
**FOLKLORE AND COMMITMENT IN ANGLOPHONE CAMEROONIAN POETRY: A
STUDY OF BONGASU-TANLA KISHANI AND NOL ALEMBONG**

Andrew T. Ngeh, PhD
University of Buea, Cameroon

Nformi Dominic Nganyu,
University of Burundi

ABSTRACT: *African oral traditions have played a fundamental role in the development of African literary discourse both in form and content. African writers in general and poets in particular have always gone back to their past in order to evaluate the present socio-political situation and carve a path for the future. This paper sets out to examine how Bongasu Tanla-Kishani in Konglanjo! (1988) and Nol Alembong in The Passing Wind (1991) explore the oral aesthetics in their poetry to espouse political, economic, social, cultural and global concerns. These poets use elements of the oral traditions as poetic ornaments to emphasize the commitments in their poetic works. Using the cultural materialist theory for the analysis of their poetry, this paper concludes that folklore and poetry have a primary commitment to freedom and can only thrive in a free state. In a neocolonial dispensation like Cameroon, the primary responsibility of poetry is to enlist in the service of freedom and aspire to profundity within the context of this active process. Consequently, the two poets suggest a dual approach to life: that is, the imperative of looking inward toward the ancestry and the imperative of looking outward towards the wider humanity.*

KEYWORDS: Folklore and Commitment

INTRODUCTION

The people of Africa, like all other peoples of the world are inseparable from their history and culture, for their history is the record of what they did, thought and said; and their culture is the totality of the ideas, concepts and values that characterize their societies. These cultural elements are manifested in their literatures (oral as well as written), religions, social, economic and political institutions, music and dance, arts and drama, and their languages- all these in turn have been and still are profoundly influenced by their environments. (Richard Olaniyan, 1982:1). One of the major forces shaping African culture is the skill with which African creative writers embellish their creative works with African cultural aesthetics. This is an acceptance of Africa's cultural and historical experience. By encompassing elements of folklore in their creative works, African writers attempt a reappraisal of African culture with the aim of rediscovery and developing its content.

During the colonization of Africa, the colonial rulers created the impression that the African people did not have a culture. To them the African people neither had a history nor a culture. Against this background, Chinua Achebe argues in "The Role of a Writer in a Nation" "... that African people

did not hear of culture for the first time from the Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and above all, they had dignity” (10).

Folklore encompasses legends, myths, riddles, proverbs, oral tales, wellerisms and wise sayings. How Bongasu and Alembong embellish their poetic works with some of these cultural aesthetics is one of the fundamental questions this paper seeks to address. The *Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Gray, 1992) defines commitment by looking at the role of a committed writer: ‘A writer or artist, who sees literature as necessarily serving a political or social programme or set of beliefs and not merely aimed at achieving literary ends, is said to be committed. These views smack of the notion of commitment in art, which in the twentieth century gained a new momentum and urgency. The writer’s commitment to political freedom is a role he or she is constantly called upon to play in society. Jean Paul Sartre contends that the duty of the writer is to “take sides with the oppressed against the oppressor in the interest of freedom, and to denounce violations of formal and personal liberties or materialist oppression or both” (Sartre, 1988:229)

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to ascertain the efficacy, effectiveness and relevance of the use of African cultural aesthetics in the poetry of Bongasu and Alembong. In other words, this paper examines the symbiotic link between elements of folklore and commitment which has resulted in what Govind N. Sharma in *Literature and Commitment* has described as “a form-oriented commitment” (1988:11)

Secondly, this paper sets out to demonstrate that African oral traditions are still relevant and can be used to interpret African contemporary issues like politics, economics and culture. The study, therefore, debunks the parochial and myopic statements made by some European anthropologists who argued that there was nothing of poetic worth in African literature. Ali Mazrui in *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* has recommended a dual approach to life in Africa. That is, while maintaining the African cultural roots, the African should also try to grapple with technological and global concerns. He contends:

Two broad principles should influence and inform social reform in Africa in the coming decades. One is the imperative of looking inwards toward ancestry; the other is the imperative of looking outward towards the wider humanity. The inward imperative requires a more systematic investigation into the cultural preconditions of the success of each project, of each piece of legislation, of each system of government. (20).

Statement of the Problem

In the nineteenth century and early twentieth century European anthropologists who studied African societies concluded that there was nothing of true poetic merit in African oral literature. According to them traditional African societies were still groping in the dark with elementary problems of existence and had not yet attained the level of achievement whereby men could indulge in the pursuit of poetic excellence. This paper debunks such parochial claims and argues that these researchers were anthropologists and not literary critics; consequently, they did not have the *locus standi* to assess and evaluate African literature using western criteria of criticism.

Another challenge is that these European anthropologists were not conversant with the various African languages; consequently could neither understand nor feel these languages.

Research Questions

From the problem as stated above, the following questions arose:

- (a) What is the link between folklore and commitment?
- (b) Can folklore effectively bring out the concept of commitment in poetry?
- (c) What is the relationship between folklore, commitment and nation-building?
- (d) What is the role of cultural aesthetics in commitment?

In view of the problem as stated and the questions raised, the main thrust of the argument of this paper revolves around the hypothetical contention that folklore constitutes one of the fundamental artistic ornaments that Anglophone Cameroonian poets like Bongasu and Alembong use to reinforce their thematic preoccupations in their poetry. As the global social and economic picture increasingly reflects the class configuration in capitalist societies; as nations of the world resolve themselves more into clubs of haves and have-nots, roughly corresponding to a North-South equation, and as the more affluent and developed nations consciously and aggressively guard their gains and interests, the main challenge is that the less privilege continue to languish in abject poverty and penury.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis of this article is informed by the cultural materialist critical theory. The fundamental argument that undergirds cultural materialism is that texts are not simple registers of social power, but they must necessarily harbor dissident, fractious energies that undermine the sense of cohesive certainty that ruling elites seek to impose on a culture. This critical approach is relevant because it establishes a strong connection between literature, culture, politics and history and brings out the revolutionary potential of literature in the Lukacsian- Marxist sense of it.

The cultural materialist critical theory traces the historicity of the present conflict in African societies and at the same time contextualizes this literature. Given that cultural materialism is a more politically active variant of New Historicism, it proffers a vigorous materialist and non-metaphysical interpretation of a literary text. The fundamental and underlying difference between these two critical approaches is that while new historicism situates the literary text in the political situation of its own day, cultural materialism situates it within that of ours. This justifies the choice of cultural materialism in the interpretation and evaluation of the poetry of Bongasu and Alembong.

The British cultural materialist, Graham Holderness describes cultural materialism as “a politicized form of historiography.” (qtd in Barry, 182) This could be interpreted as the study of historical material (including literary texts) within a politicized framework and this framework includes the present which those literary texts have in some way helped to shape. Cultural materialism draws on Post-structuralism and Feminist theory.

Cultural materialists like Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield take issue with the idea that literature reflects and promotes social power or embodies in an unproblematic way the interests of a ruling class. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan in “Political Criticism: From Marxism to Cultural Materialism” contend. All power structures are contingent; that is they lack a logical ground or a natural foundation. As a result, they must rely on cultural narratives that assure their legitimacy. Such narratives strive for plausibility, but they must work against the contingency of the institutions they defend, a contingency that leaves them open to counter narratives that suggest different social possibilities (646).

The narratives of such works usually evoke social adversaries because all class divided societies project into culture the instabilities on which they are built. From this standpoint, it could be argued that cultural materialism describes how literary texts and other agencies contest or subvert a dominant culture. Furthermore, such subversion is created and contained by the dominant institutional culture-that such a culture produces subversion in order to contain such threats to itself.

The term ‘cultural materialism’ was made current in 1985 when it was used by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (the best cultural materialists) in the sub-title of their edited collection of essays entitled *Political Shakespeare*. The term cultural materialism which was defined in the foreword of this collection of essays brings out four characteristic features as a critical method. According to Peter Barry in *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, these four features are: (1) historical context, (2) theoretical method, (3) political commitment, and (4) textual analysis (182). A close examination of each feature will facilitate and enhance the comprehension of this paper.

With regard to historical context, this aspect of cultural materialism is intended chiefly to allow the literary text to recover its histories which previous kinds of study have often ignored. The kind of history recovered would involve relating the texts to such phenomena as enclosures and the oppression of the rural poor, state power and resistance to it...witchcraft, the challenge and containment of the carnivalesque. (Dollimore and Sinfield, 1994:3) Secondly, the issue of theoretical method emphasizes and signifies the break with liberal humanism and the absorbing of the lessons of structuralism, post-structuralism and other critical approaches. Thirdly, the emphasis on political commitment signifies the influence of Marxism and feminist perspectives. Finally, the stress on textual analysis locates the critique of traditional approaches where it cannot be ignored. In other words, there is a commitment not just to making theory an abstract kind, but a practical and scholarly exercise which continue to be the focus of massive amounts of academic and professional attention.

Using cultural materialism as a theory for this paper, the motivating factor is to attempt to proffer the possibilities for a rigorous materialist cultural, non-metaphysical and historical interpretation and reading of the poetry of Bongasu and Alembong. In this regard, the poetry of these poets is a response to the socio-political, economic, historical and cultural lives of Cameroonians/Africans. Thus, the discussion of this paper is done under two thematic clusters: Afrocentricism and cultural nationalism and folklore and politics.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSES**Afrocentricism and Cultural Nationalism**

To resume the broken dialogue with their gods, most African creative writers always go back to their culture. The two poets use their poetry for both cultural and social reforms. Their poetic works constitute a framework for a national culture. Bongasu in the title poem of his collection, *Konglanjo!* and Alembong in “The Christmas Chicken” use African cultural aesthetics to contrast two ways of life and recommend the building of a national culture. In these two poems, renewal, desire, interest, prayer and wholeness are fundamental features. The two poems are concerned with the specific framework or philosophy of a national culture. Although the two poets are conscious of the fact that the way of life painted in their poems is now a dream, they want to reform the harm caused by colonialism and slave trade to their cultural heritage.

Bongasu’s “Konglanjo” which is the title poem in his collection entitled *Konglanjo!* is a demonstration of the authenticity and credibility of the African way of life before the coming of the white man to the African continent. This particular poem debunks the views held by some Eurocentric writers/critics like Charles Larson, Joseph Conrad and Joyce Cary who had misrepresented the African people in their works by insinuating that they did not have a culture. The western view that the Africans did not have a culture, a civilisation and a way of life is contested because the African people, as Achebe has argued, did not hear of the word culture for the first time from the Europeans. Bongasu was therefore influenced by the cultural realities of his society. He tries to reconstruct one of the African societies before the coming of the colonial rulers. Chinua Achebe argues in “The Role of a Writer in a Nation” “that... African people did not hear of culture for the first time from the Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and above all, they had dignity (10).

This poem is, therefore, a celebration of African cultural values with all their positivity. The poet-persona for instance appeals to Nga’a-Mbom (God Almighty) for good harvest, peace, fertility and unity amongst his people. He makes this passionate appeal:

Within the rhythms of the season!
 May the evildoer and the warrior miss their way!
 May we build on the epitaphs of ancestral feats!
 May the realms of our households never dwindle
 Under our feet
 May our offspring hunt for game of therapeutic inspiration. (15)

The poet looks at the past with some nostalgia. He highlights the communal spirit that reigned in Africa before the colonial master came and introduced individualism. That is colonialism and neo-colonialism replaced the social collectivism that prevailed in Africa with individualism. Chuba Okadigbo explains this sense of communal existence and social organisation in Africa before the coming of the colonial rulers thus:

There is an African sense of community, founded on Kinship or extended families, in a proportion unequalled and unrivalled elsewhere outside Africa. There is an authentic African experience of colonialism with its peculiar, alien racist overtones. With this there is a basic and peculiar form of African alienation and a corresponding strife to overcome them, in a style that has come to be known as “the African search for identity”. The political, religious, psychological and philosophical dimensions (4).

“Konglanjo” expresses the political, religious, psychological and philosophical aspects of the African communal existence. For example, while calling on “Nga’a’-Mbom” to unite and purify the land, the high priest pleads for more harvest among other things. The speaker, however, thinks his people have to watch out against the influence of alien cultures because they can be insidious and devastating to the African way of life.

Here

Heralds – emerge

Struggling and nagging like hunting dogs
With the unposted omens of their incoming;
On the one hand they displayed a new coin of faith
On the other a new arm-quiver of knowledge. (27)

The “new coin of faith” stands for the alien culture, which threatens the African culture. The poet seeks to recreate dignity in a people’s past but he cautions the people to be on guard because of the hurricane of western culture and even globalisation. He concludes the poem by saying that even if the Africans have been taken in by the western culture and values, they should not forget the ways of their forefathers:

If now we must march on like rivers with arms spreading
on the bigamous banks

of ancestors and youth,
with the footholds
of new clothing and monetary units
of new carvings and names ...

Heralds!

Those who inspire the way,
Those who inquire a way
Walk within the wisdom steps of their inquiry. (30)

The poet insinuates that even if the Africans do not know where they are going to, at least, they should know where they came from; and it is only their culture that can give them these directives. He uses the past to evaluate the present situation and anticipate the future. The writer, should therefore, not only dwell in the past because the past is only a transitional stage in which he must prepare the ground for the present and the future. It is only a stage for comprehension of the values with which he must judge and recommend the choices for the present and the future. This poem is a recreation of the dignity of a people without any romanticization and idealisation although it is nostalgic in tone. The poet/persona makes this very clear: / Re-echo our feats and failures up and down /Time’s sun and rain within the planets. (30)

The poet/persona admits that the African culture had/has its strong and weak points; that is the African culture had/has its good and bad aspects. The alliteration, 'feats' and 'failures' (f, f,) reinforces the objective perception of African cultural reality. This shows that as glorious and as good as African culture was, and is, it had/has its own weaknesses. The sun symbolizes those positive aspects of African cultural values and the rain signifies the negative aspects. The objective presentation of African socio-cultural reality is one of the preoccupations of Bongasu.

Like Bongasu, Alembong in "Christmas Chicken" also paints a romantic and cultural ambiance in Africa before the coming of Christianity. The poet compares the ritual sacrifices usually performed in some African societies with the aid of chickens to the supreme sacrifice Christ made on the Cross of Calvary. To the poet, the killing of a chicken in an African society and the death of Jesus Christ perform the same function. Hear the poet-persona:

For the man whose birth we celebrate
Washed down our sins with his blood
So too must we offer innocent blood
To welcome this great washerman. (13)

The poet cautions and compares the blind and uncritical acceptance of this message of the imperialist missionaries to tortoise's greed during the feast in the sky. The allusion of the tortoise is reminiscent of the myth often told in Africa to explain why the tortoise has cracked body; that is, how he borrowed feathers from birds for an occasion in the sky, and how his officially acquired name "All of You" deprived the other animals of food and drinks. During this occasion each time food was brought and said "it is for all of you", the tortoise would settle on the food alone. Angered by this greedy attitude of the tortoise, the birds collected their feathers and the tortoise was unable to fly down to the earth and his fall resulted in the cracked body he now has today. This is an African myth Alembong utilizes to good effect: The message had been swallowed/ With the greed of Tortoise in the sky/Unknown to him he was in foreign lands/With the bird's feathers stuck on him (13).

Alembong in this poem strikes a warning note against religious fanaticism which can only result in a disaster. He warns against uncritical acceptance of Christian values which compromise African cultural values which could be used for the development and advancement of a national culture: And so we folded our arms and closed our eyes/And swallowed this strange communion/Forgetting we could be stripped of our borrowed feathers/And abandoned in mid air. (13).

The phrase "Our borrowed feathers" which could be stripped at any time is a dense symbol with metaphoric possibilities and it allegorizes a national tragedy if the framework of a national culture is not built on indigenous African cultural values. Alembong perceives Christianity and colonialism as two sides of the same coin and makes a passionate appeal to Cameroonians/Africans to critically sieve whatever western cultural values they consume. This confessional manner, distanced, ironic, guarded, analytical yet allusive and tangential is not new to African poetry because the early African writers have always treated Christianity with suspicion.

There is no curious nominalism to Bongasu and Alembong's perspectives of African cultural beliefs and religions; the religious is transcendent and incarnate, and both assume some form of divine. Furthermore, in Bongasu and Alembong's poetic vision the experience of the secular world is seen as in itself having a religious nature, although it is difficult to define the precise nature of this experience beyond it being moral and life being holy. But their fundamental worry is that a sound national culture can only be constructed on African cultural beliefs and religions which encapsulate the mores, ethos and the world-view of the people. The two poems discussed above are deeper in thought, closely argued and rich in metaphors. Bongasu and Alembong's poems become an expression of both a secular and spiritual mind ill at ease with the self and its desires. Finally, the problem for Bongasu and Alembong from the analysis of the poems above has always been how to avoid the bleakness of a purely scientific materialist view of the world with its lack of values, spirit, purpose, poetry, and to avoid the confining, repressive orthodoxies of most religions and their otherworldliness at the expense of this, probably the only life we have. Consequently, a move toward the African indigenous cultural values provides a stronger framework for a national culture.

A similar depressed mood can be felt and perceived in Bongasu's "Our Way" and Alembong's "Married Widow." A similar lack of critical perception and purpose, a similar self-satisfied confusion and lack of will and the inability to master the modern world vis-a-vis a national culture is once more echoed in "Our Way" and "Married Widow".

In "Our Way" Bongasu has demonstrated that the meeting of African and western cultures had a devastating effect on the national culture. But he seems to be saying that in spite of this contact, African culture is still viable as it is important. "Our Way", for example, is a lyrical poem which exalts the characteristics of the speaker/poet's culture in song form. It is an overt and open acceptance of what his culture stands for. This is seen in the juxtaposition of the characteristics of African and western cultures in the poem. The title of the poem "Our Way" is suggestive as opposed to their way. (Western way of life) The poet appeals to the contemporary audience to conserve and preserve the positive aspects of their time-honoured cultural heritage without which there will not be any national culture:

Fend it eagerly
then poke it duly
distilling the issuing flames
for
it's your grace
before your face
it's our gold
within our fold. (40)

Africans must jealously "fend" and protect their culture eagerly. The poet compares the African culture with gold because his culture is too precious to him. He tries to discard the negative views of Europeans vis a vis African culture. As Nkrumah has asserted: The history of Africa, as presented by European scholars, has been encumbered with malicious myths. It was even denied

that we were a historical people. It was said that whereas other continents had shaped history, and determined its course, Africa had stood still held down by inertia; that Africa was only propelled into history by European contact (qtd in Okadigbo, 15).

The western scholars have always looked for means to justify the fact that Africa did not have a history and civilisation. These European scholars saw African history as an appendage to European history. This poem achieves part of its effect from the economy with which each group of thoughts is presented, the progression of feelings, the contrasting material and the richness of ideas. Evidence in the poem is where the poet compares African culture with the western cultural values and concludes that western culture is no match with African culture: Not even the Grecian Mars can forge/Your gongs/Nor can the lunar artisan carve/Your old door/Nor the Beatles belittling/Or Handel handling sing/Your songs/Sound/Your drums/And dance/Your dance. (40) The poet thinks that even the style of ancient Greece cannot beat African songs, dance and even the dexterity in the playing of the drums. The songs, dance, drum, gongs are dense symbols which convey a sense of cultural nationalism. It is a highly worked poem crafted by someone with a natural talent for patterns of sound, varied rhythms and clever reworking of traditional forms of poetic composition. Poetry reshapes his world and gives its meaning as: Mongo may meet the Thames/And both shake hands/And wed in the encircling/Depths of the seas; But/Mongo rains fall not on the Thames/Our is our culture/Let's sooth Her wounds/And betroth Her indoors. (41) Once more there is the desire to be settled, to be home, to be done with cultural exile and cultural alienation and the pains and wounds inflicted on African culture: "Let's soothe Her wounds/and betroth Her indoors."

The River Thames and River Mongo signify two ways of life. They may meet and shake hands but Thames remains Thames and Mongo remains Mongo. This is a pastoral poem in which the disagreeable qualities of western/urban landscape are symbolic of the regenerative process of building a national culture while a pastoral vision of the countryside, symbolized by the River Mongo suggests innocence and a clearer perspective on life. The River Thames contrasts the purity and relief of river Mongo.

Alembong in "Married Widows" write with the same ideological consciousness and orientation. In this poem, Alembong frowns at the influence of cultural imperialism on African way of life. He thinks that this alien culture has made the African people become disoriented in life and transmit their inner confusion to their values. He metaphorically describes this people with inner confusion as "married widows." The poet starts by establishing a link between Christianity and technological advancement which is the very antithesis of the African way of life:

Like a cock's crow
That reminds one always
Of the break of yet another day
Their daily alleluia
Tore the garments of the night
And the cornea of the morning sky
With retrospect exhibitions. (23)

While the cock's crow plays the role of a clock or a wrist watch which is a modern technological device, the songs chanted during morning devotions are a nuisance as: Their daily alleluia/Tore the garments of the night. (23) There is a comparison between the crow of the cock and the hymns sung daily in praise of God. The daily alleluia, according to the poet has robbed many of their African values. Put bluntly, Christianity has eroded and corroded all the African values in them: The armour-clad ship/That redirected the spears/meant for spongy hearts! Those with spongy hearts are the easily convinced and cajoled; those who embraced these alien values uncritically. The poet bemoans the fact that this Western religion has led many astray including the voice of reason in the society and the warriors who took their community to battles: The haloed head/That led the body/In misty weather. The voice of reason/That told our story/when lurked in dumb show. The shaken soul/That great and determined/Led his people to victory(23).

To conclude this part of this article, it could be said that Bongasu and Alembong draw from the quarry of African folklore to enhance their thematic concerns. The poems discussed above are heavily influenced by African cultural aesthetics which pave the way for cultural nationalism. The last part of this paper preoccupies itself with folklore and politics. The argument of the final phase of this paper is that Bongasu and Alembong use elements of folklore to espouse political happenings in their society.

Folklore and Politics

Besides cultural nationalism, Bongasu and Alembong also explore and exploit elements of orality such as myths, proverbs and legends to open up a window of understanding into the political process in Cameroon/ Africa with a view to drawing attention to positive change. Thus, the hypothetical contention of this section is built on the premise that folklore is a vibrant artistic tool which is used in the poetry of Bongasu and Alembong to enhance the socio-political and economic realities in Cameroon/Africa. Bongasu's "Emancipation" and "A Taxi-Driver's Lawsuit" and Alembong's title poem "The Passing Wind", and "Someday for Sure are four poems that elucidate this." In Bongasu's "Emancipation" and "A Taxi-Driver's Lawsuit", the political motif is extensively dealt with.

The poem, "Emancipation" is an expression of the poet's conviction that in the face of western influence, the African must preserve and conserve his cultural heritage and even fight to regain what has been lost. This is more of a psychological fight, which involves a realisation of who he is. In this poem, the poet uses the image of the fireplace to represent the core and the centre of tradition to which he is tied and to which he must return to find fulfilment and solace.

In the village, the fireplace occupies the central position in the hut around which the family gathers. Here it symbolizes the tradition around which everyone must gather; and it is during such gatherings that the elderly ones narrate the legends and myths of their community to the young ones. This is another way of cultural resuscitation: Yes, around the fire place/Where our youths rebuild guitar-bridges/With the broken calabashes. (31)

However, the first stanza of the poem indicates a breakdown in tradition and culture conveyed in the image of 'broken calabashes'. When the calabash, which symbolises the cultural repertoire of this community, was intact, traditional rural life was also intact considering that this calabash

stores fresh water. Fresh water here stands for the traditional and cultural values and virtues, which have been adulterated by neo-colonial politics. In those days, they were “free and fair” and their values in life well- guarded in “sacredness and lore”. The poet states;

with the broken calabashes,
wherein, intact, we had fetched
and stored the fresh water
from the streams of our free days;
around the sacred spring-forest
where militant snakes with silent tread
dwell and guard and muse
in the silence of sacredness and lore. (31)

In the second stanza, the poet points out the fact that traditional values have become echoes from which he cannot flee though he is surrounded by the cultural paraphernalia of the West imported by neo-colonial elites. This is found in the foreign names Africans have adopted and the foreign languages they speak:

So
amorously human
our anointed memories of echoes
endure in stamina
around our fireplaces and whetstones,
Yet, still fleeing away
from their savage deeds
with murmurs of defiance,
aching but never ticking away
with those taximeters of market-days
and crops of slavery, linking us
to lost names, lost tongues
whose relics now grow into pathfinder-tales
of lives ossified sphinxes
and ship-water and plantations. (31)

The poet in the following stanza seems to hold that the core of tradition remains even in the face of the encroachment of western values and neo-colonial politics. He concludes by adopting a militant tone in which he seems to suggest that the African has to recapture the past in order to be whole again: I believe/The hub remained behind/In the slave-songs of shrivelled liberties/We never recapture to scan and sing/Until we win. (31)

Alembong in the title poem, “The Passing Wind” also dwells on the negative impacts of socio-political factors on the African societies. According to the poet, the socio-political wind that blew across the African continent from Europe adversely affected most African dictators as many of them were caught off guard: it came suddenly/And caught us as if unawares/It came limping/As a child learning to walk/It came naively/As the chameleon in a race to immortality. (6) The poet uses the African myth that explains why death came into the world to explain the coming of this wind

of change. In Africa it is widely believed that dog and chameleon were sent to deliver the messages of death and life respectively. Although the dog runs faster than the chameleon, it got distracted by a bone on its way as it settled on it to eat. The chameleon who was carrying the message of death moved slowly but steadily and delivered the most dreadful message that man must die. If the dog had done its part, humanity would have lived forever. That explains why man cannot live forever. Alembong exploits this myth to enhance the political motif of change in his poetic vision. The commotion and confusion caused by the passing wind is evident:

And we saw our soft lips
 Turn to scabs
 We saw our tough soil
 Crack to let microbes in.
 We saw our trees
 Shiver in their shoes
 We saw them
 Drop their leaves in a fallen sickness. (6)

The trees personify African dictators who thought they had planted their roots deep into the soil, but when the passing wind came they shivered. This wind exposed a lot of things as the corrupt ways of these rulers were uncovered: We saw our animals/Abort their babies for lack of food/We saw our rivers/Expose their stony ways/And our fishes preyed on by hacks. (6) The fish and hawk symbols metaphorically represent the common man and the rulers respectively. In a capitalist system like Cameroon, the comprador bourgeoisie ruling class sustains its existence on the sweat and blood of the working class. The capitalist ruling class is a bird of prey that eats the fishes.

In Bongasu's "A Taxi Driver's Lawsuit", the poet dwells on the issue of corruption which is a bane to socio-political development. He uses a proverbial language and wise saying to enhance his ideological posture. This particular poem brings out the theme of corruption. The poem is a complaint of some sort launched by a taxi driver who is molested, harassed and psychologically tortured by law enforcement officers for no good reason. This poem highlights two important issues: corruption and the absence of social justice in post-colonial African societies. Taxi drivers are important people in the society. This explains why a one-day strike by taxi drivers can paralyse the economy of a whole nation. The taxi driver who is the protagonist in this poem is conscious of this vital service he renders to his community. He states:

I drive men, women and children in my taxi
 yes, men and children and women
 of all professions and social standings;
 Yes, men and women and children and not wood!
 He sues but the nation who sues me
 for a crime I never committed- my license
 my taxi vignette, relevant documents...
 have scarcely rounded their honey-moon
 of a valid marriage in our land of justice.
 Yet, because of her, our girl friend and prostitute

you sue me for them. (90)

This particular taxi driver has all the necessary documents that allow a taxi driver to ply the road or circulate in town: from driving license to windscreen license. His taxi is road worthy, yet he is harassed by the law enforcement officers whose mission is to extort money from him and spend on their numerous girl friends and prostitutes.

Considering the vital service this taxi driver renders to the nation, suing him for a crime he has not committed is tantamount to suing the nation because taxi drivers can conveniently ground a nation's economy. The poet/persona appeals to the law enforcement officers, lawyers and those of the judiciary that the real trial is yet to come. In this court, the police officers will not put on their uniforms to intimidate people, the lawyer will remain unseen. Hear the poet:

Yes, let him sue me for what I never did!
Treachery incenses his footpath only to disown him
As in a mist one day he will hear a thunder twang
in a court where the police wear no uniform
the lawyer remains unseen, and the court opens itself
its doors only to the treacherous whom this dust outlives
with the harvest of the next season. (90)

To the poet/persona, God is the ultimate judge and He is going to judge the treacherous ones, the wicked, the unjust and the corrupt. On the day of reckoning, the police officers or the lawyers will not appear in their official outfits. The poet/persona expresses fear for these corrupt people in both proverbial and word of wisdom: I fear the dust which germinates seeds/and devours our dead/and still remains as hungry as ever/I fear the soil and the lot/of those who never fear her/I fear the lot/of those who stand on dust to promote injustice. (.90) The poet-persona warns that those who indulge in corrupt practices and acts of injustice stand on the very soil that will consume them when they pass on.

CONCLUSION

To conclude this paper, it could be said that what seems modern in the poetry of Bongasu and Alembong has an African source. But rather than the reactionary revivalism or conservative traditionalism which attempts to bring back or continue an unaltered past, Bongasu and Alembong have in mind the kind of continuity that T.S Eliot wrote about in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" which says that each new significant text added to a tradition will both alter and confirm that tradition. Although their poetry can be read on its own as modern English-language poetry and within a context of modern themes and forms, it is also rooted in African culture. Thus, the broad framework that influences and should influence and inform socio-political reforms in Africa should be the imperative of looking inwards toward African cultural heritage and the imperative of looking outward so that Africans can withstand the challenges of globalisation, technological advancement and good governance.

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