

## POLITICS OF THE OPPRESSED “INSIDE OUTSIDER” IN CAMEROON: RHYTHMS OF ALIENATION AND LOSS OF IDENTITY IN BATE BESONG’S *BEAST OF NO NATION*

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### ABSTRACT

This article takes an analytical review of Bate Be song’s *Beast of No Nation*, from the critical standpoint of alienation and identity and locates itself within the corpus of Anglophone Cameroon literature, as a vibrant art form, graphically lending expression to the existentialist politics of the oppressed “inside outsider” in Cameroon. Given the growing sense of rootlessness, feelings of not belonging, fractured existence and desolation portraying the futility of human existence in the hostile city of Ednouay, the article argues for a safe, aesthetic space that will enable those affected reassert their identity and minimize alienation as a way forward because, alienation and identity have grievous implications on the characters of the play and accounts for the revolutionary nature of characters, of the lower rung in the fictional city of Ednouay. The paper addresses problems imposed on the people’s cultural fabric by colonialism, which has sustained a permanent divide between English speaking Cameroonians called Anglophones and French speaking Cameroonians called Franco phones.

**KEYWORDS:** Politics<sup>1</sup>, “inside outsider”<sup>2</sup>, alienation<sup>3</sup>, identity<sup>4</sup>, rhythms<sup>5</sup>, bate be song<sup>6</sup>, Anglophones<sup>7</sup>, Franco phones<sup>8</sup>

### Background

The play *Beast of No Nation*, by Bate Be song has attracted wide-ranging critical commentaries. From single page reviews to lengthy analytical discourses, the play could be said to have responded to the major dimensions of critical evaluation of literature: sociological, Marxism, Formalism and New Historicism with varying degrees of successes. However, an important aspect of Bate Be a song’s *Beast of No Nation*, which seems to have been neglected by critical

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<sup>1</sup> Politics: The internal maneuvers that help to crystallize the structured divide of the two entities (Anglophones/Francophones) in Cameroon.

<sup>2</sup> “Inside outsider”: The Anglophones who voted to join French Cameroon in the plebiscite of 1961 are herein described as the “inside outsider” because of mistrust imposed by cultural differences leading to the alienation of minority Anglophones.

<sup>3</sup> Alienation: Alienation is a state of rootlessness, isolation and a growing sense of aloofness that fires up the feelings of not belonging.

<sup>4</sup> Identity: identity in this context can be seen as statelessness, loss of identity which denies a people their history subjecting it to palimpsest, erasure and epistemic violence

<sup>5</sup> Rhythms: Regular recurrence of alienation and identity crisis as a collective predicament of minority Anglophones.

<sup>6</sup> Bate Besong: Bate Besong is a contemporary Cameroonian Anglophone writer of English expression who has written many plays and collections of poetry. His concern for the minority in the union of the two Cameroons made him to don the mask of a town-crier as a tradition of literature relevant to the experiences and collective predicaments of his people.

<sup>7</sup> Anglophones is a coinage which identifies the English speaking people in a united Cameroon

<sup>8</sup> Francophones is a coinage that identifies French speaking people in a united Cameroon.

scholarship, is the problematic issues of alienation and identity, based on the play and its relation to history and ideology.

Alienation and identity are sensitive areas that tend to engage the minds of scholars globally and as dominant areas of discourse, in Anglophone Cameroon literature, their relevance has been nurtured by the dialectics of history (Ngwane, 2009). The subjugation of the African continent to colonial rule at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, by the imperialist force of colonialism can be seen as being instrumental, in the configuration of Africa's post- colonial environment which, at best remains fragile and disruptive, and at worst case has resulted to conflicts both violent and ideological (David J, 2008). Post-colonial Cameroon can, therefore, be interpreted from this backdrop, where the imperialist forces of colonialism have shaped its structure and composition as a self-governing state (Juliana Abbey, 2016)

The theoretical discussion about the concepts of alienation and identity, as well as, their relevance in African literature, can be traced to historical roots (Tayo Raymond, 2017). Bate Be song's concepts of alienation and identity as observed in his plays can, therefore, be traced back to historical roots, stretching back to the Founban Conference of 1961 (Be song, 1993), which laid the foundation block uniting the two Cameroons as two equal entities and the post- Founban disequilibrium that has followed. A departure from the terms of the Founban Conference agreement are seen by the playwright, as having destroyed rather than help the union of the two Cameroons. As two parts of one put together in a clearly undefined structure in the union, cultural identity and self-concept have gradually built-up in Cameroon's body-polity, through the consciousness of time. Anita Jones, Thomas and Sara E. Schwarzbaum (2011:4) in "Culture and Identity" note that:

*Cultural identity is constructed historically and socially within groups and is influenced by contact with differences within those groups or differences between different groups which also evolves as ideas and historical times change.*

These amongst other things, have afforded the playwright a powerful ideological standpoint that feeds his writings. Hence, literature being an expression of society through the imaginative mind of the writer, these stop gaps in the writers society have constructed his mind towards protest literature, aimed at building consciousness on the excruciating plight of the minority in Cameroon. This minority problem in the society of the playwright has gained expression in alienation and identity and his concern, for the fate of the minority. This study, therefore, sets out to examine these concepts in the fictional world of the text, as how the playwright has merged text and context in the portrayal of his society and how his artistic vision can bring change in his society.

Identity is a lexicon in common usage, which helps to differentiate a person and speaks loudly about the unique peculiarities that set one aside as distinct from others. Heike Berner (2003:10) writing in "Identity and belonging in Asian American Literature" contends that, identity becomes an issue only when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty. Cameroon's identity issue gained momentum in the early eighties when the country's name was changed from the United Republic of Cameroon to The Republic of Cameroon which pre-empts a cancellation of the age long union of the two Cameroon entities (Ebune, J. B, 1992). Understanding the role of history and society as pillars in African literature, therefore, helps put in perspective the drive of the playwright (Bate Be song) in his relentless attempt to take his society from the periphery back to the center where it belongs. It is akin to the empire writing back.

In his early essay, "The Evolution of Modern Drama" (1909), the Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukacs, writes that,

the truly social element in literature is the form. It is clear that, by such standing, attention is shifted from content to sheer technical properties which rob literature of historical significance and as Eagleton retorts (1976:20) reduces it to an aesthetic game which lacks the veracity of literary interpretation. This literary position had a spinoff during the 1980s with a change of attitude towards history in American Literary Theory, which renewed interest in the study of literary works in the like of political circumstances in which they were created.

Michel Foucault (1977), a key element of this literary tradition, calls on readers to interpret the literary text and link them to context as well as to examine the sociological aspects of the texts in order to properly articulate the social struggles of contemporary society. He argues further that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. New Historicism and the Marxist-Sociological theories have been appropriated as lenses to interpret the society of the play and properly investigate the forces of alienation and identity. This provides us the link between history as well as politics, culture and circumstances under which the work was created. Thus, from a historical, political or cultural conception of a world, a creative work is born whose form and content can be judged depending on the class or social group origin of the writer. In consonance with the Anglophone/Francophone divide in contemporary Cameroon, the writer can react back and affect the political, historical and cultural continuum for a transformation of his society.

Anglophone Cameroon literature, like many other African literatures, has today gained its national and international context as a vibrant art form and a vehicle of communication, which helps to mirror its society in general and the Anglophones in a bi-cultural, neo-colonial setting. Its evolution over time and space has seriously been fashioned by the dialectics of history. From a historical standpoint, therefore, beginning of the German occupation of Cameroon under the name Kamerun, the inhabitants of this geographical space has consistently suffered alienation, as well as, has their identity reconfigured by the forces of successive historical movements which form the context that supports Be song’s plays.

### ***Alienation and Identity in the Play *Beast of no Nation****

Bate Be song is widely recognized as one of the most important stylists in modern Anglophone Cameroon writing characterized by his dense, opaque and sometimes colloquial language, and the use of techniques that tend to obscure his works, especially in the area of drama. Unfortunately, rather than read Bate Be song, the popular opinion is that, he is a difficult writer (Ambanasom, 2012). But, as it were, he is not read not because he is a difficult or an unpopular writer, but simply because his society has decided to embrace the wrong values. However, the result of his terse, disciplined approach to the craft of writing projects him as a serious and committed writer of the minority problem in Cameroon. In his protest writing, he has through both fiction and non-fiction, illuminated on the problems of alienation and identity in his society. Beginning from the late eighties, this playwright began to don the mask of a town-crier as a tradition of literature that would be relevant to the experiences and collective realities of Anglophones in Cameroon. This radical perspective, he says, must be seen in the relationship between the artist and his society, a concern for the plight of the oppressed and the oppressive environment itself, which he argued thus:

*Anglophone Cameroon literature cannot make a single step forward until it understands—please note the dubious and fragile environment that is national unity, now, like the skull of some pre-historic brontosaurus, it has in the last decade, especially become the ‘lake Nyos bomb of history, looming over the incubator of a poisonous brand of National*

*integration'. The Anglophone Cameroonian writer must never forget his origin. His writing must depict the condition of his people, expressing their spontaneous feelings of betrayal, protest and anger. Our literature must convey with remarkable force the moods of the Anglophone Cameroonian caught in the assimilation nightmare of a Sisyphean existence (Besong, 1993:18)*

In *Beast of No Nation* therefore, Be song sets in motion mankind's innate tendency towards domination and exploitation through the symbolism of character delineation (Night soil men, Blind man and cripple) revealing determination and faith as an indomitable human spirit in their struggle to wrestle with alienation and claim their identity in the fictional city of Ednouay. The play is, in reality, a modern day tragedy of human conditions in general, not so much through the gruesome elimination of Gaston Lazare Otshama by Comrade Delsham, Aadingingin at the end of the play. Rather, it is the tragedy of the effect of men's actions on other men through generations.

*Beast of No Nation* is Be song's second play and is rooted in the human predicaments of alienation and identity crisis that surrounds the lives of Anglophone Cameroonians caught in the web of relationship with the majority Franco phones in Cameroon. Seen as an echo of his ideological orientation and use of the artistic medium to raise consciousness on the endemic Anglophone problem, the playwright brings to the attention of his audience, the contentions and precarious challenges of domination and exploitation as a background scenario that triggers alienation and the quest for identity by Night soil men in the play.

Alienation and identity in Cameroon is the untold story of man's action which took root through colonialism. This colonial impact created in post-colonial Cameroon are imports, which the playwright has fictionalized through the symbolism of night-soil men, cripple, and Blind man in the city of Ednouay, who constitute the lowest strata of that society and whose collective plight is exclusion and exploitation by the upper class (Bourgeoisie). This lower class is faced with identity crises and loss of freedom with the negative consequence of alienation as created in the world of the play.

The auction runs through a linear plot and tells the story of night-soil men and their struggle for freedom and equality to reclaim their identity from the ruling class of Ednouay. The story is told from the point of view of an omniscient narrator, which allows the audience or reader to journey into Be a song's mind in his struggle to build consciousness about the endemic Anglophone problem in contemporary Cameroon. The play therefore, exploits the 19th century technique of the well-made play where there was usually a character who spoke to the author. This character was often referred to as reasoners, literarily the 'reasoner' of the play. The action of the play is therefore interspersed with interludes, where the action stops for the narrator to convey his message. Although this technique is considered too artificial to make for good drama, but Be song uses it all the same, in combination with other techniques to achieve his trajectory. Technique then is a means towards the positive definition of them as Mark Schorer (1948) writes:

*When we speak about a technique, then, we speak of really everything. For technique is the means by which the writers experience, which is the subject matter, compels him to attend to it. Technique is the only means he has of discovering, exploring and developing his subject, of conveying its meaning, and, finally, of evaluating it. And surely it follows that certain techniques are sharper tools than others, and will produce works with the most satisfying content, works with thickness and resonance, works which reverberate, works maximum meaning (387)*

Techniques or form is therefore, inseparable from content that is explored, and it becomes the focus of critical attention as a means of thematic definition, thematic exploration or thematic amplification. Aesthetic form and subject

matter become unified in critical evaluation. This is because literariness consists not in the content of the work of art, but in the unique form of the literary text by which it secures ‘aesthetic distance’ and removes itself from history.

In his fictional universe Be a song’s *Beast of No Nation*, anchors from the onset identity crises from the title of the play. This animal imagery bears allusion to Night soil men, Cripple, Blind man and the other classes of Anglophones in Ednouay who cannot trace their origin or ascribe to themselves citizenship in the city. The upper classes, as inferred in the play, are in a romance with the leadership of Ednouay and care very little about the predicaments of others and are ready to compromise their own identity. A signifier of the failure of the privileged class to instigate revolution in society and which forms a central idea in understanding the revolutionary theory of Marxism.

The cognitive metaphor of excrement, which is exclusively the duty of the Night soil men, tells the challenging story of the slave - master relationship which has become an acceptable practice and the norm in the Anglophone-Francophone co-existence in contemporary Cameroon. In consonance with this officially entrenched servitude symbolized in the functions of the underprivileged rungs of the Ednouay society. In “Literature in the season of the Diaspora: Notes to the Anglophone Cameroonian writer” (1993), be a song, himself insinuates a positive revolutionary action against the oppressive establishment thus;

*We are subject to perpetual mental and psychological servitude... the story book victims of a cultural holocaust... an embattled people caught in the terrifying coils in a world without our comprehensions... profoundly affected by cataclysmic changes and traumas which seem to toss about like an Eliotean rag doll, hollow men without speech, caught in the broken jaw, in the lost kingdom (Be song, 1993:16).*

The Anglophone problem which the Promethean revolutionary playwright anchors in *Beast of No Nation* is still very extant with Anglophones fighting to regain their identity as expressed in the demand for identity by Night soil men in the play. In the ongoing battle between Anglophones and Franco phones lumped together in an amorphous structure, be song does not hesitate to slip-in historical markers that can help reinforce argument of the play as essentially an identity document. He opens the play with the narrator echoing liberation as the Biblical Moses did to his people thus;

Narrator:

*Do you know what you have done to me? You have hurt me.... (Mimics) Moses lifted up a brass serpent in those days for the safety of his country; Aadingingin is the flag. He will rise up a golden serpent for the safety of Ednouay.... You have hurt me.... You have come to him with your oceans of flattery.... Secretes.... You are often my secret. Be frank; tell me exactly what you think.... Has yours not been a wasted generation? You have done nothing for anybody. Like vegetables, you might just as well have never lived.... Let me see, what is it we were talking about?. He is not very bright, is Aadingingin, but if the Swiss maharajahs knew how many farthings he left behind, they will fall about laughing. Trapped (in a superior tone) what the rich thief has put together, let no jaguda man put asunder... (BNN: 1)*

The specific words which the playwright uses, such as oceans of flattery and secretes, reveals inner truths about the Anglophone/Francophone union, which has all the years come to rest on flattery and secretes which the narrator voices out by saying that “you have hurt me”. The narrator talked about Moses and the lifting of a brass serpent to denote liberation of Anglophones. Figments of Be a song’s mind on Anglophone identity in Cameroon are made apparent via a variety of channels. In one of those non fictional channels he had argued purposefully that:

*The landscape of the past three decades has ruthlessly shown up all our political and economic illusions under the guise of the pictorial character of the two unifying parts, thus graphically leading expression to the existentialist predicaments of the Anglophone caught in the terrifying coils of a world beyond their comprehension (Besong, 1993:16).*

In the dialectic triad, which includes thesis, antithesis and synthesis as emphasized by Hegel, the historical processes from the Foumban conference of 1961 which unified the two Cameroon as two states equal in status and which has given rise to present day Cameroon form the thesis, (seen as the inherent weaknesses which have created the Anglophone problem) which equally needed a revolutionary counter-force (antithesis) which Besong creates using the lower rung of the Ednouay society through his symbolic characters (Night soil men, blind man and cripple) to wrestle alienation and fight for recognition in Ednouay. This did not happen as the Night soil men rather flee from confronting Aadingingin as a lumbering gargoyle of a Mayor, whose autocratic posturing remains distasteful to all. However, such a dramatic diversion in the play has attracted the fury of critics for foiling an identity revolution which it set out to achieve as amply captured in Marx's historical class struggle. Indeed, most importantly and abjured with much relevance, Hilarious Ambe, remarks that:

*The incidents dramatized in the universe of the Beast is a failed revolutionary attempt to strip the ruling bourgeoisie of its suffocating excesses, and restore meaning to the social, economic and political conditions of the alienated masses. The defeat of the oppressed characters 'liberation endeavor is a warning signal of doom and darkness emphasized in the dramatic integrity of the play. (132)*

Tala (2009) sees it differently, and argues that even though the play ends on a rather pessimistic note does not conjecture a failed revolution since the Anglophone characters in the play have fully become aware of their situation and are already challenging the forces responsible for their ordeal. He is firm on the position that, if the play ends on a pessimistic note, then it is simply because the conditions for the total liberation of Anglophones in Cameroon are not yet in place.

To better understand the context which informs the playwright's creative push in constructing *Beast of No Nation*, it is compelling to establish the historical root of the text by linking it to the debilitating political antecedents of Southern Cameroons nationhood which pre-occupies Be song, whose militancy as a committed writer has generated the counterforce in the Anglophone struggle to overcome the situation created by the thesis in an attempt to create a synthesis.

When the minority Southern Cameroonians attained political independence on 1st of October 1961 by joining the majority East Cameroon (Le Vine, 1971), they were full of optimism. But this optimism was short-lived. The minority Anglophones did not imagine that, soon after their liberation from colonial rule, they would be recolonized by the majority Francophone and be denied full citizenship in their new country. This ascribed second class status has created internal rifts and tension between Francophone and Anglophone Cameroonians, which have crystallized into what has come to be known as the "Anglophone problem" and which has found expression in issues of alienation and identity. This has seriously interrogated the notion of a Cameroon nation. Today, the issues of alienation and identity have become a dominant theme in Anglophone Cameroon literature and post-colonial Cameroon where Anglophones and Franco phones are by necessity co-existing. This is the central theme that runs through *Beast of No Nation* and other plays written by the same playwright.

In such a connecting nexus, the human action theory opines that, human beings like many other creatures, depend



on social interaction for their sense of comfort, belonging and prosperity. It is through communication and our relating with others that we gain knowledge, which allows us to evolve as individuals and develop an identity. It is this identity that creates in every individual the sense of belonging.

In the fictional world of the play, Be song portrays a very grim image of a society caught up in the dichotomy of the oppressed and oppressors. Like day and night Aadingingin and Otshama represent the bourgeois class which is prone to maintaining the status quo at Ednouay while the night soil men, the blind man and the cripple represent the oppressed class whose encaged world speaks volumes to us about their demoralized feelings, isolation and loneliness. Being denied any social contact and proper treatment in Ednouay, where all they can aspire to, is the position of night soil men, fosters a feeling of psychological seclusion from a city they call theirs. Seclusion and alienation from the affairs of Ednouay is also portrayed from another angle where the Night soil men are alienated by the capitalist mode of production.

To have a full grasp of the concept of alienation in the universe of the play, one must have an understanding of the capitalist mode of production rooted in the dominant ideology of dialectic materialism which stresses economic determinism as an index of social struggle. In the bourgeois governed capitalist society of Ednouay therefore, ownership of land and property and the means of production are the exclusive prerogatives of Aadingingin. For the Night soil men to survive in this set up, they are forced to sell their labour power. It is through the capitalist mode of production that exploitation of the worker comes alive. Marx’s view holds that the worker is exploited because of the bourgeoisie’s attempt at creating surplus profit. Capitalism creates a cruel environment where survival of the fittest reigns as the Night soil men speaks out thus:

First Night soil man:

*I am a night soil-warrior*

*First class,*

*The cruelties of Ednouay*

*Have to be faced*

*And endured (BNN: 6)*

The capitalists exploit the workers through the subtle mechanisms of paying him far less than he deserves and sometimes the worker’s conditions are deplorable such as the grotesque conditions which the night soil scavengers are allowed to work. Fatma Balci (1987) citing Arun Bose, the author of “Marx on Exploitation and Inequality”, emphasized the fact that, not only is it through exploitation that alienation develops but it is the primary source of alienation (Bose, 1980:10).

The sordid environment of the play created by Be song clearly paints a mental picture of the second class citizen’s status which Anglophones have assumed since their union with the majority French speaking Cameroonians. They are the under dogs who are called in to do all kinds of menial jobs in the country while the Franco phones, the self-imposed overlords swim in and squander the resources of the nation. A cripple, one of the characters Be song uses to denote Anglophones makes a salutary remark that...“monkey will do the dirty work, Gorilla go de wack” (BNN: 16). The statement by the cripple here reinforces our understanding of the discontentment of the characters of the play with their

alienation from enjoying what they have worked hard to achieve but which is being enjoyed by others.

Be song himself has suffered several levels of alienation in his society (Cameroon) which he believes is as a result of his roots. Ngwane (1993) notes that, Be song, with his Master's degree, after his employment in 1985 with government, was sent to one of the most remote areas of the far North of the country to teach English, to form one students in a purely French secondary school in an area called Mayo-Oulo. It was a bitter and humiliating experience for Be song and also alienating in terms of scholarship. The playwrights' society can therefore, be said to have constructed him to become a writer in search of his roots in his protest literature. His works reflect some glimpses of experiences in his society which he has fictionalized to find order and to discover an aesthetically satisfying form within the chaos experienced in his society. It is through these personal experiences that the story comes to life and becomes convincing.

Be song wrote *Beast of No Nation* in 1990, a very trying period in the history of Cameroon. It was the period when the struggle for democracy was at its height in the country in an attempt to diffuse power dominance from the centre. It equally falls within the decade of historical shifts when the name of the country was changed from the United Republic of Cameroon to the Republic of Cameroon. The new appellation of the Cameroon nation is considered by the playwright as another serious dislocation which followed the 1961 historical Foumban Conference arrangements. It is the opinion of many Anglophone scholars that this move which came up in the early eighties served as an abrogation of the union between French Cameroon and Anglophone Cameroon. The impact of this major change has constantly challenged and interrogated the identity of all Anglophones in their new nation.

The frustration of Anglophones suffering the ills of alienation due to their loss of identity is surging meteorically daily as there are few jobs for them anywhere and like night soil men in the play have become exposed to exploitation of their labour by their Franco phones overlords. This capitalist environment, with its monopoly on ideology is in a constant struggle to normalize its hierarchical class structure to levels where the sufferers (Anglophones) within the world of Ednouay, are unknowingly yielding to it, as exemplified by Otshama Lazare, a co-opted night soil man who refuses to see himself as an alienated person and neither does he see himself having any identity problems in Ednouay. The night soil men of Ednouay are the slaves of modern society. From their plight in the play, we can build a bigger picture obtainable in the Cameroon society context.

Like most good works of literature, *Beast of No Nation* is open to different interpretations. The play treats social, economic as well as political issues which have a crushing impact in the fictional city of Ednouay. Underneath the central issue of alienation and identity however, is the issue of power which has equally triggered and sustained alienation in the play. The playwright creates two worlds far apart from each other in terms of power dominance (relations). There is therefore, the question of power and marginality that supports inclusion and exclusion. The Anglophones symbolically represented in the Night soil men, Cripple and Blind man are those who suffer exclusion from the power structure. Aadingingin, the infamous Mayor of Ednouay, is saddled with the gargantuan task of subjugating all the lower rungs in his society. Together with a co-opted ex-Night soil man, Gaston Lazare Otshama, the trappings of power seize them irresistibly to the extent that, they nurture a vaulting belief of thinking they are revered with the final decision of life and death and their words are virtually law.

Lisa VeneKlasen and Valerie Miller (2006) defined power thus:

*The degree of control over material, human, intellectual and financial resources exercised by different sections of*



society. The control of the resources becomes a source of individual and social power. Power is dynamic and relational rather than absolute- it is exercised in social, economic and political relations between individuals and groups. It is also unequally distributed- some individuals and group having greater control over the source of power and other having little or no control. The extent of power of an individual is correlated to how many different kinds of resources they can access and control.

Understanding power would be incomplete, unless its partner, ideology is recognized. Ideology is a complex structure of beliefs, values, attitudes and ways of perceiving and analyzing social reality. Ideologies are disseminated and enforced through social, economic, political and religious institutions and structures such as the family, education system, religion, the media, the economy and the state, with its administrative, legislative and military wings. The economic, political, legal and judicial institutions and structures set up and mediated by the state tend to reinforce the dominant ideology and the power of the dominant group within it, even though their state objectives and policies may be superficially egalitarian. Though ideology does a far more effective job of sustaining an unequal power than crude, overt coercion and domination, it must not be forgotten that it is always reinforced by threats, should any one seek to rebel against the dominant system.

This asymmetrical power structure in *Beast of No Nation* as created by the playwright brings to the fore, the crude aspect of human domination in the society of Ednouay. The downtrodden of the Ednouay city are the most dominated people under the high heavens and this is achieved through the complicity of the intellectuals, portrayed in the play as the Anglophone educated elite, who happen to find themselves in positions of responsibility and therefore tend to lend support to Francophone domination. The adoration which Gaston Lazare, supposedly an Anglophone educated elite, who has been co-opted to the position of power, gives to Aadingingin, the almighty Mayor of the city of Ednouay tells the story through a power- marginality paradigm. Extracting from their conversational interaction, the picture of power imbalance becomes even clearer thus:

**Cripple:**

*The party-like comrade Aadingingin is infallible.*

*He is the reincarnation of Reuben Um Nyobe and Winston Churchill*

**Blind man:** *Hero-warship is strongest where there is least regard for freedom*

**Otshama:** *Do you know that he can order your execution, today, now, this week as a subversive element?(BNN: 45-46)*

The message communicated by the Blind man in the conversation interrogates power dynamics as often an unacknowledged role in processes of restorative justice and shows the example of inter-sectionality of power where Otshama can exert his society- acquired -power to advocate for the blind man, at the risk of silencing or reprimanding him. Moreover, when those revered with structural power are not aware of the weight of their words and actions, they can inadvertently affect relational interaction and social relationships.

Unlike animals that act mostly out of instincts, human beings modify their natural environment by internal consciousness to fit the requirement of their social relationship within which they live. In a social formation like what obtain in the city of Ednouay within which the forces of alienation are operational, the downtrodden (Night soil men, Blind

man and Cripple) learn to discover their essence in exclusion and helps them form an alienized consciousness. This alienized consciousness remains problematic because they are completely shaped by political, cultural, economic and natural processes in the social formation.

Alienation requires a form of dissociation and seclusion. This provides coherence between capitalist exploitation and alienation. J. Gabriel and E.O Todorora (2002) argue that, the creation and reproduction of an agent capable of selling labour power on a labour market produces a form of dissociation. Dissociation is an adaptation to a cultural requirement of capitalism. The agent must become the person the employer wants to hire in order to get a job and must then be the person the employer wants to keep employed. And must do all of these in order to gain permission to participate, on a daily basis, in her own exploitation.

Ednouay is an oppressive society as seen in the treatment of the Night soil men, Blind man and Cripple in the play which manifest itself in open conversation, internal struggles and deliberate actions by the two opposed societies in the city. In a conversation, Narrator, in the play tells the audience that, *corruption is the national industry of Ednouay... while the Blind man talking to the Cripple informs him ... it is difficult to trust anyone in Ednouay, especially a coopted night soil man who has been blinded with Greek gifts of National integration ....(45).*

To percolate its surface meaning requires that we carefully explore the centrality of history and the dismantling of institutions meant to safeguard identity that has led to the persistence of alienation, Francophone supremacy and cultural dominance in the society of the play. It can be pointed out that oppressive tendencies more often than not, exist in liberal and democratic societies, not as intended policies or practices but because it has been woven into the fabric of major cultural, socio-economic and political institutions.

Sandra Hinson and Alexa Bradley (1992) in “A structural analysis of Oppression” critically examine oppression in human society thus:

*A person lives within structure of domination and oppression if other groups have the power to determine his/her action. Individuals experience oppressive conditions because they are part of a group that is defined on the basis of shared characteristic such as race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, age, ability amongst others. These major social groups have specific attributes, stereotypes and norms associated with them. Individual membership in these groups is not necessarily voluntary. It is not necessarily acknowledged, either (Sandra and Alexa, 1992:1).*

The play pricks our consciences to the different forms of oppression which the downtrodden and alienated class of Ednouay are condemned to face. Such oppressiveness in the universe of the play takes the forms of exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural dominance and violence. Alienation in every society has a necessary partner, violence. Violence is not limited to its physical form but rather can take the form of careless utterances that affect the psyche of the dominated or marginalized. The dialogue of *Beast of No Nation* is replete with violence intended to injure the alienated. Like the Night soil men, Cripple and Blind man in the play, people do not have to experience outright physical violence in order to feel their lives threatened. Through alienation and identity issues in Ednouay, this group of people live in a threatened environment.

Aadingingin brazenly tells the Night soil men thus:

**Voice of Aadingingin**

*The truth will be kept away from you*

*Our lies will be told boldly and persistently*

*For you can be made to believe anything*

In another movement in the play Aadingingin threatens:

*I will order torture with regret. You will be held in solitary.*

*Your cell will be flooded with water. You will be deprived*

*of food and sleep. You will be beaten and forced to drink*

*your own urine(BNN: 16)*

This care free utterances hit the Night soil men who have all along been demanding their freedom on the face as a form of harassment that degrades and humiliates them.

### **Identity Crisis in *Beast of No Nation***

Be song stresses on how the emotional stream of man within, interacts with the social reality of his society. The play is essentially the search for roots by the Night soil men, Blind man and Cripple who have failed to find freedom in an artificial environment. This can be inferred to be what has caused the playwright to look back in anger, in an attempt to construct or restore identity in the play. Elements that construct identity such as Otherness ‘of Anglophones in a purely Francophone set up are very visible in the play. The fictional city of Ednouay which the playwright creates connotes an alien setting that poses the Night soil men with the problem of identity and supports reasons why throughout the play there is a persistent demand for identity. To press home their point they all sing in together:

*Give us professional identity card, sah*

*Your thirty million budget*

*sah, na salary for category*

*noughtanglo-night soil men*

*For five billion centuries*

*So give us professional*

*Identity card, sah. (BNN: 23)*

The playwright being a committed writer to the growing problem of the minority in Cameroon is particularly interested in reclaiming his identity and that of his people by rejecting any hybrid identity that could play midway. His outright stand on this is echoed through his key note address (1993) earlier quoted on “Literature in the season of the Diaspora: Notes to the Anglophone Cameroonian writer” thus:

*No one can speak for us. Only those who daily live through the humiliations, the third class citizenship, in the abattoir of servitude, only we can fully comprehend and explore these contradictions in a society undergoing such rapid and confusing transition (Be song, 1993:17)*

Bate Be song's character delineation reveals identity and forms the basis through which conflict in the play is further developed. The play projects five polarized groups of characters who occupy different rungs of the society ladder. Accordingly, from the lowest rung of the ladder upward are the night soil men, the Cripple and the Blind man. The second group which is conspicuously absent in the play but through inference from the story, gives us glimpses that can well be understood, is the committed educated intellectual class of Anglophones. Tala (1993) commenting on this absence argues that, the fact that this class is not physically present is deliberate rather than accidental. Bate Be song, sees members of this group as constituting a nascent force which will eventually liberate the Anglophones but whose impact in the Cameroon society is yet to be felt. The omniscient narrator represent the third group while Otshama Lazare, who epitomizes treachery and outright betrayal of a people for personal material gratification represents the fourth group in the play. The highest rung and top notches of the city of Ednouay is represented by Aadingingin who incarnates as the almighty Mayor, represents the Francophone class who pose as the over lords, subjecting Anglophones to perpetual servitude through power and domination. The power he wields over the other classes in the character structure of the play can be deciphered through his conversational interaction with the lower rungs.

Aadingingin exhorts impoliteness in the way he relates with others and reveals the dark side of how he sees others as second class citizens. Impoliteness is a type of aggression rendered through dialogue. In drama, Jonathan Culpeper (1998) explains that, impoliteness is not thrown haphazardly for audience entertainment, it serves other purposes. Conflict in interaction appears either as a symptom, or as a cause of social disharmony and where there are tensions between characters we are more likely to see development in character and plot.

Listen to Aadingingin's voice in a conversation with Otshama

#### **Aadingingin**

*What does that matter? If they don't, I will beat the life out of every one of them, I'll swallow each one of them the way a snake slowly swallows a juicy Ewondo- frog with money looted from the nation's bottomless hole...(49)*

Alienation and identity problems in the play are further compounded by the fact that co-opted Anglophones like Otshama and the hypocritical narrator serve as middle men (mediator) between the Night soil men and the Francophone overlords. The narrator in the play is a typical pseudo-intellectual and pretentious lackey who is full of deception, always giving the impression of committed educated elite who is on the side of the downtrodden to salvage his society.

He is quite armed with the ideological consciousness that can successfully address the power imbalance in Ednouay but rather proves to all that he is a toothless bulldog who, like a paid spy, betrays the conscience of his people. He out rightly portrays himself as such through his dialogue in the play. Listen to him.

#### **Narrator**

*Out of your own mouth will i judge you... Woe unto them that*

*are at ease in Ednouay. Multitude in the valley of Darkness*

*You continue to walk in perpetual darkness. You will never*

*See the great light. Where are the fruit of evidence of your salvation? (BNN: 5)*

When the night soil men take him to task on the issue of their freedom, he rather turns his tactics to divert attention from him to Otshama Lazare thus:

**Narrator**

*Don't complain to me. Complain to chef Gaston. Complain to Chef Lazare Gaston Otshama. Make your complaints through proper channels.* (BNN: 3)

The narrator in the play incarnates as one of those mindless Anglophone intellectuals who fail to be at the service of their people and are rather concerned with attempt at protecting their jobs and not actually caring about what goes on with the bulk of other Anglophones who are under the sledge hammer of Francophone dominance.

Like the proverbial “paying the piper to sing a song”, the Anglophone intellectual core alongside elites epitomized in the play by the narrator and Gaston Otshama Lazare, only conveys to their Francophone masters what they believe they would want to hear. They are a failed group who cannot respond with a solution to the endemic Anglophone problem of liberating themselves from modern day colonialism by Franco phones in the union, symbolically captured as the struggle for freedom and identity cards in the play.

Anglophone elites and intellectuals have become spineless in their endless gloat for material aggrandizement; the Night soil men, Blind man and Cripple remain the underdogs (Anglophones) in Ednouay and are far more alienated than others because they suffer double alienation. Their complaints can hardly get to the ears of those the message is addressed to and so they remain in their cycle of need. Frustrated with empty promises showered on them by these intermediate classes, they decided to take their destinies into their hands to confront the power dominating class in Ednouay represented by the almighty Mayor of Ednouay, Aadingingin.

In a capitalist society, literature as part of the superstructure is always a reflection of the ideology of the capitalist, the determiners of the economic situation which is clearly manifest in the actions of the bourgeoisie of Ednouay, the capitalist class of Aadingingin and other assimilated Anglophone elite. Structural Marxist like Lucien Gold Mann, Louis Althusser, and Pierre Macherey, have long challenged this theoretical position and argue that, the constitutive elements of the superstructure have their own realities and each of these elements affects each other as much as it affects the base (Eagleton: 1976). In which case, a work of art, as an element of the superstructure, has a reality of its own and can influence or even change the other elements of the superstructure, as well as influence or even change the economic base.

The revolutionary aesthetics which are congruent with Marx’s ideology which locates man in the web of class struggle, especially between the bourgeoisie who own the means of production and the proletariat who have to sell their labor for survival predominate the actions of the characters in the play. It is obvious that the oppressed in *Beast of No Nation* like the Night soil men, Blind man and Cripple are well mobilized and determined because their behavior reflects true agents committed to the positive social transformation of their society. Unlike the buffoonery clearly exhibited by the Anglophone educated elite class in the play, the lower classes of the society of Ednouay are effective in the reconstruction agenda of their society. The negation of identity in every society constitutes a human barrier to social integration and poses as one of the systemic challenges which is confronting Africa’s post-colonial environments and therefore, the writer comes in like a redeeming voice to remedy his society. This is the gap that Be song, the playwright and critic has tried to address: Pose as the historian of his people who must rescue the past of his society without attempts to romanticize the past, analyze

his society pointing to the ills with all fidelity and help guide his society towards its future.

Otshama Lazare is a clear example of the crop of intellectual paper idols in contemporary Cameroon who have failed to innovate in their thinking and use their intellectual prowess for the benefit of their society. The play tells the story of these brands of intellectuals who have today become scavengers on the corridors of power, mockingly. By creating such a filthy environment in Ednouay awash with excrement which the intellectual should look at with scorn but rather than do so, they choose to use palliative words to douse off the problems of Ednouay, which Night soil men have ignited. It smacks of the highest level of complicity with Aadingingin, the rich thief who eats and grows fat on the sweat of the Night soil men and yet alienates, exploits and refuses to recognize them by refusing to give their identity being demanded. He is obsessed with the wealth at his disposal and so takes laws into his hands. Listen to him:

*You bastard! Bastard I say! What*

*Is it you want from me eh? Others*

*Have eaten and do not lose a second sleep?*

*Some have eaten and the sky to them*

*Is the limit. I will break all the*

*Night soil buckets over your skulls. So*

*You have come to me like the CamBank or*

*The BIAO hipopo hiding in a groundnut farm*

*Like the Takemnbeng Choir and her one thousand-praise*

*Singing lepers with their iron bells.*

*(...) By Efrukpabi, take-am (52)*

To paint a vivid picture of alienation which is the resultant consequence of loss of identity, Vijah and Sonika (2013) highlighted issues surrounding alienation by quoting a late fifteen century poet, Eustace Decamps, who had commented the lot of the alienated man in the following expressive lines.

*Why are the times so dark?*

*Men know each other not at all*

*But governments quite clearly change*

*From bad to worse?*

*Days dead and gone were more worthwhile*

*Now what holds sway? Deep gloom and boredom*

*Justice and law nowhere to be found*

*I have no more where i belong. (Vijah and Sonika: 23)*



An analysis of dialogue in *Beast of No Nation* needs to be sensitive to the social dynamics of interaction. By careful selection of details, in people’s speech patterns and observations, Be song consciously (or unconsciously?) indicates the unequal class structure and social relations central to the ideology of the ruling class in the play.

## CONCLUSIONS

This paper appropriated an analytical methodological excursion of alienation and identity as expressions of the pernicious minority problem in Cameroon with respect to the play *Beast of No Nation* by Bate Be song. Power, domination, exploitation, class struggle, struggle to overcome alienation and identity, historical flash backs, human determinism, interpretation of the fictional society of the play from the backdrop of Marxism and New Historicism are dimensions of the two concepts of alienation and identity explored in the play. In this work the web of relationship between history, alienation and the question of identity is well founded. The point is firmly established that, since writers are inspired by the adversity of their day, alienation and identity are the collective predicaments of the minority Anglophones in Cameroon which serves as an agenda for the writer. Thus it has been argued logically in this study that literature becomes functional to its social universe when text and context as an artistic unity are observed

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