

# Conscientisation and Political Liberation in Anglophone Cameroonian Poetry: The Poetic Vision of Emmanuel Fru Doh, Bate Besong and Mathew Takwi

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## **Abstract**

The main thrust of the argument of this paper is that Emmanuel Doh, Bate Besong and Mathew Takwi have used their poetry as a veritable weapon of conscientisation and political liberation in Cameroon. Thus, the three poets blend literature and reality to advance the cause of Anglophone National Liberation in Cameroon. From a clearly Marxist literary perspective, the ideo-aesthetic position of Emmanuel Doh in *Wading the Tide* (1998), Bate Besong in *Just Above Cameroon* (1998) and Mathew Takwi in *Messing Manners* (2014) is very clear, though subtle: these poets view the emancipation and welfare of Anglophones in Cameroon as an index of socio-political growth.

In the light of the above assertions, the paper argues that Doh, Besong and Takwi are deeply sensitive and responsive to the realities and moods of moments of collective experience, especially crisis moments. Their poetry is, in fact, a summation of their political and ideological commitments. These poets have endeared themselves to the Anglophone, especially those who are dissatisfied with the present day political dispensation in Cameroon in their attempts to write and be involved with what has become known as “literature of conscientisation and commitment”.

**Keywords:** poetry, conscientisation, politics and liberty

## 1. Introduction

Liu Keqi in *Conscientisation and the Cultivation of Conscience* holds that the original word for conscientisation is ‘conscientizacao’ which has a Portuguese origin, and which is translated in English as “conscious raising”. To him, the term was first used by some professors at the Brazilian Institute of Higher Studies and at meetings, and first introduced in the English world by Helder Camara (2014:44). He supports this concept by saying that it found its expression in international educational discourse through the first publication of Paulo Freire’s two essays: “Cultural Action and Conscientisation” and “The Literary Process as Cultural Action for Freedom” in *Harvard Educational Review* in 1970. This concept, however, is briefly defined by Freire in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) as “learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to take actions against the oppressive elements of reality” (35, the Translator’s note). Conscientisation, therefore, provides the stimulus to better understand the root causes of human suffering, dehumanization – the loss of humanity – and how humanization – restoring of humanity – might take place. This helps in building some critical awareness and consciousness in the oppressed masses.

## 2. The Symbiotic Link between Literature and Conscientisation

According to Femi Osofisan, ‘man can change his society if the right decisions are made. There is no reason why we should not be able to move our society from its present chaos. And this is one of the fundamental duties of literature’ (in Takem, 1990:174). Since the three poets are concerned about change for the interest of the masses and the working class, their poetry becomes instructive. Poetry becomes a viable means of effecting the necessary critical awareness in the consciousness of the audience of the socio-economic and political malaise overwhelming their society. The primary virtue of literature is its subversive change hidden behind the façade of entertainment. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire argues that “the awakening of critical consciousness leads the way to the expression of social discontents precisely because these discontents are real components of an oppressive situation” (1970:36). To him the awakening of such critical consciousness can only come through the acquisition of true knowledge (education) which will create a social change in the society. Lui Keqi in quoting Freire, illustrates the characteristics of critical consciousness which he (Lui Keqi) says stand in contrast to both a magical and naïve state of consciousness. He writes:

The critically transitive consciousness is characterized by depth in the interpretation of problems; by the substitution of causal principles of magical explanation; by the testing of one’s “finding” by openness to revision; by the attempt to avoid distortion when perceiving problems and to avoid pre-conceived notions when analyzing them; by refusing to transfer responsibility; by rejecting passive positions; by soundness of argumentation; by the practice of dialogue rather than polemics; by receptivity to the new for reasons beyond mere novelty and by the good sense not to reject the old just because it is old by accepting what is valid in both old and new. Critical transitivity is characteristic of authentically democratic regimes and corresponds to highly permeable, interrogative, restless and dialogical forms of life in contrast to silence

and inaction, in contrast to the rigid, militarily authoritarian state presently prevailing in Brazil, a historical retreat which the usurpers of power try to present a re-encounter with democracy. (2014:46)

From the above quotation, Freire brings out the main characteristics of critical consciousness. Armed with these characteristic features of critical consciousness, the oppressed come to a new awareness of self, have a new sense of dignity, and are stirred by a new hope. Freire argues that though every human being is “ignorant” or submerged in the “culture of silence”, “freedom will be the result of praxis informed action – when a balance between theory and practice is achieved” (1970: 46). This indicates that the oppressed masses can only achieve freedom by putting into practice the theoretical knowledge achieved. In other words, the education given to the masses will help increase their awareness of the vices of the political system in their respective countries. He frowns at those who fear to stake their lives for freedom. Quoting Hegel, he testifies: “It is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained; ... the individual who has not staked his or her life may, no doubt, be recognized as a person; but he or she has not attained true recognition as an independent self-conscious person” (1970:36). This means that freedom has never been given on a platter of gold; it is taken by force.

Poetry has been and still is the fighting weapon. The poets in Africa and elsewhere have always used their poetry as a weapon to galvanize the collective consciousness of the oppressed and because of this are always tormented and tortured. The poets too often speak from prison – Brutus, Soyinka, and Jacinto. From their roots in Africa to the Antilles, they have carried their song into battle and have often paid the price (Eldred D. Jones, *African Literature Today*, Volume 16/2).

### **3. Anglophone Cameroon: A Historical Overview**

The Francophones who wield both political and economic power exercise supreme and irrational power over the Anglophones. In this regard, poetry becomes the handy idiom which carries the burden of social commentary. But what, precisely, is the Anglophone Problem? Victor Julius Ngoh in *History of Cameroon Since 1800* argues that although it is generally agreed that there is an Anglophone Problem in Cameroon, it is not easy to really define it. However, Ngoh maintains that “what seems glaring is the fact that the Problem revolves around the cultural identity of a minority people in a union whose first right is to exist. Anglophones feel and claim the right, as citizens of Cameroon, to exist and to be treated equally with the other partner, the Francophones” (1996:315).

After the first World War and the defeat of Germany, German Kamerun was divided into British and French spheres. The League of Nations, which was formed after the war, allowed Britain to administer her portion of the country as a mandated territory of the League of Nations (Ngoh, 1996: 315). It was in 1958 that full- region status was attained. The development of the Cameroonian identity was partly due to the neglect of the advancement of Southern Cameroons by Nigeria and Britain. The Foumban Conference of July 17 -22,1961 instituted a Federal but centralized state of governance. However, on May 20, 1972, Amadou Ahidjo as President transformed Cameroon into a Republic. “United” was scrapped; meaning

the process of assimilation begun by Ahidjo had been completed by Paul Biya. This was the beginning of the ‘Anglophone Problem’ in Cameroon because the Anglophones soon saw themselves as an assimilated and annexed people whose cultural identity and experience were threatened. Reacting to this new dispensation, one of the leading Cameroonian Anglophone Politicians, Mola Njoh Litumbe remarked:

This country is passing through a period of economic and political turmoil. All of us, writers, politicians, churchmen, and others have a role to play, until a truly democratic federation constitution is written, under which there will be a clear recognition of the bicultural nature of Cameroon. (qtd in Che Tita, 1993:1)

Consequently, this arrangement inevitably gave birth to the political sensitivity which characterizes the Anglophone Cameroonian writers.

#### **4. Statement of the Problem**

Anglophone-Cameroon Poetry seems to be that of an embattled and embittered people. Anglophone- Cameroonians constitute a minority and consider themselves marginalized by their Francophone counterparts who wield both political and economic powers. The Anglophones who may be considered the dregs of society are described in Bate Besong’s *Beasts of No Nation* as “Night soil men,” and “excreter carriers.” Although the Anglophone predicament, now known in Cameroon as the “Anglophone Problem,” has been highlighted in both novels and plays, poetry seems to be the most hermetic genre which can be used to convey the social conditions of the underprivileged and the exploited of the society. It expresses the psyche of a people and the human condition. Even Uilli Beier in *An Introduction to African Literature* is perturbed by Jean Paul Sartre’s exclusion of poetry from his scheme of commitment:

For some strange reason, Sartre excluded poetry from his scheme of commitment. Poetry was “opaque” and “Non-communicative,” while prose was “transparent” and “communicative” and used words as a means, to distinct from poetry that used words as an end. So, prose was best suited as a tool for the committed writer, (1967:ix)

Unlike other genres, poetry speaks in the first person, articulating the plight of the oppressed of the earth with a lot of authenticity. Furthermore, the concise nature of poetry makes it possible to be sung or recited.

#### **5. Research Questions**

Thus, the above statement of problem can be broken down into the following questions: (a) what is the link between conscientisation and literature? (b) Can poetry effectively raise consciousness? (c) What is the role of poetry of conscientisation in an autocratic system?

#### **6. Hypothesis**

In view of the problem and questions as stated above, this paper contends that Doh, Besong and

Takwi have used their poetry as instruments to conscientise the masses so as to liberate them from the shackles of political oppression. They use both their poetic diction and ideology to raise awareness and galvanize socio-political consciousness. It is against this vantage point that we think poetry is best suited to comment on the human condition in general and the social condition of the marginalized Anglophone-Cameroonians in particular. The poetry of Emmanuel Doh, Bate Besong and Mathew Takwi could be viewed as a collection of “war songs” aimed at liberating the Anglophones from the shackles of the Francophone-dominated regime, which has always treated the Anglophones with scorn and contempt.

## 7. Theoretical Considerations

This article is informed by the socialist realism of the Lukacsian-Marxist paradigm. The concept of socialist realism marks an important advance in the development of Marxist aesthetics on literature and art in general. Socialist realism according to <http://www.levengevaertcentre.be/> is a soviet artistic doctrine, realistic in its nature which has as purpose the furtherance of the goals of socialism and communism. Basically, some of the features of socialist realism include: optimism and hope, conscientisation and revolt. Chidi Amuta in *The Theory of African Literature* outlines the following characteristic features of socialist realism. He contends, “...the essential attributes of socialist realist expression include (a) the use of simple and accessible language (b) a sympathetic portrayal of characters from the oppressed, (c) a sense of patriotism defined in terms of concern with the struggle of socialism” (1989:140). Socialist realist writers must be politically active on the side of the oppressed.

Maxim Gorky, the doyen of socialist realism summarizes these socialist realist features thus:

... it is clear that in addition to the necessity of studying the language and developing the ability to select the simplest, most graphic and colourful words from a literary language, which while perfected to a high degree is nevertheless littered with empty and ugly words, the writer must also have a good knowledge of the past history and of the social phenomenon of contemporary society in which he is called upon to fulfill his dual role of midwife and grave-digger (1971:32-33)

Finally, Es'kia Mphahlele contends that African writers especially critics must always “hammer their theories out of their social realism” (1974:84).

The aim of Marxism is to bring about a classless society, based on the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange. Marxism is a materialist philosophy: that is, it tries to explain things without assuming the existence of a world or of forces beyond the natural world around us and the society we live in (Peter Barry, 1995: 156). The antithesis of Marxism is idealism. Marxist philosophy is materialist based. According to Maynard Solomon, Marxism is the symbolism of dialectical conflict, of drama, of the unity of opposite, of revolutionary change, of matter and man in motion, constantly transcending the moment, pointing into the future (qtd in Chidi Amuta, 1989: 52) All these articulations point to one thing: that whereas other philosophies merely seek to understand and interpret the world,

(critical realism), Marxist criticism like socialist realism seeks to change it. The power dialectics exhibited in Doh, Besong and Takwi's poetic vision is essentially meant to usher in change for the better. Their poetic works of these three poets are perceived in this article as an agent of social change.

There were various influences on early Marxist thinking in addition to that of the political experiences of its founders, including the work of eighteenth-century German philosopher, Hegel (especially his idea of dialectic, whereby opposing forces or ideas bring about new situations or ideas. These two opposing forces are the Base and the Superstructure representing the ruled and the rulers respectively. Marxism, therefore, is built on socialist realist thinking. Marx and Engels who were the brain behind Marxism applied the dialectic principle mainly to the sphere of social development. They believed that the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat would lead inevitably to the overthrow of capitalism, thus promoting the cause of social progress. (Fokkema and Ibsch, 1995:83)

The three poets under study seem to have been influenced by the Marxist ideology and the philosophy of socialist realism.

### **8. Textual Analysis**

The three poets under reference are observers of, participants in, and commentators on the social condition of the Anglophones who have been reduced to a Sisyphean existence. In their themes and artistry, these poets write poetry that is politically correct and artistically profound. To them, it seems the power structure of the Yaounde-based regime is made up of vampires, drawing on the blood of the Anglophones. Carson Anyangwe captures this imagery of cruelty accurately when he asserts that the attitude of "the authorities of La Republique du Cameroun" vis-a-vis the Southern Cameroons has been a "full-blooded commitment to cruelty" ( qtd in Che Tita, 1993:9). Emmanuel Doh picks up this theme of cruelty and the victimization of the Anglophones in one of his poems entitled "Lament of the Town Crier" in which he expresses disapproval of the incarceration of the four famous Anglophone journalists who were victimized in 1990 for calling for multiparty politics in Cameroon:

Traitors to train a town-crier then  
control the ringing of his bell:  
brainwashing him into a praise-singer  
instead of his people's eyes, ears, and mouth.  
A parrot is caged for telling the truth. (13)

It is obvious that these journalists were arrested and detained in Kondengue maximum security prison simply on the basis of their being Anglophones. This event corresponded to the experiences of Ntemfac Ofege, Charley Ndichia, and Boh Herbert, all Anglophone journalists who eventually lost their jobs because of their political activism. Doh goes further to examine the politicians and the political leaders in "Kwashiorakor Graveyard," revealing again how corrupt and inept they are for the grave task that they have. In this poem Doh laments the



misappropriation of the country's wealth left by the late president, Amadou Ahidjo:

Thou graveyard of my pre-natal chair  
thou preserver of my natal  
gifted in all to make me happy,  
fertility, fruitfulness  
yet today thou are accused. (6)

This poem depicts a situation where the former wealth of the country, especially the money fetched by agricultural produce like coffee, beans, tea, bananas, and palm produce have been depleted and in its stead we have a malnourished country (patient). The politicians are aware of this unfortunate situation and raise lame excuses, some of which are bad weather:

Treason! It is the tapper, who squanders  
all the wine and says bad weather  
affected the raffia palms; he drinks  
the oil and says the kernels  
were barren... (6)

The wine and oil are symbols of the nation's wealth which has been squandered by those who wield political power. Although the reference in this poem is to the entire nation, what is particularly lamentable is the fact that the Southern Cameroons, (Anglophone regions) especially rich in mineral resources and agricultural produce, feel this pinch personally and more sharply. In fact, the Human Rights activists and one of the founding fathers of the opposition Social Democratic Front (S.D.F) and a long-time prisoner of conscience, Albert Mukong laments this unfortunate situation:

This serves the farmers faithfully and the government respected that the reserves of the Marketing Board belonged to the farmers and hence... the reserves rose to over 45 million, including internal and external holdings and investments. After the 1972 referendum and abolition of the federation, these funds fell into the hands of the authorities in Yaounde. (1992:10)

So it was not that the "weather affected the raffia palms" but that the terrible tapper who was never trained to tap had killed the young raffia. On the other hand, Doh contends that it was not just bad tapping; the tappers were outright lying. In "The Politician Never Learns," he says, "Only the politician makes the / Same mistake twice; / Only the politician is the second fool / He alone never learns" (12). This poem's sarcastic tone takes off from the whole mistake of the Southern Cameroonians joining La Republique du Cameroun down to the whole concept of Amadou Ahidjo having handed power to Paul Biya on November 6, 1982 without any elections; it was like a chieftaincy, as Doh expresses in yet another poem, aptly entitled, "This is My Chop-Chair:" "Thanks Ahidjo, Such a will to bequeath posterity" (11). Indeed, Doh is in no

way praising Ahidjo for passing power over to Paul Biya as if it were a family business. This sarcastic tone becomes evident when the poet confesses that the money the late Amadou Ahidjo handed to Biya has all been stolen and the country plunged into a crisis of poverty and mismanagement:

For decades a god pupil  
of Al-Hadji's you were,  
yet crisis – the wage  
of the masses  
ushered by Iscariot and his kind  
legalised barons of multi-coloured ills  
wth bursting coffers alienated  
With profits from our sweat exiled. (10)

In the above poem, Doh indicates that poverty has become the by-product of someone's affluence, the issue of exploitation, living off the sweat of other people; the vampire image again. And because of this marginalization and exploitation, and the fear of repression, the marginalized can only suffer in silence in "Down Time Avenue":

But down Time-A venue my heart aches:  
from afar I hear the muted cries  
of a people who know not how to handle a  
strange tide as those who direct and protect,  
like a purgative, drain the entrails  
and leave the triangle hungry. (3)

The triangle here is the shape of Cameroon and the entrails symbolize the produce and mineral resources. But its specific reference here is the Southern Cameroons, which does not understand the language and culture of the Francophone as evidence in the expression "the strange tide as those who direct and protect." Furthermore, the Francophone exploiter is portrayed as a vampire:

They care less  
what our plight is;  
at all costs they seek the steering,  
even against the wish of the passengers,  
who dread the many ghastly accidents



social, political and economic. (3)

The poet feels this sharp pinch because he comes from this part of the country (passengers) that is being forcefully led by an uncaring and callous leader. The political “accidents” range from the elimination of the Anglophone leaders, repression of the West Cameroon House of Assembly; the economic accidents, including the destruction of Santa Coffee Estate, the Powercam Electric Corporation, the West Cameroon Marketing Board, the regional airport, etc. Here, Doh is the voice of the younger poets in accordance with Ode S. Ogede’s prescriptions of their responsibilities:

These younger poets learned that they must not make powerful indictments protesting against the dismal state of affairs, but suggest clear measures to remedy it because the military rogues who preside over the mal-administration of their country are hard of hearing and can only be moved with insults, full-throated and clamorous, not beautiful images. (qtd. in Eldred Jones, 1996:63)

In yet another poem titled “Njangi House,” Doh hits hard on the parliamentarians who are supposed to be the people’s representatives but who tend to represent their stomachs in the house of parliament:

Representatives my foot.  
Foot North to South  
from East to West they  
claim to have come errand boys  
and girls. Yet, before  
they sit, the fruits of  
our labour to squander, they  
Care less our opinion to sample. (7)

The parliamentarians tend to forget about the various constituencies they are supposed to represent; they neither sample the views of the masses nor those of the people they represent. Consequently, they have absolutely nothing to offer. Some have been reduced to hand clappers; others even sleep during deliberations of bills: “Absent minded in their looks/, siesta time for others, for what is there to discuss”. (7)

Some of these politicians do not seem to see anything wrong with the system. What is particularly shocking is the fact that even some Anglophone intellectuals have joined the oppressors instead of assuming their role in the transformation of the society. Hilary Kebila Fokum, one of the very outspoken Anglophone critics buttresses this point when he submits,

We need a leader, who is one of us, best of us; not the buffoons in Yaounde.  
We need genuine leader not self-styled elites who arrogate themselves

leadership by virtue of their education and wealth. Achidi Achu and company should be the last Anglophone buffoons. Away with the buffoon; and, welcome to UNITY. Yes! Anglophones cannot be free without unity. United we survive, divided; perish. (qtd. in Che Tita, 1993:15)

In other words, the song of brotherhood should strike fear into the Francophone oppressors. This therefore, is a clarion call for both the Anglophone politicians and the intellectuals to transcend the limitation of their vision and fight for the unconditional liberation of the Anglophones from the recolonization and neo colonization of the Anglophones by the Francophones. Frantz Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, makes this point very clear: “Each generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it” (1967:146).

In “Who Do They Think They Are Fooling?” the criticism is extended to the imperialists. This particular poem has an anti-imperialist and anti-neo-colonialist sentiment, and portrays Cameroon in particular, and Africa as a whole, as a plantation for the West: “Who do they think they are / fooling? To come here and / ask us to plant tea, coffee and rubber / for their industries” (23). What is frustrating is the fact that the buyers, rather than the sellers, fix the prices of the products, and frustrate the farmers by reducing the buying prices (23). Anglophone-Cameroon farmers are seriously affected. Most of these raw materials are found in the Anglophone regions. Two such examples are the Tole Tea and Rubber Plantation in the South West Region, which is an Anglophone region, and the Ndu Tea Estate in the North West Region. In spite of the revenue generated by these two Regions from the raw material they supply to the state, they lack basic infrastructure like good roads and social amenities. Emmanuel Fru Doh in an attempt to formulate a theory for the liberation of the Anglophone from the shackles of the Francophones, realizes that his art must be fused with social consciousness. But it is of crucial significance at this juncture to indicate that Doh’s political commitment and his artistic profundity are dialectically related.

Like Doh, Bate Besong actually diagnoses the social, moral and political ills in his society and administers doses of socio-political therapy. To argue from the position of strength. Besong maintains that in a police state like Cameroon, writers should use innuendos and obscure language to escape the dragnets of the forces of law and order that are paid to stifle and muffle criticism against the administration. However, to say that Besong’s poetry does not fall within the paradigm of poetry of conscientisation on grounds of his language would be mere cant and humbug. Chidi Amuta indicts those who use only language as the sole criterion for literary judgment in *The Theory of African Literature* when he says:

... Poetry can become readily instrumental in historical situations requiring the galvanization of: feelings and emotions in pursuit of a collective cause. But the language of such historical functional poetry cannot be legislated by professional criticism and literary theory. (1989:177)

In his collection entitled *Just Above Cameroon*, Besong starts with the definition of poetry. To him, poetry is “Sunshine and moon wreaths / cycles of redemption / Love-potions and amber, wines. / peace now. not Hiroshima / Nyerere not Marchal Amin / Easter phase Ujamaa (27). Besong debunks the myth that poetry is meant for dictators like Hitler and Idi Amin. To him,

poetry is meant for men of culture with a strong intellectual foundation like Julius Nyerere and Wole Soyinka, people with refined minds. By extension, the poet frowns at the dictatorship of the Francophone-dominated government.

He equally sees poetry in the late Augustine Ngom Jua, one of the former West Cameroon prime ministers. Jua was known for his courage and charisma, and his brilliant performance in Anglophone Cameroon politics made him an important political figure in Anglophone Cameroon politics. He was seen as a grain of hope for the Anglophones. His opposition to Amadou Ahidjo's policies of the francophonization of Anglophones made him a no-nonsense politician in Anglophone-Cameroon politics. The poet quips, "Poetry is not a Gulag/ Poetry is Jua / Voice of Anglophone Universe" (27).

Augustine Ngom Jua fought very hard to defend the Anglophone cause. Little wonder then that he was fired from his prime ministerial post. He was appointed in 1965 and fired in 1968. He was perceived as the voice of the voiceless Anglophones. If Jua had not accomplished his mission, he at least identified it. Besong's glorification, immortalization and romantization of Bobe Augustine Ngom Jua is another way of reminding the present politicians (who have given the impression that there is no such thing as the Anglophone problem, that what is crucial now is their stomachs and their families) that they should emulate the splendid example of Jua, the no-nonsense politician and statesman. In fact, Jua fought the good fight of faith before his death. He is perceived in both literary and political circles as a symbol of conscience.

From his definition of poetry, Besong in his "Prison Blues" (i-vii) explores the predicament of writers and social critics who are thrown in jail for no good reason. It is even sometimes argued that if the biblical St. Paul had not been put in prison, Christianity might have remained a religion without a literature because Jesus Christ did not write anything down throughout his ministry as Sanya Onabamori in his *Philosophical Essays* submits: "One of the paradoxes of history is that if Paul had not been in prison, Christianity might have remained a religion without Literature! As we all know, Jesus did not write anything. .."(1980:118). Most African writers have tasted the bitterness of solitary confinement in prison for speaking the truth aloud. From Wole Soyinka to Bate Besong, and from Ngugi Wa Thiong'o to Dennis Brutus and Jacinto, this confinement more often inspires them. In "Prison Blues," the poet deplors the inhuman condition that prevails in prison. He describes the prison thus:

In that human  
abattoir  
queues of two or three  
hundred escandrions.  
Cannibal militaire. (3)

Given that imprisoned writers are prisoners of conscience, they need not be treated this way. These writers are not only held in solitary confinement, but are incarcerated and lacerated. The poet persona says in "Prison Blues" "Only such demented precursors / who, rejoicing, puke / prodigal lacerations / behind prison bars" (5). In "Their Champagne Party Will End," the poet

denounces the corrupt nature of the Francophone- dominated regime and prophesies the end of the corrupt regime. Indeed, they have sworn fealty to their Masonic lodges to each other to bankrupt our national coffer. The curse on the head of the corrupt banditti (2).

Bate Besong's Marxist background has a tremendous influence on his poetry. In "The Champaign Party Will End," the poet echoes the message of Ngugi wa Thiongo. Besong equally depicts the wrong suffered by the Anglophone working class under the capitalist system of the Yaounde regime, monitored by the powerful foreign interests and stage managed by the Francophones, who play the role of middlemen: "Dead after day, / when our workers died of chronic shortages, / of overwork and exposure" (22). By highlighting the Anglophone predicament, Besong is preparing the minds of the Anglophones for their revolt which will eventually lead to their liberation.

Liberation, like freedom, is fought for; it is never given on a platter of gold. Seen from this standpoint, it could be argued that Besong, like Emmanuel Fru Doh and Mathew Takwi is preaching rebellion and violence as a sine qua non condition for liberation. Besong in this particular poem highlights the affluence of those who constitute the superstructure and the abject penury of the proletarians who constitute the base of the society. The proletarians are the producers of the nation's wealth, but they are not adequately compensated. Within the context of Cameroon, the marginalized Anglophones are the proletarians who work very hard but are not adequately compensated.

In this bilingual, bi-cultural and bijural Cameroon, the Anglophone is often treated with scorn and contempt by the Francophone, and is often stigmatized as "les anglos," "les Bianfrans," and "the enemies within." From a Marxist perspective, Cameroonian Anglophones are in the first place an exploited class, separated by exploitation and oppression from the historical gains made by humanity in its struggle with nature. The poet/persona frowns at the catchy and carefully chosen words used by the Francophone administrators to deceive and cajole the Anglophones: "It was during the golden epoch/; there was much talk of /Unity, Reconciliation, Self- Reliance and all that shit" (22).

In another poem entitled "Just Above Cameroon" dedicated to the late Mongo Beti - one of the best celebrated Cameroonian and African writers, Besong salutes Mongo Beti's courage to confront both the Ahidjo and Biya governments. As a writer in a modern African state, Mongo Beti dared to tread where Angels feared to. This literary guru actually played the role of a writer in a modern society. Wole Soyinka, in *Art, Dialogue and Outrage*, is of the opinion that "when the writer in his own society can no longer function as conscience, he must recognize that his choice lies between denying himself totally and withdrawing to the position of chronicler and post mortem surgeon" (1993:20). It is imperative at this juncture to underscore the fact that in the present dispensation, it is not enough for African writers to limit their fights only to reflective writing; it is high time they took on an activist dimension as well.

Takwi in "Where to, All Alone?" also preoccupies himself with the abuse of power which is an aspect of oppression and repression. He uses this particular poem to call on the oppressed to react so as to free themselves from political tyranny. In this poem Takwi streamlines the gulf between the haves and the have-nots in the Cameroonian contemporary society and

underscores the conflict that characterizes this gap. From the reading of this poem, it is clear that power is acquired by the ruling class for the accumulation of wealth for its own self. That is why the poet in a rhetorical style asks where the politician is heading to all alone with the nation's wealth. While the ruling class swims in the cesspool of ill-gotten wealth, the masses languish in frustration, penury and abject poverty:

I see your glittering limousine  
Glide on crowded dusty lanes  
Spraying your brethren in altruism  
Gathering scornful jibes from them  
As you solely zoom to He alone knows where  
Characteristic daily show of affluence  
So their bellies query:  
Where to, all alone? (44)

In a rhetorical style the poet wonders aloud where this particular politician is heading to alone with the nation's wealth:

I see your gigantic steps  
Pull your flamboyant frame around  
With bulged and overflowing wallet  
Yet amidst solitary crowded crowd  
Yearning your solo prospering treks  
And so their astonished gaze wanders  
Where to, all alone? (44)

Using the rhetorical poetic device to underscore his thematic preoccupation, the poet highlights one of the obnoxious and vicious practices in African contemporary politics, namely capital flight. The ruler's glittering limousine sharply contrasts with the dusty nature of the road on which it rides: "I see your glittering limousine/Glide on crowded dusty lanes". The masses' consternation as to where this particular ruler is taking the nation's wealth symbolizes their quest for identity, for purpose and their own destiny. Because the people are excluded from the running and management of the country, life becomes a bewildering dilemma and a vexing enigma. Some do the work; others only eat; some work to maintain the power structures, others work to change them. Confronted by this dialectical contradiction, the poet bemoans:

On daily basis, stomach fuel remnants you dump  
Mounting a mount by your arrogant mountainous fence

Banquet hall for neighbours' chainless skeletal dogs  
Who grumble aloud at biting hooting sounds  
Sharply emitted from city's cleaning vans  
Rushing in, to clean their rare gem meal  
Envied by their masters' lean bodies  
So their plain intestines query:  
Where to, all alone? (44)

The torments and frustrations of the masses as depicted in this poem are evidence that they do not belong, consequently do not have any socio-political and cultural freedom and the only alternative is to revolt. All the efforts made by the masses to alleviate their conditions symbolize a pathetic quest for their freedom, for purpose, for destiny and for essence and existence.

Any given society within the broader epochal unit contains its own peculiarities, and the Cameroonian scenario is just one of them where the leaders care less about the welfare of those who have legitimized their stay in power. Or at worse, the rulers impose themselves after having rigged and falsified election results.

Takwi in another poem entitled "Because I Am an Anglo" touches on one of the very sensitive and crucial political issues in Anglophone Cameroonian literature, namely, the marginalisation and social exclusion of Anglophone Cameroonians from the socio-political affairs of the country. In Cameroon's political configuration, Anglophone Cameroonians only deputize. Hilarious N. Ambe in *Change Aesthetics in Anglophone Cameroon Drama and Theatre* contends that,

In post independent Cameroon, in terms of infrastructure and appointments to top ranking positions in administration and government, Anglophones, compared to their input and resources are very marginally compensated. A recent presidential decree of ministerial appointments in Cameroon, Number 2002/217 of 24<sup>th</sup> August 2002, signals a devastating mockery of the extent of Anglophone marginalisation in Cameroon. In the decree there are only eight Anglophone ministers out of a total of fifty three. Again, in this cabinet of fifty three, there are thirty with portfolios: only two of the eight Anglophone ministers have portfolios. (2007:8)

Takwi in this poem also articulates the same social exclusion of Anglophone Cameroonians from the scheme of things. Hear the poet:

They claim  
'Cos I am an Anglo  
I cannot preside

But can only be undersized.  
They think,  
'Cos I am an Anglo  
I cannot glow  
But can only be asked to go. (51)

The ruling elite bears the responsibility for coordination and, at times, direction- but leaders who deprive the minority of its praxis also invalidate their own praxis. By refusing the Anglophones in Cameroon certain administrative positions also establishes a contradiction between the objectives of good governance in any country and the methods of governance.

Sensitive ministerial positions such as the ministries of Finance, Armed forces, Secondary Education are the preserve rights of Francophone Cameroonians. Even the coach of the National team is reserved only for Francophone Cameroonians in a situation where the administration feels that the services of an expatriate coach are not required. For example, in 2011 when an opportunity presented itself for Jules Nyongha, an experienced Anglophone coach to head the National team, he was shelved in favour of a francophone coach. Hear the poet:

They impose,  
'Cos I am an Anglo  
I cannot Chancellor Exchequer  
But can only be under-Exchequer  
They misconstrue,  
'Cos I am an Anglo  
I cannot coach our team  
But can only be clipped under the coach  
They frighten,  
'Cos I am an Anglo  
I cannot sit on leathered swivel seat  
But can only lift on sweating feet, for him to sit. (51)

The use of the words "chancellor exchequer" stands for the Ministry of finance in Cameroon, a post that has been monopolized by the Francophones since 1961. The government feels that it will be a tragic error if this ministry is controlled by an Anglophone. Cameroon got her independence in 1960, that is some fifty-four years ago and an Anglophone is yet to head either the Ministry of finance or Armed forces.



The word “Anglo” in the poem is the short form of Anglophone. In order to maintain the rhythmic pattern of his poetic lines, Takwi exploits contraction which is a poetic device par excellence. Words like “Cos” and “Anglo” representing ‘because’ and ‘Anglophone’ respectively demonstrate the poet’s economic use of word since poetry suggests and does not explain.

During the launch of *Messing Manners*, the reviewer, Andrew T. Ngeh also underscored the issue of the marginalisation of Anglophone Cameroonians in his six page review. He submits:

Some third generation Anglophone Cameroonian poets like John Ngong Kum Ngong in *Snatched from the Grave*, Emmanuel Fru Doh in *Not Yet Damascus* and Mathew Takwi in *Messing Manners* are quick to identify that the problem overwhelming the Cameroonian society and most African societies is the collapse of morality and ethical values. In fact the problem we are facing in Cameroon is more of moral crisis than political crisis because if the leadership in place has the fear of God, elections will not be rigged, particular regions will not be stigmatized as enemies in the house, there won’t be embezzlement of state funds, homosexuality and lesbianism will have no place as seen on the cover page of this collection, contracts will not be given to fake contractors; and occultic practices will have no place. “Que Nous Manque t-il?” “Ou En Sont Les Preuves?”, (where are the evidence or proofs?) “Because I am an Anglo”, “Be a Parent” and the title poem “Messing Manners” are some of the poems that carry the thematic preoccupations of the poet highlighted above. (Review of *Messing Manner*, 2014:4)

It is important to underscore the fact that in oppressive and repressive situations like the one in Cameroon, the poet who lends his art to the service of freedom, justice and democracy restates the truism that socially redeeming political action is the highest form of artistic expression. After all, a poet must be socially committed in order to be universally engaged. Thus it is the task of this article to appraise the nature of the poets’ poetics within the perspective of positive change and advancement of the human condition in the Cameroonian society.

## **9. Conclusion**

We, therefore, contend that Emmanuel Fru Doh, Bate Besong and Mathew Takwi write poetry that is politically correct and artistically profound. Both of them have been faithful adherents to Bate Besong’s prescription that “[t]he Anglophone Cameroon writer must never forget his origins. His writing must depict the condition of his people, expressing the spontaneous feelings of betrayal, protest and anger” ( Nalova Lyonga, Bole Butake and Eckhard Breitingner, eds *Anglophone Cameroon Writing 1993*:18). Their poetry constitutes a veritable weapon for the conscientisation and liberation of Anglophone Cameroonians from the shackles of Francophone autocratic and oppressive rule as Chidi Amuta contends: “In the African world, the poet as a man of culture devotes his art and life to the pursuit of justice and freedom, has become part of the very legitimacy of the poetic undertaking” (1989: 177). It is true that two “tribes” of poets have emerged in Africa: those who use their art to legitimize, uphold and

advance the cause and ideology of the status quo; and those who use their talents to challenge the ruling class and, thus, champion the cause of those who bear the burden of oppression. Doh, Besong and Takwi fall in the latter category as they have demonstrated that they possess those Promethean instincts, which they use to serve mankind. After all, a small man renders his services to his society, and a great man to mankind. Doh, Besong and Takwi who could be considered human rights activist poets, are fighting for the restoration of the collapse of humanity epitomized by the type of politics perpetuated by Francophones in bilingual Cameroon. Their ideological frameworks, which prompt and condition their writings, find artistic expression in a number of aesthetic features. As poets and fighters, Doh, Besong and Takwi pave the way and provide opportunities for the collective fulfillment of Anglophone Cameroonians.

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