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**Nation and Identity: Post-Colonial Aspects of  
the Cameroonian Novel**  
Master's Diploma Thesis

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*I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently  
using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the  
bibliography*

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## **Introduction**

In the Epigraph to his political thriller Triple Agent Double Cross, Janvier Tisi quotes poet Christopher Nkwayep-Chando who deftly articulates the current state of Cameroonian collective national identity, “Flourishing in the niche of our hearts’ dreams/Blossom the nourishing legacies of our souls/Yet, our spirits are waned by the destructive legacies/We look up to an uncertain future by our past/Knowing that the determining present is their cognation” (7). Contemporary Cameroonian fiction lays bare the complex mosaic of identities and national allegiances in the young state, which are complicated by the “destructive legacies” of European colonialism, its exploitation and insistence on cultural hegemony, as well as ethnic and regional strife which began germinating in earnest in the immediate post-colonial period.

In this thesis I explore how identity and nationalism are treated in contemporary Cameroonian novels. Since much of the existing scholarship relating to Cameroonian literature deals almost exclusively with the francophone literary tradition in Cameroon, I privilege English novels in this work by considering four of them, but as my aim is to provide a holistic and comparative perspective, I also examine two representative French novels. In this work I have chosen to consider the following novels: A Nose for Money (2006) by Francis Nyamnjoh, The White Man of God (1980) by Kenjo Jumbam, Taboo Love (1980) by Joseph Ngongwikuo, Triple Agent, Double Cross (2002) by Janvier Tisi, Les Chauves-Souris (1980) by Bernard Nanga, and C’est le Soleil Qui M’a Brûlée (1987) by Calixthe Beyala. Translations of all sources are my own work and can be found immediately following the quotes in the foot notes.

In chapter one I give historical and other background information necessary to understand the specific context in which the novelists are operating. This includes the sequence of events leading up to the establishment of a German colony in the region, the preceding British and French administrations and the similarities and differences in the way these countries carried out

the colonial enterprise. With regard to the background information on the experience of colonialism in Cameroon, I focus on the education systems in place during the colonial and immediate post-colonial period and the impact of these systems, for better or worse, on literary production in the country. I also highlight a few important events in post-colonial Cameroonian history and introduce the country's sensitive and precarious language situation. I present the theoretical basis for my research and discuss the importance of the novel as a genre and the ideal conduit for expressing identity and nationalism.

Chapter two compares the use of authenticity discourse and mimicry in two novels, The White Man of God (1980) by Kenjo Jumbam and Taboo Love (1980) by Joseph Anchangnyuoh Ngongwikuo as a call to resistance to European hegemony. Through a close reading of these two novels, I analyze authenticity discourses presented in the novels in opposition to the conclusions of post-colonial critique Franz Fanon, who argues that in order for authenticity discourses to be effective tools for resistance to European hegemony, said discourses must celebrate pre-colonial culture and conscientiously avoid representations of native savagery so ubiquitous in colonial discourse.

Chapter three explores the impact of literacy and orality on identity. I expound on Walter Ong's notion of secondary orality to make a case for representations of orality in Cameroonian novels as a form of resistance. Chapter four examines urban and rural identity and presents the problem of the comprador class and its stifling impact on nationalism. In this chapter I will examine how life in the city and in the village is depicted, as well as the representations of the differences between socio-economic obligations and expectations in each context as they relate to identity and nationality in the Cameroonian novel.

Chapter five discusses women as speaking subaltern bodies, and finally, chapter six confronts the Anglophone-Francophone divide as well as other issues of ethnic fractionalization effecting national identity politics.

In these six chapters I attempt to elucidate national identity in Cameroon as it is reflected in this selection of novels. I employ numerous contemporary debates in post-colonial literary criticism such as authenticity, alterity, colonial and post-colonial discourse, the post-colonial body, magical realism, and others as a framework to explore identity and nationalism in the novel in Cameroon. By examining the representations of nationalism and identity in these novels, we find a palimpsest of layered identities, as well as a multiplicity of national allegiances which sometimes champion and other times subvert the western concept of a nation.

## **Chapter I: History and Background**

With more than 250 distinct ethnic groups, 24 languages, and an equally diverse and varied natural landscape, Cameroon has often been called “Africa in Miniature” (Mbaku, 1). As is the case with most of contemporary Africa, and indeed most of the world once ruled by European powers, the experience of colonialism in Cameroon, the struggle for independence, and the current post-colonial discourse have influenced the concept of national identity in this young

nation-state. This concept of national identity is self-consciously manifested in a variety of cultural production, especially the novel. While not fundamentally unique to Africa, the particular colonial history of Cameroon must be examined in order to understand the myriad of complex social, political, economic, and cultural legacies which inform this concept of national identity as it is demonstrated in the novel.

### ***1.1: Colonial Masters, Independence, and the Anglophone Community***

The imperial adventure in Cameroon began in 1472 when Portuguese seamen arrived at the Island of Fernando Po and later sailed into the Gulf of Guinea. While the Portuguese were eager to exploit the vast amounts of natural resources of the region and profit from the then booming slave trade, they did not establish colonies, nor did they engage in a policy of assimilation. For more than 400 years, the region of modern-day Cameroon continued as a source of slaves for the new world. It was not until 1884 that a true colonial project began. The German Commissioner for West Africa, Gustav Nachtigal began signing treaties with indigenous rulers and the German Colony of Kamerun was established along the present day borders of the Republic of Cameroon. The Germans immediately began building up the area's infrastructure and agriculture, creating hundreds of thousands of acres of plantations. As many of the indigenous groups were reluctant to cooperate, or even resisted these intrusions, a harsh regime of forced labor was put in place.

During the First World War, German Kamerun was taken by Allied Expeditionary forces. As a spoil of war, the colony of the defeated Germans was divided between the allies France and Britain. The majority of the territory was accorded to France and only a comparatively small area near the border of the British Colony of Nigeria ceded to the British.

The new colonial masters administered their territories in very different ways. The French pursued a policy of assimilation and association whereby schools and other institutions were established to instruct the natives in French language and culture, creating a class of educated elite who could govern as proxies for the French. The French continued to build Cameroon's infrastructure, and forced labor remained in effect until 1952. Despite the innumerable injustices which took place under French administered Cameroon, this investment in the region's economy and infrastructure resulted in more economic prosperity, literacy, and eventually a rapidly burgeoning literary tradition in the post colonial area.

The British administered regions of Cameroon were not managed so deliberately. Considerably less money was invested in British Cameroons by the metropole. The result was the failure of the plantations, a stagnating economy and comparatively few contributions to public institutions like schools. Even today, there remains an economic disparity between the French and English Cameroons and a parallel disparity in the prolificacy of literary output.

Beginning in the 1940s, native opposition to colonial rule became organized in the form of labor unions and national political parties, one of the most vocal being the UPC (Union des Populations du Cameroun) (Mbaku, 31). Slow political progress toward independence continued throughout the 1950's and several agreements to that end were brokered between Cameroonians, the French, and the United Nations. Between 1956 and 1960 an armed struggle for independence was waged by the *Armée de Libération Nationale du Kamerun*. Between 10,000 and 80,000 people were killed during this conflict (Mbaka, 31).

Finally, on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1960 the French Colony of Cameroon was granted independence. The British administered territories were also on a mandated track toward independence but the people of the region were given the choice of unifying with their northern neighbor Nigeria or

joining the newly formed *République du Cameroun*. The Anglophones of Northwest Cameroon opted for federation with the *République du Cameroun*, but in 1972 the federation was dismantled and a single state established, largely without the consent of the minority Anglophone Cameroonians in the North-West. This was the first step in what many Anglophone Cameroonians consider to be a series of political, social, and economic exclusions exacted by the largely francophone federal government.

Antagonisms between the Anglophone community and the federal government continued to simmer throughout the 1980s and 90s, culminating in a clash between Anglophone political organizations demanding independence for south-western Cameroon and government security forces. Citing reports of torture and bias on the part of the government, in October of 1999 Amnesty International criticized the verdicts handed down by military tribunals concerning Anglophone defendants accused of campaigning for the secession of western Cameroon. Anglophones and northern Muslims are possibly the most vocal critics of President Paul Biya, who took power in 1982 and has since been reelected by consistently suspicious margins, once winning 99% of the popular vote. There remains a small separatist element within the Anglophone Cameroonian community. This linguistic and cultural divide continues to complicate national identity politics in Cameroon.

### ***I.II: Education and the Language Question***

Though the British had no official political position in Cameroon until their mandate began with the treaty of Versailles in 1919, English traders and merchants became a dominant force on the Nigerian and Cameroonian coasts as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century (Fonlon, 30). The natives who necessarily interacted with the foreign traders developed a form of Pidgin English. In 1827 Britain received permission from the Spanish authorities to occupy

the island of Fernando Po in order block a key point of departure for the middle passage and enforce an end to the trade in West African slaves. From this outpost the British directed missionaries to the mainland who established churches and schools where they taught English as well as native languages, having studied and transposed them into written form, most notably the widely spoken languages of Duala and Bali (Fonlon, 33).

When Cameroon fell under the dominion of the Kaiser's Reich in 1884, the Germans seemed at first perplexed by the language issue. Having previously communicated with native leaders in Pidgin, the German administration finally decided that their new protectorate should be educated in the language of the metropolis and following the lead of German missionaries who were quickly replacing British in some areas, the government began a program of intensive instruction of the German language.

As noted earlier, during the period of the League of Nations Mandates (1922-1939), the French and British administrations approached education in very different ways. Having invested more heavily in British Nigeria, the British colonial authorities administered the Western Cameroons as an outpost of the Nigerian colony and most matters of education were left up to the missionary societies, namely, the Basel Mission, the German Baptist Mission and the Roman Catholic Mill Hill Fathers (Gwei, 30). Instruction at these schools was usually done in both English and local languages. French controlled Southern Cameroon was divided into administrative divisions directed by Native Authorities (N.A.) and instruction was done in French. It is important to keep in mind that though comprehensive by some valuations, the education policies of the two administrations did not extend to secondary school until the beginning of the Trusteeship period in 1939, and no universities existed in Cameroon prior to independence. Previously, students from the French territory had been sent to France for

university studies and British subjects of West Cameroon were sent to Nigeria, Britain, or the United States.

As Salomon Nfor Gwei observes in his essay on western education in Cameroon, Western education expanded opportunities for young Cameroonians, but also led them to neglect local culture and traditions in exchange for those of Europeans:

Many Cameroonians, Anglophones and Francophones, have been westernized through the colonial educational systems. Many Cameroonians rejected their traditional values and customs in favor of those of the West. Through colonial education they came to know more about the literatures of Europe than their own literatures. (33)

Gwei is not unique in his argument that western education has complicated Cameroonian literature and the dialogism of appropriated language and culture vs. native language and culture will figure prominently in that literature.

In the early post-colonial period, many African writers were irresolute about which language to write in. While literary production in the colonial languages offered far better prospects for distribution and wider readership, some critics took an essentialist view of language as representation and argued that certain authentic features of the experience and worldview of the colonized could only be conveyed through a native tongue. Most Cameroonian writers have opted to write in either French or English, substituting words from indigenous languages where adequate expressions were absent in the colonial language. As Bill Ashcroft explains, this mode of expression is viewed as challenging not only the concept of an authentic “native” worldview, but also as subverting narrow conceptions of what kind of peripheral experience can be expressed using the language of the center:

As the contemporary accounts [are] beginning to assert, the syncretic and hybridized nature of post-colonial experience refutes the privileged position of a standard code in the language and any monocentric view of human experience. At the same time, however, it also refutes the notions that often attract post-colonial critics: that cultural practices can return to some “pure” and unsullied condition, and that such practices themselves, such as the use of vernacular terms or grammatical forms in english literature<sup>1</sup>, can embody such an authenticity. (40)

While Cameroonian authors of both colonial traditions make use of substitution and varieties of english and french have flourished in the post-colonial period, these variants are conspicuously absent from most of the texts examined in this work and the reasons for this fairly uniform adherence to standard English and French must be examined.

In The Empire Writes Back Ashcroft outlines the model of the “Creole continuum,” whereby linguistic investigations are not approached via the traditional paradigms of subjective “standard” and hegemonic speech communities, but rather on the basis of a continuum where varying degrees of creole vs. standard modes can be identified. Camfranglais, a creole based on French syntax but incorporating words from English and various indigenous languages, seems a perfect match for Ashcroft’s continuum model. Though commonly disregarded as simple code switching, Camfranglais has become a dynamic and functional mode of communication used by the urban underclass in Cameroon. As one popular Cameroonian artist who sings in Camfranglais explains in a 2006 interview:

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<sup>1</sup> Ashcroft uses “english” to identify variants of standard British English used in post-colonial societies.

<sup>2</sup>If you have good parents who have money, you go to school, if not, it's the streets.

Those who spoke neither French nor English became more and more numerous. In order to communicate, it was necessary to mix pidgin, a bit of French, and vernacular languages to create this slang which has become very popular. To speak about their problems, their suffering, it is best to do it in their own language. ([www.cameroon-info.net](http://www.cameroon-info.net))

With such a clear functionality and capacity to influence media and youth culture, why then, has Camfranglais not been appropriated on a larger scale by novelists seeking to represent the culture and community loyalties of the people they write about? The answer is simply that as a relatively recent phenomenon, Camfranglais has not been embraced by the academy, which is most central institution in the formation of the writers who attempt to represent national identities, and is abhorred and even punished in secondary schools. It seems that the current intellectual leaders and elites, at least for the time being, have taken a protectionist stance to guard against perceived corruption of European languages. As seen through study of the novels examined in this work, echoes of the colonial education system and linguistic cultural identification continue to influence identity politics and complicate constructs of nationalism in Cameroon.

### ***I.III: Nationalism and the Novel***

With such a tumultuous history of shifting borders and alliances, which are further confounded by inter-group antagonisms, how do we begin to trace a national identity from the intricate tapestry of identities woven together in the novels of Cameroon? What, in fact, is a

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<sup>2</sup> Si vous avez des parents bien, qui ont de l'argent, vous allez à l'école, sinon, c'est le quartier. Ils sont donc devenus de plus en plus nombreux, ne parlant ni l'anglais ni le français. Pour donc communiquer, il fallait mélanger le pidgin, un peu de français, et les langues vernaculaires pour obtenir cet argot, qui est devenu très populaire. Alors, pour parler de leurs problèmes, de leurs souffrances, le meilleur est de le faire en leur langue.

nation? The concept of the nation is a historically recent phenomenon, as French philosopher Ernst Renan reminded his audience at a lecture given at the Sorbonne in 1882:

Nations...are something fairly new in history. Antiquity was unfamiliar with them; Egypt, China and ancient Chaldea were in no way nations. They were flocks led by a Son of the Sun or by a Son of Heaven. Neither in Egypt nor in China were there citizens as such. Classical antiquity had republics, municipal kingdoms, confederations of local republics and empires, yet it can hardly be said to have had nations in our understanding of the term. (Renan, 1882)

Renan argued that nations as they were understood in the nineteenth century were products of the collapse of medieval empires, a historical phenomenon unique to Europe and therefore fixed culturally in a European socio-political context. Modern post-colonial states like Cameroon, however, did not come into existence as the result of a similar natural political evolution. Colonial powers demarcated territory and inculcated the colonial discourse in native subjects in a manner that served their own economic and hegemonic interests. Thus, post-colonial states are political constructs lacking in many cases what Renan argued to be the most important element in a modern nation: a communal imagined past.

Benedict Anderson restyles Ernst Renan's nineteenth century interpretation of the nation as a group with an imagined past by defining it as "an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (124). Missing from Anderson's definition is Renan's insistence on a shared imagined past. This omission makes Anderson's definition more suitable to post-colonial contexts where a multiplicity of "nationalisms" may be

at work in an individual who may not imagine a past with those he feels a nationalist connection to. The impulse of nationalism may not be connected to national communities, but rather to pan national ethnic, religious or racial groups. In the past, the globally inclusive Negritude movement has attempted to identify salient features of all African writers, as Bjornson explains:

African literary scholarship has, until recently, tended to treat writing from the entire continent as part of a single tradition. Negritude and other authenticity movements provided a rationale for this tendency, which was reinforced by the recognition of common features in the belief systems of different groups, parallels in the history of colonization throughout the continent, and similarities in the sorts of societies that emerged in Africa after independence. (xiii)

By focusing on the narration of nationalism in Cameroon, my intention is not to privilege national communities and dismiss universal approaches such as negritude, but rather to inclusively examine a variety of nationalisms as they are represented in these novels within the framework of a concrete socio-political context. While the experience of colonialism is indeed universal to the continent of Africa, as well as much of the world, as illustrated earlier, the way in which the colonial enterprise was executed by the various European powers differs radically even within a single subject country. Cultural and ethnic nationalisms are also pan-continental, but the specific way in which they complicate identity in Cameroon is also unique as is visible through examination of the novels.

The novel is the ideal form through which to examine nationalism for several reasons. At a very fundamental level the novel is unique to other literary forms such as poetry or the short story by allowing the space for writers to develop characters with complex identities. In addition, the formal characteristics of the novel such as voice, prose, and protagonist/antagonist

oppositions allow the representation of nationalism via a diametrical system of associations and differences. Jonathan Culler aptly articulates Benedict Anderson's defense of the novel as the choice literary form for reflecting nationalism:

The old-fashioned novel, Anderson writes, "is clearly a device for the presentation of the simultaneity in homogenous empty time, or a complex gloss upon the world meanwhile."

The narrative voice taking a quasi omniscient view that helps to constitute something like a society, tells us what different characters—who may never encounter one another—are doing at the same time. This imagined world "conjured up by the author in his reader's minds, is a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time is a precise analogue to the idea of a nation." Through the basic structures of address of novels and newspapers, "fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of unity in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations."

(19)

By exploring these unique characteristics and structures inherent to the novel form, as well as the specific post-colonial features of the novels in question, one can begin to elucidate a picture of nationalism and identity represented in those novels.

## **Chapter II: Authenticity, Mimicry, and Resistance**

Authenticity movements in post-colonial literatures generally seek to subvert colonial discourse and its insistence on the inferiority and barbarity of pre-colonial cultures. This desire

to subvert the post-colonial discourse is often inspired by approbation felt by post-colonial writers who fear their fragile, nascent national culture is at risk of being overcome by the culture of the former colonial center. By endeavoring to represent an “authentic” pre-colonial history, one that existed prior to the corruptions of the colonial system, post-colonial authors hope to lay the foundation for a pure, proud national culture, free of European interference. As the critic Franz Fanon explains:

It was with the greatest delight that [the native author] discovered that there was nothing to be ashamed of in the past, but rather dignity, glory, and solemnity. The claim to a national culture in the past does not only rehabilitate that nation and serve as a justification for the hope of a future national culture. In the sphere of psycho-affective equilibrium it is responsible for an important change in the native. (Fanon, 120)

While Fanon takes the position that pre-colonial, so called authentic cultural practices had to be legitimized in order to justify a post-colonial national culture, others are less certain of the nobility of the savage and have confronted pre-colonial tribal brutality in tandem with colonial brutality. As further demonstrated, authenticity approaches can serve as the basis for the validation of national culture without taking Fanon’s rather naïve view that native cultures must or can be honestly represented in an idyllic way.

Taboo Love, an English novel from author Joseph Ngongwikuo is equally critical of pre-colonial and colonial forms of brutality, but clearly laments the loss of authentic pre-colonial culture. In many ways Ngongwikuo’s biography leads one to anticipate such a view. While Ngongwikuo’s parents were the first of his tribe to convert to Christianity, his grandfather was the tribe’s chief and maintained the Kom tribal way of life. Ngongwikuo was educated in

Britain, the United States, and Cameroon, and holds degrees in both English and African Literatures.

In this, Ngongwikuo's first novel, *Iyafi and Jam*, two young members of the Mukomangoc tribe of the northern grasslands defy tribal rules by sleeping together outside of marriage, a crime made all the more taboo by the fact that Iyafi is a *wintoc* or one of several wives of the king. Set in the late nineteenth century, Ngongwikuo's novel follows two young lovers who challenge tribal leadership by voicing their objections to the brutal punishment sanctioned by the rules of the tribe. Because she is pregnant, Iyafi's life is spared by the council of elders charged with administering the punishment, but Jam is condemned to die by five strokes; a ritualistic execution in which the ears, arms and finally head of the accused are chopped off by a *juju* (a holy man in costume thought to have supernatural powers) in a public ceremony. Though Iyafi protests pointing out that other tribes have lighter punishments for the same crime, and repeated reference is made to the cruelty of the tribe, Ngongwikuo depicts the tribal justice system and scheme of social hierarchies and practices as functional for the tribe. The council of elders also solves land disputes and the king awards titles to land owners who pay tribute to him, establishing class rankings. The author reacts to the cruelty of some of the tribe's practices while simultaneously defending their authenticity in the face of foreign colonial practices.

Sick and near death, just before her suicide, Iyafi prophesies the coming of the colonialists and welcomes the coercive implementation of their practices, "Now I am sure His Highness will soon go to the land of our ancestors. Then some strange people will come and change these cruel rules of the tribe. How I wish I could live to see that day" (Ngongwikuo, 131). Iyafi's prophesies are correct and soon the tribe gets word of the arrival German colonial

expeditionaries or “men from the salted sea.” The barbarous reputation of these men precedes them:

“I have news of the plunder of the red people from across the salted water,” said one of the village heads. “They say that they have no mercy. They kill anything they come across on their way, children, women, old men as well.”

“Are they so ruthless?” asked another village head.

“They are really cruel and ruthless,” the other replied. (Ngongwikuo, 147)

Ngongwikuo rejects the essentialist assumption so prevalent in both colonial and post-colonial authenticity discourses that certain cultural features, in this case barbarity and brutality, are the exclusive property of one culture as opposed to another. At the same time, he constructs an authenticity discourse equally capable of defending against European hegemony because it stresses the trauma to the native of having his hierarchies, political systems, and social institutions, however imperfect they may have been, destroyed in a very short period of time by a force exterior to that society.

Though the German and subsequent British administrations of Ngongwikuo’s region of Cameroon bring schools, infrastructure, and a seemingly more equitable justice system, the changes are very dramatic and necessarily brought about under duress, as one of the tribal elders comments, “I know if we don’t do what they have ordered, they will only have another excuse to come and wipe us out. These red men must be very wicked people. Only wicked people who are anxious to kill others quickly make such deadly guns” (Ngongwikuo, 155). The novel ends with the end of the colonial era and in an ambivalent tone suggests the return to an authentic pre-colonial period, “The District Officer kept his word and after the war he returned and gave back His Highness his independence to rule his people the way he had before the red men came. And

he packed his things and left Atuisong Capitol Hill and went back to England, his home” (Ngongwikuo, 188). While Ngongwikuo’s objective and non-essentialist treatment of brutality can be read as an alternative authenticity discourse, his representation of cultural mimicry is quite traditional.

Mimicry as it is encouraged by colonial discourse is the insistence that colonized peoples adapt the linguistic and cultural systems and practices of the colonizer. Bill Ashcroft argues that mimicry is an important tool in post-colonial writing as well, because the unsuccessful or even troubling products of that mimicry are seen as a corruption of the original:

When colonial discourse encourages the colonized subject to ‘mimic’ the colonizer, by adopting the colonizer’s cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather, the result is a ‘blurred copy’ of the colonizer that can be quite threatening...Mimicry therefore locates a crack in the certainty of colonial dominance...(Ashcroft 2000, 139).

Ngongwikuo’s handling of mimicry does not at first suggest this type of dominance subversion, but the way in which his characters mimic the new religious and social customs they have been taught to practice certainly questions the success of that mimicry.

When the soldiers who were sent by the king and the request of the British administration to Fernando Po return to the village, they have been converted to Christianity and instructed by the white priests stationed on the island that it is their duty to bring light where there is darkness and instruct their village in the new faith. Ngongwikuo’s treatment of the Christianization of the village is noncommittal and ambivalent, at times seeming to praise the freedom of religion insisted upon by the British to the chagrin of the king and the elders, and other times depicting

the cruelty of the colonial enforcement methods of the new cultural practices and values, as with the treatment of pupils:

The children were inspected daily by the teachers, and those who hadn't washed their bodies or teeth were beaten and sent off to the stream to go and wash themselves or their teeth before returning to class...The children's feet were also inspected for jiggers, and those found with toes infested by jiggers were seriously beaten and sent back home to remove them before coming back to class. (Ngongwikuo, 183).

The fact that the children have to be beaten in order to mimic the social hygiene practices of the colonizers demonstrates that the mimicry is the product of brutal coercion. Even when the characters are not forcefully coerced into mimicking the practices of the colonizers, they do not seem to have real purchase of the practices and the result is a contrived performance similar to what Ashcroft describes.

One of the most obvious examples of this disconnect between the actual practice and values and mimicry is the wedding ceremony. The majority of the village having been converted to Christianity, the new white priest sets out to end the practice of polygyny and establish Christian marriage as the single matrimonial institution. The material components of the ceremony symbolize the lack of cultural ownership over the practices by those mimicking them. In order that the brides and grooms be properly attired for a Christian wedding, the priest procures "black suits and shirts and ties to fit all sizes of men, and white gowns and veils too, to suit all sizes of girls for their weddings...the priest gave them the dresses, which they returned to him three days later" (Ngongwikuo, 183). Thus, the villagers put on the costumes lent to them and stage the ceremony like a play in the theater, lacking possession of both the material and non-material aspects of the practice they are mimicking.

Authenticity discourse and representations of mimicry can also be found in Kenjo Jumbam's The White Man of God, but Jumbam makes more conspicuous use of both as tools for resistance to colonial hegemony. Jumbam's novel centers on the coming of age of the child narrator Tansa who grapples with the oppositional forces of Christianity and indigenous religion. Tansa's parents and much of his village have converted to Christianity and obey, often with trepidation, the orders of the head priest, "Big Fadda." There are, however, voices of dissent within his community who continue to follow the old ways and are combative towards Christianity and European cultural dominance. One of the strongest voices questioning Christian values is Tansa's grandmother, Yaya, who "is a single-handed Greek chorus, a social authority figure challenging and questioning the invading Catholicism. She does not oppose directly but rather probes as a prosecutor the events she witnesses. She continuously enters into the dialogue with her daughter and son-in-law regarding their religion and child rearing practices" (Howard, 97). Yaya views the foreign religion as divisive and incompatible with the authentic, pre-colonial religious practices of the tribe and articulates this view in an argument with Tansa's father over an edict that men with more than one wife must give them up and practice monogamy:

"It is your church. This is what we have always said about this new worship. Do you see what it is doing? In Meluv it has divided children of one womb even when they all go to church. Some say they will belong to this church and others to that one. And those of this church won't talk to those of that one. What sort of a thing is this? And when I say that there are many gods they want to kill me for it and yet they worship in rival churches. What this foreign god will bring to this country is still hidden." (Jumbam, 53)

Yaya's view that the new religion is a corruption of the authentic indigenous religious practices is shared by others and indigenous systems of social control are also depicted as more natural and functional for the community.

Those who are converted Christians are subject to the whimsical punishment of Big Fadda if their conduct violates European norms as Big Fadda interprets them. Minor transgressions are punished by a beating or violent harangue from Big Fadda, and mortal sins, as parishioners are constantly reminded, are punishable by an eternity in hellfire, a prominent refrain of the church. While the Christians live in constant fear of Big Fadda and hellfire, those who continue to practice indigenous religions and are subject to its laws and punishments are represented as enjoying a more authentic system of rules and punishments that better fits the needs of their community.

When Tansa's pagan neighbor Biy Wibah is discovered to have had an incestuous affair with her brother, both assume the temporary status of outcast, hated and ridiculed, while their relatives confer on how the crime could have been allowed to happen and how to proceed. In the end they decide to exorcise the evil of the crime in a ritual ceremony where the two offenders are tied together and both tied to a male goat. The goat is bludgeoned to death by an elder who recites an incantation to rid the two of the evil that has infected them. The goat, ropes, and every object used in the ceremony is then buried and everyone present is blessed with a splash of water. After the ceremony, life returns to normal in Tansa's village and Biy Wibah and her brother are once again respected:

The change in attitude of the people toward Biy Wibah and Dinni was dramatic. After the cleansing ceremony Biy Wibah became the idol of the people again...The past was

gone. Gone completely as if nothing had happened. Even among the children nothing was wrong and it was as if they had witnessed no cleansing ceremony” (Jumbam, 76).

Those who maintain a traditional lifestyle are clearly represented by Jumbam as having functional communities with their own mores, taboos and punishments that work for the society, which is congruent with Fanon’s argument that authenticity discourses can be employed as means of resistance to colonial hegemony. The power of the authenticity discourse is strengthened in the novel when it is revealed that even some of the most devout of Big Fadda’s flock secretly participate in pre-colonial rituals.

The people of Tansa’s village, Christian and pagan alike, fear and respect the juju Kibarankoh. This juju dances to end a mourning period and is known to be a symbol of danger, therefore all those who witness his dance dramatize the danger by running ahead to warn the others of the juju’s approach. When Big Fadda sees the Kibarankoh approaching the mission grounds, transfixed in his lithesome dance, he gives him a kick in the bottom, knocking off his mask and revealing Mathew, his loyal catechist and translator playing the part of the juju. The ceremony spectators are shocked by Big Fadda’s actions and are unable to acknowledge such a desecration has taken place, “Did people witness this event? No, nobody did. Nobody witnesses such an abomination. The juju is the land and nothing other than that. Not even the Fon that is the ruler of the land can joke with it or touch it. It is not a human being. It is a juju, a dreadful one for that matter” (Jumbam, 143). For his part, Big Fadda is so shocked at the revelation that he promptly faints where he stands and has to be carried away. The authenticity discourse in Jumbam’s novel is further enhanced by the comparison between the apprehensive obedience shown by the villagers towards Big Fadda and the way they welcome Father Cosmas.

Father Cosmas comes to the village to serve as an assistant preacher to Big Fadda. Instead of deriding and punishing the tribe for their traditional customs, Father Cosmas learns the local language and accepts invitations to eat and drink in the homes of the villagers. Because of this interest in indigenous practices, Father Cosmas' sermons are more readily accepted by the tribe. By recognizing native cultural practices as equal to those of Europeans, Father Cosmas, as a sympathetic outsider, promotes an authenticity discourse suited for resistance to European hegemony.

Jumbam's depictions of mimicry are also more unequivocally suited for resistance to hegemony and are more commensurate with Ashcroft's understanding of the phenomenon. Like Ngongwikuo, Jumbam chooses a religious ceremony to elucidate the discrepancies between the original values behind the practice as it is carried out by the colonizers and the way those values are interpreted and abased by those mimicking them. Again, the material aspects of the practice seem to be the antecedent to this abasement. In the novel, Tansa's older sister and her friends discuss their preparations for their upcoming baptism. Though all are desirous of partaking in the ceremony, the financial burden seems prohibitive. Widen complains that she has sold all her crop to pay her church contributions and now does not have enough money even for cooking oil, let alone to pay for a white dress and veil. Paulina unabashedly reveals her plans for saving up the money to buy her own dress. She will go to work at her sister's liquor stand and then "make business" with the men there. The other two girls recognize and point out the moral ambiguity of committing a mortal sin in order to acquire the means to be baptized, but Paulina's justification is convincing:

"Well, I was just telling you what I do because I couldn't afford to maintain myself, pay my church contribution and buy my baptism dress...Is there any sin that baptism cannot

wash away? Will you be given baptism if you do not pay your church contribution? If you do not have your white dress and white hair scarf?" (Jumbam, 16)

According to Paulina's understanding of the ceremony and the values behind it, the ends justify the means. Paulina's interpretation of the colonial values is necessarily impacted by the insufficiency of her material means, and her persuasive rationalization of her behavior makes for a "threatening" reproduction of the sort Ashcroft outlines.

Ngongwikuo and Jumbam's depictions of mimicry do not provide substance for the creation of national culture, per se, but they definitely seek to set the foundation for a national culture by representing resistance to imposed European practices. In the case of Taboo Love, the threat of the mimicry is understated but the lack of agency over the mimicked material culture is emphasized. In Jumbam's The White Man of God, mimicry is at times so inconsistent with the values behind the practices that the reader feels a palpable sense of resistance to those practices.

At the base of the mimicry problem is the question of authenticity. What is the point of indigenous peoples mimicking the cultural practices of Europeans if they will never really get it *right* or be *authentic*? This sub textual question pervades both novels and is never explicitly answered. At the same time, pre-colonial culture is examined through authenticity discourse. Ngongwikuo chooses to avoid a Fanonist idealization of the pre-colonial era and instead he is equally critical of tribal and colonial brutality. At the same time, he presents the pre-colonial social systems as functional, however flawed they may be, and explores the psychological and social effects on the community of such drastic changes to their systems imposed by outsiders. Jumbam is less ambiguous in his celebration of indigenous culture, with outspoken characters like Yaya, who openly challenge the assumed superiority of European culture. The continued and effective use of tribal justice, Father Cosmas' interest in local customs and Mathew's

betrayal of Big Fadda in dancing as the juju, all insist on the imperative of sustained indigenous culture. Of course, authenticity arguments are inherently inadequate, not for their tendency to idealize what is deemed authentic, but because such arguments presuppose the stasis or static and unchanging nature of both colonial and pre-colonial culture. These arguments can, however, contribute to the construction of national identity. Authenticity discourse seen in these novels, i.e., not the idealization, but the celebration and defense of pre-colonial culture, combined with a measured and critical examination of the influence of European culture, form the foundation of an “imagined community,” one that is united by, if nothing else, a common resistance to European cultural hegemony and an acceptance of how it has and will continue to affect them.

### **Chapter III: Literary Orality: Reification or Resistance?**

While orality refers simply to the verbal exchange of information, especially in the context of what Walter Ong in his book Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World calls “primary oral cultures,” the definition of an oral tradition and its implications for national identity remain elusive. Joseph C. Miller offers a very basic definition: an oral tradition is “a narrative describing or purporting to describe, eras before the time of the person who relates it” (2). Miller’s definition, while straightforward and concise, seems oversimplified to the point of excluding important aspects of oral traditions as they relate to national identity. Simply describing events which occurred prior to the lifetime of the person relating those events says nothing of the dynamic nature of oral histories which constantly change and adapt to the times in which they are being told, or the distinctly pedagogical nature of many oral histories. Also missing is reference to the importance to the group of the oral tradition as a means to maintain ownership of their history. If a history is written down, it can be copied, repeated, duplicated and manipulated. If a history is only passed orally, then those who receive the information are few and select. Being selective in who receives cultural information can be useful to a group for maintaining a sense of purity and authenticity, but also has the disadvantage of taking away the power of the group to shape the way their history is understood by outsiders.

So how does one classify representations of oral traditions in the novel? Are they more oral or literate? What is gained or lost by inscribing and reifying oral histories? I would venture that representations of oral traditions in the novel are another type of “secondary orality.” Walter Ong’s model of secondary orality includes the use of writing, print, sound recording, and video as means to convey cultural information using the style and devices of orality, while preserving

them in their original state. Secondary orality of course necessarily prevents the dynamism of primary orality, but since it is inscribed for a wide audience, it can serve as a tool by which groups can promulgate their cultural information while maintaining the spirit of its oral form and assert their ethnic national identities.

At one point in Taboo Love, as part of a seasonal celebration, Iyafi's father gathers his family and tells the story of the foundation of the tribe, a long and dramatic origin myth steeped in betrayal and revelation. Before he begins, Iyafi's father reminds the children of the importance of the story to the tribe and that it is imperative they hear it so they can pass it on to their own children, as oral histories are most commonly transferred:

“The history of the tribe,” he said, “is a very long story. When I was young I always slept halfway through it. I really got the whole history only when I had listened to it for over five consecutive seasons. I therefore remind you, my children, that whether you sleep or keep awake, no one leaves this house till I am through with the story of the history of the foundation of the tribe. You must know it so as to tell your own children when you too grow to my age” (42).

The pedagogical aspect of the story and storytelling process are constantly reinforced by the father's insistence on attention and by the way he questions and prompts his young audience on different aspects of the story, thereby creating a dynamic, dialogical environment unique to oral traditions. The origin story of the tribe is used as a primer for instruction in the rules of the tribe and Iyafi even takes advantage of the storytelling forum to question the rules of the tribe when she believes she has found an inconsistency. Patiently, her father provides her with an answer based on the knowledge he extrapolates spontaneously from the origin story to fit the questions and needs of the moment.

Oral traditions are diverse and cultural information is transmitted not only through origin histories, but also through riddles, allegories, and other didactic tales. When Iyafi cares for the younger children, she often quizzes them on tribal riddles meant to instruct children in the names and purposes of animals. Iyafi is known in her family as a great storyteller and in one place she recounts the story of Funkuonti and Nyamaboh who kill and cannibalize their mothers, a cautionary tale against being duped into evil by the craft of others.

In The White Man of God, it is women who are almost exclusively responsible for the oral tradition. Yaya often invokes cultural knowledge conveyed orally concerning the treatment of children, spouses, and animals, once imploring, “Don’t you dare! Spiders are never killed. They tell the future and can shape one’s future” (98). Even Tansa’s christianized and devout mother tells him the story of Banla and the tortured spirits that haunt the night air as a way of reminding him to be home before dark.

The oral tradition allows members of a community to coalesce around a shared “imagined past,” thereby cooperatively constructing a shared identity that we might recognize as a nation. By representing these oral traditions in the novel, these authors do not violate the orality of these traditions but rather reify and validate the cultural information contained within them. Furthermore, by representing these oral traditions as dynamic and didactic cultural institutions, not only the cultural knowledge the stories and riddles contain, but also orality itself is validated and defended in the face of a European hegemonic system which insists on the superiority of literal cultural conveyances and values.

In Wretched of the Earth, Franz Fanon argues that by exploiting and re-imagining orality as one of many cultural devices unique to the colonized, the colonized subject asserts his own culture in resistance to the received message of European cultural superiority, “By imparting new

meaning and dynamism to artisanship, dance, music, literature, and the oral epic, the colonized subject restructures his own perception. The world no longer seems doomed. Conditions are ripe for inevitable confrontation”(2005:176). This confrontation is embodied in the novels by comparative representations of literate cultural production vs. orality.

When literacy is addressed in the novels, one reoccurring theme is mystification. The colonial subjects are represented often in the novel as being mystified with literature and the mysterious materiality of the written word. Simultaneously, mystification breeds resistance, not to the concept of literacy itself, but to the colonizers manner of imposing it.

In Taboo Love Ngongwikuo presents the conflict between the tribal elders who see no other possibility than elevating the colonizers to the level of gods because of their “magic” written language, and those who question why the magic of literacy cannot be practiced via their native culture and language:

“But I know that the red men have some magic in the way they teach their language. We only speak our language. We don’t write it. The red men speak and write their language. You heard me read the letter they sent to His Highness in the German language. When your children go to school they will learn the same thing. Is it not wonderful? You do not know the red man yet. He is like god, the only thing he has not done yet is create a man the way God has done...”

“But why can’t they learn our language and teach our children how to write it?” asked another elder. (Ngongwikuo, 156)

This passage depicts an initial impulse for appropriation of literacy for the purpose of resistance which is what we find in most postcolonial writing. On the other hand, in The White Man of God, Yaya resists by pointing out an inherent flaw of literacy, “Letters are good because they

never forget any of the messages you put in them. They deliver every message you ask them. There is only one thing I do not like about them. They deliver their messages to anybody, even for those whom they are not meant” (Jumbam, 82). Yaya’s reservations about literacy reflect the desire of primary oral cultures to protect their identity via the exclusivity of the way cultural information is transferred orally.

Oral traditions are a tool of resistance because they re-emphasize difference by transmitting precious cultural information, be it origin stories or various types of oral expression meant impart a moral education according to the values of the group. Oral traditions also unify the group in a singular imagined past. Representations of oral traditions in the novel are a form of secondary orality which allows the novelist to resist hegemony by speaking directly to the colonizer. The use of an appropriated form also allows for the creation of solidarity among colonized groups thereby expanding the imagined community.

## **Chapter IV: Urban and Rural Identities**

Over the last forty years, rural to urban migration in Africa has exploded. Most come to the city looking for work and a better life for their children but many maintain a strong connection to their home villages. As Peter Geschiere explains, “A special characteristic of urbanization in Africa is the continuing commitment of many urbanites to ‘the village’. In the 1960’s researchers were already emphasizing that life in the cities could hardly be understood without reference to the continuing involvement of urban residents with their rural area of origin” (309). These connections between the city and the village are maintained in a number of ways. Money

may be sent by workers in the city to sustain poor rural relatives and city dwellers are called upon to assist members of their rural community when they come into the city on business or send their children to study. Respect from those who still reside in the village is precious to urbanites, and as is demonstrated below, has led to the politicization of rural ethnic identities.

In Francis Nyamnjoh's A Nose for Money we see the city through the eyes of the main character Prospère, a semi-literate, francophone village migrant who has moved to the city to make his fortune. Working as a truck driver, Prospère lives in a lower middle class urban neighborhood where quarters are close and everyone is looking for an angle to make money and get ahead. After his wife's infidelity and their subsequent divorce, Prospère begins to frequent prostitutes and finds that they are mostly women or girls who have come from the village to make a new start in the city and have been chewed up by the city:

Some of the women he met seemed beautiful and pure to him at the outset like his Rose of old. Once in a while a young woman would migrate from the village to the city, hoping to earn for herself a sizeable portion of the cake of modern life. When Prospère was very fortunate indeed, he met one of these girls, still friendly and open, and had an affair with her. But soon after she arrived, she would find the harsh realities of the city difficult to bear, and the cake scarcer than she had expected. Her sense of love, honesty and dignity would be corrupted by the search for material things. She would learn new tricks of life in the city and eventually find herself mired in the venereal puddles of the part of town known as Old Belle, the ghetto concentration of poverty, of hope and despair, in the midst of Sawang's promise of modernity. (Nyamnjoh, 21)

Throughout the novel, the city is continuously depicted as a cesspool of corruption and betrayal where the hopeful come from the village to have their dreams crushed if they are not able to

adapt quickly to the dog-eat-dog city mentality. Prospère is determined that this will not be his fate and when he crosses paths with the money launderers Jean-Marie and Jean-Claude, he takes advantage of the opportunity to get rich quick.

Prospère picks up the two men on one of his deliveries to the villages and offers them a place to stay while they have their car repaired. He is suspicious of the men but somehow senses he has something financial to gain by helping them. When the two men are discovered dead at the site of a car accident, presumably the result of a high-speed chase to escape the authorities, Prospère learns through news bulletins that they are wanted for producing false banknotes. Anxious about the possibility of the police linking him to the men, Prospère searches their belongings and finds 200 million CFA in fake bills. Prospère, whose very name means ‘fortunate and successful’ sees this as his ticket to the good life and quickly hides the money. As he is frightened that the police will discover his involvement and destroy his hopes for prosperity in the city, Prospère turns to one of his village elders for council.

For Prospère the village is “simply a place for the dead and dying” (Nyamnjoh, 75). Nevertheless, it is a place steeped in tradition and the supernatural elements that control one’s fate, even those who have migrated to the city. When he goes to see Seng, the village fortune teller, our attention is directed to the mysterious objects that are used in the ancient practices, “the dirty calabashes, pots and knives, the black leather amulets, the darkness, the incantations of the filthy diviner all contribute to the presence of the supernatural” (Nyamnjoh, 77). To add to his desperation, Prospère is in the unfortunate position of being an urbanite who has neglected his village and the burial place of his ancestors for quite some time. There is a palpable amount of tension between Prospère and Seng as village and urban dwellers. It has been so long since Prospère has visited the village that Seng does not remember him and plans to take as much

money as he can from this “rich” man from the city, “ ‘Anyway, one can’t underestimate you people from the city, can one?’ he asked, a funny grin on his grey-bearded face. The quest for money had become everybody’s business” (Nyamnjoh, 79). As both men are suspicious of each other, Prospère decides to give Seng a false name for the purposes of divining. Seng is wise to this deception and tells Prospère that the root of his problems are in his denunciation of the village for a corrupt life in the city, “Then, more to his patient than as part of the message, he said, ‘No one forgets his village, no matter how big the city has made him. I have known big city dwellers whose corpses were rejected for burial by people here in the village angered by their failure to visit the village when they were alive and well in the city’” (Nyamnjoh, 83). With this warning in mind, Prospère returns to the village as promised, and pays proper homage at the graves of his parents. This act of contrition to the village done, Prospère makes the most of his newfound connections in the civil service to learn the corrupt system by which he will expand his wealth and prosper, at least for some time.

The relationships and antagonisms between village and urban identity are also demonstrated through the characters of Prospère’s wives Charlotte and Chantal, whom he marries after he has made his fortune with the false money. Their understanding of their urban identity is one of sophistication, wealth, and prestige, where as the village identity which they must necessarily maintain, at least to a certain extent for posterity’s sake, is one of vanishing culture and traditions that have no place in modern society:

Both women were very used to the city and its ways, and had a passionate commitment to everything it stood for. Like her parents, Charlotte had cultivated a passionate dislike of village life and traditional values. Chantal, on the other hand, still had some roots in the village...she didn’t care much for village life and tradition and was always in a hurry to

leave again whenever she went to see her parents, yet she hated inviting her parents to the city, because she didn't want her friends to associate her with the village or with village ways. How could a dying civilization and culture matter to anybody? Had it the strength to survive, would the culture be dying?" (Nyamnjoh, 153).

For Prospère's wives, visits to the village are necessary to ensure the respect, not only of their fellow tribesmen, but also of other city dwellers. On the other hand, they take it for granted that the village ways are inferior and destined for extinction.

This duality of urban identity, always grudgingly linked to the village, comes to a dramatic head at the end of the novel when Prospère, seeking help from another medicine man for his ailing and childless third wife, brings Charlotte and Chantal to the village. In this scene the Seng reveals through traditional magic that Prospère's wives have born only the children of other men and that he himself is sterile. This triumph of rural wisdom over urban vice is ostensibly a hopeful signal that the village is not, in fact, "dead or dying," or on the brink of vanishing as everyone seems to think. This victory is considerably subverted, however when the police steal money from Prospère's dead body. As demonstrated, the urban lack of moral values has infiltrated the village as well.

The difficulties of urban and rural identity are also central in Bernard Nanga's Les Chauves-Souris (The Bats). Like Nyamnjoh's novel, Les Chauves-Souris makes use of a fictional African country, in this case Eborzel, which bares a striking resemblance to contemporary Cameroon. Bilanga is the proud and successful native son of a fertile rural region and would like nothing more than to represent this region in the national government. As he will see, however, the villagers from this region are not as enthusiastic about his candidacy as he had hoped and the true state of the countryside is not nearly as idyllic as he imagined.

As in Nyamnjoh's novel, the reader is given an idealized vision of the village in comparison to the teeming cesspool that is the city through the eyes of the protagonist:

The appearance of the villages differed completely from that of the neighborhoods of Eborzel. They were opposite worlds. The neighborhoods of the capital were hodgepodes of hovels. Piles of rubbish accumulated in front of the doors. Septic tanks spilled into the open air, which, during the rainy season, poured their contents into the ravines. The neighborhoods of Eborzel were a hotbed of parasites...The villages had, on the contrary, an air of health that enchanted Bilanga each time he visited the countryside.

<sup>3</sup>(Nanga, 32)

Bilanga's enchantment with the villages and disgust with the city mirrors that of Prospère in A Nose for Money. Having grown up in the city, away from his native village, Bilanga has forgotten many of the traditional ways and has developed a patronizing view of the countryside in which he understands the villagers as pastoral caricatures who live in harmony with the land without knowledge or interest in the amenities of the city. When he returns to his home village of Vémelé, however, it is revealed that he is gravely mistaken. His countrymen are angry about the state of their infrastructure. The bridge connecting the village to the outside world is in ill repair and continuously collapses. They are angered by Bilanga's neglect of the

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<sup>3</sup> L'aspect des villages différait du tout au tout de celui des quartiers d'Eborzel. C'étaient deux mondes opposés. Les quartiers de la capitale étaient des entassements de masures. Des tas d'ordures s'y amoncelaient devant les portes. Des fosses septiques s'y ouvraient à l'air libre, qui, pendant les saisons de pluie, déversaient leur contenu dans les ravins....Les quartiers d'Eborzel constituaient des foyers de parasites....Les villages avaient au contraire un air de santé qui enchantait Bilanga à chaque promenade à la campagne. (Nanga, 32)

village despite all the wealth he has amassed in the city through corruption and collusion with neo-colonialists, a discontent which is daily reinforced by the presence of Bilanga's huge villa that he rarely visits. As in Nyamnjoh's novel, we see the societal problems caused by urbanites who do not maintain appropriate ties and fulfill their obligations to their village. When Bilanga tries to shore up support from his region for his political ambitions, we see the negative reactions of the villagers to men of Bilanga's class, a class that by ignoring the needs of the common peasants, has assumed the role of the colonizer. In post colonial studies this is referred to as the "comprador class" and in these two novels is depicted as a cause of ethnic factionalization, corruption, and the main obstacle to national unity.

#### ***IV.I: The Comprador Class***

Comprador comes from a Portuguese word meaning 'merchant' and during the colonial era was often used to denote those natives who knew colonial languages and could thereby interface between the colonialists and local populations. Because of their social proximity to the colonial powers, their loyalty to their native peoples was often questioned. As Ashcroft explains, "In post-colonial theory, the term has evolved to a broader use, to include the intelligencia—academics, creative writers, artists, and capitalists whose independence may be compromised by a reliance on and identification with colonial power" (2000, 55). In the case of A Nose for Money and Les Chauves-Souris, the comprador class is a group of elite capitalists who consistently put their own self-interest above the needs of their nation. According to Richard Bjornson, these practices are viewed by novelists to be the primary hindrance to the fulfillment of true national independence:

Among Cameroonian writers and intellectuals of the post-1972 period, there was widespread agreement that the promise of national independence had been compromised

by the materialistic individualism that found exaggerated expression in the conspicuous consumption of the privileged class. Supporters of the nation building concept regarded the greed, corruption and favoritism fostered by this attitude as obstacles to the realization of their goals, whereas radical social critics interpreted them as reflections of values inherent in the neo-colonialist system. From both perspectives, however, it was clear that the promise of independence remained unfulfilled. (407)

Nanga, along with many other Cameroonian authors has had his works banned in Cameroon and others have even faced exile for the provocative depictions of the state of national independence and corruption from a comprador class of elites who exploit the poor and destroy the dream of national unity and independence. Through a close examination of the character development in the novels, one can see how national independence is hindered by the comprador class of elites that Bjornson describes

Les Chauves-Souris, refers to the bats that fill the night sky in Vémélé to devour the flying insects which represent the poor, mostly rural underclass. From this population Richard Bilanga attempts to garner support along ethnic lines for his political campaign, which, if successful, will put him in a more lucrative financial position. He tries to buy the support of his village with truck loads of food and empty promises. As seen before, relations between urbanites and villagers are precarious and must be handled delicately if the comprador is to achieve the necessary support to enrich himself. As Nyamnjoh explains in an essay on the subject, “The central point is that the extent to which urban elites will play a significant role in defining a regional identity for their home area depends on the resources they bring with them and the incentives that encourage them to mobilize local political support” (1998, 323). But despite Bilanga’s token gifts of cigarettes and sweets intended to bribe the villagers and secure their

support, a small group of opponents begin mobilizing to defeat him, convinced that he is only abusing the people for his own financial and social gain. Even his mother begins to doubt him and associate him with the comprador class.

Bilanga's mother is concerned that her son has been so corrupted by the city as to think himself too far above his rural countrymen. "Maybe Bilanga was ashamed to come into her kitchen which was too dirty for the "nouveau Blanc" that he had become, as if he should be repulsed to shake the earthy hands of his country brothers"<sup>4</sup> (Nanga, 84). In response to his mother's warnings about his behavior, Bilanga is dismissive and displays an over-inflated sense of worth to the villagers and disdain for their anger,<sup>5</sup> "I don't need the people of Vémelé. It's they who will be needing me" (Nanga, 86). Going beyond the urban-rural tension displayed by Bilanga's strained relations with his home village, Billanga's would be mistress is able to connect Bilanga's actions to the larger struggle for national independence<sup>6</sup> "Marie understood obscurely that her situation, like that of the peasants of the young republic, depended on the mentality without scruples of the opportunists in Eborzel. In order to fix the country, she thought, it was necessary to proceed with massive arrests of all the Bilangas of Eborzen and other cities" (Nanga, 91). Despite this original impression of Bilanga, Marie will continue to see him and will eventually discover that though in effect, his actions damage the republic, he is in fact very misguided and also wants what is best for his country.

While he splits his time between mistresses (one of which is his own son's girlfriend who he eventually drives to suicide and then covers it up) and accepting and giving bribes, Bilanga is

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<sup>4</sup> "Peut-être Bilanga avait-il honte d'entrer dans sa cuisine, trop sale pour le nouveau «Blanc» qu'il était devenu, comme il devait avoir de la répugnance à serrer les mains terreuses de ses frères paysans" (Nanga, 84).

<sup>5</sup> , "Je n'ai pas besoin des gens de Vémelé. C'est eux qui auront besoin de moi"

<sup>6</sup> , "Marie comprit obscurément que sa situation, comme paysans de la jeune République, dépendait de la mentalité sans scrupules des arrivistes d'Eborzel. Pour guérir le pays, pensa-t-elle, il fallait procéder à des arrestations massives de tous les Bilanga d'Eborzel et des autres villes" (Nanga, 91).

actually quite a patriot as we see from his sentimental reflections on the national flag hanging in front of the palace,<sup>7</sup> “Billanga felt his heart beat a little bit faster when he saw the flag and the magnificence of the palace. A pilgrim wouldn’t experience different feelings while in the midst of holy places” (Nanga, 160). Despite this shallow patriotism, Billanga continues to act in collusion with French business interests to subvert the law and line his own pockets. He justifies this in the name of human nature and progress and blames the peasant villagers for being too backward thinking when they accuse him,<sup>8</sup> “In the meantime, the neo-bourgeoise elites as Roger called them, couldn’t be asked to cross their arms and refuse the crumbs that fell from the table of the rich, crumbs that this same elite sometimes forced the rich to drop” (Nanga, 174). In the end, the villagers don’t believe his speeches about nation building through economic development and they refuse to sell him their votes, violently chasing him out of the village. In the last chapter, having given up on the national project for his country, Billanga leaves with his family for France, an appropriate finish for a “nouveau blanc.” Billanga’s character is as complex and contradictory as the obstacles to national identity in Cameroon. Though he is vehemently opposed to the tribalism and sectarianism that he believes weakens the country and obscures the ultimate goal of a single national identity, he is also not opposed to dealing with neo-colonialist French to arrange corrupt business deals that undermine the legitimacy of that same identity.

In A Nose For Money, one sees not only how the comprador class operates, at times reliant on the same tribalism Bilanga dispised, but also how the mentality of self-interest displayed by the comprador class has begun to influence the poorer social classes, creating a national culture

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<sup>7</sup> “Billanga sentait son coeur battre un peu plus vite à la vue du drapeau et de la magnificence du palais. Un Pèlerin ne devait pas éprouver des sentiment différents lorsqu’il arrivait en vue des lieux saints” (Nanga, 160)

<sup>8</sup> “Entretemps, on ne pouvait tout de meme pas demander aux elites neo-bourgeoises, comme les applait Roger, de se croiser les bras et de refuser les miettes qui tombaient de la table des riches, miettes que cette même élite forçait parfois les riches à laisser tomber ” (Nanga, 174).

that is more interested in money than in love, fraternity, nationalism, or any other impractical and abstract notion.

Though not his first encounter with hucksterism, Prospère's experience with the banknote counterfeiters Jean-Claude and Jean-Marie is definitely a moment of initiation into the comprador class, a social position that Prospère will eventually grow very comfortable with. The two Jeans take directions from one they call the "Grand Master," who is described thus:

The Grand Master had started in a very modest way at a youthful age. First at a purely local level by defrauding villagers and market women, then at the national level by luring civil servants, plantation workers, and petty traders into parting with their life's savings, then at the level of the continent by focusing on the ill-gotten wealth of megalomaniac dictators. Today his business was like a multinational corporation with standardized and routinised practices, and with branches on every continent. (Nyamnjoh, 35).

In Nyamnjoh's estimation, these more overtly criminal elements like money counterfeiters operate in tandem with government structures to defraud the population while maintaining a public front and systems of management similar to a legitimate business. The Grand Master started out as a small time thief, and if we consider the scenes with the opportunistic medicine man, a spirited bartering session at the beginning of the novel, and the final scene with the police rob Prospère's dead body, the story begins to suggest that this type of innate dishonesty is rampant at all levels of society regardless of how it manifests itself.

At the level of government and the civil service, ethnic ties are exploited and bribes doled out to ensure the safety of business deals of questionable legality. When Prospère visits a government financial minister to help him invest the counterfeit money, Prospère chooses Matiba because he is a fellow tribesman and can be bribed to overlook the illegality of the

investments, “Once the Minister understood how much money was involved, he was more interested in siphoning some off for himself than in Prospère’s muddled and lengthy explanation of how it came about” (Nyamnjoh, 132). So clearly the theft is a cycle whereby the crooks steel from the civil servants and the civil servants demand bribes to help the crooks continue stealing.

A Nose for Money and Les Chauves Souris depict a stark urban rural divide entrenched in suspicion and mutual distrust. The peasants are viewed by urbanites as being backward, unsophisticated and tribal, but the urban elites who comprise the comprador class abuse this same tribal sentiment for their personal gain. According to Nyamnjoh’s more pessimistic view, the dishonesty practiced in the highest echelons of society sets a national standard of materialistic individualism, whereby every class and every profession is willing to cheat those with perceived wealth. The urban-rural divide and the distrust between the comprador and peasant class are two major obstacles to Cameroonian national identity according to Nanga and Nyamnjoh.

## **Chapter V: The Problem of Women and Nationalism in Post-Colonial**

### **Contexts**

In the course of its evolution over the last three decades, research in the area of post-colonial studies has necessarily been interdisciplinary, incorporating theoretical perspectives from anthropology, historiography, cultural studies, and women’s studies among others. Feminism and post-colonial studies have an especially important connection, as both are concerned with the aspect of subjectivity in different dominance-subordination relationships. The question of how to interpret the post-colonial woman in the novel becomes difficult when one concedes that much

of post-colonial theory relies on dichotomies, one being master and subject, such that the post-colonial woman has a double “subject” status, one based on her ethnicity and geography, the other on her gender. As Feminist critic Nfah-Abbenji explains, the study of women in post-colonial contexts “requires a different order of theorizing, since post-colonial women are like a fragment, an oppositional system within the overall colonized framework” (19). While Nfah-Abbenji is correct to argue that post-colonial women warrant special consideration, she is deceived in thinking post-colonial studies lacks the theoretical structures for examining post-colonial women. One such structure discussed in depth in post-colonial studies is the concept of the subaltern.

Antonio Gramsci first used the term subaltern to describe a general category of people locked out of the hegemonic power structures of dominant groups. Though many have criticized Gramsci for the generality of the term, “subaltern” has been adopted by post-colonial studies to describe the perspective of many different categories of dominated peoples, without specific regard to the concrete reasons for which they are kept subject. As Gyan Prakash explains, “The term ‘subaltern’ refers to subordination in terms of class, caste, gender, language and culture and was used to signify the centrality of dominant/dominated relationships in history” (1477). Examining representations of post-colonial women in the novels reveals the implications of their dual subalterity for nationalism and identity.

Calixthe Beyala was born in Duala, Cameroon in 1961 to a poor family of 11 siblings. She went to France to study at the age of seventeen and has since become one of the most prolific francophone African authors. She lives in voluntary exile, citing both state subjugation of the people and the limitations on free thought and social obligations imposed on Cameroonian women in an interview with Emmanuel Matateyou:

<sup>9</sup> I won't be able to live in Africa...I won't even be able to eat, to have the freedom to think...And if I am limited by these hasty and underhanded censures, then I won't live anymore...I need to be independent. I need to not have to support the weight of the whole family (613).

Like Beyala herself, the heroine of C'est le Soleil qui M'a Brûlée also struggles under the weight of her dual subalterity, as both a woman and an African. Eighteen year old Ateba lost her mother at a young age but is constantly reminded by her tyrant aunt and guardian that she was a prostitute. Living in the inner-city slums, Ateba does what she can to avoid a fait similar to her mother's. This becomes progressively more difficult, beginning when she is attacked by one of her aunt's male lodgers, Jean. She is able to escape him, but the encounter makes her acutely aware of her powerlessness:

<sup>10</sup> On her knees, face raised towards the sky...the position of the guilty woman since the beginning of time...at the bottom. Squating. On her knees...She had nothing anymore but her tears which she tried to hold in and which formed a screen behind which she contemplated her powerlessness (Beyala, 36).

This incident reminds Ateba not only of her powerlessness in the face of the aggression of men, but also of her subaltern status as an African woman. Before attacking her, Jean taunts her for trying to be like a white woman by resisting him<sup>11</sup> "Look! Another one who talks like a westerner!" (Beyala, 14). Ateba is ridiculed for being so presumptuous as to demand the same

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<sup>9</sup> Je ne pourrai pas vivre en Afrique...je ne pourrai même pas manger, avoir la liberté de penser...Et si je suis limitée par ces censures hâtives ou sournoises, mais je ne vis plus...J'ai besoin d'être indépendant. J'ai besoin de ne pas avoir à supporter le poids de toute la famille

<sup>10</sup> A genoux, le visage levé vers le ciel...la position de la femme fautive depuis la nuit des temps...assise. Accroupie. A genoux...Elle n'a plus que ses larmes qu'elle tente de retenir, et qui, comme d'habitude, forment en écran derrière lequel elle contemple son impuissance...

<sup>11</sup> . "Tiens! Encore une qui parle comme les Occidentaux!"

respect for the autonomy of her identity and body as Europeans at the same time as she is pushed to accept her place as an inferior being who belongs prostrate at the feet of men.

Ateba's friend Irène has succumbed to a life of prostitution and is a constant reminder to Ateba of her mother. Nervous for her friend and alienated by the meddling gossip of her traditional neighbors, Ateba seeks refuge in her pen. She begins writing long letters to "the women of the world" expressing her love for them. She uses the letters as a cathartic tool to make sense of her predicament. She makes notes to herself that her first priority must be "to find *the woman*," and she continually makes connections between Africa and women. When Jean makes a sentimental comparison between Africa and women, saying,<sup>12</sup> Africa is neither a fact nor a sign, but a reality that flows from our hearts, exactly like women"(Beyala, 129), Ateba's acerbic response is <sup>13</sup> If woman is like Africa, neither fact nor sign, man is the act that nullifies her from the first contact and strips her from the first word"(Beyala, 131). By associating the nullification and striping of Africa with that of women, Ateba charges Jean, and through him all men with being culpable in a similar fashion to the colonizers, thus demonstrating the dual subalterity of women.

In her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak argues that since the category of the subaltern is so broad and unspecific, being defined only by difference and opposition to the group in power, it can have no unified voice. Though Spivak doubts the ability of historians to find a clear and coherent voice of any historic subaltern, she concedes the dual subalterity of third world women. "If, in the contest of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (32). By writing her

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<sup>12</sup>"L'Afrique n'est ni un fait, ni un geste, mais une réalité qui prend source dans nos cœurs, exactement comme la femme"

<sup>13</sup> "Si la femme est comme l'Afrique, ni fait, ni geste, l'homme est l'acte qui s'annule au premiere contact et s'évapore au premiere mot"

letters addressed to “the women,” Ateba struggles against the silence imposed on subalterns and actively seeks to give a voice to the subaltern. While other representations of post-colonial women in Cameroonian novels may also assert a kind of doubly subject status for women, culpability is not always as clearly defined as in Beyala’s novel.

Nyamnjoh’s female characters are not so much subaltern as they are complicit partners in the ceaseless pursuit of money and power. In A Nose for Money, women are almost always passive characters and most often used as symbols of status. Prospère aspires to have multiple wives, as the number of wives is seen as an indicator of one’s wealth, but even prostitutes can denote social class. “The experience had impressed upon Prospère, once and for all, that not all prostitutes were the same and that there were some who represented status and affluence” (Nyamnjoh, 25). When the women in the novel do “speak” their voices and actions are consistently treacherous. Prospère suffers the indignity of three unfaithful wives, two of whom dupe him into thinking their children by other men are his.

Save his doe-eyed and placid third wife, Marie, all the female characters are as corrupted by material self-interest as Prospère himself. This is evidenced by the change in countenance of the minister’s secretary Marie-Claire, who initially ignores his requests for an interview with the minister, but then thinks better of it when Prospère knowingly flashes a wad of cash. “It was as if the sound, smell, or sparkle of the bank notes had purged her of all impoliteness or imprudence, and shattered her bureaucratic code of conduct” (Nyamnjoh, 102). To be fair, Nyamnjoh doesn’t forget to mention the reasons why women in the city are especially lured by money:

Like other female students at the university, Marie-Claire found it difficult making ends meet. It is true that some female students tried to lighten their burden by getting involved

in commercial activities...well to do men like Matiba were usually ready to date, feed, cloth and house female students. As a result, such students as found themselves wanting in the face of difficulties were tempted to choose to date these men for survival rather than perish in moral uprightness. (Nyamnjoh, 114-115)

Thus, though women admittedly sacrifice their morals for material wealth out of necessity, their subject status in relation to men makes them equally culpable to the type of material self-interest that Nyamnjoh and other authors see as destroying Cameroon's hopes for a national identity. Beyala's representation of post-colonial women as subalterns complicates national identity further by refuting the possibility of uniform subalterity across genders which could constitute a unified voice against European hegemony.

## **Chapter VI: Post-Colonial Difference and Affiliation: Obstacles to Unified National Identity in Cameroon**

In order to fully understand the palimpsest of political and public identities represented in Cameroonian novels, textual examples of political and ethnic difference and affiliation must be considered in tandem with the colonial history of the state as well as the historic basis on which ethnic antagonisms are founded.

Probably the most divisive issue in post-colonial Cameroonian identity politics is the Francophone-Anglophone cleavage. As Jean-Germain Gros illustrates, Cameroon's unique colonial legacy is at the root of many of the country's difficulties in creating an enduring national identity:

Cameroon is the only African state where the respective colonial legacies of Britain and France have had to coexist, however awkwardly. Cameroon is also exceptional in another respect, for while the transition from colonial status to statehood was generally peaceful in much of French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa, Cameroon's independence in 1960 came amid a violent uprising by the left-wing nationalists of the Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC) that was not decisively defeated until the early 1970s. Both of these

circumstances left an imprint on Cameroonian political life that endures to this day.

(113)

Due to the new nation's unique situation of having two former colonial administrations, Cameroon is not unlike Canada, except that in Cameroon, the former French subjects are the overwhelming majority of the population, with more than four-fifths of the territory. Gros goes on to explain the vastly different colonial administrations of the two European powers and the impact these different practices had on shaping expectations for the form of democracy of the newly independent Cameroon:

Moreover, French-speaking East Cameroon was economically more developed than the former southern British Cameroon; unless increased investments were made in order to bring the latter up to par with the rest of the country, the anglophone region would languish as a backwater. In addition to their language, the British left behind their traditions of Westminster-style bicameral parliamentarism, administrative decentralization, vibrant local government, and a relatively open society. By contrast, the more prosperous and populous East Cameroon had a classically "Gallic" orientation, with a strong executive, a centralized bureaucracy, and less tolerance for open debate and dissent. (114).

This lack of tolerance of dissent resulted in harsh crackdowns on opposition groups, many of whom employed brutal tactics themselves, early in the independence period. One of the most important points of resentment between the Anglophone and Francophone communities was the decision taken by President Ahmadou Ahidjo's government to coalesce all of Cameroon's political factions under one party (the Cameroon National Union) and dissolve the federation. For many of the groups living in the territory formerly ruled by England, this move meant the

loss of their autonomy and the placing of power in the hands of a centralized elite more loyal to France and her financial incentives than to Cameroon and national independence.

Nyamnjoh's novel, A Nose for Money is set in Mimboland, a grudgingly bilingual country that though fictional, bears an unmistakable resemblance to contemporary Cameroon. Nyamnjoh carefully reconstructs the distrust between the two communities and the extent to which each affiliates itself politically with the traditions of their respective metropole, as evidenced by the humorous but poignant sign Prospère sees when he crosses from Anglophone into Francophone territory which reads:

To all foreigners: Thanks for visiting Western Mimboland. We hope you enjoyed our Anglo-Saxon hospitality and generosity. Wishing you well as you start your journey of a thousand dangers into La Republique. We can't protect you against their savagery, but we'll pray for you. Do come again if you survive their intrigues. (45)

Aside from the obvious display of antagonism towards the formerly French administered part of the country, it is especially interesting that the authors of the sign identify their region and culture as "Anglo-Saxon," clearly showing their self confessed cultural affiliation with England.

While the emphasis on a kind of European cultural heritage is pervasive in the novels, Gros argues that this cultural identification is almost exclusively based on a desire to differentiate themselves from their economically more prosperous and resented neighbors:

To watch how English speakers define themselves in relation to their francophone counterparts, and romanticize the past, is to witness the marvel of corporate identity.

British rule brought few material benefits to what was called West Cameroon; and those that it did bring (e.g., language, decentralized administration, local governments with tax-

raising functions) were for the sake of British interests, not the good of the locals. Had they not had more prosperous, French-speaking East Cameroon to rub up against in an uneasy federation, it is doubtful that Anglophones would have been as adamant in emphasizing their distinct heritage. (126)

Reactionary or not, Cameroonians' identification with the culture and political structures of their respective former colonial masters, in conjunction with complicated systems of tribal loyalty are represented in the novels as persistent obstacles to the formation of national identity.

In Janvier Tisi's Politically charged thriller Triple Agent Double Cross, double agent Gavin Nemafofu works for the autocratic Cameroonian intelligence services but secretly carries out operations on behalf of the opposition. Gavin's position allows him access to both sides of the struggle; both nationalist and that of those loyal to France who want to hang on to power. The novel begins with Gavin scolding his fellow intelligence officers over the execution of opposition leader Vincent Ndi Chi. Ndi Chi's ideas for the pursuit of national independence reflect those of the formerly English subject tribes of the North West provinces who prefer a return to federation in order to ensure the equality of Cameroon's diverse groups and respect for the much ignored Anglophone region in general:

As a nationalist, Vincent Ndi Chi had harbored the original Kamerunian dream of a reunited and independent nation...where the Kamerunian ideal would be applied to bridge the difference in development of her Anglophone and Francophone regions, build a genuine bilingual ethos, and revive a unique Kamerunian identity from the different ideas and actions of the adopted French and English cultures as a model for the future united Africa. He had always favored a moderate federation of autonomous provinces

and regions; a federation where the rights of minorities—both indigenous and settler are respected. (Tisi, 22).

While this vision of federation and mutual respect for the bilingual and bicultural nature of the nation is a common motif, both in the novel and in the political reality of Cameroon, throughout the novel, Tisi employs the German spelling of the country (Kamerun), possibly in subtle subversion of the French (Cameroun) and English (Cameroon) spellings and cultural influence. At times, characters insist on speaking in their mutually comprehensible indigenous languages and some characters suggest to Gavin that “true nationalism” is found in celebration of native culture, not the appropriation of colonial differences:

[Maurice] had concluded that only those Kamerunians with homelands in zones where the dominant language is not either French or English [sic] could possibly understand how it feels when their immoderate compatriots spew divisive ideas based on the imposed alien English and French cultures, and subjugating Kamerunian national identity. (Tisi, 14)

Though some nationalists in the novel try to point to their shared, albeit extremely diverse indigenous culture as a rallying point for the development of a Cameroonian national identity, Gavin sees it a just another layer in the palimpsest, another excuse for mistrust between groups, “ ‘We all know that tribalism, nepotism, corruption and Anglophobia has eaten deep into the bones and marrows of this system,’ Gavin added” (Tisi, 41). Tribal affiliation as a cause of division rather than unity is also evidenced by Gavin’s observation that though almost exclusively loyal to France, the government ministries are still “a clique steeped in tribalism” (Tisi, 51). To understand how these ethnic rivalries operate, it is first helpful to examine a few of the ethnic rivalries mentioned in the novel.

Considered the descendants of kings, the Beti are one of three groups of Pahouin. The Beti are widely supposed to have benefited from France's post-colonial continued involvement in the country, and have also increased their economic activity under Biya's regime, the same leader who cracked down on Anglo, federation leaning opposition groups (Mbaku, 13). It is no surprise then that Tisi portrays the mistrust of Anglo groups toward the Beti in his novel. Unaware of the operation being orchestrated by the government in collusion with French intelligence to wipe out the rest of the opposition leaders, one of Gavin's opposition cohorts is shocked to get a tip off from a Beti calling anonymously. The caller has to prove himself, reassuring that despite his Beti origins, he is a nationalist and, as he supposes most Betis do, wants only the best for his country, "Yes, I'm Beti, but I'm a patriot, a nationalist, and more so. I don't believe in placing emphasis on the ethnic, religious, cultural, or political ties of my compatriot, in so far as they don't infringe on the integrity of my Kamerun" (Tisi, 194). Here Tisi clearly betrays a political agenda of encouraging through his characters respectful relations between groups with the goal of a unified Kamerun.

Conversely, the mostly Beti intelligence officers, in a conversation with the French hired, Albanian assassin divulge the logic behind their mistrust of the Bamilekes. The Bamilekes are, according to Mbaku, "one of the earliest groups to accept and adapt to the cash economy and are among some of the country's most important entrepreneurs today" (11). Mbaku goes on to explain, however that the Bamilekes' political and economic power has been greatly diminished as a result of the current government's nepotism and preferential treatment of the Beti. The Bamileke ethnicity transcends the Fraco-Anglo divide, but they are commonly associated with Anglo influenced opposition. The attitudes of Tisi's characters mimic the reality of the distrust

between these two ethnicities. The Beti intelligence officers give the Albanian assassin his introduction to the Bamilekes thus:

‘They constitute about a quarter of this county’s population. Their homeland though is only about three percent of the land. That’s why they are everywhere...They are dirty! They are the cause of filth in Duala and Yaoundé, giving our capital the reputation of the garbage city of Africa...They are the cause of most of the ills in our country.’ (Tisi, 187)

Through the voice of the Albanian as an outside observer, Tisi editorializes on the ethnic strife and uses his character as a vessel to transmit what can reasonably be assumed to be his own vision for the resolution of Cameroon’s ethnic problems, “ ‘The drive for greater unity was erroneous, but a complete return to the past would be hazardous. All you have to do is redress the problems of the minorities and [sic] push for equitable respect for the two cultures. That’s where your two leaders failed’” (Tisi, 189).

In the end, Gavin thwarts the government’s plot to kill off all of the opposition and by murdering the Albanian assassin. The novel doesn’t end entirely on a note of violence, however, because the president himself has a disturbing dream about a military parade that dissolves into an opposition demonstration demanding attention be paid to their many grievances. The demonstrators are non-violent, but are still able to overwhelm and overpower the president in his dream, a sign that despite the carnage of the novel, eventually reconciliation will be reached through non-violent means. Though Tisi’s novel is in most respects a standard, suspense-spy thriller, the way in which his characters are developed with all the complexity of identity and national sentiment seen in Cameroon, both at the level of ethnicity and affiliation with colonial culture, makes it an important work in the canon of post-colonial Cameroonian literature.

## **Conclusion**

After having examined these novels and their treatment of post-colonial identity and nationalism, a return to Renan's definition of a nation is useful for measuring how the Cameroonian national identity, as reflected in the novels, compares to such early, Euro-centric concepts of a nation. Post-colonial nationalism is clearly incomparable to common European

constructs of the nation as a group with a shared imagined past. The Cameroonian state, like most of Africa, and indeed the post-colonial world was born not out of the collapse of a domestically controlled empire, but out of the slow struggle for national independence from a foreign empire that drew up borders and divided territories in a way commensurate with its own interests, not those of national independence. How then is an imagined past to be constructed, and what is the role of the novel in the creation of national identity? Which aspects of Cameroon's search for a post-colonial national identity can be applied to a pan-African context, and which are specific to Cameroon's peoples and writers?

The novels of Cameroon serve the dual purpose of both reaffirming the nation's cultural identity in defiance of European hegemony and also expressing hopes for a future of unity and drawing attention to the many obstacles obstructing the path toward that unity. Unique authenticity discourses are used to balance critical evaluations of pre-colonial culture with measured cultural pride in institutions and practices that had been discussed in colonial discourses as purely savage. Various tools of resistance to European hegemony are employed by the authors. Depictions of mimicry highlight the absurdity of the appropriation of some cultural practices. Like the wedding ceremonies in Taboo Love, or Paulina's plans to sell her body to pay for her dress for her christening, mimicry defeats the aim of the original practice. The embarrassment of the mimicry is a challenge, not only to colonial hegemonic discourses, but also to cultural appropriation on the part of the colonized.

Orality is defended as a legitimate mode of cultural transmission through depictions of that orality in literary form, called secondary orality. Secondary orality will likely continue to appear in the novels of Cameroon as it does in the blossoming literary traditions of many post-colonial

states, as a means to promote oral traditions to a wider audience, thereby shaping a national identity based on control over the discourse and how culture is represented.

Conversely, the novelists also exploit the form of the novel to develop characters with complex identities with many more layers than the simple colonizer-colonized dichotomy. Gender, ethnicity, economic status, education, language, and region all contribute to palimpsest identities not easily molded to a national identity. Engaged, the reader follows these characters through their struggles, encountering with them the numerous obstacles hindering the achievement of true unity through a national identity, such as the corruption of the comprador class. The novel provides a forum for authors to openly critique the path of their national independence and criticize the Bilanga's and Prospères around them.

The mistrust between urban and rural peoples and the difference between traditional, mystic rural identity that privileges familial connections and reciprocity, and urban identities which favor self-interest will no doubt continue to be an important theme in Cameroonian novels as the country continues to urbanize.

The dual subalterity of post-colonial women should also continue to be studied in order to reach an understanding of how those women identify themselves and how they are depicted by men. Will authors continue, as Beyala has done, to compare their subjectivity to that of colonized Africa? Or will they reveal society's apprehension at the thought of female compradors?

Antagonisms between former French and former English subjects who have very different past experiences with government and management of institutions, as well as inter-ethnic antipathy are an important part of the post-colonial reality in Cameroon and their representation in the novel will continue to evolve along with the search for a national identity to link people

across space and time. In this way, the novels are a sort of outlet for the voicing of frustrations in the face of so many difficulties.

Viewed in another light, the novels offer the authors the chance to promote their nationalist agenda, be it through mordant criticism of the comprador class, as in A Nose for Money and Les Chauves-Souris, or through the moral ambiguity of characters such as those in Triple Agent Double Cross who value their country even more than human life. As the cannon of Cameroonian literature, novels in particular, continue to develop and expand; how that agenda evolves and is conveyed artistically through the careful construction of characters with complex and heavily politically influenced identities will continue to be an important subject of scholarship in terms of the novel, Cameroon, and the rest of the post-colonial world.

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