NEW TRENDS IN ANGLOPHONE CAMEROONIAN POETRY-THE ROLE OF GUERRILLA POETS

ANDREW T. NGEH, MINANG MOSES SONDE,
UNIVERSITY OF BUEA, CAMEROON

Abstract
Guided by the Marxist critical theory and the concept of socialist realism, the assumption of this paper rests on the hypothesis that recent Anglophone Cameroonian poets like Gahlia Gwangwa’a, Emmanuel Fru Doh, John Ngong Kum Ngong, Bate Besong, Nol Alembong and Mathew Takwi have written very revolutionary and radical poetry with the sole intention of effecting a change in the society. Consequently, this paper preoccupies itself with the various critical poetic voices that emerged in the early 1990s and the later part of 2000 which were concerned with the process of effecting change; that is, they were change-oriented. This poetry unlike early poetry is a subversive weapon intended basically to rebuild the fragmented socio-political structures of the Cameroonian society caused by dictatorship, bad governance, alienation and estrangement. Finally, this paper also underscores the role played by guerrilla poetry in addressing some of these psycho-socio-political ills that alienate and estrange the people from their leaders and their society.

Key words: Alienation, estrangement and guerrilla poetry

INTRODUCTION
This paper preoccupies itself with the radical and revolutionary poetic tendency of the second generation Anglophone Cameroonian poets. Since Southern Cameroonians joined La Republique in the 1961 Plebiscite organized by the United Nations Organizations, two major tendencies have emerged. On the one hand, there is the earlier tendency which perceives poetry as an artistic exercise, an exercise in image making, and thus maintains that for any poetic work to be relevant, its language must attain a certain measure of vastness and it must project the society as it sees it. On the other hand, there is an emergent tendency which sees poetry not only as an artistic exploration but as a mechanism which could be used to change the world by showing the people the way ahead in their endeavours, to tame their environment in order to live in harmony and in happiness. This is what is referred to in this paper as guerrilla poetry. The former category is represented by poets like Bernard Fonlon, Sankie Maimo, Bongasu Tanla-Kishani, Mbella Sonne Dipoko and Buma Kor while the second category (the focus of this paper) is represented by poets like Gahlia Gwangwa’a, Emmanuel Fru Doh, Bate Besong and Mathew Takwi.

The concepts of alienation and the socialist realist aesthetics as enunciated by Karl Marx, Maxim Gorgi and Georg Lukacs have been employed for the evaluation of the corpus of poetry studied in this article. The four poets in their poetic vision adopt the guerrilla approach to confront socio-political ills like alienation and estrangement that have physically, psychologically and socially rendered the people homeless. It is one of the contentions of this article that the poetic vision of these poets is not so much to inform and entertain, but to change the world, to re-direct and to channel the minds and consciences of the people towards a new set of values, ideals and a higher awareness of reality.

Early Anglophone Cameroonian poetry was somewhat dominated by the imagist concept which perceives poetry as image-making, a pure intellectual exercise. Fonlon for example admits...
Andrew, J. A Social Sci Humanities 2015, 1:1, 15-25. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.15520/2015003

this in an interview he granted to Balafon: An Anthology of Cameroon Literature in English:

When I was in my seminary I was serious about the required studies. But I also stumbled on certain poets’ books on my own and read them. I was especially touched by Scott’s poetic skills. By reading such poets I got to know how to use very simple expressions very clearly and understandably. (Taille & Tarkang, 1986:158)

Fonlon further confirms that, ‘I wouldn’t say that I am a poet, only that I love poetry – Scott, Tennyson, Burns and so on. I wanted to be a poet, so I bought books to study style. After studying, I began to write not for the public but for friends’ (Taille & Tarkang, 1986:159). Besides the penchant for this linguistic display, these poets were preoccupied with the issue of culture contact and conflict. The radicalization of consciousness and the fighting spirit evident in recent Anglophone Cameroonian poetry with poets like Gwangwa’a, Doh, Besong and Takwi are some of the preoccupations of this article. The poets use their poetic works as artistic missiles intended to bring down the system that has alienated the common man. Satire pervades and permeates their poetry. Poetry of satire, therefore, is perceived in this study as a fighting weapon, and the poets are seen as guerrilla fighters who use their poetic articulations as missiles to confront the ruling class that has used its position to oppress and repress the masses. This study affirms Eldred Jones and Jones Marjori who have argued that “Poetry has been and still is a fighting weapon. The poets too often speak from prison—Brutus, Soyinka, Jacinto. From their roots in Africa to the Antilles they have carried their songs into battle and have often paid the price.” (Jones, 2) It is from this standpoint that the poetry of these four poets is studied.

THE CONCEPT OF GUERRILLA POETRY

In his paper entitled “War Poeticism”, Professor Harry Farlex in a Seminar at the University of Princeton argues that guerrilla poetry is “poetry that seeks to reform through sabotage, harassment and force.” (qtd in Jesse, 297) This means that guerrilla poetry uses rebel cannons such as open war against constituted authority, throughwriting which will go a long way to influence and impact change.

Guerrilla poetry which is variously called radicalpoetry and proletarianpoetry is informed by both a Marxist and socialist realist view of society. This poetry is as empirical as it is evangelical; it is didactic as it is angry and impatient. Generally, it is the story of one more turn in the cycle of revolts. According to Femi Osofisan, the primary virtue of literature is its subversive change hidden behind the façade of entertainment and which must be tapped, controlled and made to explode for the use of our people, for mankind. (qtd in Takem, 1990:176)

Poets like Gwangwa’a, Doh, Besong and Takwi who write within the paradigm of the guerrilla poetic tradition operate on the basic assumption that man’s ontological vocation is to be a subject who acts upon and transforms his world, and in so doing moves towards ever new possibilities of fuller and richer life individually and collectively. The poetry of these four poets provides proper tools for both individual and collective fulfillments of the oppressed. Their poetry becomes a weapon that physically and psychologically gives them that sense of belonging and beingness. Gwangwa’a’s Cry of the Destitute, (1995)Doh’s Wading the Tide, (1992), Besong’s Disgrace: autobiographical narcissus (2007) and Takwi’s People Be Not Fooled (2004) will be studied against this backdrop.

For this paper to be properly comprehended, it is important to define three key concepts: alienation, estrangement and guerrilla poetry. According to Bernard Fonlon “The Idea of Literature” the first principle of any scientific discourse is the definition of one’s terms or concepts so as to know ‘clearly and precisely right from the start what these terms or concepts mean (1982:179). Alienation is defined by Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary as “the feeling that you have no connection with the people around you: depressed people frequently feel a sense of alienation with those around them” (29). The same source defines estrangement as “when you are estranged from somebody” (415). If one is estranged from his community it means he is in disagreement with his community. The third term is “guerrilla. According to The Oxford Universal Dictionary Illustrated, guerrilla is “an irregular war carried on by small bodies of men acting independently” (841). This particular definition fits in this study because writers are generally few, and the committed ones are
Andrew, J A Social Sci Humanities 2015, 1:1, 15-25. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.15520/2015003
always at war with oppressive systems. And oppressive systems always alienate those who are oppressed.

The problem addressed in this study is the possibility of poets effecting change in a society especially in a situation where the ruling class and the ruled do not coexist cordially. Since the ruling class uses its power to exploit and alienate the ruled, poetry is used to create a more harmonious environment. This then leads to the following questions:

(1) Can art/poetry create a friendly environment and eliminate an alienating social existence?
(2) What is the role of guerrilla poets in a society bedeviled by alienation and estrangement?
(3) What is the relationship between guerrilla poetry and nation-building?
(4) What is the relationship between art and ideology in poetry?

Based on the above questions, this paper sets out to examine the role played by guerrilla poetry in addressing societal ills in Cameroon. Some of the ills addressed are social injustice, political barbarism, and economic exploitation which alienate and estrange the people from their society physically and psychologically. These socio-political and economic problems create an atmosphere of the fear of not belonging. Poetry is thus important not only for the nationalist awareness, but it contributes to the building of a nation. When the poets satirize, their aim is to reform and reconstruct their society. These poets are both teachers and soldiers of words.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

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

ANALYSES AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of this article is done under six thematic clusters: sensitization and revolt, the absence of dialogue and social justice, political barbarism and economic exploitation. Though this is done under separate headings, they should be considered as a whole because the purpose of this paper is to bring out the methods and strategies employed by these poets to effect a change in their community. The poetic works of these four poets who emerged in the 1990s and 2000 take on new power; it is no longer an abstraction or the magic of words but a means by which the poets try to re-name their world. They are more likely to decide to take upon themselves the struggle to change the structures of the society using their artistic and poetic missiles.

SENSITIZATION AND REVOLT

Gwangwa’a, Doh, Besong and Takwi in their respective collections, Cry of the Destitute, (1995) Wading the Tide (1992) Disgrace: autobiographical narcissus (2007) and People, Be not Fooled (2004) convey in very grim images the affairs of the society. This is intended to raise awareness, educate and conscientise the populace about their dismal and sordid existence that alienates them from their environment. The outcome is revolt. In Gwangwa’a’s “If an Anglophone must Die”, “In Search of my People” and Doh’s “Njangi House” and “Kwashiorkor Graveyard”, Besong’s “Poetry is”, and Takwi’s “Art After them” and “Writing”, the poets redirect their artistic prowess towards re-educating their society out of its acceptance of failure. In “If an Anglophone must Die”, Gwangwa’a brings out the predicament of Anglophone Cameroonians who are socially isolated, politically marginalized and economically exploited. He exhorts and appeals to the oppressed Anglophone Cameroonians not to give up the fight because any death registered in the process of this struggle/fight is a noble one:

If an Anglophone must die, let it be a noble death
So that his precious blood is not spilled in vain
Let no scream be heard in the glimpse and breath
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.15520/2015003

Though, by grenades, he suffers much in utter pain. (46)

Even more, the poet is concerned with the radicalization of this section of the country which has been subjected to Sisyphian existence by virtue of their numerical disadvantage. The feeling is that Anglophones are not part of Cameroon.

And if the Anglophone is outnumbered, be sternly brave

The frightener’s blows deal severe death blows
Before tumbling into the frog’s odious grave. (46)

The poet decries the absence of dialogue. Alienation is the basis of the absence of dialogue. He thinks that this “continuous feigning for dialogue” accounts for the endless cycle of destruction and of the perpetual strife in human nature. The poem, “If an Anglophone must die” sounds like a war song. The poet in a very satirical style is preaching a subversive message, trying to incite the oppressed against constituted authority. He places the two inherited cultures side by side and metaphorically refers to the oppressors as “frogs”. He meditates on the fluctuations between joy and despair, fulfillment and devastation which operate as invariable law both within the individual and the society which he incarnates. Through such a stance, the poet subscribes to the conception that poetry as a fighting weapon/guerrilla poetry must be on the side of the oppressed, a people’s poetry that creates as Ngugi submits in Writers in Politics, “positive heroes from among the workers, positive heroes who would embody the spirit of struggle and resistance against exploitation and naked robbery by the national bourgeoisie and its global allied classes. (5-6)

In “In Search of my People”, the poet goes back to history as a way of raising awareness in the people about real patriots who waged a ferocious war against French imperialism in Cameroon and Africa. The poet in this poem admits that the past cannot be changed, but that the future can be ruined if the present is not well handled. To him the real patriots of Cameroon’s independence were fighters like, Um Nyobe, Moumie, Kingue and Ernest Ouandie:

In search of my people
Patriots Um Nyobe, Moumie,
Kingue, and of course Ouandie
Takala, Wambo Le Courent, et al
In their brothers paid the supreme

Sacrifice. (22)

All these names are household names in Cameroonian history. Gwangwa’a’s identification with these patriots and nationalists brings him very close to the ideals and ideas these people stood for. His criticism of the present comprador bourgeoisie is a way of instilling a fighting spirit in the oppressed to resist their alienation and should be seen as actors in the reconstruction of their society. The poet concludes that if these heroes of independence could live again, the disturbing situation in Cameroon will be solved:

If only they could live again
The new trend plaguing today’s society
Will have no place
In the pages of Cameroon history.
If only they could live again
They would inject courage
In the inmates of Cameroon territory
And rid the masses of endo-imperialism. (22)

The poet uses some historical figures in Cameroon’s history to satirize, ridicule and exhort the very passive and docile Cameroonians who have refused to fight for their right. They are even described as prisoners in their own country. He asserts in the last stanza that:

The biggest mistake in living
Is the fear of dying
When each enters the dock of history,
The charge shall be what was not done
To alleviate the people’s constant bondage.

(22)

This pedagogic methodology facilitates the process of sensitization which can create tension and conflicts within the society which can lead to the creation of a new man who will mark the beginning of a new era in history. This is one of the preoccupations of guerrilla poets. They write with the strong conviction that if something is not done, society will slowly but surely drift to the precipices of insanity; the people will become strangers and inmates in their own society because they have been estranged by the politics of neocolonialism

Doh in “Kwashiorkor Graveyard” and “Njangi House” paints a bleak picture in which the aspirations, hopes and fulfillsments of the people are dashed because they do not belong; they are socially isolated and politically marginalized. In “Kwashiorkor Graveyard”, he states that his society/Cameroon is endowed with natural minerals such as oil and agricultural
produce, but metaphorically is now a "kwashiorkor graveyard".

Thou graveyard of my pre-natal chair,  
thou preserver of my navel,  
gifted in all to make me happy:  
fertility, fruitfulness-  
Yet today thou are accused-  
a kwashiorkor patient-lacking  
in vital vitamins: minerals, oil  
 agricultural products, foreign exchange.(6)

The images of 'kwashiorkor' and "graveyard" are dense symbols with metaphoric possibilities. Kwashiorkor, for example is a grotesque image that represents the exploitation and alienation of the people. Paradoxically, this alienated people are kwashiorkor patients in spite of the fact that this country is endowed with natural resources. The poet accuses the leaders of mismanagement, falsehood, lies-telling manipulation and maneuvers:

Treason! It is the tapper who squanders  
all the wine and says bad weather  
affect the raffia palms; he drinks  
the oil and says the kernels  
were barren  
Grey heads beginning to lie?  
I fear for tomorrow, for when  
awareness shall dawn  
the bad weather shall be purged  
and the kernels’ barrenness cleansed  
Or else limbs shall fly. (6)

The poet as a revolutionary thinker must strive to change the world. He is expected to conscientise and lead in the struggle against oppression and neocolonialism that only help to alienate the people. The exploitation of the people and their social isolation as depicted in this poem create an atmosphere of alienation. The gulf between the haves and the have-nots is too wide; the leaders do no tell the truth to the people they administer.

In “Njangi House”, the poet debunks the myth that African parliamentarians are really the people’s representatives. They are blind since they move only in one direction and toward themselves. The parliament is perceived as a “Njangi house” where parliamentarians go to save and loan money. In a sarcastic tone the poet says,

Representatives my foot.  
From North to South  
from East to West they  
claim to have come-errand boys  
and girls. Yet before  
they sit, the fruits of  
our labour to squander, they  
care less our opinions to sample. (6)

The awareness raised in this poem has resulted at least in intention in an attempt to use poetry to combat or demystify the power structure that alienates and estranges the people and instills in them the fear of not belonging. The poet’s intention here is to dispel the complexities of the masses that have been estranged from their community, and as a consequence urge them to fight for civil liberties. He feels that society belongs to all who inhabit it and no individual or group of persons has the right whatsoever to set standards to oppress and alienate others. To demonstrate their non-commitment in representing the interest of the people, some of them sleep during deliberation sessions and are woken up by claps from their peers.

Absent-mindedness in their looks  
siesta time for others  
for what is there to discuss?  
only to start and join the others already clapping. (6)

Takwi in “Art After Them” and “Writing” also writes with the same revolutionary conviction. The primary objective of guerrilla poets like Takwi and Besong is not so much to inform and entertain but to change society. According to Eugene Lonesco, the poet as a revolutionary thinker must strive “to change the world”, to redirect and channel the minds and consciences of his people towards a new set of values, a higher awareness or reality (qtd in Jesse, 291). Takwi demonstrates that poetic writing can be as dangerous as a gun:

Sprinkled drops of heavenly tears,  
New seeds of scribblers sprout  
To spin the wheel of change  
Through their  
Positively inspiring lines,  
In muscles flexing attempt  
To transform this planet,  
To a quieter reassuring  
Relaxation place,  
In man’s meandering and laborious journey  
To the wide-eyed staring unknown. (3)

The poet sees the role of the poet as divine and sacred, “Sprinkled drops of heavenly tears”. Consequently, these poets must change the society by virtue of their divine assignment:
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.15520/2015003

“New seeds of scribblers sprout/To spin the wheel of change”. The poet makes the point that freedom and the choice to determine the type of future that the people desire can never be given on a platter of gold especially when confronted with a ruthless leadership. Muscle-flexing and arm-twisting are crucial in effecting change in a system that is adamant to change and insensitive to the plight of the masses:

In muscle flexing attempt
To transform this planet,
To a quieter reassuring. (3)

This indicates that the task of achieving freedom and a promising future depends on the downtrodden’s determination to overthrow an oppressive regime that does not plan for a “relaxation place”. It is evident that it is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained; the individual who has not staked his or her life may, no doubt, be recognized as a person; but he or she has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-conscious person. Takwi expresses the same ideology in his poem entitled “Writing”.

To him poetic radicalism, nourished by a critical spirit is a subversive weapon that can transform society. The poet quips:

Like drops of spittle in dry mouth
New scribblers sprout on Arts vibrant farm
To spin in the heart-leaping wheel of change
Through mind piercing lines
In a tiny bid to metamorphose
This spicy planet of black and white
To a better stop over shady groove
In man’s rough smooth odyssey,
To the shaky unknown. (1)

The paradox of “…man’s rough smooth odyssey” has been effectively used. The theme of life as change which is facilitated by muscle flexing is rough yet smooth when the time for the celebration of the victory is done. It would appear that the only way to overcome an oppressive regime and bring in change is to engage in drag-out fights. In line with the concept of guerrilla poetry, a good poet is one who wants to plead the cause of his people, and he must not necessarily be God’s advocate; he must also do duty for the devil. This explains the anger, bitterness, outrage and confrontation in their poetry.

Besong too in “Poetry Is” writes with the radical commitment that the human liberation does not become the prisoner of a circle of certainty within which reality is also imprisoned. “Poetry Is” is a revolutionary precepts and theoretical articulations of the poet. To him,

Poetry is
Reggae, not irate Marxist slogans
Not hatchet-swinging mallams not
Poetry is
Not the Gulag
Poetry is Jua
Voice of Anglophone Universe. (108)

Poetry is perceived as reggae music and Augustine Jua. These are two dense symbols and images with both metaphoric and revolutionary possibilities. The form and content of reggae music are always revolutionary. This explains why reggae musicians like Bob Marley, Peter Tosh and Luke Dube were considered as subversive elements and rebels to dictatorial regimes. They question the status-quo in their music/songs. He debunks the empty slogans of Marxist ideology in poetry. The poem depicts the people’s struggles and their sufferings, achievements and hopes. This is captured in the image of Jua. Historically the late Augustine Ngom Jua was appointed Prime Minister in the then Southern Cameroons in 1965 and fired by the Ahidjo’s regime in 1968. He proved himself to be a no nonsense politician. In fact, he is perceived in this poem as a metaphor of struggle and a symbol of conscience. He concludes by saying that the poet should fight like the Spartans:

The poet is
Solemn like Spartan fakirs
In vision, more erratic-if tuned so
Than, Aro inmate
The poet is. (108)

It is evident in this poem that the poet as a soldier of words and guerrilla fighter prescribes violence because the analysis of existential situations of oppression reveals that their inception lay in an act of violence.

The other two thematic concerns that empower guerrilla poets are the absence of dialogue and social justice. The poets believe that the society will go nowhere if these two important ingredients are absent. In fact the absence of these only helps to alienate and estrange the populace socially, politically and psychologically.

The Absence of Dialogue and social Justice

Commenting on the relevance of dialogue in any democratic setting, Freire contends that
Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world. Hence, dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming - between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them. Those who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of this dehumanizing aggression. (1970:69)

Dialogue and social justice are interrelated and interdependent. The one exists for the other. Consequently, the absence of both in a society can bring about chaos and violence, and this can only lead to alienation. Dialogue and justice are crucial requirements in restoring peace in any democratic society.

The following poems by the four respective poets will highlight the point that without dialogue and social justice the people are condemned to wage a war against an insensitive regime: Gwangwa’a’s “The Contagion”, Doh’s “Lament of the Town Crier” Besong’s “The Party’s over” and Takwi’s “Corruption”. These poets try to articulate the feelings behind this fight so as to empower the masses.

Gwangwa’a’s “The Contagion” relates the frustration and oppression of the masses who contribute in nation building through the payment of taxes, yet have no voice or say in political affairs. The poet does not fail to express his indignation and outrage. Because the administrative machinery is a slow monster that crushes any dissenting voices, the masses are at the mercy of the status quo:

Yaoundé city
You have infected
Douala
With a contagious
Sickness.
Heaps undefined mushroom
Here and there,
Communal tax payers
Impotent to raise a voice
Nor a finger
Accepts the status quo
Silently. (20)

The effectiveness of the poet’s diction lies in his choice of words and phrases that enhance his thematic preoccupation. For example words like ‘contagious’, ‘sickness’, ‘heaps of undefined mushroom’, ‘impotent’ ‘silently’ all reinforce the grim and sordid existence of the ruled. There is no building plan as houses are doted like “heaps of undefined mushroom.” The road network is a veritable dead trap for the very people who pay taxes to the government:

The Douala commune
Unable to cover the holes
Of varying sizes
And depths, condones
Man’s hidden death traps
That spares not the autos. (20)

The cities of Yaoundé and Douala which are respectively the political and economic capitals of Cameroon symbolize hardship and frustration for the people who contribute in the building of these cities through the payments of taxes. There are striking explorations of the grotesque and macabre. The road network is so deplorable that neither vehicles nor human beings can move.

In Doh’s “Lament of the Town Crier”, the poet denounces the hypocrisy of the government that trains journalists and gags them. Journalists are referred to as the fourth estate that fights against oppression and exploitation. They are trained to be objective and are persecuted at the same time for their objectivity. The poet sees this as hypocrisy on the part of the government:

What hypocritical existence
you prefer, you kings of third
world clans. Shivering at the
truth; persecuting the town –criers
for ringing their bells too loud,
for giving the news too straight
and endangering your sycophantic existence
with vulture-master of so-called
first-worlds. With them you soar
dévouring the cadaver.(15)

The poet feels that this hypocrisy of the government can estrange the very journalists she has trained. On the whole, the poem is a grim warning of how objective journalists can be alienated from their society for telling the truth. The poet concludes that these committed journalists end up in prison for reporting the news too straight. Once in prison they are
devouring the cadaver: (15)

A parrot is caged for telling the truth,
and beaten by unschooled uniforms- the
vermin of society-hand-picked
to protect their benefactors
a parrot is no parrot if it cannot report
for fear of the master’s rage. (15)
In the same light, Besong in “The Party’s over” highlights the same social condition, the suffering and agony of the people and apportioning blames on the ruling class. The ruling class uses the people’s money for themselves:

Before their party was over
Long we have listened to the howl of human misery
The drying voices from that human world below:
Filling the gaps. (92)

Besong demonstrates in this poem that there is the private world both of subjective feelings of failure and homelessness and of loss and failure. Writing poetry here is seen as a problem, as it reawaken memories which the poet would have loved to forget; the siphoning of the country’s wealth and the looting of mineral resources:

Plunders of the fruits of our apple trees
Looters of the minerals of our unwilling earth. (92)

Being a poet then is painful; the pain produces poems which are, whatever claim one has about social change; it is this hope and optimism that heal:

But when I returned
The hour had come, friend
For the shah had to flee
And leave his stooges behind
And the bloodsuckers who stretched
Out their hands for new manacle
And haggled away my country;
to the magic of Swiss lucre
were left behind
One morning we simply pulled off;
The harlquin’s motley
Ah, what straw! (92-3)

The poet’s optimism in the above lines after the “shah” had fled is evident. The shah metaphorically represents the colonial and neo-colonial masters whose mission was/is to exploit the masses. Besong draws a fine line between exploitation and alienation in this particular poem:

Before the party was over
We have watched with awe our oil bonuses
Spreading
Along their cobbled amphi-
Theatres: (92)

His poetry reshapes his world and gives meaning to it. This poem shows the relationship between poetry and life. The optimism that characterizes this poem empowers both the poet and the struggling masses who want a meaningful change.

Takwi in “Corruption” treats similar thematic concerns. He treats themes that can inflame one and push him/her to the battle field. The poet undertakes a journey through the various facets of the Cameroonian society and concludes that the entire system needs complete overhauling: if it is not the police officer extorting money from drivers on the highway, it is university Lecturers who indulge in sexually transmitted marks; if it is not government officials awarding contracts to person who will give them part of the money; it is the Supreme court falsifying election results in spite of protests from the populace:

It is not the raised hand of a police on traffic
Control
To marshal default driver to court, but
Proudly squeeze out a bank note and let go.
It is not the dishing out of undue marks
To female students by lecturers,
In skillful exchange of calmed libidos.
It is not the giving out with the right hand of state
Contracts
To masquerade companies by ministers and Managers
While the left receives smiling swollen envelopes
Below sparking oval tables. (9)

In a society where corruption is endemic, civil strife is rife. Takwi exposes the naked self behind the mask of contemporary socio-political life. But the naked face of socio-political crisis, of emotional turmoil, of frustrated desires, of disillusionment and longing, of despair screaming to escape can only be facilitated through a revolt. The poet emphasizes the wholeness of society, justice, ethical commitment and the public defence of human rights. That is why even in terms of aesthetics he begins by writing free verse to demonstrate freedom of formality and aesthetic liberty. The poet in the above stanzas confirms the view that the evil in human nature as concerns corrupt practices cannot move the society forward. He thinks that these practices can only accelerate pace of destruction as even the Supreme court which symbolizes the nerve centre of jurisprudence in the country is also involved:
It is not instructions through bulged bank accounts
- Of shivering Supreme Court judges, by feeble state
- Acme
- To verdict election results in favour despite... (9)

The suspension dotes in the last line signals election that has been rigged and falsified in favour of the ruling oligarchy in spite of protests from those who have been cheated. Danger therefore looms in the horizon in such a corrupt society. Takwi makes himself relevant to his community by highlighting this sordid and deplorable condition which suggestively calls for a fight. For a poet to be identified and qualified as a guerrilla poet, he must be relevant to the needs and aspirations of his society or group and he can fight for his people using his pen which has been described as “mightier that the sword”.

Finally, political barbarism and economic exploitation are other themes that are passionately treated by these four poets to highlight the grimness of the state of affairs that can provoke tension and conflict in the society thereby alienating the people from their society. They perceive these as dehumanizing and provoking. Far from reforming and building the society, these two socio-political ills will only help to destroy it. Gwangwa’a, Doh, Besong and Takwi call for a fight against these ills because they only help to alienate the people.

**POLITICAL BARBARISM AND ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION**

Ideologically charged poems like Gwangwa’a’s “Who are we?” Doh’s “Bamenda Chop Fire” and Besong’s “Ntarikon, massacre, 1990” and Takwi’s “When shall we Dance?” are poems that highlight the contradictions in a post-colonial dispensation. The four poets with their artistic missiles and weapons wage a ferocious war against these ills and perpetrators of such injustices.

Gwangwa’a in “Who are we?” raises fundamental rhetorical questions that try to redefine Cameroonians who have been alienated psychologically, physically, politically, socially and materially. He examines the various facets of the Cameroonian society and concludes that all the ills that pervade and permeate its body politic have resulted in the alienation and estrangement of Cameroonians. The leaders have imposed themselves on the populace in spite of their rejection:
- He’s been vomited out
- The blind and the blame shout
- In bitter refusal of his rule
- He forces himself on the ruled. (17)

The ‘He’ represents politicians who have used foul and crooked means to impose themselves on the people and cling to power. In an effective metaphor, the poet indicates that even “the blind and the lame” protest against the falsification and rigging of election results that help to alienate the people politically and socially.

From the wanton destruction of the forest, economic hardship (in spite of the fact that the citizens pay their taxes) to the unchecked activities of armed bandits, the poet expresses his frustration with regard to the people’s shabby treatment. He believes that it is the cynicism of the politicians and the lethargy of the masses that breed this alienating situation:
- Despite bitter negations
- By the popular population
- We continuously watch our forests’ rape
- Without a blink and say we’ve no stake.
- Economic hardship is deepened
- While the masses are frightened
- By the increased activities of bandits
- Who with their booties are not candid. (17)

Rape is used in the poem literally and literally. The people’s forests are brutally destroyed and people’s wives are also brutally raped with reckless abandon:
- If husbands watch the contemptuous
- Rape of their wives by pseudo law
- Enforcement bandits, without remorse,
- Then who are we? (17)

The beautiful use of oxymoron in the poem reinforces the contradictions in post-colonial politics. Law enforcement officers have become rapists and killers instead of keepers of peace, order and law:
- We watch grenades and bullets hauled
- At our armless wives and children
- Who deserve our protection,
- Who are we? (17)

The poet sees leadership as a continuous process for putting on facial masks to shroud their real intentions. The rhetorical questions raised in the poem are important for their metaphorical implications. They illustrate the tragic effects of the breakdown of a normative...
order that culminates in estrangement and alienation. The political view expressed in this poem is that those who aspire for leadership have a hidden agenda to rape the economy and the wives of law-abiding citizens.

Doh’s “Bamenda Chop fire” relates the unfortunate events of the 1992 when the Presidential election results widely believed to have been won by the Social Democratic Front party were proclaimed. Bamenda, the birthplace of the Social Democratic Front party was invaded by the law enforcement officers because the entire Bamenda came out in their number to register their frustration and disappointment with regard to the falsification of results. The poet thinks that the falsification of the election results was away of depriving the people of their victory which results in alienating them from their community:

Bamenda chop fire
Babies, mothers, husbands,
Women: girls, the young, the old,
the very old;
even takumbeng with displayed greying groins and sagging breasts,
born out by maternal callings,
for a curse;
All violated the scorching sun
to say enough is enough,
to ruins of a
once popular political dream:
Le RENOUVEAU! (15)

The peaceful marches and demonstrations all over Bamenda town resulted in an unfortunate confrontation with the police. Many people died; some disappeared; and yet others had their limbs amputated in the process. Some were even forced to drink the urine of the brutal soldiers:

The soldiers, the tear-gas canisters
the grenades, amputated limbs
disappeared husbands and sons
the rape of daughters and mothers
before parents, husbands, children
brothers and sisters alike
the whips, drinking of military urine (15)

The falsification of results and the brutality of the military on the people are clear indications that the people do not belong; they have been estranged from their own very society by virtue of the brutal and barbaric treatment meted on them by the military men. They do not have the right for even peaceful demonstrations.

In the same light, Besong’s “Ntarikon massacre, 1990” written in simple but evocative and powerful language captures a war scene reminiscent of the macabre incident that took place in Bamenda on the 26th May 1990 when six innocent Cameroonians were brutally murdered by law enforcement officers when the Social Democratic Front party was launched. The poet thinks that the law enforcement officers jeopardized the future of these promising Cameroonians.

the blood is still fresh
on the slabs, the morgues
are wet
for those whose
tomorrows
are now shards of broken
glass. (59)

In photographic realism, the future of these Cameroonians is metaphorically compared to a glass that has been shattered into shards by the very people who should protect it. Thus the broken glass becomes a metaphor of broken dreams, hopes and aspirations. The poet makes the point that neo-colonialism is sustained, supported and accentuated by carnage, brutal repression and reckless dehumanization of the masses. Lack of freedom of expression is a serious impediment to progress and nation-building. There is no doubt here that the poet is talking about a military regime wherein the masses have no freedom of speech, and are subdued by the ruling class. Thus, the physical and psychological brutalization of the masses only lead to alienation.

CONCLUSION

From the analyses of the poetry of the four poets, it is evident that these poets use their poetry as weapons that can redress the issues of alienation, estrangement and the fear of not belonging. They intimate in their poetry that only a guerrilla artistic warfare can solve these problems. That is why their poetry is ideologically and revolutionary oriented. Thus, their poetic works become a moral force and a political voice that counteract alienation and estrangement in the Cameroonian society.

WORKS CITED
Primary Sources
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.15520/2015003


**Secondary Sources**


**Dictionaries**