

Brother or Broader: Marginalisation in Mbuh Tenu Mbuh's *The Oracle of Tears*

Gilda Nicheng Forbang-Looh*, De Noumedem Peter Caleb

Department of English, The University of Bamenda, Bambili, Cameroon

Email address:

gildanic2005@yahoo.fr (G. N. Forbang-Looh)

*Corresponding author

To cite this article:

Gilda Nicheng Forbang-Looh, De Noumedem Peter Caleb. Brother or Broader: Marginalisation in Mbuh Tenu Mbuh's *The Oracle of Tears*. *International Journal of Literature and Arts*. Vol. 9, No. 2, 2021, pp. 55-62. doi: 10.11648/j.ijla.20210902.12

Received: February 18, 2021; **Accepted:** March 13, 2021; **Published:** March 22, 2021

Abstract: This article seeks to analyse Mbuh Tenu Mbuh's depiction of the Anglophone problem in Cameroon in his poetry collection, *The Oracle of Tears*. Mbuh's poems indicate that this problem is caused by the duplicity of the Francophone leadership in the country. This leadership, from 1961 till date, has not treated the Anglophone as a brother but has instead devised strategies to broaden its power through the erosion of Anglophone identity and the corrosion of Anglophones' political weight in the state. This state of affairs has nurtured a sentiment of marginalisation in many Anglophone Cameroonians. Marginalisation in this paper is understood as a series of political actions undertaken by Cameroon's Francophone leadership to stifle effective self-governance in Anglophone regions and reduce the latter's identity to a varnish for decreed national unity. Though both Francophone and Anglophone identities are admittedly colonial, this article argues that it is biased to use this argument only when the preservation of Anglophone identity in the nation is evoked. Since Francophones gladly use their colonial bequests (French language, educational and judiciary systems), the same freedom ought to be conceded to Anglophones without any attempts at annexation. Hence, this paper underscores the responsibility of Francophone leadership in causing a generalised sentiment of frustration in Anglophones. It also emphasizes the need for Anglophones (like all dominated people) not to miss the target of their struggle. Postcolonialism is used in this paper to discuss the central issue of marginalization with which Anglophone Cameroon poetry grapples for decades. This theory helps analyse the fragmentation of formerly colonised nations like Cameroon – fragmentations which still make perceptible the shadow of French and British colonisation over the country. The study arrives at the conclusion that Mbuh's poetry is a reminder addressed to Anglophone consciousness about the need, not to fight themselves, but reason with the divisive sexagenarian Francophone Establishment.

Keywords: Brotherhood, Marginalisation, Identity, Francophone Leadership, Anglophone

1. Introduction

The condominium of French and English colonial powers over Kamerun produced two territorial entities and engendered two distinct cultural heritages, albeit colonial, in the state known today as Cameroon. Following the demarcation made by the Picot-line on 4th March 1916, France administered 4/5th of the territory while Britain controlled 1/5th. From 1916 till the achievement of independence, these entities experienced different colonial policies: Assimilation was applied in French Cameroon while Indirect Rule was applied in British Cameroons. It is worth noting that while Assimilation rested on coercive control of the "natives", Indirect Rule left a margin for the latter's self-

determination. After the independence of French Cameroon in 1960, British Southern Cameroonians (Anglophones) reunified with their Francophone brothers instead of joining Nigeria as the British Northern Cameroonians had done. Hence came to birth The Federal Republic of Cameroon in 1961. From this time, the Anglophones started complaining about marginalisation and the situation seems not to have changed till date. In his explanation of what the Anglophone problem is, Cameroonian historian, Victor Julius Ngoh, in *History of Cameroon Since 1800* says, "What is glaring is the fact that the problem revolves around the cultural identity of a minority people in a union whose first right is to exist. Anglophones feel and claim the right, as citizens of Cameroon, to exist and be treated equally with the other

partner, the Francophones” [13]. Clearly then, the Anglophone problem in Cameroon is a one of identity. In the relationship that Anglophones have with the state, there seem to be profound fissures caused by the largely Francophone-dominated political apparatus that either interferes with or side-lines Anglophone colonial heritage in the management of public affairs. It is with this identity problem that Anglophone Cameroon literature grapples till date as each writer uses the genre (s) they master to indict and resist a post-independence government that has failed to manage this particular historical contention. Writers like Victor Epie Ngome, Mathew Takwi, Emmanuel Fru Doh, Alobwed’Epie, Bole Butake, Bate Besong, Eunice Ngongkum, Nkemngong Nkengasong and Mbuh Tenu Mbuh are some of the leading voices that have brought to the limelight the predicaments of Anglophones in Cameroon. This article analyses three poems from Mbuh Tenu Mbuh’s poetry collection, *The Oracle of Tears*.

While writers like Bate Besong and Matthew Takwi call for the end of the oppressive regime in seat in Cameroon, other writers like Bole Butake call for a mutual effort of both the Establishment and Anglophones to end oppression. This article is spurred by the need to understand the perspective from which Mbuh Tenu Mbuh’s poems discuss the identity problem of Anglophones. This study equally exposes his own reaction to the Anglophone’s victimisation. Hence, this paper seeks to answer this question: How does Mbuh present the problem of Anglophones in Cameroon? This research therefore aims at demonstrating that Mbuh’s poems emphasize the marginalisation of Anglophone Cameroonians by a dubious Francophone political apparatus. The reproach that Mbuh formulates against this apparatus is its constant undermining of the rich cultural heritage of Anglophones and its proclivity for the annihilation of Anglophone identity.

This study contends that Mbuh Tenu Mbuh in *The Oracle of Tears* presents the Anglophone problem as one that is nurtured by the ill will of the Francophone political Establishment, notably its obstinate violation and betrayal of their agreed brotherhood. Taking advantage of its numerical superiority over Anglophones, this Francophone system maliciously broadens its power to side-line and dilute Anglophone identity. The sense of genuine brotherhood that ought to synchronise the values of Francophones and Anglophones has been shunned and substituted with the Francophones’ “colonial” expansion (broadening) over Anglophones.

Mbuh Tenu Mbuh is given particular attention in this paper because he is one of those creative writers in Cameroon whose works are pregnant with meaning but have, strangely, not received scholarly attention. His poetry collection, *The Oracle of Tears* was published in 2010 and is the subject of our analysis because it offers an interesting depiction of Cameroon and Africa five decades after independence. Among the post-independence dilemmas that have plagued Cameroon, Anglophone marginalization is surely the most known and most dreaded by the Francophone political elite. Mbuh addresses this particular preoccupation

in his poetry through poems like “Anniversary Dirge”, “Prophet Meka” and “In the Shadow of My Country”. These poems are discussed in this research as works that denounce and condemn the political sordidness of the Francophone Establishment ruling Cameroon.

1.1. Theoretical Considerations

This study uses the postcolonial literary theory. Postcolonialism functions as a theory, a movement, and even a process engaged by the colonized to retrieve their identity from colonial denigration. It marks the beginning of the reconstruction of the oppressed, not the end of oppression as the prefix, ‘post’, may seem to indicate. The oppressed/colonised, having realised that they are at the crossroads between colonial modernity and adulterated traditions, build a discursive space (postcolonialism) that enable them to explain their condition (postcoloniality). Since modern European colonialism affected at least three quarters of the world, its operations and consequences have produced manifold strategies of identity reconstruction worldwide. Hence, the latter strategies make it difficult to provide a precise definition to postcolonialism, given the broadness of issues, contexts and practices it encloses. Nonetheless, Bart Moore-Gilbert in *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* says that postcolonialism can be “understood as preoccupied principally with analysis of cultural forms which mediate, challenge or reflect upon the relations of domination and subordination – economic, cultural and political – between (and often within) nations, races or cultures, which characteristically have their roots in the history of modern European colonialism” [10]. In line with this statement, this article analyses a cultural form (poetry) which exposes and condemns the subordination of a minority population within a nation, Cameroon.

In African societies like Cameroon, European colonialism engendered other forms of hegemony within the state. These new forms of hegemony resulted in feelings of exclusion and marginalization. But what precisely is marginalization? Is it a feeling or a condition? Bill Ashcroft et al in *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts* define marginality as “an experience” which is “a consequence of the binaristic structure of various kinds of dominant discourses” [1]. This binary opposes a centre to a periphery. Knowledge and power emanate from the former and are diffused in the latter. This opposition is perceivable in virtually all forms of domination because those who wield power construct their “superiority” through “differences” between themselves and others. Hence, differences in language, gender, race, class and nation are sites of marginalization: those who belong to categories regarded as different are victims of societal exclusion, identity stultification and cultural assimilation.

Postcolonialism therefore relates to this study because it is a field that discusses the experiences of the marginalized, especially their attempts to gain in agency and freedom. Since (neo) colonialism preserves a centre-margin dichotomy for the sake of its power, the oppressed continually seeks to unsettle the centre.

1.2. The Concept of Marginalisation

Marginalisation is a concept that is used in a variety of fields namely cultural and gender studies, social geography, sociology and political sciences. Although these various fields analyse marginalization from specific angles, they share the idea that marginalisation deals with mechanisms, processes and policies of exclusion.

Bent Jorgenson in "Ethnic Boundaries and the Margins of the Margin" links marginalization to the exercise of power by a dominant group. This group builds a social boundary that separates its 'self' from the 'other' – generally viewed as a queer minority with which it is preferable not to sympathise. Talking about this boundary that excludes the 'other' from participating fully in society, Jorgenson in "Ethnic Boundaries and the Margins of the Margin" argues that this "boundary has a marginal zone, a place which is neither inside, nor outside. It is a socially constructed human 'no man's land' in which 'we' have located people...who are neither 'we' nor 'them', they are rather a subjugated subjectivity" [5]. Hence, marginalization becomes a situation in which a minority people are contained in a sphere of inexistence: they are neither made full actors in society nor are they allowed to live separately from society. Also, their identity (subjectivity) is misrepresented and subjugated by the ruling Establishment. These constitute the dilemmas and plights of the marginalised in many societies today and it is with their condition that postcolonial studies mainly deal. One therefore understands Jorgenson's contention that "the postcolonial approach calls for revival and politicization of the marginalized's subjectivities" [5]. Marginalisation leaves the socio-cultural realm to nurture exceedingly political moves and insights. These moves and insights are perceivable in literary productions emanating from marginalised people.

In the same move, David Sibley views marginalisation as the effect of an egocentric exercise of power. Sibley in *Geographies of Exclusion* posits that "power is expressed in the monopolization of space and the relegation of weaker groups to less desirable environments" [15]. Those who monopolise power do so because they have an advantage which can be financial or numerical over other groups. These power-wielders also aver some form of superiority which may be racial, tribal, religious or national. In any case, they broaden and expand their influence over weaker groups, containing the latter at the peripheries of society.

Geographically, the peripheries are the rural areas, slums and ghettos that are disconnected from the booming urban milieu. Politically, those in the periphery are groups that are either under-represented or not at all represented in the institutions governing the country. Usually, they are indigenous groups, tribes and races which the ruling system wants to suppress. Cultural marginalization is the most recurrent and widespread form of exclusion. It consists in creating ideologies that hierarchize society in terms of what is normal and what is queer. It is the form of marginalisation that places a gender/race/value/identity above another in a

bid to broaden the sphere of influence of a given archetypal culture. Cultural marginalisation inevitably poses the problem of belonging. David Sibley in *Geographies of Exclusion* says that "who is felt to belong and not to belong contributes in an important way to the shaping of social space" [15]. Indeed, social space is an arena in which competing cultures fight for influence and domination.

The political and cultural facets of marginalisation are our focus in this paper. In the context of this research, being at the margins means that the Anglophones' access to presence and power is jeopardised by an utterly centralized Francophone system. The Anglophone poet intervenes in this marginalisation process to reason with his Francophone brother and expose his dubiousness.

2. Brotherhood: The Shattered Cameroonian Dream

Cameroon's independence fighters and fathers namely Um Nyobe, Ernest Wandji and Felix Moumie, strongly insisted on the fact that French Cameroon and British Southern Cameroons should reunify before independence. The logic and pertinence of this opinion was that the Francophone and Anglophone colonial heritages would be given enough time to know and befriend each other. As such, independence would be like a marriage that finalises a period of observation between two equal partners. Unfortunately, events did not unfold this way: French Cameroon gained independence earlier as La République du Cameroun and this made the Francophone leadership to view this new state as one that Anglophones must simply join. Like a scion that is grafted to a trunk, the Anglophones were considered as an errata page that is added to an already printed book. This explains the failure of the reunification of both Cameroons after independence. Piet Konings and Francis B. Nyamjoh in "The Anglophone Problem in Cameroon" posit that:

Contrary to expectations, [federalism] did not provide for the equal partnership of both parties, let alone for the preservation of the cultural heritage and identity of each, but turned out to be merely a transitory phase to the total integration of the anglophone region into a strongly centralised, unitary state. Gradually, this created an anglophone consciousness: the feeling of being 'marginalised', 'exploited', and 'assimilated' by the francophone-dominated state, and even by the francophone population as a whole. [6]

Hence, the Federal system failed to reunify both Cameroons because the Francophone political apparatus conceived it as a springboard to the complete annexation of Anglophones. By so doing, the Francophone elite betrayed the dream of brotherhood (reunification) that had hitherto been deferred by French Cameroon's independence. Till date, many Anglophones struggle with the consciousness of their exclusion from a country that they joined in sheer good faith.

Mbuh Tenu Mbuh, being an Anglophone Cameroonian, expresses his discontent with the marginalisation of his

people and condemns the political duperies of the Francophone Establishment ruling the country. His poetry exposes the problems and legitimate aspirations of many Anglophones for recognition in the nation. He poeticises the failure of a union that could be successful if the Francophone side had respected its engagements. Unlike some Cameroonian scholars who stress the role of the Anglophone in his own victimisation, Mbuh blames the Francophone leadership's political dishonesty. In this paper, "Anniversary Dirge", "Prophet Meka" and "In the Shadow of My Country" are analysed as poems that depict the break of the union between Anglophones and Francophones.

2.1. "Anniversary Dirge": *Memories of Marginalisation*

In "Anniversary Dirge", Mbuh Tenu Mbuh attacks the Francophone political system ruling Cameroon. The self/other binary is used in this poem to oppose "coffee estate pensioners" (the Francophone political Establishment) to the "weeping fold" (the Anglophones). As an Anglophone Cameroonian, the poet emphasizes the pregnant history of his kin, a history that is full with the memories of torture and exclusion that fathered it. To describe the hurtfulness of this marginalisation, the speaker says it is "the bloom in our veins...Yeasting our dawn-led steps" [9]. The image of a bloom (mass of iron) that pierces the flesh and cuts the veins indicates that much blood is spilled. As the blood of Anglophones continuously drip, the wish of independence fighters for a united Cameroonian nation gets yeasted (decomposes). This sentiment of marginalisation has destroyed the sense of belonging that Anglophones ought to have in Cameroon. The Francophone majority seems not to be ready to acknowledge and resolve the historical contentions that have estranged Anglophones from the state. The speaker asks a rhetorical question in the second stanza to expose the mismanagement of nationhood by Francophones. The speaker asks:

*Else, what fractured memory can they banner
In balance sheet of our dreams-in-statehood,
Now exposed to the ridicule of charity nations,
Black and white, saint and mercenary? [9]*

According to the poet, the Francophone Establishment cannot brandish a story that can account for its failure to consolidate a sense of nationhood with Anglophones. The ideal of building a prosperous unitary state devoid of all forms of marginalisation has been botched up since foreign nations, in the course of intervening in Cameroon's political problems, play dubious games that only enhance divisions.

In the following stanzas, the speaker decries the fact that instead of working for the unity and development of the country, this Francophone Establishment allows strangers to "swim our shores with cupped hands" [9]. The image of cupped hands shows the avidity with which European countries exploit the riches of Cameroon at the detriment of the local population. This foreign exploitation is the result of the connivance of European powers with the Francophone leadership. The latter continue to foster Western hegemony ("Machiavellian tutelage") over Cameroon. Hence, the

speaker qualifies them as people who are "crippled of heart, crippled at heart" [9]. The image of a cripple emphasizes the profound political perfidy of these rulers whose human feelings have been deformed by their vassalage. The speaker condemns the centralised and wasteful management of Cameroon's wealth in Yaoundé when the rest of the population, including the Anglophone, lives in dearth. Andrew Ngeh et al in "Anger and Rejection: The Rhetoric and Dialectics of Violence in Anglophone Cameroon Poetry" rightly submit that "Anglophone Cameroon poetry is an embittered poetry...the poets poeticize the bluffs and systematic exploitation of the Cameroonian people by a decadent and inflexible oligarchy" [12]. Mbuh in this poem actually shows that the Anglophone's problem in Cameroon is caused by corrupt Francophone leadership that cripples the ideal of a shared community.

The poet accuses the Francophone-dominated leadership saying: "They, our frenzied Mvolyean drop-outs/And coffee estate pensioners/Still wallow the waste in dubious manhood" [9]. Mvolye is at the heart of Yaoundé and is the seat of institutions in Cameroon. Consequently, the expression, Mvolyean drop-outs, alludes to the ministers and top administrative officials ruling the country from the centralised institutions of Mvolye. They are described as drop-outs because they abandoned the 1961 agreement on the rotation of power between Francophones and Anglophones. They have rather placed themselves at the antipodes of this agreement by silencing Anglophones with political dishonesty. The line about Francophones wallowing "the waste" is a zeugma: the waste here refers to both the neglected state of Anglophone regions and the demeaning opinion that the Francophone Establishment has about Anglophones. Thus, the poet shows that in every aspect, the Anglophone is belittled and even treated as an undesirable being by the Francophone system. Njongoh Gwangwa'a in "Frogs with Us" also underscores the deceitfulness of the Francophone apparatus when he writes: "When we met the 'frogs'...We thought they ate termites/But they ate our pride... 'frogs' show no care/And there is no time they'll share" [4]. "Frogs" is a colloquial expression used by many Anglophones to describe Francophones. The speaker in Gwangwa'a's poem uses the image of an apparently inoffensive frog that has mischievously devoured the dearest possession of every human being: his/her pride. This pride is the Anglophone's identity that has been adulterated and sidelined by the Francophone system. When joining the Francophones, Anglophones thought they were meeting their brothers but they suddenly realised that the former was not and may never be ready to "share" equitably the resources and powers of the nation. One therefore understands the speaker's disillusionment in this poem when he describes Cameroon as "the hurting 'somewhere' nowhere" for Anglophones [4]. In other words, the speaker highlights the paradox in Cameroon where the Anglophone's presence is totally absent.

The speaker in Mbuh's "Anniversary Dirge" ends the poem by urging Anglophone Cameroonians who cry over

their marginalisation at the foot of mythic mount Fako to stop crying because tears “only blur vision in bondage, /Over the Mungo pass-way” [9]. This is an important call for vigilance and optimism to those living in a position of subalternity because a hackneyed contemplation of one's woes easily drains their ability to resist domination. The speaker rather encourages his Anglophone kin to wait for the “great Anglophilic dawn” [9] when Anglophones will no longer be discriminated but will rather be esteemed and treated with equity. In the meantime, he invites his people to stop mourning and prepare themselves to resist bondage. The poet's tone is one of indictment. He accuses the Francophone system of causing the Anglophone's grief. The evocation of an anniversary in the title of the poem is a metaphor that stands for the perpetuation of the Anglophone's sufferings: each day that passes reminds the Anglophone of his bondage.

2.2. “Prophet Meka”: The Leader Is Guilty

In the same light, “Prophet Meka” is a satirical depiction of the role of the President in the marginalisation of Anglophones in Cameroon. The name, “Meka” alludes to the South region of Cameroon from where this president hails. It is therefore one of the names that identify people of that region. Thus, Meka may literally stand for Biya. But why is Biya presented as a prophet? The first line of the poem answers: “Meka was his own prophetic victim” [9]. In fact, by deciding to launch his political party in Bamenda, a land that he will later marginalise, he made himself guilty of this choice. Talking about Meka, the speaker says “his land and his sons...devalued collaterals for a toy” [9]. This implies that Biya's clan and political family have side-lined their brothers (from the Anglophone regions of the country) to enjoy more power and material advantages. The power wielded by the Francophone political machinery is metaphorically compared to a toy because it is of no practical value; it rests on the slippery ground of betrayal and political dubiousness, and consequently fails to serve the interests of the Cameroonian people. Expatiating on the question of power, the speaker in stanza two presents the two socles of the President's power: “The *boucarie* that conspired against his raw manhood/and the snarling sun of his ancestors/became fangs of God's white man” [9]. The Biblical allusion to God's evangelist points at the president's Christian name, Paul. So the speaker indicates that his power is based on two things: French paternalistic support (French patronymic, “*boucarie*”), and confiscated ancestral powers (justifying the anger/snarling of these ancestors). These two socles give him “fangs” or weapons to prey, politically speaking, on Anglophones. Fangs are symbols of predation and highlight the exploitation of Anglophones by Biya's regime. Instead of power acting as a means of protection of the people, the poet regrets that it is used in Cameroon to either exploit or kill the masses. The speaker therefore condemns the President's submission to French hegemony – an allegiance that has reinforced the exclusion of Anglophones from the country.

The poet goes further to present himself as an Anglophone

who accorded the benefit of doubt to the President and believed his promises, “his voice”. In the last two stanzas, the speaker explains what happened next:

When I followed his voice, it led to a fallowed trail in the brain

*at the end of which, in futuristic whorls
was a monument on which was grafted
two verses, a broken rainbow:*

*A nous la patrie, and in perfect translation,
Ah, why am I here! [9]*

As the speaker explains, he is quickly disenchanted when he follows the direction or leadership of this president. The poet is led into a barren, inactive track where he is lost: in his brain, he cannot figure out the bright future he was awaiting. Indeed, Biya's promises of rigour, moralisation, democracy and prosperity made many, like the speaker, to await some novelty, a change of paradigm regarding the treatment of Anglophones hitherto catastrophic under Ahidjo's regime. On the contrary, what the speaker sees is a concentric, spiral-like future that indicates the perpetuation of the Anglophone problem with no efforts furnished to end the sufferings of the people. Worse still, the marginalisation of Anglophones is institutionalised since a monument is erected on which one can perceive a “broken rainbow”, a shattered union.

This monument metaphorically stands for the change of the name of the country in 1984 from The United Republic of Cameroon – name that suggested the presence of two united entities – to The Republic of Cameroon – name that subsumed both Cameroons under the Francophone section of the country, *La République du Cameroun*. By manoeuvring for the name of the whole nation to carry exclusively the name of the Francophone side, President Biya finalised the project of Anglophone subordination in Cameroon. This name is rightly compared to a monument because it is an outstanding evidence of the dilution of Anglophone identity by the Francophone political apparatus. A foreigner reading the present name of the country would imagine that the country is entirely a Francophone state. Hence, the poet accuses Biya of institutionalising the absence of Anglophones through the unilateral change of the country's name. Piet Konings in *The Politics of Neoliberal Reforms in Africa: State and Civil Society in Cameroon* reminds us that:

[T]here was vehement Anglophone protest when the new president [Paul Biya] changed the country's official name from the 'United Republic of Cameroon' to simply 'Republic of Cameroon' in February 1984. The new name was not only similar to that of Independent Francophone Cameroon prior to reunification but also appeared to ignore the fact that the Cameroonian state was composed of two distinct entities. [7]

The change of the country's name from a federal to a unitary state had already created disaffection for the regime but the singlehanded transition from unitary state to the Republic of Cameroon was the last stroke on the Anglophone's back. Therefore, the monument in this poem represents a fundamental change in the country's identity, a change that diluted the Anglophone's presence in the state.

The symbol of the rainbow is also important because it

represents the splendid union of differences. The Francophone and Anglophone heritages are different but can shine as a rainbow if there is mutual acceptance of the positive aspects of these heritages. Unfortunately, many postcolonial nations have not reified their myth of nationhood by being equitable in the management of the various cultural entities they contain. Bill Ashcroft et al in *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts* argue that “in each case the glue that held them together was a constructed national mythology” which ought to be concretised by fair, inclusive leadership [1]. This sense of nationhood has not yet been consolidated in Cameroon since the President’s tribal and Francophone-oriented leadership has made Anglophones, like the poet, to feel remote from the nation. This idea is echoed when the speaker says that the Francophone Establishment appropriates the nation at the exclusion of Anglophones. Since the former claim the state as solely theirs, the latter are logically secluded from the state. Adroitly and ironically, the speaker translates the meaning of this arrogation to imply that he, an Anglophone, does not have a place in Cameroon: he does not matter. The speaker seems to say that if the regime had not “devalued” Anglophones, there would be no problem today. The end of the poem suggests that the Anglophone has the responsibility of defining himself against his present condition in the country. The speaker’s tone is one of regret. He regrets that the hopes for a better management of Anglophone identity have been shattered by Biya’s regime. Biya’s leadership has only deepened the Anglophone’s sentiment of frustration.

2.3. “*In the Shadow of My Country*”: No More Longing to Belong

Mbuh continues condemning the marginalisation of Anglophones and the cruelty of the regime in the poem titled “*In the Shadow of My Country*”. The symbol of the shadow in the title of this poem implies that the speaker’s identity is either blurred or misrepresented by his own country. He does not recognise himself in the way ‘his’ country is governed. This feeling of exclusion is noticeable in the first stanza of the poem where the speaker says, “These is peace./away/from the crowd/and god’s face shines/in the dark, ever” [9]. The speaker, an Anglophone, feels safer when alone, far from the majority Francophone-dominated regime because he realises that Francophones are favoured while he is disregarded. The fact that “away” is given a line of its own suggests the speaker’s distancing from them. As a marginalised subject, the speaker does not feel at home in his country. Gilda Nicheng Forbang-Looh in “Marginalisation and (Un) Belonging in John Nkemngong Nkengasong’s *Across the Mongolo*” asserts that “the result of marginalisation is unbelonging... [which] entails feeling uncomfortable, unhappy and suffering from homelessness...with the people whom one is expected to live together as one” [3]. It is this sentiment of not belonging that is emphasised in “away” – not away because he hates the group (centre) but because the latter has clearly made the speaker feel that he is an outcast in their midst. In other

words, the Anglophone persona is inside-out, unwelcomed by the system.

This paradox of home is explained by David Sibley in *Geographies of Exclusion* where he says “the home, the neighbourhood and the nation are all potential spaces of exclusion” because they are usually predicated on “feelings of belonging and ownership” [15]. According to Sibley, this can lead to an “exclusive nationalism, one which denies the sharing of national space by diverse cultures” [15]. The Francophone leadership in Cameroon actually falls prey to this exclusive form of patriotism in that its zeal to make Cameroon a haven (in terms of identity) for Francophones secludes Anglophones. The identity of the latter is side-lined and the country fails to benefit from the rich diversity that both cultures can offer.

In the poem, the face of god that shines symbolises the favours which the President of the Republic showers on Francophones, notably by appointing them at key positions at the helm of the state. This deified president blesses Francophones who are in front of him while Anglophones who have been kept behind find themselves in the dark, in the shadows of their Francophone brothers. This discrimination is what pushes the speaker to think that he will find peace if he stays far from the crowd. Being far from the crowd may help him evade from the injustices he is facing. To show how shadowy Anglophone identity is in Cameroon, the speaker, in stanza two, follows “the kite for guide/along uncharted space” [9]. Lexically, a kite is somebody who preys on others, and the use of the definite article, “the”, indicates that this kite is well known by the poet. The kite is the president. The speaker is therefore asserting that he followed this president to the underdeveloped (“uncharted”) Anglophone zones where graves mark “decades of a heavy tale” [9]. These graves are testimonies about the long story of oppression, violence and poverty endured by the Anglophones.

The poem ends with the speaker’s submission of his identity problems to the verdict of Time, history’s truest tribunal. He says: “the lintel of time/toys my name, /excavating the king’s earth-filled mouths” [9]. The poet recognises that as time passes, his identity is “toyed” or devalued in the nation but he is also aware of the fact that time enables the excavation or revelation of all the atrocities committed by “the king” (the president). The latter’s mouths are filled with earth in the sense that he is responsible, according to the poet, for the corpses of many Anglophones. Even if these people were not killed physically, they were killed culturally and politically; the speaker holds the ruler of Cameroon responsible for these deaths, this marginalisation. Throughout the poem there are three words that describe the president: god, kite and king. While “god” and “king” denote leadership and power, “kite” underlines the exploitative nature of this power on its subjects. Mbuh is, therefore concerned with the oppressive use of power and openly denounces its perpetuation. The poet reminds all those who oppress Anglophones in Cameroon that time will reveal their deeds and judge them. The tone of the poet is one of

resignation as he accepts the fact of his exclusion and believes no more in the possibility of a just union between Anglophones and Francophones. The poet leaves the judgement to Time; let history continue revealing the duplicity of the Francophone Establishment.

The above discussion has demonstrated that indictment, regret and resignation are the attitudes of the Anglophone speaker towards his marginalisation in Mbuh Tenu Mbuh's poems. As reflected in the three poems discussed earlier, many Anglophones condemn their politico-cultural exclusion from the nation, regret the duplicity and egoism of the Francophone Establishment, and relinquish their hope for a truly unified Cameroon. In Gwangwa'a's "The Imperfect Blend", the speaker summarises the Anglophone problem in these words: "The blend is imperfect/For our brethren/Wont, for any reason, bend" [4]. Actually, the Francophone's refusal to "bend" or humbly acknowledge his errors and correct them makes the prospect of a real union more and more elusive. John Nkemngong Nkengasong in "Interrogating the Union: Anglophone Cameroon Poetry in the Postcolonial Matrix" rightly argues that "Anglophone Cameroon poetry articulates a network of experiences and visions to offer a severe critique of the irreconcilable union" [14]. The union is irreconcilable because there is on one hand a dubious system and on the other a disenchanted people.

3. Conclusion

The concept of marginalization has been central to this discussion pertaining to the Anglophone's situation in Cameroon. This paper has argued that marginalization is linked to the egocentric exercise of power. Jamal Nejat and Fateme Yaghoobi in "Marginalization in John Maxwell Coetzee's *Disgrace*", support this view when they write: "the perception and description of experience as marginal is a consequence of the structure of various kinds of dominant discourses such as patriarchy, imperialism and ethno-centrism" [11]. In the Cameroonian context, the experience and feeling of marginalization ensues from unresolved historical contentions and monopolization of the state by a numerically-dominant Francophone side. The ruling system seems to make the country revolve around Francophones at the exclusion of their Anglophone brothers whose only "crime" was to be administered by a different colonial power, the British.

This paper has analysed the marginalisation of Anglophone Cameroonians from the perspective of Mbuh Tenu Mbuh's poetry. The argument that runs throughout the three poems examined above is that the mischievousness of the Francophone political Establishment is the fundamental cause of the Anglophone problem in Cameroon. This argument does not inscribe itself in a blame theory against Francophones; it rather underlines the colossal responsibility of the oppressor – a responsibility which the latter endlessly shifts toward the oppressed. Ania Loomba in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* argues that "hegemony is power achieved through a combination of coercion and consent" [8]. Power that is

exerted through consent involves ideologies that make the oppressed to submit unconsciously to his oppression. The strategy of those who wield power is to induce their subalterns into believing that they (the oppressed subalterns) are the cause of their own predicaments. This strategy creates all sorts of debates and divisions among the oppressed while the oppressor consolidates his power without much resistance. Mbuh's *The Oracle of Tears* is thus a reminder not to fall into this trap. The Anglophone should always recognise that his enemy is neither himself nor the ordinary Francophone but the Establishment that rules the country. This Establishment relies (among other things) on the numerical superiority of Francophones to marginalise the Anglophone minority.

How can this spiral of marginalisation and oppression end? Cameroonian politician and former SDF militant, Abel Elimbi Lobe, proposes that Francophones should give way for Anglophones to rule the country by organising a presidential election where all candidates would be natives of the Anglophone regions. On the Anglophone side, Political figures like Simon Munzu call for the restoration of a federal system. Ateki Seta Caxton on his part advocates Cameroonians' reconciliation with their own history. In "The Anglophone Dilemma in Cameroon", Caxton says that Anglophone identity crises offer an opportunity for the regime to reimagine "a 21st century [Cameroonian] society where everybody who comes with their own uniqueness, is guaranteed a means of celebrating and preserving it, and at the same time, feels that they belong to the larger nation" [2]. This is a call for genuine national unity.

While we expect this brotherly unity, it is important to allow Mathew Takwi's poem entitled "Man" reverberate in our minds. In this very short poem, Takwi, an Anglophone Cameroonian poet, says: "Man in/Man, not/Man on/ Man, is/Man" [16]. Indeed, broadening domination traumatizes and sometimes dehumanizes human beings whereas un-hypocritical mutual agreement strengthens bonds. As Anglophone Cameroonians envisage a brighter dawn, hopes for a peaceful union remain in suspension.

References

- [1] Ashcroft, B. Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds. *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. London: Routledge, 2013. Print.
- [2] Caxton, Ateki Seta. "The Anglophone Dilemma in Cameroon: the Need for Comprehensive Dialogue and Reform". <http://www.accord.org.za/>. n. p., February 2017. Web. March 8, 2021.
- [3] Forbang-Looh, Gilda Nicheng. "Marginalisation and (Un) Belonging in John Nkemngong Nkengasong's *Across the Mongolo*". *International Journal of Academic Research and Reflection*. Vol. 6. No. 2. May 2018: pp. 81-95. Print.
- [4] Gwangwa'a, Njongoh G. "'Frogs' with Us"; "The Imperfect Blend". *Cry of the Destitute*. Limbe: Nooremac Press, 1995: 23-25. Print.

- [5] Jorgenson, Bent D. "Ethnic Boundaries and the Margins of the Margin". *Peace and Conflict Studies*. Vol 4. No. 2. January 1997: pp. 1-10. Print.
- [6] Konings, Piet. and Francis B. Nyamnjoh. "The Anglophone Problem in Cameroon". *The Journal of Modern African Studies*. Vol. 35. No. 2. June 1997: pp. 207-229. Print.
- [7] Konings, Piet. *The Politics of Neoliberal Reforms in Africa: State and Civil Society in Cameroon*. Leiden: Langaa and African Studies Centre, 2011. Print.
- [8] Loomba, Ania. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. London: Routledge, 1998. Print.
- [9] Mbuh, MbuhTennu. *The Oracle of Tears*. Bamenda: Langaa Research & Publishing, 2010. Print.
- [10] Moore-Gilbert, Bart. *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics*. London: VersoBooks, 1997. Print.
- [11] Nejat, Jamal and FatemeYaghoobi. "Marginalization in John Maxwell Coetzee's *Disgrace*". *Journal of Novel Applied Sciences*. Vol. 3. No. 6. 2014: pp. 566-571. Print.
- [12] Ngeh, Andrew, Minang Moses and Usman Suleiman. "Anger and Rejection: The Rhetoric and Dialectics of Violence in Anglophone Cameroon Poetry". *European Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*. Vol. 3. No. 3. July 2015: pp. 43-56. Print.
- [13] Ngoh, Victor J. *History of Cameroon since 1800*. Limbe: Pressbook, 1996. Print.
- [14] Nkengasong, John N. "Interrogating the Union: Anglophone Cameroon Poetry in the Postcolonial Matrix". *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*. Vol. 48. No. 1. 2012: pp. 51-64. Print.
- [15] Sibley, David. *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West*. London & New York: Routledge, 1995. Print.
- [16] Takwi, Mathew. "Man". *People Be Not Fooled*. Limbe: Design House, 2004. 44. Print.