumont judges the African way of life with a foreign yardstick. There is a contrast between Drumont's value judgement, "il y eût une honte pour la famille dans une telle situation" and Denis's view that his father "serait l'homme le plus heureux" if Denis's sister, Anne, "faisait un enfant avant d'aller en mariage." What is regarded as shameful in the European culture is, in Drumont's words, "un bonheur estimable" (PC, 203) for the Africans. Drumont recognizes that the natives' moral codes stand in opposition to Christian ethnical principles, and yet he fails to respect this difference. Beti, here denounces Drumont's disrespect for a people's culture probably because this missionary considers it inferior to the European culture. Beti's satire here is seen from Denis's child-eye view:

> Je parie que... dès notre première étape, il /Drumont/ attrapera une colère épouvantable à cause de ce qu'il appelle les filles-mères. Cette question-là le rendra certainement fou un jour, pauvre Père Drumont! Parfois, j'éprouve vraiment de la pitié pour lui. Qu'est-ce qu'il n'aura pas fait et dit devant les villageois ahuris pour leur révéler l'odieux de la situation des filles-mères!.... Moi, je ne vois pas pourquoi il attache tant d'importance à cette question. (PC, 18).

Although Denis apparently endorses Drumont's actions most often, he is here unwittingly critical of this Reverend Father's opposition to having pre-marital babies. Denis does not share his master's view which explains his detachment from Drumont. Denis's remark, "l'odieux de la situation" has been described as "an oblique, ironic reference to Drumont's own interpretation of the girls' behaviour."[18] Furthermore, Denis dismisses Drumont's furious reaction as unreasonable and unnecessary. To Denis, Drumont's relentless effort to combat African tradition is grotesque. The absurdity shown by Drumont appears to symbolise the clash between the Judeo-Christian tradition and African tradition.

Similarly, Beti derides the missionary's attempt to impose monogamy on the African, who by custom is free to marry as many wives as he chooses. While Father Drumont imagines that the villagers' love for the pomp and ceremony associated with church wedding explains their willingness to wed in the church and soon after revert to polygamy, the catechist in Bitie accepts that explanation as probably incomplete for he comments sarcastically:

> -Mon père... Il y a peut-être de cela, oui, il y a certainement de cela. Mais il semble bien que ce n'est pas tout. (PC, 58).

This catechist is, possibly, drawing the Father's attention to the conflict of cultures which appears to be the crux of the matter here. It would seem that Beti wants to show here that the Africans' tendency to jettison monogamy and revert once more to polygamy emphasizes the incompatibility of the

Judeo-Christian tradition and the African tradition. In Le roi miraculé, Le Guen's insistence on the converted chief Mendouga adopting monogamy is mainly because of his zeal to save the chief from sin. (RM, 187). From the standpoint of the christian religion, a married man sleeping with any woman other than his wife is committing a sin. On the contrary, the African sees nothing immoral with such a practice. It is in this sense that Christianity regards polygamy practised by Africans as reprehensive. Le Guen's obstinacy leads him to act imprudently: he compels Chief Essomba Mendouga to repudiate all but the youngest of his wives. This tactless move plunges the Essazam tribe into a state of turmoil. It, actually, incites a collective revolt. Le Guen falls a prey to mob action and "ne tarda pas à regagner la mission et à s'aliter." (RM, 199). The disturbance demands the intervention of the more pragmatic colonial administrators, who immediately arrange for Le Guen's transfer in the interest of peace and harmony among the Essazam. This disorder appears to suggest a clash between Christianity and African tradition, between the two worlds - Europe and Africa.

Mongo Beti denounces the disrespect towards, and the destruction of, manifestations of African culture simply because the Roman Catholic Church aims to impose an alien culture on Africans. In La ruine..., for example, we find a catalogue of African manners and practices smothered by Christianity. (RP, 232-233).

> ...nous avions dû renoncer aux dés, bien que nous raffolions du jeu; nous buvions même notre bon vin de palme en nous dissimulant. Peu à peu, sous prétexte de nous élever

> au-dessus des animaux, il [Van den Rietter] s'était ingénié à substituer à nos coutumes si douces des usages extravagants, qui n'étaient même pas ceux de son pays, mais tout simplement le produit délirant de son imagination dépravée ou, peut-être, de quelque livre écrit par un esprit morbide. (RP, 233).

It is clear from the above passage that the missionaries treat with contempt the Africans (viewed more or less as beasts, "sous prétexte de nous élever au-dessus des animaux"), and their customs. The missionaries' contemptuous attitude partially explains their determination to wipe out African customary practices. Williamson's observation about Christianity among the Akan can be generalized to other African societies. According to him, the object of the missionary was to turn converts away from their traditional life towards what he, the missionary, considers to be the civilized and superior mode of worship.[19] Mongo Beti critizes the Christian missionaries' attitude to African traditions. Mongo Beti, in La ruine.... establishes a contrast between Western and African cultures. In the words of the narrator:

> Jo Le Jongleur allait bientot lui [Van den Rietter] en faire honte, les traditions en honneur dans son pays sont bien plus bestiales que les nôtres: ne dit-on pas que la rapine, le viol, le meurtre de vieux parents dont la longévité retarde le moment d'hériter, l'abandon de nourrissons innocents, l'usurpation de terres, qui ne sont chez nous qu'accidents rares, font là-bas partie de la vie quotidienne? (RP, 233, See also, 292).

Beti's aim here is not to paint an idyllic image of Africa and its culture. He wants to draw our attention to the social vices in the Western world which have become more or

less endemic and which are worse than those practices in Africa rated bestial and barbaric by the missionaries. Beti appears to say: "how can people from such an immoral world come to Africa and deride the blackman's culture which is relatively modest as opposed to the eccentricities ('usages extravagants,' RF, 233) of the western world?" In short, Beti denounces the missionaries' mistaken belief that the African culture is inferior to the alien culture peddled by Christianity.

The brand of Christianity professed by Beti's white priests, because it is not in consonance with African cultural norms, leads directly to adverse consequences: this type of Christianity tends to break up family ties, destabilize clans and villages, provoke conflicts in the community, (PC, 34) and this is precisely what attracts Beti's criticism. For example, in Le pauvre Christ... , the ban imposed by Father Drumont on Christians mixing freely with non-Christians cuts across the African principle of "la communauté du sang" (relationship by blood or consanguinity) as Uncle Mama puts it in Mission terminée (MT, 124). The church is indirectly trying to destroy the community spirit amongst Africans. Ironically, Drumont's action here exposes him as being basically un-Christian for after all, Christianity advocates loving one's neighbour as oneself.

Secondly, Drumont's disruption of the traditional dancing at night on the first Friday of the month (regarded by the church as a day of penance) (PC, 77) amounts to flouting traditional African culture. In La ruine... , Van den Rietter also sets out to disrupt the villagers' dancing: "c'est vrai

que nous lui avions obéi et renoncé à danser la nuit dans la cité même." (RP, 232). The doggedness with which Drumont fights against the Africans' dancing at night leads him to adopt an absurd attitude which attracts Beti's irony. Drumont's violent destruction of the dancers' musical instruments amounts to denying the African his cultural identity. This is implied in the remark made by an African at Evindi:

> -Mais qu'est-ce que nous ferions, mon Père, si nous ne dansions plus. Vous autres, vous avez des automobiles, des avions, des trains... Nous n'avons que cela, danser. Et vous voulez nous empêcher de danser! Qu'est-ce que nous ferions à la place? (PC, 80).

Drumont's contention is that if these villagers cease to dance they will go to Heaven. By reducing the essence of Christianity to the injunction "Ne plus danser" (PC, 80), Drumont cuts a comic figure here. Zacharie's cynical frankness is an instrument of Beti's satirical irony. Take, for example, this dialogue between Denis and Zacharie:

> -Pourquoi veut-il les empêcher de danser, du moment qu'ils ne sont pas chrétiens? Le premier vendredi du mois, tu parles! Ils s'en moquent, les gars, ici....
> - Je croyais qu'il s'était assagi, ton prêtre. En fait il est toujours aussi nerveux....
> - Tu devrais lui dire ça, qu'il est trop nerveux et qu'il devrait s'assagir. (PC, 72).

Drumont, according to Zacharie, should have been wiser not to interfere with the Africans' dancing. In short, Zacharie condemns outright Drumont's action. He even tries, unsuccessfully, to dissuade him from disrupting the dancing: "une telle expédition n'est pas prudente," Zacharie tells him.

(PC, 74). Zacharie condemns Drumont's impetuousity, irascibility and imprudence, all of which ironically contradict the Christ-like image naively accredited to him by Denis. The fact that Drumont is told that the natives concerned here are not Christians and he still proceeds to destroy their musical instrument highlights his determination to combat African tradition. Beti attacks the church for attempting to efface African tradition.

The pertinent question at this point is whether the object of Christian missionary teaching is to estrange the African from his roots since the missionaries are seen to be fighting against African customs whilst imposing Western culture on the African. Kesteloot has written that:

> le missionnaire ne comprend pas l'indigène, il veut lui imposer sa religion et sa morale, et il traite avec mépris les moeurs et croyances ancestrales.20

The problem is less a matter of understanding the native (since that is the least of the missionary's preoccupation) as treating him as a sub-human species bound to accept the priest's "superior" religion and civilisation. This explains to a considerable extent the missionary's disregard of Africans' traditional culture.

Le pauvre Christ de Bomba raises the question whether the Christian religion, in terms of its doctrine and practice, is really meant for Africans. Beti here resorts to Denis's ingenuous viewpoint. The "innocent" narrator, Denis, bewildered by the failure of his master, Father Drumont, reflects on the question of the evangelisation of Africans:

> Moi aussi je commence à me demander si la religion chrétienne convient vraiment aux Noirs, si elle est bien faite à notre mesure. Je le croyais fermement, puisque Jésus-Christ a dit à ses apôtres: 'Allez et annoncez la bonne nouvelle aux peuples de la terre... ' Mais maintenant je ne sais plus... 'Allez et annoncez la bonne nouvelle... ' Il l'a pourtant bien dit, Jésus-Christ! Je suis certain qu'il l'a dit! Même que c'est écrit dans la Bible!.... (PC, 245).

Denis, of course, is not wrong for Jesus did say so to his disciples: "Allez par tout le monde, et prêchez la bonne nouvelle à toute la création."[21] What Denis is not sure of is the relevance of this to Africa when the approach is as dogmatic as Drumont's, Le Guen's and Van den Rietter's. Were the approach of Beti's missionaries as pragmatic as that of his colonial administrators, the inadaptation of Christianity to African conditions might not have constituted food for thought for Denis or for readers of Beti's novels.

Vidal's cynical but practical proposition to Drumont is pertinent here:

> Dans la pensée du Christ, ce devait être une religion universelle, non? Et ce n'était pas un imbécile, le Jésus-Christ: il devait bien se douter qu'il y avait de par le monde des gens qui avaient des moeurs à eux.... Pourquoi ne pas faire un christianisme à l'usage des Noirs? Un christianisme.....où la polygamie serait autorisée... où la pureté sexuelle ne figurerait pas en tête du cortège des vertus? (PC, 204).

However, Beti's priests, particularly Drumont and Le Guen, are too intransigent in their conception of Christian evangelism to embrace Vidal's realistic views. They, like the Abbe Nioka, contend "qu'on ne doit inféoder la religion chrétienne à aucune culture."[22]

At the conscious level, Drumont recognizes that Africans are a people with a specific culture and identity, and therefore, cannot be easily shaped into any form. This is implied in Drumont's sarcastic retort to Vidal:

> Vous qui êtes amateur d'art, prenez donc un vase déjà cuit, essayez de lui imposer votre forme à vous et venez m'en dire les nouvelles. (PC, 50).

Yet, ironically, the same Drumont is determined to destroy African culture and force the Africans to adopt the Judeo-Christian tradition. Beti satirizes this idea of trying to universalize Christian principles. Vidal, the young administrator, points out:

> Evangéliser les Noirs, ça serait comme de vouloir imposer à une vieille gargoulette la forme d'une amphore? (PC, 50).

It is implied here that if the African is already formed and has his own vision du monde, trying to christianise him in Drumont's rigid and illusory way appears to be an impossible task.

What Beti objects to is the church's view of evangelization of blacks as synonymous with effacing all aspects of African traditional culture and replacing them with European trends. Mineke Schipper-de Leeuw has observed that the missionary "semble souvent avoir confondu la culture occidentale avec l'évangile de Jésus-Christ...."[23]

One might argue that this is inevitable since the missionaries' world-view is based on the Judeo-Christian tradition. Nevertheless, Beti's missionaries are, on the whole, Euro-centric in their identification of Christianization

with Westernization. After all, as Vidal earlier observed, the Africans might be christianized without being alienated from their roots. This is obvious in Africa of today: many of the African customs frowned upon by the missionaries have been revived, and are respected by many present-day African Christians. This identification of Christianity with Western culture, coupled with the representation of Jesus Christ and other Biblical figures as whitemen (as Drumont confesses: "ceux d'ici me disent souvent.... 'tu n'es qu'un Blanc... Et Jésus-Christ, est-ce que ce n'était pas un Blanc aussi?' (PC, 203) leads to the African's perception of Christianity as the whiteman's religion. This is the conviction of Banda in Ville cruelle, Denis in Le pauvre Christ... , Kris and Bitama in Le roi miraculé, and Abéna in Remember Ruben. These characters recall Oyono's Toundi who equally wonders if Christianity is really suited to African conditions. Beti, like Oyono, perceives the inadaptability of Christianity to African situation. Beti accuses the Catholic Church of trying to impose the whiteman's religion on Africans. His attack on the church in this regard recalls that by Ezekiel Mphalele who contends that the church is white and preaches false fraternity; that it is nothing but the symbol of Western hypocrisy.[24]

What tends to justify Beti's denunciation of the idea of the universality of Christian principles is the return of many African converts to African culture not only in Cameroon but also in many other parts of Africa. Another pointer to the validity of Beti's accusation is the proliferation of sects

(about five thousand of such sects exist in Africa as a whole); almost all of which have emerged from the prostestant churches, only two or three from the Roman catholic church and probably none from the Orthodox Church.[25]

The multiplication of sects in Africa tends to imply the Africans' resentment of missionary Christianity with its connection with colonialism and westernization. In the words of Mbiti:

> Whatever else might be said in general about the independent church movements in Africa, they are, in their own ways, attempts by African peoples to 'indigenize' Christianity and to interpret and apply it in ways that, perhaps spontaneously, render Christianity both practical and meaningful to them. 26

Furthermore, none of these sects has originated from the Orthodox Church in Ethiopia and Egypt, the two major areas in the present day Africa where Christianity can be rightly said to be "African", indigenous and traditional,[27] since it has been steeped in the history and tradition of those who profess it there. Writing on the situation in the Cameroons, Bureau observed that a Christian was regarded there as one who has jettisoned the ancestral tradition. Many customs were discouraged by the Christian missionaries. A cultural vacuum was more or less created by Christian evangelization. A prelate remarked that the Christian missions produced Christians but life robbed them of these African converts.[28] This undermines the myth of the universality of Christian principles.

Beti demolishes the idea of missionaries trying to impose Christian principles on the Africans regardless of the latter's culture, incompatible with the Judeo-Christian tradition peddled by Christianity.

THE MISSIONARY

The missionary in colonial Africa has been satirized by several African writers. It appears, however, that Beti excels in the satirization of the white missionaries. There is practically not a novel of Beti which does not contain an indictment of the Christian missionary, at least at the implicit level. We intend to focus here on the various aspects of Beti's attack on the missionary.

The Missionary's Callousness

One is struck by the cruelty and insensitivity of the missionaries who appear in Beti's novels. Beti denounces their reprehensible traits.

Take, for example, Drumont's impassivity to the pleadings of the old woman in Timbo to be exempted from the payment of class dues and allowed to partake of the Holy Sacrament. As the narrator in Le pauvre Christ... observes:

> ... elle [the old woman] a éclaté en sanglots et les larmes lui ont coulé sur les joues. Je croyais que le R.P.S. finirait par l'exonérer, mais il ne l'a pas fait. Il a simplement recommendé à la vieille femme de harceler ses parents jusqu'à ce qu'ils lui payent le denier du culte.... (PC, 39).

Denis's remark "Je croyais que le R.P.S. finirait par l'exonérer, mais il ne l'a pas fait" betrays Denis's sympathy for the old woman as well as his unwitting detachment from his beloved master. Denis's initial neutral remark, "on voyait bien qu'elle était pauvre: elle portait une vieille robe loqueteuse et crasseuse" (PC, 38) tends to indicate that the old woman has a genuine case, and therefore should elicit the Father's sympathy. However, Drumont does not sympathize with her. Father Drumont's behaviour here portrays him as basically un-Christian.

In Remember Ruben, Abéna refers to Van den Rietter as "un animal dangereux." The fact that this is an apt description is confirmed when Jo Le Jongleur is tortured by this Reverend Father in La ruine.... As the narrator puts it:

> ...le missionnaire plongea brusquement sur les hanches de Jo Le Jongleur, saisit à pleine main ses testicules qu'il se mit tantôt à presser, tantôt à tordre pour arracher des aveux à son prisonnier déjà torturé cruellement par sa posture et par les liens qui lui sciaient ou broyaient les membres. La prunelle chavirée, les lèvres retournées par la douleur, le militant rubéniste poussait des hurlements déchirants, qui exprimaient une souffrance intolérable. (RP, 149).

Van den Rietter's cruelty is highlighted here by Mongo Beti in order to indict the missionary.

The missionary's callous treatment of his servant appears to be confirmed by Mongo Beti's own personal experience. As Beti says:

> Tout jeune garçon, j'ai été marqué par mon séjour dans plusieurs établissements missionnaires où les expressions...que 'sale

> nègre' ou 'affreux négrillon' n'étaient pas rares dans les échanges des religieux blancs avec leurs employés et leurs élèves noirs. 29

Toundi in Oyono's Une vie de boy notes that his master, Father Gilbert, treats him "comme un petit animal familier."[30] This animal image is revealing: it suggests the brutal treatment Toundi receives from his master. Antoine, a character in Turnbull's book, The Lonely African, has rightly remarked:

> I have seen the reverend fathers stub their cigars out in the food left on their plates so we shall not be able to eat it or take it home. They are a heartless people and think only of themselves. 31

Like Beti, Antoine has experienced the missionary's cruelty which he sets out to castigate here.

Mongo Beti who detests injustice denounces the callousness inflicted on the African by the white missionary.

Evangelization: An Instrument for Enslaving Africans

In his novels, particularly Le pauvre Christ... , Beti accuses the missionaries of intimidating and exploiting Africans. In this way, the missionaries contribute to the enslavement of Africans by the colonial authorities.

Mongo Beti in his article, "Le pauvre Christ de Bomba expliqué", describes the missionary activity in Africa as an attempt at "déportation morale." As he puts it:

> A une époque où le Noir, sujet français, s'expose à la prison en Afrique ou à des sarcasmes en France, s'il ose prononcer

> le mot indépendance, l'interrogation sur l'évangélisation missionnaire comme auxiliaire de l'asservissement des Africains est le sujet même du 'pauvre Christ de Bomba'. 32

The Missionary's Proselytism and Superiority Complex

The missionary feels superior to the African whom he sets out to convert and dominate. Beti attacks the missionary's attitude and behaviour towards his African converts.

In Le roi miraculé, Le Guen achieves his secret ambition as a missionary. The missionary's ambition to dominate Africans is shown in Le Guen's desire to convert Chief Essomba Mendouga, an action which appears to symbolise European supremacy over Africa as Le Guen frankly admits. The conquest of Africa, to Le Guen, is a mark of "la volonté de puissance de l'Europe triomphante (RM, 27). However, instead of conquering Africa, Le Guen is defeated and ejected from Essazam. Chief Mendouga returns to the practice of polygamy. Beti attacks the whole idea of converting an African chief to Christianity, and moreover, imposing monogamy on this African chief married to 23 wives. Beti uses Lequeux, the colonial administrator, to condemn Le Guen's unrealistic project. Lequeux describes Le Guen's ambition to convert the chief as an "entreprise insensée." (RM, 239). Le Guen's expulsion is a way of cutting him down to size.

Beti demystifies the missionary in order to show that the white priest is neither superior to the African nor has he the right to convert, subjugate and dominate him.

The Missionary's Exploitation of His Converts

Beti's novels show that the missionaries exploit their African converts through various ways such as the imposition of fees and fines. Mongo Beti denounces this type of exploitation.

The exploitation of Africans by the missionaries is described by Jo Le Jongleur in La ruine... in the following words:

> Au début, ils [the missionaries] brandissent la Bible et nous autres nous [the Africans] avons la terre. Cent ans après, c'est nous qui brandissons la Bible.... et eux ils ont la terre, notre terre. (RP, 312).

Beti, in his essay, Main basse sur le Cameroun, attacks the missionary:

> Ma propre expérience d'enfant me fait penser aujourd'hui que ces soi-disant messagers du Christ se voyaient bien mieux en descendants de Robinson Crusoé environnés de hordes de Vendredis africains au cannibalisme mal ravalé. 33

Drumont who exploits his parishioners ironically remarks: "Du moins, nous [the Christian missions] n'avons pas institué de travaux forcés." (PC, 53). Thus, he implies that the missionaries, unlike the colonial authorities, do not extort forced labour.

We perceive Beti's irony when Vidal unmasks Drumont's self-delusion:

> - Que vous dites, mon père, que vous dites! Vous leur déclarez: 'venez travaillez à la mission, sinon, vous irez en enfer.' Est-ce que ce n'est pas une contrainte pire que toutes les contraintes du monde? (PC, 53).

The satirical voice of Beti emerges in Vidal's sarcasm. Drumont is shocked by Vidal's words. This is obvious in Denis's reporting: "comme s'il se réveillait d'un mauvais rêve, le R.P.S. a soupiré brusquement..." (PC, 53). Vidal's primary aim here is not just to indict the missionaries but to dismiss their false claim to being better than the colonial administrators. Moreover, Vidal insinuates here that both the missionaries and the colonial administrators play a complementary role as far as exploiting the Africans is concerned.

The Missionaries and the Sixa

Each Catholic Mission in the Southern Cameroons has the institution of the sixa, a kind of hostel meant to prepare young betrothed women for their future role as Christian wives and mothers. The duration of this training varies from two to three months. Although the Catholic Church extols the virtues of the sixa, some people have reservations about it. Several Francophone African writers have attacked the sixa. For example, Ferdinand Oyono, in Une vie de boy, makes an ironic reference to the sixa as a fertile ground for the exploitation of the African women. This is what Toundi's observation implies:

> Aujourd'hui, le père Vandermayer est rentré de la brousse. Il a amené cinq femmes - chrétiennes.... La Sixa compte cinq pensionnaires de plus. Si elles savaient les travaux qui les attendent ici, elles seraient restées avec leur mari! 34

Mongo Beti, too, condemns the practice whereby engaged Christian women are kept in the sixa for about three months before being allowed to be wedded to their fiancés. The primary goal of the sixa which is to prepare these girls for their future role as Christian wives and mothers turns out to be an exploitation of these young women. Beti's denunciation of the sixa, however, is somewhat different in the sense that his is a complete indictment of the church authorities for debasing the apparently commendable objective of the sixa.

Whereas Beti criticizes in passing the abuses of the sixa in Le roi miraculé, he describes the sixa in Le pauvre Christ de Bomba as an embodiment of exploitation, immorality and a breeding ground for venereal diseases. The sixa with its lofty ideal degenerates more or less into a brothel. In this way, Beti indicts the whole idea of the sixa and its founders.

Catherine, an inmate of the sixa, symbolises all that is reprehensible about the institution which, far from being an ideal Christian haven for betrothed girls, actually corrupts them. This is really what Beti's satire seeks to establish.

Father Drumont himself exploits the sixa girls' labour. He assigns masculine jobs to these girls. For example, the narrator of Le pauvre Christ... observes that:

> il [Drumont] fit battre les briques et les tuiles par les femmes de la sixa... il mit une femme de la sixa partout où manquait un homme et révéla aux gens de chez nous que les femmes étaient aussi aptes que les hommes à des travaux que personne auparavant n'aurait eu l'idée de leur faire accomplir: tels de scier le bois en planches. (PC, 27).

Subjecting these women to hard jobs could have some positive values. It could be interpreted as a way of preparing these women for the more arduous task of running a Christian home. Nevertheless, the missionaries have an ulterior motive in setting up this sixa which recalls a similar home run by Van den Rietter and Brother Nicolas in La ruine.... Drumont, the shrewd exploiter extends the duration of these women's stay in the sixa from three months to four months. The underlying motive is not the need to impart more spiritual and moral education to the sixa girls but to ensure a prolonged exploitation of their labour. Drumont's shrewdness earns him the nick-name "Le Malin" (PC, 27) which is, in fact, an indictment of Drumont as a dedicated missionary. Mongo Beti denounces the exploitation of the sixa girls when Drumont observes:

> -La femme indigène, la petite femme noire si docile, quelle machine idéale! Pas besoin de la graisser, pensez-donc! Pas même besoin d'aller voir de temps en temps si elle ne se rouille pas dans le petit garage où on l'a fourrée. Machine vraiment introuvable! Elle s'entretient toute seule, retenez le bien, toute seule! Surtout, n'allez pas la sortir du garage le matin; quelle idée stupide! Non, elle s'amènera toute seule et vous dira: 'Donne-moi donc du travail à faire.' Qui aurait jamais pu réaliser une aussi belle invention? (PC, 263-264).

Drumont, unknowingly betrays his exploitation of the African woman's labour. There is an underlying sarcasm in Father Drumont's tone which indicts him even more. He continues:

> Les indigènes, bien avant nous, avaient déjà découvert que leur femme était une machine idéale: ils ne sont pas plus bêtes que nous; détrompez-vous si vous le croyiez... Nous nous amenons, nous les Chrétiens, les messagers du Christ, nous, les civilisateurs. Et qu'est-ce que vous croyez que nous faisons? Que nous rendons à la femme sa dignité? Oh! surtout pas, mon père. Ah, non! Nous la maintenons dans sa servitude. Mais, cette fois, à notre profit.... (PC, 264).

Drumont's ulterances here reveal Beti's satire. For Beti, Christianity which aims to liberate all peoples is indirectly enslaving the converted African women. Beti appears to say that Christianity in Africa has not improved the lot of the African women. On the contrary, the traditional enslavement of the African woman persists, and the Christian missionaries actually contribute to her exploitation. Father Drumont under whose very nose the sixa girls are exploited and corrupted does nothing to arrest the scandalous situation. Ironically, he has spent twenty years of his missionary work preaching morality and yet the girls under his protection indulge in immoral acts.

Beti accuses the missionaries of imposing a kind of servitude on the African. Beti noted that Christian Missions in the Southern Cameroons were initially, financially handicapped, and were, therefore, faced with the problem of acquiring the capital for physical infrastructure.[35] As Beti puts it:

> Les quêtes effectuées, même trop souvent, à Ploufragram, à Trégomeur, à Stosswir ou ailleurs n'étaient qu'une goutte d'eau dans l'océan des besoins d'une entreprise parfaitement incapable de s'accommoder de l'humilité et de l'indigence. 36

The missionary resorts to free labour to compensate for inadequate funds which could disrupt the mission's activity. The missionary, therefore taps the African woman's labour. As Beti puts it:

> Où la trouver [free labour] sinon dans la classe sociale maintenue traditionnellement par les Bantous dans la quasi-servitude, les femmes? Voici nos civilisateurs contraints de s'encanailler avec les sauvages qu'ils étaient venus convertir et qui les convertissent, juste retour des choses.... Alors on dira que c'est pour leur bien qu'on rassemble en troupeaux ces pauvres créatures: on veut les éduquer, élever leur dignité de future épouse chrétienne à la veille de leur mariage, bien qu'une très faible proportion seulement des pensionnaires de la sixa soient véritablement fiancées; encore ces dernières sur lesquelles on craint d'avoir des comptes à rendre, sont-elles exemptées des besognes les plus harassantes... ici, la mission catholique, glissant irrésistiblement sur la pente de toutes les institutions blanches, si bien intentionnées soient-elles, a reconstitué instinctivement l'esclavage. 37

It is partly because of the exploitation of the sixa women that Beti refers to Christian Missions as "balbutiement du capitalisme sauvage."[38] According to Bernard Mauralis, Mongo Beti denounces

> toute ambiguité de l'entreprise d'évangélisation qui prétend se développer en s'appuyant sur la seule force de la persuasion et qui n'hésite pas à recourir à des méthodes coercitives... quand elle ne fait pas purement et simplement appel au bras séculier pour arriver à ses fins. 39

As far as Beti is concerned, catholicism and colonialism are inseparable although the Abbé, Jean Zoa, who later became the Archbishop of Yaoundé feels that catholicism has nothing in common with colonialism.[40]

Beti finds it reprehensible that these abuses and scandals have persisted for a period of twenty years, and Drumont, the founder of the sixa is unmindful of the situation. Clementine whose husband, Zacharie, flirts with Catherine openly accuses Father Drumont:

> -C'est...une... femme... de... la... sixa! ... Elle... couche... avec... mon... mari... Oui, elle est sortie de la sixa! ... Et elle couche avec mon mari... depuis une semaine! ... Ma parole... depuis une semaine... en tournée là, tout près de toi!... Sous tes yeux! ... (PC, 164).

Drumont eventually accepts the blame for the scandals at the sixa. It is, therefore, surprising that Gerald Moore should write:

> Never does he [Drumont] blame his past unwillingness to listen to complaints or argument... or his gross negligence in supervising effectively the life of the sixa.... [41]

In fact, Drumont admits in the end that:

> Le seul coupable dans cette histoire, c'est moi, vous entendez, moi! ... La dernière fois que j'ai mis les pieds à la sixa, elle venait d'être construite! ... Il y a presque vingt ans de cela. (PC, 263).

Much as Drumont is to blame, we feel that these sixa women share a part of the blame. Since the Fang custom permits

even betrothed girls to have as many lovers as they wish during the engagement period,[42] these girls must have been conditioned by this custom to indulge in illicit sexual intercourse.

Although Beti's butt is the missionary, held responsible for the progressive moral degradation of the sixa girls, Beti does not endorse the immorality of the sixa inmates. Beti causes the corrupt occupants of the sixa to be chastised. For example, Clementine, the legitimate wife of Zacharie has to beat Catherine, her husband's mistress and strip her naked publicly in Kondo (PC, 164-165). Father Drumont gets the local catechist at Kondo to flog Catherine. As the narrator notes:

> Le catéchiste faisait claquer sa longue baguette de rotin sur les fesses de Catherine et Catherine se tordait et pleurait, se frottait le derrière tandis que le regard de Clémentine brillait étrangement. (PC, 171).

Mongo Beti, in choosing Catherine's "behind" and not the hands or legs to receive the lashes, is using humour and obscenity to drive home his point. Moreover, by choosing Catherine's "behind", Beti appears to re-echo Drumont's favourite expression quoted by Denis: "on est bien puni par où l'on a péché." (PC, 184). The scene of double punishment meted out to Catherine, indecent as it is, is quite comic. Beti is very good at painting scenes of obscenity to help drive home his message. The fact that Catherine is left stark naked before the crowd after she has been beaten by Clementine is, perhaps, a way of exposing the emptiness and the moral decadence of the sixa. It is scandalous to find a sixa girl in such a disgraceful

state. This disgrace of a sixa girl is implicitly an ironic comment on the sixa idea.

Furthermore, on the return of Drumont and his entourage to Bomba, Catherine's "behind" is once again subjected to serious flogging; so also the behinds of all sixa girls found guilty of immoral dealings. The immoral conduct of these sixa girls is thus castigated. The denunciation of their obscene behaviour forces the reader to perceive the indecency and futility of the sixa idea.

Finally, violence is sometimes used as a satiric device in Beti's novels. Beti seems to contrive the disgrace and punishment of those whose behaviour he condemns. This is, perhaps, a way of castigating evil and indecency, For example, after Zacharie's extramarital affair with Catherine has been uncovered, Zacharie is suddenly attacked by Catherine's fiancé. (PC, 182-184).

Mongo Beti exposes the scandals that occur at the sixa in order to drive home his anticlerical satire. For Beti, the failure and the depravity of the sixa reflect the duplicity and the moral degradation of the Roman Catholic Mission in the Cameroons. The missionary finds the sixa a useful instrument for exploiting and enslaving the African woman. Beti unmasks and denounces the missionary's ulterior motive for instituting the sixa which is inconsistent with Christian principles.

The Duplicity of the Missionary

The image of the missionary that emerges in Mongo Beti's novels is that the missionary is insincere and apt to cheat his African converts while pretending to work in the latter's interest.

The missionary's portrait as it emerges in Beti's novels runs counter to the idealized image that the Roman Catholic Church aims to project. Beti's satire brings out the contradiction between the idealized image and the actual portrait of the missionary. For example, Van den Rietter's portrait in Remember Ruben and La ruine... reflects that of his predecessors - Le Guen in Le roi miraculé and Drumont in Le pauvre Christ.... According to the narrator in Remember Ruben, "c'était un homme... calculateur et méfiant..." (RR, 80); "cet homme autoritaire, impatient, coléreux, jamais satisfait..." (RP, 233). All these traits are at variance with the ideal image of a missionary.

In Le pauvre Christ..., Drumont is described as "un homme autoritaire, Un homme terrible. Un père... Jésus-Christ!" (PC, 11). The appellation "Jésus-Christ" helps to throw into relief Beti's satire here. Beti insinuates that Drumont as a missionary is a far cry from Jesus Christ. Drumont is so blind that he could not detect early enough the immoral acts of his cook, Zacharie, or the scandals at the sixa. Drumont is so full of self-delusion and condescension that he lacks, at times, self-criticism as well as a proper assessment of others and events around him. This is a weakness which Christ did not possess. Furthermore, Drumont, like Le Guen and Van de Rietter, is irascible, violent and extremely arrogant. These

traits contradict his priestly image and the Christ-image to which he aspires. Also, Drumont's dismissal of the diseased sixa girls without bothering to have them cured is un-Christian.

The title of the novel, "Le pauvre Christ de Bomba", offers a good insight into the kind of person that Drumont is. By dubbing him "Christ", Beti is, in fact, parodying Drumont because he is a poor imitation of Christ, so unlike Christ that he needs to be pitied.

It is significant that the missionaries see nothing outrageous with the immoral behaviour of the Whites in the colony. Similarly, the priests' conduct sometimes negates Christian ideals. Ironically, the missionary who crusades against fornication amongst the natives is accused, in Beti's novels, of sexual immorality: Father Van den Rietter and Brother Nicolas in La ruine... have illicit dealings with Chief Grabataire's fugitive wives. Van den Rietter harbours these rebel wives in a hostel and while pretending to provide them with a moral education takes "sa part de cette aubaine." (RP, 116). Brother Nicolas even has an illegitimate child. The white missionaries' sensuality recalls that of the black prelate in Les deux mères... who lusts for Marie-Pierre, Jean François's wife. (DM, 172-174). The narrator calls this African bishop "l'ecclésiastique libidineux." (DM, 172). The missionaries do not attack the Whites in the colony for the latter's misbehaviour. And yet once the African is converted, he is rebuked by the Reverend Father for any act considered sinful in the eyes of the church. The African Christian is also compelled to severe all

relationship with non-Christians. Mongo Beti uses the Africans' viewpoint in Le pauvre Christ... as well as Amougou's remark in Perpétue... (P, 115) to condemn the missionary's use of double standards. As the catechist tells Drumont:

> Ils [the Africans] disent que... tous les Blancs qui, à la ville, vivent en concubinage avec de mauvaises femmes, as-tu [Drumont] jamais été fulminer contre eux? Bien plus, tu leur touches la main, tu vas à leurs invitations et c'est dans leurs voitures qu'ils te conduisent à Bomba. Et cependant tu voudrais qu'après le baptême, les Noirs cessent de fréquenter ceux des leurs qui ne sont pas chrétiens. (PC, 33-34).

The application of double standards by the missionary, suggests duplicity and hypocrisy on the part of the missionary.

Beti is not exaggerating when he portrays some Catholic priests as immoral; in fact, this is historically documented. Gorer reports:

> They [the Catholic Missionaries] do not even set a good example; Father X, has taken a vow of chastity and you all know that he has several children by a black woman living up at his house yonder. 43

Gorer himself asserted that the missionaries

> have succeeded in making sex as overwhelmingly important and as filthy in the minds of their converts as it is in their own. With the obvious result that they either indulge their natural instincts and lie about it, or become neurotic and perverted. 44

Gorer's contention explains to a large extent the two types of priests found in Beti's novels, namely the Drumont type (neurotic and perverted);[45] and the Van den Rietters (who

secretly have sexual intercourse with their female followers while pretending to be chaste). Whichever way we look at it, each of these cases is a clear indication of the missionary's insincerity.

In Mission terminée, when Medza is received by a Kala woman, he is offered whisky to drink instead of water. He later learns that an American missionary has the habit of rewarding the villagers with a bottle of whisky each time they do him a favour. The missionary who pretends to save the Africans' souls and extol the virtues of continence arms the Africans with a weapon which enables them to violate the virtues preached by the same missionary. Medza, whose background prevents him from joining the Kala boys in indulging in sexual intercourse finally succumbs, thanks to the missionary's whisky. According to Medza:

> J'étais extrêmement excité par cet alcool. Il me semblait alors que même avec Eliza, j'aurais accompli tous les gestes avec la sûreté d'un professionnel. (MT, 121).

Here, Beti holds the missionary responsible for Medza's misconduct. There is an implicit condemnation of the missionary's duplicity.

Again, in Mission terminée, Yohannès le Palmipède, caricaturing the missionary, recommends to Fils-de-Dieu that the way to heaven is through indulging in drinking. It is ironic that whereas Christianity condemns alcoholism, Yohannès who parodies the missionary describes it as the way to heaven. The fact that Beti is indirectly attacking the missionary's behaviour

emerges when Yohannès mocks at the missionary:

> -Je te bénis, mon fils [Fils-de-Dieu], au nom du Père et du Fils... termina Yohannès le Palmipède avec une satisfaction emphatique et en esquissant le geste de la bénédiction apportant une drôlerie irrésistible dans la parodie du missionnaire. (MT, 56-57).

There are numerous references to the deceitful nature of the white missionary in Beti's novels. This impression comes out clearly in the Timbo catechist's honest report to Drumont:

> Ils [the natives] disent que... vous [the missionaries] n'êtes pas sincères, vous leur cachez des choses, vous ne leur enseignez rien. (PC, 33).

Antoine must have perceived the missionary's insincerity when he observed in The Lonely African:

> I shall never be a Christian... When Sunday comes go to Mass in the Cathedral. There it is, right above us looking across the river. You may find a few white men there, standing all by themselves... (African services were separate because, as a priest told Turnbull, 'Of course we don't believe in segregation, but Africans smell?) It is a lie, the whole thing. There is not a thing that they preach with their mouths and do with their bodies.[46]

Furthermore, Georges Balandier in the course of his anthropological fieldwork learnt from an African that the Catholic Mission lost its grip on the natives once the Africans came to realise that:

> les Pères n'ont pas enseigné tout ce qu'ils connaissent de Dieu... que la religion des Européens sert à laisser les richesses entre les mains de ceux-ci et cache un secret que personne ne veut révéler. 47

There is no denying the fact that the Africans learned a lot from the missionaries considering the fact that the missionaries pioneered not only moral education but also formal and health education in Africa. The Africans had expected the missionaries to teach them, for example, how to make aircraft and motor-cars. Failing to acquire this knowledge, they accuse the missionaries of insincerity.

What we have tried to show here is Beti's denunciation of the missionary's duplicity. The missionary, despite his noble mission to christianize the African tends to facilitate the colonial subjugation of the African.

Contradiction between the Missionary's Idealism and Materialism

One of the tenets of Christian teaching is disinterestedness in earthly riches and pleasures since it is assumed that one's reward is in heaven. Besides, the missionaries claim to have come to Africa to save Africans' souls. However, Beti's priests tend to show great love for worldly comfort. They are quite practical and calculating. They have a shrewd grasp of economic realities and plan well in advance to meet the economic needs of their missions. Thus, Zacharie describes Drumont as:

> Un organisateur... Un constructeur... Un homme d'affaires... Mais certainement pas le représentant de Dieu. (PC, 26).

Mongo Beti decries in his novels the missionaries' tendency to profit from every possible opportunity in order to make money. Beti's satire shows the contradiction between the

missionaries' materialism and idealism.

The church has some basic needs like erecting and maintaining a church and other ancillary buildings. The missionaries must raise funds for the procurement of the church's basic needs. Nevertheless, when the mission becomes excessively materialistic, and therefore, contradicts its ethical and spiritual values (as Denis makes clear: "nous avons besoin de tant de choses; un orgue pour la nouvelle église, un tracteur pour nos champs, un générateur électrique pour l'éclairage, une auto... " PC, 18), one gets the impression that the church is more or less a mere trading company and the missionaries are simply concerned with maximizing its profits. For example, the missionaries impose fees or levies on the natives to discharge their religious obligations to them - class fees, baptismal fees, confession fees, death tolls, marriage fees. Higher fees are set aside for special cases considered by the church authorities as abnormal- baptism of the so-called illegitimate babies of unmarried Christian mothers and that of polygamists' children. Through the caustic remark of Tonga re-echoed by Banda, Beti attacks the missionaries' preoccupation with enriching the church, which negates the Christian ethical ideals demanding that they should not care for worldly riches:

> Zut! là il avait raison, Tonga... Même les missionnaires avec leur robe, leur croix et leur longue barbe... Seulement, eux, c'est plus malin... Et cent francs si tu veux aller à confesse, et deux cents francs si tu veux faire baptiser ton gosse. Et mille francs si tu veux te marier devant un prêtre. Et cinq cents pour le denier du culte. Et tant pour qu'ils acceptent ton fils à l'école, et tant

> pour qu'il soit dispensé du travail manuel, une fois inscrit à l'école. Et tant pour que sonnent les cloches de la mission catholique à l'enterrement de ta mère! ... Ouai! Pour tous la grande affaire c'est l'argent. Seulement un missionnaire c'est plus malin. (VC, 132).

Here Beti denounces the mean ways the priests try to enrich the church and by so doing exposes the mercantilism of Roman Catholicism.

It should be pointed out here that Beti, in his novels, accuses both white and black priests in the colonial and post-colonial eras of their attachment to the luxuries of this world. The narrator in Les deux mères... observes:

> L'évêché resplendissait de lumières électriques et grouillait, malgré l'heure, de fidèles et de parents du prélat, dont les ardeurs éclectiques s'exprimaient par des chants tour à tour liturgiques ou païens. Le visiteur retirait du spectacle une fâcheuse impression d'hédonisme et de triomphalisme bien éloignés de la solitude désolée et du dénuement où naquit le Messie selon le Nouveau Testament. (DM, 171).

In other words, the priest's passion for earthly pleasures which negates the ethical ideals of Jesus Christ does not stop in the colonial period but is also noticeable in the post-independence era.

Banda, in Ville cruelle, has rightly conceived priesthood not as a real vocation, a call to the duty of God as the missionaries claim but as a profession "bien rémunérée" (VC, 154). As far as Banda is concerned, the priestly vocation is chosen simply for its material benefits. As the narrator in Ville cruelle puts it:

> Il en avait vu, lui, [Banda] des prêtres indigènes, et de près. C'était certainement les gens qui avaient le plus de privilèges parmi les Noirs. Des maisons de briques, la table servie comme pour un Blanc, des motocyclettes, des bicyclettes ce n'est pas ce qui leur manquait. Et l'estime et le respect de tout le monde... même des Blancs! (VC, 154).

Mongo Beti condemns the Catholic priests for being so blinded by their materialistic concerns that they exploit their African converts. Beti's satire emerges in the Africans' critical view of the white missionaries:

> Ils [the Africans] disent qu'il n'y a pas de différence entre un commerçant grec et un prêtre même pareil au R.P.S. Ils donnent comme preuve les richesses de la mission catholique, par exemple, les présents que le R.P.S. accepte et le denier du culte. Ils disent que le R.P.S. perçoit l'impôt tout comme l'administrateur. (PC, 133).

Beti appears here to be highlighting the fact that the missionaries' materialistic concerns contrast sharply with their professed ethical ideals.

In Ville cruelle, Father Kolmann extols M.T. as a respectable Christian and even rates him a saint not because of his holy and pious behaviour but because of "ses largesses envers la mission catholique." (VC, 162). Ironically, this is the same M.T. (wealthy Greek businessman), whose failure to pay his black workers for months costs him his life. When the narrator describes M.T. as "très estimé de tous les Chrétiens du pays," Beti is, in fact, deriding him because M.T. is definitely unpopular with at least Koumé and his group. Thus, not all Christians in the country hold him in

high esteem. In fact, his reputation rests on his contribution to the mission, that is, "ses largesses envers la mission catholique." It might be argued that Father Kolmann is ignorant of the root cause of M.T.'s unpopularity and subsequent assault. However, his vocation demands that he find out why Koumé and his colleagues decided to use jungle law on their master, M.T. If Father Kolmann were free of any bias or racial prejudice, he should have discovered that M.T. is far from being a "saint". Unfortunately, Kolmann appears to have been blinded by M.T.'s generous donations to the church. Kolmann's estimation of M.T. as a good Christian seems to have been influenced by the missionary's materialistic preoccupations. In fact, a negation of his Christian idealism, thus attracting Beti's criticism.

Beti denounces the missionaries' inordinate pursuit of worldly riches which is at variance with their priestly ideals. Beti condemns the missionaries' acquisitive propensity because it suggests a tendency on the part of the Christian missionaries to exploit the Africans they originally set out to convert.

The Complicity between the Missionary and the Colonial Administration

Even a cursory reading of Beti's novels reveals that there is a recurring collusion between the missionary and the colonial administration. The missionary is portrayed as playing more or less a role identical or complementary to that of the colonial official.

The collaboration between the missionaries and the colonial administration appears in various ways in Beti's novels. First, the missionaries through their teaching render the Africans submissive to the will of the colonial administration. Beti attacks the missionary for discharging a function which complements that of the colonial master. Drumont betrays this when he tells Vidal:

> Ou je reste dans ce pays en même temps que vous, près de vous, et alors je vous aide à coloniser, fatalement; je vous déblaie d'abord le terrain et plus tard j'assure vos arrières... (PC, 199).

The missionaries protect the interest of the colonial administration. This explains why in Remember Ruben, Van den Rietter does not stop the colonial soldiers from maltreating Mor-Zamba and conscripting him into forced labour.

In their work, the missionaries receive adequate protection from the colonial administrators. For example, Vidal locks up Catherine's fiancé for attacking Drumont (PC, 136). When Vidal tells Drumont: "N'ayez crainte, mon Père; je veille sur vous" (PC, 141) he is confirming the fact that the missionaries are protected by the colonial administration. Drumont admits:

> Pour le moment, je sais que vous /the colonial administration/ nous /the missionaries/ protégez et que nous déblayons le terrain pour vous en préparant les esprits, en les rendant dociles... c'est une chose bien triste. (PC, 202).

Beti aims at highlighting the fact that the missionaries' complicity with the colonial authorities constitutes a betrayal not only of Africans but also of the priests'

Christian principles.

Secondly, the colonial administration imposes forced labour on the natives but exempts devout Christians. This is clearly a method of ensuring the exploitation of Africans; either the African is drafted into forced labour by the colonial authorities or he finds refuge at the Catholic Mission where he is equally exploited and oppressed by the missionary. The only difference is that the missionary consoles him with religious teaching and this renders him more docile and exploitable by the agents of colonialism. This tactic is particularly advantageous to the missionary whose followers are dwindling. Vidal brings out this collusion when he tells Drumont:

> Réjouissez-vous, Révérend Drumont, réjouissez-vous et n'ayez plus de souci. Vous l'aurez bientôt, votre route et votre clientèle... Vos gars vont rappliquer, vous aurez beaucoup de fidèles... (PC, 52-53).

The fact that Drumont is aware of the colonial authorities' contribution to the success of his missionary work emerges when Drumont bluntly admits: "il n'y a que les gens de la route pour être bons chrétiens" (PC, 51), which recalls Schloegel's observation in Le roi miraculé: "c'est fou ce qu'il peut y avoir de croyants, quand c'est pour ne pas travailler." (RM, 94). Schloegel, like Drumont, is aware that forced labour instituted by the colonial administration compels many of the natives along the highway to embrace Christianity. Drumont himself describes the plight of the natives who live close to the road:

> Les gens de la route vivent dans une terreur constante... Ils vivent dans une terreur perpétuelle à cause des réquisitions, des travaux forcés, des bastonnades, des tirailleurs... (PC, 51-52).

Drumont, in his usual candour, condemns these atrocities of the French colonial rule whilst he fails to see the missionary as a party to such acts. Vidal perceives Drumont's self-deception when he remarks:

> ... Vous aurez beaucoup de fidèles... Vous les protégerez spirituellement. Vous leur direz: 'Mes chers enfants, acceptez les souffrances de cette vallée de larmes. A votre mort, vous serez largement indemnisés.' (PC, 53).

Mongo Beti is here denouncing the missionary's teaching which extols the virtues of suffering, resignation and forbearance. And this is precisely what turns the converted Africans into submissive colonial subjects. In this way, Beti's satire insinuates the link between missionary activity and colonial subjugation.

Beti condemns the role played by the missionary in colonial Africa. Vidal tells Drumont: "Je continue à soutenir envers et contre vous que la mienne et la vôtre n'en font qu'une." (PC, 48).[48] Thomas Melone has rightly noted that "une solidarité étroite a uni dans leur action coloniale le prêtre et l'administrateur."[49] Memmi calls it "une alliance accidentelle et profitable."[50] On this matter, Mongo Beti himself has written in his article, "Le pauvre Christ de Bomba expliqué":

> Le pauvre Christ de Bomba suggère avec une force de persuasion qu'attestent maintes réactions passionnées, que l'identité de

> finalités de la colonisation et de l'évangélisation, la convergence de leurs activités, la complémentarité de leurs fonctions dépassent largement le simple grossissement épique. 51

It is significant that the colonial administrator makes use of the missionary and vice-versa. Although the missionaries turn the natives into pliant subjects of the colonial regime, their objectives are, sometimes, at cross purposes, probably, because the administrator is more pragmatic than the missionary.[52] For example, the more realistic Vidal and Lequeux see no sense in forcing monogamy on Africans whereas missionaries like Drumont and Le Guen are bent on suppressing polygamy.

The colonial administration does not hesitate to discipline any missionary who impedes the objectives of the colonial rule. A good example is the expulsion of Le Guen from Essazam in order to restore peace and order in the area. In spite of the missionary's self-deception that he came to save Africans' souls and despite the fact that the missionary means well, the colonial administrator ensures that the missionary does not undermine the colonial objective for the administrator sees the evangelization of Africans as a method of ensuring their assimilation. The colonial administrator does not really want to transform the colony into a carbon copy of the West.[53] It is only natural that there will be occasional clashes between the administrator and the missionary since the latter, unlike the former sees the evangelization of Africans as a form of Westernization. Beti's description of the missionary is revealing here:

> Qu'est-ce que le missionnaire? C'est la courroie de transmission de l'idéologie occidentale... C'est l'agent qui propage la psychologie, la mentalité occidentale. Or, la mentalité occidentale qu'est-ce que c'est? C'est tout ce qui favorise l'aliénation des Noirs. Tout effort religieux qui consiste à enlever au Noir ses croyances, ses philosophies pour les doter d'une autre philosophie qu'il ne maîtrisera jamais parce que ce n'est pas la sienne. 54

This observation throws into relief part of Beti's quarrel with missionary activity in colonial Africa: the missionaries strive to impart foreign values to the African and subsequently promote his social and cultural alienation.

Le Guen's transfer from Essazam emphasizes the fact that the French colonial regime conceives of the missionary "as a sort of colonial agent without pay."[55] Furthermore, the reaction of colonial authorities in Le roi miraculé reveals that although the missionary and the colonial administrator work hand in hand, the colonial administrator still wields supreme power over the colonised and all other agents of colonisation, and does all he can to ensure the continuity of colonial rule. In the words of Memmi,

> il disposait d'une totale liberté d'action, d'une puissance d'oppression illimitée, et d'une large complicité internationale. 56

The Missionary and the African Fetish Priest

Mongo Beti, in his novels, repeatedly draws our attention to the similarities between the missionary and the African fetish priest or sorcerer. He denounces, for example, the

charlatanism and hypocrisy of both the missionary and the fetish priest as well as their exploitation of their followers.

Both the missionary and the African sorcerer are adept at deceiving the natives who run to them for help. For example, in Ville cruelle, Banda parodies the Latin liturgy practised by the Catholic Church. This liturgy is not understood by the African converts. It helps to create a mysterious aura around the priest and the Roman Catholic Religion. In Ville cruelle too, Banda attacks the vanity and useless incantations of the African fetish priests:

> Il /Banda/ ne pouvait pas se remémorer sans un dégoût profond la scène chez ce sorcier... vain et prétenticux avec ses simagrées, ses incantations et tout son rite inutile et pitoyable. (VC, 129).

The word "simagrée" suggests the sorcerer's charlatanism akin to that of the missionary. The sorcerer's "incantations et tout son rite inutile et pitoyable" also recalls the Catholic missionary's liturgy. Mongo Beti is here exposing a contradiction: the missionary who condemns the fetish priest is depicted as really not different from the latter.

In Le pauvre Christ...., Drumont deflates the sorcerer's charlatanism and exploitation of his followers:

> Des gens comme Senga Loto sont extrêmement dangereux. Ils arrivent comme ça parmi une population naïve et superstitieuse; ils se mettent à la bonimenter en faisant des simagrées, en s'entourant de mystère. Après quoi, ils l'exploitent. (PC, 96).

It is clear that Drumont is unwittingly drawing a moral portrait of the missionary. Behind this criticism is the satirical voice of Mongo Beti. Beti, the social critic and moralist, resents exploitation. Like the missionary, the fetish priest exploits the natives. Like the missionary, Sanga Boto has accumulated a lot of wealth and property. "Il ne peut plus compter son argent," (PC, 96) and he has many wives. Although the missionary has no wives, unlike the African sorcerer, he accumulates material possessions as Zacharie puts it: "Notre mission est très grande et très riche..." (PC, 133). Just as the natives bring gifts to the missionary so also they offer Sanga Boto numerous presents. Thus, when Drumont attacks "des gens comme Sanga Boto..." for exploiting their followers, Drumont is, in fact, criticizing also the Christian missionary, who is very much like the fetish priest.

Sanga Boto is witty enough to perceive the whiteman's tendency to deceive and exploit the Africans. Thus, Sanga Boto finds that the missionary is not superior to him from the moral standpoint. Sanga Boto thus swears to fight "contre l'emprise des Blancs." (PC, 133). The missionary recognizes that the African sorcerer constitutes a threat to the advancement of his missionary activity in Africa. Therefore, Drumont aims to extirpate the influence of Sanga Boto over the natives.

Beti is, however, detached from both Sanga Boto and Drumont because both represent forces of oppression and exploitation. Whereas the missionary is a representative of the colonial authorities and Europe, the fetish priest wields

authority in the African traditional context. Mongo Beti denounces reactionary, repressive forces, whether alien or indigenous. The fact that Beti is detached from both the missionary and the fetish priest underlines his rejection of the oppressive forces. Beti condemns the missionary by drawing an analogy between the missionary and the African fetish priest.

Beti destroys the myth of the superiority of the "European fetishists" to the African fetish priests both of whom he resents. By so doing, he denounces the missionary.

Demystification of the Missionary

The missionaries who appear in Beti's novels have an inflated view of themselves. Beti, the satirist, aims to demystify the missionary. Beti admits in an interview:

> Il y a chez moi une volonté de démystification. Il faut dire que la meilleure demystification se fait par l'humour, l'ironie et la satire. 57

Drumont is made to present an idyllic image of the Provence in France, his homeland (PC, 68). Denis, the narrator, accepts this exaggerated picture of the Provence. Beti, however, is too intelligent and lucid to endorse Denis's views here. Drumont's insistence on Africans adhering to the ethical ideals of Christianity implies that his place of origin is a kind of paradise. And yet, it is not so. We note the humour in the ironic expression "comme ce doit être bien là-bas!" which comes up again and again. It is comic and ironic because we know it is not really wonderful in Drumont's country. The satirist is

only harping on what does not exist - utopic Western world - in order to draw our attention to the reality of the situation: Europe, in the last analysis, is not better than Africa. Beti decries the missionary's contempt for Africa.

Beti demystifies the missionary by means of scenes of violence. A slight verbal attack which marks the missionary - native conflict in Ville cruelle degenerates into open insults, culminating in physical confrontation in Le pauvre Christ... and Le roi miraculé. Mongo Beti's aim in Ville cruelle is, probably, to show how the missionary succeeds in deceiving helpless Africans from the rural areas. Unlike the Africans in Tanga town whose interest in Sunday worship is to exhibit their "somptueuses toilettes" (VC, 163), these villagers show genuine piety. (VC, 150-151). These peasants are thus at the mercy of the missionary. It is revealing that the master-servant relationship characterizes the missionary's dealings with the Africans in Ville cruelle.

On the other hand, Le pauvre Christ de Bomba depicts a situation where the so-called Christians have demolished the myth around the missionary and have come to unearth the latter's inadequacies. Consequently, the Africans are dissatisfied and critical of Christian mission in Africa. As Britwum points out, in Le pauvre Christ de Bomba, "la voix du petit peuple se révèle incisive à l'égard de l'évangélisation du père Drumont."[58] The level of socio-political awareness of the characters in Le pauvre Christ... probably reflects that of the Cameroonians at the time of the novel's publication. It is the time when

Ruben Um Nyobé and his party, the U.P.C. were agitating for the independence of the Cameroons. Beti writes:

> Mon roman parut pour la première fois en 1956 tandis que le grand Ruben Um Nyobé popularisait chez nous la revendication d'indépendance, rassemblant les masses en vue de l'assaut contre le colonialisme et que l'Afrique, après avoir longtemps dormi, écarquillait les yeux, s'étirait, s'ébrouait, interpellait ses oppresseurs mais bien mollement encore. 59

Thus, in Le pauvre Christ... and Le roi miraculé, there are episodes where the missionary is openly insulted and sometimes beaten up by angry natives. For example, the chief of Evindi village pours torrents of abuse on Drumont in Le pauvre Christ... (PC, 78) and Le Guen is mobbed by an angry crowd in Le roi miraculé (RM, 199).

Beti, the social critic champions the cause of the oppressed. It is precisely because he wants to help the African assert his personality that he demystifies the missionary who acts as an agent of the enslavement of the African.

THE CHRISTIAN

Although Mongo Beti's main concern is to condemn the collusion between the missionary and colonial administration, we disagree with Bernard Mouralis when he asserts that Beti presents "les convertis comme des victimes si bien que les incidences religieuses du problème finissent par être escamotées."[60] The converted African is to a certain extent presented as a victim of the whiteman's religion but that is not to say that inherent problems of being a Christian are

ignored nor does Beti try to give excessive importance to the African. Though the principal target of Beti's satire is the missionary, the converted African does not escape his attack.

The Religious Gullibility of Naïve Africans

Mongo Beti derides the gullibility of naïve African converts. In Ville cruelle, we sense Beti's satirical voice behind Banda's internal monologue:

> Il faut qu'ils croient vraiment ceux-là, songeait-il. Venir de si loin pour assister à la messe, à la sainte messe à Tanga! Et de nuit! Oh! ... venir de si loin, c'est ça qui m'étonne et juste pour assister à la messe. Faire dix ou quinze kilomètres dans la nuit, juste pour ça... Tiens! (VC, 150).

The interjections point to Banda's condemnation of this practice by the villagers who cover a long distance on foot simply to attend church service. Since Banda is anticlerical it would seem that Banda is here the mouthpiece of Mongo Beti. Beti disapproves of the naïve African Christian's attitude to church attendance.

In Beti's novels, the gullible Christians are predominantly old women and children. For example, the narrator in Le pauvre Christ... observes that "Les communiants étaient surtout de vieilles femmes et quelques petits enfants." (PC, 146). According to the catechist at Zibi, "les femmes seules ont Dieu dans le sang; mais les hommes, ça ne les intéresse plus." (PC, 133). Mongo Beti himself has pointed out that

> la fantasmagorie catholique peut s'infiltrer par surprise à travers le tendre tissu d'une conscience enfantine; pour une femme âgée qui au soir de sa vie s'interroge sur le sens de celle-ci ou doute de sa valeur, le message chrétien, même frelaté, la poésie de la résignation et du renoncement peuvent distiller les harmonies de la consolation. 61

It is significant that naive, old women are devout followers of the missionary. Beti insinuates that old women and children are more gullible, and therefore, more prepared to embrace the missionary's religion. Beti does not endorse their credulity.

Denis, in Le pauvre Christ... , falls a victim to the imported religion like Meka in Le vieux nègre et la médaille and Barnabas's father in Chemin d'Europe. However, Beti criticizes Denis for his excessive religious devotion which contributes to his tragic fate.

Thus, Beti like Oyono, while condemning the missionary for cheating the naïve African, castigates the latter's gullibility which predisposes him to exploitation.

The Unreliability of Converted Africans

In spite of the zeal with which Beti's priests execute their evangelical work in Africa, their so-called followers are shown to be unreliable. There is a progressive decline in the number of African converts. The majority of them are not committed but cosmetic Christians, who readily jettison the precepts of Christianity. Beti denounces their vacillations. Beti's main target is, probably, not the Africans themselves, but the white priests, whose mission in Africa is

as precarious as the converted African is unreliable.

In Ville cruelle, Banda holds up to ridicule his mother's hypocrisy: despite her extreme piety and devotion she still consults the African witch-doctor:

> Zut! elle y croit ma mère, elle qui est chrétienne. Et les missionnaires ne détestent rien comme ces histoires-là. S'ils le savaient les prêtres de Tanga, que ma mère m'a forcé à consulter l'homme-au-miroir, ils lui auraient interdit les sacrements pour longtemps, pour très longtemps. Tiens! le seul point où ma mère n'est pas d'accord avec eux, les missionnaires (VC, 131).

One should expect that deeply religious as Banda's mother is, she would obey the Christian code of conduct to the last letter. But she consults the sorcerer and is disloyal to the missionary. Beti appears to make the point: if Banda's mother, more or less a fervent Christian cannot be relied upon, who else can?

It is not surprising that in Ville cruelle, believers leave a lot to be desired in their behaviour as Christians. The urban Christians of Tanga like to attend daylight masses which favour ostentatious display of their material possessions. Even the village Christians, who come all the way to Tanga for the Sunday six o'clock mass are perhaps not as naive as the critic, Mbock, would make us believe.[62] Their preference for six o'clock mass can be explained in part by their reluctance to show their shabby clothing compared to that of urban Christians.

In Le pauvre Christ de Bomba, while attacking the missionary for attempting to convert and dominate the natives, Beti shows the indifference of the converted Africans. Many of

the Africans are disillusioned with Christianity and have abandoned it. Others like the Christians who live along the highway are simply professing to be Christians in order to escape from colonial oppression. Throughout Father Drumont's tour of the Tala district, he discovers the same thing over and over again: people who initially accepted baptism and monogamous marriages revert to polygamy and desert the church.

The converted African lives contrary to Christian principles. The catechist at Ndimi beats his wife. (PC,127). With the exception of Denis and perhaps Anatole, the behaviour of the so-called Christians working at the Bomba Mission is not exactly exemplary.

In Mission terminée, Mongo Beti uses the young men in Kala to criticize the Christian and indirectly the missionary. The names of some of the characters are fraught with ironic implications. Take, for example, Zambo's clique, with the exception of Zambo, these young men bear Christian names - Saint Yohannès de Kala, Pétrus Fils-de-Dieu, Abraham le Désossé. Far from being a saint, son of God, Biblical Abraham, these characters are portrayed as rascals whose behaviour is at variance with Christian principles: they drink excessively, indulge in fornication and other frivolous activities. Furthermore, they are religious rebels in the sense that they deride the missionary's teaching. What emerges here is a group of young men who, although professedly christians, are, probably, dissatisfied with the Christian religion. By ridiculing these supposedly Christian youth of Kala, Beti is

deerying the value of Christian missionary activity.

There is a parallel situation in Le roi miraculé where Maurice, the first son of Chief Essomba Mendouga, who, though apparently a Christian, is "un beau spécimen de voyou" (RM, 141). Kris is also an incarnation of moral decadence despite the name he bears; there can be no name more overtly Christian than Kris's name. But there is nothing to suggest that Kris is a practising Christian. In fact, Kris has more in common with characters like Banda and Zacharie who are not hostile to the missionaries but are indifferent to Christian principles.

It is obvious then that African converts do not actually put into practice what the missionary has taught them. They are Christians by name. In short, they are erratic. Their unreliability tends to point to the precarious nature of missionary activity in Africa. Beti seems to suggest that Christian missionaries have not achieved positive results in Africa.

WHY IS BETI ANTICLERICAL?

Beti's anticlericalism should not be misconstrued as amounting to atheism since he has said nothing in his novels to imply his disbelief in God. Having said in an interview that at the time of the writing of Ville cruelle (the 50s) he was "une sorte de marxiste assez naïf," [63] one might conclude that he does not believe in God seeing that in line with Marxist-socialist viewpoint, "religion is the oppressed man's illusory source of joy, his spiritual aroma. It is the self-consciousness

or prop of those who have not yet affirmed their personalities and authorities."[64] Karl Marx summarizes this in his popular statement: "Religion is the opium of the people."[65] One thing is certain, Beti is sceptical of all forms of mysticism. He has affirmed it, himself, in an interview with Biakolo.[66] But disbelief in religious mysticism is not synonymous with atheism. It is not surprising that a character in Le pauvre Christ... has remarked:

> -Père [Drumont], je ne suis pas chrétien, je n'ai jamais été baptisé et je ne crois pas que je le serai jamais; pourtant je crois que Dieu existe. (PC, 80).

Beti believes that God exists but rejects all revelations about God and all mystical worship of God. Traditional animism, unlike Christianity, is not a revealed religion, and is devoid of sacraments like baptism. It is, like Christianity, fraught with rituals, belief system, tradition and organisation. In short, it has its own form and structure. It is now clear why Beti condemns both Christianity and animism. Beti, probably, feels that man can relate directly with God without having to pass through any mediator or be a slave to dogmas, rituals, traditions and mysticism. In the light of these explanations, the villager is simply echoing Beti's own belief in the existence of God. Beti is actually using the character to denounce baptism which is one of the numerous practices of the Roman Catholic Church.

Beti appears to be a deist like Voltaire, who has influenced him in no little way as Beti himself admitted in an interview.[67] Willy Umezinwa maintains that Beti's God is not "le Dieu de la

religion révélée." He adds that "c'est un Dieu dont la religion est basée sur la théologie naturelle, une religion où l'homme, sans intermédaire, peut communiquer avec la divinité à travers les phénomènes de la nature."[68] We do not agree entirely with Umezinwa. It is true that Beti rejects all revelations. It is equally true that he disregards all forms of mysticism, which explains his scepticism to both Christianity and animism in his novels. In short, from Mongo Beti's indictment of religious ceremonies and mystical worship in both traditional and imported religions, we come to the conclusion that Beti is simply spiritual and not religious.

The pertinent question, however, is, how can the spirit be expressed if there is no formal act taking cognizance of the fact that as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without actions is dead.[69] One would expect that for one to be in proper atonement with the Divine both form and spirit (life force) should interplay moderately.[70]

Beti declares in his article "Le pauvre Christ de Bomba expliqué" as well as in an interview that he is an agnostic.[71] This means that he is neither spiritual nor religious. As he puts it:

> ....je suis très formé en ce moment aux problèmes mystiques. Je n'ai pas de foi religieuse - je n'ai plus de foi religieuse, à supposer que j'en aie eu une. Je crois que je suis un matérialiste. Donc, mon regard sur la religion, sur le mysticisme en général, est un regard sceptique. Je considère la religion et tout mysticisme comme une aliénation. 72

This assertion appears to suggest a certain evolution in Beti's religious ideology. However, at the time of the interview, Beti had a clear and firm view regarding the matter of religion and mysticism. "Je n'ai plus de foi religieuse, à supposer que j'en aie eu une," is aimed at rectifying some critics' misconception of Beti's attitude to religion. His message states, apparently, that if he had purported to be religious in the past, he should now be seen as a materialist. The fact is that the agnostic has no room in his heart for considering spiritual and religious issues. Could it be that Beti, the deist, who was sometime ago fumbling with Marxist thinking, has now emerged into a real Marxist showing a total disbelief in God? He admits that his political consciousness has undergone a remarkable change.[73] Even then, we have no concrete evidence, so far, to label Beti a Marxist. He does not seem to have a definite ideology. His philosophy as he asserted "c'est que dans la vie, rien n'est jamais définitif."[74]

With this background in mind; one can grasp partly why Beti is anticlerical. Beti's attack on the Roman Catholic Church did not stem from a lack of belief in God.

It might be argued that Beti criticizes Christianity not just for the sake of criticism but because he desires to remedy certain unwanted aspects of it, effect some desirable changes in the Christian's approach to communication with God. In this sense, his criticism should be rated constructive.

When Beti is envisaged as an agnostic, his anticlerical satire can be said to be nihilistic. Beti aims at exploding

the myth of the redemptive mission of Christianity. By so doing, he undermines the ideological basis of evangelization in Africa and the world at large. His view of missionary activities in Africa is pessimistic. Repeatedly in his novels, Beti depicts the Christian missions (for example, the Bomba Parish Churches) and white missionaries (such as Drumont, Le Guen and Van den Rietter) as having failed. Their ruin symbolises the failure of Christianity in Africa. As far as Beti is concerned, Christianity has failed in Africa partly because it is the whiteman's religion. Beti does not see the point in the white missionaries imposing Christianity steeped in Euro-American culture on the Africans only to alienate them from their ancestral roots.

Mongo Beti's anticlerical penchant is rooted in his natural hatred of oppression and injustice. As an ex-seminarian, Mongo Beti has been privileged to observe closely the Catholic Mission in the French Cameroon. Beti's innate combative spirit and critical penchant partly account for the audacity and fierceness of his attack on the Catholic Mission.

Beti's anticlerical satire is of such virulence that he apparently fails to give credit to the positive side of Christianity. We do not deny the valid contribution of Christian missions in Africa. Since Christ is the only way back to God, credit should be given to the white missionaries for daring the hostile climate and geographical conditions of Africa in their zeal to save Africans' souls. It should be recalled that the missionaries put an end to inhuman practices among the Africans such as the killing of twins, babies born

with abnormal presentation at birth and human sacrifices.[75] The word of God preached by the missionary saved the African from the grip of superstition, witchcraft, traditional customs that suppress the individual and some other forces which thwart the progress of the African.[76] The white missionaries pioneered formal education and health services in Africa. The coastal ethnic groups in the Cameroons, as elsewhere in Africa south of the Sahara, owe their early attainment of literacy partly to their early contact with the white missionaries.[77] In the case of the Douala people of Cameroon who are, true-to-type, combative and vocal, their early education helped to accentuate their political awareness and their zeal to fight for their rights. Thus, the syndicalist and nationalist movements like the U.P.C. were quite often initiated by the Africans whose progress in society depended a lot on the education provided by the missionary. It is in the Ewondo region where Christianity flourished most in the French Cameroon that the Country's capital - Yaoundé - is found. The fact that coastal areas of Cameroon (which first embraced Christianity) developed faster than the hinterland and especially the Northern Cameroons is an ample evidence of the positive impact of Christianity. African states especially the Cameroons owe their independence to the missionary's campaign for literacy.[78] The leaders of the independent African states could be in that position partly because of their contact with Western education. Christianity has made a lasting impact in Africa. Even in the present-day Cameroon, as Beti notes himself, the missionaries have managed to ensure the perenniality of their existence. There is even a greater number of white missionaries in Cameroon

today than in the colonial era.[79] Added to these white missionaries are Cameroonian priests and prelates. These officials in the church, according to Mbiti: "symbolize the concrete and serious presence of Christianity in Africa, and its acceptance by African peoples."[80]

Beti does not seem to take into account these merits of Christian missionary activity in Africa. What he actually does most of the time is to denounce the missionaries' or colonizers' vested interest behind any helpful measure taken by the missionary. Mongo Beti accuses the missionary of setting up social services like the Health Care geared towards the welfare of the Whites in the colony. Perhaps, Beti feels like Gorer that the negative aspect of Christianity outweighs the positive side.[81] In short, he tends to feel that the latter is negligible. Beti's view tallies more or less with Dumont's. Dumont contends that Christian evangelism has, among other factors, contributed to the underdevelopment of Africa.[82]

Although Beti's anticlerical satire has been pushed to extreme exaggerated limits, Beti still has a message relevant to humanity: the whiteman (typified by the missionary) should disabuse his mind of a sense of cultural and racial superiority which inevitably leads him to think in terms of how to dominate the blackman perpetually. Considering the zeal of Beti's white priests (for example Drumont) in their evangelical mission in Africa, one may imagine like Thomas Cassirer, Robert Pageard, Molly Mazrui and Almut Nordmann-Seiller[83] that Beti sympathizes with these missionaries in their moment of failure. But this

is not true. Beti condemns outright these missionaries whom he accuses of playing a complementary or identical role with the colonial administrators. Beti observes rightly that "avant l'indépendance, ce n'était pas seulement une église coloniale, mais une église véritablement colonialiste, qui avait épousé les errements, les préjugés, les idéaux de la colonisation."[84] It is in this light that Beti's anticlerical satire can be fully appreciated.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. Béti notes himself: "Tout jeune garçon, j'ai été marqué par mon séjour dans plusieurs établissements missionnaires..." in Main basse sur le Cameroun: Autopsie d'une décolonisation (Paris: Maspero, 2nd ed., 1977), p.88. He also went to Akomo Seminary. See Thomas Melone, Mongo Beti: L'homme et le destin (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1971), p.46.

2. Beti's anticlerical attack in Le pauvre Christ de Bomba is so pungent that Rt. Rev. Graffin, the then Archbishop of Yaoundé used threats to stop the unique supplier of reading materials for educational institutions in Yaoundé from selling Le pauvre Christ... which the Archbishop described as "ce fatras de calomnies communistes", see Beti, "Le pauvre Christ de Bomba expliqué," Peuples noirs peuples africains, No.19, janvier-février 1981, p.124. Le pauvre Christ... was banned in Cameroon. Only one copy of it is retained in the Faculty of Arts of Yaoundé University because the novel features in the programme of UNESCO. The novel's original publisher, Robert Laffont, was obliged to get the copies out of print and he sold reprint rights to Kraus Reprints in Lichtenstein for the book to be marketed outside France. See Hans M. Zell et al. (Eds.) A New Reader's Guide to African Literature (London: Heinemann, 1983), p.363.

3. Bernard Mouralis, Comprendre l'oeuvre de Mongo Beti (Paris: Mls. Saint Paul, 1981), p.42.

4. See Melone, Mongo Beti: L'homme et le destin, p.117.

5. See C. Coquery-Vidrovitch and H. Moniot, L'Afrique noire: De 1800 à nos jours (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974), pp.143-150.

6. See M. Prouzet, Le Cameroun: "Comment ils sont gouvernés" (Paris: Librairie Générale de Droit et de Jurisprudence, 1974), p.13. It should be noted that Portuguese Navigators were the first to arrive in Cameroon. Slave trade flourished between tribal chiefs especially the Douala chiefs and European merchants and navigators until the middle of the 19th century when English missionaries intervened and abolished slave trade under the commandment of Nachtigal. From 1884-1916, Cameroon was colonized by the Germans. In February, 1914, French and British soldiers chased away German colonialists and took over Cameroon. Through indirect and direct rule, the British and the French governed respectively West Cameroon and East Cameroon. Ibid., p.22.

7. Mongo Beti, "Le pauvre Christ de Bomba expliqué," p.112.

8. See Claude Wauthier, L'Afrique des Africains: Inventaire de la négritude (Paris: Eds. du Seuil, 1977), p.198.

9. Ibid.

10. See (i) John S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy (London: Heinemann, 1969), p.238. (ii) Geoffrey Gorer, Africa Dances: A Book about West African Negroes (London: John Lehmann Ltd., 1935), p.177.

11. Beti, "Le pauvre Christ de Bomba expliqué," p.112.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., p.113.

14. Wole Soyinka, Myth, Literature and the African World (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p.98.

15. Melone, Mongo Beti: L'homme et le destin, p.172.

16. Beti, "Le pauvre Christ de Bomba expliqué," p.112.

17. Georges Balandier, Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire: dynamique sociale en Afrique centrale (Paris: Presses Univ. de France, 1955), p.121.

18. Kwabene Britwum, "Irony and the Paradox of Idealism in Mongo Beti's Le pauvre Christ de Bomba, "RE: Arts and Letters, Fall 1972, Vol. VI, No.2, Austin State University, Texas, p.48.

19. Williamson quoted by John S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, p.237.

20. Lilyan Kesteloot, Les écrivains noirs de langue française: naissance d'une littérature (Bruxelles: Univ. de Bruxelles, 1977), p.289.

21. Louis Segond (Ed.), La Sainte Bible (Paris: La Société Biblique, 1910), p.1016.

22. See Claude Wauthier, L'Afrique des Africains, p.198.

23. M. Schipper-de Leeuw, Le Blanc et l'Occident au miroir du roman négro-africain de langue française (Yaoundé: Clé, 1973), p.129.

24. Ezekiel Mphalele, Down Second Avenue (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p.221.

25. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, p.232. The orthodox church is found in Ethiopia and Egypt which embraced Christianity along with parts of Sudan in the seventh century long before the advent of Islam. Ibid., p.229.

26. Ibid., p.233.

27. Ibid., pp.229-231.

28. R. Bureau, "Influence de la Christianisation sur les institutions traditionnelles des ethnies cotières du Cameroun," in Christianity in Tropical Africa, quoted by Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, p.238.

29. Beti, Main basse ... p.88.

30. Ferdinand Oyono, Une vie de boy (Paris: Presses Pocket, 1956), p.24.

31. Colin Turnbull, The Lonely African (London: Chatto and Windus, 1963), p.116.

32. Beti, "Le pauvre Christ de Bomba expliqué," p.120.

33. Beti, Main basse..., p.86.

34. Oyono, Une vie de boy, p.25.

35. See Beti, "Le pauvre Christ de Bomba expliqué," p.126.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid., pp.126-127.

38. Ibid., p.120.

39. Mouralis, Comprendre l'oeuvre de Mongo Beti, p.20.

40. Wauthier, L'Afrique des Africains, p.187.

41. Gerald Moore, Seven African Writers (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962), p.81.

42. Balandier, Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire, p.121.

43. Gorer, Africa Dances, p.174.

44. Ibid., p.176.

45. Palmer accuses Drumont of having a relationship with his cook, Zacharie, "which smacks of homosexuality". See The Growth of the African Novel (London: Heinemann, 1979), p.129.

46. Turnbull, The Lonely African, p.116.

47. Georges Balandier, Afrique ambiguë (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1957), p.219. See also Gorer, Africa Dances, pp.174-176.

48. For similar statements by Vidal, see PC, 141 and 198.

49. Thomas Melone, De la Négritude dans la littérature négro-africaine (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1962), p.101.

50. Albert Memmi, Portrait du colonisé précédé du portrait du colonisateur (Paris: Petite Bibliothèque Payot, 1973), p.101.

51. Beti, "Le pauvre Christ de Bomba expliqué," p.125.

52. Cf. Mouralis, Comprendre l'oeuvre de Mongo Beti, p.20. See also Judith Gleason, This Africa, Novels by West Africans in English and French (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1965), p.6.

53. Memmi, Portrait du colonisé, p.98.

54. Tunji Adegboye, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," in the Appendix to "Exil et retour dans l'univers romanesque de Mongo Beti," Unpublished M.A. thesis, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, April 1981, pp.12-13.

55. Gleason, This Africa, p.6.

56. Memmi, Portrait du colonisé, p.102.

57. Anthony Biakolo, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," Peuples noirs peuples africains, no.10, juillet-août 1979, p.117.

58. Kwabena Britwum, "Mission terminée: déracinement et connaissance des choses des blancs" in Recherche, Pédagogie et Culture, No.47-48, mai-août 1980, p.61.

59. Beti, "Le pauvre Christ de Bomba expliqué," p.132.

60. Bernard Mouralis, Individu et collectivité dans le roman négro-africain d'expression française. Annales de l'Univ. d'Abidjan, Série D-Lettres 1969, Tome 2, p.72.

61. Beti, "Le pauvre Christ de Bomba expliqué," p.113.

62. See Charly-Gabriel Mbock, Comprendre Ville cruelle d'Eza Boto (Paris: Eds. Saint-Paul, 1981), p.20.

63. Adegboye, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," p.5.

64. Karl Marx, "Towards the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy, Ed. Lewis S. Feuer (New York: Double Day and Co. Inc., 1959), pp.262-263.

65. Ibid.

66. Biakolo, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," p.106.

67. Ibid., p.117.

68. Willy Umezinwa, "Révolte et création artistique dans l'oeuvre de Mongo Beti," Présence Francophone, no. 10, printemps 1975, p.43.

69. James 2[26] Good News Bible.

70. See Herbert B. Puryear, The Edgar Cayce Primer: Discovering the Path of Self-Transformation (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1982).

71. See Beti, "Le pauvre Christ de Bomba expliqué," p.111. Biakolo, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," p.101. Mouralis, Comprendre l'oeuvre de Mongo Beti, p.29.

72. Anthony Biakolo, "Achebe et Beti: Ecriture et réalité traditionnelle en Afrique noire," Unpublished Doctorate thesis, Univ. of Paris XIII, 1980, pp. 94-95.

73. Adegboye, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," p.29.

74. Ibid., p.48.

75. See Gorer, Africa Dances, p.177.

76. See Wauthier, L'Afrique des Africains, p.188.

77. For a detailed account of the positive value of Christianity in Africa see Joseph, Radical Nationalism in Cameroun, pp.15-16. Prouzet, Le Cameroun..., pp.103-106. Coquery-Vidrovitch and Moniot, L'Afrique noire..., pp.171-172.

78. In Cameroon, although Ahidjo, a moslem was made the President, the U.P.C. comprising mainly the Beti-Pahouin, the Douala and other Southern ethnic groups with Christian background carried out most of the crusade that led to the independence of the Cameroons.

79. Adegboye, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," p.13.

80. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, p.239.

81. See Gorer, Africa Dances, p.177.

82. See René Dumont, L'Afrique noire est mal partie (Paris: Eds. du Seuil, 1962), p.26.

83. Thomas Cassirer, Robert Pageard, Molly Mazrui and Nordmann-Seiller see the missionary as basically good and only a victim of the colonial administration. Nordmann-Seiller pointed out that the missionaries:

> se heurtent au système qui, lui, est mauvais. C'est le système qui contraint les Africains à recourir aux mensonges et aux tromperies, c'est

> le système qui pousse les Européens y compris ceux de bonne volonté à commettre les pires erreurs.

See Almut Nordmann-Seiller, La littérature néo-africaine (Paris: Presses Univs. de France, 1976), p.68. See also Thomas Cassirer, "The Dilemma of Leadership as Tragi-Comedy in the Novels of Mongo Beti" L'Esprit créateur, Vol. X, No.3, Fall 1970, pp.223-233; Robert Pageard, Littérature négro-africaine (Paris: Le Livre Africain, 1966), p.69; Molly Mazrui, "Religion in African Fiction", East Africa Journal, Jan., 1968, pp. 32-36.

84. Beti, Main basse..., p.131.

CHAPTER II

ANTI-COLONIAL SATIRE

Albert Memmi has remarked:

> Après avoir été si longtemps refusé par le colonisateur, le jour est venu où c'est le colonisé qui refuse le colonisateur.1

Memmi's assertion refers to the era of anti-colonial struggle. This was a period in the history of Black Africa when some Blacks with a sense of commitment to their people rose in protest, especially through their writings, against the injustices of the colonial situation. They denounced the blackman's oppression and exploitation, the colonizer's sense of racial superiority.

An insight into the meaning of colonial situation might elucidate the gravity of the blackman's predicament during this historical period. Georges Balandier describes the colonial situation as follows:

> la domination imposée par une minorité étrangère, 'racialement' et culturellement différente, au nom d'une supériorité raciale (ou ethnique) et culturelle dogmatiquement affirmée, à une majorité autochtone matériellement inférieure; la mise en rapport de civilisations hétérogènes: une civilisation à machinisme, à économie puissante, à rythme rapide et d'origine chrétienne s'imposent à des civilisations sans techniques complexes, à économie retardée, à rythme lent et radicalement 'non chrétiennes'; le caractère antagoniste des relations intervenant entre les deux sociétés qui s'explique par le rôle d'instrument auquel est condamnée la société dominée; la nécessité, pour maintenir la domination, de recourir non seulement à la 'force' mais encore à un ensemble de pseudo-justifications et de comportements stéréotypés, etc. 2

Memmi like Balandier has noted that "le racisme résume et symbolise la relation fondamentale qui unit colonialiste et colonisé."[3] The colonized in order to survive is obliged to be passive under the absolute domination of the colonizer. Memmi, Balandier, Malinowski, Mannoni, Sartre and Fanon have all dealt in one way or the other with the sociological, psycho-pathological problems of the colonized Black. Memmi conceives "la révolte" as "la seule issue à la situation coloniale".[4] Revolt, whether implicit or explicit, is a demonstration of revulsion against the predicament of the colonized. Thus, the Africans' revolt is a reaction against the situation imposed by the colonizer.

Initially, the African writers' protest took the form of negritude movement. Senghor defines negritude in this way:

> l'ensemble des valeurs culturelles du monde noir, telles qu'elles s'expriment dans la vie, les institutions et les oeuvres des Noirs.5

Aime Césaire (who coined the word negritude) defines the term negritude as

> la simple reconnaissance d'un fait-ne comporte ni racisme, ni reniement de l'Europe, ni exclusivité, mais au contraire, une fraternité avec tous les hommes, une solidarité plus grande entre les hommes de race noire qui n'est pas fonction de la peau, mais d'une communauté de culture, d'histoire et de tempérament.6

The two definitions of negritude are quite revealing. It is clear that the negritudists protest albeit at the

implicit level against the colonial situation. Poems such as Senghor's "Femme noire", David Diop's "Afrique", novels like Claude McKay's Black Boy and Laye's L'enfant noir, all represent Africans' voices of protest against the dehumanization of the Black race by the white colonizers. In this way, they denounce erroneous and stereotyped image of the Blacks by the white colonialists. Black was said to be bad and ugly while White was regarded as good and beautiful. Fanon pointed out:

> En Europe, le bel est représenté par le noir... Le bourreau c'est l'homme noir, Satan est noir... quand on est sale on est noir... le nègre a une fonction: celle de représenter les sentiments inférieurs, les mauvais penchants... la couleur noire symbolise le mal, le péché, la misère, la mort, la guerre, la famine. 7

Fanon's assertion illuminates the whiteman's prejudice against the blackman, the former's treatment of the latter as an inferior being, and by implication the whiteman's sense of racial and cultural superiority which is the idea behind European colonization of Africa. The negritude writers aimed to reject this misrepresentation of the blackman. Although negritude was a form of commitment, it appeared to be a mild protest. Whereas some writers cling to negritude, a good many others reject this school of thought. Among the latter group is Jean-Paul Sartre who described negritude as "un racisme anti-raciste." As far as this class of writers are concerned, negritude is not relevant to Africa's social reality since it is a new form of mystification which leaves unsolved serious socio-poliitical problems confronting the Blacks.

Shortly afterwards, the African protest writing became more combative. One remembers here René Maran's Batouala, which is the first important African protest novel published as far back as 1921. Maran, a Black West Indian, thanks to his role as a French colonial administrator was privileged to witness, at first hand, the evils of French colonialism in Africa. This partly explains the virulence of his attack in Batouala on the French colonial regime. That, however, cost him his job. Many other black protest novelists took their cue from Maran but the majority of them tended to be more subtle in their indictment of colonialism. The increased political awareness of the Africans in the 1950s accounted, to some extent, for the proliferation of African protest novels. Among the very first ones was Mongo Beti's Ville cruelle (1954) which several critics described as a bad novel.[8] The African protest novelist soon began to produce fine works, for example, Beti's Le pauvre Christ de Bomba and Sembene's Les bouts de bois de Dieu. These African writers, in varying degrees of originality and boldness, attack the oppressive nature of colonial regimes, denounce malpractices such as forced labour, encroachment on African traditional life by the colonizers, economic exploitation of Africans by the colonial authorities and foreign commercial interests. Mongo Beti is noted, particularly, for his political outspokenness.

POLITICAL OPPRESSION

The French colonial rule, despite its ostensibly noble policy of assimilation was notable for its abuses. In short, the French colonial administration was as oppressive as

(perhaps even more oppressive than) the other colonial regimes.[9]

In reality, the French assimilation policy was a pretext intended to deceive and exploit the colonized. As Prévost-Paradol has pointed out:

> Africa... must not be for us [the French] a trading post, as India is, nor merely a camp and a training field for our army, even less an experimental area for our philanthropists. It is a French land which should be populated, owned and cultivated as soon as possible by French people, if we want it one day to weigh in our favour in the arrangement of human affairs.[10]

There was the myth of a "Greater France" which should cause her influence to be felt wherever possible, impose her language, culture, civilization, flag, weapons and technology on as many peoples as possible. French political leaders even saw the colonial domination of Africa by France as a way of counterbalancing the deflated French national pride caused by her defeat by Germany in 1870 and the loss of Alsace Lorraine.[11] It is not surprising that France used all available means to establish her influence in colonial Africa.

Mongo Beti, like some other satiric novelists (Oyono and Dadié), sets out to denounce the French colonial oppression and exploitation. We intend to focus here on Beti's criticism of the various methods of colonial oppression.

Taxation

Taxation was one of the methods employed by the colonizers to oppress the African. One finds in Beti's novels an indictment

of colonial taxation.

In the colonial era, the colonial administration imposed a form of levy on the clan or the village and it was the responsibility of the village chief to see to the collective payment of this tax.[12] Later on, the levy took the form of individual taxation where the poor native who could not afford to pay it in cash was obliged to pay in kind. As Coquery-Vidrovitch and Moniot observed, only the chiefs benefitted from this system of taxation: they misappropriated most of the collected tax and sometimes imposed levies on the villagers in order to satisfy their own selfish goals.[13] Mongo Beti criticizes this method of colonial taxation in Le roi miraculé. In this novel, the majority of the natives, even the well-to-do ones like Ondoua, refuse to pay their tax. Mekanda, delegated by Chief Mendouga to collect the tax from his clan members is frustrated because many refuse to pay. (RM, 17-18). By depicting characters like Ondoua who have the means but refuse to pay their tax, Beti draws our attention to an abnormal situation. It appears that Ondoua is aware that the tax which is collected from the natives is being misused. His refusal to pay the tax reveals, in a sense, his revolt against the whole system of taxation imposed by the colonial authorities. Since Beti resents oppression in all its forms, and the villagers in Le roi miraculé appear oppressed by colonial taxation, it would seem, therefore, that Ondua's protest against the system of taxation represents Beti's own position.

Later the head - or pool-tax was instituted by the colonial administration. This was a burden for the African peasentry who lived from hand to mouth. In Remember Ruben, armed soldiers are often sent to intimidate the villagers to pay their tax. As the narrator of Remember Ruben puts it:

> Nous vîmes d'abord arriver par la route et pénétrer dans notre cité... un détachement de soldats, fusil à l'épaule... Au vrai, ce n'était pas la première fois que ces gens faisaient ainsi intrusion chez nous. Mor-Bita, qui n'avait pas une véritable police, mais deux sbires inoffensifs, servant d'épouvantail au moment de la collecte de l'impôt de capitation surtout quand il fallait en accélérer le recouvrement, en appelait, dans les situations graves, aux autorités de Tamara... qui lui dépêchaient alors quelques dizaines d'hommes en uniforme et armés. Au besoin, ils se saisissaient d'un malfaiteur et repartaient aussitot. (RR, 78).

Here, Beti condemns the colonizers' use of taxation to harass the natives.

In Remember Ruben, the colonial administration even made it mandatory for tax to be paid on transport vehicles. The tax rate varies according to the size of the vehicle. In view of the fact that the Africans in transport business are not the actual owners of the transport and yet these Africans are made to pay the tax levied on the vehicles, thereby barricading their chances of making profits, one could infer that Beti aims to condemn this oppressive fiscal system. (RR, 236). By so doing, Beti denounces colonialism which made it possible for the Africans to be exploited in this manner.

In Remember Ruben, Mongo Beti contrasts the toll of taxes for the Africans with the absence of taxation or minimum taxation for the Whites[14] in order to show how the French colonial administration oppressed its African subjects through unequal distribution of taxes. In this novel, it is shown that the French colonial administration not only increases taxes for its subjects but also fails to provide these Africans with social services. Beti sees this as a form of exploitation. With the continued increase in taxes, many leave the villages for towns in search of employment to be able to pay their tax.[15] Beti's anti-colonial novels show that the majority of these Africans remain jobless in towns and suffer a worse plight. Thus,Beti denounces the undue hardship to which the Africans are subjected because of colonial taxation.

Extortion of War Effort

Extortion of war effort was another means by which the French colonial government exploited its subjects. Beti sets out in Remember Ruben to condemn the conscription of Africans into the colonial army to fight wars that did not concern them.

Remember Ruben shows the adverse impact of drafting Africans into the French Army to fight the First and Second World Wars. There was a depopulation of Africa owing to the massive killings of Africans who took part in the wars. The demobilised soldier, Joseph, tells Jean-Louis:

> Mais pour ce qui est d'avoir vu des Noirs pendant la guerre, je te parie tout ce que tu veux que j'en ai vu, et pas qu'un peu. (RR, 174).

According to Coquery-Vidrovitch and Moniot, from 1914 to 1918, about 200,000 Africans were recruited by force in French colonial Africa. Only half of this number were conscripted between 1939 and 1945.[16] Old Joseph's admission sheds light on the high death toll recorded for the Africans. Out of the 211,000 Africans conscripted into the French Army during the First World War, 163,952 actually participated in the war in Europe and 24,762 of them died for the French cause.[17] The French colonial power made use of almost one million Africans in the First World War, some as combattants, and others as workers.[18] The Second World War saw a repetition of the French extraction of war effort from her colonies. By raising the issue of the great loss incurred by Africa during the wars, Beti is actually registering his disapproval of the colonial administration's extortion of war effort.

In Remember Ruben, Beti decries the inhuman treatment meted out to these African soldiers during the wars. As one of the ex-servicemen put it:

> Une vie de chiens de nègres... Reclus, mis en quarantaine comme des pestiférés, ne sortant que pour le coup dur, mais toujours exclus des défilés de victoire. C'était cela notre belle vie... (RR, 168).

"C'était cela notre belle vie" is an ironic reference to the horrible life of the African soldiers during the European wars. The treatment given to these African soldiers recalls Memmi's

assertion: "Quel devoir moral a-t-on envers un animal ou une chose, à quoi ressemble de plus en plus le colonisé..."[19] Since the colonizers regard the colonized as beasts, it is not surprising that the African soldiers receive inhuman treatment and are pushed to the hot war zones. After all, as Memmi observed, "un accident, même grave, qui atteint le colonisé, fait presque rire. Une mitraillade dans une foule colonisée lui fait hausser les épaules."[20]

Mongo Beti condemns the French for using Africans to fight European wars. The narrator, in Remember Ruben, appears to be speaking for the author when he observes:

> s'étant trouvés opposés à des régiments noirs, les Allemands n'avaient-ils pas plusieurs fois refusé de les combattre, protestant ainsi contre la déloyauté de mêler les Africains aux querelles des Blancs dans lesquelles ils n'avaient que faire? (RR, 103).

What is highlighted here is the protest of the Germans against the French use of Africans in European wars. Beti appears to endorse the protest of the German soldiers. It is absurd and unfair that Blacks are used by the French colonial power to fight against the Germans. Since the technologically advanced French should know how to fight and defend themselves from enemy attack in war fronts better than the technologically backward Africans, it would appear that Beti feels that it is inhuman on the part of French colonial rulers to get these ignorant Africans involved in the relatively sophisticated European wars. As far as Beti is concerned this act is sheer exploitation and oppression.

Beti is not alone in denouncing the recruitment of Africans to fight the whiteman's wars. Oyono satirizes it in Le vieux nègre et la médaille. Kelara, the wife of Meka, becomes Oyono's mouthpiece when she denounces the injustice of this practice. Kelara laments:

> -Quelle femme, quelle mère est plus malheureuse que moi! ... Mes enfants, mes pauvres enfants, on vous a vendus comme Judas a vendu le Seigneur... Lui au moins il l'avait fait pour des sous... Vous valez tous les deux, mes pauvres petits, une médaille...21

Kelara's observation denounces the exploitation and oppression of the African by the whiteman. Giving a piece of medal to Meka is not an adequate compensation for his two sons lost in the wars. It tends to punctuate the colonizers' indifference to the emotional disturbances they create for the Africans by conscripting them into the French Army in order to use them in fighting wars in Europe.

It is clear then that the extortion of war effort from the colonies constituted one of the forms in which the Africans experienced French colonial oppression. Beti, like Oyono, attacks the French for operating such a system in their colonies.

Forced Labour and Forced Labour Camp

> J'ai vu creuser la route Manding-Zomba; c'était terrible! Les gens travaillaient attachés à une corde qui s'enroulait autour de la taille du premier, allait s'enrouler autour de la taille du suivant et ainsi de suite. Et les tirailleurs les surveillaient: si quelqu'un tombait, ils lui faisaient

> claquer leurs chicotes sur le dos, lui striaient la peau jusqu'à ce qu'il se relève et se tienne fermement sur ses pieds. (PC, 55). 22

This observation by the narrator of Le pauvre Christ... reveals the atrocities perpetrated through the practice of forced labour. The plight of the African here recalls David Diop's poem, "Afrique":

> ...Afrique dis-moi Afrique
> Est-ce donc toi ce dos qui se courbe
> Et se couche sous le poids de l'humilité
> Ce dos tremblant à zébrures rouges
> Qui dit oui au fouet sur les routes de midi...[23]

Diop protests against the inhuman treatment meted out to the African slaves. Beti shows in Le pauvre Christ... that the Africans drafted into forced labour are treated like slaves.

Beti's novels show that forced labour practised by the colonial regime is found in both road building and building construction. The natives are also compelled to farm for the colonizers in order to increase the production of cash crops. Sometimes, they are obliged to sell their farm produce to the whiteman at give-away prices.[24] In other words, these peasant farmers are cheated by their colonial masters.

The recruitment of Africans into forced labour was common practice in the French colonies. Africans recruited in this way were usually deprived of all liberty. In Ville cruelle, Banda narrates his experience of being forcibly sent to a labour camp. (VC, 41). In the Cameroons under colonial rule,

forced labour sites were set up at places like Njock, Dizangué and Bétoré Oya, where people were sent to construct railway lines.[25] In Remember Ruben, Mor-Zamba recalls the inhumanity shown to him when he was drafted into forced labour. As the narrator of Remember Ruben notes:

> Ils [the soldiers] poussaient devant eux un troupeau d'hommes, rouges d'avoir longtemps marché sur des chemins de terre ou sur la chaussée caillouteuse, sans jamais être autorisés à se baigner... les soldats avaient maîtrisé Mor-Zamba et lui avaient garrotté les mains derrière le dos; il avait la bouche pleine de sang et le visage tuméfié d'un homme qui a reçu des coups sans compte. (RR, 78-79).

It is clear that the African workers are treated as animals. Beti accuses French colonialism of practising forced labour which is a form of slavery. This fact emerges in a conversation between the three revolutionaries - Evariste, Jo Le Jongleur and Mor-Zamba - in La ruine...

> C'est tout à fait cela, répondit Mor-Zamba. C'est une main-d'oeuvre gratuite. Personne mieux que moi ne sait ce que c'est.
> -Alors, c'est l'esclavage en somme!
> -Tu l'as dit, galopin! fit Jo Le Jongleur.
> -Toujours l'esclavage des Noirs! s'écria l'ancien collégien de Kola-Kola, comme en Egypte, comme en Amérique, comme en Afrique du Sud. C'est drôle, les toubabs refont toujours la même chose avec nous. Partout où il y a un Blanc et un Noir, il y a un maître et un esclave. Le maître, c'est toujours un Blanc, l'esclave, c'est toujours un Noir... (RP, 250).

The fact that forced labour amounts to the enslavement of Africans is confirmed when Beti describes how the natives drafted into forced labour are treated. The detainees are made

to do hard labour or menial jobs "comme de ramasser les ordures et les détritus dans les rues, d'enterrer les morts de l'hôpital, quand ils n'avaient pas de famille..." (RR, 84). Woken up very early, they work till six o'clock in the evening when they return to the camp "harassés, traînant le pied" (RR, 85). These forced labourers are exposed to diseases like pneumonia, malaria, amoebic dysentry and yet they are denied proper medical care.

In view of the fact that those conscripted into forced labour are detained for a long time it goes without saying that these African workers suffer from oppression and misery. The fact that the practice of forced labour persisted for a very long time during the colonial regime shows the extent of the Africans' endurance of forced labour. Mongo Beti the defender of the oppressed condemns forced labour in Remember Ruben.

Mission terminée shows that even after the closure of the forced labour camps in 1946 forced labour still thrives in the form of allowance in cash or kind which is based on the traditional custom of work that the subject owes the chief. As Coquery-Vidrovitch and Moniot observed:

> Les chefs dotés d'un pouvoir administratif subalterne plus étendu, eurent tendance à en abuser à leur profit. 26

Mongo Beti uses the case of the Kala Chief to indict the abuse of compulsory labour by the chiefs. This Kala chief extorts forced labour in kind or cash from the unsuspecting villagers.

He bullies these villagers into responding positively. (MT, 178). This is a clear case of abuse of forced labour since this practice has been proscribed. Thus, the narrator is probably speaking Beti's mind when he blurts out:

> Oui, je sais ce que vous vous demandez: comment depuis la révolution que fut la constitution d'octobre 1946, un chef pouvait-il encore menacer les citoyens de brimades administratives? C'est ce que vous vous demandez, n'est-ce pas? (MT, 178).

The reader's attention is drawn here to an abnormal situation: the extortion of forced labour by the chief of Kala after it has been banned. The chief takes advantages of the ignorance of the people by claiming that he is "encore investi" with the power he enjoyed before October 1946. (MT, 179). By exposing in this way the abuse of forced labour, Beti condemns the French colonial administration for investing the chief with the authority to oppress the Africans in this way.

The Colonial Detention Camp and Prison

The French colonial rule was notorious for arbitrary arrests, detention and imprisonment. Colonial detention camps and prisons were instruments of colonial oppression. Mongo Beti paints in his novels scenes of torture in the colonial prisons. Beti uses characters, like Mor-Zamba in Remember Ruben, to condemn such atrocities. For example, while Ruben is being tortured by the soldiers on the instructions of some white colonial officials, Mor-Zamba is secretly watching it all. The narrator describes the torture scene:

> On entendait des coups sourds suivis chaque fois d'un cri déchirant, qui s'étranglait aussitôt au milieu d'éclats de voix et de grommellements qui semblaient gourmander, menacer peut-être, comme si des gens avaient juré de faire un mauvais sort à leur prisonnier s'il ne se décidait pas à se taire. Puis, ce furent encore des coups... La victime, qui n'osait plus ouvrir la bouche, sans doute terrorisé à l'idée des représailles qu'on venait de lui promettre, poussait de longs gémissements larmoyants qui faisaient croire à son agonie, fendaient le coeur de Mor-Zamba, lui arrachant des ruisseaux de larmes dont il sentait ses joues s'inonder... (RR, 187).

Mor-Zamba's reaction against colonial oppression emerges here. He plans to liberate Ruben. "Il faut faire quelque chose! ils vont le /Ruben/ tuer! Mor-Zamba shouted. (RR, 189). Mor-Zamba, like Mongo Beti, is sensitive to the sufferings of the down-trodden, and therefore, fights on the side of the oppressed.

Mor-Zamba's own arrest illustrates the arbitrary nature and injustice of colonial rule as Beti sees it. Mor-Zamba is arrested ostensibly for a traffic offence but in reality for alleged subversive actions. Here is a description of Mor-Zamba's interrogation:

> ...les yeux bandés ... il fut soumis aux questions les plus inattendues, roué de coups, fouetté au nerf de boeuf, jeté sur le sol de ciment, piétiné, relevé, interrogé et encore roué de coups. (RR, 254).

Beti's use of appropriate descriptive words and expressions (fouetté, piétiné and roué de coups) is perhaps meant to draw our attention to the slavish treatment meted out to Mor-Zamba. The detention camp is one of the colonizer's instruments of subjugating refractory Africans. Beti, the

social critic, condemns the sinister role played by the colonial detention camp.

Mongo Beti describes the various methods of torture employed by the colonizers to terrorize and hold in subjugation the subject class. These methods of torture range from flogging to more complex methods such as asphyxiation and electric shock. (RR, 255-256). By so doing, Beti aims to denounce the brutal treatment inflicted on Africans in the colonial detention camps.

Remember Ruben shows that the French colonial administration uses detention and imprisonment to silence radical, insubordinate Africans, who crusade for the independence of their countries. Remember Ruben deals specifically with the historic figure, Ruben Um Nyobé, who suffered from intermittent imprisonment. Memmi has written that "le colonisateur dénie au colonisé le droit le plus précieux reconnu à la majorité des hommes: la liberté."[27] Beti attacks the French colonial regime for using imprisonment to suppress progressive Africans. In Remember Ruben, Mongo Beti describes a typically colonial prison:

> La prison de Fort-Ségre était une forteresse léguée par les premiers colonisateurs un peu à l'écart de la ville européenne, offrant à la vue hautes murailles crénelées, tours de guet et tours d'angle, mâchicoulis et meurtrières... (RR, 259).

The external description of the prison reveals the type of dehumanized beings found within its deadly walls. This point is confirmed when the narrator observes that:

> la première fois que Jo Le Jongleur approcha de Mor-Zamba, la vue du prisonnier le glaça d'horreur. (RR, 260).

The fact that Mor-Zamba's look is horrifying tends to reveal to what extent the colonial prison dehumanizes the Africans. By showing the effect of the colonial prison on the African Beti castigates the French colonial regime for using the colonial prison to oppress its subjects.

Mongo Beti's description of scenes of torture in colonial detention camps and prisons is somewhat similar to Ngugi Wa Thiongo's in Weep not Child. In this novel, the character, Njoroge, is taken from school to the homeguard post popularly known as the "House of Pain", where he is tortured as the following passage in the novel shows:

> Mr. Howlands rose and came to Njoroge. He was terrible to look at... He held Njoroge's private parts with a pair of pincers and started to press tentatively. 'You'll be castrated like your father.' Njoroge screamed. Tell us. Who really sent you to collect information in Jacobo's house about...?' Njoroge could not hear: the pain was so bad. And whenever he asked a question, he pressed harder. He still screamed... Then he [Mr. Howlands] saw the boy raise his eyes and arms as if in supplication before he became limp and collapsed on the ground. 28

Njoroge is here tortured and oppressed in a much similar way as Jo Le Jongleur in La ruine...

Mongo Beti condemns colonialism for using detention and imprisonment for suppressing and oppressing the subjects.

Suppression of Trade-Unionists/Rubenists

Remember Ruben, Perpétue... and La ruine... focus on the plight of black workers in the Cameroons, the struggle put up by organized workers to fight injustices and the resultant suppression of the trade-unionists.

Beti's novels show that the trade-unionists fight tooth and nail to protect black workers' interest. It is in Remember Ruben that Beti portrays the actual workers' movement. As Coquery-Vidrovitch and Moniot observed, trade-unions came into existence in French colonial Africa for the first time in 1937 as an arm of the Metropolitan Federation,[29] and they became fully developed after the Second World War. L'Union des Syndicats Confédérés du Cameroun, L'U.S.C.C., was formed on 18 December, 1948.[30] Thanks to the syndicalist movement spearheaded by leaders such as Ruben Um Nyobé, the black workers started to enjoy better working conditions. They could then register their protest through industrial action. Mahjemout Diop has recorded an average of 7500 strike days in a year in each territory of the old A.O.F.[31] One of the popular strikes was the 1947 Dakar-Niger Railway Workers' Strike, which was the longest of all the strikes. The Cameroons was not an exception. With the zeal and determination of Ruben Um Nyobé to remedy the plight of his fellow oppressed Blacks, there were several demonstrations and strike actions by the Cameroonian workers. This fact emerges clearly in Remember Ruben. The collective revolt of black workers in Douala in this novel

tends to suggest the first big and violent strike organized by the U.S.C.C. in September 1945, instigated by railway workers.[32]

Remember Ruben depicts the change brought about by syndicalist protests. As its narrator puts it:

> Pendant deux années peut-être, les Africains purent aller et venir très librement, même dans la ville européenne; on eût dit qu'avec la fin de la guerre [Second World War] le monde avait été mis à l'envers par on ne sait quel extraordinaire magicien;... Les syndicalistes ne contribuaient pas peu à modeler le visage de Toussaint-Louverture et à lui créer cette réputation qui inspirait à la ville européenne un effroi sournois, vite traduit en sarcasmes dans sa presse. On les appelait 'les frères africains' ou 'les hommes de Ruben.' (RR, 107).

The magician referred to in this passage is Ruben Um Nyobé, the leader of all black trade-unionists in the Cameroons. Um Nyobé reminds one of the fictional syndicalist leader, Ibrahima Bakayoko, who heads the Dakar-Niger Railway Workers' Strike of 1947 in Sembene's Les bouts de bois de Dieu. Bakayoko and Ruben are both men of the people, political activists, determined to better the lot of their fellow workers. Both are hero-worshipped by their followers.[33] It is possible that Beti and Sembene had the same historical figure, Um Nyobé, in mind while creating the fictional characters Ruben in Remember Ruben and Bakayoko in Les bouts de bois de Dieu.

Apparently, the trade-union movement portrayed in Remember Ruben was at its peak in terms of initiating effective action.[34] It was at a stage in which, according to Jean N'Diallo, there was a total agreement between syndicalist

unions and political parties to merge "leurs objectifs politiques."[35] For example, Ruben Um Nyobé in 1945 was made the Assistant General Secretary of the U.S.C.C. In 1947, he was elected the first Secretary of the U.S.C.C. On April 10, 1948, Ruben was elected the General Secretary of L'Union des Populations du Cameroun (L'U.P.C.) founded on that day.[36] By the end of 1948, Um Nyobé had assumed the leadership of the U.P.C.[37] The historical Ruben was, therefore, combining his role as the syndicalist leader with that of a political leader. In Remember Ruben, the fictional character, Ruben, is shown to be a syndicalist leader as well as a leader of the P.P.P. (Partie Progressiste Populaire) which is, in fact, the U.P.C. Coquery-Vidrovitch and Moniot have remarked that:

> Um Nyobé, lui-même Bassa, sut surmonter le particularisme ethnique pour donner au mouvement (U.S.C) (affilié au R.D.A.) une idéologie (marxiste) un but (l'indépendance et la réunification des deux Cameroun français et britannique). 38

It is clear that the syndicalist movement portrayed in Remember Ruben has transcended its primary goal of improving the socio-economic conditions of its members to become involved principally with the politics of total liberation of the Cameroons.

Remember Ruben shows that the colonial administration resents the growing power of the trade-unionists/Rubenists and so uses all repressive measures to try to exterminate the movement and assassinate the Rubenists. The colonial government

even uses naked power against these trade-unionists/Rubenists. Young people, even children, are arrested often for shouting "vive Ruben!" The "Bourse du Travail" is closed down and the workers dispersed so as to prevent their setting up another syndicalist house. (RR, 111).

Through detailed description, Beti exposes the brutality of the colonial authorities in their attempt to suppress trade-unionists/freedom fighters. Beti shows for example, that for a sporadic revolt after a football match, the young trade-unionists in Toussaint-Louverture are massacred by the colonial police. According to the report of one of those who manages to survive:

> dans le fracas d'un tonnerre infernal, mille foudres à la fois s'abattaient sur eux [the trade-unionists]. Pour plus d'une centaine de jeunes gens qui avaient à peine goûté aux douceurs de la vie, la chaussée caillouteuse fut le dernier lit d'un sommeil de feu, avant le vrai repos... (RR, 114).

What is highlighted here is the callousness of the colonial authorities towards the trade-unionists. The administration looks for the slightest excuse to kill as many of the trade-unionists as possible. The colonial police acted in an unreasonable manner: just because of one wanted man (Manengouba) these policemen massacred many young workers in his company. Beti attacks the colonial regime for this inhuman act. The fact that Beti sympathizes with the oppressed trade-unionists and denounces the repressive measure of the colonial police emerges clearly in the narrator's comment: "C'était décidément un combat inégal" (RR, 114).

This incident tends to suggest an event that happened in reality - the massacre of workers on strike in Douala in 1945.[39] It happened that during this time, some jobless young Africans embarked on a sporadic revolt destroying some government buildings. The colonial administration capitalized on this to attack the trade-unionists. The colonial police occupied Douala for two days (24-25 September 1945) killing about eighty people.[40] According to Abel Eyinga's report, the colonial police force,

> faisaient des cartons sur les Camerounais. Personne n'a pu dénombrer exactement les personnes décédées dans ces conditions, puisqu'on ramassait les morts au fur et à mesure. Mais j'ai entendu un peu partout avancer le chiffre de quatre-vingt-cinq morts... Ce qui est certain, c'est que les colons voulaient la peau des syndicalistes rendus, à tort ou à raison responsables des troubles. [41]

Beti's attack on the colonial regime for suppressing black workers and freedom fighters recalls Sembene's. Les bouts de bois de Dieu contains an indictment of the numerous attempts made by the colonialists, in collaboration with some black renegades like El Hadji Fabigué, to thwart, though without success, the railway workers' strike. L'harmattan shows that the colonial administration has recourse to all sorts of repressive measures to silence the freedom fighters headed by Tioumbé Koéboghi. Nevertheless, Beti's criticism of colonial suppression of trade-unionists and nationalists is even more thorough and vivid.

Beti's object in writing Remember Ruben is principally to commemmorate the noble deeds of Ruben and attack the brutality

and inhumanity of the colonial oppressors and their black collaborators. The title, Remember Ruben, testifies to the author's admiration and sympathy for Ruben Um Nyobé. Ruben's name aptly fits his historical role: "Um le 'Mpodo'" in Bassa dialect means the Saviour.[42] It is significant that Ruben dies in his attempt to save his people. Beti deplores the persecution as well as the ultimate assassination of this Cameroonian hero.[43] In his novels, Remember Ruben and La ruine..., Beti sets out to condemn the assassination of Ruben and to champion the "Rubenist" cause.

Beti denounces a strategy employed by the colonial regime to intimidate its recalcitrant subjects. Beti calls it "l'action psychologique." Thus, all militant revolutionaries considered subversive by the colonial authorities are assassinated and their dead bodies displayed for sometime. In Remember Ruben, when Ruben is executed, his corpse is exhibited for a whole day in Boumibell and the administration gives a distorted version of his mysterious death. (RR, 267). Boumibell would seem to refer to Boumnyebel, Ruben's home town in Bassa forest in Sanaga-Maritime.[44]

In Perpétue..., Beti shows how at the dawn of independence, several active Rubenists were captured and publicly executed, (P, 12). The P.C.P. had long been proscribed even before Ruben's murder (RR, 247).[45] Nevertheless, the party members still carry on secretly their anti-colonial activities as exemplified by the three Rubenists in Remember Ruben and La ruine...: Mor-Zamba, Evariste and Jo Le Jongleur. The French colonial

administration sees the Rubenists as a threat to its continued presence in Africa, and therefore, seeks to eliminate them. Thus, after banning the P.P.P. and assassinating their leader, Ruben, it goes on to track down and kill the remaining underground leaders of the P.P.P. Beti says in La ruine... that "pour le moment le parti /F.P.P./ était loin de compte," (RP, 60).

Mongo Beti denounces the repressive measures used by the French colonial administration against trade-unionists and Rubenists. Beti sees this suppression as an attempt to perpetuate the political oppression of the Africans. In his novels, he attacks this kind of oppression.

The Colonial Officials

By colonial officials we refer to those directly concerned with executing the French colonial government policies. The colonial officials include the administrator, the civil servant and the law enforcement agents.

The Colonial Administrator

The colonial administrator may be the Governor. He could be the Commandant (the equivalent of the District Commissioner in the British colonized states), or a Police Commissioner. The fact is that the administrator was vested with unlimited and arbitrary power.[46] The French colonial policy exercised at each level of its hierarchy, three basic principles - centralization, bureaucratism and absolute and arbitrary power.

Existing African traditional authorities were either nullified or coopted into strict collaboration with the French colonial rule.[47] This, perhaps, explains in part the atrocities perpetrated by the French colonial administrators. Beti denounces the excesses of the colonial administrator "défiguré", according to Memmi, "en oppresseur, en être partiel, incivique, tricheur, préoccupé uniquement de ses privilèges, de leur défense à tout prix."[48] More pragmatic than the missionaries, the colonial administrators who appear in Beti's novels (Vidal in Le pauvre Christ..., Lequeux and Giovanni Palmieri in Le roi miraculé, for example) are shown to be opportunists, devoted to the cause of a "Greater France", the idea underlying French colonialism in Africa. It is this French imperialism that Mongo Beti seeks to denounce in his novels.

Beti seeks to puncture the administrator's self-deception. In Le pauvre Christ..., when Vidal expresses his scepticism about the practicality of the administrator's so-called civilising mission in Africa, Drumont objects:

> Non, Monsieur Vidal, vraiment non! Vous [the colonial administrators] n'êtes pas ici pour implanter une civilisation: ne vous mentez pas à vous-même... vous êtes ici pour protéger une certaine catégorie de gens très précise, un point c'est tout. Et vous les protégerez jusqu'à ce que les autres soient plus forts et les expulsent, et vous avec.(PC,198).

The point Beti is trying to advance here is that the French colonial administration is simply using its civilizing mission as a pretext to justify its colonial presence in Africa. Beti

explodes in this way the myth of a civilizing mission. By so doing, he intends to undermine the ideological basis of colonialism as well as denounce the administrator's self-delusion.

In Mission terminée, Beti launches an indirect attack on the colonial administrators' lack of scruples and their oppression of the Africans.[49] The military men get some African prisoners to pull down some badly constructed houses without providing them with adequate protection. When eventually the walls give way, one of the villagers is critically impaled. As the narrator, Medza, puts it:

> Nous entendîmes un indicible gémissement de bête écrasée: un homme n'avait pas eu le temps de se mettre hors de portée des murs. Certes, j'ai vu le cadavre affreusement écrasé... Mais ce dont je me souviens encore mieux, ce dont je me souviendrai toute ma vie... c'est de ce gémissement d'homme abattu criant, ou plutôt essayant de crier, non pas tant pour appeler au secours, que pour protester contre la vie et son injustice, C'est ce cri de révolte et d'agonie à la fois qui toujours retentira à mes oreilles comme une obsession. (MT, 76).

The character in question here would seem to represent the colonised African. His moan symbolises the cry of the colonized African in a helpless situation. It underlines the degree of social injustice suffered by the Africans in the colonial era. In exposing Africans to hazardous jobs of this nature without protecting them adequately, the colonial administrator is being unscrupulous. It is quite clear that Beti is here denouncing the colonial administrator's

callousness. The future tense in the verb "retentira" in the passage suggests that for Mongo Beti colonial oppression leaves a lasting impact. Given Beti's implicit attack on colonialism in Mission terminée, it is clear that this novel is quite political.

Beti is not alone in condemning the colonial administrator's inhumanity to the Africans. His compatriot, Oyono did so in Une vie de boy and Le vieux nègre et la médaille. Faye, in Sembene's O pays mon beau peuple! protests against the Commandant's physical and verbal violence by beating him up to the amazement of the crowd in the Casamance harbour. As the narrator remarked: "La populace recula sur le wharf, le blanc ensanglanté leur faisait peur."[50] Unlike Beti and Oyono, Sembene, here, uses physical violence to protest against the administrator's brutality.

In the eyes of Beti, the colonial administrators deceive the Africans into believing that they, the administrators, have come to civilize them when in reality, they have vested interests. They oppress the Africans while trying to achieve their selfish goals. Beti condemns the oppression which the administrators inflicted on the colonized Africans.

The Colonial Civil Servant

The colonial civil servants were under the colonial administrators. In Beti's novels, the colonial civil servants include the officials of the Cocoa Management Board and black civil servants. Mongo Beti attacks the inadequacies of the colonial civil servants.

For example, in Ville cruelle, Beti castigates the indifference, inefficiency and unfriendliness of the officials of the Cocoa Management Board which contribute to the oppression of the colonized. Above all, Beti condemns the abuse of power by these public officers. As the narrator remarks: "D'abus en abus, ils en étaient venus au Contrôle. Jusqu'où iraient-ils?" (VC, 36). It throws into relief the abuse of power by these colonial officers. One can infer from the narrator's tone that Beti is denouncing the abuse of power.

Beti deplores the behaviour of cocoa control officers because it does not augur well for the welfare of the colonized Africans. Take, for example, Banda's misfortune and suffering which could have been averted. After Banda's arrest, the pleadings of the five women for Banda to be released fall on deaf ears. Banda turns to one of the women:

> Arrête donc Régine! lui cria Banda.
> Ce n'est pas un homme que tu vois là.
> C'est une bête. (VC, 47).

Mongo Beti does not only condemn the black civil servants' callous attitude towards their compatriots but also denounces their obsequiousness to their white colonial masters. The narrator in Remember Ruben observes:

> les employés noirs, si intraitables et méprisables avec leurs congénères, lui [the white colonial master] obéissant au doigt et à l'oeil. (RR, 236).

Here, Beti contrasts the black civil servants' hostile attitude to their fellow Black with the former's servile attitude

towards the colonial master. In this way, Beti highlights the fact that black civil servants also help to foster the colonial oppression of the Africans. Beti is implicitly attacking the colonial regime for rearing workers who make life difficult for their fellow Africans.

In Remember Ruben, Beti makes use of contrast to castigate the colonial employees' attitude to work. The narrator in Remember Ruben notes about the workers in "Bourse du Travail":

> 'Bourse du Travail', ouverte du matin au soir et parfois jusqu'à la nuit. On y voyait des employés graves, absorbés dans la lecture d'un dossier... C'étaient des gens affables contrairement aux employés de l'administration; ils étaient toujours disposés à rendre service à leurs congénères - de là leur surnom de 'frères africains'. (RR, 107).

Here, the positive attitude to work of the trade-unionists in "Bourse du Travail" contrasts with the indifference, negligence and lack of scruple of the colonial civil servants in the Licencing Office. By indicting these colonial workers, Beti is actually attacking colonialism.

Mongo Beti satirizes generally both the white and black civil servants in the colonial regime without typifying them as he occasionally does with the colonial administrators. The colonial civil servant is identified as an oppressor of the colonized and referred to not by name but as "les employés blancs" or "noirs" or "de l'administration".

The Law Enforcement Agents

The Law enforcement agents include the soldiers and the police. The military and paramilitary were instruments of colonial oppression. As Fanon puts it:

> Aux colonies, l'interlocuteur valable et institutionnel du colonisé, le porte-parole du colon et du régime d'oppression est le gendarme ou le soldat. 51

The law enforcement agents transmitted to the colonized the message of the colonizers. Their medium of communication was usually violence. Fanon noted that "l'intermédiaire porte la violence dans les maisons et dans les cerveaux du colonisé."[52] In Beti's novels, the soldiers otherwise known as the "saringalas" or "balafrés" and the police referred to as "mamelouk" are portrayed as barbaric and callous.[53] Beti denounces their brutality as well as the atrocities which they perpetrate in the colony.

The "saringalas" and the "mamelouks" are shown in Beti's novels to carry out arbitrary arrests and torture of "les sapaks" or "bandesalos" (the young political activists). Scenes of cruelty abound in Beti's novels and these scenes owe their existence mainly to the inhumanity of colonial soldiers and their deference to the colonial administrators. Mor-Zamba notes in Remember Ruben that it is in the interest of prisoners not to attract "l'inimitié des balafrés" since nothing guarantees their safety "contre leurs sévices". (RR, 97). In Ville cruelle, as the four soldiers are beating

Banda, the women who accompanied him are so appalled that they dare raise their voice against the soldiers:

> Vous ne pouvez pas vous battre à quatre contre lui seul. (VC, 46).

These women's denunciation, probably, echoes Mongo Beti here. By denouncing the cruelty of the "saringalas", Beti is, in fact, attacking colonialism.

The unquestioning obedience of the soldiers and police to the authorities accounts to a large extent for the atrocities which the law enforcement agents commit in the colonial regime. Beti uses old Joseph in Remember Ruben to condemn the soldiers. As Joseph puts it:

> il y avait les saringalas... Mais eux, tu sais, comme ils ne savent même pas lire leur propre sabir, c'est le bétail, les animaux du champ de bataille; on en fait ce qu'on veut... Question tenir le coup au feu, champions, les saringalas. (RR, 175).

France uses the "saringalas" because the latter are an effective instrument of oppression.

Beti also criticizes the inefficiency of the colonial police vis-à-vis the colonized. We are told in Ville cruelle, that a lot of criminal acts take place in Northern Tanga because of "la carence nocturne de la police." (VC, 24). Whereas the police fail to operate night patrols in Northern Tanga, the same police protect the interests of the colonial administration. Corrupt itself, the colonial police cover up

the corrupt practices and abuses of the colonial officials and their allies. In short, ensuring fairplay for the colonized is out of the question. For example, the Police Commissioner in Tanga does not reprimand M.T. for refusing to pay his black workers. Instead, he enjoys whisky with him. (VC, 101). This shows clearly the complicity between the Whites in the colony and the colonial police. By condemning the colonial police in this way, Beti is actually denouncing the colonial regime which gives the police the authority to perpetuate injustice and oppression in the French Cameroon.

The Colonial African Chief or Canton Chief

Although in the pre-colonial era some Bantu ethnic groups were ruled by chiefs like King Bella of Douala, other Bantu groups like the Beti-Pahouin had no chiefs. The colonial African chiefs or canton chiefs were a creation of the colonial administration. As Beti explained in an interview, the original Bantu were not ruled by chiefs but by "l'assemblée d'hommes."[54] Jean Suret-Canale points out that the colonial administration either eliminated the traditional authorities or made them close collaborators of the colonial regime.[55] According to Beti, the colonizers,

> ont... supprimé le système et l'ont remplacé par le chef... Mais en plus, le plus mauvais a été les Français qui ont imposé leurs anciens caporaux, enfin ils ne savaient pas quoi faire avec leurs anciens combattants. Voilà la situation du chef qu'on a dans Le roi miraculé. Il n'a aucun rapport ethnique ni culturel

> avec la communauté on tête de laquelle on l'a placé de force; il est doublement illégitime. 56

It follows from Beti's explanation that all chiefs in his novels are illegitimate because they were imposed on the natives by the colonial administration. However, Chief Mor-Bita in Remember Ruben and not Chief Mendouga in Le roi miraculé, as Beti noted, is "doublement illégitime" because the chief appointed by the Germans was assassinated and Mor-Bita imposed on the natives of Ekoumdoum by the French colonial administration. This point is further elucidated by the narrator in Remember Ruben:

> A dire vrai, le chef, ses femmes, ses scribes ni ses domestiques n'étaient à proprement parler des nôtres; mais les origines de cet homme ainsi que les circonstances dans lesquelles il avait été placé à la tête de la cité, étaient un sujet tabou... Seuls les hommes d'âge savaient qu'autrefois, il en était allé tout à fait différemment et, avant qu'aucun Blanc ne paraisse chez nous, plus différemment encore. (RR, 47-48).

The fact that these chiefs are appointed by the colonial administration explains, to a large extent, their extreme submission to colonial authorities. The canton chiefs, like the elders, belong to the traditional elite. These two groups constitute what Beti refers to as "l'autoritarisme traditionnel de la société africaine."[57] This is a class of privileged few who, either by their wealth, position or age, tyrannize and oppress the great majority of their people. Beti's novels show that the colonial African chiefs enjoy power and wealth, these two assets which keep them head and shoulders above their compatriots. Beti observes, "le chef exerçait sur sa

petite collectivité une autorité sans partage."[58] Beti insinuates that the colonial African chiefs are instruments of colonial exploitation and oppression.

The importance of the canton chief to the administration is shown when, for example, the black doctor invited to treat the dying chief Mendouga tells Le Guen:

> Ce Chef, à ce qu'on dit, est un très grand bonhomme et nous avons charge de veiller sur lui, c'est ce que vient de me rappeler l'administrateur en chef des colonies, chef de la région Lequeux... (RM, 114).

The colonial administrators recognize the importance of these canton chiefs who facilitate in no small way the execution of colonial objectives such as taxation and the conscription of the villagers into forced labour or the French Army. The narrator in Le roi miraculé notes that Chief Essomba Mendouga

> ne se pardonnait pas, entre autres fautes commises pendant la dernière guerre, d'avoir, ainsi qu'on le lui demandait, livré des hommes de la tribu qui avaient été emmenés ensuite sur des chantiers dont certains n'étaient pas revenus - c'était pendant la période des travaux forcés. (RM, 23).

Chief Mendouga and every other chief in the colonial regime could commit this and other atrocities partly because of their uncritical acceptance of French colonial policies.

This is so because of their obsequiousness to the administration. Mongo Beti condemns the chief's unquestionable deference to the colonial administrators since it perpetuates colonial oppression. The tailor, Banda's uncle, appears to

echo Beti's views when he observes:

> Ils [the canton chiefs] n'ont jamais pu paraître devant le Blanc sans avoir envie de pisser. Les chefs... pouah! Et va faire ceci. -'Oui, mon commandant!' Et va dire ceci à tes gens: 'Oui, mon commandant!' Quand diront-ils:'Non, mon commandant!' ... Les chefs... pouah! (VC, 53).

Here, Beti is castigating the chiefs' tendency to obey excessively the administrators,[59] to the extent that the former serve as an effective instrument of oppression.

Whereas these chiefs are weak before the colonial administrators, they are tyrannical and inconsiderate towards their fellow Africans. In Mission terminée, the Vimili Chief is referred to as "cet homme d'Etat, ce dictateur de village." (MT, 35). The Kala chief tyrannizes and exploits his subjects. After marrying his seventh wife, he bullies the villagers into rendering him help to enable him pay for the expenses involved with the marriage ceremony. Medza makes a revealing observation here:

> En réalité, les menaces du chef se passaient aisément de tout rapprochement avec le bluff: les chefs, aidés et conseillés par leurs supérieurs hiérarchiques, savoir les administrateurs coloniaux, avaient mis au point un système nouveau d'oppression, apparemment conforme à la légalité et qui leur permettait, suivant un mécanisme routinier mais d'une précision désarmante, de tenir les populations bien en main, et même, s'ils le voulaient, de les mettre en coupe parfaitement réglée. Par exemple, toute une réglementation avait cours dans les circonscriptions de l'arrière pays, qui tout en posant la suppression des travaux forcés comme un principe de base, n'en contenait

> pas moins une disposition à peine lisible suivant laquelle l'autorité était habilitée à réquisitionner les populations en cas de danger public... (MT, 179).

It is clear that there is an implicit criticism here of colonialism. When Beti attacks the colonial chiefs he is condemning, by implication, the French colonial administration which invests these chiefs with powers that enable them to terrorize their own people.

The African chiefs in Beti's novels are portrayed as friends of the missionary and allies of the colonial authorities. Drumont pays social visits to his parish chiefs in Le pauvre Christ... and they in turn try to impress him with gifts. In Le roi miraculé, Le Guen visits Chief Mendouga in his house. Beti reveals in his novels his dislike of these chiefs partly because they are puppets of the colonial administration. Even though Mongo Beti detests the white colonizers, he resents more Africans who collaborate with the colonial authorities.[60]

Mongo Beti is against all conservative and repressive forces which thwart the aspirations of the people. The colonial African chiefs constitute one of those negative forces deplored by Beti. It is, therefore, not surprising that Beti tends to denounce these chiefs in his novels. Beti clarifies his attitude to these chiefs in an interview:

> C'est pour cela... que je considère les anciens et les chefs comme les tenants de la droite, de l'immobilisme de la même espèce que la droite. Je n'ai rien à faire avec eux. 61

Beti's concern is what will help the Africans to manage their own affairs and promote their well-being. This explains why in his novels, he denounces the colonial African chiefs who form part of the negative political forces.

ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION

Colonial powers exploit their colonies. This exploitation takes different forms. For example, the colonial authorities may expropriate the natural resources of their subjects. They may buy the farm produce of the natives at extortionate rates, indirectly making the peasants toil for the colonizers. The novels of Beti denounce the economic exploitation of Africa.

Mongo Beti attacks the arbitrary seizure of lands and wealth belonging to Africans. This colonial practice is favoured by the collaboration between the missionaries and the colonial administration. In Remember Ruben, two out of the 15 or 20 houses owned by black traders in Kola-Kola "furent l'objet d'une expropriation." (RR, 204). Dr. Arnaud would seem to echo Beti's critical view when he notes:

> Ce qu'il faudrait ici, c'est un médecin tous les cinq kilomètres! Au lieu de ce bric-à-brac: les exploitants forestiers,... les commerçants grecs, les administrateurs. Ah! ceux-là! On se demande ce qu'ils foutent dans cette saloperie de pays. Comme si les indigènes n'étaient pas assez embêtés comme cela. Une vraie peste... (PC, 262).

In saying that Africa is plagued by these exploiters, Beti is denouncing the economic pillage of Africa.

In Ville cruelle, Mongo Beti denounces the Greeks' monopoly of trade in the French Cameroun. As the narrator observes:

> Le 'Centre commercial', comme on l'appelait, on aurait tout aussi bien fait de l'appeler le centre grec. Tout le long des rues, les enseignes sonnaient grec: Caramvalis, Despotakis, Pallogakis, Mavromatis, Michalidès, Staveridès, Nikitopoulos. (VC, 18).

The phrase "les enseignes sonnaient grec" insinuates the idea that trade in Commercial Tanga is monopolized by the Greek. Beti uses the repetition of Greek names to stress the point. These Greek merchants are shown in Beti's novels to maximize their profit margin and accumulate wealth, which they subsequently remit to their country thereby ruining the economy of Africa. Démétropoulos represents the typical Greek merchant who arrives in Africa with practically nothing and after ten years owns "des camions, de grosses voitures et même une femme." (VC, 209-210). Banda, who appears to be the novelist's mouthpiece, shows his revulsion against this type of European merchant in the colonies. As the narrator puts it:

> Ce Démétropoulos, il [Banda] le connaissait bien... Il ne l'aimait pas... C'est vrai qu'il ne payait pas de mine, avec son nez trop fort et crochu comme un bec d'aigle, avec son obésité récente, ses dents artificielles; c'est vrai qu'il ne payait pas de mine. Il ne pouvait pas aimer le Démétropoulos. (VC, 208).

Banda's resentment of this Greek merchant who enriches himself through dominating commerce in Africa would seem to represent Beti's own views.

Mongo Beti denounces the economic domination of Africa by the colonial powers by contrasting the two Tangas. Commercial Tanga, in all respects, is superior to the African quarter of Tanga. The superiority of the European quarter tends to suggest not only the privileged position of its white residents but also their economic superiority. As the narrator in Ville cruelle puts it:

> Tanga commercial, Tanga de l'argent et du travail lucratif, vidait l'autre Tanga de sa substance humaine. Les Noirs remplissaient le Tanga des autres, où ils s'acquittaient de leurs fonctions. Manoeuvres, petits commerçants, cuisiniers, boys, marmitons, prostituées, fonctionnaires subalternes... (VC, 20-21).

What emerges here is that Commercial Tanga has the economic power and so dictates the pace for the other Tanga and exploits it. The sharp contrast between the two Tangas depicted in Ville cruelle conveys the socio-economic gulf between the colonizers and the colonized. Beti condemns in this way the economic domination of Africa by the colonial powers.

Mongo Beti highlights the predicament of peasant farmers in French Africa who are indirectly made to toil for the colonizers. Even the promulgation of control prices for the sale of cocoa by the colonial administration does not alleviate the suffering of the peasants. Banda, like Mongo Beti would probably have preferred these peasants fixing the selling price to avoid being unduly cheated. The unjust system which Beti denounces in Ville cruelle and Remember Ruben is found also in Sembene's O pays mon beau peuple! Here too, Oumar Faye's

revolt is provoked by his desire to improve the lot of the peasantry. As he puts it:

> Je vivrais cent ans, rien que pour voir une seule fois les cultivateurs fixer eux-mêmes le prix de leur labeur. 62

Thus, Sembene, like Beti, condemns the exploitation of peasant farmers in French colonial Africa.

The novels of Beti have shown that the establishment of agencies such as the Cocoa Management Board, with the ostensible and laudable goal of helping the peasant farmers in French Africa only aggravated the plight of the peasantry. The colonial regime simply substituted the former system with new and more sophisticated methods of appropriating their surplus yield. The colonial authorities engage in the exploitation of the peasantry. The fraudulent tactics employed by the white merchants to exploit the peasant farmers treated slightly in Ville cruelle are fully and vividly described and denounced in Remember Ruben (RR, 148-157). Here, Beti shows that the peasant farmers are exploited by the Greek, Lebanese, French and black traders.

Remember Ruben shows that lack of roads or bad state of untarred roads resulting from neglect of the rural areas by the colonial administration also exposes the peasant farmers to economic exploitation at the hands of colonial traders. Black middle men who manage to reach the backwaters offer the peasants very low selling prices. Having no option, these villagers agree with the terms. Sometimes, as is the case in

Ville cruelle, the merchant bribes the official assessors so that they confiscate the peasant's cocoa, be it of first class quality. They pretend to burn it while in reality it is earmarked for sharing amongst themselves. Banda raises his voice of protest against this form of exploitation as the following dialogue reveals:

> -Mauvais, ce cacao... très mauvais. Au feu!...
> Banda frémit de colère...
> -Non, rugit-il, ce n'est pas vrai !
> Mon cacao est bon!
> Il bondit après les costauds du contrôleur
> (VC, 46).

Banda, apparently, realises that these Control Officers are only trying to trick and cheat him and so challenges them. Given Beti's outlook, Banda's protest here would seem indicative of Beti's own protest against economic exploitation of the peasant farmers.

Remember Ruben shows that while the white merchant is busy robbing the peasants of their cocoa, the black petty trader trains men to help him rob the whiteman of part of the loot. Mor-Zamba watches his black master, Robert, do it to the latter's white master, Niarkos. (RR, 150-157). That is what Jean Louis refers to as "un coup fumant". It is also what Banda, in Ville cruelle just before his reward for recovering the lost money of the Creek couple, contemplates to do - rob the colonial merchants who plunder the wealth of Africans. Mor-Zamba has rightly noted that

> en matière de commerce les pratiques de
> son ancien patron [Fulbert] et des autres
> commerçants koléens, parias de l'affairisme

> colonial qui ne leur concentrait au mieux que le rôle de ramasse-miettes, relevaient à la fois du bricolage et de la jonglerie (RR, 141).

It is clear from Mor-Zamba's assertion that the black petty traders are aware that they, like the white merchants, engage in shady deals. Since the African has no say as far as economic decisions are concerned, it would appear that the black petty trader resorts to this kind of cheating as a protest against the whiteman's exploitation of the African peasant. In this respect, Robert's remark is quite revealing:

> S'il y avait une justice pour punir les méchants, c'est d'abord le Blanc qui en prendrait pour son grade. (RR, 157).

Robert implies here that although the white and black merchants exploit the peasant farmers, the white merchants are more guilty of the offence than the black petty traders. This point is further elucidated when Robert establishes the difference between white and black exploiters: the white exploiters, according to Robert, take all their loot back home thereby sabotaging Africa's economy. On the other hand, the black exploiters put the money in circulation either by giving it back to the villagers in the form of dowry or investing it in the purchase of essential commodities for sale in the remote villages in the interest of the peasant farmers. (RR, 157). One thing is certain, the black petty traders recognize their economic insecurity and try to fight against it by aiming to have their own cut out of the ill-gotten gain of their colonial masters. This is a subtle way of protesting against the whiteman's economic exploitation

of the African, his undermining of Africa's economy. It is also a subtle way the helpless African petty traders contest the whiteman's thwarting of the black merchants' aspirations. By preventing the African from directly controlling commerce in the colony, the white colonial merchants are really oppressing the African. Beti's satirical attack here is not so much on the black exploiters as on the white colonial merchants who prevent the African from attaining economic independence.

Beti denounces the French colonial regime for making it impossible for Africans to control the commercial and transport business in the colonies. The African is even denied direct access to transport business. The African is obliged to buy his transport vehicle through a white merchant. The vehicle must be registered, not in this African's name but in the name of his white master. Despite the fact that the African's name does not appear in any register of commerce, every month of January, he is made to pay a special tax on his vehicle. As the narrator in Remember Ruben puts it:

> De la sorte, tout se passait comme si le patronnat africain eût été inexistant; d'ailleurs, un seul Africain figurait parmi les membres de la Chambre de Commerce. (RR, 236).

African merchants are thus inhibited and frustrated by the colonial government's clear intention of paralysing the African's efforts to manage his own affairs. Beti appears to support Robert in Remember Ruben when the latter deplores the European monopoly of commerce:

> les affaires se trouvaient dans un état lamentable. La fripouillerie avait achevé d'infecter l'arrière-pays et assassinait lentement le commerce. Comment commercer avec des gens sans foi, traiter avec des brigands, faire du négoce avec des sauvages? Les Blancs avaient bien de la chance, eux, de disposer à Fort-Nègre d'une police et de tribunaux chargés de châtier l'improbité. Le commerçant noir ne possédait, lui aucun recours. (RR, 271-272).

If the white traders receive police protection, it is clear that the colonial administration aims to discourage the black traders. A remark by Memmi throws light on this situation: "le colonisé est exploitable à merci et non protégé par les lois de la colonie."[63] By trying to frustrate the black traders the white merchants intend to perpetuate their trade monopoly and enfeeble Africa's economy.

The colonial administration floods the local markets with expensive French products protected in several ways from external and internal competition. For example, in order to promote the sale of imported drinks which directly enriches the colonial treasury, the colonial authorities proscribe the distillation, sale and consumption of African gin which is called in the Southern Cameroons "le bienheureux-joseph" and "bière de maïs." Since the African gin is the major source of income for most families in the Southern Cameroons, one would consider the banning of this local gin by the colonial administration as unjust. The colonial regime commits a worse offence by substituting this locally brewed gin (banned on the grounds of its harmful effects) with French alcoholic drinks which have no less health hazards. It is clear that Mongo Beti

perceives the ambivalence of the colonial authorities and accuses them of banning the local gin in order to better exploit the African. Thanks to Ruben's efforts, the ban placed on the manufacture of local gin is temporarily lifted. (RR, 207). Ruben is apparently the author's surrogate. Ruben's political tracts, indicative of his commitment, tend to reflect Beti's own anti-colonial position. Through Ruben's satirical pamphlet, Mongo Beti is attacking the French colonial regime for banning the local gin in order to promote the commercial interests of France. Oyono made a similar attack in Le vieux nègre et la médaille when the narrator notes:

> On avait interdit aux indigènes la distillation de leur alcool de bananes et de maïs, bon marché pour les pousser vers les liqueurs et le vin rouge européens qui inondaient le Centre Commercial. 64

Beti's novels reveal that the economic infrastructure, notably the roads and railways, set up by the colonial administration is done in the interest of the mother country. The roads and railways convey the products of the hinterland to the sea-port from where they are exported overseas. For example, in La ruine... it is stated that "la route qui n'était que la coloniale 13, piquait tout droit vers le pays du cacao." (RP, 55). This recalls what Drumont tells Vidal in Le pauvre Christ...:

> Si vous creusez une route, mon petit Vidal, n'est-ce pas avant tout au profit et sous la pression des quelques gros commerçants européens du coin? C'est néanmoins des indigènes que vous vous servirez... (PC, 199).

Beti uses Brunot here to unearth the economic goal of the colonizers. Beti accuses the colonizers of pretending to build roads and railways in the interest of the natives when in reality, they set up these infrastructures in order to enhance their economic exploitation of Africa.

Sometimes the black workers are not paid, as the case of Koumé and his fellow mechanics shows. Beti condemns this kind of economic exploitation of the African. Usually, the Greek merchants prefer employing Africans because they pay them very poor wages. As Memmi points out: "il est plus économique d'utiliser trois colonisés qu'un Européen."[65] The Africans are actually not "working" but "being worked", to use Booker T. Washington's words.[66] Evident in Beti's novels is the fact that the colonial subject is made either to work for little or no pay or to produce raw materials without obtaining a reasonable return on the fruits of his labour. Seeing that under colonial rule the colonized has no legal protection, Koumé and his colleagues resort to physical violence: thus, their master, M.T., is lynched. The protest of Koumé and his fellow workers echoes Beti's protest against the colonizers' exploitation of the African. Koume's protest somewhat calls to mind Diaw Falla's in Sembene's Le docker noir. Sembene Ousmane like Beti attacks the colonial regime for oppressing black workers. "African Voices of Protest", an article in Mercer Cook and Stephen Henderson's The Militant Black Writer, contains numerous fictional examples of Africans' protest against the exploitation of black workers by colonial officials. Beti's denunciation of

colonialism reminds one of Walter Rodney's anti-colonial stance. Beti attacks French colonial exploitation and its negative impact on African societies. On the other hand, Rodney contends that "colonialism was a one armed bandit."[67] He sees nothing good in colonialism. This is where he differs a bit from Beti. Although Beti like Walter Rodney attacks colonialism for "underdeveloping" Africa, Beti, unlike Rodney, is not a thorough-going anti-colonialist.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

Africa in the colonial era was ravaged by numerous social and economic problems. African protest writers like Beti try to grapple with these problems in their works. In the pages that follow we shall examine Beti's treatment of these problems.

Social Injustice

Beti's anti-colonial novels reveal that the French colonial regime is notable for the injustice it metes out to its subjects. Beti uses Banda in Ville cruelle to protest against the social injustice practised by the colonial authorities. Banda, cognizant of the fact that his cocoa, "bon inconstestablement" (VC, 46), is unjustly confiscated by the official assessors protests against these officers' "pouvoir discrétionnaire". However, Banda's protest leads to his arrest by the soldiers. Apart from losing his 200 kilogram of cocoa, Banda has "un oeil poché au cours de la mêlée avec les gardes territoriaux" and is chained and detained. Banda, frustrated, "crut avoir touché

du doigt le fond de la cruauté humaine." (VC, 40). Banda's protest re-echoes Beti's protest against the injustice inflicted upon the African by the colonial authorities. It is possible that Banda's plight here is a reflection of Beti's own personal experience. For example, in 1958, following Biyidi's quarrel with a Greek merchant, he was imprisoned for several days. Biyidi was bitter at this unjust treatment. This experience probably inspired Beti's "Lettre de Yaoundé", and "Tumulteux Cameroun".[68] This experience coupled with the assassination of Ruben compels Biyidi to quit the Cameroons in 1959.[69] Also, Beti's own father suffered atrocities at the hands of the white colonizers. The injustice suffered by Banda is, probably, modelled on the atrocity inflicted on Beti's father. While trying to defend molested women against some white colonizers, Beti's father, Oscar Awala, was arrested and thrown into prison.[70] According to Beti, his father's corpse recovered from River Nyong on 2nd November 1939:

> portait au front notamment de nombreuses ecchymoses, qui étaient autant de traces évidentes de corps frappés à l'aide d'objets contondants. Manifestement, mon père n'avait été jeté dans le fleuve qu'après avoir été assassiné. 71

It is understandable that Beti, whose father had been a victim of colonial oppression or injustice, denounces colonialism in his writings.

Bribery and Corruption

Beti's novels show that bribery and corruption started during the colonial era. In fact, corruption pervades all

facets of the colonial government.

In Ville cruelle, the colonial administration is portrayed as corrupt. Banda's uncle serves as the author's mouthpiece when he denounces the corruption of the officials of the Cocoa Management Board. As he notes:

> Les contrôleurs, il faut leur mouiller la barbe.... Et ton cacao sera toujours de la meilleure qualité. (VC, 54).

Banda's uncle reveals too that these colonial officials pretend to destroy the confiscated cocoa of the peasant farmers when, in fact, it is being confiscated for their own benefit. The colonial masters are all a party to this fraud as can be inferred from what Banda's uncle says:

> Et les ordres, dis, d'où est-ce qu'ils viennent? De très haut, fils, je te le dis. (VC, 55).

The colonial soldiers and police are shown in Beti's novels to be even more corrupt. In Remember Ruben, the "saringalas" who work as guards in the forced labour camp can allow a relation to pay an illegal visit to a detainee provided they are bribed. The narrator is clearly expressing Mongo Beti's view when the former attacks the "saringalas":

> Les balafrés étaient gens très vénaux, à tel point même qu'on les corrompait pour un peu de monnaie. (RR, 97).

This reminds one of a similar situation in Oyono's Une vie de boy. When the protagonist, Toundi, is in detention, his sister

brings him un peu d'argent, juste de quoi mettre dans la grande main de Mendin', his "ange gardien".[72]

Since, in the novels of Beti, the law enforcement agents are as corrupt as the other colonial officials, one can conclude that this is ultimately an indictment of colonialism.

Poor Health Facilities

In Beti's novels, the medical facilities in the colonial era are shown to be inefficient.

In Le roi miraculé, Le Guen appears to be echoing Beti's views when he observes that the natives are scared away by the bureaucratic nature of the French colonial hospital administration. Le Guen notes that the hospitals lack adequate equipment and the workers are impolite and corrupt. (RM, 112). The fact that the natives are prepared to cover a long distance and pay to receive good medical attention in the American Hospital confirms the point made by Le Guen. It is clear that the villagers' problem with the French colonial medical services is "moins la foi dans la médicine européenne que la confiance dans les services hospitaliers d'Ongola." (RM, 227). Le Guen contrasts the French colonial hospitals with the single hospital owned by the Americans in the colony. Le Guen notes about the American hospital:

> Evidemment, les Américains n'ont qu'un hôpital dans le pays, mais comme il est équippé et comme les gens y sont avenants! (RM, 227).

Beti denounces in this way the inadequacies of the French colonial medical services.

In Remember Ruben, the inefficiency of French colonial medical facilities is the object of Beti's satire. The case of the prisoner suffering from a severe beating at the hands of soldiers is reported to the hospital. But it takes a long time before anything is done. The narrator observes:

> Comme dans tous les cas graves, ils n'ont envoyé deux hommes avec un brancard que dans l'après-midi; il /the prisoner/ était sans doute déjà mort en sortant du camp. (RR, 97).

Beti accuses the French colonial government of jeopardising the life of its subjects by failing to provide an efficient medical service.

Beti's novels reveal that the suburbs of colonial towns like Kola-Kola and the remote villages have no medical centres. The narrator in Remember Ruben notes: "Kola-Kola manquait même d'un dispensaire pour soulager ses maux les plus pressants." (RR, 201). This is a clear indictment of the French colonial administration for its failure to see to the health needs of its subjects. Beti insinuates that by running an inefficient medical service, the French colonial administration exposes its subjects to deaths that could otherwise be averted.

Unemployment and the Colonial Regime

Unemployment is shown in Beti's novels to be a familiar phenomenon in colonial Africa. In Ville cruelle, Beti

condemns unemployment among the Blacks. In the African quarter of Tanga there is a large, unemployed population given to "l'alcoolisme et tout ce qui excite le mépris de la vie humaine." (VC, 21).

The white colonizers attribute unemployment among Africans to the latter's illiteracy and the fact that they are "veules, vains, trop gais, trop sensibles." (VC, 21).[73] Beti accuses the colonial administration of failing to provide job openings to absorb the unemployed Africans. As the narrator in Ville cruelle puts it:

> L'Administration... ignorait tout ce qui concernait cette demi-humanité, ses joies, ses souffrances, ses aspirations qui, certes, l'eussent déroutée mais qu'elle n'avait jamais cherché à deviner et encore moins à comprendre, à s'expliquer." (VC, 25).

It is clear here that the colonizers are not interested in the well-being of these Africans. Memmi has noted that the main reason for the colonial authorities' neglect of the unemployed Africans is that

> le colonialiste n'a jamais décidé de transformer la colonie à l'image de la métropole et le colonisé à son image. 74

Beti appears to suggest that if the colonial administration had the interest of its subjects at heart, it would have provided them with a job-oriented education. On the contrary, these indigent Africans are denied access to even the rudimentary colonial education. The narrator in Remember

Ruben remarks:

> Nor-Zamba trouva donc à se loger dans une bicoque habitée par des jeunes célibataires tous en chômage, à l'exception d'un homme qui était domestique dans une famille du quartier européen. (RR, 104).

Mongo Beti appears to insinuate here that, in the eyes of the whiteman, the African is only good as a whiteman's servant, short of which, he should be jobless. Beti deplores this and in his novels, he accuses the colonial regime of being responsible for the unemployment among Africans in the colony.

Neglect of the Rural Area

Beti's novels show that the rural community in the Southern Cameroons is not provided with proper farming equipment . It lacks amenities to encourage the younger generation to stay on. Furthermore, its communication system with the urban locality is almost nil. As a result, it remains impoverished and underdeveloped. Mongo Beti attacks the colonial administration for its neglect of the rural areas.

In Mission terminée, this neglect is subtly criticized. During one of Medza's sessions with the natives of Kala, when Medza talks of the method and techniques of farming used by the Kolkhozes[75] in Russia, a Kala villager notes:

> Si seulement on nous donnait aussi un tracteur par clan, seulement un tracteur par clan, sûr que nous aussi on ferait du bon travail, et peut-être que nous aussi on produirait dix fois plus qu'en ce moment... Mais voilà: qui nous donnera jamais un tracteur? (MT, 99).

It is implied here that the peasants have no improved farming technology. The French colonial government favours the cultivation of a single major export crop. Subsistence farming is left solely in the hands of some peasants and their antiquated farming implements do not increase the productivity of their farms.[76] Frustrated villagers abandon the countryside for the towns to look for an alternative means of livelihood only to face a more terrible predicament - unemployment. It would seem that Mongo Beti establishes a contrast between capitalism practised in a Western Country like the United States of America and socialism practised in states like Russia in order to attack the capitalist mode of production encouraged in colonial Africa. The narrator observes:

> l'évocation de la Russie des Kolkhozes avait éveillé de sympathie sinon d'enthousiasme chez ces paysans de chez nous, alors que l'Amérique les avait laissés complètement indifférents. A quoi attribuer cette différence de réactions? (MT, 101).

The question, "A quoi attribuer cette différence de réactions?" helps direct our attention to the fact that the people of Kala prefer socialism to capitalism. Mongo Beti endorses implicitly the Kala's ideological preference. In an article entitled "Identité et tradition", Beti writes:

> notre identité ne peut être sauvegardée que grâce au socialisme, recherché à l'évidence par nos ancêtres, même s'ils n'ont pu le nommer exactement. 77

Besides, in the fifties when Beti wrote Mission terminée, he was a young Marxist.[78]

Beti condemns the colonizers' lack of interest in the well-being of the peasantry. He seems to suggest that the adoption of socialism will improve the lot of the peasantry. Since colonialism is an outgrowth of capitalism, one can see why Beti condemns it.

Social and Cultural Alienation

Mongo Beti attacks the French colonial regime for using education and urbanization to alienate its colonial subjects socially and culturally.

Colonial Education

The colonial school is depicted often in the Francophone African novel. While Laye presents in L'enfant noir an idyllic view of the European school, others like Cheikh Hamidou Kane (L'Aventure ambiguë), Bernard Dadié (Climbié) see Western schools basically as a destructive force which alienates the African from his roots. The narrator in L'Aventure ambiguë describes the Western school as the new form of war the colonizers are waging on the Africans.[79] Beti's conception of formal colonial education is somewhat different from that of the two groups of writers mentioned above. Beti is neither totally for, nor completely against, Western form of education. Like Kane, he recognizes that one of the harmful effects of colonisation is cultural alienation, a consequence of the introduction of Western form of education. Beti denounces the negative aspects of Western education. However, unlike Kane, He still acknowledges the merits of Western education. While discussing

Mongo Beti's attack on Western education, we need to bear in mind that he recognises too the laudable aspects of European education.

For example, his novels portray how school helps the individual to think clearly. Banda in Ville cruelle, Medza in Mission terminée, and Kris in Le roi miraculé refuse to show uncritical deference to their elders probably because of their acquisition of at least some amount of Western education. This is confirmed by Mekanda's attitude in Le roi miraculé. As the narrator puts it:

> C'est que le séjour de Mekanda dans une école, si bref qu'il ait été, l'avait rendu instinctivement méfiant à l'endroit des patriarches et singulièrement d'Ondoua. (RM, 34).

Furthermore, Mongo Beti sees school as a means of enabling the individual to better his lot. Kris, in response to Ntolo's suggestion that he should abandon school, refuses for Kris knows fully the beneficiary effects of school. As Kris tells Ntolo: "Tenir, mon vieux, tenir, ne jamais lâcher, voilà la clé de tout." (RM, 83). In Remember Ruben, Abéna owes his recruitment into the French Army to the minimal education given to him by his friend, the school teacher. (RR, 110).

True, Beti sees formal education as promoting social progress and equipping the individual to challenge outdated social practices. Nevertheless, he also considers this education as destructive - a potential source of cultural alienation. Mission terminée shows that Western education tends to produce the man of the two worlds, that is the African caught between Europe and Africa. Medza symbolises this type

of man. Medza, as Charles Larson has observed, is a classic example of the cultural outcast.[80] While at Kala, Medza recognizes the extent of his social maladjustment. Medza has a mixture of admiration and disdain for the village boys (a contradiction which probably emanates from his split personality). Medza admires the Kala boys for their excellence at village dancing and sports like the "boule". He is contemptuous of them because his Western education makes him look down on such practices he qualifies as primitive and barbaric. Thus, the same Jean-Marie Medza who refers to the villagers' "jeu de boule" as "la rude sauvagerie" (MT, 39) and their assiko dance as "une telle débauche d'esquisses de gestes obscènes, tant de clowneries" (MT, 53) is full of admiration for the Kala's achievements as evident in his remark:

> J'aurais donné tous les bachots du monde pour nager comme le Palmipède, danser comme Abraham le Désossé, avoir l'expérience sexuelle du jeune Pétrus Fils-de-Dieu, lancer la Sagaie comme Zambo, boire, manger, rire en sécurité, dans l'insouciance, sans me préoccuper de seconde session, ni de révisions d'oraux. (MT, 38).

What emerges here is Medza's love for African village life and his resentment of school which has deprived him of this social initiation. As Nouralis puts it, "tout en lui procurant une certaine satisfaction, l'école fait du héros un déclassé."[81] Medza regrets going to school and blames colonial school not only for his loss of contact with traditions of his people but also for his inability to relate freely with girls. Medza's sexual inhibition is a result of the strict moral instruction imparted to him at home and has nothing to do with his having

gone to a European school or his being a city dweller. Britwum has observed:

> Medza avoue sa 'pudeur' et sa 'timidité' par rapport à son cousin, Zambo: conséquence de son déracinement ... [qui] tient à la fois à sa situation de citadin et à son instruction.[82]

We agree with Britwum's second reason for Medza's inadaptation if by instruction he refers not to formal colonial education but to informal education imparted to the child in the family. We disagree with Britwum when he attributes Medza's shyness and chastity to city influence. After all, the city features in several African novels as a fertile ground for the moral depravation of innocent villagers. The city is associated with European culture and sexual immorality in particular. Cécile, in Le roi miraculé, is depicted as a prostitute in town. Formal colonial education is not solely responsible for Medza's maladjustment in Kala. Given Beti's criticism of European education's shortcomings, apparent in Mission terminée, one may assume that he endorses Medza's condemnation of colonial school. But that is not so. Medza's sense of loss for going to school fails to inspire much sympathy because Beti does not share what Medza considers as the root cause of his maladjustment. Since Beti recognizes the positive value of colonial education he would not say like the naive Medza that he would have given "tous les bachots du monde pour nager comme le Palmipède..."

The problematic situation of Medza would seem to reflect the tragic fate of colonial Africa which is aptly depicted by the narrator-hero as follows:

> Le drame dont souffre notre peuple, c'est celui d'un homme laissé à lui-même dans un monde qui ne lui appartient pas, un monde qu'il n'a pas fait, un monde où il ne comprend rien. C'est le drame d'un homme sans direction intellectuelle, d'un homme marchant à l'aveuglette, la nuit, dans un quelconque New York hostile. (MT, 251).

Thus, Beti deplores the image of colonized Africa badly battered by colonial implantation so much so that it is neither African nor European. Beti criticizes the French colonial government for subjecting the French Cameroon to this predicament. Medza's cultural alienation recalls that of Kofi Busia who many years ago made the following admission:

> At the end of my first year at secondary school (Mfantsipim, Cape Coast, Ghana), I went home to Wenchi for the Christmas vacation. I had not been home for four years, and on that visit, I became painfully aware of my isolation. I understood our community far less than the boys of my own age who had never been to school. Over the years, as I went through college and university, I felt increasingly that the education I received taught me more and more about Europe and less and less about my own society. 83

It is clear from Busia's confession that colonial education actually alienated the African from his roots.

Beti seems to suggest that Western education could alienate the African from his roots partly because of its inappropriateness to African situation. Books used in colonial schools are European-oriented, school children are inevitably furnished with ideas and materials alien to the African world. As Medza puts it in Mission terminée, the pupils are "abrutis

par des livres qui leur présentaient un univers sans ressemblance avec le leur." (MT, 231). Medza having failed the baccalauréat, remembers his classmate, Daniel's joke:

> Moi, mes ancêtres furent non point
> Gaulois mais Bantous (MT, 14).

Daniel implies here that what is good as education for French children is not necessarily good for the Bantu or the African. Daniel echoes here Mongo Beti's own opinion of this form of education. Medza also appears to attribute his failure not to himself but to the colonial educational system. This point emerges clearly when Medza remarks: "J'ai été recalé comme il se doit." (MT, 13). Beti, apparently, endorses Medza's reason for his failure, which confirms the lack of suitability of colonial education to the African context.

What Beti objects to in Western education is its failure to prepare the African for life. This is evident in Medza's uncertainty about the specific profession the European education he is pursuing will fetch him. (MT, 115).

Mongo Beti accuses Western education of cutting off the African from one of his ancestral occupations - farming. Zambo appears to be expressing Beti's views when he noted:

> Tout le monde ne peut pas être comme lui
> [Medza]... Si j'étais bachelier, qui
> travaillerait dans notre cacaoyère? (MT, 87).

By portraying colonial education as turning the African away from farming and promoting the neglect of subsistence farming,

Beti seems to blame the lack of development in agriculture on colonialism. Since as Engels has observed, without agricultural revolution there would be no industrial revolution which is a higher level of development in society,[84] it would seem, that in Beti's eyes, colonial education, and therefore, colonialism has contributed to the underdevelopment of Africa.

Mongo Beti attacks the deficiencies of Western education which leads to the intellectual emasculation of the educated African. Thanks to Medza's contact with the Péquenots of Kala, he can evaluate his Western education and recognize its pitfalls. Medza realises the imperfection of whatever knowledge he acquired from school. Although this may be partly because of his personal weakness, it is principally because of the defective school syllabus. The young African is taught many subjects, and in none, is instruction thorough, profound or relevant. He is, thus, made " a rolling stone that gathers no moss." The fact that Medza is incompetent in the subjects he learnt at school emerges in the approximate and superficial answers he gives to the questions put to him by the villagers of Kala on subjects like Geography and Mathematics. It is also confirmed by his inability to give a specific and satisfactory answer to the question: "Qu'est-ce donc qu'ils /the school teachers/ vous apprennent à l'école?" (MT, 73). Whether Medza's failure to give satisfactory answers stems from his inability to grasp what has been taught at school or from his indifference or from the defective nature of the school curriculum, one thing is certain: Medza tries to eclipse his ignorance with a vague answer.[85] Beti endorses

the following remark by Medza:

> C'est fou ce que les connaissances du collège sont illusoires... je découvrais des trous énormes dans mon petit royaume... C'est bien la peine, me disais-je, de gâcher la jeunesse de pauvres bougres si c'est pour les entretenir des années durant de choses approximatives... (MT, 100).

It is clear here that Beti is condemning colonial education for imparting inadequate education to the African. He accuses the French colonial administration of using this type of education to stall the African's progess. Walter Rodney has aptly described colonial schooling as "education for subordination, exploitation, the creation of mental confusion and the development of underdevelopment."[86]

Probably, Beti's attack on the inadequacies of colonial school stems from his personal experience. Alexandre Biyidi was attending school at a time when the French colonial administration had restructured the Cameroonian educational system in such a way as to offer the same type of education to both the metropole and the colonies. Biyidi like Medza in Mission terminée, Kris and Bitama in Le roi miraculé studied the Classics at school. As a student of the Classics, Biyidi was initiated into European cultural traditions. He was bewildered by the respect conferred on him by his own people for being a student of the Classics. He was shocked by the contradiction between the prestige he enjoyed and the unpractical and imperfect knowledge obtained from the colonial school system.

Although Mongo Beti feels that colonial education is unsuitable in the African environment, he still recognizes it has some merits.

The Colonial Town or City

Pre-colonial Africa had cities like Kano, Zaria and Gao. Each was a centre of commerce and government and had a population larger than that of a village. Each was a coherent, autonomous society, distinct from the peasantry. However, when the whiteman came, he created new towns such as Lagos, Accra and Douala. These colonial towns were segregated, with the Whites occupying the comfortable parts and the Blacks confined to the slums. Thus, the colonized African was already alienated socially by the way the colonial city was planned. Mongo Beti's novels portray the colonial town as a form of social and cultural oppression.

The title of Beti's first novel Ville cruelle is already indicative of his indictment of the colonial town. There is already something wrong in the location of the two Tangas as well as their physical disposition. Several references are made to the European town or quarter and the native town in Remember Ruben (26, 84, 104, 105). Beti contrasts both sections of the town in order to highlight the racial segregation and oppression practised by the colonial authorities. He denounces the lack of amenities in the native quarters like Toussaint-Louverture and Kola-Kola. These African quarters have no schools, health facilities nor good roads. As the

narrator in Remember Ruben observes: "Kola-Kola était dépourvu de tout même de l'indispensable." (RR, 200). Contrary to this miserable native quarter, the European quarter has all the comfortable facilities. Frantz Fanon has written:

> la ville du colon est une ville en dur, toute de pierre et de fer. C'est une ville illuminée, asphaltée,... La ville du colon est une ville de Blancs, d'étrangers... La ville du colonisé, ou du moins la ville indigène, le village nègre, la médina, la réserve est un lieu malfamé, peuplé d'hommes malfamés... C'est un monde sans intervalles, les hommes y sont les uns sur les autres, les cases les unes sur les autres, La ville du colonisé est une ville affamée, affamée de pain, de viande,... de lumière... une ville accroupie, à genoux, vautrée. C'est une ville de nègres... de bicots. 87

Here, Fanon like Beti contrasts the European quarter with the native quarter in order to show that the colonial town functions as an agent of social and cultural oppression. Beti quite clearly deplores this adverse impact of colonial town on the African.

In Ville cruelle, Banda denounces injustices perpetrated by the colonial authorities in the towns. As the narrator remarks:

> A maintes occasions auparavant, il avait déjà éprouvé combien la ville était cruelle et dure avec ses gradés blancs, ses gardes régionaux, ses gardes territoriaux et leurs baïonnettes au canon, ses sens uniques et ses 'entrée interdite aux indigènes'. Mais cette fois, il avait lui-même été victime de la ville: il réalisait tout ce qu'elle avait d'inhumain. (VC, 167).

Mongo Beti, probably, wants to draw our attention to the cruelty and frustration which are endemic in the colonial towns.

Mor-Zamba acts as Beti's mouthpiece when he warns Abéna to return to the village of Ekoumdoum after being visited by the latter in the Gouverneur LeClerc Camp at Oyolo adding that "dans une ville, la vie est une chose affreuse" (RR, 97).

Beti attacks the French colonial government for its utter neglect of the natives in town. Some of these helpless Africans return to their villages "où ils parleraient de la ville avec tristesse" (VC, 24). Others like Banda's uncle, the tailor, resign themselves to their fate. The hostile city environment makes the inhabitants depraved, given to "le calcul mesquin... l'alcoolisme et tout ce qui excite le mépris de la vie humaine..." (VC, 21). Philippe Laburthe-Tolra and René Bureau have rightly noted that "l'environnement urbain ... prend l'aspect d'une machine hostile d'où les éléments humains sont éliminés."[88] Beti criticizes the colonial administration for turning its subjects in the urban centres into social scums. He holds the colonizers directly responsible for the crimes committed by frustrated urban dwellers.

Furthermore, these Africans in colonial cities are cut off from their cultural roots because of lack of contact with their indigenous way of life. Thomas Hodgkin has rightly observed that colonial towns of Africa weaken "traditional social ties" and loosen "the hold of traditional beliefs and values."[89] In the towns, the Africans are denied access to a decent way of life. They are discriminated against and so cannot identify with the whiteman in the towns. Even the so-called educated Africans suffer the same fate. In this sense, the city like European schools, turns the African into a half-cast, a marginal

character, not exactly African, not exactly white. Medza is a classic example in Beti's novels.

All the same, Beti recognizes the fact that the town like school promotes progress. Thus, Jean-Louis advises Mor-Zamba in Remember Ruben to behave like a city boy and not like a villager and even gives him the name, Nicolas, to help him out. As he puts it:

> Il ne faut jamais faire péquenot. Les péquenots ce sont des éternels paumés, ceux qu'on exploite et trompe éternellement. (RR, 234).

The political activists who carry out the revolution in La ruine... have varying degrees of social and political awareness because of their exposure to Western education which is inseparable from Western-style urban life. Mor-Zamba, the more mature and experienced amongst the three Rubenists but the least educated and enlightened fails as a revolutionary. As Beti puts it, Mor-Zamba is "le prolétariat timide incapable de faire la révolution."[90] It is not surprising that Beti sees the city as the fertile ground for nurturing the revolution: "Je pense que la révolution viendra de la ville..."[91]

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

1. Albert Memmi, Portrait du colonisé précédé du portrait du colonisateur (Paris: Bibliothèque Payot, 1973), p.156.

2. Georges Balandier, Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire: dynamique sociale en Afrique centrale (Paris: Presses Univ. de France, 1955), pp.34-35.

3. Memmi, Portrait du colonisé, p.99.

4. Ibid., p.155.

5. Léopold Sédar Senghor, Liberté 1: négritude et humanisme (Paris: Eds. du Seuil, 1964), p.9.

6. Lilyan Kesteloot, Les écrivains noirs de langue française: naissance d'une littérature (Bruxelles: Univ. de Bruxelles, 1977), p.301.

7. Frantz Fanon, Peau noire masques blancs (Paris: Eds. du Seuil, 1952), pp.152-154.

8. See, for example, Dorothy S. Blair, African Literature in French (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976), pp.205-207.

9. See Richard Joseph, Gaullist Africa: Cameroon under Ahmadu Ahidjo (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publs. 1978), p.9.

10. Quoted in Gaullist Africa..., p.5.

11. Ibid., p.9.

12. C. Coquery-Vidrovitch and H. Moniot, L'Afrique noire: De 1800 à nos jours (Paris: Presses Univ. de France, 1974), p.205.

13. Ibid.

14. Joseph observed that the taxation on French individuals and firms was kept to the minimum. See Gaullist Africa..., p.9.

15. For a detailed account of the exploitation and oppression of the Africans by the colonizers through the system of taxation see Coquery-Vidrovitch and Moniot, L'Afrique noire..., p.205.

16. Ibid., 218.

17. Jean Suret-Canale, Afrique noire: II L'ère coloniale 1900-1945 (Paris: Eds. Sociales, 1964), p.138.

18. Abbé Raboisson quoted by Henri Brunschwig in French Colonialism 1871 - 1914: Myths and Realities (London: Pall Mall Press, 1966), p.29.

19. Memmi, Portrait du colonisé, p.116.

20. Ibid.

21. Ferdinand Oyono, Le vieux nègre et la médaille (Paris: Ed. Julliard, 1956), p.112.

22. Le Pauvre Christ... offers a vivid picture of colonial forced labour and its indictment by Beti. See PC, 60, 189, 201.

23. David Diop, "Afrique" in An Anthology of African and Malagasy Poetry in French (Ed.) Clive Wake (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), p.138.

24. This situation has also been described by Joseph in Gaullist Africa, p.9.

25. V.H.-R. Manga Mado mentions these deadly sites in Complaintes d'un forçat (Yaoundé: CLE, 1970).

26. Coquery-Vidrovitch and Moniot, L'Afrique noire..., p.201.

27. Memmi, Portrait du colonisé, p.115.

28. James Ngugi, Weep not Child (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1964), p.133. See also pp.130-133 for the whole scene of Njoroge's torture.

29. Coquery-Vidrovitch and Moniot, L'Afrique noire..., p.215.

30. Mongo Beti, Main basse sur le Cameroun: Autopsie d'une décolonisation (Paris: Maspero, 2nd ed., 1977), p.57.

31. Majhemout Diop, Histoire des classes sociales dans l'Afrique de l'ouest II: Le Sénégal (Paris: François Maspero, 1972), p.214.

32. See Coquery-Vidrovitch and Moniot, L'Afrique noire..., p.215. See also Beti, Main basse..., p.58.

33. Compare "Les gens l'adoraient vraiment comme un Dieu..." (RR, 108) with "Bakayoko, Bakayoko!... comme si c'était un prophète!" Ousmane Sembene, Les bouts de bois de Dieu (Paris: Presses Pocket, 1960), p.74.

34. For more details, see "The Decline of Syndicalist Power in Black Africa," in Ifeoma Onyemelukwe, "Sembene Ousmane and His Protagonists: Evolution from Le docker noir to Xala," unpublished M.A. Thesis, A.B.U., Zaria, Oct., 1979, pp.290-301.

35. Jean N'Diaye, "Le syndicalisme," Tradition et modernisme en Afrique noire (Paris: Eds. du Seuil, 1965), p.270.

36. See Beti, Main basse..., pp.60-61; Jacques Benjamin, Les Camerounais occidentaux: la minorité dans un état bicommunautaire (Montréal: Les Presses de l'univ. de Montréal, 1972), p.214.

37. Richard A. Joseph, Radical Nationalism in Cameroun: Social Origins of the U.P.C. Rebellion (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1977), p.193.

38. Coquery-Vidrovitch and Moniot, L'Afrique noire..., p.237.

39. See Jean Suret-Canale, Afrique noire..., pp.18-19 and Coquery-Vidrovitch and Moniot, L'Afrique noire..., p.236.

40. Beti, Main basse..., pp.57-58.

41. Abel Eyinga quoted in Beti, Main basse..., p.59.

42. Cf. Georges Chafford, Les carnets secrets de la décolonisation II, p.347 quoted by Beti in Main basse..., p.148.

43. For a detailed account of Ruben's murder see Joseph, Radical Nationalism in Cameroun..., pp.348-349; Benjamin, Les Camerounais occidentaux..., p.214; Beti, Main basse..., p.67, pp.148-149; Joseph, Gaullist Africa..., pp.54-56.

44. Beti stated in Main basse... that Ruben's death at Sanaga-Maritime was officially announced on 11 September, 1958 and his corpse was shown for a long time in his village while the Bassa people were invited to come and see. pp.67, 148-149. Joseph notes that Ruben's town is Boumnyebel. See Gaullist Africa..., pp.54-56.

45. The U.P.C. was proscribed on 13 July, 1955. See Beti, Main basse..., p.63.

46. Joseph, Gaullist Africa..., p.8.

47. Ibid.

48. Memmi, Portrait du colonisé, p.118.

49. The colonial administrators are shown in Beti's novels to carry out practices like forced labour, through which the colonized African is greatly oppressed.

50. Ousmane Sembene, O pays mon beau peuple! (Paris: Presses Pocket, 1957), p.91.

51. Frantz Fanon, Les damnés de la terre (Paris: Ed. François Maspero, 1961, 2nd Ed. 1982), p.7.

52. Ibid., p.8.

53. The word "mamelouk" (mameluke) is from the Arabic word which means possessed or mad. See Paul Robert (Ed.), Le Petit Robert 2: Dictionnaire Universel des noms propres (Paris: S.E.P.R.L.T., 1975), p.1156. This sheds light on the callousness of the "mamelouks". The "saringalas" or "balafrés" and the "mamelouks" are mostly foreign soldiers. The "balafrés" are the Sara (a tall powerful people) from Southern Chad and from around the Shari river in Cameroon. The "mamelouks" are foreign soldiers recruited from slaves converted to Islam; who were serving in Egypt and later became the rulers of Egypt. They ruled for almost two centuries in Egypt (Mameluke sultans, 1250-1517) until exterminated or dispersed by Mehemet Ali in 1811. See Le Petit Robert 2, pp.1156 and 1784. See also Webster's New International Dictionary, Vol. II. (Cambridge: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1953, 1st print 1909), p.2216.

Mongo Beti affirms in an interview that many of the "Saringalas" are recruited from the North and so are not natives of Cameroon. See Tunji Adegboye, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," in the Appendix to "Exil et retour dans l'univers romanesque de Mongo Beti," unpublished M.A. thesis, Ahmadu Bello Univ., Zaria, April 1981, p.43. Beti tries to attribute the Saringalas' excessive brutality to the fact that most of them are not Cameroonians. However, some soldiers like the "gardes régionaux" in Ville cruelle are recruited from within the locality. They can speak the local dialect and connive at times with the Southerners as is the case during the protest action taken by the mechanics spear-headed by Koumé. (VC, 65).

54. Adegboye, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," p.34.

55. Jean Suret-Canale, French Colonialism in Tropical Africa (London: C. Hurst and Co., 1971), p.73.

56. Adegboye, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," p.34.

57. Mongo Beti, "Identité et tradition," in Guy Michaud, Négritude: traditions et développement (Bruxelles Eds. Complexe, 1978), p.21.

58. Ibid.

59. The Chief of Vimili is said to obey the administration "comme un robot idéal." (MT, 34).

60. This is implied in his narrator-hero's remark in "sans haine et sans amour," Présence Africaine, No.14, 1952, p.217.

61. Anthony Biakolo, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," Peuples noirs peuples africains, No.10, juillet-août 1979, pp.110-111.

62. Sembene, O pays mon beau peuple!, p.150.

63. Memmi, Portrait du colonisé, p.38.

64. Ferdinand Oyono, Le vieux nègre et la médaille (Paris: Julliard, 1956), p.15.

65. Memmi, Portrait du colonisé, p.110.

66. Booker T. Washington quoted by Charles Roden Buxton in The Race Problem in Africa (London: Hogarth Press, 1931), p.12.

67. Walter Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (Enugu: Ikenga Publishers, 1982, 1st ed. 1972), p.223.

68. See Hans M. Zell, Carol Bundy and Virginia Coulon (Eds.), A New Reader's Guide to African Literature (London: Heinemann, 1983), p.364. See also Bernard Mouralis, Comprendre l'oeuvre de Mongo Beti (Paris: Eds. Saint Paul, 1981), p.65.

69. Ibid.

70. Biakolo, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," p.106.

71. Mongo Beti, "Le pauvre Christ de Bomba expliqué," Peuples noirs peuples africains, no.19, jan-févr. 1981, pp.115-116.

72. Ferdinand Oyono, Une vie de boy (Paris: Presses Pocket, 1956), p.175.

73. Cf. the usual stereotyped image of the colonized as presented by Memmi in Portrait du colonisé, p.109.

74. Ibid., p.98.

75. The Kolkhozes are those who do collective farming in Russia.

76. This has been observed by Coquery-Vindrovitch and Moniot in L'Afrique noire..., p.206. See also Nkrumah, La lutte des classes en Afrique (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1972) Engl. transl. by Marie Aida Bah-Diop, p.16.

77. Beti, "Identité et tradition," p.25.

78. Beti affirms this himself in an interview. See Adegboye, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," p.5.

79. Cheikh Hamidou Kane, L'aventure ambiguë (Paris: Julliard, 1962).

80. See Charles Larson, The Emergence of African Fiction (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1978), p.169.

81. Bernard Mouralis, "Une vie de boy (Oyono, 1956) Mission terminée (Mongo Beti, 1957), "Annales de l'Université d'Abidjan: Littérature Série D, Lettres 1970, Tome 3, p.57.

82. Kwabena Dzitwum, "Mission terminée: déracinement et connaissance des choses des blancs," in Recherche, Pédagogie et Culture, no. 47-48, mai-août 1980, p.6.

83. Kofi Busia quoted by Walter Rodney in How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, p.270.

84. Marx Engels, Pre-Capitalist Socio-Economic Formations (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1979).

85. See Dzitwum, "Mission terminée: déracinement et connaissance des choses des Blancs," p.66.

86. Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, p.264.

87. Fanon, Les damnés de la terre, p.8.

88. Philippe Laburthe-Tolra and René Bureau, Initiation africaine: Supplément de philosophie et de sociologie à l'usage de l'Afrique noire (Yaoundé: Eds. Clé, 1971), p.164.

89. Thomas Lionel Hodgkin, Nationalism in Colonial Africa, (London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1956), p.63.

90. Adegboye, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," p.23.

91. Ibid., p.44.

PART II

SATIRE OF TRADITIONAL AFRICAN SOCIETY

IN COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL

SITUATION

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Traditional African society had its own way of life and its world view. In other words, pre-colonial African society had a specific cultural identity. It is important to note the interaction between culture and society. As Linton and Goldschmidt have pointed out;

> A society is an organized group of individuals. A culture is an organized group of learned responses characteristic of a particular society. The individual is a living organism capable of independent thought, feeling, and action, but with his independence limited and all his resources profoundly modified by contact with the society and culture in which he develops.
>
> No culture can exist except as it is embodied in a society of men; no society can operate without cultural directives. 1

Pre-colonial African societies had their own civilisations. July pointed out that as far back as the fifth century B.C., Africans had the knowledge of ironworking as shown by the famous Nok culture located north of the middle Benue.[2] Dumont has suggested that African civilisation reached its zenith in the 14th and 15th centuries. Africans could work iron, silver, bronze and gold.[3] Laye in L'enfant noir recalls the special gift of his father's lineage for goldsmithing. African civilisation was also characterized by subsistence farming and the absence of private ownership of land. Nevertheless, African civilisation was influenced by barter-trader, slave trade, Christian missionary activity and colonization.[4] If one takes into account the external influences that have impinged upon African societies, one can no longer talk of unadulterated, traditional African culture. Edward Tylor

defines culture as follows:

> Culture... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. 5

Tylor's definition of culture brings out the idea of culture as acquired behaviour. It implies that culture is learned and not innate. Culture is imparted to the younger members of the society through the process of socialization. Culture, therefore, constitutes a heritage or a social tradition. Since culture is learned, it is possible that one might acquire foreign cultural elements prevalent in the society. This is true of Western cultural traditions imported into Africa during the colonial era. It is clear then that culture is not static but undergoes constant changes. Acuff et al. have put forward this composite definition of culture:

> Culture: (1) is a unified whole; (2) is learned; (3) extends throughout time; (4) is cumulative and selective in its transmission (that is, each culture adds to and deletes various parts of itself); (5) is symbolically anchored through shared meanings; and (6) is potentially both functional and dysfunctional (i.e. both helpful and harmful). 6

The question that arises here is this: how valid is it to talk of traditional African society in present day Africa? There is no denying the fact that some African rural and urban communities still observe traditional practices which, far from being a carbon copy of the pre-colonial African tradition is only a residue of it. African culture in the pre-colonial period has undergone some changes. It has been greatly modified

in some instances and degraded in others. The fact that Africans, like Medza's father in Mission terminée, are owners of farms where they appropriate the surplus of others is a pointer to the emergence of a new form of capitalism. One can understand why Beti criticizes Africans' resistance to change and their rigid attachment to the so-called traditional African culture which to Beti has been greatly modified by external, cultural influences. Mouralis has written:

> Biyidi sait que ces traditions, loin d'exister en soi, sous la forme d'un héritage venu du passé, subissent en fait très fortement la pression du pouvoir colonial ou néo-colonial qui ainsi les modifie profondément ou les dénature. 7

Mongo Beti attacks in particular the elders for claiming to be guardians of the African tradition. As Beti puts it:

> Il est certain que les anciens connaissent quelques traditions venues de l'époque pré-coloniale. Ils connaissent quelques traditions, mais ils ne les connaissent pas toutes. Ils connaissent quelques bribes d'un système qui n'est plus viable, compte tenu des conditions actuelles. 8

Here, Beti argues that African tradition in its original, pre-colonial form no longer exists. What is seen in his novels are only remnants of the ancestral tradition.

It is, perhaps, worth pointing out here that Beti is a progressive. In other words, he thinks that society should evolve and advance in the sense that it should improve the lot of the majority of the people. Thus, to him, all aspects of a people's culture, their social and political

institutions at any time which do not visibly promote advancement or progress in society are retrogressive and, therefore, should be done away with. He himself makes this clear when he observes:

> Moi, je suis un homme de gauche. Je suis partisan de l'évolution des choses. Il faut qu'une société, qu'une culture reste ouverte pour pouvoir s'adapter à toutes les évolutions, à tous les changements. 9

Beti here betrays the fact that his idea of progress is vague. A society, we feel, should not adapt to all changes but should rather select the changes that will produce more benefits for the greater number of the population. It would seem that this is Beti's idea of progress. He is emphasizing the tendency of some people to feel that everything is all right with their own culture and so are unwilling to accept any change. This is his quarrel with the elders in traditional African society, as his novels amply illustrate. Whether Beti is attacking the colonial regime or the post-independence era, he also denounces conservative, reactionary and unproductive elements of traditional African society at the confluence of cultures.

In the following chapter, we shall focus our attention on Beti's indictment of the evils inherent in traditional African society in both colonial and post-independence eras.

NOTES TO PART II: INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

1. Ralph Linton and Walter Goldschmidt as quoted by F. Gene Acuff et al. in From Man to Society (Hinsdale: The Dryden Press, 1973), p.67.

2. For more details on iron technology in Africa, see Robert W. July, Pre-colonial Africa: An Economic and Social History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), pp. 133-135.

3. René Dumont, L'Afrique noire est mal partie (Paris: Eds. du Seuil, 1962), p.21.

4. Ibid., pp.22-46.

5. Edward Tylor, Primitive Culture (London: J. Murray, 1871), p.1.

6. Acuff et al. From Man to Society, p.70.

7. Mouralis, Comprendre l'oeuvre de Mongo Beti (Paris: Eds. Saint-Paul, 1981), p.15.

8. Ibid., p.16.

9. Biakolo, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," Peuples noirs Peuples africains, no.10, juillet-août 1979, pp.110-111. See also Mongo Beti, "Identité et tradition," in Guy Michaud, Négritude: traditions et développement (Bruxelles: Eds. Complexe, 1978), p.17.

CHAPTER III

ANTI-TRADITIONAL SATIRE

Mongo Beti has observed:

> Je crois qu'il est évident pour le lecteur de mes romans qu'il y a de bonnes et de mauvaises traditions, et en tout cas qu'il ne suffit pas qu'une tradition nous ait été léguée par nos ancêtres pour que nous soyons automatiquement fondés à la vénérer. 1

This remark clearly spells out Beti's attitude to African tradition. Mongo Beti denounces all elements of the African heritage which impede progress in society. Beti thinks that it is foolish "de sacraliser des attitudes, des usages, des habitudes qui ne sont peut-être, en réalité, que fonctionnels, sujets à usure d'une signification fort relative"[2] But Beti is not completely against African tradition. As Mouralis has rightly pointed out:

> L'expérience qu'il [Beti] a acquise au cours des années d'enfance et d'adolescence passées en Afrique lui a appris que toutes les traditions ne se valent pas. 3

In fact, Beti deplores the debasement or disappearance of certain traditional, African virtues. For example, in Remember Ruben (RR, 69) and La ruine..., (RP, 60) Mongo Beti condemns the demise of traditional African valour. As the narrator in La ruine... puts it: Christian evangelism has subjugated the natives "au point d'être désormais dépourvus de toutes les vertus ancestrales de courage et de vaillance." (RP,60). Beti's attack is directed at only those aspects of African tradition which hinder man from improving his lot in society.

TRADITIONAL GERONTOCRACY

Some Bantu ethnic groups in Beti's novels practise gerontocracy. This traditional form of government - gerontocracy - is government by old men.

Polity and Socio-economic Background

In Southern Cameroon, as elsewhere, man's economic and material struggle determines the traditional structure of his society. His social and political institutions revolve around his economic needs.[4]

Traditional African communities are essentially subsistence-farming societies. The women and children constitute the major productive forces. They accomplish the bulk of the farm work while the men discharge heavy duties like hunting, felling of trees, clearing of bushes, building of houses and carrying out of military expeditions. Since farming is the major means of livelihood, women are indispensable to the African men: women are used by the men for the accumulation of wealth. The African man has great need of the woman. This is the main idea behind polygamy practised amongst the Bantu, for the more wives a man has the more his chances of getting many children (which means increased labour force) and of boosting his wealth and prestige. One can, therefore, understand why the woman is regarded in traditional Fang society as the husband's property and is not quite free to desert him.[5] Beti deplores this practice.

Production relations lead to the division of the Bantu society into groups. Two major groups emerge - the exploiter (the men) and the exploited (the women and younger generation). In his novels, Beti denounces the exploitative production relations in traditional Bantu society.

In many parts of Southern Cameroon, it is the old people who form the ruling class. This privileged group are referred to in traditional African societies as the elders.[6] The elders are a select group who claim to have been initiated into jealously guarded, ancestral secrets. These elders also claim to be the depository or "archives" of their ancestral wisdom and heritage. Finally, it is the prerogative of the elders to ensure the perpetuation of these ancestral norms and values and they apply punitive measures against all those who fail to conform to these values. These elders cling to the so-called African tradition because of their own vested interest in the existing social set-up. They, therefore, complacently favour the status quo. Banda in Ville cruelle notes that the elders "n'aiment pas les gens qui remuent." (VC, 130).

In short, the elders endorse the moral and ideological codes passed on to them by their ancestors. They even modify sometimes certain aspects of African tradition to suit their self-interests. Mongo Beti denounces the elders' hypocrisy, self-importance and duplicity. In this way, he demystifies the cult of the elders and thus undermines the traditional hegemony of the elders. In the eyes of Beti,

these elders, like the colonial African chiefs, are reactionaries and foster capitalism in colonial and post-independence African societies. That is why Beti can never see eye to eye with the elders. As he says in an interview: "Je n'ai rien à faire avec eux [the elders]"[7]

The Elders' Vested Interest

Beti shows in his novels that vested interest underlies the thinking and behaviour of the elders. These elders claim to be fighting in the interest of the community when in reality, they are basically concerned with furthering their own personal interests. There are many instances in Beti's novels where the elders unwittingly betray their vested interest. We shall illustrate this with a few examples.

The payment of exorbitant dowry is motivated by the patriarchs' self-interest. In spite of the fact that the colonial administration had fixed the payment of dowry at 500C.F.A. so as to reduce marriage expenses, the exorbitant dowry still persisted. It is not for nothing that these elders who readily collaborate with colonial authorities flout this particular colonial order. Through Banda, Mongo Beti castigates the elders' vested interest here. As Banda remarks:

> Ils [the elders] ont tous des filles qu'ils espèrent vendre un jour. Ils ont dit au prêtre et à l'officier d'Administration des blancs... qu'ils ne renonceraient jamais à une coutume léguée par leurs ancêtres. Les blancs ont répondu que c'est là qu'ils se trompaient: ce n'était pas du tout une coutume de leurs ancêtres... (VC, 83).

The Whites are right. In other words, inflated bride-price favours the patriarchs. This is the reason why the elders defied the colonial authorities. It is true that the payment of dowry is a traditional practice. But Balandier has noted that dowry was initially in the form of a token gift. Rare objects were used by the Bantu for the settlement of the bride-price. However, that practice, as observed by Balandier, corresponds originally "moins... à une notion de prix élevé."[8] The concept of exorbitant dowry evolved with time.[9] Beti might not find much fault with this earlier form of the dowry. Beti, however, is not unaware of the fact that the inflated dowry is a degenerate form of the original idea of the dowry; a creation of the elders, born out of an acute sense of materialism and greed. Banda, acting as the author's mouthpiece, exposes the duplicity of the elders; the pretext for their resistance to change effected by the colonial administration is, apparently, their zeal to safeguard their traditional practice, but the real reason is that inflated bride-price favours them.

Medza, in Mission terminée, remarks that his uncle "n'était pas aussi désintéressé" (MT, 140) in giving priority to an older person when two people, one old and the other young, invite Medza simultaneously to the house. The shrewd Uncle Mama knows that the economic system in Kala, like elsewhere in Southern Cameroon, favours the old: "En général, la fortune... d'un homme à Kala était fonction de son age. Un homme vieux avait plus de chances de disposer de quelques titres de bétail qu'un homme jeune." (MT, 140). Because of

the social set-up, a patriarch tends to have a bigger labour force at his disposal, and therefore, more economic power.[10] That means that the old man in Kala and other parts of Africa is respected because of his material possessions which have some sort of direct relationship with his age. It is a simplistic view to think that the old man in traditional African society is respected just because of his grey hair and wealth of knowledge and experience. Medza initially thought that his uncle was fair in giving preference to the old people's invitation: "Moi, je n'y voyais que justice, considérant naïvement que le respect dû à un individu est directement proportionnel à son age." (MT, 140). It later dawns on him that an old man's riches more than anything else determine the respect paid to him in traditional African society. Therefore, if Uncle Mama gives preference to the old man, it is because he realises that such a visit will offer him better chances of deriving some material benefits. Beti condemns the elders' materialistic outlook that determines their social behaviour.

The elders' covert desire to satisfy their selfish ends leads them to cheat the younger generation. Medza becomes a victim of this social vice. If, initially, Uncle Mama hides his real sentiments behind his theory of consanguinity - "la communauté du sang" (MT, 126-128) - Medza soon perceives his uncle's hypocrisy. Thus, when two sheep are added to the flock already presented to Medza in Kala, the latter makes this ironic remark: "Voilà comment mon oncle s'occupait de tout" (MT, 214). Uncle Mama (an elder) has earlier ruled that

he will take half of the sheep while Medza (who represents the younger generation) takes the other half in the name of "la communauté du sang." Exasperated by his uncle's duplicity, Medza observes:

> Mais je ne l'écoutais plus que d'une oreille. Son personnage me décevait totalement. Tant de sérénité dans ses convictions m'a toujours semblé une provocation ... je lui restais au moins reconnaissant de m'avoir accordé son amitié, quitte à m'exploiter. (MT, 129).

Here, one sees the emergence of Medza's revolt against his uncle for using the traditional idea of consanguinity as a pretext to deceive him.[11] Beti condemns the elders' penchant to exploit the defenceless.

The Essazam elders in Le roi miraculé like the Ekoumdoum elders in Remember Ruben and La ruine... and those of Kala in Mission terminée are basically concerned with fulfilling their ambitions. The elders' concern for self-centredness, coupled with the associated contradictions within this ruling class, prevents them from tackling seriously crucial social problems. Take, for example, the rivalry between Ndibidi and Ondoua. Both vie for supremacy. They pull the unsuspecting villagers here and there like marionnettes simply because they desire to satisfy their selfish ambitions. Their assembly in the dying chief's palace from morning till night, every day, conceals an ulterior motive. Mongo Beti uses Kris to criticize this in Le roi miraculé. Kris describes the Essazam elders as "gourmands" (RM, 131). The word, "gourmands" accurately describes their real reason for gathering in the chief's palace

daily: they drink and chat, display their oratory proficiency and canvass for leadership. None does anything concrete to save the critically sick Chief Essomba Mendouga for that is not their main objective. Gerald Storzer aptly observes that the Essazam elders "like the older inhabitants of Kala, are motivated primarily by selfish goals."[12]

The same pursuit of self-interest is at the core of the elders' generosity. For example, when the Kala chief invites Zambo's father and Medza to his house and gives his daughter, Edima, in marriage to Medza free of bride-price, he counts on future favours. The elders' generosity can be likened to that demonstrated by the women in Jean-François's family in La revanche de Guillaume Ismaël Dzewatama. These village women led by Guillaume's grand-mother present Marie-Pierre with gifts in order to entice her to come back and dwell permanently in their midst. Beti's critical voice emerges in the narrator's comment:

> Cette générosité débridée, c'est bien l'opium où toutes les dupes de la foi et du salut aiment à s'enivrer. (RG, 103).

It is clear then that an elder's benefaction aims to prepare the ground for the exploitation of the recipient.

Beti shows in his novels that almost every move by the elders is determined by their self-interest, though they usually conceal this. The elders' pursuit of their vested interest leads to the oppression and exploitation of the subject class. This is why Beti shows a great deal of antipathy towards the elders.

The Manipulative Tactics of the Elders

It is not for nothing that the elders uphold the cult of ancestors, celebrate the absolute wisdom and discernment ascribed to themselves and encourage African superstitious beliefs. Beti accuses the elders of using these subtle ways to mystify the people, thus, making it easy to exploit them. We shall now examine in detail Beti's denunciation of these manipulative tactics.

The Cult of Ancestors

By the cult of ancestors we mean an excessive respect of, and devotion to the departed fathers and forefathers. The way of life of the ancestors is generally considered a model to be transmitted from one generation to the other. Many traditional Africans believe that the dead ancestors influence the lives of the living. They believe that a kind of communion exists between the world of the dead and that of the living. They try to restrain themselves from violating any of the ancestral practices for fear of incurring the wrath of the departed.[13] Banda, in Ville cruelle, is constantly tormented by this fear. It is the elders who instil this fear into the people in order to avert the infringement of traditional customs and thus enforce discipline. In his novels, Mongo Beti accuses the Bantu elders of teaching the cult of the ancestors in order to perpetuate their dominant position in society.

In Ville cruelle, Tonga, a Bamila elder, in an attempt to convince Banda that he, Tonga, does not hate him declares:

> ... Mes ancêtres morts me sont témoins que je ne t'ai jamais voulu du mal. (VC, 123).

If this African calls on the departed ancestors to bear him out, it shows his belief in ancestral communion. When Banda, after a series of misfortunes stumbles on a large sum of money (16000 CFA) in the late Koumé's pocket he jubilates and lauds his dead father for coming to his rescue. This is evident in Banda's observation:

> S'il avait rencontré une telle chance, c'est tout simplement que son sort avait dû émouvoir la pitié de son défunt père. C'est vrai, son père ne pouvait vraiment pas rester indifférent à ses malheurs: non il ne pouvait pas. Les morts ne sont-ils pas toujours présents là, aux côtés des vivants? Ne les voient-ils pas? Ne se mêlent-ils pas à leur existence? (VC, 171).

Banda's belief in ancestral cult reflects that of the Cameroonians at that time. We take exception to Biakolo's contention that Banda's cult of ancestors reflects Beti's belief in ancestral cult.[14] It is understandable if Biakolo rejects Beti's explanation given in an interview.[15] Sometimes, what the writer says in an interview is at variance with what is implied in his works. Beti has told Adegboye in an interview that:

> Ce n'est pas à l'auteur de dire au critique ce qu'il faut qu'il fasse. Enfin, en ce qui me concerne, je répète que je suis très mauvais critique de mes livres. Etant professeur de littérature, je sais très bien à quel point il est difficile pour un auteur d'être objectif avec lui-même. 16

However, Beti does not accept the views imputed to him by Biakolo:[17]

> ...je trouve que votre interprétation de mes propos est très passionnante et très exacte en général. Mais à propos de la communication mystique de Banda avec son père, je suis un petit peu sceptique. Je ne sais pas si c'est vraiment ce que j'ai dit. 18

But that is exactly what Beti wrote in Ville cruelle, and Binkolo has rightly inferred Banda's belief in ancestral cult. Our quarrel with Binkolo lies in his tendency to see Banda's belief as reflecting Beti's. The fact that a writer portrays a character or characters who believe in ancestral communion does not mean one should ascribe the same belief to him. The fact that Banda resembles, in some respects, Mongo Beti[19] does not mean that he is in every respect like Beti, that all his beliefs tally with those of Beti; after all, Banda has only a rudimentary education. If the Bantu people (typified by Banda in Ville cruelle) mystify and deify their ancestors as most of Beti's novels show, Beti is not a party to this practice.

Mongo Beti condemns the cult of ancestors because it tends to impede innovations in the society. Take, for example, the elders' resistance to the enforcement of divorce by the colonial administration. The Chief of Kala reacts thus to the colonial administration's decision:

> Autrefois, nos ancêtres ne connurent pas certaines des moeurs en cours chez nous aujourd'hui. Nos ancêtres ne connurent pas la possibilité pour l'épouse de quitter son mari. Mais les Blancs sont venus ici; ils ont déclaré qu'une épouse pouvait quitter son mari... En ce qui me concerne, je trouve une telle loi inique, parce qu'elle rend les femmes désobéissantes, mauvaises épouses. (MT, 208).

Divorce exists in principle but rarely in practice among the Bantu.[20] The colonial authorities enforce divorce to the dissatisfaction of the elders who, in fact, are not ignorant of the injustice inherent in the traditional system which hardly allows the woman to leave her husband. "Je trouve une telle loi inique" is ironic because, far from being unjust, it is justice itself: it permits the oppressed woman to find redress, to be liberated. But to the colonial African chief obliged to dispense justice in this manner the granting of divorce is an unfair judgement because it amounts to liberating the woman who is the major source of production in the society. That is not in the interest of the ruling class. However, this truth is masked. The reason advanced by the chief for condemning divorce is merely the obvious: divorce conflicts with the set patterns of behaviour inherited from the dead ancestors. Mongo Beti condemns the elders' calculated attempt to glorify ancestral customs which favour their vested interests, and more importantly, their traditional hegemony.

Mongo Beti is not alone in showing his contempt for the cult of ancestors. According to Georges Balandier, some Africans are conscious of the retrogressive nature of ancestral cult. Balandier received from an educated African in Brazzaville the following information:

> ... Bwango [a chief] voudrait qu'on revienne au culte des ancêtres. Mais les gens répondent que ce n'est pas ça le progrès. 21

We have attempted to analyse Beti's criticism of Africans' excessive reverence for the departed. Beti sees the cult of ancestors as a protext for opposing any change when in reality the patriarchs' resistance to change is motivated by the latter's desire to perpetuate the exploitative relations in the traditional social structure.

The Acclamation of the Patriarchs' Wisdom

The narrator in La revanche... remarks:

> Dans sa masse compacte, Marie-Pierre remarqua surtout les vieux mâles, car leur pas affecte souvent une majesté hiératique, leur vêtement la simplicité antique de la toge, les attributs arborés le mystère des ésotérismes anachroniques. (RG, 73).

The narrator's comment highlights the major attributes of the old in traditional African setting. The old men walk with an air of majesty ("majesté hiératique"). They command great respect and obedience in society partly because of their long acclaimed knowledge and wisdom inherited from their ancestors. Thus, their much trumpeted wisdom is not achievement motivated but simply ascriptive. In this sense, one can talk of the myth of the elders' wisdom. Beti demolishes the elders' so-called wisdom. When the narrator in La revanche... remarks apropos of the elders' wisdom, "le mystère des ésotérismes anachroniques", it is implied that the time has long passed when the elders used their privileged position as holders of esoteric wisdom to mystify and deceive their fellow Africans.

As the novels of Beti show, these elders, in the colonial era, are recognized as the wise men in society. For example, in Ville cruelle, Tonga "se disait vieux et plein d'expérience" (VC, 128). In Mission terminée, Bikokolo, the patriarch of Vimili village is referred to as "le sage du village" (MT, 23). The elders' obsession with their status emerges in the following remark by Banda:

> L'argent, il [the old man] n'y attache presque pas d'importance. Il t'en donnerait même s'il en avait... pourvu que tu l'admires, pourvu que tu vantes sa sagesse, sa perspicacité. (VC, 133).

Banda derides the elders' acceptance of the acclamation of their so-called wisdom.

However, Mongo Beti contests the myth of the elders' wisdom. In Ville cruelle, Banda dismisses the advice of the elders as "inutiles et stupides" (VC, 130) and goes on to note:

> ... un vieillard, c'est beaucoup plus difficile. Il faut l'écouter du matin au soir. Il faut toujours approuver, admirer ce qu'il raconte. Il faut toujours dire qu'il a raison, qu'il est un sage, qu'il a vu le monde entier, qu'il connaît beaucoup de choses, même quand c'est visiblement un imbécile et un gâteux. (VC, 133).

Here, Banda acts as the author's spokesman. By describing the elder as "un imbécile" and "un gâteux", he insinuates that the elders' so-called wisdom is false. Beti objects to the received notion that the elders' presumed wisdom is necessarily true.

Beti's quarrel with the elders' so-called wisdom is that it stifles advancement in society. These elders recline in

their cocoon thinking that they know it all and do not try to improve man's lot in society. Thus, Beti implicitly scoffs at Medza's uncle for whom "tout se ramenait à la communauté du sang." (MT, 128). As the narrator-hero puts it:

> Ce devait être pour lui la clé de toute science, la fin mot de tout mystère, la base de sa conception de l'univers, sa théorie d'Euclide, ou mieux, sa quatrième dimension. D'autres avaient inventé la relativité de l'univers, la géométrie à courbures positives et négatives, lui avait trouvé ça: la communauté du sang, cosmogonie irremplaçable, irréfutable, incontestable. (MT, 128).

It is ironical that while people in the developed countries of the world are preoccupied with great scientific and technological advancement, the African elders (as represented by Uncle Mama here) are theorizing on "la communauté du sang". Beti denounces the elders' proverbial wisdom in so far as it does not contribute to society's progress.

Mongo Beti denounces the traditional practice of making wisdom synonymous with old age. The dangerous implication of this is that the useful suggestions from the youth which could lead to progress in society are relegated to the background simply because the old people like Tonga regard the young ones as imbeciles "incapable de voir clair..." (VC, 128). Mongo Beti contrasts old Lobila's lack of perspicacity with young Jean-Louis's pragmatism in order to contest this traditional norm. Thus in Remember Ruben, Lobila, despite his twenty years experience as a docker, contends that "Fort-Nègre offrait à chacun sa chance: seuls les fainéants ne trouvaient pas à

s'emploient..." (RR, 121). This reveals the shallow-mindedness of Lobila, whom the narrator-author sarcastically calls "le sage Lobila". His reasoning belies his supposed wisdom. In reality, his compatriots in Fort-Nègre are jobless principally because of racial discrimination. The narrator in Remember Ruben makes an ironic commentary on Lobila's supposed wisdom when he observes:

> Pareil à un homme qui n'avait jamais quitté son clan natal, il [Lobila] se croyait un sage, un guide de bon conseil parce que ses cheveux blanchissaient. (RR, 121).

Jean-Louis tells Mor-Zamba:

> Les vieux... tu n'as pas encore vu qu'ils sont complètement aveuglés. C'est qu'ils ont fait leur temps, ceux-là. La vraie vie n'est plus ce qu'ils s'imaginent. L'important, ce n'est pas de se tuer à mettre de l'argent de côté, même quand on en gagne des masses... (RR, 124).

There is a contrast here between Lobila's mentality and the pragmatic and irreverent outlook of Jean-Louis, Lobila's son. Through this contrast, Mongo Beti insinuates that old age is not a mark of wisdom.

Beti is not alone in contesting the cult of the elders' wisdom. There is, for example, Sembene who also objects to the cult of the elders' wisdom. However, their respective indictments of the elders' wisdom differ somewhat. While Beti dissociates himself completely from all the elders, Sembene feels that some elders can also be as progressive as the younger generation. Niakoro, in Les bouts de bois de Dieu, is like the elders in Beti's novels: characters like Tonga, Bilokola

and Ondoua, who think that wisdom is the hallmark of old age, and that the younger generation, should depend solely on the old for advice and direction. Fa Keita in Les bouts de bois de Dieu, though equally old, does not endorse the elders' outlook because he is a progressive like Sembene and Beti.[22] Sembene contends, like Beti, that grey hair should not serve as the yardstick for wisdom.

We feel that Beti is rather too harsh with the elders. Although old age is not the prerequisite for wisdom, it might not be quite safe to write off the wisdom traditionally ascribed to the old. That is tantamount to cutting off the spring that was the source of life to the traditional African society of the present-day. It should be borne in mind that the past gave rise to the present and the present is relevant to the future.

Beti attacks the elders for considering old age as the stamp of wisdom. He contests this practice not just because it is a subtle method of submitting the ruled to the will of the dominant class and thus fostering traditional gerontocracy, but also because it is an impediment on the Africans' road to progress.

The Elders' Perpetuation of the Africans' Superstitious Beliefs

Mongo Beti uses Evariste to condemn the superstitious beliefs of Africans. One of the beliefs of Southern Cameroonians is that if a person kills, the blood of the one murdered and the owl cry for vengeance. The elders obviously use this to

limit violence and murder. Nevertheless, Beti demystifies this belief, as the conversation between Evariste and some villagers in La ruine .. shows:

> --Oh, mais c'est que ce n'est pas pareil, s'écrièrent en choeur les paysans... Le péché mortel, c'est vrai que personne ne l'a jamais vu ni entendu, mais l'appel du sang versé, le hibou et ses hululements la nuit, ce n'est pas une fable, ça... il suffit d'avoir de bonnes oreilles.
> --Menteur! fit méchamment le sapak en se tirant cruellement les deux oreilles et en tournant la tête dans tous les sens. Tiens, on m'a toujours dit que j'avais de bonnes oreilles, et pourtant, dis, je n'entends rien. (RF, 73).

Here, Evariste shows that there is nothing like "l'appel du sang versé, le hibou et ses hululements la nuit." The insomnia and mental torture of the four peasants have no justification: given the cruelty inflicted on the helpless villagers by the brutal soldiers, the latter deserve the capital punishment meted out to them. Beti's objection to superstious beliefs is that they make the Africans inactive.

Beti condemns the superstitious beliefs of his people because such beliefs prevent them from adopting a rational approach to their problems. For example, death or illness is never accepted as a natural phenomenon but is usually attributed to the vindictive or malicious nature of man. Any misfortune that comes the African's way is imputed to the sorcerer or witch-doctor or medicine-man. Thus Yosifa, as well as the two elders, Ndibidi and Ondoua, accuse the Bamaneu, and particularly the wives of Chief Mendouga, of being responsible for the unprecedented illness of the chief.

(RM, 67-68). While the elders are engrossed in mystifying the villagers with the presumed implication of fratricide, nobody thinks of any concrete measures to save the dying chief. One can sense the elders' zeal to profess a whole lot of superstitious beliefs in order to avert crime and maintain discipline in society. Their harping on the adverse consequences of flouting any of those beliefs would serve as a deterrent to others. However, Beti does not seem to value this positive aspect of the elders' astute use of superstitious beliefs. To Beti, the belief in superstition does not augur well for the attainment of scientific reasoning and progress.

Furthermore, Beti detests superstition because it makes the African an easy tool in the hands of the manipulators and exploiters. Thus, the elders who directly control the African fetish capitalise on the superstitious beliefs of the people in order to exploit them. The prevalence of superstition among the Bantu, to some extent, explains the rapid expansion of Christianity in Southern Cameroon.

Mongo Beti accuses the elders of taking advantage of the superstitious beliefs of the people in order to exploit them. The elders encourage some of these superstitious beliefs as a way of maintaining law and order in the community. This is, perhaps, positive. Nevertheless, Beti shows that superstition is, on the whole, inimical to progress.

The Coercive Methods of the Elders

The elders wield absolute authority at the various levels of the traditional social structure. Such authority is vested in the patriarchs and the old in general at the village or clan level. This may be a way of ensuring discipline. But in Beti's eyes, this enables the elders to hold in subjugation the younger generation and the women, thereby securing the principal sources of farm labour power. In other words, it fosters the exploitative relationship in the traditional setting. Beti denounces in his novels the elders' coercive rule.

The Tyranny of the Old

Mongo Beti contests the excessive authority exerted in traditional African society by the patriarchs like Bikokolo in Mission terminée, Ndibidi and Ondoua in Le roi miraculé, Ndzomam in Les deux mères de Guillaume Ismaël Dzewatama, the old men like Tonga in Ville cruelle, Engumba in Remember Ruben; and old women like Yosifa in Le roi miraculé and Mbolo in Remember Ruben.

Bikokolo, in Mission terminée is described as "ce patriarche qui avait pour ainsi dire droit de vie et de mort sur toute personne de notre village." (MT, 26). In La ruine..., Mor-Zamba observes that "les vrais dépositaires de l'autorité ce sont les vieillards, ceux qu'on appelle le Conseil des Anciens." (RP, 281). In Mission terminée, Niam exploits the authority of the patriarchs in order that Medza may be compelled

to embark on the mission to Kala. Bikokolo argues that the pressing problem of recovering Niam's wife concerns every member of the community, he Medza, being a member of the amorphous social block. Niam has pitched the elders in the village against Medza (MT, 26). Beti makes a character, Aunt Amou, criticize Niam. (MT, 27). Beti implicitly sides with Medza. Beti's quarrel with these elders is their submergence of the individual under the pretext of the communal interest. He deplores this because the individual ceases to exist in his own right but is obliged to lose his identity in the interest of social cohesion and the patriarchs' dominance. As Mouralis rightly observes: "L'individu tout d'abord ne peut exister qu'avec l'accord du groupe auquel il appartient et dans la mesure où cette existence individuelle ne met pas en peril l'harmonie sociale."[23] Obiajunwa Wali also remarks: "the myth of heredity and community obstructs the being from becoming."[24]

Beti's agitation for the liberation of the individual from the group might be construed as a defence of capitalism. But in fact, Beti hates capitalism. It might be that, like a liberal Voltaire, Beti simply wants the individual to be himself, claim his freedom and assert his personality. Beti is well aware that political consciousness is vital to the liberation of Africa from all forms of oppression. The man liberated from the village community becomes eventually the young African <u>évolué</u>, the future hope of Africa as Beti's later works tend to portray. For the progressive, man and society should undergo a ceaseless transformation. Mongo Beti

believes that the evolution of man in society is a necessary prelude to the evolution of society at large. Beti's crusade for the liberation of the individual might also be viewed not at the level of the individual but the group. In other words, Beti fights for the liberation of the oppressed typified in the individual (for example, representative characters like Abéna, Mor-Zamba and Jean-François). There are several references to this in his later novels. Beti asserts that Mor-Zamba "est représentant d'une classe prolétaire africaine qui n'a pas le courage de faire sa révolution parce qu'elle n'est pas armée pour cela."[25] It is possible that when Beti was writing his early novels his conception of the freedom of the individual was more liberal but later, as he matures and his socio-political consciousness increases, he adopts the second perspective where the individual like Mor-Zamba is simply representative of a group or class of oppressed Blacks. This is somewhat in line with the Marxist outlook. And Beti at the moment, is no more the naïve progressive he used to be when he produced his earlier works.

Beti is not saying that the youth should never obey their elders. What he appears to criticize is blind obedience or passivity of the youth vis-à-vis the elders. Similarly, he denounces the African tradition that encourages master-slave relationship between the older generation and the young generation. Banda, in Ville cruelle, echoes Beti's satirical voice when he notes:

> Ce qui me dégoûte, c'est seulement que les autres jeunes gens... manquent de courage à ce point... Jamais ils n'oseraient parler en

> face à un de ces vieillards. On n'affronte pas un vieillard... Ouais! un vieillard, un père, un oncle ou je ne sais plus quoi, est-ce que ce ne sont pas des hommes?... Impossible de leur expliquer qu'on peut bien affronter n'importe qui s'il n'est pas droit. (VC, 131).

Beti insinuates here that where an elderly person is right, the young one should comply. Otherwise, he should feel free to object to or even revolt against the social constraint, as Banda eventually does.

Beti conceives the elders as an ally of the forces of tyranny and reaction in colonial and post-colonial Africa. He accuses the elders of conniving with colonial and post-colonial governments to oppress their fellow Africans. There is no significant difference between the elders and the Whites in the colony: both exhibit arbitrary power. As Banda puts it:

> Les Blancs et les vieux, les vieux et les Blancs, au fond, c'est tous la même chose... (VC, 132).

Beti is actually indicating the need for re-examining the notion of automatic obedience to authority in society when the socio-economic structure favours the supremacy of the elders. To Beti, the uncritical deference of the youth to the elders paralyses the aspirations of these youth. The elders' despotism makes life in the village so unbearable for Banda that he contemplates leaving Bamila for Fort-Nègre.[26] Banda's desire to leave the rural vicinity for a colonial town, despite his bitter experience of cruelty in the city, highlights how unbearable the patriarchs' tyrannical rule can be. Banda's self-exile implies

a protest against reactionary, oppressive forces operating at the traditional level in the Southern Cameroons. Banda's protest conveys Beti's denunciation of the elders' tyranny.

Beti condemns equally the cruel and unjust use of power by old women. Old Yosifa in Le roi miraculé and old Ntolo in Remember Ruben are classic examples of female tyrants. Yosifa's tyranny becomes noticeable when she pours torrents of abuse on the Essazam villagers and the wives of Chief Mendouga in particular, accusing them of causing the chief's illness. By virtue of her old age and the authority she wields, Yosifa could insult the villagers and the chief's wives without anyone daring to challenge her. But she wields special authority over the members of the chief's family and that needs further clarification. Balandier tells us that the fact that "le frère se marie avec la dot de sa soeur" among the Fang, explains "les droits que la tante paternelle a... sur les enfants de son frère, puisque c'est grâce au prix de sa vente que son frère a pu se marier et par consequent avoir des enfants."[27] Yosifa is the paternal aunt of Chief Essomba Mendouga. It is, therefore, not surprising that she exercises such authority over her nephew's household. Beti condemns Yosifa's tyranny.

Mongo Beti condemns the African tradition that bestows absolute authority on the elderly members of the society because such authority leads them to paralysing those under them especially the youth. Beti denounces the tyranny of the old particularly as it prevents the tyrannized from improving

his lot or contributing to society's progress.

Paternal Dictatorship

The family comprises the head and his wife together with all others related to them either by blood or marriage. Where this type of family structure is headed by a male, it is said to be patriarchal. It is matriarchal where a female is the head of the family.[28] In Southern Cameroon, as in many other parts of Africa, the kinship system is patrilineal, the father is the head of the family. Although the woman may be the economic mainstay of the family, the husband is still recognized by the society as the absolute master. The wife and children are there simply for his comfort, honour, prestige, in short, the procurement of his self-interest.[29] The father has as part of his responsibility to make decisions of paramount importance for the family members regarding, for instance, sales, marriage and migrations. The members of the family owe him allegiance and complete obedience. The family head has the right to curse or ostracise any dissident member of the family.[30] This portrait fits Medza's father in Mission terminée. As Malone noted, before the father "tout le monde tremble et se plie."[31] Instead of showing fatherly love to his children, he becomes a source of terror and the child lives in awe of him.

Mission terminée is, in a way, a satire of paternal dictatorship. In Le pauvre Christ..., there is an authoritarian father who forces his son, Denis, to be a missionary's houseboy. In Mission terminée, Mongo Beti shows the adverse impact of

paternal tyranny on two adolescents, Jean-Marie Medza and Zambo.

There are several places in the text which show that the old Medza rules his household with an iron hand. Medza describes his father as "papa omnipotent" (MT, 94), "un dragon inutile" (MT, 2?), "le flic... un dictateur à domicile, un tyran au foyer." (MT, 230). Beti condemns here old Medza's tyranny.[32]

Beti denounces paternal dictatorship because it does not make for a peaceful and happy home. This fact emerges in the narrator-hero's remark about his home: "Jamais de tranquillité, jamais de sécurité, des reproches tout le temps, des éclats, la peur." (MT, 230). Medza's home is a model of what a good home should not be. It is characterized by disharmony and insecurity. As Medza observes:

> ... chez nous, on se tançait sans arrêt. Le père tançait tout le monde, la mère tançait les enfants... les garçons tançaient les filles, et la fille aînée tançait sa cadette... On se tançait et se rossait les uns les autres, et c'est le chef lui-même qui donnait l'exemple. (MT, 237).

This is obviously not an environment conducive to the healthy growth and development of a child. This explains, perhaps to a certain degree, why Medza like his older brother does not grow into a viable personality. The emotional distress which Medza is likely to experience will partly account for his poor academic performance. This explains why Medza, compelled to go to school by his father, does not take his studies seriously. As Medza himself admits:

> Bref, si l'on m'avait forcé à aller à l'école, je m'étais arrangé pour l'accommoder à ma sauce, j'en avais fait une distraction, un jeu. (MT, 115).

It also offers a partial explanation to Medza's failure at the baccalauréat. Medza gauges for the first time the gravity of his psychological problem in Kala when he fails to make love to Edima. Medza is too ashamed to admit his inhibition. He almost gives up Edima in Kala for fear of his tyrannical father, "un dieu suprême, un dieu terrible,.. Jupiter tonnant." (MT, 221). Medza lives in awe of his father. His inability to relate freely with the opposite sex can be traced to the despotic influence of his father. As Medza points out:

> Mon père avait tellement veillé à ce que je n'aie aucune vie sexuelle (...), il m'avait tellement donné de complexes sur cette question que la seule idée de faire l'amour avec Edima dans la même case où dormait mon père m'eût littéralement glacé. (MT, 242).

Mouralis has observed that:

> Le père [of Medza] ... n'incarne pas seulement une autorité sociale tyrannique dont le pouvoir, d'ailleurs, comme celui des chefs, est lié de près à la colonisation; il représente encore, au sein du groupe familial, l'instance dont la fonction essentielle paraît être de s'opposer de toutes ses forces à la réalisation des désirs sexuels du fils. Il joue ainsi un rôle castrateur. 33

There is something special about Old Medza's exercise of absolute authority. The Bantu custom in Southern Cameroon does not restrict sex among the unmarried young men and women.[34] But here, Medza is shown to be tyrannized by his father to the point that this young man develops this kind of inhibition. Malinowski

has observed that:

> any maladjustments within the mind and in society can be traced back to the faulty cultural mechanism by which sexuality is suppressed and regulated or by which authority is imposed. 35

Beti accuses tyrannical fathers of hindering the natural development of the younger generation, thereby, producing deviants in society as the cases of Medza and his elder brother amply illustrate.[36]

Fanon has noted that religious or secular education just as "la formation de réflexes moraux transmissibles de père en fils," generates around the exploited "une atmosphère de soumission et d'inhibition."[37] This implies that the subject class should always defer to the ruling class. Malinowski has asserted that "father-right... is to a great extent a source of family conflict."[38] Father-son relationship is usually characterized by conflict in traditional African set-up. This is illustrated by several African novels such as Sembene's O pays mon beau peuple! and L'harmattan. In Mission terminée, the relationship between father and son is characterized by this kind of conflict. This is illustrated by old Medza-young Medza and Mama-Zambo relationships. The latter is mistakingly assumed to be cordial during Medza's first few days of stay in Kala. This must have given rise to some critics' misconception of Mama-Zambo rapport as warm. Palmer describes Mama-Zambo relationship as ideal.[39] As Medza matures, he comes to grips with the true nature of Mama-Zambo relationship: it is characterized by paternal dictatorship. Zambo is, however, not as submissive as Medza and his father does not interfere with

his sex life. Instead of being inhibited like Medza, Zambo swings to the other extreme, he becomes licentious and frivolous. Zambo is aware that his father is authoritarian. (FP, 154, 159). Since Zambo's father is tyrannical, the question of an ideal father-son relationship between the two is ruled out.

Mongo Beti contrasts father-son relationship (Old Medza-young Medza relationship) with uncle-nephew relationship (Mama-Medza relationship) in order to bring out the defects of the former. Medza notes that his interaction with his uncle is more relaxed and cordial.[40] He ends on the positive note: "Je grandissais." (MT, 123). Thus, Mama-Medza type of relationship promotes the healthy growth and development of the child.

Father-son conflict symbolises conflict between generations and as Memmi noted, it is conducive to progress in society. In this regard, Beti, the progressive, sees father-son conflict as positive.

In Mission terminée, the father-son conflict generated by paternal dictatorship nearly degenerates into a physical confrontation between Medza and his father. However, Medza stops short of fighting his father. (MT, 246). Medza's unwillingness to hit his father points to the fact that Beti's heroes in his pre-independence novels, like Oyono's heroes,[41] do not engage in direct physical confrontation with their oppressors, (unlike Sembene's heroes such as Diaw in Le docker noir, Faye in O pays mon beau peuple!, Bakayoko in Les bouts de bois de Dieu and Tioumbé in L'harmattan). Although Medza does not face squarely

his belligerent father as does Mbondé, this tyrannical father of Medza cuts a comic figure here because of the futile attempts he makes to hit the son. Mongo Beti satirizes in this way Old Medza's tyranny.

The tyrannised adolescent ends up revolting against father, family, clan and the social set-up. Medza and Zambo take to "une vie d'errance sans fin." (MT, 250). Like Banda and Kris and like Oyono's Toundi, Medza and Zambo flee from their oppressors. However, whereas Banda contemplates exiling himself from the tyrannical elders, Kris and Toundi try to escape from colonial oppressors. Medza and Zambo evade paternal dictatorship and social constraints. The fact that both Medza and Zambo flee from home tends to underline Beti's indictment of tyrannical fathers.

Medza's self-exile is a form of revolt and this revolt though negative, implies a desire to liberate himself and assert his personality. Nnami rightly writes:

> la révolte contre le père et la famille est un acte sain et indispensable à l'achèvement de soi; il permet de commencer la vie d'homme; nouvelle bataille heureuse ou malheureuse, mais parmi les autres hommes. 42

Although Medza asserts himself in this way, one wonders if this is the kind of independence oppressed Africans (represented here by Medza) approve of. Beti is quite pessimistic here. While Sembene's heroes revolt positively against paternal dictatorship and other forms of social constraints, Beti's heroes tend to embark on negative revolts: in Medza's words

"révolte égoïste et inutile." Medza's remark, "A nous deux la liberté" expresses his bitterness. The narrator describes it as a "cri de détresse, de désespoir total, poussé par le héros pour se marquer l'infortune de son exil." (II, 227). One might infer that Medza the narrator (and implicitly Mongo Beti) has a broader view than Medza. Perhaps, Beti, personally conversant with the experience of exile, must have realised that going into exile does not provide any effective solution to problems. This is somewhat in line with Sembene's view expressed by a character in his short story, "Devant l'histoire": "Changer de pays ou d'épouse ne résout aucun problème."[43] It is, perhaps, because of this that Beti depicts in his post-independence novels, heroes who return to their roots and try to find real answers to endemic social problems. Take, for example, the Rubenists in La ruine... who successfully topple the dictatorial regime of Nor-Bita, Jean-François in Les deux mères... who takes part in an abortive coup and Guillaume who returns from France to Cameroon and successfully fights for the release of his father, Jean-François in La revanche.... True, Beti in an attempt to explain why his pre-independence novels show protagonists who are ineffective (as Melone notes, they "finissent tous dans l'échec,")[44] says that:

> 'A l'époque parce que nous étions colonisés, nous étions condamnés à l'échec dans nos actions. Montrer quelqu'un qui était colonisé comme vainqueur aurait été étrange...[45]

Nevertheless, his portrayal of heroes who react to problematic situations in a defeatist manner does not suggest that Beti is

a radical. Recently, at the time of the production of his anti-colonial novels, he was more of a liberal. However, Mongo Beti's views have undergone a transformation: he has become a radical who creates revolutionary characters like Evariste, Nor-Zamba, Jo Le Jongleur and Jean-François. The reason advanced by Beti is not cogent enough. After all, some other black writers came up in their anti-colonial fictional works with protagonists who are men of action, who engineer collective and constructive revolts in order to better the lot of the masses. Take, for example, Sembenian protagonists like Diaw, Faye, Bakayoko and Tioumbé. We have written elsewhere that

> The Sembenian heroes, like Soyinka's Ofeyi, like the heroes of Césaire and Jacques Roumain - these West Indian writers, Marxist-oriented and revolutionary as Sembene Ousmane - do not exhibit any cowardice as do the heroes of Oyono and Beti, for instance, whose individual revolts crystallise negatively in flight. 16

Beti's pre-independence novels show that he is simply a social and political critic but not a revolutionary. His criticism shows he desires to remedy the deplorable situation of the African in a colonial setting, oppressed not only by foreign domination but also by a traditional gerontocracy. The solution proposed by Beti, that is, personal revolt and exile, is obviously a slow one.

Although Beti, like Memmi and Sembene, might see the revolt of the adolescent against the father and the community as a wise act, a manifestation of his craving for self-assertion and independence, Beti treats this issue in Mission terminée

in order to show as well the disastrous effect of paternal dictatorship.

Maternal Domination

Maternal domination takes two forms in Beti's novels: either the mother or grand-mother out of overwhelming affection for the child wants to exert absolute authority on him or her or she simply manages her home with an iron hand. As Arlette Chemain has shown: "la mère trop aimée renforce l'oppression d'une gérontocratie traditionnelle inhibitrice."[47] This is the plight of Banda in Ville cruelle. Maternal domination usually occurs where the father is dead or physically absent, and the eldest son is yet not fully mature to assume his customary leadership role. Orphans are found in Beti's novels. Those who lost their fathers like Beti himself (for example, Banda, Nelig, Kris, Grigris, Martin, Essola, Perpétue and Antonia) experience the domineering influence of their mothers who, in some cases, get endeared to them (the example of Banda). Where the mother is deceased, as in the case of Ntolo, the character feels the excessive authority of his grand-mother in whose care he is placed. We intend to discuss here one classic example of maternal tyranny that Beti denounces.

In Perpétue..., the incarnation of maternal tyranny is Maria, whose tyranny provokes misfortunes for her children and herself. This widow like Banda's mother dotes on his first son, Martin. Martin, on the other hand, is not

emotionally attached to his mother. Thus, mother-son rapport here is marred by one-sided love. Love is more or less insignificant in Maria's relationship with her other children - Essola, Perpétue and Antonia. What is glaring is the absolute authority which this mother exerts in her home. Maria tyrannizes not only Essola, Perpétue and Antonia but also her favourite son, Martin. Quite unlike the passive African woman, Maria carries out policies in collaboration with her good-for-nothing son, Martin. In this way, Maria "sells" Antonia, her eldest daughter to a wicked man, thereby, condemning her to a perpetual life of poverty and misery. This marriage is contracted in order to use the fat dowry to fetch Martin a wife. Martin, the drunk, is soon deserted by his wife. (p.89). Maria forces the young Perpétue into a marriage (that yields a handsome sum) to enable this tyrannical mother to provide Martin with yet another wife. Martin steals the dowry and goes to squander it in Zombotown. Meanwhile, Perpétue is languishing under the oppression of Edouard, whose cruelty, pettiness, mediocrity and greed parallel those of Baba Toura, the president of the imaginary, African state (which, from all indications, is Cameroon). The maltreatment of Perpétue by her husband leads to her death. Her tragic death worries Essola, her educated brother with a revolutionary penchant and he decides to probe it. The results of his investigations show that Maria and Martin are directly responsible for Perpétue's premature death. Essola resolves to avenge the death of his sister. The severity of Maria's dictatorship emerges in Antonia's warning to Essola:

> Elle a toujours broyé quiconque lui tenait tête: il n'y a guère que père qu'elle n'a pas broyé, mais moi qui les ai vus, je sais qu'elle l'a grignoté jusqu'à la fin. Martin lui-même, son petit chouchou... (p. 89).

However, Essola who is Western-educated cannot be subdued by his mother.

Aware of Maria's tyranny, Essola protests against it by killing Martin, the only thing that will pain her to the marrow, and teach her one of the great lessons of life - never to be tyrannical. As Essola tells her:

> Je t'ai frappé dans ce que tu avais de plus cher, ton fils adoré. (p.294).

However, Essola, bearing the stigma of fratricide flees from the village community. Mongo Beti uses Essola's assassination of Martin to express his condemnation of Maria's tyranny. Martin is not just "la victime expiatoire"[48], as observes Martin Bestman, but also the victim of maternal tyranny.

In Perpétue... maternal tyranny castigated by Beti takes on a symbolical meaning. Perpétue tends to symbolise the African woman in a neo-colonial situation. This African woman, in a sense, represents independent Cameroon. Maria symbolises Gaullist France, the mother of the French Cameroons. Thus, Maria's tyranny epitomizes the domination of post-independence Cameroon by a foreign power - France. Mongo Beti, by criticizing maternal tyranny in Perpétue..., is, by implication, criticizing the French domination of independent Cameroon.

Fraternal Tyranny

In Southern Cameroon, the eldest son is usually the heir-apparent to the patriarchal status.[49] Mongo Beti, in his novels denounces the Bantu tradition that ascribes authority to the eldest sons purely on the basis of birth right. Beti shows first sons whose capability is not commensurate with the absolute authority traditionally vested in them. Some of these characters are Melig in Le roi miraculé and Martin in Perpétue....

In Le roi miraculé, Beti contrasts Melig's irresponsibility with the partriarchal status he inherited from his dead father. Melig drinks excessively, runs after women. Kris knows full well that his elder brother is "incapable de tout ce qui n'est pas une bêtise, pas viable..." (RM, 128). Melig's behaviour leaves a lot to be desired. Mongo Beti uses Kris to attack Melig's incompetence as a leader. When Kris is asked to go to Essazam, he notes: "Après tout, c'est Melig, l'aîné, qui a le plus d'autorité sur ces questions-là" (RM, 78). If Grand-mother who supports Melig's patriarchal authority fails to entrust him with the mission, it is because she is aware of her first son's fecklessness.

Paradoxically, the same Melig, who is incapable of discharging his duties as a first born, uses the authority bestowed on him by tradition to tyrannize those under him. In Le roi miraculé, Beti uses Kris to attack Melig's tyranny, just as he uses Essola to condemn Martin's dictatorship in Perpétue.... Mongo Beti denounces fraternal dictatorship because it is a form of oppression.

However, it would seem that Beti exaggerates a bit here. The majority of eldest sons portrayed in Beti's novels are social misfits: Medza's elder brother ("un vaurien," MT, 253) in Mission terminée, Maurice and Melig in Le roi miraculé and Martin in Perpétue.... Jean François's elder brother, called Emile in Les deux mères... and Edouard in La revanche... appears to be relatively responsible in Les deux mères..., However, in La revanche... Edouard is bought over by the officials of the post-colonial regime who torment his younger brother, Jean-François, arrested for attempting to overthrow the government. Edouard bears the stamp of mediocrity and excessive spending typical of his predecessors - Martin and Melig in particular. There is no denying the fact that in reality some responsible first sons exist. On the authority of eldest sons, Balandier has observed:

> Le fils aîné est non seulement héritier quasi exclusif des biens... mais encore des privilèges religieux - il est le seul gardien légitime des crânes d'ancêtres - et des privilèges politiques, s'il se révèle suffisamment capable. 50

It would appear then that Africans consider to some extent the capability of the eldest son before allowing him to inherit the authority of his late father.

The Elders' Arbitrary Dispensation of Justice

Although the French colonial administration appointed canton chiefs to dispense justice to their subjects we still find in Beti's novels pointers to the vestige of pre-colonial African judiciary system in Southern Cameroon. Beti himself

has pointed out:

> La vraie société bantou est démocratique en ce sens qu'il n'y avait pas de chef. C'était une démocratie, qui était quand même entre les mains d'une classe sociale. C'était les vieillards, qui se réunissaient dans leur conseil, dans leur case à palabres, et qui prenaient les décisions. Et les deux classes réduites à obéir étaient les jeunes et les femmes. 51

The council of elders acts as a kind of judicial body at the traditional level in Southern Cameroon. Mongo Beti objects to the council of elders because it dispenses justice arbitrarily. Instead of showing good leadership and sound judgement, the elders are dishonest and unjust.

For example, in Remember Ruben, the elders take advantage of their privileged position as judges to enrich themselves in a case involving old Engamba and Mor-Zamba. Old Engamba would not allow Mor-Zamba to marry his daughter because this suitor is a stranger when in reality, he only wants to satisfy his desire to increase his prestige by having his daughter married to a man from a wealthy family. When this matter is tabled before the council of elders, these old men deliberately prolong the case so as to extort as much profit as possible from both parties (RR, 70-71). Finally, a rich patriarch who agrees to have his son marry Engamba's daughter bribes the elders into ruling against Mor-Zamba. Abéna, the author's surrogate, here accuses the council of elders of dishonesty and unfairness:

> Rassemblement de pantins! grondait ce soir-là Abéna vaincu et amer,... Des combines tortueuses et fétides, voilà à quoi ils savent s'employer... Bande de pantins... (RR,75).

Abéna denounces the inefficiency of the traditional judiciary. The good old man points out that vanity underlies Engamba's rejection of Mor-Zamba. The council of elders betrays their dishonesty and incompetence by failing to keep to their initial ruling that Engamba should consent to Mor-Zamba marrying his daughter. (RI, 70).

The judiciary at the traditional level is characterized by injustice and dishonesty. Beti condemns the arbitrary dispensation of justice in the traditional set-up. It seems that, to Beti, there is no significant difference in the way justice is administered to the Bantu people in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras. The African is thus denied justice not only at the hands of colonial and post-colonial authorities but also in the traditional, gerontocratic society.

The Impotence of the Elders

All Beti's novels to date contain an indictment of the elders' impotence. In Ville cruelle, Banda alludes to the elders' miserable life of "amateurs de palabres et de censure." (VC, 130). Similarly, for Kris in Le roi miraculé, the elders "étaient de tristes emmerdeurs, oisifs,... inutilement bavards." (RM, 131). Marie-Pierre in La revanche... describes the elders thus:

> Ils adoraient le verbe indéfiniment dévidé, la parole redondante, le mot répercuté à tous les échos. La forme unique de leur culte, son objet même peut-être, c'était le pathos. (RG, 73).

Marie-Pierre's irreverent view of the elders corroborates Kris's and Banda's cynical opinion of the elders. For all these young characters, the elders are idle and indulge in fruitless ranting.

Mongo Beti denounces the elders' impotence. In Le roi miraculé, the dynamism of the young men from Makrita's clan contrasts strikingly with the inaction of the older people. Despite the elders' concerted effort to solve the social upheaval generated by the conversion of Chief Mendouga to Christianity, when their opinion is sought on the issue by Lequeux, the colonial administrator, they offer an unintelligible answer. Lequeux, who had expected the elders to blame the missionary, is surprised when they replied "qu'ils n'avaient point d'opinion précise et partant point d'argument pour l'étayer." (RM, 211). On the contrary, the young Ebibots "entassèrent tous les torts sur le dos de Le Guen dont ils firent le bouc émissaire, s'enhardissant peu à peu, allant jusqu'à demander son expulsion." (RM, 211). Although the elders' reaction could be called cautious diplomacy it is endorsed by the colonial officials. On the other hand, the youth's reaction frightens the colonial masters. In this way, the elders' tact can be interpreted as their tacit connivance with the colonial authorities. The colonial administrators are aware of the elders' passivity and thus prefer them to the refractory youth, as the narrator shows:

> Ce fut une belle invasion dans la grande salle du Palais et Lequeux commençait même à sérieusement redouter l'émeute, quand on vit entrer les vieillards en une interminable procession claudicante, reniflante, toussotante et bedonnante, alors le Chef de la région qui avait une longue expérience des vieilles

> générations et de l'identité fondamentale de leurs façons de penser, connaissait bien leur grande pondération (entendez leur passivité) eut un soupir de soulagement. (RM, 210).

The narrator's comment here shows that Nequeux's fear of mob action diminishes when he notices in the crowd a procession of elders because they are physically and politically ineffective. The elders' incapacity is suggested by the adjectives with which the narrator describes them: "claudicante", "reniflante", "toussotante" and "bedonnante". No positive act is expected of this group of Africans, Beti seems to imply. He makes us see the elders through the eyes of the colonial administrator to whom the elders are individuals who lack drive and are incapable of decisive action.

The elders are traditionally respected for their sound judgement and deliberations. Nouralis has argued that the latter quality has a positive value.[52] It is perhaps the elders' tendency to carefully weigh the consequences of an act that makes them level-headed. By equating the elders' level-headedness with their passivity, Beti aims to contest implicitly their authority as patriarchs. Beti thinks that no matter how long these elders reflect on an issue they never find remedies to problems confronting their society. In a situation demanding a demonstration, for example, they would rather stay calm ostensibly in the interest of peace when in reality they are clearly impotent. Here, Beti is saying in an indirect manner what he stated categorically in an interview that the elders are of no use and therefore should be relegated to the

background. In his own words, "on ne pourrait rien espérer des vieux."[53]

Beti denounces the elders' passivity not only at the traditional level and in their relationship with the colonial authorities but also in their dealings with the post-colonial authorities.

Mongo Beti uses Abéna in Remember Ruben to attack the elders for failing to react against the usurpation of power in independent Cameroon. As Abéna tells "le bon vieillard":

> Votre impuissance [impotence of the elders] date bien d'il y a longtemps, quand sous prétexte qu'on braquait des fusils sur vous, vous avez capitulé, déshonoré vos ancêtres et trahi vos traditions de vaillance et de vigilance.... L'orang-outan a tout dévoré. Un Chef imposé, c'est cela, ô noble vieillard. Comment pouvez-vous accepter de cohabiter avec l'orang-outan, vous, nos pères? (RR, 68-70).

Beti indicts the elders for not protesting against the imposition of Ahidjo on the Cameroonians and also for failing to react against Ahidjo's dictatorship. Beti has written:

> chez les Bantous par exemple, l'histoire et la tradition de Chaka à tel Caligula noir, plus vénéré que Quetzacoall, établissent que chaque fois qu'un individu a voulu imposer sa tyrannie, il a dû traverser un fleuve de sang: comment mieux démontrer que par cette résistance toujours farouche notre aversion traditionnelle pour le despotisme? 54

In La ruine..., Mongo Beti castigates the elders for collaborating with the post-colonial authorities. Instead of intervening and stopping Zoabékwe, the chief's son, and

his accomplice, Van den Kietter from subjugating the young men of Ekoumdoum to forced labour, these elders support them. The traditional authorities' failure to protect the younger ones emerges clearly in the narrator's observation:

> les membres du Conseil des Anciens, c'est-à-dire tous les vieillards, tous les hommes dont l'âge avancé était unanimement reconnu, fraternisaient avec les autorités de la cité, rendant ainsi hommage à une tyrannie étrangère et criminelle. (RP, 230).

The elders are clearly portrayed here as incapable of defending their young ones. They, instead, collaborate with the Establishment "autorité de la cité", who are neo-colonial agents.

The fact that Beti denounces traditional gerontocracy is suggested when Marie-Pierre abandons her project of opening a school and dispensary in her husband's village in order to improve the lot of the villagers. It is because "aucun des mécanismes de cette foutue société ne se prête naturellement au progrès." (RG, 111). Beti appears to look up to the town people, for they seem more capable of bringing about the deserved revolution. An example is the revolutionary action of the Bubenists in La ruine....

THE CONDITION OF THE AFRICAN WOMAN

Before the coming of the whiteman, the woman's position in the Southern Cameroonian society is already ambivalent. On the one hand, the woman is relegated to the background: she is expected to bow to the authority of men. On the other hand,

the same woman is greatly valued and secretly cherished by the men who lord it over her. The second attitude to the woman can be traced to the fact that the woman constitutes the principal source of farm labour in a society which thrives on subsistence farming. She produces the children potentially useful in the farm work and (in the case of male children) in the defence of the group. The daughters are useful in the procurement of alliances. They also help to increase a man's influence.[55] Thus, as P. Trilles has observed "le Fang épousera donc une jeune fille pour se procurer des alliances dans les autres tribus, acquérir ainsi plus d'influence, ayant plus d'hommes rattachés à lui par les liens du sang."[56] Also the woman is the matrice of traditions and customs. Beti's novels show that the lot of the African woman has not improved in the colonial and post-colonial eras.

Beti is not alone in deploring the plight of the African woman. Sembene Ousmane, one of the advocates of women's liberation denounces the condition of the African woman. Guillaume Oyono-Mbia and Francis Bebey, Cameroonian writers like Mongo Beti, also protest against the Bantu practice of exploiting women and they fight for the emancipation of women. However, Beti's treatment of the condition of the African woman seems to be more thorough.

Contempt for the Feminine Sex

Antonia in Perpétue... has observed that the woman "ne compte à peine pour deux sous." (p.90). Perpétue tells

Edouard that "la vie donne tous les droits aux hommes." (p.190). The woman is regarded simply as the property of the man and the man's clan. According to Balandier, the woman

> n'a pas de propriété personnelle considérable, plutôt des biens d'usage, elle n'accède pas aux successions; elle est transmise par héritage, tout comme les 'marchandises' et richesses diverses. 57

Beti treats this problem in his novels. Edima is inherited by Medza's elder brother in Mission terminée, Agathe by Emile, Jean-François's elder brother, in Les deux mères....

In Mission terminée, Mongo Beti uses Aunt Amou to condemn the contempt the African man feels for the woman. Aunt Amou tells Medza:

> ... depuis le départ de madame, tout allait sens dessus dessous chez ce Niam qui était plutôt un fainéant... ce zéro de Niam traitait une femme aussi travailleuse exactement comme si elle avait été une chienne!... elle qui n'avait pas d'enfant, était jugée bonne pour toutes les injures et tous les mépris. Les hommes, quels imbéciles, quels prétentieux!... (MT, 21).

Aunt Amou's remark shows that Niam has a wife who is superior in practical terms to him: whereas Niam is "un faineant", his wife is "une femme aussi travailleuse". Her importance is stressed by the fact that since her desertion of her matrimonial home, "tout allait sens dessus dessous" there. The chronic idler cannot organize his life and home in the absence of his wife whom he despises. This fact emerges in the narrator's comment, Niam avait raté une saison d'arachides depuis le

départ de ses femmes". (MT, 23). Niam might miss yet another season (MT, 24) because he is too lazy to do the farming by himself unlike a few other men in the village (MT, 25). It would seem that in the eyes of Beti, it is unjust for such an unproductive person as Niam, to treat his diligent wife with no respect simply because he is a man. The fact that Niam's wife is childless even makes her more inferior as a woman before Niam. Beti demolishes the myth of the inferiority of the African woman.

Beti contests this concept of male supremacy and disregard for the feminine sex because he knows that women have a lot of potential and can be useful in carrying out a revolution as shown by women characters like Ngwané-Eligui La Jeune in La ruine.... Beti asserts nowhere that African men, "surtout homo rusticus," cannot all alone carry out a revolution, the women are indispensable in this regard. He continues:

> Il y a un éclatement de la culture africaine qui fait que les valeurs féminines sont très différentes des valeurs masculines. Je crois que les hommes [village men] ont fait la preuve qu'ils sont des gens inaptes qu'ils soient vieux ou jeunes. En revanche, les femmes ont beaucoup de potentialités et puis les gens qui viennent de la ville. 58

Mongo Beti like Sembene implies that the hope of a better Africa will not materialize without the active co-operation of the African woman.

Forced Marriages

In the traditional Bantu society in Southern Cameroon,

matrimony is arranged by the parents. Tyrannical parents with the support of the elders tend to force their daughters or sons to marry against the latter's wishes. Mongo Beti shows in his novels that forced marriages are usually motivated by the parents' own materialistic calculations (as the case of old Engamba in Remember Ruben clearly illustrates).[59]

Mongo Beti denounces forced marriage when he shows that it is potentially disastrous. It can result in misery, boredom, disillusionment and frustration. Prostitution or promiscuity sometimes turns out to be one of the negative consequences of such forced marriages. Examples of victims of forced marriages are Perpétue and Ngwané-Eligui La Jeune.

Threats, torture and imprisonment could not force Ngwané-Eligui to consummate her marriage with the old chief. She joins the revolutionary movement that overthrows the chief. Equally, Perpétue is tortured to death by her husband. Beti depicts the failure of forced marriages in order to indict the practice.

The failure of forced marriages may take the form of physical abandonment of the man by the woman and vice-versa. For example, Ngwané-Eligui La Jeune, like all his other wives, abandons the chief. Agathe in Les deux mères... is cleverly deserted by Jean-François for whom she has already had a child.

Guillaume Oyono-Mbia castigates forced marriages in Trois prétendants... un mari. Juliette, the young student criticizes the Fang marriage system that allows the father to

arrange a husband for his daughter. Oyono-Mbia's satirical voice emerges when Juliette remarks: "Quoi... on ne peut pas me consulter pour un mariage qui me concerne."[60] She defies her father and the elders and finally succeeds in marrying the young student, Oko, whom she loves and who loves her too. Mongo Beti condemns forced marriage in his novels because he considers it an oppressive system, a means of enslaving the African woman.

Exorbitant Dowry

Mongo Beti denounces, in almost all his novels, the Bantu custom that encourages the payment of excessive dowry which is partly responsible for the enslavement of the African woman. Mongo Beti has observed:

> Cette coutume est révélatrice de l'esclavage de fait de la femme dans la tradition bantoue où elle joue le rôle peu enviable dévolu jadis au serf dans la tradition féodale. 61

This recalls the remark made by a young Fang to his wife and recorded by Balandier: "Qu'es-tu à te plaindre, tu es ma bête... je t'ai payée assez cher!"[62]

In Ville cruelle, Beti's criticism of the custom of exorbitant dowry emerges in the form of a curse pronounced by his surrogate, Banda: "Maudit soit le premier homme qui obligea son futur gendre à débourser une telle somme!" (VC, 39-40). A conversation between two characters in Ville cruelle is revealing here:

1st Voice: Qui ignore ici qu'une femme coûte
une fortune par les temps qui courent?...
2nd Voice: ... est-ce que tu crois qu'une femme,
ça vaut la peine que l'on se prive
pour elle? Moi, je me suis privé
durant des années pour acheter la
mienne... (VC, 73-74).

The verbs "coûte" and "acheter" depict the woman as a commodity.[63] If a man pays a large sum of money to marry a wife, he is entitled to say he has, in a sense, bought the woman and thus regard her as his property.[64] When the value of exchange is much higher than the real value of the commodity, the dealer aims to appropriate the surplus. In the case of the woman, her father who "sells" her makes enormous gains. Beti condemns this kind of exploitation of the woman.

Banda, like Essola and Beti, criticizes parents who treat their daughters as objects and "sell" them "comme du bétail" (VC, 83). Beti implicitly denounces the payment of exorbitant dowry when Essola observes: "Je ne voulais pas qu'elle [Perpétue] soit vendue, qu'elle devienne l'esclave d'un homme." (P, 47).

Mongo Beti insinuates that the acceptance of exorbitant dowry eliminates the woman's chances of salvation should she fall a victim to her husband's inhumanity as the case of Perpétue illustrates. Martin could not come to Perpétue's rescue because he knows that if he withdraws his sister he will not be able to reimburse Edouard the high bride-price which he has already squandered. Beyong, in Perpétue... is echoing Beti's views when he remarks:

> Surtout ne vendez jamais vos soeurs ni vos filles. Car, dès qu'une enfant aura été échangée contre de l'or, qui pourra encore la sauver, s'il faut la sauver? (P, 71).

Beti is not exaggerating when he implies that Bantu women are "commercialised". Dumont has observed

> Avec la monétarisation de l'économie, ces dots tendent à prendre une valeur excessive et constituent un obstacle au développement. Dans le centre et le sud Cameroun, comme au Sénégal, une dot de 100 000 à 250 000 F.C.F.A. est devenue courante. 65

Dumont has also noted that the young Christian women of Cameroon "encore vendues comme du betail lèvent l'étendard de la révolte."[66]

Several other Cameroonian writers including Francis Bebey denounce exorbitant dowry although none of them attacks it with as much virulence as Beti. Beti's pre-independence novels, notably Ville cruelle, Le pauvre Christ... and Mission terminée, show that the problem of expensive dowry is deeply rooted in traditional African society. But the colonial administration attacks this practice. However, as Beti's post-independence novels show, the problem has got worse with the result that a woman in Perpétue... is alleged to have married off her two daughters (Antonia and Perpétue) at a high price. The post-colonial authorities make no attempt to curb exorbitant dowry. Perpétue incarnates the African woman sold into bondage in the name of marriage and Beti uses her tragic death to condemn the practice of exorbitant dowry.

Beti brings out in his novels the undesirable consequences of the custom of expensive dowry. He indicts equally parents who condone this practice precisely because they stand to gain from it. But, as Beti's novels show, it is usually the woman who is the victim of this kind of social injustice. Beti deplores the lot of the woman as a helpless victim of a tradition buttressed by materialistic considerations.

Polygamy

Africans were generally polygamous in the pre-Christian era. Christian missionary activity in Africa introduced monogamous marriages amongst some African converts, but did not succeed in eradicating polygamy. Georges Balandier has pointed out:

> la possession de nombreuses épouses est, dans la société fang traditionnelle, le signe principal de la richesse et la condition de tout accroissement de richesse; cette richesse détermine en partie le niveau du statut social et permet d'acquérir une sorte de pouvoir personnel dans une société très peu hiérarchisée.[67]

Balandier's remark throws light on the narrator's observation in Mission terminée, that in Kala, "la femme est un signe infaillible d'aisance, comme le frigidaire ou l'automobile en Amérique." (MT, 141). Just as an old fridge or car is discarded, the woman when she has outlived her usefulness is abandonned by her husband. It is implied in this remark that polygamy predisposes the woman to exploitation. The African woman is subjected to enslavement in a polygamous marriage. Mongo Beti in his novels attacks polygamy which, to him, is one

of the causes of the African woman's dehumanization.

The novels of Beti provide a detailed account of how women in polygamous homes are maltreated and exploited. After having produced many children, the old woman is more or less abandonned by her husband who now enjoys the company of his younger wife. In Le roi miraculé, the laments of Makrita, the eldest of the repudiated twenty-two wives of Chief Mendouga, illustrate the deplorable plight of the woman. (RM, 157). Here Makrita reminds one of a character, Noumbé, in Sembene Ousmane's short story, "Ses trois jours". However, unlike Noumbé who reacts with contempt to her husband's action, Makrita protests against the treatment meted out to her.

Although Beti sympathises with this old woman, he does not approve of her reaction. Beti would have preferred her taking up the challenge, asserting herself by leaving the chief's palace. As Krio advises his aunt:

> Tu viendras chez nous, tu seras libre, tu cultiveras des champs et tu iras en vendre le produit à Yaoundé comme Noumi et tu disposeras de ton argent librement, voilà. (RM, 158).

By recommending that the maltreated woman should leave the polygamous husbands, Beti is, indirectly, condemning the inhumanity meted out to the African woman by her polygamous husband.

Mongo Beti refutes the idea that polygamy in Bantu society is inevitable because many wives are needed by the African man to help him in the farm work. Each of the wives of the polygamist strives to cater for her own children while,

as Beti's novels show, the polygamist squanders the hard-earned money of these women on drinking and getting for himself new and younger wives. Mongo Beti attacks the polygamists for their irresponsibility.

Furthermore, Beti denounces polygamy because it permits old men to marry innocent, young girls who should rightly have been married to young men. The Vimili chief has six wives, the Kala chief, seven, Chief Essomba Mendouga, 23, and Chief Mor-Bita, 30. In Beti's novels, the chiefs are the major polygamists. But that is not to say that men who are less privileged in traditional African society are not polygamous. In Le pauvre Christ..., rich peasant cocoa farmers are polygamous. Denis remarks that "les hommes [in Koumé] sont presque tous polygames," (PC, 191) and the Christian mothers at Ekokot remark:

> Et avec tout ce cacao- et cet argent - ... ils boivent, ils prennent de nouvelles femmes... (PC, 91).

Such statements abound in the text. African men and particularly the elders are portrayed as polygamists in Beti's novels. Marie-Pierre's observation in La revanche... is revealing here. As the narrator reports:

> Vieillards ou hommes en passe de le devenir, ils étaient polygames sans exception; leur plus jeune épouse avait parfois l'âge de leur arrière-petite-fille. (RG, 111).

Mongo Beti uses characters like Medza, Kris, Evariste, Mor-Kinda, and Mor-Zamba to castigate the practice whereby the polygamists marry young girls (who could easily pass for

their grand-daughters) and their general inclination to multiply their wives. Beti's indignation against such a practice emerges in Medza's observation during the marriage ceremony of the seventh wife of the Essele Chief:

> Le chef prit effectivement livraison de sa femme qu'il alla déposer dans un fauteuil-assez délicatement pour que le spectacle de ce vieux porc emportant une fillette inoffensive dans ses bras ne m'ait pas révolté, ne m'ait pas semblé odieux. (MI, 185).

The metaphor "porc" used to describe the chief aptly satirizes the practice of polygamy. The use of the word "pig" to describe the polygamist recurs in Le roi miraculé where even Maman describes Chief Mendouga as "ce vieux cochon de polygame alcoolique" (RM, 77). Polygamy, Beti appears to say, is a reprehensible practice. The metaphorical expression, "cochon de polygame" which recurs in Beti's novels underlines his disgust with polygamy.

In La ruine..., there is a dramatization of the grievances of Chief Mor-Bita's wives: one of these grievances is their resentment against polygamy. (RP, 284-285). The chief is rejected not just because he is old but also because he is married to many wives. This is made clear in the first woman's remark that she would not consent to marry the chief's son because he is polygamous. Chief Mor-Bita's rebellious wives contest polygamy because, according to their mouthpiece, "l'époux de plusieurs femmes n'est celui d'aucune en vérité." And she adds: "Il m'aurait fallu attendre des semaines, des mois parfois avant qu'un homme me prenne dans ses bras. Non que les hommes manquaient bien au contraire." (RP, 285). Whereas Beti

implicitly attacks polygamy in his early novels, he condemns it openly in La ruine....

To Beti, out-dated, obnoxious customs should be discarded. In his article,"Identité et tradition," Beti writes:

> Les uns, réactionnaires africains pensent même quand ils n'ont pas le courage de l'avouer franchement, que des pratiques traditionnelles telles que la vente des filles à marier, l'excision (connue dans certaines régions seulement), une rigoureuse division des tâches au bénéfice de l'homme, la polygamie gérontocratique, le prêt et même l'échange des épouses, méritent d'être défendues, étant garantes de notre identité pour la seule raison qu'elles nous viennent de nos ancêtres. 68

Beti, the progressive, condemns polygamy which Engels associates with barbarism.[69] Polygamy, to Beti, is a form of servitude for African women. As Dumont observes:

> la femme africaine se trouve triplement asservie: par le choix forcé du conjoint; par la dot, et la polygamie qui accroît les temps de repos des hommes, comme leur prestige social; enfin par la répartition si inégale du travail. 70

While condemning polygamy Beti advocates monogamy which is compatible with progress in society.[71] "Un homme une femme!" is the recommendation given to the inhabitants of Ekoumdoum by the young revolutionaries. (RF, 294).

It is clear from our discussion that Beti condemns polygamy. As far as he is concerned, polygamy is a retrogressive custom which favours the exploitation of the woman.

The Exploitation and Oppression of Women

Mongo Beti accuses the traditional authorities of perpetuating the exploitation of the African woman. The obsequiousness of the woman facilitates her exploitation and oppression. Referring to the submissive nature of the African woman, Dumont says: "la femme indigène, la petite femme noire si docile, quelle machine idéale!" (PC, 263).

The exploitation of the Bantu woman, though unjust, is exaggerated somewhat by Beti. The fact is that there is unequal distribution of labour. As Dumont aptly observes:

> La majorité des paysannes africaines atteint le plein emploi, et beaucoup sont nettement surmenées. Tandis que les hommes sont généralement sous-employés au moins une partie de l'année (savane), sinon la grande majorité du temps (forêt, sauf les salariés immigrés). 72

In Africa, men generally carry out jobs like hunting, building, wine-tapping, felling of trees and clearing of land for farming.[73] Beti is not ignorant of this basic truth, for in Les deux mères..., he shows that men hunt and fight wars (DM, 142), and in La revanche... he recognizes that clearing the land is the job of the men in Southern Cameroon (RG, 93). However, when Beti depicts the men in Southern Cameroon as completely lazy, he is deliberately exaggerating in order to drive home his satirical message.

Although women in Beti's novels are generally exploited and maltreated, Perpétue stands out clearly as the embodiment

of the oppressed African woman. We need to examine briefly the condition of Perpétue.

Perpétue is deceived into believing that her husband is a privileged civil servant. When she arrives in Zombotown, Perpétue discovers "avec une stupéfaction horrifiée" (P, 123) that she has to live in a "bicoque" and that she is much less equipped than her old mother. (P, 124). Moreover, Perpétue is maltreated by her husband. He treats her as an object. In short, Perpétue is Edouard's slave. Initially, she revolts against the inhuman treatment meted out to her. (P, 125-126). Perpétue's protest conveys Beti's condemnation of the African woman's enslavement.

Edouard, apart from "buying" Perpétue "sells" her to the Police Commissioner M'Barg' Onana in order to get promoted. We disagree with Abiola Irele who sees Edouard's lending of his wife to M'Barg'Onana as "a perversion of the normal social code of marriage".[74] We also do not accept Emejulu's contention that Edouard's act of wife-lending is

> la conséquence rétroactive la plus choquante l'abaissement morale que favorise la ville et le faubourg où des tabous sexuels ne sont plus catégoriquement impératifs. 75

What Edouard has done is not outrageous in the eyes of the Fang people. It belongs to the custom described as "prostitution tolérée" whereby a husband is free "de prêter sa femme moyennant paiement."[76] However, this is a form of exploitation of the

woman. This practice of wife-lending debases the woman, Beti seems to imply.

Edouard is to blame for Perpétue's moral degeneration for he initiated her into prostitution. Unable to love Edouard or M'Barg'Onana, Perpétue falls in love with the footballer, Zeyang. This time, her husband's jealousy is aroused and he punishes her by stripping her naked in public. In spite of Perpétue's pregnant state, Edouard neglects her completely. Edouard's callous reaction is in line with the Fang people's prescription for punishing the woman's adulterous behaviour. These include "exposition nue devant l'assemblée des villageois, attache à l'arbre à fourmis; ablation du clitoris ou supplice du piment; mutilations diverses."[77] It is ironic that a custom that permits a man to trade with his wife's body recommends such severe penalties for a married woman guilty of infidelity. Beti perceives the injustice in this ambiguous moral code. He blames this moral code and Edouard (its advocate) for Perpétue's adultery. Perpétue dies during childbirth probably because of lack of antenatal care. Mongo Beti uses Essola to denounce the treatment of the African woman as typified by Perpétue's predicament. After killing his brother, Martin , who, together with Maria, are to blame for the tragic fate of Perpétue, Essola accuses his mother, Maria, of having sold her daughter "sans pour autant avoir à répondre des souffrances infligées à ces esclaves [Perpétue and other women in her plight] par la cruauté de leurs maris." (P, 294-295). What Beti is attacking through Essola, his mouthpiece here, emerges in an interview. Beti remarks:

> Ce que je dénonce surtout dans ce roman (Perpétue) c'est la misère de la femme camerounaise, qui, malgré son évolution et ses aspirations, vit dans une condition matérielle abominable, elle est vendue; quand elle accouche c'est dans une condition arriérée.[78]

Not only Perpétue is oppressed by her husband in the novel. Antonia, her elder sister, suffers at the hands of her husband. So also is Crescentia, Perpétue's childhood friend. (P, 50). Beti shows in La revanche... that African women are treated as slaves by their husbands. The case of Séverine underlines this. The narrator in La revanche... points out:

> A l'en croire, les maris africains étaient tous volages et violents: perpétuellement en chasse de femelles, ils n'hésitaient pas à rouer de coups leurs épouses légitimes, les mères de leurs enfants quoi, si elles osaient faire mine de protester. (RG, 57-58).

Beti once again exaggerates here. Not all African husbands are fickle and violent. Perpétue symbolises Cameroon that has been exploited, oppressed and tyrannized by Ahidjo's regime. The story of Perpétue's humiliation, agony, and dehumanization would seem to represent, as Irele pointed out, the betrayal of Africa by its leaders, the sacrifice of this continent to base interests.[79] It would seem that Beti recommends revolt for the oppressed African women as shown by the peasant women's collective action in La ruine... Dumont has remarked that "une révolte paysanne africaine pourrait commencer par les femmes..."[80] and this could help the African woman to regain her freedom.[81]

Mongo Beti champions the cause of the exploited and oppressed African women. In his novels, Beti denounces the

condition of the African woman. His novel, Perpétue et l'habitude du malheur stands out as an indictment of the inhuman treatment to which the African woman is subjected by an inhuman social set-up.

MORAL LAXITY IN TRADITIONAL AFRICAN SOCIETY

Like every other aspect of culture the question of morals is relative. An English proverb says: "one man's meat is another man's poison." What may be considered as morally acceptable by one social group may be frowned upon by another. In some parts of Africa, it is a taboo for an unmarried girl to have a child; pre-marital intercourse is discouraged. Among the Fang, Balandier has observed:

> Les jeunes gens célibataires ont, entre eux, une entière liberté de relation sexuelle; c'est la coutume nommée azòya-anròn (azòya, fornication; ngòn, jeune fille). 82

Pre-marital babies are even considered by the Fang as desirable. Although Mongo Beti is a Cameroonian steeped in the traditions of his people, he has been greatly influenced by his contact with the Western World. Thus, he evaluates his people's behaviour from the standpoint of a Westernized African. Beti castigates what he considers as the loose morals of his people.

In Mission terminée, Mongo Beti satirizes the moral laxity of the Kala people. He shows that it is a fallacy to envisage the colonial town as a hotbed of immorality and the village as an embodiment of moral purity. Beti seems to suggest that the inhabitants of some African rural communities

are sometimes more depraved than the city dwellers. Medza, the city boy is shocked by the frivolous and licentious life led by his counterparts in the village. Eustace Palmer rightly pointed out that these Kala inhabitants act in conformity with their ethical norms.[83] Medza is aware that in Southern Cameroon, fornication is not outrageous (MT, 21, 196). We are in support of Palmer when he says that the Kala people should not be accused of promiscuity.[84] Where the European or Europeanized African like Beti sees immorality there might be a different kind of moral criterion.[85] We agree with Soyinka that Beti "demonstrates a truly idealic love dignified by humour, by pathos, and crucial to the novel as a major factor in the development of a young, sensitive personality."[86] Beti, the moralist, condemns the sexual habits of the adolescents of Kala. Medza arrives at Kala full of condescension for the people of Kala whom he regards as "bushmen". Paradoxically, the same Medza, discovering that his peers in Kala are superior to him in other areas of human experience admires them. Not all aspects of the Kala's way of life extolled by Medza receives Beti's approval. Medza's admiration of the Kala's proficiency in swimming and dancing may be indicative of Beti's. However, Beti castigates the Kala's debauchery. Abiola Irele has written about Kala society depicted in Mission terminée: "The picture that emerges is one of a society in decay, of the absurdity of life in a situation where individuals are left to their own devices."[87] Irele's observation is quite appropriate. We, therefore, do not share Palmer's opinion that

> Mongo Beti idealizes the Kalans almost to the extent of turning a blind eye to their faults. This is very much in line with his Negritudist position. 88

Neither do we subscribe to Melone's view that Beti describes Medza's adventure in Kala "avec romantisme, émotion, admiration, idéalisation."[89] Beti is not a Negritudist, as his attack on Laye for producing an idyllic image of Africa in L'Enfant noir clearly shows.[90] Mongo Beti, far from being a praise-singer denounces the retrogressive aspects of African tradition including the moral laxity of the people of Kala.[91]

In Le roi miraculé, Beti criticizes the indiscipline of the Essazam. The Essazam like the Kala are given to excessive drinking and debauchery. Unlike the idealists, Bitama and Beti, Kris has an immoral penchant and cannot help exploiting Medzo sexually. (RM, 194). In Le roi miraculé, Beti uses Bitama to condemn Kris's immoral behaviour (RM, 175) just as he uses another idealist, Abéna, to denounce Mor-Zamba's illicit relationship with a married woman in Remember Ruben. (RR, 50). Kris's sexual intercourse with Medzo recalls somewhat Medza's affair with Odile in Mission terminée. The difference is that while Medza, who like Bitama and Beti "était en retard sur les choses de la chair" (RM, 193), is a novice, Kris is already experienced in these matters. The narrator in Le roi miraculé denounces Kris's immorality when he describes the latter's intercourse with Medzo as "cet accouplement bestial" (RM, 193). The same Kris distils and sells illicit gin and when his crime is uncovered, he takes to his heels. He is simply interested

in making money. (RM, 129). Kris is not ignorant of the fact that by distilling alcohol, he is contributing to the moral degeneration of his people. Alcoholism is recognized as one of the possible obstacles to the development of Africa.[92] Kris's act here is clearly unprogressive. Kwabena Britwum has pointed out that Kris "personnifie surtout l'affairisme, le matérialisme, la débauche des Essazam."[93] This is what Beti finds reprehensible in Kris.

The fact that Mongo Beti is a Beti-Pahouin does not blind him to the limitations and imperfections of the moral codes of his people.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

1. Beti, "Identité et tradition," in Guy Michaud, Négritude: traditions et développement (Bruxelles: Eds. Complexe, 1978), p.17.

2. Ibid., p.19.

3. Mouralis, Comprendre l'oeuvre de Mongo Beti (Paris: Eds. Saint-Paul, 1981), p.15.

4. Cf. Frederick Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1978), p.4. See also Robert W. July, Precolonial Africa: An Economic and Social History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), p.135.

5. Georges Balandier, Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire: dynamique sociale en Afrique centrale (Paris: Presses Univ. de France, 1955), pp.120-121.

6. In the context of this work, elders should be seen as men who are recognized in traditional African society by virtue of advanced age, leadership position in the village, clan or family notably, the old, the patriarchs, the fathers and uncles. Cf. Thomas Melone, Mongo Beti: l'homme et le destin (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1971), p.133.

7. Anthony Mangolo, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," Peuples noirs peuples africains, no.10, juillet-août 1979, p.110.

8. Balandier, Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire, p.126.

9. For a detailed account of the evolution of the payment of dowry among the Bantu, see Ibid., pp.126-127.

10. See Balandier, Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire, pp. 120-121.

11. Sunday Anozie has aptly observed that "Chez Beti en particulier, l'ironie et l'humour (...) constituent... un mode de révolte contre la situation de dépendance de type traditionnel: tels par exemple certains aspects de relations familiales entre membres apparentés." See Sociologie du roman africain (Paris: Eds. Aubier-Montaigne, 1970), p.199.

12. Gérald Storzer, "Abstraction and Orphanhood in the Novels of Mongo Beti, Présence Francophone, automne, 1977, no.15, pp. 107-108.

13. For a detailed account on the cult of ancestors, see (i) H.H. Farmer, Revelation and Religion (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), pp. 91-92; (ii) Geoffrey Parrinder, West African Religion (London: Epworth Press, 1949), pp. 115-127.

14. Anthony Biakolo, "Achebe et Beti: Ecriture et réalité traditionnelle en Afrique noire," Unpublished Doctorate thesis, Univ. de Paris XIII, 1980, pp. 95-96.

15. The psycho-analytical theory of father image is not a sufficient explanation for the cited reflection by Banda. Alexandre Biyidi is not to blame either for supplying the critic of his novels with a deficient explanation. It is not in the writer's place to criticize his own work as he is likely to lack objectivity.

16. Tunji Adegboye, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," in the Appendix to "Exil et retour dans l'univers romanesque de Mongo Beti," Unpublished M.A. thesis, Ahmadu Bello Univ., Zaria, April 1981, pp.27-28.

17. Biakolo, "Achebe et Beti: Ecriture et réalite traditionnelle en Afrique noire," p.96.

18. Ibid., p.95.

19. Banda and Biyidi have both strict and puritanical mothers; fathers dead prematurely while their sons are yet very small; both have tumultuous lives, are anticlerical and are social and political critics.

20. See Balandier, Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire, p.127.

21. Georges Balandier, Afrique ambiguë (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1957), p.218.

22. Ousmane Sembene, Les bouts de bois de Dieu (Paris: Presses Pocket, 1960), p.29.

23. Bernard Mouralis, Individu et collectivité dans le roman négro-africain d'expression française, Annales de l'Univ. d'Abidjan, Série D, Lettres, Tome 2, 1969, p. 67.

24. See Obiajunwa Wali, "The Individual and the Novel in Africa," Transition, Vol.4, No.18, 1965, pp.31-33.

25. Adegboye, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," p.23.

26. And not Tonga as Biakolo notes in his "Achebe et Beti: Ecriture et réalité traditionnelle en Afrique noire," p.109.

27. Balandier, Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire, p.18.

28. See F.G. Acuff et al., From Man to Society (Hinsdale: The Dryden Press, 1973), p. 276.

29. See Balandier, Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire, p. 120. See also Bronislaw Malinowski, Sex and Repression in Savage Society (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1927), p.31.

30. Acuff et al., From Man to Society, p. 276. See also Melone in Mongo Beti: l'homme et le destin, pp. 134-135

31. Melone, Mongo Beti: l'homme et le destin, p. 134. We have shown elsewhere that African fathers are generally "fanatical, reactionary and uncompromisingly authoritative." See Ifeoma Onyemelukwe, "Sembene Ousmane and His Protagonists: Evolution from Le docker noir to Xala," Unpublished M.A. thesis, Ahmadu Bello Univ., Zaria, 1979, p. 53.

32. There is a remarkable contrast between Medza's father and Laye's father in L'enfant noir. Laye's father, as opposed to Medza's father, is quite sympathetic. He patiently socializes his son, Laye. He is, in fact, an ideal father.

33. Mouralis, Compredre l'oeuvre de Mongo Beti, p. 52. Mouralis has observed elsewhere that "Chez Mongo Beti, dans Mission terminée, le père apparaît comme un personnage hostile, opposé systématiquement aux aspirations les plus légitimes de ses enfants." See Individu et collectivité dans le roman négro-africain d'expression française, p. 16

34. See Balandier, Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire, p. 121.

35. Malinowski, Sex and Repression in Savage Society, p. 276.

36. It is somewhat like the case of Banda who gets fixated because of the excessive domineering influence of his beloved mother, referred to as "l'ogresse" by Charly-Gabriel Mbock. See Comprendre Ville cruelle d'Eza Boto (Paris: Eds. Saint-Paul, 1981), p. 64.

37. Frantz Fanon, Les damnés de la terre (Paris: Librairie François Maspero, 1968), p. 7.

38. Malinowski, Sex and Repression in Savage Society, p. 32.

39. See Eustace Palmer, The Growth of the African Novel: Studies in African Literature (London: Heinemann, 1979), p. 152. He made a similar statement in his article, "An interpretation: Mongo Beti's Mission to Kala" in African Literature today, Nos. 1,2,3,4. Ed. E.D. Jones, 1972, p. 35.

40. We have alsewhere noted that uncle-nephew relationship in Africa is more cordial than father-son rapport. See Onyemelukwe, "Sembene Ousmane and His Protagonists..." p. 59. Balandier tried to explain why uncle-nephew relationship is more cordial than father-son relationship in Africa. See Balandier, Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire, p. 118.

41. Cf. the confrontation between Toundi and his father. See Oyono, Une vie de boy, p. 19.

42. Albert Memmi, Portrait du colonisé précédé du portrait du colonisateur et d'une préface de Jean-Paul Sartre (Paris: Petite Bibliothèque Payot, 1973), p. 126.

43. Ousmane Sembene, Voltaïque (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1962), p. 13.

44. Melone, Mongo Beti: L'homme et le destin, p. 89.

45. Adegboye, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," p. 21.

46. Onyemelukwe, "Sembene Ousmane and His Protagonists...," p. 28.

47. Arlette Chemain, "Ville cruelle: situation oedipienne, mère castratrice," Présence Francophone, No. 13, 1976, pp. 24-25, 28.

48. Martin Bestman, "Une Lecture de Perpétue de Mongo Beti," Présence Francophone, No. 24, Printemps 1982, p. 45.

49. For more details on this, see Balandier, Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire, p. 117. See also Acuff et al. From Man to Society, p. 276.

50. Balandier, Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire, p. 117.

51. Biakolo, "Achebe et Beti: Ecriture et réalité traditionnelle en Afrique noire," p. 109. See also RC, 109 where Raoul tells Marie-Pierre "il n'y a pas de chef ici."

52. Mouralis, Comprendre l'oeuvre de Mongo Beti, p. 15.

53. Adegboye, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," p. 44.

54. Beti, "Identité et tradition," p. 24.

55. Balandier, Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire, pp. 120 - 121.

56. Quoted by Balandier, Ibid., p. 120.

57. Balandier, Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire, p. 120.

58. Adegboye, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," pp. 44-45.

59. Balandier notes that personal advantages determine the choice of a son-in-law in the traditional African society. See Balandier, Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire, pp. 120-121.

60. Guillaume Oyono-Mbia, Trois prétendants...un mari (Yaoundé: Eds. Clé, 1964, 2nd ed. 1969), p.20.

61. Beti, "Identité et tradition," p.17.

62. Balandier, Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire, p.120.

63. Worthy of note is the recurrent use of the metaphor, "vendez" in Beti's novels. It is probably meant to amplify the degradation of the African woman by this marriage custom of exorbitant dowry. Guillaume Oyono-Mbia, in his Trois prétendants... un mari, uses the same metaphor to condemn the payment of exorbitant dowry when Juliette whose parents aspire to give to the highest bidder, sadly retorts: "Quoi? Je suis donc à vendre?... que j'accepte de me laisser vendre comme une chèvre ?" See Trois prétendants... un mari (Yaoundé: Eds. Clé, 1964), p.20.

64. This is probably the rationale behind the traditional conception of the woman as "la propriété d'un homme" (RP, 137); see Balandier, Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire, p.120. It also offers a partial explanation to the practice of discouraging a woman from deserting her husband. As the elders argue in La ruine... "il faudrait plutôt aider le mari à recouvrer son bien..." (RP, 137).

65. René Dumont, L'Afrique noire est mal partie (Paris: Eds. du Seuil, 1962), p.134.

66. Ibid., p.135.

67. Balandier, Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire, p.121.

68. Beti, "Identité et tradition," p.18.

69. Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, p.83.

70. Dumont, L'Afrique noire est mal partie, p. 189.

71. Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, p.75.

72. Dumont, L'Afrique noire est mal-partie, p.188.

73. Walter Rodney has equally observed that African men carry out such jobs. See How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (Enugu: Fenga Publ., 1982, 1st ed. 1972), p.248.

74. Abiola Irele, "Parables of the African Condition: A Comparative Study of three Post-Colonial Novels," Journal of Africa and Comparative Literature, no.1, March 1981, p.74.

75. James Amejulu, "Mongo Beti et la recherche d'identité: pour une certaine lecture de Perpétue," Unpublished text, Paris X, Nanterre, 1977, p.94.

76. Balandier, Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire, p.122.

77. Ibid.

78. Adegboye, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," pp. 15-16.

79. Irele, "Parables of the African Condition: A Comparative Study of three Post-Colonial Novels," p.73.

80. Dumont, L'Afrique noire est mal-partie, p.189.

81. Ibid.

82. See Balandier, Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire, p.121.

83. Palmer, The Growth of the African Novel, p.147.

84. Ibid.

85. To elucidate this point see Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, p.51.

86. Soyinka as quoted by Michael Popkin (Ed.) in A Library of Literary Criticism: Modern Black Writers (New York: Frederick Ungar Publ., 1978), p.81.

87. Irele, The African Experience in Literature and Ideology, p. 155.

88. Palmer, The Growth of the African Novel, p.146. Palmer even contradicts himself when in his article: "An Interpretation: Mongo Beti's Mission to Kala", he states: "Mongo Beti is too intelligent to idealize the Kalans..." p.43.

89. Melone, Mongo Beti: L'homme et le destin, p.274.

90. See Mongo Beti, "Afrique noire, littérature rose," Présence Africaine, vol.1 - 11, 1955, p.144. See also, Popkin (ed.), Modern Black Writers..., pp. 120-121.

91. Beti's attack on the imperfections of his people's norms and habits is to the extent that some critics have accused him of betraying his cultural identity. As Beti notes himself in "identité et tradition":

> M'interviewant en 1957 à la télévision... à propos de Mission terminée qui venait de paraître, Pierre Dumayet me révéla, comme un petit scandale, que j'avais désacralisé la société africaine. P.21.

92. See Dumont, L'Afrique noire est mal-partie, p.40.

93. Kwabena Dritwum, "Le moraliste face au matérialiste: une lecture du roi miraculé," Peuples noirs peuples africains, no.27, mai-juin 1982, p.120.

PART III

SATIRE OF POST-INDEPENDENCE REGIME

CHAPTER IV

I. SATIRE OF NEO-COLONIALISM

After independence, the ex-colonial powers do not interfere directly in the affairs of independent African states. They use more subtle methods to maintain their former colonies in subjugation. This is what is termed neo-colonialism. Beti denounces the neo-colonial subjugation of independent Cameroon.

The Imposition of Ahidjo on Cameroonians

In Remember Ruben, Mongo Beti celebrates the heroic achievements of Ruben Um Nyobé, father of the nationalist movement in Cameroon. Ruben contributed immensely towards Cameroon's independence. In Remember Ruben, Beti throws light on the injustice in the choice of Ahmadu Ahidjo as the president of Cameroon by the French colonial administration.

Beti contrasts the leadership qualities of Ruben (especially his dynamism, bravery, eloquence, altruism and popularity) with Ahidjo's mediocrity, selfishness, irresponsibility and brutality. By so doing, he condemns the imposition of Ahidjo on the people of Cameroon. The narrator in Remember Ruben observes:

> un certain nombre de fonctionnaires... désapprouvent la manière dont l'indépendance s'instaure. Entre eux, ils déplorent qu'au lieu de traiter avec Ruben, le père de la nation, on le pourchasse et on lui substitue un homme totalement inconnu, dont peut-être le pays ne veut pas. (RR, 276).

Here, Beti appears to use these workers to decry the imposition of Ahidjo on the Cameroonian people.

Beti suggests that the French colonial authorities saw in Ruben a true man of the people, with an acute sense of what the freedom of a nation entails. The colonial administration thus cleverly eliminated him so as to transfer power to Ahidjo (a puppet of the colonial regime). Mongo Beti attacks France's neo-colonial presence in independent Cameroon through a P.P.P. propaganda tract:

> Avec Baba Toura, ce gauleiter noir de de Gaulle, l'indépendence ne sera que la poursuite de la colonisation, avec les mêmes moyens, sous d'autres formes peut-être. C'est une indépendance qui ne répondra nullement aux objectifs poursuivis par le P.P.P. dès sa naissance. Notre pays ne jouira que d'une indépendance nominale. Celle-ci loin d'être un instrument indispensable au plein épanouissement du peuple, se révélera au contraire chaque jour davantage comme le carcan au moyen duquel les agents du colonialisme et de l'impérialisme, dissimulés derrière Baba Toura, Kapo d'un genre nouveau, continueront à le tenir prisonnier dans son propre pays. Ce peuple continuera à aller nu et à mourir de faim dans un pays regorgeant de ressources. (RR, 270).

The P.P.P. tract (which would seem to represent a tract of the U.P.C.) is meant to bring out the consequences of having Baba Toura as the president of Cameroon. The tract is a form of protest against the imposition of Ahidjo on the Cameroonians.

Beti deliberately belittles Ahidjo and thus throws into relief Ahidjo's unsuitability as a president of Cameroon. Baba Toura (P, 155) is a deformation of "Babatoura", Ahmadu Ahidjo's other name. Beti refers to Ahidjo variously

as "Maître Le Bituré" (RR, 107), "Massa Bouzza" (RP, 22), "Baba Soulé", "Baba Le Bituré" (RP, 65) which insinuate that Ahidjo is a drunk. Baba Toura is accused of having sexual intercourse with small girls. (P, 153) and of being a homosexual. (RR, 242-243). In Perpétue..., Beti uses a character, Jean-Dupont, to stigmatize Ahidjo. Jean-Dupont, who is a classmate of Baba Toura, describes the latter as "un malheureux garçon noué, craintif, souffreteux." (P, 180). This corroborates Beti's description of Ahidjo in Main basse.... Ahidjo is seen here as more or less illiterate, an insignificant fellow from the Muslim North, a béni-oui-oui, a second-rate political figure.[2] In Remember Ruben, Beti parodies one of Baba Soulé's public speeches.[3] Beti derides Ahidjo by making a caricature of his medical history. He is portrayed as an invalid suffering from hypertension and other diseases. Jean-Louis appears to echo Beti's satirical voice when he remarks:

> Il est question que Massa Bouza retourne bientôt discrètement en Europe pour sa quatrième cure de désintoxication,... il faut que le personnage soit présentable au moins pendant les cérémonies d'indépendance. Personnellement, je n'ai jamais vu Le Bituré dans un état normal... Le plus tôt qu'il m'ait été donné de le rencontrer, tenez, ce fut un matin, vers huit heures, peut-être. Eh bien, vous ne me croirez peut-être pas, Baba Toura tenait déjà sa dose. Ce personnage est un sujet de honte pour nous tous. (RR, 293). 4

Beti uses such details to deride Ahidjo the historic personnage. Beti seems to imply that given Baba Toura's defects the latter would not fight in the interest of the masses. Moreover, he would be an impotent head of state, in fact, "un pantin", "un

polichinelle" who would ruin Cameroon by ensuring the continuation of French dominance in independent Cameroon. By decrying the choice of Ahidjo as president, Beti is attacking the ex-colonial masters whom Beti accuses of fostering French influence in independent Cameroon.

French Cooperation or Politico-Economic Oppression

Before granting independence to Cameroon and other colonies, France made these territories agree, among other things, to satisfy the greater part of their countries' educational needs from France, to procure military equipment and advisers solely from France, and to clear with France before attending any international conference. In addition, the former colonies were expected to carry out the same financial policies towards other countries as France did, to allow the freedom of exchange and capital flows and to tie the post-colonial currencies to the French franc.[5] This is what the so-called Franco-African Cooperation entails. This cooperation works largely to the advantage of France. Cameroon signed her own Cooperation Accords with France on 13 November, 1959 shortly before her independence in 1960. Mongo Beti saw that France had a vested interest in the Cooperation Arrangement. The Cooperation with France meant that, although Cameroon was politically independent, she was economically impotent. Cameroon became dependent on foreign capital and investments and this is precisely what Beti denounces.

In Beti's novels, sarcastic references are made to the aid given by France to her ex-colonies, which is part of the

Cooperation Agreements. The FIDES (Fonds d'investissements pour le développement économique et social) and the FAC (Fonds d'aide et de coopération) up to 1961 were meant to pay subsidies to areas like education, agriculture, and social amenities. Industry is completely omitted, thereby ensuring the primitive nature of Francophone African economies.[6] From 1959-1968, France spent about 90 million French francs as investment in education and the promotion of Cameroonian culture; 67.8 million on school equipment and universities and 22.5 million on cultural development and technical work.[7] Benjamin has observed that

> cette très importante aide française au Cameroun contribue de façon indirecte à solidifier la présence de la langue et de la civilisation françaises au Cameroun. 8

By placing more emphasis on cultural development, the French aid is geared, as Benjamin's remark suggests, towards the encouragement of French language and culture in Cameroon. Beti, in Perpétue..., refers to French policy in this area as "ce forçage culturel." (P, 131). Thus, French is imposed on the Cameroonians as an official language while their indigenous languages are relegated to the background. Through Essola, Beti attacks France for using cultural aid to ensure French influence in independent Africa. Thus, as in the colonial era, the African is culturally alienated and this facilitates his subjugation and exploitation. (P, 131).

Beti blames France for the problems arising from the imposition of the French language on the Cameroonians. One

of these problems is that it leads the majority of the Cameroonian population to behave in an awkward manner as the following case illustrates. When Marie-Pierre, a character in Les deux mères..., recruits some jobless Cameroonians to work for her, one of them asks her how many of them will be accommodated in her office "pour faire ce travail de terrassement." (DM, 127). Obviously, an office is not relevant to the job of digging. As a result of his poor grasp of the French language, this Cameroonian mistakes a digging job for an office work and that is why he demands an office. Marie-Pierre is about to react when El Malek cuts her short and blames the French who teach the Africans French irrelevant to their day-to-day living. As El Malek puts it:

> Pour terrassement, c'est un mot que ces jeunes entendent rarement, figure-toi. C'est une langue étrangère ici, le français. Ne ris pas trop vite de l'un des innombrables effets pervers de votre domination. (EM, 127).

The imposition of French on the Cameroonians constitutes a serious handicap for the African in the field of education. The case of Edward in Perpétue... is a vivid illustration of this. The use of French in the educational sphere causes a lot of school drop-outs. This is ultimately to the advantage of the neo-colonial authorities who would not want the Africans to attain great heights in education. The aim of the neo-colonialists is to prevent the African from mastering the appropriate knowledge and technology indispensable for improving the Africans' battered economies. As the narrator in Perpétue... puts it:

> Tout comme à l'apogée de la colonisation, l'absolutisme de la langue française était un humus empoisonné sur lequel poussaient nécessairement des plantes malsaines: l'apprentissage jamais achevé de ses raffinements retenait dans l'infantilisme; l'exclusion inévitable ou calculée hors de ce paradis de l'immense majorité des populations produisait l'obscurantisme, la stagnation sociale et politique, ainsi que la frustration des masses. (P, 132).

Beti insinuates here that the imposition of French on the African is pernicious to the well-being of the African. It is, in fact, an instrument of oppression of Africans. This emerges in Essola's remark: "L'Afrique est ravagée par trois grands fléaux, la dictature, l'alcoolisme et la langue française, à moins que ce ne soient trois visages d'un même malheur." (P, 132).

France sends to her former African territories mediocre technical advisers. What interests France, as Beti's novels reveal, is not that these African states should be truly independent and self-reliant. In fact, it would seem that France would want these African states to continue being dependent on France. Beti denounces this in Les deux mères... when his surrogate, Bl Nolok, observes:

> Quant aux déchets que l'Occident nous délègue ici sous prétexte d'assistance technique... ces cromagnons, ces lilliputiens acharnés à détruire les plus puissants génies de la nouvelle Afrique, eh bien, rien ne m'étonne d'eux. Les grands hommes ne courent les rues nulle part, la métropole elle-même n'en possède pas suffisamment pour son service. Comment nous en enverrait-elle? (DM, 156-157).

By describing these technical advisers as "déchets", "lilliputiens", Beti insinuates that they are mediocrities. Beti has pointed out in an article:

> En France, il est rare de partir pour l'Afrique quand on est assuré de son talent, de son avenir ou de sa carrière... On embarque aventurier hâve et déguenillé... Ainsi va la tradition depuis des siècles. Nounou noire des blonds garnements, mère nourricière des ratés de l'Occident, dépotoir, souillon, catin..., l'Afrique, c'est cela. Bref, les Français qui vont en Afrique n'ont généralement rien à donner au continent noir, quoi qu'ils en disent, alors qu'ils attendent tout d'elle et en obtiennent d'ailleurs tout. 9

These technical advisers are mediocrities deliberately sent to French Africa because the French do not care too much about Africa's progress.

Marie-Pierre observes in Les deux mères... that many years after independence, every important area of life in Cameroon is controlled by foreigners "la police, l'armée, le commerce, la monnaie, l'éducation." (DM, 144). Coquery-Vidrovitch and Moniot have rightly observed that "l'aide est donc restée pour les pays qui ont dû renoncer à leur Empire, un moyen de prolonger leur influence."[10]

Stephano, in Perpétue..., acts as the author's mouthpiece when he remarks:

> Avise-toi seulement, même à mots couverts, de déclarer douteux ce que cache le voile, bien transparent d'ailleurs, de la rhétorique pompeuse de l'aide étrangère, il ne te reste plus qu'à numéroter tes abattis. (P, 79).

What Beti seems to suggest here is that the foreign aid ostensibly meant to assist the developing Francophone African countries is not in the final analysis beneficial to these states.

Perilhou, an old colonial administrator, who served in several French African countries admitted in an interview that France counterbalanced whatever subsidies she allocated to these countries with the enormous profits she derived from them.[11] Perilhou cited as an example the 1966 budget which was to give 120 billion old French francs as aid to the 14 French African and Malagasy countries. Perilhou noted that this aid was nothing compared with the 400 billion francs France derived from tobacco in 1965 and 1400 billion received from the export to these states of alcoholic drinks in 1964. Perilhou explained that half of the aid was used to pay the French technical assistants who repatriated most of it back to France. Numerous private French firms invest in these African states because of the great advantages they derive from it. Their yearly profits equal the total budget of French aid to the African states. Perilhou went further to show that even the remaining aid is misappropriated by the ruling elite in the African states.[12] Perilhou has observed.

> Si la France renonçait à la coopération - certains pays seraient trop heureux de la relayer - plusieurs de ses activités, comme le textile en sentiraient sérieusement le contre-coup. 13

Perilhou's remark throws light on the fact that the Cooperation Arrangement was not established to help foster the development

of the Francophone African States.

Beti objects to the "Cooperation" idea because France uses it to hoodwink the Africans into believing that she is giving them aid when, in fact, this is far from the truth. Beti accuses France of using the Cooperation Arrangement to make the economies of the French African Countries dependent on that of France. Beti's novels show that locally manufactured goods like the local gin are banned in order to encourage the sale of the more expensive French goods which flood the markets. The Francophone African countries thus become consumer-oriented societies (RG, 106). The French commercial houses monopolise trade in independent Francophone African states. Abel Eyinga has rightly noted that the Franco-African Cooperation is meant to deprive the Africans of control of their money and especially foreign exchange which help to enrich the reserves of French Banks.[14] Beti has observed: "Il saute pourtant aux yeux que, pas plus qu'aucun autre de ces pays, le Cameroun n'a une économie à proprement parler."[15] Beti blames France and her ally, Ahidjo, for the depleted Cameroonian economy which is such that the common man in Cameroon, "un des hommes les plus pauvres du globe (120$ par an)," is forced to buy at about the same high rate as a New Yorker, "l'homme le plus riche du monde (4500 dollars par an!)."[16] Also the capitals of the Francophone African states are among the most expensive cities in the world.[17]

In Perpétue..., Beti uses characters like Stéphano and Essola to castigate France's persistent exploitation of

post-colonial Cameroon as the following conversation reveals:

> ... il faut avoir vu de ses yeux, ce qu'on appelle vu, des exploitants forestiers européens, pour atteindre une petite essence d'exportation isolée, dévaster des hectares de forêt ou même des cacaoyères en improvisant de vive force une piste-vraiment, il faut avoir vu cela pour croire à tant d'anarchie désinvolte et de rage destructrice.
> -Pillage et saccage quoi! comme avant l'indépendance, commenta Essola, désabusé et las.
> -Non, pire! coupa Stéphano... c'est bien pire... (P, 74).

Beti insinuates here that the economy of independent Cameroon would have been stronger if not for the Cooperation system. This is why he denounces the Franco-African Cooperation Arrangement. African and Malagasy governments have campaigned against the Cooperation Accords, and have fought to be allowed to control capital movements between their states and France.[18] Nevertheless, no significant change has been effected. Though some revisions have been made in the Cooperation Agreements as in the 1973-74 versions, France has not yet abolished the system. The French troops are still stationed in the Francophone African countries.

Mongo Beti denounces the Franco-African Cooperation Arrangement which he sees as a subtle method employed by France to perpetuate her influence in her former African colonies. Beti protests especially against the persistent economic exploitation of Cameroon by France.

Van den Rietter and Brother Nicolas tell Chief Chimpanzé Grabatoire:

> Vieillard, nous sommes ton seul et véritable bouclier. Dès que nous aurons tourné le dos, tes ennemis ne tarderont pas à se jeter sur toi et à t'égorger. (RP, 302).

This remark throws light on the collaboration between the missionaries and the post-colonial authorities in Cameroon. Mongo Beti denounces this complicity between the missionary and Baba Toura's government.

In La ruine..., Beti shows the collaboration between the missionaries and the authorities in independent Cameroon. In this novel, the missionary's office serves as a cell for the Rubenists, Jo and Evariste, arrested for plotting to topple the government. Van den Rietter tortures the Rubenists. Brother Nicolas says:

> Nous [the missionaries] sommes des hommes de Dieu, nous. Ce qu'il leur faut, à ceux-là, c'est un bon petit peloton: pan, pan, pan, et on n'en parle plus!... Remettez-les au Chef et à son fils, comme les autres tout à l'heure. Pan, pan, pan... (RP, 151).

Although Brother Nicolas would not like to shoot the arrested Rubenists because of his situation as a man of God, the fact that he hands them over to the chief for execution betrays his callousness. This is antithetical to the missionary's own Christian preaching. The irony emerges when shortly afterwards one of the villagers comments: "si cet homme est un serviteur

de Dieu, que voilà un Dieu qui aime bien entendre parler la poudre." (RP, 151). The fact that this missionary betrays his principles in this way calls into question the missionary's avowed aim to save Africans' souls.

When Van den Rietter destroys all but one of the propaganda tracts mounted in strategic positions by Jo Le Jongleur, he reveals the missionary's vested interest in the politics of independent Cameroon. In other words, he betrays his complicity with the post-colonial authorities in Cameroon. This is implied in Van den Rietter's utterance, "L'indépendance, tu parles! ils [the Cameroonians] n'ont même pas entendu le mot ici à Ekoumdoum [Cameroon], je veillerai d'ailleurs à ce qu'il en soit ainsi le plus longtemps possible, rassure tes maîtres là-bas, si jamais tu y retournes..." (RP, 149). Here, Mongo Beti condemns the role played by the missionary in post-independence Cameroon. The missionary exhorts the Africans to defer to Baba Toura's regime because Baba Toura's puppet government is conducive to the perpetuation of French influence in independent Cameroon.

In Beti's novels, the missionary in post-independence Cameroon is portrayed as an astute politician and administrator. This is shown by Van den Rietter's advice to Zoabékwe that the best way to hold a person in captivity is by instilling fear into him (RP, 183-184). Similarly, his tactics of divide and rule (RP, 224), and his adoption of the method of forced labour, all this testifies to his ability as a calculating politician. In La ruine...,the missionary's role in post-colonial Cameroon is portrayed as somewhat akin to that of the

> disposent sont bien supérieurs au rôle social et aux fonds dont disposaient les missionnaires avant l'indépendance.[19]

Beti's remark here shows the sinister role played by the missionary, in post-independence Cameroon.

Beti fails to show in his post-independence novels the heroic role played by the black missionaries in independent Cameroon, whereas he discusses this well enough in Main basse....[20] This may be explained by the fact that Mongo Beti is more concerned with attacking the negative role played by the white missionaries. After La ruine..., Beti's novels show that the church authorities in Cameroon under Ahidjo, though highly politicised, prefer being politically neutral. An example is the prelate in Les deux mères... and La revanche.... The prelate, we are told in Les deux mères..., "sait beaucoup de choses... Il est comme les hauts fonctionnaires, il obéit au gouvernement." (DM, 171).[21] If the prelate knows a lot about what goes on in the corrupt Ahidjo's administration and still defers to it, it is implied that he prefers not to get involved with politics.

Beti attacks the missionary in independent Cameroon for playing a role inimical to the progress of the Cameroonian society. The collaboration between the missionary and the state shows the former as promoting the interests of a foreign power since the Cameroonian government is, in fact, a puppet regime.

colonial administrator. He employs intimidation to prevent the Cameroonians from indulging in any subversive activities. For example, Van den Rietter tells the young men of Ekoumdoum whom he drafted into forced labour:

> Je suis le potier, et vous, vous êtes la glaise. C'est Dieu qui l'a voulu ainsi, alors, quel plus beau rôle y a-t-il pour chacun de nous, que de suivre la voie tracée pour nous par Dieu lui-même? (RP, 237).

The missionary's domination of these Africans is symbolic of Western dominance in Africa. Beti reproves the missionary's excessive love of power which leads him to behave more as a politician than as the man of God.

Whereas Beti attacks the missionary in the colonial era for his proselytism and his complicity with the colonial administration, he accuses the missionary in the post-independence era of serving as an agent of neo-colonialism. The missionary is the symbol of the physical presence of the colonizers.

Beti shows in his post-independence novels that the missionary in independent Cameroon plays an important role in helping to perpetuate the foreign domination of Cameroon. In an interview, Beti points out:

> le missionnaire joue en ce moment un rôle plus important qu'avant l'indépendance parce que l'Occident est plus conscient maintenant que l'Afrique peut lui échapper et fait tout pour que l'Afrique ne lui échappe pas. Par exemple, le nombre des missionnaires canadiens, français, qu'on retient au Cameroun est bien supérieur au nombre de missionnaires qui étaient là avant. Et leur rôle social et les fonds dont ils

II. THE ATTACK ON AHIDJO'S REGIME

Soon after Ahidjo was sworn in as the President of Cameroon he set out to consolidate his power and he eventually turned Cameroon into a police state. In fact, Ahidjo ruled the country with an iron hand for about a quarter of a century. Beti aptly refers to Ahidjo as "Le Papa Doc de Yaoundé un misérable [sic] assassin à gages."[22] The picture that emerges in Beti's novels of Ahidjo's rule is one of extreme oppression. Ahidjo's authoritarian government bears the stamp of repression, terrorism and bloodshed. Ahidjo's regime was intended to favour the domination of Cameroon by France. Beti, the progressive denounces Ahidjo's administration.

It is important to remark here that the phenomenon of "Papa Doc" is not peculiar to post-independence Cameroon. The other Francophone African countries are familiar with the echoes of "Papa Doc". The phenomenon recalls the birth in French Africa of police states similar to that in Haiti under the tyrant, François Duvalier alias "Papa Doc." Thus, Cameroon under Ahidjo recalls Gabon under Mba and Bongo, Central African Republic under Bokassa.[23]

Beti's denunciation of Ahidjo's government links Beti with other African novelists like Alioum Fantouré who in Le cercle des tropiques attacks the dictatorship of Sekou Touré the first president of Guinea; and Francis Bebey who in La Poupée Ashanti denounces the corrupt, despotic regime of Kwame Nkrumah.

The Excesses and Inefficiency of Ahidjo's Regime

Mongo Beti denounces Ahidjo's government through the portraiture of representative characters like Edouard and Martin in Perpétue.... Those characters typify all that is reprehensible in Baba Toura's regime. The narrator in Perpétue... remarks:

> Edouard était proprement la réplique zombotownienne de Baba Toura en miniature. (P, 249-250).

In his novels, Beti shows that Baba Toura wields absolute power testified by the arbitrary amendments of the Constitution, adoption of the one-party system, and the assassination of his political opponents.[24] Ahidjo instils so much fear in the people that the majority either sing his praises or keep their mouths shut. Richard Joseph has observed that "the quiet exercise of absolute power in Yaoundé" creates the alkali court.[25] In Les deux mères...,the head of state imposes the death penalty on the opponents of the regime. Jean-François, the Attorney-General, is made to sign these death sentences.

Ahidjo started to take some major decisions independently of the French government thereby undermining the Cooperation Agreements. In Les deux mères..., Beti alludes to Ahidjo's attempt to be autonomous.[26] Ahidjo unilaterally repatriates French magistrates and recruits directly without passing through the French Ministry of Justice. France was not happy to see Ahidjo acting with such a free hand. Thus, it is not impossible that the French government engineered Ahidjo's

removal from power. It is alleged that Ahidjo was tricked by his French doctors into relinquishing his post as the president of Cameroon on the grounds of serious ill-health.[27]

Mongo Beti accuses Ahidjo of turning Cameroon into a hotbed of corruption. To be fair, corruption was a problem in Cameroon as in other parts of Africa during the colonial era. But it has got worse after independence. Stéphano, in Perpétue..., reveals that Ahidjo's henchmen are bribed into stamping all the relevant documents permitting the Europeans to exploit Cameroon's natural resources. It would appear that Stéphano is echoing Beti's view when he blames Ahidjo for this:

> Hier encore, il [Ahidjo] marchandait des cacahuètes au gobelet sur les carrefours? Cela ne fait rien , le président, c'est lui, un point c'est tout. Et nous, il ne nous reste qu'à être étrangers sur notre propre sol.(P, 75).

Ahidjo is accused of graft: he diverts the country's oil earnings and part of its foreign aid to his personal account in Geneva. (RG, 10). Beti observes in an interview that Ahidjo "mettait dans son compte particulier à Genève le produit de la vente du pétrole."[28]

Mongo Beti castigates the conspicuous consumption of Ahidjo and his officials in post-independence Cameroon. Beti accuses them of ruining the economy of Cameroon through their high tastes and flamboyant life-styles. In Perpétue..., the head of state is said to have a magnificent palace, a personal aircraft, a helicopter and many houses in la Côte d'Azur. In

Les deux mères..., Beti accuses the president of providing his officials with many privileges: they live in luxurious houses and ride in flashy cars. (DM, 50, 92). Dumont observed that "aux 403, après l'indépendance, succèdent... les Mercédés de Yaoundé, souvent renouvelées tous les six mois, ce qui fait grincer des dents les petites gens."[29] These public officials are encouraged by the president to accumulate wealth and property. (DM, 47, 92). Many of them own houses in France acquired at the government's expense. (DM, 92). Zeyang in Perpétue... acts as Beti's spokesman when he observes that these officials misappropriate funds that should have been used to better the lot of the masses:

> Et il ne reste plus un sou en caisse au moment de nous fabriquer quelques ampoules d'antibiotique... (P, 78).

Beti denounces the ruling elite which robs Cameroon of its riches. He sees Ahidjo's role as "le président général de la société de profiteurs impatients de jouir que constitue la bourgeoisie nationale."[30] The ruling class is so blinded by the corrupting power of money that they fail to discharge their duties to the state.

Beti tends to see Ahidjo and his officials as impotent leaders whose greed and corruption have contributed in no small measure to the deterioration of the Cameroonian economy and the suffering of the masses.

Agents and Instruments of Ahidjo's State of Emergency

Beti's novels show that Ahidjo employed all sorts of

tactics including persuasion and repression in order to subdue the underprivileged.

The Repression of the Cameroonians under Ahidjo

Beti's novels show that Ahidjo's regime is characterized by arbitrary arrests, torture, imprisonment and assassination. The regime makes use of the soldiers, the police and secret agents to carry out its atrocities. The important agents of Ahidjo's secret service are the Brigade Special Mixte (DM, 39) and the SEDOC ("Service de documentation"), the Cameroonian equivalent of the French C.I.A. called SDECE ("Service de documentation extérieure et de contre-espionnage"). Hergé Xourbes is shown in Les deux mères... and La revanche... to belong to the SEDOC, (RG, 45). It would seem that the Brigade Special Mixte depicted in Beti's novels refers to the BMM (Brigades Mixtes Mobiles). Richard Joseph observes that the SEDOC is the Cameroonian extension of the French SDECE. He adds that the SDECE was founded in the years 1959 - 1960 by two French SDECE agents seconded to Ahidjo's regime.[32] Mongo Beti depicts these agents as specialising in secret prosecutions, bugging of telephones and spying. (DM, 130-131).

Prisons and detention camps proliferate in Cameroon under Ahmadu Ahidjo. In Beti's novels, there are many examples of victims of atrocities perpetrated by Ahidjo's government. For example, in Perpétue..., Essola is released after about four years of imprisonment. Zeyang is shot for opposing Baba Toura's

government. In Les deux mères..., Gilbert's father dies in the "Camp d'internement du nord" (DM, 129) and the young artist is arrested and quietly eliminated for parodying Ahidjo. (DM, 96). Colin Legum observes that at least 200 political prisoners languish in various secret camps.[33] Even those in Baba Toura's entourage are extremely cautious not to violate the dictator's orders or they would be summarily dismissed if not "physically eliminated," as the case of M'Barg'Onana, the Oyolo Police Commissioner in Perpétue... shows. The usual pretext is subversive action. For example, M'Barg'Onana could be identified as Onana Awana, a minister in Ahidjo's government whose prestige was posing a threat to Ahidjo. Consequently he was dismissed on the grounds that he was being subversive.[34]

Mongo Beti accuses Ahidjo of applying methods of torture and murder in dealing with his political opponents.[35] Essola observes that "dans le camp... la souffrance la plus effroyable était un spectacle banal." (P, 33) Jonathan Derrick reports what some Cameroonians told him about atrocities committed during Ahidjo's rule:

> 'Do you know that not far from here people are kept underground until they go blind?', said one Cameroonian to me. "If you know what goes on there you won't be a happy man again," said another. 36

This information highlights the extent of terrorism and bloodshed carried out during the rule of Ahidjo. Beti uses characters in his novels to condemn Ahidjo's practice of assassinating his political opponents, especially political activists of the UPC.

and the intelligentia. Osendé Afana killed in 1966 would seem to be represented by Bifanda in Perpétue....[37] Mor-Kinda apparently is expressing Beti's views when in La ruine... he notes that "le Bituré fait la guerre aux black, ses frères pour le compte des toubabs, ses maîtres." (RP, 74).

As Beti's novels show, the repressive methods used by Ahidjo's regime include press censorship. Beti insinuates that Ahidjo does this so that his atrocities and fraud may not be divulged. (RG, 10). As the narrator in Les deux mères... commented, the sentencing of the last five U.P.C. leaders is not published in the local or foreign press. Colin Legum has observed:

> The last two years have seen no relaxation in the very strict censorship of the press. All newspapers and periodicals still require permission of the authorities for anything they wish to print; the official line on all matters has to be followed faithfully. Violations of the censorship regulations are severely dealt with, the penalties including arrest and imprisonment. 38

It would seem that Mbaya-Caillebaut, in La revanche... is expressing Beti's views when she observes that "deux fléaux dévorent le pays, la répression sanglante et la corruption." (RG, 10).

In the eyes of Beti, Ahidjo held about 9 million Cameroonians captive thanks to the use of terror and violence. (RG, 180). Beti as a progressive deplores dictatorship not only in Ahidjo's Cameroon but also in black Africa. (RG, 174). These forces of oppression impede progress in society.

Ahidjo's regime was one of the most repressive in Africa. However, the extent of Ahidjo's despotism could only be gauged with his eclipse in 1983.[39] The fact that the Cameroonians heaved a sigh of relief and showed massive support for Biya would suggest that the Cameroonians felt liberated from the despot, Ahidjo. Commenting on the eclipse of Ahidjo, Jonathan Derrick notes:

> We are also witnessing the end of one of the most efficient and ruthless police states in Africa - an event long overdue, but nonetheless, heartening. To Cameroonians, this is more important than any other aspect of the changes in the past few months. 40

Using Amougou as his mouthpiece, Mongo Beti had prophesied the eventual eclipse of Ahidjo in Perpétue... Amougou notes:

> Baba Toura passera, comme tant d'autres avant lui. Quand les toubabs commandaient directement ici... qui aurait cru qu'un jour ils seraient obligés de trouver un paravent dans Baba Toura? Petit Baba passera, comme les toubabs avant lui. (1, 63).

Beti's prophecy here is what he probably envisages as the possible solution to the oppression, exploitation and violence perpetrated by Ahidjo's regime. Beti's prophecy started to crystallise in 1982 when on 4 September, Ahidjo stepped down from power and by 22 August, 1983, Ahidjo had been discredited.[41] Beti, as a social critic, denounces dictatorship practised in Cameroon under Ahidjo and in black Africa because it is oppressive. Also it is inimical to progress.

III. SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS IN AHIDJO'S CAMEROON

Coquery-Vidrovitch and Moniot have observed that:

> La décolonisation, inachevée, transmit un héritage lourd des troubles ultérieurs: politiques... sociaux... et surtout économiques. 42

This remark sheds light on why independent Cameroon is still plagued with problems such as poor health facilities, corruption, alcoholism and crime which were already prevalent in the Cameroonian society in the colonial era. As Beti's novels show, these problems appear to have been exacerbated in Cameroon under Ahmadu Ahidjo. In his post-independence novels, Mongo Beti brings out these socio-economic problems.

Stagnation of Health Care Services

Mongo Beti shows that the medical services in independent Cameroon are not only inadequate but also they have actually deteriorated. For example, nothing significant has been done in terms of building new hospitals and dispensaries. The few existing ones lack medical personnel and facilities. The few available doctors are frustrated by the inadequacy of equipment and drugs. Beti shows that this situation leads to an unnecessarily large number of deaths as Perpétue's predicament reveals. Beti accuses Ahidjo of wrecking the rudimentary health facilities inherited from the French colonial authorities.

Zeyang acts as Beti's spokesman when he points out:

> Perpétue ne serait sans doute pas morte si ce maudit pays n'était totalement dépourvu de médicaments depuis l'avènement de Baba Toura. Drôle d'indépendance, frère Wendelin [Essola]! Nous avons un président bien installé dans son palais... Mais la seule chose dont nos populations éprouvent un besoin pressant, les médicaments, eh bien, nous en sommes démunis, nos frères, comme par hasard. Pouvez-vous m'expliquer ce mystère...? (P, 76-77).

Beti is here attacking Ahidjo for neglecting the health requirements of the people. The question "Pouvez-vous m'expliquer ce mystère...?" suggests some shady deal on the part of Ahidjo's regime. This "mystery" is later unravelled by a woman in Perpétue...:

> Tu sais quoi? il paraît que les pharmacies du gouvernement sont vides, les stocks de médicaments épuisés. Alors, forcément, pas de médicaments, pas de soins; pas de soins, pas de consultation - du moins pour nous autres. On dit que Baba Toura et son ami Langelot ne cessent de parcourir le monde, à quémander des médicaments soi-disant pour soigner les pauvres Africains; et on leur en donne, paraît-il! et des tonnes et encore des tonnes et toujours des tonnes. Mais une fois revenus ici, au lieu de les distribuer, ils les vendent. Et à quel prix encore! (P, 158-159).

Here, Beti denounces Ahidjo for trafficking drugs meant for the hospitals. The elite are not affected since their own medical facilities are guaranteed. The high incidence of deaths during child birth and infant mortality in independent Cameroon constitute an indictment of the Ahidjo regime. Beti observes in Main basse...:

> Dans ce pays [Cameroon], les gens meurent comme des mouches, faute de médicaments, et la mortalité infantile atteint les sommets vertigineux de 200 pour 1000. 43

Beti is clearly highlighting the poor medical facilities in Cameroon under Ahmadou Ahidjo. Beti's indictment here is re-echoed by Zeyang in a remark to Essola: "il faut payer sous la table les soins médicaux officiellement gratuits." (P, 81).

Beti also condemns Ahidjo's failure to establish factories for the manufacture of drugs. Zeyang again acts as Beti's surrogate when he notes:

> Mais dites-moi pourquoi notre président tout puissant, ... au pouvoir depuis dix ans, n'a pas créé une seule usine de médicaments? Un gouvernement noir, fondant des usines avec l'argent des Noirs, pour donner des médicaments à ses frères noirs, ça devait être cela l'indépendance, non? (P, 77).

Ahidjo is portrayed here as incapable of initiating positive measures geared towards the progress of Cameroonian society. Ahidjo's Cameroon is still dependent on the Western world for drugs as with other imports. In this way, Ahidjo betrays his failure as a leader of an independent African state.

Mongo Beti, in an interview has observed:

> ... je dénonce dans Perpétue des faits qui m'ont été rapportés, des faits précis qui m'ont été rapportés: l'absence de médicaments dans les hôpitaux dès le 10 du mois .... Et bien, c'est ça que j'ai dénoncé dans ce roman, le fait que la mère de famille ne trouve auprès du gouvernement aucune aide pour accoucher 44

It might be argued that Beti's informant is not reliable. However, Beti asserts that although in exile, he still follows closely happenings in Cameroon and Africa. Thus, he got to

know that his brother died in June 1976 "parce qu'il n'y avait pas d'insuline" and a cousin of his died during child-birth "parce qu'elle avait une grossesse extra-utérine... elle a souffert, subi un vrai martyr de longues heures avant de mourir." [45]

The Cameroonian budget for medical care, as shown in Africa Contemporary Record, rose from 13 billion F.C.F.A. in 1973/74 to 67 billion F.C.F.A. in 1975/76 and that was shortly after the publication of Perpétue... (1974).[46] It is possible that Beti's virulent attack on Ahidjo in Perpétue... for wrecking health care services in independent Cameroon was one of the factors that prompted the multiplication of the health care budget by roughly five times. Asked by Adegboye whether the situation has improved since the publication of Perpétue... Beti replies:

> il est possible qu'ils aient amélioré la situation, qu'ils aient fait venir un petit peu plus de médicaments maintenant. Peut-être que le traffic des médicaments soit moins grave c'est possible. [47]

Beti, the social critic, condemns the discriminatory practice evident in the way medical services are offered in independent Cameroon. Beti accuses Ahidjo of ruining the medical services and thus jeopardising the health of the majority of Cameroonians.

The Educational System and Inequality in Education

In Perpétue..., Les deux mères... and La revanche..., the post-independence educational system is shown to be

unsuitable for the African. As the narrator in Perpétue... puts it:

> L'indépendance avait donc non seulement maintenu mais accusé les absurdités de l'enseignement colonial, tant il est vrai que les antiques charrettes, même repeintes, continuent, de rouler dans les mêmes ornières. (P, 131).

Mongo Beti likens the mediocrity of the system of education in the post-independence era to the mediocrity of the urban poor. (P, 128).

Mongo Beti suggests in Les deux mères... and La revanche... that the system of education in the post-independence era has deteriorated further. Marie-Pierre condemns the student-teacher ratio. Classes are over-crowded. This does not create the right climate for effective teaching. As Marie-Pierre puts it: "mieux vaudrait les [the school children] laisser mourir dans la barbe." (DM, 140).

Marie-Pierre in Les deux mères... remarks:

> Quelle idée... de confier ces pauvres enfants à des religieux, et des religieux canadiens encore! De sacrés Tartuffes, ces catholiques québécois. Et quels fanatiques! Pires que les nôtres encore, qui n'étaient déjà pas si mal. (DM, 141).

Through Marie-Pierre, Beti condemns the idea of leaving instruction in post-colonial Cameroonian schools in the hands of missionaries, whether Canadian or French. Beti is deploring here a practice which he sees as inimical to the interests of an independent country like Cameroon.

Beti speaks against the poor condition of service for teachers. In the case of Marie-Pierre shows, the teacher in post-independence Cameroonian school is overworked. Moreover, the school teacher is assigned courses outside his area of specialization. One of the defects of education in independent Cameroon is the recruitment of unqualified teachers. The same problem explains, to some extent, the poor performance in French of some Cameroonians, as Edouard's case shows. Beti appears to suggest that the educational system in Cameroon under Ahidjo is partly responsible for the maladjustment and failure of many young Cameroonians. In his article "La dormeuse et les flibustiers" Beti observes that "les masses de recalés se ruent clandestinement aux frontières..."[48] A.P.J. Vanrensburg has observed that Cameroon by August 1974 had a high post-primary school drop-out rate.[49]

Mongo Beti contrasts special schools for the elite's children [the type attended by Guillaume in les deux mères... (DM, 141)] with schools for the masses in order to highlight inequality in education. Elsewhere, Beti has noted that "les lycées de l'Etat refusent les enfants des pauvres..."[50] Beti insinuates that the provision of unequal opportunities in education is a way of widening the gap between the few rich and the poor majority. In his novels, Mongo Beti shows unambiguously that he is on the side of the underdog. In attacking inequality in educational opportunities, he is on the side of the Rubenists in their crusade against tyranny and injustice in Ahidjo's Cameroon.

What Beti objects to in the educational system in independent Cameroon emerges in his own comment in Main basse....

> Le démantèlement de l'embryonnaire système d'éducation laissé par la colonisation apparaît plus révoltant et plus scandaleux encore; une privatisation méthodique, aux niveau du primaire comme du secondaire, livre les enfants à diverses sectes chrétiennes de toutes nationalités comme à autant d'entreprises de charité auquelles il faudrait plus que des effectifs avoisinant cent enfants par classe pour ôter une bonne conscience à toute épreuve. Mais les enfants des serviteurs de la dictature sont élevés avec soin, bichonnés dans des écoles réservées où enseignent des religieuses catholiques européennes. 51

Beti condemns the educational system in post-independence Cameroon because it is unsuitable for the Cameroonian environment and also provides unequal opportunities for the children of different socio-economic backgrounds.

The Neglect of the Peasantry

Mongo Beti's novels, especially La ruine..., show that the farmers tend to be exploited even more than in the colonial era. Despite the productivity of the Cameroonian peasants (agriculture still contributes over a third of the G.D.P. and Cameroon claims to have attained self-sufficiency in food production in the late 1970s),[52] the peasants are not well loked after. Marie-Pierre in La revanche... highlights the plight of those farmers:

> aux yeux d'un citoyen habitué à entendre parler d'intérêts des populations et de leur bien-être, d'édiles et de services municipaux, des responsabilités du département ou de l'Etat, ce qui frappait le plus dans la condition des habitants de la cité, c'étaient le manque d'équipement et un dénuement administratif dont des heures de conversation avec Jean-François à Lyon et même dans la capitale ne lui auraient pas donné une idée juste. Une vague maison commune au lieu d'une mairie, pas d'école ni d'instituteur, pas de dispensaire ni d'infirmier. Pas un embryon de commerce; il fallait aller à quatorze kilomètres, presque toujours à pied, pour se procurer les objets les plus ordinaires.... Un impôt uniforme, appelé la capitation, était pourtant prélevé chaque année par des fonctionnaires venus de Mazenga... (RG, 91-92).

Marie-Pierre's observation suggests the almost total neglect of the peasantry by the government. Beti accuses Ahidjo's government of using its law enforcement agents to bully the farmers into paying taxes for social services which are non-existent.

Beti deplores the neglect of the peasantry not only because it is unjust but also because it leads to rural emigration. Urban migration, a recurring theme in Beti's novels, goes back to the colonial era. But it became worse in independent Cameroon. It is, therefore, not surprising that in Beti's post-independence novels, one tends to find villages almost depleted of their active population; in fact, they are virtually "ghost" villages. As the narrator in Perpétue... puts it: "A un village presque fantôme succédait un village de même apparence." (P, 14). The Greek driver tells Essola in Perpétue...:

> Tu étais parti, comme tous les jeunes d'ici. Regarde quelle lamentable ruine devient un pays que la plupart de ses jeunes désertent. Note bien que je les comprends; car, que faire ici? Défricher la jungle avec une machète? Pourquoi pas avec une lame à rasoir! Et se soûler chaque soir au Karkara, à vingt ans? (P, 16).

The Greek driver's remark stresses the problem of rural emigration in Cameroon, particularly after independence. When the Greek driver says "Note bien que je les comprends" he is not condemning so much those who emigrate from the rural areas as those Beti holds responsible for the neglect of the peasantry. Beti appears to say here that since the government has failed to improve upon rural agriculture and modernize the rural areas, it is directly responsible for the frustration of the youth and their resultant emigration. The 1979 uprisings and killings in a remote area of the Muslim North were said to be as a result of the refusal of the administration to open a school for the villages after they had contributed huge sums of money for the project.[53] Mongo Beti intimates that independence far from bringing progress to the Cameroonian masses has compounded their difficulties. Here the object of Beti's attack is really the government of Ahidjo.

A program of resettlement of jobless persons on farms was underway in 1969 along with the construction of roads and railways and the modernization of agriculture.[54] It has been ascertained that agriculture in Cameroon under Ahidjo was not really modernized. Ahidjo and his men falsely claimed that agriculture was the real focus of investment.[55]

As a matter of fact, agriculture was allocated only one fifth (545 billion FCFA) of the planned investment over the five years totalling 2,3000 billion FCFA (£8.2 billion). This was hardly more than the share for transport infrastructure. As Mark Doyle asserted, the much trumpeted self-sufficiency in food production is actually a fallacy, for Cameroon still imports in tons commodities like wheat flour and frozen chicken.[56]

Beti accuses Ahidjo and his henchmen of failing to cater for the interest of the peasantry while exploiting the peasants' labour. Beti feels that modernization of the rural areas will help improve the lot of the peasants.

The Urban Poor

In the colonial era, the Africans living in the suburbs suffered because the colonial administrators were more concerned with what would be beneficial to the whites in the colony and so concentrated the few social amenities in the European quarter. The attainment of independence did not make the situation any better for the slum inhabitants. The slum dwellers are faced with acute unemployment, alcoholism and crime.

Beti's post-independence novels depict the plight of the Cameroonians living in the slums. The slums are not developed. They lack decent houses, good sanitation and medical care as well as other social amenities like electricity. Beti has noted elsewhere: "les foyers africains des quartiers déshérités et des bidonvilles n'ont pas d'électricité..."[57]

Most of the inhabitants are jobless or just odd-job men. Les deux mères... and La revanche... show that unemployment has worsened in Cameroon since the advent of independence.[58] What characterizes the shanty-towns in post-independence Cameroon is destitution and misery. As the narrator observes in Perpétue...:

> L'adolescente [Perpétue] se révolte d'être condamnée au laisser-aller d'une population privée d'espérance, au spectacle navrant des scènes d'ivresse dont l'horreur, chaque fois, la laisse pantelante, de la faim qui avilit, de la soumission fanfaronne, de la débandade précipitée aussitôt que pointe un mousqueton du régime, toutes les misères par l'accumulation desquels Zombotown, hier encore cité d'un clan d'hommes libres, tournait peu à peu à une jungle infestée d'animaux anarchiques guettés par un chasseur sans pitié. (P, 125-126).

Beti highlights the deplorable situation of the inhabitants of a Camerooni an suburb.[59] He also shows the dehumanization and helplessness of the urban poor, as suggested by the following description "une jungle infestée d'animaux anarchiques guettés par un chasseur sans pitié." Mongo Beti who is committed to the cause of the oppressed here uses Perpétue to protest against the neglect of the slum dwellers in post-independence Cameroon. His criticism comes out more clearly in Les deux mères... and La revanche... where he contrasts the predicament of the majority living in the slums with the affluence of the elite.[60]

Beti indicts the injustice in independent Cameroonian society. Cameroon and Africa as a whole are yet to establish Beti's ideal society. Beti's ideal society, as suggested in Les deux mères... and La revanche... appears to be the egalitarian society where the gap between the rich and the

poor is very slim, a society where justice and fairplay prevail, in fact, a society completely free of exploitation and oppression. As Beti himself has remarked:

> Mais cet idéal d'une société fraternelle et égalitaire, c'est précisément ce sur quoi s'acharne implacablement la domination occidentale en Afrique parce qu'il est un obstacle insurmontable pour le libre déploiement de son insatiable énergie. 61

1. Mongo Beti, Main basse sur le Cameroun: Autopsie d'une décolonisation (Paris: Eds. Maspero, 1977), pp. 71-75.

2. Rolf Hellender has noted that "Ahidjo is perhaps not a great statesman, but destiny has forced him into a highly responsible position." See The New Leaders of Africa (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1961), p.190. Hellender also observed too that Ahidjo "looks more like a young teacher than a president." Ibid., p.180.

3. One [illegible] of Ahidjo's usual marathon speeches. Rolf Hellender made the apt observation that Ahidjo's "speech is unhurried and almost without passion." Ibid., p.180.

4. A.P.J. Vanrensburg notes that Ahidjo suffers from high blood pressure for which reason he frequents Europe for medical check-up. Vanrensburg observes also that there are unconfirmed reports that Ahidjo has other health problems. See Contemporary Leaders of Africa (Landsdonne: Citadel Press, 1975), p.41.

5. See Richard Joseph, Gaullist Africa: Cameroon under Ahmadu Ahidjo (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publ., 1978), pp. 22-23, 18-19. It should be pointed out that the original Cooperation Agreements have never been published, similarly the revised 1973-1974 versions.

6. See René Dumont, L'Afrique noire est mal partie (Paris: Eds. du Seuil, 1962), p.41. See also pp. 34-37.

7. Jacques Benjamin, Les Camerounais occidentaux: la minorité dans un état bicommunautaire (Montréal: les Presses de l'Univ. de Montréal, 1972), p.133.

8. Ibid., p.137.

9. Mongo Beti, "La dormeuse et les flibustiers: Jean Imbert ou l'Univ. Française encerclée par l'Afrique des dictateurs," Peuples noirs peuples africains, no.15, mai-juin 1980, p.69.

10. C. Coquery-Vidrovitch and H. Moniot, L'Afrique noire de 1800 à nos jours (Paris: Presses Univ. de France, 1974), p.439.

11. Jean Doulet, Français d'Aujourd'hui en Afrique noire (Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1966), p.19.

12. Ibid., pp.17-21.

13. Ibid., p.21.

14. See Mongo Beti, "La dormeuse et les flibustiers," p.77.

15. Beti, Main basse..., p.122.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., p.123.

18. See Joseph, Gaullist Africa..., p.13.

19. Adegboye, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," p.13.

20. He discusses, for example, the case of Rt.-Revd. Ndogmo, the Ex-bishop of Nkongsamba. See Main basse..., pp.159-162, 32-39. Cf. Prouzet, Le Cameroun..., pp.108-110.

21. This prelate recalls somewhat Rt-Rvd. Zoa, the Archbishop of Yaoundé who insists on the principle of the church co-existing with the state, and maintaining political neutrality. See Claude Wauthier, L'Afrique des Africains: Inventaire de la négritude (Paris: Eds. du Seuil, 1977), p.187.

22. Beti, Main basse..., p.6.

23. It somewhat recalls the police state in Chile under Pinochet, that in Argentina under Videla and the one in Brasil under Figueredo. See Jean Ziegler, Main basse sur l'Afrique: la recolonisation (Paris: Eds. du Seuil, 1980), p.234. Ahidjo might not have, as Idi Amin did, "tasted the flesh of some of his victims in cannibal ritual". But Ahidjo appears to have a lot in common with the world's notorious dictators including Pol Pot of Kampuchea (the former Cambodia). For more detailed information on Amin and the other world notorious dictators see Neil Blandford and Bruce Jones, The World's Most Evil Men (Bungay: Richard Clay Ltd., 1980), pp. 10-192.

24. Richard Joseph has shown that Ahmadu Ahidjo wielded absolute and arbitrary power. See Gaullist Africa..., p.80.

25. Ibid. An alkali court is a modern court where the Sharia law is applied.

26. Vanrensburg observed that Ahidjo would want to reduce the dependence of Cameroon on France. See Vanrensburg, Contemporary Leaders of Africa, p.40.

27. See David Achidi Ndifang, "The Eclipse of Ahidjo," West Africa, No.3447, 5 Sept. 1983, p.2049.

28. Adegboye, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," p.13. Beti has elsewhere noted that the President should be the first to receive death sentence for the embezzlement of public funds since he syphons the Cameroonian oil earnings to his Swiss account. See Beti, "La dormeuse et les flibustiers," p.79.

29. For more details on the excesses of the ruling class in emergent African States see Mamont, L'Afrique noire est mal partie, p.47.

30. Frantz Fanon, Les damnés de la terre (Paris: Librairie Maspero, 1968), p.109.

31. Joseph, Gaullist Africa..., p.107. See also Jonathan Derrick, "Things Don't Fall Apart," West Africa, 15 August, 1983, no.3444, p.2273.

32. Joseph gives more details on the activities of these secret agents. See Gaullist Africa..., pp.107-110.

33. Colin Legum (Ed.), Africa Contemporary Record: Annual Survey and Documents Vol. XII, 1979 - 80 (New York: Africana Publ. Co., 1981), p. B.391.

34. See Joseph, Gaullist Africa..., p.38.

35. For more details see Ibid., pp.107-109.

36. Derrick, "Things Don't Fall Apart," p.2273.

37. There were other UPC. leaders assassinated by Ahidjo's regime, for example, Felix-Roland Moumié and Ernest Ouandié. See Beti, Main basse..., pp.148-150.

38. Legum (Ed.), Africa Contemporary Record, p. B.394.

39. Ahidjo's eclipse was as a result of a foiled coup attempt to overthrow his constitutional successor, Paul Biya, and the subsequent open clash between the Ex-President and the incumbent head of state of Cameroon. For more details on this, see Derrick, "Things Don't Fall Apart," p.2273.

40. Ibid.

41. See David Achidi Ndifang, "Biya, Ahidjo in Crisis," West Africa, no.3446, 29 August, 1983, pp.1986-1989. See also David Achidi Ndifang, "The Eclipse of Ahidjo," West Africa, no.3447, 5 Sept. 1983, p.2069; and Derrick, "Things Don't Fall Apart," p.2273.

42. Coquery-Vidrovitch and Moniot, L'Afrique noire..., p.218.

43. Beti, Main basse..., p.11.

44. Adegboye, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," p.15.

45. Ibid., p.11.

46. Ibid., p.14.

47. Ibid., p.12.

48. Beti, "La dormeuse et les flibustiers," p.70.

49. Vanrensburg, Contemporary Leaders of Africa, p.38.

50. Beti, "La dormeuse et les flibustiers," p.69.

51. Beti, Main basse..., p.32.

52. Legum (Ed.), Africa Contemporary Records, p. B.396. Agriculture is the corner-stone of the economy of Cameroon. The past and present five-year Development Plans have pretended to allocate a lion share of the budget to the agricultural sector. See Derrick, "Things Don't Fall Apart," p.2273.

53. Legum (Ed.), Africa Contemporary Records, p. B.392. Derrick also talked about the Dolle massacre in 1979. See "Things Don't Fall Apart," p.2273.

54. See Luman Long (ed.), The World Alamanac and book of Facts (New York: Newspaper Enterprise Assoc. Inc., 1970), p.508.

55. Derrick, Things Don't Fall Apart," p.2273.

56. Mark Doyle, "A Cameroon Diary," West Africa, no.3518, 28 January 1985, p.141.

57. Beti, "La dormeuse et les flibustiers," p.69.

58. Michel Prouzet observes that the unemployed in the capital rise to the tone of about 60,000. See Le Cameroun: Comment ils sont gouvernés (Paris: Librairie Générale de Droit et de Jurisprudence, 1974), pp. 34-35. See also Vanrensburg, Contemporary Leaders of Africa, p.38.

59. In an article, Beti has pointed out "l'effroyable misère des masses... Le chômage... Les bidonvilles réduits à la famine et au désespoir... See "La dormeuse et les flibustiers," p.79.

60. The Unity Palace in Yaoundé, which has cost the president a fortune to erect, contrasts with the slums of many Cameroonians. Mark Doyle could gather from a Cameroonian resident in Yaoundé that "most Cameroonians move house at night because of their embarrassment at neighbours seeing their paltry possessions." See Doyle, "A Cameroon Diary," p.140.

61. Beti, "Identité et tradition," p.24.

CONCLUSION

We have tried to show that Mongo Beti condemns the misdeeds of the Catholic missionaries in Cameroon. He sees the missionary teaching as a way of mystifying and subjugating the African. Beti deplores the idea of imposing Christianity on the African. Mongo Beti's quarrel with the missionary is the latter's failure to recognize the blackman's major interest in embracing the Christian religion: to gain access to the whiteman's secret. This is defined in terms of the acquisition of European education and Western technology. Beti satirizes the idea of trying to universalize Christian principles. His missionaries are, on the whole, Euro-centric in their identification of Christianization with Westernization. Mongo Beti's attack is directed at the alien moral standards, imported by the church, which are antithetical to the African way of life. Beti denounces the missionaries' mistaken belief that the African culture is inferior to the Judeo-Christian tradition. What tends to justify Beti's criticism here is the return of many African converts to African culture not only in Cameroon but also in many other parts of Africa. Beti destroys the myth of the superiority of the "European fetichists" to the African fetish priests both of whom he resents. His satire sets out to establish the contradiction between the missionaries' materialism and idealism. He condemns the missionaries' acquisitive

propensity because it suggests a tendency on the part of the missionaries to cheat the Africans. In his eyes, the naïve Africans are partly to blame because it is their gullibility that makes them amenable to exploitation. However, Beti denounces the missionary for enslaving and exploiting the African whose soul he initially set out to salvage. Beti's novels show that the African converts do not actually put into practice what the missionary has taught them. The majority of them are not committed but cosmetic Christians. Beti denounces their vacillations. His main target is, probably, not the Africans themselves, but the white priests, whose mission in Africa is as precarious as the converted African is unreliable. Beti, the social critic, champions the cause of the poor, the oppressed and the wretched.

It is important to remark here that Beti's attack on the Roman Catholic Church did not stem from a lack of belief in God since he has said nothing in his novels to imply that he is an atheist. His novels reveal, however, that he is sceptical of all forms of mysticism and that he rejects all revelations about God. Thus, he condemns both Christianity and animism. Beti insinuates in an interview that if he had appeared to be religious in the past, he should now be seen as an agnostic. It appears, therefore, that there is a certain evolution in Beti's religious outlook. Could it be that Beti, the deist, who was sometime ago fumbling with Marxist thinking, has now

emerged into a real Marxist showing a total disbelief in God? He admits that his political consciousness has undergone a remarkable change. Even then, we have no concrete evidence, so far, to label Beti a Marxist. It seems he has no definite ideology.

Mongo Beti's anticlerical satire is of such virulence that he, apparently, fails to give credit to the positive side of Christianity. We cannot deny the valid contributions of Christian missions in Africa. The white missionaries, among other things, pioneered formal education and health services in Africa. Perhaps, Beti feels like Geoffrey Gorer that the negative impact of Christianity outweighs the positive aspect. In short, to Beti, the latter is negligible. Mongo Beti accuses the missionaries of playing a complementary or identical role with the colonial administrators. In a sense, Beti's anticlerical satire implies also a denunciation of the French colonial administration.

Mongo Beti condemns the methods used by the colonial administration to oppress the African. He castigates the colonial officials' inhumanity to the African. Beti denounces their brutality as well as the atrocities perpetrated by them in the colony. Mongo Beti satirizes the tendency on the part of the colonial African chief to defer uncritically to the administrator to the extent that the former serves as an effective instrument of oppression.

Although Beti detests the white colonizers, he resents more these chiefs because they are allies of the colonial authorities.

Beti's novels denounce the economic exploitation of the African and the negative effects of colonial rule in Africa. Beti, who like his father, Oscar Awala, experienced colonial oppression and injustice raises his voice of protest against the injustice meted out to the African by the colonial authorities. He indicts the administration for failing to attend to the health needs of its subjects. He blames the colonizers for the unemployment among the colonized Africans. Also, he attacks colonialism for the neglect and subsequent pauperization of the peasantry. It would seem that, in Mission terminée, Beti establishes a contrast between capitalism practised in a Western country like the United States of America and socialism practised in states like Russia in order to indict the capitalist mode of production encouraged in colonial Africa. Beti uses the people of Kala to register his ideological preference - socialism. He seems to suggest that the adoption of socialism will improve the lot of the peasantry. Mongo Beti accuses the French colonial regime of using European education and urbanization to alienate its subjects socially and culturally.

Beti's novels show that Western education is unsuitable for the African environment, and that, like the colonial town or city, it tends to produce a marginal character, the African caught between Europe and Africa, of which Medza, in Mission terminée, is a classic example. Nevertheless, Beti recognizes some merits of the city and formal colonial school: they promote social progress, and enable the individual to contest outdated social practices.

Although Beti like Walter Rodney attacks colonialism for "underdeveloping" Africa, Beti, unlike Rodney, is not a thorough-going anti-colonialist. In the eyes of Beti, the colonial administrators deceive the Africans into believing that they, the administrators, have come to civilize them when, in reality, they have vested interests. They oppress and exploit the Africans. Thus, it can be said that, to Beti, colonialism and evangelism are inseparable. Beti's anti-colonial attack reveals his indignation at the injustices perpetrated by the French colonial rule. His anti-colonial stance stems from his inclination to fight against oppression, exploitation and injustice. Thus, his criticism is not limited to the French colonial regime and the attendant Christian evangelism.

In his novels, he also attacks the tyranny and conservatism of the African elders. Beti deplores the elders' exertion of absolute authority because the individual ceases to exist in his own right but is compelled to lose his identity

in the interest of social cohesion and the patriarchs' dominance. Beti's agitation for the liberation of the individual should not be misconstrued as amounting to his advocating capitalism. Beti recognizes that political consciousness is of paramount importance to the liberation of Africa from all forms of oppression. The man liberated from the village community becomes eventually the young African évolué, the future hope of Africa, as Beti's later works tend to portray. For Beti, the progressive, the evolution of man in society is a necessary prelude to the evolution of society at large. Beti's crusade for the liberation of the individual should be seen at two levels: the level of the individual and that of the group typified in the individual. Probably, when Beti was writing his early novels his conception of the freedom of the individual was more liberal. But later, as he matures and his socio-political consciousness increases, he adopts the second perspective where the individual, like Mor-Zamba, is simply representative of a group or class of oppressed Blacks. This is somewhat in line with the Marxist vision du monde. And Beti is no more the naïve progressive he used to be when he produced his earlier works.

Beti contests ancestor worship and the cult of the elders because he considers these as customs invoked by the elders to hoodwink their subjects and thus maintain their ascendancy in society. In Beti's eyes, these

practices constitute impediments on the African's road to progress. Mongo Beti denounces not only the elders' vested interests (which inform their behaviour as leaders in society) but also the exploitative relations between the dominant group and the dominated in traditional gerontocratic African setting. He condemns the arbitrary dispensation of justice in the traditional set-up when he depicts the council of elders as an unreliable, incompetent and reactionary institution. All Beti's novels to date contain an indictment of the elders' impotence. Beti equates the elders' level-headedness with passivity. To him, these conservative patriarchs should be relegated to the background because they are incapable of effecting any positive change in society. His is a complete demystification of the elders.

Furthermore, Beti accuses the elders in Southern Cameroon of advocating traditional practices and customs such as contempt for the feminine sex, forced marriages, exorbitant dowry and polygamy in order to exploit the labour of the women who are treated more or less as slaves. Beti contests the concept of male supremacy and disregard for the feminine sex because he acknowledges the fact that women have a lot of potential and can be useful in carrying out a revolution. Mongo Beti like Sembene implies that the hope of a better Africa will not materialize without the active co-operation of the African women. Beti aims to denounce forced marriage when he points out that it is fraught with potentially undesirable consequences:

misery, boredom, disillusionment, frustration, prostitution and abandonment. Beti indicts parents who condone the practice of expensive dowry simply because they benefit from it. He attacks polygamy partly because it encourages the monopoly of women by the older members of society; the young men being consequently deprived of wives. Beti feels that polygamy is inexcusable. To him, outdated, obnoxious customs should be done away with and substituted by better ones. While condemning polygamy Beti advocates monogamy which is compatible with progress in society. Mongo Beti is a defender of the exploited and oppressed African woman. Thus, one finds in his novels an indictment of the condition of the African woman. True, the Bantu woman is exploited and oppressed: there is unequal distribution of labour. Nevertheless, Beti's criticism, in this regard, is somewhat exaggerated. It would seem that Beti recommends revolt for the oppressed African women as shown by the peasant women's collective action in La ruine....

Beti does not hesitate to criticize the imperfections of his people's moral codes. It is noteworthy that he is not totally against African tradition. In fact, he denounces only those aspects of African culture which impede man's advancement from a lower to a higher condition of life in terms of greater benefits for the majority of the people. Whereas Negritudists are busy singing praises of the glorious past of colonized Africa, Beti presents a critical view of traditional African society. It is significant that he disapproves of the

debasement or erasure of certain ancestral virtues like valour. Beti finds them indispensable to social revolution. In his view, the revolutionaries "ne doivent être ni nécessairement intellectuels ni nécessairement anti-intellectuels... ce qui compte surtout, c'est la violence, l'audace."[1]

Beti attacks in his novels the phenomenon of neo-colonialism. He sees the imposition of Ahidjo on the Cameroonians, the presence of white missionaries in post-colonial Cameroon and the so-called Franco-African Cooperation as clever ways of fostering the neo-colonial subjugation of independent Cameroon. Beti contrasts the laudable leadership qualities of Ruben with Ahidjo's mediocrity, irresponsibility and callousness so as to decry the imposition of Ahidjo on the people of Cameroon. Beti insinuates that given Baba Toura's defects the latter would not fight in the interest of the masses. Mongo Beti attacks the Cooperation Arrangement because France uses it to make the Africans believe that she is giving them aid when, in fact, this is only a way of ensuring that the economies of the French African countries remain dependent on that of France. Beti protests against the persistent economic exploitation of post-independence Cameroon by France. Beti condemns the missionary in independent Cameroon for his excessive love of power which leads him to act more as a politician than as the messenger of God. As far as Beti is concerned, the missionary's

domination of these Africans is symbolic of Western dominance in Africa. The complicity between the missionary and the state depicts the former as fostering neo-colonial interests since Babo Roure's government is, in fact, a puppet regime.

Beti castigates Ahidjo's administration which bears the stamp of excesses, repression, terrorism and bloodshed. Mongo Beti deplores the conspicuous consumption of Ahidjo and his officials in post-colonial Cameroon. He accuses Ahidjo of turning Cameroon into a hotbed of corruption. Beti's novels show that misappropriation of public funds is the order of the day in Ahidjo's Cameroon. Beti holds Ahidjo and his henchmen responsible for the ruined Cameroonian economy. Ahidjo's regime was one of the most repressive in Africa, although the extent of his tyranny could only be gauged with his eclipse in 1983. To Beti, the progressive, dictatorship is harmful to progress on the continent of Africa. It is not surprising that he denounces evangelism, colonialism and the dictatorship of African puppet heads of state which are all forces of oppression and exploitation and have constituted in one way or the other, obstacles on the African's road to progress. Whether Beti employs satire or criticizes openly, he does not spare any of these elements which are pernicious to the African's well-being.

Mongo Beti's novels show that the socio-economic problems which were already prevalent in the colonial Cameroonian society

appear to have been exacerbated in Ahidjo's Cameroon. Beti attacks Ahidjo for drug trafficking and marginalization of health care services. Beti condemns the system of education in post-colonial Cameroon because it is inefficient, unsuitable for the Cameroonian situation and provides unequal opportunities for the children of different socio-economic backgrounds. He castigates Ahidjo's failure to protect the interest of the peasantry while exploiting the peasants' labour. Beti throws into relief the neglect of the Cameroonian slum dwellers who are faced with unemployment, alcoholism and crime. Beti's indictment comes out more clearly in Les deux mères... and La revanche... where he contrasts the predicament of the urban poor with the affluence of the elite.

The substance and scale of Beti's criticism, in his earlier novels, tend to show Beti as a reformer. He highlights the problems prevalent in society with the hope that the situation will be remedied. However, in his later novels, Beti's criticism shows him more as a radical. It would appear that he has lost hope that any important changes could be made in society when the approach is non-revolutionary. And so, he advocates a revolutionary over-throw of corrupt and unjust governments in La ruine..., Les deux mères... and La revanche....

Given Beti's attack on societies in the colonial, traditional and neo-colonial setting and his stand as a moralist and idealist,

one can infer with a certain degree of plausibility that the ideal society for him is one free of all forms of exploitation and oppression. Beti's criticism tends to suggest that Cameroon and Africa as a whole are yet to establish what he considers as an ideal society. It would seem, therefore, that Beti's ideal society is the egalitarian society where the gap between the rich and the poor is very narrow. In other words, it is a society which has respect for fundamental human rights, in short, a society where justice and fairplay prevail.

NOTE TO CONCLUSION

1. Tunji Adegboye, "Entretien avec Mongo Beti," in the Appendix to "Exil et retour dans l'univers romanesque de Mongo Beti," Unpublished M.A. thesis, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, April 1981, pp. 18-20.

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