



**NEGRO SPIRITUALS AND ANGLOPHONE CAMEROON
POETRY: IN SEARCH OF SOLACE**



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ABSTRACT

Negroes in the American society and Anglophone Cameroonians share similar challenges as presented in the Negro Spirituals and selected poems by Anglophone Cameroonian poets. These challenges range from marginalization, oppression, to the question of the systematic eradication of a people's culture and identity. From the theoretical discourse of Marxism and Individual Psychology, an

attempt has been made in this paper to show how both Negro and Anglophone Cameroonian poets use their art to alleviate the plight of their oppressed masses.

KEY WORDS

Solace, Negro Spirituals, Anglophone Cameroon Poetry, Oppression

RESEARCH PAPER

Introduction

Poetry is increasingly being used by writers across the world as an opening to release painful feelings. It is also used as a weapon to combat ills that have socio-political, religious, existentialist and economic ramifications in the lives of people in any given society. The case of the Negro spirituals and Anglophone Cameroon poetry portrays the anger, frustration, suppression and oppression of a people who have resorted to poetry not only as a weapon to combat injustice and oppression, but also as a tool to instill hope in the minds of the suffering masses.

Negro spirituals are poems or songs that were written and sung by Negroes (African Americans or black slaves) in the United States of America. *Slave Songs of the United States* was the first major collection of Negro spirituals and was published in 1867. The primary function of the spirituals was as communal songs sung in a religious gathering, performed in a call-response pattern reminiscent of West African traditional religions. The slaves brought African cultural traditions with them. Many of their activities, from work to worship, involved music and dance. However, their European and American masters banned many of their African-derived forms of worship involving drumming and dancing as they were considered to be idolatrous. The slaves were forced to perform their music in seclusion. Slaves were forbidden to speak their native languages, and were generally converted to Christianity.¹

The spirituals equally served as socio-political protest to express their bitter feelings due to the forced labour, marginalization and brutality they were subjected to by American slave masters. It should be noted that even after slave trade was abolished in America in the second half of the 19th century by President Abraham Lincoln, the living conditions of African Americans still remained deplorable.

The case of Anglophone Cameroon literature which has been described in the preface of Douglas Achingale's *Before I Die* as protest literature, is somehow similar to the negro spirituals in the sense that both group of poets in their poetry decry oppression, injustice, marginalization and their quest for solace or freedom from their oppressors. A major issue that inspires Anglophone Cameroonian poets is their history of marginalization.

Before 1918, Anglophone Cameroon was part of Kamerun which included French Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, part of Central Africa Republic and Gabon. When Germany lost this territory after the First World War, Kamerun was repartitioned and the present two English speaking regions of Cameroon was given to Britain and the other larger part was handed to France.

Britain joined the present Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon to Nigeria to ease administration and was referred to as British Southern Cameroons. The British Southern Cameroons faced enormous marginalization, injustice and maltreatment from the Nigerians notably the Ibos² and thus decided in 1957 to first move out from the Enugu House of Parliament in protest. They expressed their desire to have a country of their own but were disappointed when they were not given that opportunity. They were instead obliged to either have their independence by joining French Cameroon or the Federal Republic of Nigeria in a United Nations organised plebiscite in 1961. They however voted to join French speaking Cameroon who already had their independence in 1960 and were still under so much influence from France their colonial master. After the plebiscite in 1961, a new bilingual, bi-cultural and bi-jurial country was formed known as the Federal Republic of Cameroon.³

Just a decade after the plebiscite, the terms of the union were violated and the British Southern Cameroons who constitute just twenty percent of the entire country started feeling marginalized. This spirit of discontent amongst Cameroonians from the English speaking regions has grown over the years and most recently, there has been a greater quest for them to have their independence or return to the 1961 agreement. As of 2019, the crisis has escalated to a bloody armed conflict between Anglophone separatist fighters and the military of the Republic of Cameroon. While the separatists are fighting for the independence of their country, the government of Cameroon is fighting for the unity of the country. It is therefore at the backdrop of this historical reality that Anglophone Cameroon poetry (literature) is informed.

Taking into consideration the fact that both Anglophone Cameroonian and African American poets selected for this study live or experience marginalization and oppression in their respective communities, this paper therefore seeks to show how they use poetry to decry oppression and how they seek to give hope or consolation to their suffering masses.

¹ African American Spirituals. <https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200197495>.

² These are people from the Ibo tribe which is one of the biggest tribes in the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

³ Kiykishi, Lawrence. *The Reunification of the Cameroons*. PP 10-11

In this paper we shall examine the following poems (songs) by African Americans which are referred to as spirituals: “Free at last”, “His eye is on the sparrow”, “Steal away to Jesus”, “We shall overcome”, “Nobody knows the trouble I’ve had”, “Sometimes I feel like a motherless child”, “Ain’t gonna let nobody turn me „roun“, “I’ve been buked and I’ve been scorned”, “Kumba Yah” (come by here), “Oh freedom.” The following poems by Anglophone Cameroon poets will also be examined in this study: “The beauty of exile” by Bate Besong, “Gem of the Highlands” by Bernard Fonlon, “Twin streams” by Mathew Takwi, “Freedom we wrote” by Christmas Atem Ebini, “Bamenda Chop-fire” by Emmanuel Doh, “Betrayed” by Joyce Ashutangtang, and “I want to go” by Douglas Achingale.

Definition of terms

The Merriam – Webster Dictionary defines the word solace as “comfort in grief: alleviation of grief or anxiety.” It further defines the word as “a source of relief.” *The Free online Dictionary* also defines the word solace as “comfort or consolation in a time of great distress or sadness.” The word „solace“ was borrowed into English in the 14th century (via Anglo-French) from Latin *solacium*, which in turn derives from the Latin verb *solari*, meaning to console.

The appellation “Anglophone Cameroon Poetry” needs to be redefined and situated in the context in which it will be used in this study. Anglophone Cameroon refers to the English speaking regions of the Republic of Cameroon. These regions constituted the entity referred to from 1919 – 1961 as the British Southern Cameroons. She gained her independence on October 1, 1960 and on February 11, 1961 voted in a United Nations organized plebiscite to either join the French speaking regions of Cameroon referred to as the Republic of Cameroon or the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The agreement was to form a federation of two states with equal status. This culminated to the creation of the Federal Republic of Cameroon after the British Southern Cameroons overwhelmingly voted to join French Cameroon. Anglophone Cameroon Poetry is therefore the works of poets who hail from the two English speaking regions of present day Republic of Cameroon. It should be noted that they are peculiar in their writing due to their roots. In the context of Anglophone Cameroon literature as far as this paper is concerned, poets from the French speaking regions of Cameroon are not included even those of them who write in English. This is because they do not face the same socio – political realities although they all share the same territorial space.

Theoretical framework

The poems selected for this study are spiced with a recurrent sociological, religious, political and historical undertone. The poets are not merely involved in speaking for their people, but are also committed if not immersed in the cause of liberating their people from the shackles of oppression. Their poetry is informed by political and religious activism that is reminiscent of a battered people who need freedom at all cost. It is because of this motivation that one finds it appropriate to use the Marxist and Individual Psychologist theories for this study.

Karl Marx perceived human history to have consisted of a series of struggles between classes-- between the oppressed and the oppressing. He thought that "historical materialism" was the ultimate driving force, a notion involving the distribution of resources, gain, production, and such matters. In bourgeois capitalism, the privileged bourgeoisie rely on the proletariat--the labor force responsible for survival. Marx theorized that when profits are not reinvested in the workers but in creating more factories, the workers will grow poorer and poorer until no short-term patching is possible or successful. At a crisis point, revolt will lead to a restructuring of the system (Abrams, 147).

According to Marxists, literature reflects those social institutions out of which it emerges and is itself a social institution with a particular ideological function. Marxists view literature "not as works created in accordance with timeless artistic criteria, but as 'products' of the economic and ideological determinants specific to that era" (Abrams 149).

The Marxist school follows a process of thinking called the material dialectic. This belief system maintains that "...what drives historical change are the material realities of the economic base of society, rather than the ideological superstructure of politics, law, philosophy, religion, and art that is built upon that economic base" (Richter 1088).

African American literature in general and African American poetry can be aptly described as a product of troubled minds inspired by the maltreatment of man by fellow man. It is not just a question of class which is milder but a combination of race, gender and class that Negroes were subjected to. The fate of Anglophones in Cameroon is what has provoked the relentless overflow of bitter and agonizing works of art geared towards redressing the dismal conditions they have been living in for decades. Using the Marxist lens to interrogate and analyse the poems selected will better portray if not decode the meaning contained in the verses artfully crafted by Anglophone Cameroonian poets.

The tenets of Individual Psychology are also applied in this paper. Alfred Adler (1870 – 1937) is known as the founder of Individual Psychology). According to Alfred Adler, the term Individual Psychology expresses his belief in the uniqueness and indivisibility of every human personality. As opposed to Freud, he insists that the conscious and unconscious always work together, and personality is never torn by conflicting wishes and goals that set one part against another part. It by no means precludes the social element. He argues that the individual becomes an individual only in a social context.

Adler maintains that what is important is community feeling that gives the individual a sense of kinship with humanity which enables our physically weak bodies to survive through cooperation. In defence of his stance in relation to social interest as opposed to Freud and Jung, he further reiterated that:

It is social interest, rather than a superego or collective unconscious that establishes the guidelines for proper personality development. The well-adjusted person learns at an early age to develop this inherent potential, and to assist the common good of present and future generations. Maladjustment is defined not as the failure to sublimate or individuate, as Freud or Jung would argue, but as the denial of one's social interest. A major task of psychology, therefore, is to understand and alleviate deficiencies in cooperation. "Society has no place for deserters." (An Introduction to Personality Theories 92)

One opines that Adler's argument is more convincing and most suitable for this study that seeks to rebuild broken relationships between races and groups of people who are torn apart as a result of ethnic, economic and socio-political chaos.

Another aspect of Adler's individual psychology has to do with the feelings of inferiority complex and the strivings for superiority complex. Adler insists that healthy striving for superiority complex is of absolute necessity. Social interest must be taken into consideration so as to ensure the welfare of others. On the contrary, if the striving for superiority complex is not healthy, that is, if the strive is guided by a selfish quest for dominance and personal glory, it is bound to produce undesirable effects in the society. Slave trade, racism and marginalization can be considered as manifestations of unhealthy striving for superiority. These vices are portrayed by African American and Anglophone Cameroonian poets in their poetry. This tenet of individual psychology will be helpful in the analysis of some of the poems selected for this paper.

Adler also grapples with the subject of education and religion in his personality theory. He posits that education and religion significantly influence the rate of social interest in the society. As far as his focus on religion is concerned, one senses that unlike Freud, he encourages religion because it promotes the spirit of social interest. He supports the church's doctrine of "loving your neighbour as yourself" and preferring giving than receiving as desirable expressions of social interest. Although Adler does not see religion as an innate need as it is the case with Jung who insists that the individual absolutely needs religion in order to be socially fit, he however encourages some religious teachings which encourage social interest. Negro spirituals have a profound religious undertone. The aspect of religion as an individual psychologist tenet will be analysed in this study to portray how the search for solace is enhanced by religion.

The Plight of the Oppressed

The narrative of the Negroes has remained a bitter pill to swallow in the lives of African Americans in particular and Africans in general. The pain, torture, gross marginalization and dehumanization of slave trade remains a scar that will forever remind the world of the acts of barbarism and greed inflicted on humans by fellow human beings. The *Holy Bible* describes human beings as super creatures that are only lesser than God and angels but supreme over all creation. However, the barbarism and disorder amongst humans put to question their status as the supposedly choicest of God's creation. It is worth noting that the United States of America that prides herself as the number one nation of the world was built on the blood, tears and sweat of African slaves who were brutally shipped from Africa against their will to labour in plantations in Europe and America. This can be considered as one of the greatest crimes against humanity that in all fairness and objectivity should be interrogated, and the culprits sanctioned accordingly.

To begin with, in the spiritual entitled "Nobody knows de trouble I've had", the speaker in the poem laments because he has so many problems which seem unknown to many. In his lamentation and bondage, he writes:

Nobody knows de trouble I've had

Nobody knows but Jesus

Nobody know de trouble I've had Glory, hallelu ! ... (1-4)

Sometimes I'm up, sometimes I'm down

O yes, Lord

Sometimes I'm almost o de groun"

O yes, Lord... (13-16)

What make ole Satan hate me so O yes, Lord

Because he got me once and he let me go yes, Lord (17-20)

The lamentation of the speaker is representative of the general cry and agony of the Negroes who are subjected to forced labour and dehumanizing living conditions in the supposed “land of the free.”⁴ According to Marxists, literature reflects those social institutions out of which it emerges and is itself a social institution with a particular ideological function. Marxists view literature not as works created in accordance with timeless artistic criteria, but as 'products' of the economic and ideological determinants specific to that era" (Abrams 149). In this light, the broken English used by the poet-speaker is reflective of their appalling level of illiteracy and the fact that the slaves were forbidden to speak their African languages. Their languages were considered as primitive and communicating amongst themselves may give them room to conspire against their oppressive masters.

Slave trade disconnected Africans from their roots. This traumatic experience greatly destabilized them psychologically and culturally. The situation becomes critical when one's language is silenced. What this insinuates is that the oppressed can no longer report or talk about their plight to anyone because their vehicle of communication (language) has been destroyed. Considering the fact that sharing a problem with someone is a source of relief, the speaker in the above poem slowly dies in silence because he is not tolerated to speak in his native language. He has no other choice but to speak in broken English. This is evident in the following lines:

Nobody know de trouble I've had... Sometimes I'm almost o de groun"... What make ole Satan hate me so (1,13,17)

Due to the fact that he cannot express himself well in the language he masters well, nobody can know the trouble he has had and will still have as the title of the poem denotes. In another Negro Spiritual titled “Sometimes I feel like a motherless child”, the feeling of abandonment and frustration is evoked. Parental care especially motherly care is of utmost importance in the upbringing of children. In the absence of motherly care, the child is exposed to the risk of juvenile delinquency, hunger and diseases. In the last stanza of the poem, the speaker laments thus: “Sometimes I feel like a motherless child- A long way[s] from home.” The feeling of abandonment and misery is acute when the speaker does not only feel motherless, but also finds himself thousands of miles away from home. Such lamentation brings to mind the perilous journey of the shipping of blacks from Africa to America to work as slaves. The fact that such oppressive treatment of Africans went on for centuries before slave trade was reluctantly abolished in the United States of America, is telling of the callousness of humans against fellow human beings.

⁴ The United States of America is referred to as the land of the free in “The Star SpangledBanner” (American National Anthem)

Adler in his individual psychology maintains that, it is social interest rather than a superego or collective unconscious that establishes the guidelines for proper personality development. The well-adjusted person learns at an early age to develop this inherent potential, and to assist the common good of present and future generations. If the speaker in the above poem feels like a motherless child and feels like going “way up in de heaby land”, it is because he was not well-adjusted especially during childhood due to inadequate parental guidance. He lacks the vital aspect of social interest that can enable him to succeed. Due to oppression and the many difficulties in life, he rather adopts an escapist attitude by longing to quickly go to heaven. In the poem “Ain’t gonna let nobody turn me roun,” the spirit of resistance is evident as sensed in the tone of the speaker. In defiance, the speaker is not willing to allow anyone manipulate him in any way. He underlines thus:

Ain’t gonna let nobody turn me roun Turn me roun

Ain’t gonna let nobody turn me roun I’m gonna wait until my change comes

Don’t let nobody turn you roun “Turn you roun”

Don’t let nobody turn you roun

Wait until your change comes (1-8)

The tone of the speaker in the above poem is suggestive of someone who is angry as a result of verbal or physical pressure exerted on him. It is evident that he is not ready to succumb to the aspirations of the oppressor. This is why he is ready to “hold out until change comes”. In the second stanza of the poem, he shifts from expressing his personal decision to resist to urging others to do same. From his assertion in the first stanza: “Ain’t gonna let nobody turn me roun to “Don’t let nobody turn you roun in the second stanza, the change of pronoun from “me” to “you” is symbolic. It is no longer his personal desire to resist but is telling others to join him in the resistance.

Marx theorized that when profits are not reinvested in the workers but in creating more factories, the workers will grow poorer and poorer until no short-term patching is possible or successful. At a crisis point, revolt will lead to a restructuring of the system. This is the kind of situation that the speaker in the poem is faced with. Due to so much labour in the plantations by the black slaves under the brutal supervision of white slave masters, the suffering masses consider the option of a revolution in order to change the status quo. The above poem that was always sung by the slaves while working or in their assemblies instilled in them team spirit and the zeal to fight for their freedom. It is obvious that it is the combination of resistance from the slaves themselves, advocacy by religious organizations and

human rights activists that led to the abolition of slave trade in Europe and America. More still, the language of protest, resentment and resistance continues to resonate in the song titled “I’ve been buked an“ I’ve been scorned.” There seems to be no solace for the song writer whose slave status makes him an object of scorn. In consternation and fury, he berates:

I’ve been buked an “I’ve been scorned, children I’ve been buked an “I’ve been scornedI’ve been talked about, shos you’re born

Dere is trouble all over dis world

Children, dere is trouble all over dis worldliness (1-5)

In this poem, one has the feeling that the wound of oppression is deeper and in frustration the speaker decides to tell his children the many troubles he has faced since they were born. Parents have the tendency to avoid talking to their children about their problems because this may greatly traumatise them. By deciding to tell his children his problems, it shows the depth of his pain as a result of oppression. The children will definitely grow up with an inferiority complex that may reduce their chances of survival in a world of slavery and racism. They will obviously grow up with the mindset that the world is full of trouble. The repeated lines in the poem above (Dere is trouble all over dis world - Children, dere is trouble all over dis world) only goes a long way to reinforce the theme of oppression in the spirituals. The corrupted form of the language used in the poem is not only suggestive of under scholarisation amongst the blacks, but also exposes the corrupt minds of slave masters who callously exploit fellow human beings to make profits for themselves.

“Kum ba yah” is the title of another spiritual, which means „come by here.“ It can be interpreted as an alarm that is blown to notify the world about the torture or maltreatment of blacks in the plantations in America. In the second verse of the song, the song writer writes: “Someone’s crying, Lord – Kum ba yah”. This sounds more like a desperate signal or an urgent alert. The alarm seems to be the last attempt by the speaker for rescue. Such a cry prepares the ground for any kind of action (peacefully or violently), that may be initiated by the oppressed to free themselves from bondage. According to the Marxists philosophy, it is at such a critical moment that the proletariats have no other choice than to massively rise against the bourgeoisies so as to equitably share or benefit from their labour.

It should be noted that it was only when there was an outcry by the Negroes and human rights organizations across the world that slave trade was abolished. In America, the process of abolition was bloody because it had to take a civil war that lasted for close to a decade, before Abraham Lincoln forcefully abolished slave trade in the United States of America. The

decision to abolish Slave Trade in America severely threatened the unity of the United States of America. This was due to the fact that, the Southern States were not willing to stop this inhumane trade in men because they made much money from it; and abolishing it entailed taking away their source of income. These southern states preferred to maintain Slave Trade and secede from the US rather than to abolish it and remain in the union. The civil war that ensued between the north and south was therefore intended to preserve the union. The unionists finally won the war after untold loss of lives on both sides. It was also as a result of the abolition of Slave Trade in the United States of America that Abraham Lincoln was killed by an angry slave dealer just weeks after the end of the war.

Similarly, Anglophone Cameroon poetry gives us the opportunity to savour the beauty of Cameroon's cultural heritage on one hand, and on the other hand, informs the world about the plight of Anglophones in the Republic of Cameroon. Anglophones constitute just a minority in Cameroon and thus face so many challenges ranging from marginalization, neo-colonialism, corruption, unemployment and torture. Since the independence and reunification of the two Cameroons (that is the Southern Cameroons and La Republique du Cameroon) in 1961, the desired unity and peaceful cohabitation of these two entities have not been without problems. They are these differences that have provoked Anglophone Cameroon poets to use poetry as a tool or means to make their plight known.

Bate Besong (1954 – 2007) is one of the finest Cameroonian poets and playwrights whose critique of the Cameroonian government over the years always put him in serious problems with the administration. Before his brutal death in a ghastly car crash in 2007, his artistic works exposed the oppression of the Cameroonians in general, and those of the English speaking regions in particular. In his poem "The beauty of exile", the speaker in the poem evokes the memory of heroes who stood against corruption, dictatorship and marginalization but were brutally suppressed. The mention of "Tchollire" in the second stanza of the poem brings to mind the unlawful or unjustified imprisonment of freedom fighters and political prisoners in Cameroon by the authorities. As described in the second stanza: "Their limbs became too frozen – For them to rise to their feet, to walk." Such a vivid description paints a sad looking picture of the torture of prisoners in underground cells like those in Tchollire⁵. Tchollire is symbolic of torture, despair and death.

⁵ Tchollire is a locality in the North Region of Cameroon where an underground prison is built.

It is notorious as a prison where harden criminals and political prisoners are imprisoned under deplorable conditions. In the 4th stanza, the poet-speaker desperately asks a rhetorical question due to his lack of means to change the conditions of his suffering people. He puts it thus: “Who will bridge the firepower – Of our anger across the Mungo⁶?” This statement is very symbolic because it exposes the deep feeling of betrayal and marginalization of the Anglophones in Cameroon. The “firepower” mentioned in this poem coupled with “our anger across the Mungo” speak volumes about the plight of Anglophones in Cameroon. The Mungo bridge is very symbolic in the history of Cameroon. Crossing the Mungo to live and be administered from east of the Mungo (French Cameroon) has been a bed of thorns for those living west of the Mungo (Anglophone Cameroon). The “firepower” mentioned in the poem is suggestive of the oppressive, manipulative and corrupt ways in which the people of Cameroon have been governed over the years. The poet-speaker berates at such maltreatment of a people who deserves much better than what has been offered to them. In the 5th stanza of the poem, another rhetorical question is posed thus:

*Who will convert the broodings
Of these people over the past
Into bouquets to a new dawn ?(26-28)*

The speaker is conscious and feels the pain of those living west of the Mungo and longs for a day when their challenges will be overcome. He impatiently waits a new dawn when equality, justice and peace will be the order of the day. The poem is concluded on a paradoxical note. He parodies the shabbiness and ugliness of the exiles in the following lines: “It is the beauty of your exile that has shown how ugly we have become.” Living in exile has never been a good choice for anyone whose life is not at risk. There can really be no beauty in exile if it rather renders one ugly as the speaker insinuates. The fact that some Cameroonians still consider themselves to be in exile in their country is a pointer to the abandonment, poverty, victimization and the exclusive policies implemented by those who ought to govern in justice and love. As seen in the above poem, the “anger of those passing across the Mungo” is similar to that of the Negroes portrayed in the Negro Spirituals. It is almost the same story of marginalization, impunity and brutality. From a Marxist standpoint, such a volatile situation sets the premise for a revolution.

In Bernard Fonlon’s “Gem of the Highlands,” the picture of the beautiful landscape of Cameroon is painted. Fonlon celebrates the richness of the biodiversity of his “homeland” in the following lines:

Tis the scene of my homeland

So charming in May:

O wild was thy beauty... (1-3)

How thrilling this blending!

Of mountain and glen. (7-8)

In such an environment, one would expect everyone to live in harmony so as to savour the fruits of this abundantly rich society. It is rather unfortunate that something happens that turns the entire story tragic. The speaker declares in lamentation in these words: “A new hustings liar puts peace on the run.” The “new hustings liar” is indicative of the new dismal dispensation contrary to the old which sustained peace and unity. These new liars bring to mind the political decisions taken by unscrupulous politicians to the detriment of the masses. Fonlon wrote this poem at the time in Cameroon history when the expected unity and cohesion between west and east Cameroon started fading away. Instead of building a healthy, inclusive and peaceful society, “peace was instead put on the run.” (line 16)

The poet concludes on a hopeful note despite the absence of genuine peace or an environment that can guarantee lasting peace. He sounds prayerful and hopeful about the future of Cameroon as seen in the following lines:

May the ties that bound fondly

Bind us once again;

Let the ashes of discord

Be buried in urn... (19-22)

When this poem was written, the divide between the peoples of Cameroon was not as wide as it is the case today. Today, the division and disgruntlement amongst Cameroonians have degenerated to an armed conflict that seriously threatens even the territorial integrity of the country. However, like the prayer of the speaker in the poem who hopes for a better future, one is of the opinion that such a bright future can be guaranteed only when there is justice, good fate and love amongst Cameroonians.

Joyce Ashuntantang in her poem “Betrayed” recounts in a pathetic tone her betrayal by someone she mistook for a lover. She compares the painful union between West and East Cameroon to the betrayal of an innocent lady by an unscrupulous and cunning lover. The poem opens with the speaker recounting what prompted her in the first place to fall for this supposedly lover:

⁶ Mungo is the river separating the Former Southern Cameroons and La Republique du Cameroon. Today it separates the English speaking regions from the French speaking regions of Cameroon.

I fell headlong for you

Your saintly face goaded me to sing

Your seminary days betrayed me... (1-3)

But you betrayed me too soon

What happened to the ring binding us?

The “united” in our names?.. (6-8)

Everything of mine became yours

The nectar from my tea leaves The pods of my cocoa The coffee from my farms... (14-16)

Now decisions excite me

And my future bugs me Can you meet me at the

M^x bridge? (27-29)

From the above excerpt in the poem “Betrayed”, one senses that the extent and gravity of the betrayal is great and the wound inflicted in the mind of the betrayed and exploited lover is deep. The word “united” in the second stanza above is likened to a wedding ring that symbolizes marriage between a couple. Due to the fact that the ring has been thrown away or abandoned, there seems to be no legal or symbolic item that binds the marriage. The analogy of the ring in this poem directly points to the change of name from the United Republic of Cameroon to simply the Republic of Cameroon. This change has so many implications to the detriment of the former Southern Cameroons because the “united” in the former appellation shows that two states came together to form one while the omission of “united” implies the replacement or annulation of the British Southern Cameroons by the Republic of Cameroon which was actually the name referred to the French speaking part of Cameroon before the reunification of both Cameroons in 1961.

In the third stanza, the speaker laments over this manipulation and reveals that after this change of name, “everything of mine became yours”. The tea leaves, cocoa and coffee farms are symbolic of the economic takeover of the lady (west Cameroon) by her supposedly lover (east Cameroon). In the last stanza of the poem, the speaker in disillusionment declares: “...my future bugs me – Can you meet me at the M^x bridge?” Meeting at the M^x bridge is very symbolic of the need for dialogue and negotiation by both parties that constitute present day Republic of Cameroon. The M^x bridge is the insinuated appellation of the Mungo bridge which is the boundary that separates the English from the French speaking zones of Cameroon. Telling the lover who has betrayed her to meet her at the boundary or borders is suggestive of the fact that, they must go back to the drawing board and decide whether to resolve their differences or sue for a divorce. This is indeed the fate of the English speaking regions of Cameroon who are today fighting to regain their autonomy after decades of marginalization and assimilation.

Like Ashutantang, Matthew Takwi's "Twin Streams" is yet another poem that points to the spirit of resentment amongst Cameroonians leaving west of the river Mungo. In a melancholic and agonizing tone, the poet - speaker makes this observation in the last stanza of the poem:

*See twin sons of Africa's bilingual piece
With twin tongues of Voltaire and Shakespeare,
With Voltaire's half-son trampling on brother always
For him to know the stream of wrath and pain only... (13-16)*

The element of suppression is glaring in the above excerpt. Voltaire's half son who is suggestive of French Cameroon is said to be trampling on the "brother" who is inevitably Anglophone Cameroon. The fact that this deprived "brother" is made "to know the stream of wrath and pain only", is enough reason for him to resist such callous tendencies unjustifiably imposed on him.

More still, the speaker in Douglas Achingale's poem "I Want to Go", does not only decry corruption and marginalization, but he makes it abundantly clear that he is fed-up with the system and wants to go away. He sounds wounded and drastic in the measures he has taken. He underlines thus:

*I am wrapped in awful tedium high time I left this promise land
now sprinkled with giant thorns, strewn with banana peelings... (5-8)
To insist to remain here
is eloquent pointer to one truth:
that your doleful preference
is to collapse with the land (21-24)*

The appellation, "promise land" in the excerpt above refers to the Republic of Cameroon. It is also referred as such in the national anthem of Cameroon. The fact that this "promised land" is "now sprinkled with giant thorns and strewn with banana peelings" shows the great extent to which the land has fallen from glory to filth. The "giant thorns and banana peelings" mentioned above are symbolic of the vices that have resulted to the collapse of a once promising state. These vices include: corruption, bribery, electoral fraud, marginalization, tribalism, dictatorship, impunity, embezzlement and inertia. According to the speaker, the collapse of the land is imminent, and the speaker is determined to flee so as not "to collapse with the land." From the above analysis about the plight of the oppressed masses reflected in the Negro Spirituals and Anglophone Cameroon poetry, there is need for the masses to resist oppression and strive for justice, solace and happiness. The search for solace may be achieved by using different means, but the central concern is to overcome their challenges or find something that gives them hope for a better tomorrow.

This takes us to the next part of this paper that focuses on how the oppressed masses depicted in the Negro Spirituals and Anglophone Cameroon poetry chart a way forward towards their liberation. While some pursue an escapist route through religion, some seek a revolutionary approach to change the status quo.

In Search of Solace

In the Negro Spiritual entitled “Free at last” by J.W. Work, the speaker declares in ecstasy his freedom from oppression and despondency. In the opening line of the poem, the repetitive use of the phrase “free at last” is reminiscent of the ecstatic shout of a prisoner who regains his/her freedom. The speaker thanks God because he attributes his freedom to the special grace of God. In the second stanza of the poem, one is made to wonder why someone rejoices when his dying hour approaches. It is disturbing to find someone rejoicing to face his death. It gives one the feeling that his life has been a painful and catastrophic one. This explains why death will bring him the solace or respite he badly needs. The speaker in the poem rejoices in the following words:

Way down yonder in the graveyard walk I thank God I'm free at

last Me and my Jesus going to meet and talk

I thank God I'm free at last... (5-8)

Some of these mornings, bright and fair I thank God I'm free at

last Goin' meet King Jesus in the air

I thank God I'm free at last. (13-16)

It is worth noting that, the only thing that gives the speaker joy is the fact that he is going to meet Jesus. He does not see the grave as a dreadful end where many people don't like to think about it. This is what religion does to afflicted people. Because Christianity teaches about salvation for those who believe in Christ Jesus, people burdened with so many problems see such teachings as a solace. It gives them hope and happiness. Marx refers to religion as an opium of the poor while Adler in his individual psychology posits that religion significantly influences the rate of so interest in the society. This opinion of Adler actually reflects the role that religion played in the lives of Negroes who experienced dehumanizing treatment from the white slave masters. Due to the fact that they were helpless in the hands of their all-powerful and armed masters, their only place of refuge was the church whose head (Jesus Christ) promises abundant life or salvation to the oppressed who believe in Him.

“Steal away to Jesus” is the title of another spiritual by Wallace Willis whose content portrays religion as a source of solace to the oppressed. “Stealing away to Jesus” can be seen as an escapist channel to flee from the throes of life especially the dehumanizing and traumatizing experience of one who has been enslaved and held captive by a fellow human being who feels

more superior because of the colour of his/ her skin. The lyrics of the first and second stanza actually capture the singer's source of hope and glee thus:

Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus Steal away, steal away home

I ain't got long to stay here

My Lord, He calls me

He calls me by the thunder

The trumpet sounds within-a my soul I ain't got long to stay here (1-7)

The repetitive use of the phrase "steal away" is suggestive of the strong desire of the poet to surreptitiously escape from pain or danger. Stealing away to "Jesus" and stealing away "home" echoes the poet's point of final rest. Jesus is his anchor if not a safe harbor when the storms of life have bartered him. The mention of the place "home" gives one the impression that this world to the singer is a strange land and in no way can he be comfortable in it. He can only find solace at his celestial home in the presence of Jesus Christ his ultimate source of salvation.

In the second stanza, the call or the appeal for him to steal away to Jesus sounds more urgent and stronger. The imagery of thunder and trumpet reinforces this call and further makes the singer more eager to quit this life. He is confident about his call to glory and therefore opines that his soul can only find lasting peace at "home" where he will dwell with his Lord and savior Jesus Christ throughout eternity.

The shift in seeking or longing for solace from the celestial to the terrestrial realm is glaring in this famous Negro Spiritual entitled "We shall overcome" By Pete Seeger, Zilphia Horton, Guy Carawan and Frank Hamilton. This hymn which was considered as an anthem by Negroes greatly inspired and injected so much hope in them despite their precarious living conditions in their land of exile (USA). In this poem, the speaker is not talking about finding solace in heaven; rather, he is hoping for a better life of equality, peace and prosperity in the land of a people who have been ruthless and unfair to him and his race. The following excerpt from this hymn accurately captures the aspirations of the Negroes living in bondage in the United States of America:

We shall overcome, we shall overcome

We shall overcome some day

Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe

We shall overcome some day

The Lord will see us through, the Lord will see us through

The Lord will see us through some day

Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe

The Lord will see us some day

We're on to victory, we're on to victory

We're on to victory some day

Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe

We're on to victory some day...(9-12)

The song writer of the above piece is very conscious and has himself lived the torture, forced labor and racism in the new world. Despite all these, he remains optimistic and militant in his spirit to see his people overcome their numerous challenges. The song opens on a hopeful note: "We shall overcome, we shall overcome." The opening line of the second stanza reads: "The Lord will see us through, the Lord will see us through." The third stanza opens thus: "We're onto victory, we're on to victory." Such a song does not only remind the Negroes of the challenge that lies ahead of them, but it also galvanizes them to remain focused and hopeful to the end. Freedom has never been given to any people across the world on a platter of gold. In most cases, it is fought for with "blood and iron."

Political freedom, economic stability, and the respect of fundamental human rights are factors that will give the negroes the solace they are in search of. Their rights have been grossly, if not callously violated. Singing the song "We shall overcome" is telling of their firm resolve to overcome every challenge that stands on their way of liberation. The speaker reiterates in the other four stanzas that "We'll work hand in hand... We are not afraid... The truth shall make us free... We shall live in peace..." Such declarations only go a long way to buttress the fact that they are determined to take their destinies into their hands believing God to be free "someday." In bourgeois capitalism, the privileged bourgeoisie rely on the proletariat--the labor force responsible for survival. Marx theorized that when profits are not reinvested in the workers but in creating more factories, the workers will grow poorer and poorer until no short-term patching is possible or successful. At a crisis point, revolt will lead to a restructuring of the system. Political Marxists also posit that when the masses are not actively involved in the decision making process, there is bound to be conflict in the long run. This is because the policy of exclusion reflected in the spirituals is a good example of oppressed masses that are left with no other choice than to fight back for their rights to be respected. The fight for freedom by Negroes over the years has witnessed untold successes as can be perceived in the many prominent positions that blacks occupy in several governments in the United States of America and the overwhelming influence they have in international politics and trade. Such success achieved is closer the solace the Negroes aspired for, although, so much still needs to be done in order to fully achieve such a lofty dream.

The quest for solace is equally echoed in the poetry of Anglophone Cameroonian poets. Although Anglophone Cameroonians as portrayed in the poems under study have been victims of marginalization, corruption and brutality, they seek for respite not just in fighting for their

freedom but also in counting on God for help.

Ashuntantang's poem "Betrayed" brings to the limelight the plight of a manipulated or betrayed people who are left with no option but to resist. In the last stanza of that poem, the speaker reiterates her resolve to have the long standing problem of exploitation resolved once and for all. The speaker concludes in these words:

Now, decisions excite me

And my future bugs me

Can we meet at the M^x bridge? (27-29)

The speaker's future is bleak because all what was agreed amicably have been violated by the other party involved in the initial agreement. The speaker sees herself as cheated or betrayed spouse and can only find solace in a meeting "at the M^x Bridge." The Mx Bridge is the abridged reference to the Mungo Bridge which is the river that separates West from East Cameroon. The mention of this bridge is very symbolic as far as the reunification of both Cameroons is concerned. Suggesting a meeting at the Mungo Bridge is indicative of the need to revisit the initial agreement that was arrived at by the actors involved in drafting the constitution of the Federal Republic of Cameroon. It is worth mentioning that some of the cardinal clauses of that constitution have been violated and the speaker in the poem who is symbolic of West Cameroon feels marginalized, deceived, if not betrayed as the title of the poems denotes.

Her envisaged meeting at the M^x Bridge will give her the opportunity to present her grievances so that a better settlement can be negotiated. She believes in a political settlement of the problem because it was through a political decision that both parties came together. It is however unfortunate that the poet-speaker's voice or advice has not been heeded to. A violent armed conflict is on-going between Ambazonian⁷ separatist fighters against the Cameroonian army instead of a genuine dialogue that ought to have been organized to resolve what is known today as the Anglophone or the Southern Cameroon problem. This betrayed speaker can only find solace at the M^x Bridge where she believes the root causes of her predicament would be addressed.

Emmanuel Fru Doh in his poem "Bamenda Chop fire" and Christmas Atem Ebini in his poem "Freedom we wrote" paint yet another gloomy picture of the plight of Anglophone Cameroonians. They are presented as people who are always struggling for freedom but never really getting what they really want. Doh recounts the adversity of the people of Bamenda who go out to revolt against the high rate of injustice they face in Cameroon. Bamenda is the chief town of the North west region of Cameroon which is famous in sparking revolutions in Cameroon. Bamenda in this sense refers to all the people who hail from the North West region. The event portrayed in the above poem is the political upheavals in Cameroon in the early 1990s as a result of the march or protest against a one party system, which according to the

speaker rather stifles freedom. The brutal crackdown by the military on the protesters is again another tragic action that is always taken by government to quell down peaceful protests. Despite all odds, the speaker still sounds optimistic at the end of the poem. He finds solace in his quest for justice for his people. He believes that at the appointed time, justice shall take its course.

He philosophizes thus:

...Time is the ultimate judge

And the will of the suffering masses

The path of justice

Bamenda chop fire. (66-69)

⁷ Ambazonia is the name of the self-declared country by Anglophone Cameroon separatists who want independence from the Republic of Cameroon.

The speaker's belief in justice and the fact that the people of Bamenda are resilient gives him hope. "Bamenda chop fire" as the poem ends refers to the very determined attitude of the people of the North west region when it comes to fighting for their rights. This indeed is what gives the speaker's troubled mind solace.

Christmas Atem on his path equally decries the shabby treatment of the English speaking people of Cameroon in his poem "Freedom we wrote." He opines that Anglophones have experienced pain as a result of marginalization perpetuated by French speaking Cameroonians who are in the majority. He dissects the rate of marginalization, betrayal and exploitation of the Anglophones and regrets why such an unfortunate thing is happening to them when they wholeheartedly embrace their francophone counterparts as brothers by voting to join them in the plebiscite in 1961. The poet-speaker however concludes that they shall be free someday. He declares:

*And yet we dreamt, wrote and spoke of a time to
comedifferent from today and yesterday
A tomorrow with the trumpets sound
Announcing our hard-won freedom
Based on the freedom we wrote. (19-24)*

From the above excerpt, one is of the opinion that the speaker is categorical on the fact that freedom must come because of the "freedom they wrote" even when they were still under colonial rule. The "tomorrow of the trumpets sound" is suggestive of the political freedom the Anglophones or Southern Cameroonians aspire for after a long period of marginalization. Although their plight or dilemma still persists, he is consoled because his people remain focused and determined to regain their freedom.

Conclusion

The search for solace which is the focus of this paper has enabled us to shed more light on Negro Spirituals and Anglophone Cameroon poetry. Having used the Marxist lens to interrogate the political ramifications of Negro Spirituals and Anglophone Cameroon poetry, one opines that both peoples (Negroes and Anglophone Cameroonians) presented in the poems examined need collective political action to change the status quo to their favour. Marx intimated that when profits are not reinvested in the workers but in creating more factories, the workers will grow poorer and poorer until no short-term patching is possible or successful. At a crisis point, revolt will lead to a restructuring of the system (Abrams 147). The plight of the Negroes as presented in the poems under study can only be resolved by the exploited masses who must stand up and fight for their freedom; because freedom is hardly given by the oppressor on a

platter of gold.

It is the same fate with Anglophone Cameroonians who find solace in advocating for their suppressed rights and actually fighting to secure such rights that have been violated for decades. Anglophone Cameroon poetry is therefore referred to as protest poetry because Anglophone Cameroonians selected for this study use poetry as a weapon or tool to protest against the exclusive policies of their oppressors.

Another point of convergence in the poems of Anglophone Cameroon writers and the Negro Spirituals under study is religion. Due to excessive oppression and disillusionment, the oppressed slaves in the American society and the marginalized Anglophone Cameroonians look up to God as their source of refuge. While Marx described religion as opium of the poor, Alfred Adler in his individual psychology considered religion as an aspect that enhances social interest. In the analysis made in this paper with respect to religion, one opines that religion is presented as a source of solace to the oppressed masses. The hope for a better life in the hereafter, and the consolation that God is ever present and ready to help those in need, makes religion a formidable source of hope, joy and solace to the oppressed. The originality of this paper therefore resides in the fact that, Negro spirituals and Anglophone Cameroon poetry have been brought together to critically analyse how poets from these different backgrounds use poetry to seek for solace for their oppressed masses. As seen in the analysis of the selected poems in this study, these poets have been brought together because they share similar traumatizing experiences as a result of marginalization and torture.

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