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*Andrew T. Ngeh, Salliane Liengu Wolete*

## ABSTRACT

The poet and the politician both possess the power of words; the difference is that while the poet uses this power to improve the human condition, the politician uses it to oppress the people since he sees them as objects. This article argues that Alembong, Besong, and Takwi have used their poetic arsenals to espouse the abuse of political power in Cameroon. These poets who have endeared themselves to the struggle in Cameroon have blended poetry and political reality to advance the cause of freedom because they are dissatisfied with the present day politics. Thus, they attempt to write, and be involved with what has become known as literature of conscientization and commitment. From a Marxist literary and socialist realist perspective, the ideo-aesthetic positions of the three poets are perceived, though subtle: they view the political liberty and welfare of Cameroonians as an index of socio-political growth.

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# Power and Political Liberty in Anglophone Cameroonian Poetry

Andrew T. Ngeh<sup>α</sup> & Salliane liengu wolete<sup>σ</sup>

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## I. ABSTRACT

*The poet and the politician both possess the power of words; the difference is that while the poet uses this power to improve the human condition, the politician uses it to oppress the people since he sees them as objects. This article argues that Alembong, Besong, and Takwi have used their poetic arsenals to espouse the abuse of political power in Cameroon. These poets who have endeared themselves to the struggle in Cameroon have blended poetry and political reality to advance the cause of freedom because they are dissatisfied with the present day politics. Thus, they attempt to write, and be involved with what has become known as literature of conscientization and commitment. From a Marxist literary and socialist realist perspective, the ideo-aesthetic positions of the three poets are perceived, though subtle: they view the political liberty and welfare of Cameroonians as an index of socio-political growth.*

*Keywords:* Poetry, Power, Politics, Liberty, conscientization and Commitment.

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## II. INTRODUCTION

*To revitalize a nation, poetry must be revitalized and to revitalize poetry; we must turn to poets who are capable of inspiring the nations with a sense of commitment, justice, and equality. (Berry in Newey and Thompson, 1991: x)*

*There is no area of human lives including the boundaries of creative imagination which does not affect the way that society is organized by the whole operation and machinery of power: how*

*and by whom that power has been achieved; which class controls and maintains it and the ends to which power is used/abused constitute the thrust of this article. Critical and radical writers/poets can be affected by the abuse of power in two ways: first, he/she as a human being is a product of history, of time and space. Secondly, as a member of the society, he belongs to a particular class and is a participant in and commentator on the socio-political struggle against political tyranny.*

*African radical and revolutionary poets are both commentators on and participants in the reconstruction of their nations. African poets have always championed the liberation struggle and political liberty in Africa. Christopher Okigbo, Wole Soyinka, Bate Besong, Agostinho Neto and Dennis Brutus have always used their poetic works as weapons to fight against social injustice and political tyranny in their respective countries. Thus, poetry has been and still is the fighting weapon in an oppressive political set-up. These poets use their poetry as a weapon to galvanize the collective consciousness of the oppressed against autocracy. Eldred D. Jones highlights the predicament of radical poets in a dictatorial system when he says: "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" (1996:2)*

*Anglophone Cameroonian intellectuals have always subscribed to the view that, Anglophones in Cameroon are not fairly treated as they are socially isolated, politically marginalized and economically exploited. It is against such a background that radical and revolutionary poets*

like Nol Alembong, Emmanuel Doh, John Ngong Kum Ngong, Bate Besong and Mathew Takwi write. Unlike the poetry that was written by their predecessors like Bongasu-Tanla Kishani, Bernard Fonlon, Mbella Sonne Dipoko and Sankie Maimo, the poetic works written by Alembong, Besong and Takwi are devoid of mysticism and subjective idealism; they reflect the concrete reality of a people fighting for freedom, social injustice and political oppression. They write with the conviction, orientation, and consciousness that if something is not done the beleaguered and plagued lives of Cameroonians will continue to be a bewildering dilemma and a vexing enigma. Terry Eagleton succinctly captures the relevance of poetry in the fight against power abuse and social injustice in the following words:

*The future of poetry is immense, because in poetry, where it is worthy of its highest destinies, our race as time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay. More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry....Poetry, that is to say, is the final resort of a society. (1986:103)*

For Anglophone Cameroonian poets like Alembong, Besong and Takwi to use their poetic idiom to express their nationalistic, radical and revolutionary consciousness, it has to arise from their political reality and a reaction against the dominant ideology of the ruling class or colonial power which is now indirectly exercised by the neocolonial elites. The overriding consciousness that informs the poetry of these three poets as will be demonstrated later in this article is the dialectical relationship of power in Cameroon's neocolonial society ranging from graft and corruption to the abuse of power. It is this abuse of power that has resulted in corruption, greed and graft that constitutes the perspective from which third generation Anglophone

Cameroonian poets like Alembong, Besong and Takwi write.

### III. ANGLOPHONE CAMEROON: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The Francophones in Cameroon with their numerical advantage over the Anglophones wield both political and economic powers; and they exercise supreme and irrational power over this numerically disadvantaged 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, he 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 Founban 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 United Republic. In 1984, Ahidjo's constitutional successor, Paul Biya who had taken over the helm of affairs in Cameroon, deleted the word "United" 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 Anglophone Cameroonian 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. (qt. in Che Tita ed. 1993:1)

From the above submission, it is evident that this historical arrangement inevitably gave birth to the political sensitivity which characterizes the Anglophone Cameroonian writers. According to Emmanuel Fru Doh, one of Anglophone Cameroonian poets, the literature which is written by Anglophone Cameroonians "...is the literature of a patriotic minority trying to set right a hypocritical system; a literature which is largely protest and iconoclastic in nature. Works written or performed orally by Cameroonians West of the Mungo in their indigenous languages or in English... constitute Anglophone Cameroon Literature (1993:81) This paper concurs Doh's position and intends to investigate the positions of Alembong, Besong, and Takwi about the use / abuse of power and political liberty in Cameroon.

#### IV. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Anglophone-Cameroon poetry seems to be that of an embattled and embittered people. The Anglophones in Cameroon constitute a minority and consider themselves marginalized by their Francophone counterparts who wield both political and economic powers. As regard the power axis, the Anglophones who are considered as "the dregs of the society" and described by Bate Besong in his *Beasts of No Nation* as "Night soil men," and "excrement carriers" are politically marginalized, socially isolated and economically exploited.

Although the Anglophone predicament, which is now known within political circles in Cameroon as

the "Anglophone Problem" has been highlighted in both the novel and play, poetry seems to be the most hermetic genre which can be used to convey the socio-political conditions of the underprivileged and the exploited of the society because it expresses the psyche of a people and the human condition. Even Ulli Beier is perturbed by Jean Paul Sartre's exclusion of poetry from his commitment agenda when he complains:

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, too 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 authenticities. In addition, the concise nature of poetry makes it possible to be sung or recited. It is from this perspective that this paper uses poetry to examine and discuss the liberating role of poetry in a society where power is abused.

#### V. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESIS

Arising from the above problem are the following questions: (a) Can poetry effectively play a liberating role in the context of political oppression (b) What is the link between poetry and society? (c) Can poetry actually raise consciousness for political liberation? (d) What is the place of power dialectics in an autocratic set-up? (e) Can poetry right the wrongs of power abuse?

Drawing from the socialist realism of Lukacsian-Marxist artistic mode, this paper argues that Alembong, Besong, and Takwi have used their poetry as weapons to conscientize the oppressed so as to liberate them from the shackles of political oppression. They use their poetic

works to galvanize the collective consciousness so as to highlight the sordid condition in their society. It is against this background that we think the poetry of these three poets is best suited to comment on the use /abuse of power in Cameroon. Thus, one of the concerns of this paper is that the poetry of Alembong, Besong and Takwi has the potentials to espouse the abuse of political power in Cameroon and also provides a way out of this economic sclerosis and political quagmire.

## VI. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The socialist realism of the Lukacsian-Marxist paradigm informs the reading and interpretation of the data for this article. The prime objective of this critical theory would be anti-neo-colonialism with its attendant ills of bribery, exploitation alienation and oppression. The concept of socialist realism marks an advance in the development of Marxist aesthetics on literature and art in general. Socialist realism according to <http://www.l.evengenvaertcentre.be/> is a Soviet artistic doctrine, realistic in its nature which has as the purpose the furtherance of the goals of socialism and communism. Basically, some features of socialist realism include, optimism and hope, conscientization 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. Finally, socialist realist writers must be politically active on the side of the oppressed. (1989:140).

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) The foregoing submissions emphasize the point that philosophical writings like critical writings merely seek to understand and interpret the world, but Marxist criticism like socialist realism seeks to change it. The binary opposition of power exhibited in Alembong, Besong and Takwi's poetic vision is essentially meant to usher in change for the better.

Even though Marxism began in Europe historically, it is a truly revolutionary theory which is well suited to the task of liberating the oppressed from the shackles of neocolonialism. Frantz Fanon became such an eloquent spokesperson of the oppressed black peoples because he based his analysis on the plight of 'the wretched of the earth' on Marxist principles.

The Marxist thinking has played an influential role in the political experiences of its founders; and this includes the work of eighteenth-century German philosopher, Hegel. This reinforced

especially Hegel's idea of dialectic, whereby opposing and binary forces or ideas bring about new situations, ideas, and ideology. These two opposing forces are the Base and the Superstructure representing the ruled and the rulers respectively. Marxist critical discourse, 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) One of the Marxist theoreticians is the French-born Louis Althusser (1919-1990). He is one of those Marxist practitioners who dwelled extensively on the concept of power. Power in Marxist criticism is a very sensitive and loaded concept. According to Peter Barry,

Althusser makes a useful distinction between what we might call state power and state control. State power is maintained by what Althusser terms *repressive structures*, which are institutions like the law courts, prisons, the police force, and the army, which operate, in the last analysis, by external force. But the power of the state is also maintained more subtly, by seeming to secure the internal consent of its citizens, using what Althusser calls *ideological structures or state ideological apparatuses*. These are such groupings as political parties, schools, the media, churches, the family and art (including literature) which foster an ideology- a set of ideas and attitudes- which is sympathetic to the aims of the state and the political status-quo. (Barry, 1995:164)

Whether it is state power or state control, there is evidence of abuse of power which the three poets think can be addressed and redressed with the help of their poetry. That is poetry can be used to liberate the oppressed from both state control and state power that have been abused.

Marxist ideology and the philosophy of socialist realism have influenced the three poets under

reference as will be seen in some of the ideas raised in their poetry. This article preoccupies itself with the following concerns: power dialectics and Alembong's socialist realist vision, Besong's political vision: sensitization and political victimization, and Takwi's poetic vision and liberation aesthetics.

## VII. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The three poets under study are perceived as observers of, participants in, and commentators on the social condition of Anglophone Cameroonians who have been deprived of "the national cake". In their ideological postures and aesthetics, these poets write poetry that is intended to improve the lot of mankind. To them, it seems the ruling class that possesses the political power is not using it to solve the socio-political problems of the nation. Carson Anyangwe, one of the vocal Anglophone Cameroonian politicians 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" (qt. In Che Tita, 1993:9)

## VIII. POWER DIALECTICS AND ALEMBONG'S SOCIALIST REALIST VISION

According to *The Oxford Universal Dictionary Illustrated*, dialectic "is the art of critical examination into the truth of an opinion...a synonym of Logic as applied to formal rhetorical reasoning; logical disputation" (p.500) The same source adds that dialectics is the criticism which shows the mutually contradictory character of the principles of science when employed to determine objects beyond the limits of experience (p.500). The omnipresence of the dialectic principle has been emphasized in most contemporary literature, which views the dialectic as the theory of progress and development. For example, Fokkema Douwe and Ibsch Elrud in *Theories of Literature in the Twentieth Century* have dwelled on this extensively. In this paper, the two types of

power exerted and exercised by both the poets and the political leadership in Cameroon are dialectically related. In dialectics, there is thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. That is, while the politicians use power to dehumanize the masses, (thesis) the poets use their poetic power to right the wrongs of the abuse of power in society; hence thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. This brings about power dialectics and emphasizes the quest for political liberation; and this is one of the positions of this article.

Poetry must not be sequestered from the masses in terms of communicability. The language of poetry should be accessible. In fact, it should be within reach of the average reader and the subject matter should reflect the day to day happenings. One of the fundamental features of liberation poetry in Cameroon Anglophone is its simplicity. Apart from Bate Besong, Nol Alembong, and Mathew Takwi's poetic diction is neither complicated nor embellished with artificial adornments. Niyi Osundare in *Songs of the Market place* (1983), affirms this important feature of liberation poetry when he says, poetry is not a 'philosopher's stone,' but 'the hawker's ditty,' 'the song of the market place' (Osundare, 1983:4). The language used by Alembong is more accessible to the average reader than Besong's. Besong's medium of poetic expression is somewhat obscure and incomprehensible for an average reader. However, his ideological posture bespeaks the struggle for social justice and political liberty since language is not the sole criterion for the evaluation of literature.

When one of these researchers interviewed Alembong on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 2010, the poet admitted that his poetry, from the standpoint of style, (his studies in Oral Literature) has influenced his poetry. Essentially, the language of oral narrative is accessible. The poet contends:

[...] from the point of view of style, yes my poetry is in line with the mainstream African poetry. And also you must have realized that my style is influenced by my studies in oral traditions. So there are a lot of oralities that

come in when you look at my style. (Interviewed on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2010)

Alembong's (1991) collection under study entitled *The Passing Wind* provides a watershed of revolutionary and radical poetry reflecting the changing times accentuated by the wind of change that blew from Eastern Europe to the continent of Africa. The poet confirms in the interview he granted to one of these researchers that his poetry has socialist leanings:

'The passing wind' is the title poem and if you remember the days of Gorbachev in the then Soviet presidency, he sparked off a revolution in the world that led to the collapse of the Berlin Wall, that resulted in the dismemberment of the Russian Empire – the Soviet Union (Interviewed on the 8<sup>th</sup> February 2010).

Poetry is seen here as a key location for the creation, expression and maintenance of political justice. The radicalism expressed in Alembong's poetics has also enriched the potentialities of the quest for political liberty in Cameroon.

It is this change that impacted on the poetic temperament of Anglophone Cameroonian poets who emerged in the 1990s. Consequently, there has been a shift in both content and form in Anglophone Cameroonian poetry. The early poets like Bernard Fonlon, Sankie Maimo, Bongasu Tanla-Kishani and Mbella Sonne Dipoko lack the radicalism exhibited by Alembong, Besong, and Takwi. The social and historical conditions, differences in ideological orientation, perception, and creative talent determine the form of the poetry of these poets.

National assertion, national liberation, national survival, are crucial conditions for a vibrant national culture that can free a people from political bondage. Alembong's poetic vision is evident in three of his poems titled "The Game", "Come Brothers" and 'Some Day for Sure'. 'The Game' and 'Come Brothers' are two of Alembong's poems in which he brings out his philosophy of

power dialectics and socialist realist vision. ‘The ‘Game’ for example is one of Alembong’s widely quoted poems. The ‘Game’ expresses the ambiguity of post-colonialism. It highlights the irregularities that characterize elections in post-colonial Africa in general and post independent Cameroon in particular. Politics is perceived as a game wherein only the perfect manipulators find themselves comfortable in the results of that game. Eckhard Breitinger makes the following observation about this particular poem,

Nol Alembong’s poem that was written, before the rise of an organized political opposition and its ensuing repression by the CPDM government and before the highly contested Presidential election of October 11<sup>th</sup> 1992 expresses the feeling of Anglophone in Cameroon: the feeling of being caught in an antagonism with the Francophones, in a competitive game where the rules of fair play do not prevail, a political game where fraud and cheating and the use of sheer power dominate. (qt in Willer et al. 1995:472)

The poet thinks that politics is a game of numbers which creates a better chance for the opposition parties because of their numerical advantage but the government in power perceives politics as a game of manipulation, maneuver, and fraud. That explains the unfair treatment of the other team which metaphorically represents the opposition. The poet laments the partiality of the referee, (the government in power who is also a player):

The ball he gave them  
For he feigned our fault  
In the ground of play  
And the penalty goal they had  
The only goal the net had  
In the ground of play. (Alembong, 1991:27)

In spite of protests from the spectators/crowd, the poet/person says, the referee upheld the results of the match because he was in possession of the whistle and the power. This partiality which symbolizes power abuse makes the crowd shout in protest:

The crowd cried loud  
And cursed and cursed  
In the ground of play  
But the whistle he had  
And the power he had  
In the ground of play. (Alembong, 1991:27)

The whistle in this poem is a dense symbol with metaphorical possibilities. It represents the various communicative mechanisms used by the powers that be to cajole, hoodwink, deceive and manipulate public opinions. Some of these state instruments put in place to manipulate consciousness and deceive the masses include state-owned media, newspapers and even the Supreme Courts that officially declare election results in most African countries and Cameroon is not exempted. According to Barry, “State power is maintained by what Althusser terms repressive structures, which are institutions like the law courts, prisons, the police force, and the army which operate, in the last analysis by external force. (Barry, 1995:164) For example, the disputed Presidential election results of October 1992 in Cameroon were declared by the Supreme Court in favor of the ruling C.P.D.M. (Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement). The opposition parties cried foul and complained that they respected all the rules of the game, but the ruling government party (CPDM) cheated them of their victory. The poet’s Promethean enterprise of highlighting the erosion of popular will in democratic elections finds greater impetus in these three lines:

The rules were there  
And I kept them  
In the ground of play. (Alembong, 1991:27)

The noxious gangrene of hatred, the morbid corruption of the ruling class impose their destructive toll on the body politic. The rigging of election is a classic case of abuse of power, (which is a dominant thematic concern in post-colonial dispensation), is metaphorically presented in the form of a football match. Here, the impression created is that the government in power can violate the rules of the game with reckless abandon. The poet/speaker once more echoes the

absence of social justice and political fairness in these words:

I kicked the ball  
And made the goal  
In the ground of play  
But it was denied me  
In the ground of play. (Alembong, 1991:26)

Thus, as Andrew T. Ngeh (2013:110) has observed about this poem, “The Game’ is necessarily one in which the audience becomes an active participant and his will is aroused to action. As the people’s consciences and consciousness, the poet condemns political barbarism and the pervasion of social justice”. The awareness of the co-existence of terror and peace within the soul and the relationship of reality to poet/art are among some of Alembong’s thematic preoccupations in his poetry. This poem is also a satirical comment on Cameroon’s football fanaticism. Cameroonians are so engulfed in football so much so that the ruling powers use this to cajole them. Alembong suggests a revolution where the oppressive system can be toppled. The protest from the crowd symbolizes this. Here, Alembong 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. (1996:63)

.Hilary Kebila Fokum, one of the very outspoken Anglophone Cameroonian social critics buttresses this point of bad governance and lack of social justice in Cameroon when he says:

We need a leader, who is one of us, best of us; not the buffoons in Yaounde. We need genuine leaders, 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. (qt in Che Tita,1993:15)

In other words, the song of unity should intimidate the oppressors who have deprived the people of their livelihood, thereby inflicting pains and agony in them. This, particular poem, is therefore, a clarion call for both Anglophone Cameroonian writers and intellectuals to transcend the limitation of their vision and fight for their unconditional liberation from re-colonization and neo-colonization of the francophone dominant system. 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” (1963:146). Alembong like Besong and Takwi seems to have discovered his mission and wants to artistically and ideologically fulfill it.

In “The Game” Alembong has treated the theme of power and dictatorship to bring out the sordid reality and erosion of popular will which has become the hallmark of rulership in contemporary African states. Thus, the horror and dehumanization unleashed by the dictatorial ruler through the rigging of elections are brought to the reader as a way of raising his consciousness for immediate action.

The quest for social justice and political liberty finds expression in yet another poem titled ‘Come Brothers’. In this poem Alembong invites all the oppressed in Cameroon to unite as one person, with one voice and fight the oppressive system that has curtailed their liberties. This is important in socialist realist discourse because division amongst the oppressed, individualism, loneliness, and estrangement foster despair and hopelessness, whereas unity, social collectivism, optimism and hope are two important ingredients of socialist realist art. The poet calls on all to be involved in the liberation struggle. Three factors

unite the entire oppressed who are metaphorically presented as brothers. These factors are: oppression, hunger, and social injustice. The poet states:

Come brothers.  
The dog of the house calls.  
Come, stand on the anthill  
And let the mound give way  
Under your weight.

Leave this chosen vale of your lives:

This Vale, this vale of tears.  
Grove your way up the anthill  
And let the mound give way  
Under your weight. (Alembong, 1991:7)

There is a clear philosophy behind the images of ‘anthill,’ ‘mound’ and ‘vale’ which bring out the compartmentalization of the Cameroonian society. Those living in “this vale of tears” symbolize the base and the superstructure occupies the mound and the anthill. The base and the superstructure represent the oppressed and the oppressors respectively. The mound in the context of Marxist discourse is a metaphor of comfort and fulfillment while the ‘vale of tears’ symbolizes suffering and oppression. Life in the context of this poem is perceived as a changing flow in which the relationship between past, future and origins is increasingly improbable, although logically necessary regarding causality and continuity. The neocolonial elites who are the perpetrators of these ills are continuing from where the colonial rulers ended. This move of the ruling class is egocentric, narcissistic and self-aggrandizing.

The poet in “Come Brothers” sees himself as a watch dog of the compound that announces the coming of an intruder and draws the attention of the inhabitants that there is danger: “Come brothers/The dog of the house calls” (1991:7) Alembong in this poem tries to redefine the role of a poet in a contemporary society: he is a Socratic gadfly; he is a prophet; he is a conscientizer; and he is a moral legislator. That is why in the third

stanza he makes a passionate appeal to the oppressed not to be deceived by the appearances of things because the reality is beneath these appearances:

The dale may be the rose of your lives,  
But it’s only the surface of the deep  
And therein only the laughter of babies  
May be heard: laughter in tears. (1991:7)

By emphasizing the images of the ‘dale’, ‘vale’, ‘anthill’ and ‘mound’ in this poem, the poet proclaims the Marxist philosophy of struggle reinforced by a revolution. He states: “So/ Let us roll our God-given strength/And run the anthill, for it must collapse/Under the lead that is our weight”. (Alembong, 1991: 14) In terms of numbers, the masses have a numerical advantage over the ruling class, and in the context of a Marxist revolutionary struggle, the masses will win. In this poem, the focus is not only the ruling class but also the oppressed that seem comfortable in their ‘vale of tears’. The poet’s use of oxymoron in: “And therein only the laughter of babies/ May be heard: laughter in tears” (14), bespeaks the poet’s Marxist orientation which suggests the poet’s alignment and sympathy with the downtrodden and the struggling marginalized and oppressed in Cameroon.

In a typical socialist realist tradition, the poet elevates his ideological orientation and contemplation in the last stanza which bespeaks a combative tone reminiscent of Claude McKay’s poem “If We Must Die”. He makes the oppressed understand that to say ‘yes’ to oppression, injustice and the aesthetics of submissive acquiescence will be choosing the wrong side of the struggle. Part of the force of the poem comes from the rhetorical questions that close it. The poetic voice asks:

Did you say the queen ant  
Will raise a stink?  
But what does it matter if one is stunk  
In the dust of the mound? (Alembong, 1991:7)

This radical reorientation expressed in this poem in the form of rhetorical question has also

enriched the potentialities of the socialist realist paradigm. The two rhetorical questions raised above reinforce the poet's determination for the struggle against dictatorship. While the first question may sound naïve, the second which constitutes the final statement of the poem is indicative of a high level of political consciousness on the part of the poet's political vision. The oppressor is stigmatized as the queen ant by its size which is evidence of good living. The queen ant becomes a dense symbol with metaphoric possibilities. Even though the queen ant which symbolizes the oppressor poses a threat to the struggling masses, the poet thinks that the people will definitely win this war given that they have a numerical advantage over the ruling class. From the appreciation of this poem, it can be deduced that Alembong is committed in an overt sense because it is poetry expressed in terms of time and space.

The poet extends the theme of struggle against political injustice in another poem titled "Some Day for Sure". Its title encapsulates and encompasses the optimism of the poet regarding the victory of the fight against social injustice which lies ahead of the struggle. The poetic voice assures the struggling masses that victory is theirs. He echoes Bate Besong's optimistic and hopeful views in "Their Champagne party will end" that this oppressive system will one day come to an end. Drawing extensively on oral traditions, the poet uses the myth about the race for eternity between the chameleon and the dog. Although the dog runs faster than the chameleon, it is the latter that arrives first. In African mythology, if the dog had won the race, humankind would have lived forever. In a rhetorical style, the poet wonders: "The journey may be too long and hard/ But was the chameleon, not the first/To drum the long awaited message of death? /Where was Dog that thought/The race was his? (Alembong, 1991:20)

The poet indicates that the journey to political freedom and liberty may be long and thorny, but victory will be guaranteed if the oppressed come

together as one man with one voice. "Some Day for Sure" expresses the optimism and hope that characterize socialist realist poetry. This is expressed by Gustavo Gutierrez's in *The Power of the Poor in History* when he argues, "To struggle without hope would be futile leading to cynicism or despair: to hope without struggle would be irrelevant, cheap and self-defeating. But to struggle while affirming hope is to have a future and to be more empowered by it for the present." (1983:155) Alembong has demonstrated in his poetry that poetry can be used as a weapon to right the wrongs of the society. Thus, his poetry constitutes both his political and social vision regarding the liberation struggle that is going on in Cameroon. His poetic vision is an engagement in and a response to the past as well as the contemporary Cameroonian society.

Bate Besong is the second poetic voice that discusses the use/abuse of power in relation to political liberty in Cameroon. Besong like Alembong and Takwi is not only interested in civil liberties per se, but in the transformation of the Cameroonian society.

*Besong's socio-political and poetic vision: Sensitization and political victimization*

There is first, the literature of knowledge, and secondly the literature of power. The function of the first is to teach, the function of the second is to move; the first is a rudder, the second an oar or a sail. The first speaks to the mere discursive understanding; the second speaks ultimately, it may happen, to the higher understanding or reason, but always through affections of pleasure and sympathy. (qt in Georgina Pell Curtis, 1917:ii)

(Thomas De Quincey "Essays on the Poets".  
(Alexander Pope.)

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' (qt in Takem, 1990:174). Besong is concerned about change for

the interest of the masses and the working class. Poetry is perceived in this study as a viable means of inculcating and instilling the necessary critical consciousness in the audience with regard to the socio-economic and political malaise overwhelming Besong's society.

The primary virtue of literature is its subversive change hidden behind the façade of entertainment. This liberation aesthetics finds expression in poems like, "Poetry is," "Poems after detention" and "Their Champagne party will end." These are poems that protest against social injustice, political oppression, the inhumanity of neo-colonialism and the marginalization of some Cameroonians.

Bate Besong is one of the most distinguished poets of the new generation. Like Alembong, Besong also diagnoses the social, moral and political ills in his society and administers doses of socio-political therapy. Bate Besong has always maintained that when a writer functions in a police state like Cameroon, he/she should use metaphors, symbols, innuendos and obscure language/images to escape the dragnets of the forces of law and order that are paid to stifle and muffle criticisms against the administration. Although some critics of Besong are bewildered by his medium of poetic expression and even doubt his socialist realist leanings, Chidi Amuta has dismissed such literary judgment which is only based on language in *The Theory of African Literature* in these words:

... 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. (Amuta, 1989:177)

In his collection entitled *Disgrace: autobiographical narcissus*, 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 Marshal Amin / Easter phase Ujamaa (Besong, 107). In his definition of poetry, Besong debunks the myth that poetry is meant for dictators like Hitler and Idi Amin. To him again, poetry is meant for men of culture with a strong intellectual foundation like Julius Nyerere and Wole Soyinka, people with refined minds.

He also perceives poetry in his definition 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 a relevant political figure in Cameroonian 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 states, "Poetry is not a Gulag/ Poetry is Jua / Voice of Anglophone Universe" (Besong, 2007: 107)

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 romanticization 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.

Besong's "Poetry is" means what it says, but the echoes, the contexts, the additional significances and complexities enrich the poem and give it a different density from a poem by either Alembong or Takwi. The relationship of the past (as evident

in the historical allusion of Jua) to the present often takes the form of unpleasant memories which, while creating continuity, may change in unexpected ways with surprising fears. The poet speaks with the voice of a revolutionary who is concerned with events in the history of post-independence Cameroon. From his definition of poetry in “Poetry is”, Besong in “Poems after detention” (i-vii) explores the predicament of writers and other vocal activists and social critics who are thrown in jail for their social criticisms. This poem articulates the whole concept of fears of survival in a world of power, of conquest, fears of losing and being unable to secure and procure one’s freedom and liberty. Most critical and radical writers are prison graduates. Many examples abound in Africa; Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Wole Soyinka, Dennis Brutus and Agostinho Neto. The prison becomes a metaphor and source of literary creativity. Even in biblical history, it is often argued that if 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* states: “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).

A good number of African writers have tasted the bitterness and brutality of African repressive governments. More often, they are put in solitary confinement for expressing the truth aloud. From Wole Soyinka to Bate Besong, and from Ngugi Wa Thiong’o to Dennis Brutus and Jacinto, but this confinement more often inspires them. In “Poems after detention,” the poet decries the inhuman condition that prevails in contemporary Cameroonian prisons. He describes the prison in very frightful and grotesque images:

In that human  
 abattoir  
 queues of two or three  
 hundred escandrions:  
 Cannibal militaire. (Besong, 2007:83)

The images of the prison as a slaughter house (abattoir) and ‘cannibal militaire’ are very frightful metaphors that bespeak the brutality and inhuman treatment meted on innocent prisoners which are classic cases of power abuse. Again, the poet describes the prisoners using bestial and grotesque images as they are taken to a slaughter house. The poetic voice reinforces this again: “epileptics, unstable gangsters/power-crazed/dwarves: animal dung, only/such quisling functionaries/In New Deal demonolatr.” (Besong, 2007:84) First, the poet stigmatizes the ruling class in this poem as a group of armed robbers and power mongers; secondly they are beasts because the way they use power is not different from beasts. The use of bestial images in this poem has multiple significance; both the ruler and the oppressed are perceived as beasts. First, the brutality of the ruler can only be compared to beasts. Secondly, because these rulers behave like beasts, they tend to treat everyone like animals. This bestial image clarifies concepts, reveals truth and exposes the contradictions of the acquisition and use/abuse of power in Cameroon politics.

Finally, the poet thinks that if the oppressed are not conscientized, they will continue to live and operate as if they were animals. The poet debunks this vegetative existence and exhorts the oppressed to stand up and fight against what he calls ‘New Deal demonolatr.’ When Paul Biya took over from Amadou Ahidjo in 1982, he christened his new government ‘The New Deal government’ which the poet thinks the policies of this new political dispensation are demonic. Defeat, intimidation, fear and discouragement which demean and deprecate people, interdicting success and achievement in life are the features of the “New Deal government.”

The poet again indicts the ruling elites for ill-treating writers and other vocal social critics who have become prisoners of conscience. These writers and social critics are not only held in solitary confinement but are incarcerated and lacerated. The poet persona says “Only such demented precursors/who, rejoicing, puke/

prodigal lacerations /behind prison bars” (Besong, 2007:84). From the reading of this poem, the impression is that the ruling class believes that there is no mercy in the struggle to rule humankind; and that is why the people do not have any political liberty; what they know is political oppression.

Besong continues with the same theme of the misuse of power in “Their Champagne Party Will End,” in which he castigates the corrupt nature of the Francophone dominated regime. The poet optimistically prophesies doom to this 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.  
(Besong, 2007: 22)

The poet’s Marxist background has a tremendous influence on his poetry. In “Their Champaign Party Will End,” the poet echoes the message of Ngugi wa Thiong’o in *Petals of Blood* and *Devils on the Cross*. In a typical socialist tradition, the poet is optimistic that in spite of the exploitation and alienation of the working class, one day the exploiters will be overthrown by the working class. In this poem the poet indicates where his sympathy lies, that is with the oppressed. Socialist realists recommend that committed writers should be politically on the side of the oppressed. While the ruling elite swims in the cesspool of ill-gotten wealth, the workers who toil and moil under the scourging sun languish in abject poverty and penury.

This particular poem is a highly worked one, crafted by someone with a natural talent for patterns of sound and clever reworking of images which reinforce the revolutionary struggle in Cameroon. For example, words and phrases like: ‘masonic lodges’, ‘evil still survives’, ‘workers died’, ‘victims they have exploited wretched’ reinforce the devastation of deceit and evil, the decadence of lust and envy, the noxious gangrene of hatred and vengeance, and the morbid

corruption of politics. There is a clear philosophy behind these phrases of exploitation and alienation of the workers. First, they represent concrete images which bespeak a materialist non-metaphysical conception of life and social struggle; secondly, through these phrases, the poet proclaims the Marxist philosophy of the dignity of labor and the centrality of work in any endeavor to wage a revolution and embark on a program of development. The superstructure which wields both political and economic power should compensate the workers who are the producers of the nation’s wealth adequately.

“Their Champaign Party Will End,” depicts the wrongs suffered by the working class under the capitalist system in Yaounde, 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” ( Besong, 2007:22). By highlighting the predicament of the oppressed workers in Cameroon, Besong is preparing the minds of these workers for their revolt which will eventually lead to their liberation. The poet poeticizes the bluffs and systematic exploitation of the working class in Cameroon by a decadent and inflexible phantasmagorical oligarchy.

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 Alembong and Takwi is preaching rebellion as a way of reforming his society, and by so doing, he prescribes violence as a sine qua non condition for political liberation. Besong in this poem highlights the affluence of those who constitute the superstructure and the abject penury of the proletarians who are made up of the base of the society. The proletarians are the producers of the nation’s wealth but are neglected and not adequately compensated. What the poet is saying is that, within the context of Cameroon, the marginalized Anglophones are the proletarians who work very hard but are not adequately compensated. Material privation, destitution and

indigene demoralize humanity in the midst of a naturally endowed country like Cameroon.

There is a consensus amongst Anglophone Cameroonian intelligentsia that Anglophone Cameroonians 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 politicians in Cameroon to deceive and cajole the Anglophones such as ‘unity,’ ‘reconciliation’ and ‘self-reliance.’ The poet says: “It was during the golden epoch; there was much talk of/ Unity, Reconciliation,/ Self- Reliance and/ all that shit” (Besong, 2007:22). The poet thinks that all these are vacuous rhetoric because genuine unity and reconciliation will bring a new exhilaration and cultural stamina in the lives of Cameroonians. One of the roles that a writer in post-colonial dispensation should play is to unmask fake patriotism, pinpoint national errors and dispel ethnic prejudices; and this is exactly what Besong is trying to do in this poem.

By taking sides with the oppressed masses, the poet underscores the fact that national/political liberation, national survival, and national assertion are preconditions for a vibrant national culture that brings the people together to fight against political injustice. Besong is not a spectator, but a participant who strives to communicate his own passion, vision, and convictions through his poetry embracing the socialist realist tradition. The poet’s decision to side with the “wretched of the earth” brings a new exhilaration and spiritual and cultural stamina in the struggle against political oppression.

The third poetic voice is Mathew Takwi. He is another Anglophone Cameroonian poet with a revolutionary vision who uses his poetry to address the abuse of power in Cameroon to free Cameroonians from political bondage.

#### *Takwi’s poetic vision and political liberation*

Takwi in “Where to, all alone? and “Because I am an Anglo” demonstrates what the abuse of power

can do in any nation. Capital flight, embezzlement, and marginalization are the hallmarks of power abuse. Greed, evil, lust and deceit have resulted in a depraved human society where the very powerful dominate and manipulate the weak and the oppressed of the society. These are some of the themes Takwi brings out in some of the poems in this collection. Ernst Fischer has pointed out that “whether poetry soothes or awakens, casts shadows or brings light, it is never merely a clinical description of reality. Its function is always to move the whole *man*, to enable the ‘I’ to identify itself with another life... (Fischer, 1978:14)

In “Where to, all alone?” the poet employs the lament motif and rhetorical devices to communicate his social vision and convictions. He uses this poem to call on the oppressed to react so as to free themselves from the ills of political tyranny and power abuse. The three rhetorical questions posed by the perturbed masses are not done so with the help of the mouth, but with the aid of three different organs each corresponding to a specific theme in the poem. In the first stanza, the people only use their gaze to wonder where the leader is going to all alone with the nation’s wealth,

With bulged and overflowing wallet  
Yet, amidst solitary crowded crow  
Yearning your solo prospering treks  
And so their astonished gaze wanders  
Where to, all alone? (Takwi, 2014:44)

The bulged, and overflowing wallet symbolizes the wealth siphoned by this leader to be kept somewhere because of the uncertainty in this society. He does this because the only certainty in such a society is uncertainty. Capital flight is the specific theme addressed by the poet in the first stanza. In the second stanza it is the flat bellies of the people that query where the politician is taking the nation’s wealth to, all alone:

As you solely zoom to He alone knows where  
Characteristic daily show of affluence  
So their flat bellies query  
Where to, all alone? (Takwi 2014:44)

Flat bellies symbolize poverty, deprivation, destitution, deficiency and indigence which are some of the themes the poet highlights in a society that lacks political liberty. In the last stanza, it is the plain intestines that pose the questions. Again the intestines are plain symbolizing hunger: “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 master’s lean bodies/So their plain intestines query:/Where to, all alone?” (Takwi, 2014:44). Takwi highlights the gulf between the haves and the have-nots in the Cameroonian contemporary society so as to bring out the conflict created by the misuse of power in Cameroon. From the reading and appreciation of this poem, it is evident that power is acquired by the ruling class for the accumulation of wealth for its own self and not to ameliorate the human condition. This is greed and evil, lust and deceit which result in a depraved human society where those who possess political power dominate the weak.

The poet exploits contrast in the poem to bring out his thematic preoccupation. He uses this poetic device to highlight the acquisition of wealth by the ruling class on the one hand and the wretched living conditions of the masses on the other: “I see your glittering limousine/Glide on crowded dusty lanes” (Takwi, 2014:44). The glittering limousine and dusty lanes are powerful symbols/images in the poem which contrast sharply and also reinforce the class system evident in the Cameroonian society. This poetic device brings to focus what Marx and Engels refer to in *The Communist Manifesto* as the bourgeoisie and the proletarian dialectic. (13) The limousine in the poem is a dense symbol with metaphorical possibilities. It represents wealth, power, comfort and fulfillment, but paradoxically, its glittering reflections hurt the eyes of the masses who watch this expensive car pass. The dusty lanes represent the wretchedness and the underdevelopment of the Cameroonian society even though she is endowed with natural resources.

Using the rhetorical poetic device to enhance his thematic preoccupation, the poet highlights one of the obnoxious and vicious practices in contemporary African 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, political liberty, and their own destiny. Because the people are socially and economically excluded from the running and management of the country’s political affairs, life becomes a bewildering dilemma and a vexing enigma. Some do the work; others only eat; some work to maintain the power structure; others work to change it. Confronted by this dialectical contradiction, the poet bemoans:

On a 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.  
 (Takwi, 2014:44)

The torments and frustrations of the masses 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 to acquiring their liberty is through a revolution, and this is what Takwi seems to be proposing in “Where to, all alone?”

Takwi’s preoccupation with freedom and political liberty goes beyond mere contemplation and wishful longing. In “Because I Am an Anglo” he touches on one of the very sensitive and crucial political issues in Anglophone Cameroonian literature, namely, the marginalization 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. (Ambe, 2007:8)

In “Because I Am Anglo”, an occasional sense of utter desolation and despair mingles with angry resolve to emphasize hope. Endurance becomes a stoic acceptance of suffering as a concomitant of the struggle for political liberty, while hope itself is a reaffirmation of the will to succeed. The social exclusion of Anglophone Cameroonians from political affairs is absolute:

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 political leadership 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 its methods. For example, 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. In 2011 for example when the government had an opportunity to appoint a coach for the National team in the name of Jules Nyongha, an experienced Anglophone coach, the government shelved him in favour of a Francophone coach. The poet bemoans:

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 and Anglophone Cameroon joined her in 1961, that is some fifty-six years ago and an Anglophone Cameroonian is yet to head either the Ministry of Finance or Armed Forces.

It is to the credit of Takwi’s revolutionary optimism that he can transcend the pangs of understandable despair and disillusionment to reaffirm his hope in freedom and political liberty. This much is the conclusion of this poem in which the poet stresses the value of endurance in the struggle against political injustice:

They fumble,  
 ‘Cos I am an Anglo

I cannot rise and reign  
 But can only have my face to rain

They genuflect,  
 ‘Cos I am an Anglo  
 And my yell He has listened  
 His White kapok ‘kerchief, my face He wipes  
 Then waterfall tears drought in smiles, as I  
 arise staff in hand. (Takwi, 2014:52)

It is endurance and determination that will make ‘waterfall tears drought in smiles’ as the poet rises with the leadership staff in hand. The oxymoron, ‘waterfall tears drought in smiles’ emphasizes optimism and hope that one day an Anglophone Cameroonian will occupy the most coveted position in Cameroon, the Presidency.

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 words since poetry suggests and does not explain.

During the launch of *Messing Manners*, the reviewer, Andrew T. Ngeh also underscored the issue of the marginalization 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. (Review of *Messing Manners*, 2014: 4)

It is important to indicate 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 to political liberty in order to be relevant in the contemporary society. 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.

## IX. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it could be said that Alembong, Besong and Takwi’s sense of patriotism which is here rendered in dialectical terms does not compromise the activist and combatant dimension of their commitments. The three poets 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” (Lyonga et al, 1993: 18) And Chidi Amuta reinforces this position when he contends that: “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” (Amuta, 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. Alembong, Besong and Takwi fall in the latter category as they have demonstrated that they possess those Promethean instincts, which they use to serve humankind.

Finally, Alembong, Besong and Takwi are the voices that speak most directly and convincingly about the socio-political contradictions of the Cameroonian society today and about the various forces, both internal and external which militate against the progress of the Cameroonian people. The three poets reinforced their poetic vision by exploiting the Marxist-Leninist and the Lukacsian paradigm of socialist realism of life as a continuous struggle to overcome the forces of reaction and to establish a happy society for all.

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#### Public Interest Statement

This article titled Power and Political Liberty in Anglophone Cameroonian Poetry focuses on the relationship between literature and political

liberty in Cameroon, and it highlights one of the fundamental functions of literature, namely as agent of social change. Given that literature is the fictionalization of concrete historical evidence, the dialectical and symbiotic relationship that exists between literature and politics is emphasized in this article. The paper contends that the power of art and political power are always at variance. Thus, it is this power dialectics that this paper preoccupies itself with.

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He has published extensively nationally and internationally in peer-reviewed journals. He won a prize for “the most outstanding literature article” for 2013 in the *South African Journal of African Languages. (SAJAL)* in his article titled “Language and Commitment in Anglophone Cameroonian Poetry: The Poetic Vision of three Anglophone Cameroonian Poets.” His recent publication which is a book published by Scholars’ Press titled *Power Dialectics in Anglophone Cameroonian Poetry* (2014) is on sale in the market.

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