

“New People, New Style, Old Dance”: An Analysis of the Dominant Ideologies in Bate Besong’s Plays

Yimbu Emmanuel Nchia

Department of English, Higher Teachers Training College
Yaounde, CAMEROON

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*Email for correspondence:
nchiayimbu@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Borrowed from Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born*, the notion of ‘New People, New Style, Old Dance’ is a perfect description of the kind and type of leadership that characterizes post independent Africa as exemplified in the plays of Bate Besong. This paper x-rays the parasitic nature of leadership politics in Besong’s plays and argues amongst other issues that the dreams of independence were all deferred with the accession to power by the neo-colonialist. It further stresses that the political transition of power from the colonial to the neo-colonial regime was a mere changed of political actors

and tactics but the doctrine of oppression, exploitation, corruption and embezzlement amongst many other social vices still remained unchanged. Like their predecessors, these leaders perceived power as an opportunity for personal gains and not for the benefit of all and sundry.

From a Marxist critical paradigm, the analysis in this paper validates the Marxist dictum that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely (Emerich, 1887.1902). Besong’s plays in terms of ideology can rightly be considered as a dramatization of the excesses of autocratic leadership, conceived, spear headed and master minded by a group of beastlike (or Zombie) creatures with absolutely no concern for the suffering masses. Also, that his plays capture and dramatize the grimness and futility of the human condition in postcolonial Cameroon in particular and Africa at large. Furthermore, the analyses reveal that Africa’s leadership is responsible for the inability of the continent to emancipate itself from poverty, epidemics and persistent diseases. As a result, a continent rich in natural and human resources is continuously characterize by coup d’états, civil wars and social unrests because the wealth of the nation is at the mercy of a few elites while the rest of the citizenry suffer in abject poverty. Besong therefore as a ‘writer in postcolonial politics’ frowns at autocratic leadership and his plays suggest that Cameroon in particular and African as a whole need a new set of leaders with a decolonized mindset as conditions sine qua non for their emancipation from physical and mental oppression, corruption and exploitation.

Key Words: Independence, Oppression, Leadership, Power, Politics

INTRODUCTION

African politicians have been described as "blind men" by Nurrudin Farah simply because their political ideologies are designed with the intention of satisfying themselves and not the people they are called upon to serve. Greed, self-centeredness and egotism characterize their political agendas. The major theme in African drama as exemplified in the plays of Besong is the excesses of political leadership. The taking over of power by the neo-colonialist from their colonial masters led to the evaporation of all dreams of greatness, nationalism, liberation from the colonial thralldom and poverty. As soon as the neo-colonialists took over power, they suddenly became worse than their colonial masters. The transition from the colonial to the post-colonial period has been described by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *I Will Marry When I Want* as a journey from "Cold Land" to "Frost Land". This is proof of the fact that the neo-colonialists in regarding ideology, are worse than their colonial predecessors.

'CHOP BROKE POT' LEADERSHIP POLITICS IN BATE BESONG'S DRAMA

'Chop Broke Pot' is a Pidgin English expression used in local parlance in Cameroon to describe people suffering from excessive greed and self-interest. It is used here to refer to leadership that is allergic to the plight of the suffering masses and as such, thinks only of itself. Shortly after independence, African drama and theatre took a dramatic twist as the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized became the major thematic pre-occupation in almost all creative works of literature. As a result of the failure of independence to improve the lives of the masses, most committed African writers have described the relationship between the masses, the colonizers and their neo-colonial counterparts as unhealthy and fruitless. G.E Okereke for example comments on the relationship between the colonialist and their emergent neo-colonial counterparts in his illuminating study of the works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o. To him:

The African predicament is compounded by the emergence of colonialism in new robes bearing a slightly different name, neo-colonialism. This is a new kind of colonialism because Europe is now controlling Africa not directly as in the colonial era but indirectly through the new African leaders whose aspirations are to perfect themselves in the art of oppression and exploitation, an art at which the European colonizers were adept. (Qd in Critical Perspectives, 1993, 132)

From the colonial to the neo-colonial period, there was little or no improvement in the lives of the masses who fought together with their enlightened elites to send away the colonialists. This is because the new third world elites merely fitted into the shoes of their former colonial masters. The departure of the colonizers and the attainment of independence by many once-colonized countries was not a panacea for political, economic social and cultural freedom Ayi Kwei Armah, describes the journey from the colonial to the neo-colonial period as a change in "dancers" but the "dance" remained the same. As he puts it "New People, New style, Old Dance" (*The Beautiful Ones*, 23). The old dance of oppression exploitation and marginalization of the colonized masses was intensified in a more traumatic manner by the neo-colonialist. The relationship between the masses and the neo-colonial elite has been described by Fanon, as a pitfall of national consciousness. Independence thus did propel a new set of leaders in most of the newly independent states. These leaders did not only fail to fulfill their pre-independence promises but presented their peoples, with a series of betrayals and catastrophes. As Hilarius Ambe makes us understand, quick and rapid alliances and negotiations were forged or imposed by the new leaders as "a means of cementing and consolidating their new position: and then they settle down to a systematic and shameless looting of the collective wealth" (94).

Ambe further argues that either through improved legislation, presidential decrees/ordinances, political manipulation or outright totalitarianism, the new leaders continued trampling on their citizenry, who remained dispossessed and incapacitated. In almost the same mannerism as their colonial predecessors, the neo-colonial regimes were characterized by oppression, exploitation,

power abused, marginalization and religious hypocrisy. The excesses of neo-colonial leadership politics inform and continue to pre-occupy most postcolonial writers including Bate Besong. Besong's plays regarding thematic concerns can be qualified as a dramatization of the excesses of power, conceived, spear headed and master minded by a group of beasts or zombies who are completely indifferent to the problems of their suffering masses.

Besong in his plays attempt to dramatize, in plain terms, the exploitation of the workers and peasants by an evil alliance of foreign capital and indigenous middlemen under the guise of economic development. The overriding pre-occupation in Besong's plays which focuses on the excesses of neo-colonial leadership is the nature of capitalist exploitation and its implications in every facet of life among members of different classes in society. Chidi Amuta buttresses this assertion when he says:

The fundamental opposition in Africa today is between imperialism and capitalism on the one hand, and national liberation and socialism on the other: between a small class of native "Haves" which is tied to international monopoly capital and the masses of the people. (98)

Exploitation and alienation in *The Most Cruel Death of the Talkative Zombie* (Henceforth referred to as *Zombie*), *Beasts of No Nations* (Henceforth *Beasts*), *Requiem for the Last Kaiser* (Henceforth *Requiem*) and *Change Waka and His Man Sawa Boy* (Henceforth *Change Waka*) are objectified through the life experiences of ordinary people on a day-to-day basis. The masses have to toil endlessly in return for a pittance and a life of squalor and chronic want. Supporting evidence emerges from the experiences of the masses in the plays under study.

Bate Besong in *Zombie* highlights not only the colonial history of Cameroon, but also the continuous neo-colonial presence. The play, from the events it portrays is a combination of both the pre-independence and post-independence predicaments of Cameroonians. As Ambe makes us understand, the incidents of the drama sets it in postcolonial Cameroon but the dramatic action moves back and forth in episodic form-from the politics and maneuvering of the politicians before Independence and Federation in the 1960s, through the Unitary State in 1972, and then to the present day neo-colonial usurpation of power (Ambe, 2007). *Zombie* becomes a bitter satire on the hypocritical, corrupt and dubious nature of Toura's neo-colonial leadership regime which is representative of many postcolonial societies. If one considers Baba Toura and Badijka to represent the Francophone Ahidjo and the Anglophone Foncha, then, their relationship becomes that between Francophones and Anglophones in Cameroon. The relationship is not a cordial one because one person considers himself as the master, giver and taker and his counterpart, his servant. It is a relationship characterized by oppression, dictatorship and marginalization.

In a section of the play entitled "Ballad of a Party Cadre" Besong portrays how oppressive, brutal and totalitarian Baba Toura's regime is:

*Curse to those who mock a messiah
We'll caress their skulls in the sand-paper hands of the Mantoum enqueteur.
We'll scatter the human nature of those who hate a messiah,
Whose sensitive organs we plucked
In the Balancoire of the Fouban ideological corvee.
So curse to those who mock him
We will machine-gun them
From the rear
So eternal curse to those who hate
Him we will Bazooka them at Tignere
For we'll not let those who
Hate him for no reason
Smile with delight (9)*

From these declarations, one realizes that Baba Toura's regime is one of oppression, dictatorship, physical torture and massive murder. "We will machine-gun them". We will bazooka them at Tignere" all these declarations contextualize the overriding villainy in the play. Also, from the lines cited above, it becomes clear that Baba Toura's regime is still much under French neo-colonial influence. "Mantoum" and "Tignere" mentioned in the speech were notorious prisons reserve for those who were not willing to obey state laws. They are where many political opponents were locked up and some later executed. Mantoum and Tignere in the context of this play symbolize oppression, pain, and torture.

Another obvious example of neo-colonial dictatorship and oppression is presented fairly on in the play through the activities and utterances of Yaro Amichive, head of the country's security network. He is the chief commander who kills mercilessly and even licks human blood. As Besong portrays later in the play, ESCANDON Amichive's portrait paints him more as a beast than the human being:

He is the most powerful man in the country-uncrowned fuehrer of the chapels, even the father of the nation thinks twice before issuing degrees unfavorable to him. His face is expressionless, the face of a man who hates deeply-His eyes are those of a predator, as he examines the prisoner, clinically, in order to break him... Even his breathing is filled with controlled loathing. (33).

The synecdoche of Commandant Escandon Yaro Bakary Amichive as presented above clearly exposes his dictatorial and oppressive nature. As an epitome of his former colonial masters, Amichive is prepared to use all possible means at his disposal to subject the innocent masses to a life of fear and torture. He is not only physically frightful, but his language and utterances carry with them, the undertones of a typical neo-colonial tyrant:

Yaro Amichive: (*Venomously to Gorillas*)
Hunt them down!
Grind them to dust
And cutlass them!
Destroy them!
Bayonet them!
Raze their secessionist
Towns to the ground!....
Your are your own worst enemy...
We are beyond error!...
Yaro est le seul maitre (34)

A proper syntactic and semantic analysis of the above utterances reveals salient issues relating to the type of leadership that took over the colonial regime. The neo-colonialists are ruthless, brutal, inhuman and above all, murderers. It is Baba Yaro's autocratic dialectics that makes Besong to refer to him as a "talkative" and "Zombie" because he licks the human blood. His death is described as "cruel" because he faces death almost under the same brutal and cruel circumstances in which he uses to kill those he considered as secessionist. Yaro's utterances and death are what gives Besong play the title "The Most Cruel Death of the Talkative Zombie". Baba Yaro's dictatorial attitude and declarations are very similar to Gilboa Agulaba's utterances in *The Banquet* to his prison inmates when he declares "I will make you roll in the mud. I will force you to eat soil. I'll make you stare continuously at the sun! (213). Regarding language, the utterances of the dictators carry with them, images and symbols which all heightened an atmosphere of pain, brutality, and torture. It is worth mentioning here as well that in an attempt to break aware from conventional dramatic rules, Besong uses language that in the most part violates the conventional rules of grammar.

From the evidence above, it can be seen that *Zombie* is one of the plays in which Besong x-rays and satirizes the excesses of a corrupt and dictatorial neo-colonial leadership. However, unlike in *Beasts* and *Requiem*, in *Zombie*, there is no confrontation between the oppressed and exploited masses and their dictatorial leadership. Besong's political recommendations in this play are not too overt because he vividly diagnoses the problems the masses face in Cameroon like dictatorship, marginalization, oppression and exploitation but refuses to prescribe any precise therapy which the exploited and oppressed could use for their emancipation.

Similarly, like in *Zombie*, *Requiem* and *Beasts* present a capitalist society in which the masses are relegated to the background politically, oppressed and exploited by their leadership. Like Baba Toura and Baba Yaro in *Zombie*, Akhikirikikii and Aadingingin in *Requiem* and *Beasts* respectively are neo-colonial tyrants who consider leadership as an avenue for self-aggrandizement. Their autocracy is manifested, as in *Zombie*, both in their actions and pronouncements.

Requiem for example is a play in which Besong presents in a very provocative mannerism, the excesses of neo-colonial leadership politics. Commenting on neo-colonial leadership in *Requiem*, George Nyamndi argues that, the Marxist dialectics is sustained in *Requiem* by a triangular construct made of White colonialist agents, their bourgeoisie surrogates and alone to face the demonic pull of these two forces, the masses. The French Ambassador and the Swiss Banker incarnate the agents of political manoeuvre and exploitation. The French Ambassador symbolizes a particular form of European influence in Africa, which is that of the French. Alluding to the French Ambassador, Nyamndi posits that in him can be captured the domineering cynicism, contempt and the sneering disregard that stamped the French colonial mind. As the typical capitalist that he is, he considers all Africans as apes and embarrassments to nature's scheme of things. He refers to Africans as "nigger punks" and insane beasts" (26).

Akhikirikikii, the leader of the people of Agidigidi in *Requiem* and Aadingingin the almighty mayor of Ednuoay in *Beasts* are first class tyrants and dictators who are deified and held as demi-gods by the stooges. They both perceive leadership as an avenue for self-aggrandizement, oppression, dictatorship, and tyranny. Akhikirikikii's speech at the beginning of *Requiem* does not only portray him as a dictator and oppressor, but especially, the numerous metaphors in the speech carry a lot of signification as to the nature of leadership in Agidigidi especially from an ideological standpoint. From the very beginning of the play, Akhikirikikii pricks the consciousness of the audience when he declares:

I'll mesmerize them...I'll get them where I want. Take these Journalists off and torture them... I am the consciousness, the Tempo and heart- throb of Iduote.. The He alone and guide. (short Pause). ...I'll tax them for the air I provide.... In total coming, I will be the alpha and omega, the last and only pharaoh in paradise... the history of the historicity of Agidigid... (1)

In terms of characterization, the use of hybris (excessive pride or self confident that leads a character to violate or disregard societal laws) as seen in the soliloquy above becomes a relevant dramatic device in almost all of Besong's plays. In a manner similar to that of Baba Toura, each time Akhikirikikii speaks, it is only the language of torture and brutality that comes out of his mouth. As noticed in the other plays, most of the speeches in *Requiem* are altered by voices off stage. The use of this dramatic technique becomes very relevant in the case of multiple role play. The above declarations can be very revealing to a reader familiar with the nature of leadership politics in Cameroon in particular and postcolonial societies as a whole. They are very glaring verisimilitudes between the world projected in the plays and the actual realities that exist in the society. For instance, when Akhikirikikii says "I will be the alpha and omega, the last and only pharaoh in paradise... the history of the historicity of Agidigidi" (ibid,1). Later in the same declaration, the tyrant proclaims himself a ruler for life when he says "I will be in

politics still I die..." (ibid,1). Here Akhikirikirii sees himself as a god and is bent on staying in power till death. Such a declaration becomes a perfect reflection of the political scenario in today's Africa where some presidents have self proclaimed themselves life time rulers. Vivid examples include rulers like Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo – Equatorial Guinea (35 years) José Eduardo dos Santos – Angola (35 years), Robert Mugabe – Zimbabwe (34 years), Paul Biya – Cameroon (32 years), Yoweri Museveni – Uganda (28 years), Omar al-Bashir – Sudan (25 years), Idriss Déby – Chad (23 years), Isaias Afwerki – Eritrea (23 years), Yahya Jammeh – The Gambia (20 years), Denis Sassou Nguesso – Republic of Congo (17 years) amongst others. These postcolonial tyrants share a similar leadership ideology as Akhikirikirii.

Equally, Akhikirikirii considers himself the "tempo and heart-throb of Iduote" because the destiny of the country lies in his hands. The fact that Akhikirikirii is ready to "tax" even air hyperbolically emphasizes the extent to which the masses are exploited by neo-colonial leadership. Akhikirikirii declares himself omnipotent and omnipresent and is bent on staying in politics till he dies and only a revolution like the one that takes place at the end of the play can remove him.

Akhikirikirii is a replica of the real man presented by Besong in a stage comment where he says, "at sixty one, he is crazy, ruthless and immensely cunning" (21). Ironically, the French Ambassador who considers the man as "a distinguished genius of politics" (20) salutes these character traits. The Ambassador's admiration for a ruthless and cunning tyrant as a leader only goes to justify their contribution in Africa's turmoil. The man whom the Ambassador describes as a "genius" because they share the same political ideology is actually considered by the Voice of Woman as "a ruthless tyrant, a thief and murderous robber... a dwarfish thief in a messiah robe, with a regime with no justice" (70). The Swiss Banker considers him as "an impenetrable negro-a drugged fool" (23). Voice of Mandela affirms that Akhikirikirii's regime is a corrupt and tyrannical kleptocracy, a regime made up of the vilest rogues and traitors" It is indeed the regime of a "two headed monster with four eyes of rigour and moralization" (2). Allusion here is made to Nelson Mandela, the former South African president whose open criticism on the wrongs committed against the blacks in South Africans brought an end to the apartheid regime. As Mandela, Voice of Mandela openly criticizes Akhikirikirii's dictatorial regime.

Regarding its contextual relevance, the mention of the words "rigour and moralization" readily carries a lot of signification to a Cameroonian reader because this happened to be one of President Paul Biya's political slogan when he took power in 1984. The country at the time was so rigorously devoid of essential moral values that the president insisted on rigorously moralizing the entire political set up at the time. Akonchong makes a mockery of the whole notion of rigor and moralization when he states that "we are through with that era of political banditry, oppression and organized terror-for instance, the army will secrete itself into every nook and corner to rigorously moralize the nation with bulldozers" (48) Unfortunately, this attractive political slogan never was effectively implemented because the country continued to suffer from oppression, exploitation, corruption and embezzlement. By alluding to this, Besong is making a clarion call for the eradication of corruption because a moralized society is one void of corruption, and embezzlement.

Besides oppression and dictatorship, corruption becomes an ideological leadership strategy as well. The society in *Requiem* is so corrupt to the extent that "all the waters of the ocean can never clean the filth in the country" (5). As a result of corruption, there is a vast disparity between the masses and their leaders. The ideological conflicts between the rulers and the ruled, the "Haves" and the "Have-Nots" or the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are intensified by corruption and the exploitation of the masses by their leaders. Amuta buttresses the above claims when he affirms "Since independence, the relationship between the postcolonial rulers and their subjects is characterized by a frightening disparity between the scandalous affluence of a few and the abject penury of the majority" (*Theory*, 58). Amuta feels therefore that this situation is the pre-occupation of most African writers and is responsible for the excessive revolutionary literature that has spread throughout the continent today.

In *Requiem* still, the French Ambassador and Swiss Banker are perpetrators of exploitation. As a product of French Capitalism and its agents in Africa, the Ambassador plants French flags on the slightest area of economic advantage. For example, he claims that the “oil tapped at SONARA is the oil of solidarity between civilization and Agidigidi” (25). The civilization he is referring to is that of the French. Woman happens to be so aware of the presence of exploiters in Agidigidi that she advises Student to avenge his comrade’s death by fighting against “the enemies within whose stomachs are made of coded account, the sweat and blood of workers” (9). “The enemies within” she is referring to are the colonizers and the neo-colonialists. Akhikrikrii does not care for the masses. He uses brute force to stay in power while the rest of the population suffers in misery and poverty. Woman again rekindles the exploitative nature of Agidigidi’s leadership when she affirms “We fool ourselves if we believed that these parasites care for us” (58).

Closely linked to corruption is exploitation which is not only a vice in Agidigidi but has become a problem in almost all postcolonial societies especially in Africa. In *I Will Marry When I Want*, for example, Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Ngugi wa Mirri, present the most gruesome picture of the exploitation of the masses by their neo-colonial counterparts. In the play, Wangeci laments the exploitative nature of neo-colonialists by describing them as “bedbugs and local watchmen for foreign robbers”. According to her, “When they see a poor man’s property their mouths water, when they get their own, their mouths dry up! Don’t they have any land?”(31). This rhetorical question highlights the theme of land appropriation and emphasizes the extent to which the foreigners have exploited the land of the masses with the help of the neo-colonialists. As “parasites” and “bedbugs” that live at the mercy of their prey, Agidigidi’s leadership lives at the expense of the masses. Equally, Akhikrikrii’s continuous mention of “ma ding Sonara money” emphasizes his exploitative nature. “Ma ding” in Ewondo dialect means to like and Ewondo is the local dialect of those who control political power in Cameroon. “Ma ding” provokes the idea of embezzlement. The scenario above confirms Karl Marx’s claims that, those who control the means of production (the landed Aristocracy in a Feudal society, the factory owners and bankers in a capitalist society exploit those who do not (Serf or workers).

From the evidence provided so far, one realizes that the neo-colonial system of governance as presented in *Requiem* is worse than that of the colonialist. This assertion is buttressed by the Voice of Woman in the play when she states that “the colonial masters were shepherds of evil, but you’ve proved Lucifer himself a novice” (67). What Woman means is that the neo-colonial leaders in Agidigidi are worse than Lucifer himself. This hyperbole is intended to highlight the extent to which Akhikrikrii’s government is corrupt and its indifference towards the plight of the down trodden masses.

Conversely to *Zombie* and *Requiem* especially regarding style, Besong’s *Beasts* is a play in which the author exploits his talents as an experimental playwright. In this play, Besong in an attempt to portray and denounce the excesses of neo-colonial leadership politics make excessive use of thought provoking and most especially, nauseating images of decay, excrement, and filth. As in most of Besong’s plays, *Beasts* in a typically absurdist mannerism, breaks away from traditional dramatic conventions. Once again, Besong’s central pre-occupation in *Beasts* is the nature of leadership and its politics. *Beasts* is also concerned with the socio-political, economic, cultural and social problems the city Ednouay is facing under the rule of supreme Mayor Dealsham Aadingin.

Politically speaking, Besong in *Beasts* once more re-awakens the inequalities that exist between the Francophones (pejoratively referred to throughout the play as “Frogs”) and the Anglophones (referred to in the play as “Anglos”). The nature in which Anglophones and Francophones are portrayed in the play shows clearly that the Francophones will political and economic power while the Anglophones are simply reduced to “carriers of shirt”. The principal conflict in the play therefore becomes the excessive oppression and exploitation of the Anglophones (Night-Soil-Men) by their francophone brothers. While the “Frogs” are the

consumers, the "Anglos" are confined to mean, unidentified roles of carriers of the waste passed out by their francophone masters. There are thus considered as traitor and slaves: "Anglos are traitors and slaves" (105). As slaves, their duty is to do the work while their masters eat, "monkey will do the dirty work, Gorilla go dey wack" (104). The forgone lines immediately bring into perspective, the question of inequality, marginalization and class difference. In Marxist terms, Aadingingin and his Comrade Otshma represent the superstructure and the Night-Soil-Men, Blind Man and Cripple, the based. Considered within such a context, *Beasts* could be read as a commentary on the relationship, struggles and engagement of the masses battling against a dominant, more privilege bourgeois class. The declaration made by Aadingingin becomes a political statement on the inequality that beset the nature of the characters in the play's universe, and a critique of the prevailing unequal and rigged nature of their social being.

As Baba Toura and Akhikrikikii, Aadingingin is portrayed in *Beasts* as a notorious tyrant and dictator. As mayor of the city of Ednouay, he uses torture and intimidation to maintain his leadership position. His government enjoys absolute powers and tolerates no opposition and criticism. The government banned all sort of rebellion and those suspected to be rebels were incarcerated in torture chambers:

You'll be put in the torture chamber. The machine will go full swing. They'll chain your hands and feet and drag you on the floor until you faint. Bottles will be broken on your head....I will order torture with regret. You'll be held in solitary. Your cell will be flooded with water. You'll be deprived of food and sleep. You'll be beaten and forced to drink your own urine. (98 / 131)

One can surmise from these declarations that Aadingingin is a typical dictator and a tyrant. The harsh nature of his tone as exemplified above equally highlights the extent to which the masses are oppressed and tortured.

Furthermore, one of the main tools used by the neo-colonialist to maintain their leadership position is exploitation. They reap the masses of all economic power and render them financially bankrupt. This in the context of *Beasts* is done through corruption and embezzlement of state funds. An instant of the exploitative nature of Aadingingin's regime is reveal in the "Song of Prodigal" below:

*Goat di chop
For place weh
Dey be tie him
Goat di chop
For place weh
Dey tie him...
So my dear frog
Brother wack...
The Night-soul-men sing)
Solo: How many million
Promises can
Fill a basket?
All: When you eat money
They way locusts
Eats tones of green,
When frogs eat money
The way locust
Eat tones of green. (100, 101, 102)*

This song reveals a number of profound images with a lot of signification within the context of Enuoy. The proverb "Goat de chop for place weh dey tie him" justifies the embezzlement of

state funds by politicians in positions of power who consider their positions as an opportunity to enrich themselves. A good number of former government ministers in Cameroon today are serving life jail sentences in prison because instead of serving the nation, they spent time eating where they were tied. The repetition "How many million promises can ever fill a basket?" expresses the inability of the rulers to fulfill their pre-election promises. The images of the locust consuming tones of green vegetable underscore the rapacious and callous greed of a neo-colonial kleptocracy bent on acquiring wealth for their ludicrous interest. The numerous expressions and images above continually capture Aadingingin's regime as one that is voracious and destructive to the country's economy. The word "frog" mentioned in the song shows that Francophones, like locusts are responsible for the massive embezzlement in Ednuoay. This argument is justified by Pierre Fandio who considers *Beast*, as a play that proves that French-speaking Cameroonians constitute the "fauna of the predators who, in 40 years of independence, have transformed the lives of their compatriots into a nightmare" (101).

The fact that the song above is sung in pidgin is an attempt by the playwright to identify with the ordinary masses, who for the most part are the greatest victims of oppression and exploitation. The attitude manifested by Aadingingin in the lines above is further buttress in the later part of the play in a stage direction which describes him as "a lumbering gargoyle of a mayor and one who eats and drinks too much. As a result, he has become extremely fat and the Besong compares his shapeless fat nature to that of "a juicy toad". He is also said to have developed "several ripe fleshy layers, pumpkin-like below the natural skin and from time to time, he rubs his article pregnancy and belches frequently" (138). This synecdoche and disgusting animalistic physique of Aadingingin all portray the image of a monster that uses torture, brute force and corruption to constrain the people into apathy and silence. The fact that Akhikrikikii assassinates his close friend and political ally Otshama justifies the claim that neo-colonial leadership is allergic to any form of opposition even if such an opposition comes from a bosom friend.

Change Waka is considered by many critics as the best of Besong's experimental drama and one which subscribes to the absurdist theater tradition. As in the previous plays, Besong in *Change Waka* is once again pre-occupied with the ills of neo-colonial leadership. Unlike in the other plays, Besong's principal concern in *Change Waka* is on electoral chicanery and a fraudulent electoral system. The play revolves around political election in the Epeng Ebho society, under the leadership of his imperial Excellency, Mfawbahep Gknoekor Ghnoekor. Despite the fact that an entire ministry is devoted to managing elections, their corrupt electoral practices leave much to be desired. The rigging machinery in the play is spear-headed by the Kangaroo judge of state, the provincial governor, the prefets and sous-prefets. Besong presents the electoral system as a corrupt and rotten one and the corrupt and rotten system is echoed in Part II of the play in the following words by Sessekou Atemengeng:

...We are all democrats and want elections that reflect reality... But that is neither here nor there... it does not matter what you do or do not do, you are bound to be ill with the cholera of ballot-boxes. The air was thick with swarms of flies. The stench...we are bound to live with corruption...Happy are those who vote without believing.(54)

The renditions above are vivid expression of how corrupt and rotten the electoral system is. The leadership one comes across in *Change Waka* is one which is very aware of its unpopularity. As such, the only means for its leaders to cling to power and maintain their leadership position is by rigging election.

The electoral system in Epeng Ebho is so corrupt that Besong compares it to a decaying mouth that brings shame to its owner when he laughs in public "Decaying teeth smell and we feel ashamed when we laugh in public..." (8) The topicality of Besong's message in *Change Waka* finds expression not only in Cameroon but in most post-independence African States. It is on records that since the institutionalization of multi-party democracy in Cameroon, there have

been no free and fair elections. The numerous post-electoral conflicts and Supreme Court cases on electoral fraud and inconsistencies are revealing testimonies of Cameroon's fragile electoral system. *Change Waka* can be read therefore as a play that frowns at some of Africa's greatest post-independence problems which include: Electoral fraud, political intrigues and chicanery, bribery and corruption and above all oppression and ruthless dictatorship.

CONCLUSION

The analyses so far reveal that independence was not a panacea for the emancipation of the Africa masses from the forces of oppression and exploitation. This is because the neo-colonialists in terms of political ideology conceive power as an avenue for self aggrandizement and personal gains. As a result, there are obliged to use all unorthodox means to maintain and sustain power. This paper has also stressed on the fact that though rich in natural and human resources, the neo-colonial leadership politics of oppression, dictatorship, exploitation, corruption and embezzlement are amongst the many vices that have transformed a rich continent into one of abject poverty. As a writer in 'postcolonial politics', Besong recommends a complete mental and physical decolonization of Cameroon's leadership in particular and that of Africa as a whole as the principal condition for the emancipation of the suffering masses from the bondage of oppression, exploitation, corruption and poverty. The playwright's wish therefore is for new leaders, new style and new dancing style which place the interest of the community above individual interest.

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