

## **Radicalizing Consciousness in the Dramas of Derek Walcott and Bate Besong**

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### **Abstract**

The postcolonial period in the Caribbean Island and Anglophone Cameroon continues to witness a deliberate and systematic betrayal of the hopes and aspirations of the citizenry, who in no small way fought very hard for the acquisition of political independence. This period was characterised by capitalist exploitation, with colonialist and their neo-colonial counterparts, who as a result of self interest, had transformed the lives of their people into a “perpetual nightmare”. This paper examines the extent to which slavery, oppression, exploitation, misery and corruption amongst other societal ills have eaten into the fabric of the Caribbean and Cameroonian societies and the manner in which the playwrights address and confront such burning societal mishaps. This paper also argues that the failure of independence to provide immediate solutions to the problems of the colonised people acted as a catalyst for the emergence of nationalist sentiments and open revolutions in most once colonised societies. From a Marxist critical paradigm, this paper reveals that Walcott and Besong are playwrights who hold strongly to the thesis that, morality and the doctrine of equal opportunity are treasured commodities that cannot be led loose on the hostile landscape of postcolonial dictatorship, oppression, exploitation and, above all, corruption. Thus, nationalism and social revolutions are considered, by the playwrights, as the panacea towards the complete emancipation of the impoverished masses from political, economic, social and cultural bondage.

**Keywords:** Independence, Dictatorship, Nationalism, Revolution.

### **INTRODUCTION**

One of the principal tenets of Marxist criticism is, “consciousness is a product of social conditions and human relationship is often subverted by and through economic considerations” (Micheal Meyer, 1184). What this pre-supposes is that, the conditions in which people live will determine the ways in which they will react towards such conditions. This claim is corroborated by Karl Marx when he states that “it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but on the contrary, their social conditions determine their consciousness”. (ibid, 1859). The consciousness of postcolonial writers and postcolonial people are greatly influenced by their social conditions. To Karl Marx, a period of slavery, oppression, exploitation and misery generates revolt among working class. In most postcolonial societies, nationalist sentiments and open revolutions were initiated by the vast inequality that existed between the rulers and the pauperised masses. This is because, these inequalities radicalised the consciousness, not only of the writers but most especially the suffering masses and as a result, they were obliged to fight back.

### **The Postcolonial Societies and the Spirit of Nationalism**

Nationalist sentiments which were, dominantly, a post world war II development inaugurated a new dawn in the re-awakening of the consciousness of the colonised people. As James Tar Tsaaior posits, the politicians and the pioneer writers constituted an array of revolutionary

vanguard under the auspices of the “nationalist ferment pervasive at the time, with freedom from colonial domination, exploitation and oppression as the ideological drive force for the monumental struggle” (Tar,2006, 416). Tar further argues that, nationalist activities concealed with the growth of Marxism in Eastern Europe, and that the unprecedented awareness created and increased commitment of socialist countries especially, the Soviet regime in Moscow to the liberation struggles of the colonised and oppressed peoples of the world.

It is worth mentioning that, the ideological warfare between the West and East had earlier manifested itself in the eruption of the Second World War and the Cold War that subsequently followed it. While the former was bent on ensuring the longevity of imperialism, the latter was preaching the gospel of socialism. At this time, the relentless struggle for independence had been galvanised and many colonised societies were on the verge of political autonomy.

The attainment of political independence by most once colonised nations, initiated a new ideological consciousness in literature. The people of these newly independent countries hoped for a radical departure of the colonial masters. As a result, they invested a lot of hope in the nationalists who were in the vanguard of the struggle for better living conditions, freedom from colonial rule, justice and good governance. Unfortunately, the betrayal, treachery and resultant evaporation of the hopes and dreams nursed by the people generated a sense of utter disillusionment and disenchantment with the emergent profit bourgeoisies who assumed the reins of power and became worst than their departed predecessors. The new leaders aggravated the situation of their populace with their decadent leadership. Their leadership politics created in the masses, the feeling that independence was not a panacea for freedom, justice and economic development.

In Africa for example, there were numerous demonstrations of the inefficiency of independence to resolve the people’s problems throughout the continent. These claims are supported by James Tar Tsaaior in “Ideology and African literature” in which he states emphatically that in Nigeria for example, there was a turbulent political atmosphere which generated instability evidenced in coups and counter-coups with the concomitant war of assassination. To Tar:

*This scenario continued unabated with ethnic allegiances, regional affiliations, bribery and corruption, nepotism and other social atrocities and malfeasances... There was also a total neglect of initial public infrastructural base, scientific and technological development and the flagrant flouting of codes of ethical conduct... it was this retrogressive and unwholesome state of affairs that culminated in the fratricidal civil war of 1967-1970. Achebe’s A Man of the People, Girls at War and Anthills of the Savannah, Soyinka’s The Interpreters and Season of Anomy and Clark’s Casualties are both a lamentation and an indictment of this chequered development after independence... (Tar, 2006, 416)*

Though made specifically on the state of affairs in Nigeria, the picture painted by Tar above became a general phenomenon in almost all once colonised societies including Cameroon and the Caribbean Island. If there is one thing that independence did, it is that it helped in widening the gap between those who wallowed in affluence and the abject poverty stricken masses.

Similarly, Chidi Amuta, argues that Marxist thinking in literature as an orchestrated and concerted effort gradually building up into an alternative tradition became significant in the

mid-and-late 1970s (Amuta,1989:56). He further contends that, this radicalisation of consciousness can be linked up with the unexpected post war oil boom and its “accompanying social, economic and political dislocation” (56). The wastage of the wealth of the nation and the resultant moral atrophy that permeated the entire societal strata, initiated a literature that was unabashedly revolutionary from an ideological sense. This to Amuta, led to the emergence on the literary scene of a “new generation of young revolutionary writers whose pre-occupation was the indictment of the self-indulgent political elite, and the general re-orientation of society and the sanitation of its psyche” (Ibid, 57).

Like Amuta, Tar considers published works by young writers like Festus Iyayi’s *Violence and Heroes*, Odia Ofeimun’s *The Poet Lied*, Osofisan’s *The Chattering and the Song*, Niyi Osundare’s *Songs of the Market Place* and Kole Omotoso’s *Sunset at Dawn* as works that lent their eloquent voices in decrying and denouncing neo-colonial predicaments. Their literatures to Tar, were progressively and increasingly identified with the masses and were most vociferous in recommending the alternatives of socialist transformation of the society and the rejection of international monopoly capital.

As was the case in Nigeria, Ghana was not remarkably different. Having won independence in 1947 under the initial of the charismatic leadership of Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana was soon in ruin. As Onoge Omatume makes us to understand in “*Toward a Marxist Sociology of African Literature*’, Nkrumah’s identification and flirtation with Socialism were at best effective and hypocritical as he soon constituted himself into a personality cult to be worshipped. A dynasty of “corruption, incompetence, dereliction of duty by public officers and the general sense of moral bankruptcy was erected” (28). The hopes of the people were unmaterialistic, as the national bourgeoisie succeeded their foreign counterparts. The Ghanaian writer, Ayi Kwei Armah delineates the situation in *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments*, while Kofi Awoonor’s *This Earth, My Brother* also articulates this dominant concern. These novels are ideologically engage and interrogate the social hierarchical paradigm that privileges the dominant class and betrays the people.

In Kenya as was the case in the above mention countries, nationalism and euphoric mood that granted Uhuru under Kenyatta was transient, as the writings of betrayal and lost hopes became very clear on the wall. To the utter disappointment of the Kenya masses that fought for freedom and won it with the help of the Mau Mau, independence worsens their problems. There was growing intimacy between Kenyatta’s government and the imperialist. The masses and peasants suffered alienation from the bourgeoisies who collaborated with the enemy to betray the poor that sacrificed everything, even their lives, for emancipation. Worst of it, the masses were alienated from their lands. The situation in Kenya finds testimony in Ngugi’s *A Grain of Wheat*, *Petal of Blood*, *Devil on the Cross*, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and *I will Marry When I Want*. Another Kenya novelist, Meja Mwangi documents the situation in *Kill Me Quick*, *Carcass for Hands* and *Going Down River Road*. In Uganda, Okot Bitek’s “*Song of Lawino*” and “*Song of Ocol*” and Teban Lo Liyong’s *Eating Chiefs* are a dramatisation of the aftermaths of independence and with anti-imperialist ideological undertones.

Furthermore, in Southern Africa, especially in the front line states of Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Namibia, Amuta argues that the violent and protracted “liberation struggle was waged on the context of an anti-imperialist ideological stand point which in turn necessitated a mass mobilisation of culture and literature in the service of the struggle for freedom” (Amuta, 1989,56-57). Their harrowing experiences, is what Clive Welis describes in “*Negritude in Portuguese-African Verse: Some Historical perspectives*” in *Comparative African Literature* as

“protracted armed struggle” for independence (Willis, 2001, 80). This situation also informed volumes of writings from the above countries. The resolve of these Lusophone countries to conceive national independence, according to Emmanuel Ngara, justifies their “socialist alternative to development strategies based on the dialecticist, materialist interpretation of history” (Ngara, 1985, 36). E.C Nwezeh in *Colonialism and Lusophone Africa* qualifies this ideological imperative in a dialecticist and revolutionary perspective as “the armed struggle of the Lusophone peoples against colonialism” (Nwezeh, 1986, 1).

Moreover, the Nationalist situation in South Africa deserves to be mentioned here as well. The monolithic theme of apartheid with its cardinal creed of racial discrimination engaged the attention of writers in the former racist country. The non-white population of South Africa suffered disenfranchisement, denial of education, restriction of movement under the pass laws and colour bar, exploitation of non-white labour and the general economic bankruptcy of the blacks and the coloured. The South African blacks were treated as strangers in their own home land. This situation called for an ideologically radical literature that spear-headed the struggle and Marxism emerged as the preferred option. The liberation movements in South Africa notably the African National Congress (ANC), spear-headed the struggle for the eradication of the obnoxious apartheid system. Writers like Peter Abrahams, in *Mine Boy* and *Tell Freedom*, Ezekiel Mphahlele’s *The Wanderers*, Alex La Guma’s novels especially *In the Fog of Seasons End* and *Time of the Butcherbird*, and Dennis Brutus’ *A Simple Lust*, amongst numerous others, all exposed the plight of the South African masses and the need for revolutionary action to strangle the fascist, racist regime.

In Cameroon, the situation was not any different. The Nationalist aspirations of the people were dashed to the walls as embezzlement, corruption, oppression and dictatorship became the order of the day. Plays like Bate Besong’s *Beats of No Nations*, *Requiem for the Last Kaiser*, *Change Waka* and *His Man Sawa Boy*, *The Banquet*, *Once Upon Great Lepers* and *The Most Cruel Death of the Talkative Zombi*, Babila Mutia’s *Before This Time Yesterday*, Nkengasong’s *Black Caps and Red Feathers*, and *A Call for Blood* and amongst many others, portray the farcical nature of Cameroon’s independence and her failure to remedy the situation of the masses from exploitation and oppression. Besong in *Requiem* for example considers Agidigidi’s independence as a farce. The leader of the Market Women emphasises this when she says “They’ll always be at ease so long as our independence is merely a crap of French toilet paper (49). This satire shows that just as toilet paper that can be used in any manner by its owner, France can use Agidigidi the way she likes.

Though with a slight difference, the situation in the Caribbean Island very much resembles that of the already mentioned postcolonial societies. By 1963, most of the former British colonies in Africa were independent, so to were Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago. But like the case of the former British colonies, independence did not in anyway, emancipate the West Indians from oppression, poverty and exploitation. Commenting on Nationalism in the Caribbean and drawing inspiration from Walcott’s *Ti-Jean*, Julia Udofia had this to say:

*Nationalism (in the Caribbean context) involves the re-evolution of the self and of old values. It also embraces certain new yardsticks for examining oneself and abandoning colonial models. For Walcott, the substitute for colonial models should not necessarily be derived from Africa. He believes in the theory of the “amnesia blow” in which he argues that the racial memory of Africa was permanently lost during the middle passage crossing from Africa to the New World. Therefore, to him, these substitutes*

*should be taken from the West Indian indigenous folklore and natural environment.*  
(*Udofia*, 2008, 32)

To *Udofia*, the play *Ti-Jean* becomes an allegory of the three different stages by which the Afro-Caribbeans attempt to fight their white oppressors. The first response *Udofia* stresses is violence, as seen through the slave revolt. Next, the ex-slave attempted to overcome the White master by acquiring the trappings of Western culture, mainly through education and this attempt, to *Udofia*, is counter productions since it focuses on imitation of Western models and reveals a fundamental lack of confidence on the black man's part. The third, *Udofia* concludes, is a combination of aggression and humility and includes the denigrates and underrated members of society, for example *Ti-Jean*.

So far, I have tried to contextualise the circumstances that initiated nationalist sentiments in some colonised societies. The discussions above have proved that nominal independence was not a guarantee for cultural, socio-political and economic self determination. Consequently, the socio-political, economic and cultural ideological differences that existed between postcolonial leadership and their subjects after their political independence precipitated the need for a new form of nationalism and social order. This new nationalism expressed in Marxist terms, through open revolutions became the only means through which postcolonial writers could once more define and affirm their people's personalities in the face, to continue cultural, economic and political subjugation. The plays of Walcott and Besong fit squarely within the umbrella of nationalist literature and as Elleke Boehmer posit:

Nationalist movements elsewhere in the empire were distinguished by...the invention that went into making of true national characters in literature as in other forms of cultural life...self-representation also exacted its cost. In practice, it did not mean that everyone obtained a voice...as well as invention, the exclusion from self expression of the powerless by those who had established for themselves a public voice, marked (colonial) nationalism world wide.(qtd in Ako,2001,21)

Boehmer sees nationalism as a consequence of the exclusion of the masses from participating in the socio-political life of their societies.

### **Nationalising and Revolutionizing Drama by Walcott and Besong**

The nationalist expressions and activities of Walcott and Besong portray their plays as true instruments of the political and cultural processes for change. Their plays set out to conscientize the masses and as Ambanasom makes us to understand in "Pedagogy of the Deprived", "conscientization implies the education of the masses especially the oppressed, in such a way that they become imbued with a heightened sense of critical consciousness" (242). Ambanasom further argues that, Conscientization does not only help the masses to become familiar with the inner structures of their society and the dynamics of the vicious system that held them captive, but more especially, it produces a behavioural change in such a way that it would make the oppressed want to eradicate all the evil forces that have helped to cripple them. Walcott and Besong preach change through a design that uses the essence of theatre both as an agent of communication and as a means of confrontation for the creation of a new society. Kevin Harrison in *Understanding Political Ideology and Movement*, says nationalism as an ideology involves "creating a world view" a set of coherent ideas and values that give meaning to the past for a social group, explains the present and offers a program for possible future action" (155).

Walcott in *Dream and Ti-Jean*, unlike Besong seem an unlikely candidate for the title of revolutionary. Peter Balakian argues that, Walcott's tendency to delve into all sides of complex issues, his balance handling of sensitive questions, and his opposition to extreme solutions marks him as anything but violent. Nevertheless, Walcott's plays not only chronicle but promote growth and change others for he considers the writer to be a special kind of revolutionist. To him, any West Indian writer is immediately, synonymously a revolutionary even when he puts himself in a defensive position. His only worry is that, "there are certain values, regardless of the violence of the revolution, need to be preserved for the society to work. Unlike Besong who appears to be more stringent in his revolutionary stands. While Walcott seems to be more concerned with the quality of change than mere change itself. *Dream* does not only depict the Negro's righteous rebellion against the white master but goes to the extent of having the protagonist reject the oppressive role imposed by black racists.

*Dream* opens, as Makak is unjustly arrested and must be tried. Makak is tortured and maltreated in prison. The cell scene is rich in action and with the education that Makak gets from the inmates, he then understands that he is a lion and has the capacity to kill the Corporal and gain freedom. Souris and Tigre become agents of conscientization as they conscientize Makak. Makak stabs the Corporal and escapes to Monkey Mountain:

*[The corporal comes to Makak's cell]*

*Corporal: Old man...Years thirsty? [He goes nearer]*

*Tigre: For blood, perhaps. Not you who call him?*

*Corporal: He who? That ape? What you want to drink old man...*

*Makak: [with a cry] Blood! Blood! Lion...lion I ...am...a lion*

*[He has grabbed the Corporal, dragging him, then he hurls him to the floor]. (255)*

The conscientization of Makak gives him courage to question the socio-political conditions in which he finds himself. The beheading of the apparition that has the image of a white woman is Makak's reaction toward the oppressive conditions in which West Indians find themselves. Makak's killing of the apparition is symbolic of St Lucian's freedom from white colonial role, and the revolution of the Blacks against all forms of oppressions. As Fanon posits in *Black Skin, White Mask*, Makak's act can rightly be considered as an act of "helping black men to free themselves of the arsenal of the complexes that has been developed by the colonial environment" (30). *Dream* therefore, does not only end with the beheading, but most especially, with a man reaching an accommodation with his environment.

Despite the moment of humour and the frame work of the dream, as Lloyd Brown has suggested, the play offers a serious prescription for change. Makak's dream fantasy about revolution involves and confirms a revolution of his self-perception as he returns to the mountain a new man as a result of his increased insight. *Dream*, can thus be read as that historic movement of West Indian nationalism and revolution against colonialism.

Also, the revolution in *Dream* can be perceived psychologically in terms of Makak's vision of the White Woman. At one level there is the opposition between Makak's certainty that she is real and Moustique's opinion that "you had a bad dream, or you sleep outside and the dew seizes you" (241). At another, 'poetic' level, there is Makak's early, instinctive answer to this question, "Tell me please, who are you?", that she will pose repeatedly when she is brought before him at the 'tribunal'. Makak feels she is his saviour who has brought him identity and strength after a lifetime of hiding away from others because of his sense of inferiority:

*Sirs, when I hear that voice,  
Singing so sweetly,  
I feel my spine straighten,  
My hand grows strong...  
I began to dance, with the splendour of the lion...(229)*

Makak goes further to tell Moustique that she said something he will never forget “She says I should not live so any more, here in the forest, frighten of people because I think ugly. She says that I come from the family of lions and Kings” (236). While Makak considers the White woman in his dream as a saviour, Lestrade feels she is a diablesse, the wife of a devil, the white witch because in more psychological terms, she claims to be superior and inaccessible:

*She is lime, snow, marble, moonlight, lilies, cloud, foam and bleaching cream, the mother of civilisation, and the confounder of blackness. I too have longed for her. She is the colour of the law, religion, paper, art...she is the white light that paralysed your mind, which led you into this confusion. It is you who created her, so kill her! (319)*

Makak respects Lestrade’s instructions and kills the white woman, announcing as he does so that “now I am free” (320). From the evidence, one realises that the White Woman is the germ that Makak must devour in order to gain freedom. By killing the white apparition, Makak becomes free of white value systems, an image which has stunted his Black self-awareness. Walcottis by this act insinuating that, freedom is such a precious commodity that can be achieved at some point, only through open violence and revolution as seen in Makak’s beheading of the white apparition. Dream on Monkey Mountain therefore depicts not only the Negroes righteous rebellion against the white master but goes to the extent of having the protagonist reject the oppressive role imposed on the West Indians by the black racist.

Furthermore, the revolutionary vision of Walcott can be perceived in Dream through Makak’s attitude toward ‘Her Majesty’s Government’. Makak, the sixty years old charbonnier, ‘Ugly as sin’, is seen in constant defiance to ‘Her Majesty’s Government’. Besides being drunk and disorderly and breaking up Alcindor’s cafe, Makak is also accused among other things of having:

*A dream (in) which he claims to have experienced, a vile, ambitious, and obscene dream...*

*(The JUDGES mime: see no evil. Hands to their faces in horror)*

*Elaborating on the aforesaid dream with vile words and with a variety of sexual obscenities both in language and posture! Further, the prisoner, in defiance of Her Majesty’s Government, urged the aforementioned villagers to join him in sedition and the defilement of the flag, and when all this was received with civic laughter and pious horror...*

*{The JUDGES mime: Speak no evil. Their hands to their mouths}*

*The prisoner, in desperation and shame, began to wilfully damage the premises of Felicien Alcinder, urging destruction on Church and State, claiming that he was the direct descendant of African kings, a healer of leprosy and the saviour of his race*

*{Pause. silence} You claimed that with camera of your eye you had taken a photograph of God and all that you could see was blackness.*

*{The judges rise in horror}*

*Blackness, my lords. What did the prisoner imply? That God was not white but black, that he had lost his faith? Or...or...what...*

*Makak: I am an old man. Send me home, Corporal. I suffer from madness. I does see things. Spirits does talk to me. All I have is my dream and they don't trouble your soul. (224-225)*

This play, within a play scene, with an excessive use of mime and a stream of consciousness technique, is a vivid expression of Makak's revolutionary potentials. He does not only break down Alcindor cafe, but openly denounces Western religion as he proclaims himself the direct descendant of the king. Again, as in the previous incident, Makak adopts violence as a means of questioning the body politics he finds in his society. Walcott's note to the prospective producer of *Dream on Monkey Mountain* establishes the fact that it is only through a forceful projection of the imagination that the play's derivative, illogical and seemingly contradictory discourse could be fully realised. By describing the play as a dream, "one that exists as much in the given minds of its principal character as in that of its writer", Walcott "delineates the innermost character of a people, the essence of what it means to have been West Indian". (225). He equally, as one can conjecture from the mock trial scene, proposes a revolution as a genuine means toward the emancipation of the Afro-West Indians. This is noticeable, as the judge says, when Makak calls for "a defiance of her majesty's government"

Unlike in *Dream* Walcott's nationalistic and revolutionary vision becomes very overt in *Ti-Jean*. The West Indies has a long tradition of slave rebellion, characterised by bloodshed and mass murder of slaves. This inhuman institution reduced able West Indians to instruments of production. Aimé Césaire in *Contemporary World Writers* emphasises on this point when he states that "No human contact, but relations of dominations and submissions, which turn the colonising man into a classroom monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard, a slave driver and the indigenous man into an instrument of production" (64).

*Ti -Jean* becomes Walcott's revolutionary stand against the concept of "Self" and "Other" propagated by the colonialist for their personal benefits. The three *Jean*s all variously try in their different ways to overcome the Planter (Self). The first two attempts at revolution are carried out by *Gros Jean* and *Mi-Jean*. *Gros Jean*, as a result of his self pride, falls prey to the Devil. He is proud of his physical strength and just when he is about to confront the Devil, his mother warns him against reliance on his physical strength, and advises him to be humble, tactful, and careful. His mother's advise is supposedly to serve as the ultimate strategy for *Gros Jean*'s revolution but unfortunately, he does not listen to his mother's advise and as a consequent, is defeated by the Devil. Walcott's revolutionary vision here becomes very glaring. He is in other words saying that any revolution that is not strategic is bound to fail like that of *Gros Jean*.

Very much like *Gros Jean*, *Mi -Jean* symbolises the second stage of the Afro-West Indian attempt at revolution, this time initiated by those West Indians who depended solely on their intellectual pride. Unfortunately, *Mi- Jean*'s intellectualism is not good enough to stand the philosophical argument of the Planter (Devil) concerning the divinity of man:

*Mi-Jean: All I say is that man is divine*

*Planter : A man is no better than an animal... He is a kneeling hypocrite who in four legs, like a penitent capriped, prays to his maker, but is calculating the most vice...*

*Mi-Jean: Nonsensical verbiage! Betties!*

*Planter: Descendant of the ape, how eloquent you have become! How marvellous in intention! And yet, poor shaving monkey...124,128,129)*



Moved by his intellectual pride, Mi-Jean grows full of precocious rage and consequently forfeits his life. Again, Walcott insinuates that, for any successful West Indian revolution to take place, the oppressor's strategy cannot be used to outwit him as Mi-Jean struggles to do.

The last and final stage of Walcott's revolutionary vision is symbolic of Ti-Jean. Unlike his two brothers, Ti-Jean's mother is afraid of his small size:

*Mother: Oh, Ti-Jean, You are so small,  
So small  
Ti-Jean: Yes, I small, Maman, I shall,  
And I never learn from book,  
But, like the small boy David, ...  
I go bring down, bring down Goliath,  
Bring down below...(134)*

Like the Biblical David, in the book of Samuel, who used his wisdom to challenge and conquer the mighty Goliath, Ti-Jean outwits the Devil. Unlike his two brothers, Ti-Jean seeks advice and cooperation from the Frog, Birds, Cricket and Firefly. It is the combined forces of his mother's advice and his cooperation with the little creatures that enables him to defeat the Devil. Ti-Jean can be considered then, a play of great revolutionary potentials. Walcott is implying in this play that, the true and successful West Indian revolution must (like Ti-Jean) seek co-operation from all elements of the society. Egoistic behaviour (like that of Gros Jean) and emphasis on Western learning (as Mi-Jean) all prove to be of no use in this situation. The play also asserts the themes of rebellion and liberation from white tyranny. It attempts to liberate the West Indians from their self-hate and myopia created by the colour based ethic of slavery. Walcott in this play as Udofia concludes, tries to make the West Indians aware of the different ways in which they can look at themselves and tries to guide them toward a re-evaluation of their worth and also provides them a chance of expanding their awareness of life's possibilities. Walcott's vision in *Dream and Ti-Jean* is akin to that of Bob Marley who argues and with good reason, that "it takes a revolution to make a solution" (qtd in Mombara, 1997, 270).

In a similar perspective as Derek Walcott in *Dream and Ti-Jean* and Bate Besong in *Requiem, Beast, and The Banquet* consider nationalism and revolution as indispensable elements towards genuine freedom for the oppressed and marginalised masses. Besong, in his play, creates characters that question the social conditions in which they find themselves by adopting revolutionary behaviours. In *Requiem and Beast* for example, the atmospheres of the plays are characterised by an unrelieved tension between the galvanised revolutionary will of the masses and the ferocity of the omnipresent neo-colonial dictatorship. The solidarity of the people baffles the neo-colonialist and creates a permanent sense of insecurity and panic among them. In almost all of Besong's plays, he demonstrates the plight of the Cameroonian masses and their determination to overcome neo-colonial dictatorship. *Woman* in *Requiem* for example assumes the aura of a Nationalist and her activities permeate the consciousness of the people of Agidigidi and provoke them to collective action. In these plays, Besong, to sustain his ideology and inculcate a new value system in society, which perpetuates the revolution, introduces characters like *Woman*, the *Narrator* and *Belle* in *Requiem, Beast and The Banquet* respectively. These characters become the consciousness of their fictive societies and the initiators of revolutionary action. They all refuse to succumb to the body politics they find in their societies through out right condemnation and revolutionary action.

In Requiem, a collective revolution is sustained throughout the play as the playwright's ideological standpoint. After trying unsuccessfully to use dialogue to revamp her society, Woman and the paralysed masses resort to revolutionary action. To her, "there can be no way for the people outside the revolutionary action. We fool ourselves if we believe that these parasites care for us" (58). The image of "parasites" as used by Woman emphasises the extent to which the masses of Agidigidi are exploited by their leadership. Woman's proposals are buttressed fairly on in the play by Gambari who states emphatically that:

*...We must transform an unpopular army into a revolutionary coup, resolutely committed on the side of the people to fight against under-development in the political, socio-economic and operational fields. A brutal and vicious polemic-by a mad dog-that indirectly assaults the benevolent fighter that fed it. (52)*

While Woman and Gambari believe only a revolution can emancipate them from oppression and dictatorship, they equally insist on the need for collective action. One is therefore not surprised when the Crowd shouts "Get rid of the robbers! Power to the people! The people must govern! Amandla Awether! Amandla Awether!" (36). From the preceding evidence, it is clear that for there to be any meaningful change, the people must come together and take real action. "Power to the people" in the lines above can also suggest that the people be given the right to choose their leadership. It is equally for this reason that Woman insists in the following lines that irresponsible leaders should be eliminated and power given to the people. Woman also insists that, there is no need to be afraid of dictators because power to her, belongs to the people who constitute the majority. As she posits:

*Far from it! We have no fear, for it is we who are in the majority against you. Natural law and justice demands that those who have contributed to the depression of the national economy, the starvation and mass death of its citizens, should pay for this! Down with the fat thieves of the church! Down with the robbers in paradise! All power to the people! (14)*

The pre-occupation of Woman in the above lines very much resembles that of Female Voice (Belle) in The Banquet, where she states:

*people of virgin erooncam origin, rise up like one man against prancefraud! death to killeran! damnation to all. prancefraud lackeys in erooncam! up with those who urge us to take hold of our own levers of history! our future lies in our strength, our own capacity, our industry, in our own courage!! up with people-oriental power!! (183)*

The fact that, the above declarations appear in the text, in capital letters re-enforces the message that is embedded in it. The message is a clarion call for collective action and for the masses to rely on their own strength. The only way in which a callous leadership can be overthrown as Besong proposes in Requiem and The Banquet is through a popular uprising. That is why, at the end of Requiem, a popular uprising hastens the end of Akhikrikikii's corrupt and dictatorial regime. His army deserts him, his friend Ngongo commits suicide, the French Ambassador faints and apparently never regains consciousness. Akhikrikikii commits suicide by gunshot. The masses become victorious and the Marxist ideal of popular governance is upheld. Poet as Mandela writes the epitaph on the tombstone of Akhikrikikii saying "Your government has always been above the people, you've reached the pinnacle of slaughter and

desolation where you mocked the memory of the slain. The people are above government” (70).

The fate of Akhikrikrii very much resembles that of Traourou in Nkengasong’s Black Caps and Red Feathers, who laments on the paradox of power when it slips off his palms:

*Oh! Traourou, Traourou! What is this thing called power? What do men really call power? Is it the melting fat of the tyrant when the anger of the clan is aflame? Who could believe that me, Traourou, who had the hammer and the nail, who sued, and unsued, who gave life and took it away at will could lose the grip of power as a child’s play? Those times when Traourou coughed, fears and fever ran through the nerves of the clan. But all that has come to naught. All naught. (39)*

The dramatic contrast in Traourou’s utterances between what he used to be and what he has been reduced to by the masses emphasises the eminent end of dictatorial regimes. Nkengasong sees power in the image of “fat” that must melt when the masses unite and the visual images of torture instruments like “hammer and nail” only proves how oppressive Traourou’s regime was. Nkengasong equally proves that the masses are above the government and like in the case of Akhikrikrii, their collective will led to the down fall of Traourou’s dictatorial regime. Abessollo acknowledges the power of collective strength when he tells his friend Akhikrikrii that:

*Nyunghu, you cannot go against the will of the people: the voiceless, the mingled, the wretched and the deceived whose strength lies in their unity... There is the only victorious and indispensable party. Enjoying a complete monolithic unity they are the divined majority, the steel of revolution. Where should I begin? It is the battle of the entire nation against the dark forces of tyranny, tribalism, and greed, which we incarnated. (69)*

He equally acknowledges their contribution toward the turmoil in Agidigidi. Even though Akhikrikrii dies at the end, he accuses the French and his administrators as the cause of the predicaments in Agidigidi, “under my administration, I was never corrupt, it was the French and the corrupt civil servant I appointed into government who embezzled SONARA money, not me” (71). After the above confession, Akhikrikrii shoots himself and this act symbolically portrays the end of a tyrannical regime and a new and transfigured future for Agidigidi. The use of confessions, like the one above, is one of the dramatic strategies Besong employs in Requiem to satirise postcolonial leadership. After the death of Akhikrikrii, National voices offstage prescribe the kind of leadership Agidigidi needs, “An honest and well-meaning nationalist. A leader who will ensure total and genuine independence for his country and above all, a leadership that is responsible. Our country must not be an appendage of Chirac’s mad colonial dreams” (64).

The voices further insist that the kind of leadership that Agidigidi needs, “Should have the courage to punish evil doers! Any society that does not punish evil doers is doomed! Leadership means responsibility! We fool ourselves if we believed that Akhikrikrii’s men will ever care for us!” (64-65). The fact that these declarations are made by Voices (a dramatic device which Besongs exploits elaborately in almost all his plays) and not by an individual is an indication that the prescriptions are the collective wishes of the people. Besong can be considered therefore as a playwright who advocates for responsible leadership and the Abraham Lincoln kind of democracy: “government of the people, by the people and for the

people” (Lincoln,1863). This claim is justified by Besong in an interview with Pierre Fandio in which he states:

*I identify myself with those progressive forces in society who are calling for a leadership that is made up of front line nationalist with a steely resilience, honed in democratic zeal, and who will propel the Cameroonian people to redefine their individual as well as their national focus and aspirations.(101)*

Thus, Requiem celebrates the death of a dictatorial regime that negated collective happiness and progress. The author equally accuses French colonial policy of being the cause of Agidigidi’s problems and upholds nationalism as the fundamental requirement for Africa’s quest for genuine freedom.

As in Requiem, Besong’s revolutionary ideology is quite overt in The Banquet. Like in Requiem, neo-colonial leadership in partnerships with their French colonial counterparts converted the lives of the masses into a perpetual nightmare. The subjected people had no choice but to seek ways of breaking away with the vicious circle if they must improve their lot. Revolutionary forces, consisting of Wakenmbeng collective, Erooncam Belle from across the Mungo and other democratic elements made up the movement for democracy. Unfortunately, these revolutionary forces were brutalised by the forces of law and order, with torture instruments like ‘Water Cannons, Teargas, Police Dogs and live bullets” (208).

Fairly on in the play, revolutionaries ‘from across the wall’, led by Belle take Nouayed’s leadership, including Prancefraudian and their stooges by storm:

*Male Voice: The way of peace is to cultivate Justice*  
*Another: Death to the colons murdering our women and children!*  
*Female Voice: Death to the colonial vulture wrecking our first Reserves!*

Voice of Belle: Away with Messiahs of truth from above and tyrant At the helm; away with irredeemable blunderers who feed from the oyster of the national economy; we denounce those force of mammon who derail us from the search of self affirmation. (203-204)

The stage direction that follows the voice of Belle above indicates that the collective will of the people overshadows Prancefraudain leadership. The power of the masses, in their collective action, becomes redemptive and reassures a new and prosperous dispensation. Also, the fact that the leader of the revolutionary forces in The Banquet comes from “across the mungo”, is an indication that true and patriotic democrats who will redeem Nouayed from socio-political and economic oppression, can only come from the Anglophone part of Cameroon since “across the mungo” symbolises Anglophone Cameroon.

The vision of nationalism and revolution in Beasts is not as overt as in Requiem, The Banquet, Dream and Ti- Jean. Besong’s satire in Beasts falls equally on the masses who to him are doing very little to remedy themselves from their precarious conditions. Beasts becomes a direct contrast to Requiem in terms of its revolutionary vision. It is worth noting that, unlike in Requiem, Beasts, the Night –Soil- Men who represent the masses, they are not courageous enough to stand against the forces of oppression. They are not even bold enough to go forward

and present their petitions to the leader. They channel them through a Francophone who is expected to plead on their behalf:

*Otshama: ...They are peaceful and penitent, your eminence*

*Aadingingin: They have as much to do with peace as I have to do With Iman, shah, QQM or Emperor Akihito of Japan.*

*Osthame: But they are truly sorry, your Eminence.*

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

The unsuccessful attempt by the "Anglos" to overthrow the leader only called for our contempt because, they fall back at the single shot of the pistol. The conscientization that the Night- Soil - Men gets from the Narrator stimulates them to stand up and revolt against their ruler:

*(Abruptly Night-Soil Men storm in with buckets full of excrement. Comrade Mayor Aadingingin perfectly motionless glowers at Otshama who rushes immediately at one of the intruder. Otshama bends to lift one of the intruders but he plants his feet on the ground and put up resistance, indicating he wants to speak...(142)*

The strike presented in this stage direction, shows the cowardice of post-independent leadership in Cameroon. Bate Besong's call is that, the oppressed labourers should not sit quietly and be oppressed and exploited, but should stand up and fight. Though Besong's nationalistic and revolutionary stands are not as glaring in *Beasts* as in *Requiem*, his excessive mockery of post-independent leadership is a genuine step to awaken the consciousness of the down trodden to confront the forces of oppression. It is for this reason that *Ambanassom* in *Epassa Moto* considers *Beasts* "The battle between political domination and rebellion..." (226), and to *Ambe*, although the Night-soil-men's failed attempt at redefinition is crushed by the all-too-powerfully *Aadingingin*, *Beasts*, in its form, language, content and imagery successfully offers an artistic view of the different tableaux of the total picture; "how things are and how they could be" (3). Besong as a writer is therefore looking forward to the time when the Cameroonian Federation will be "back on the road on an all-inclusive reconstruction, to the extent that no dichotomy will exist between the leader and those who are now left in the lurch" (94).

The use of revolution as an emancipation tools can also be noticed in *Bole Butake's Dance of the Vampires*. *Psaul Roi*, the central character and notorious despot's regime is over powered by a popular uprising, the oppressed masses. Led by *Mformi* a general in the army, the masses take the revolution to the barracks where they succeed not only in arresting *Psaul Roi*, but in putting an end to his dictatorial and oppressive regime. The lines below are indicatives of the tragic end of *Psaul Roi*:

*Mformi: Arrest him! He has done real damage to our land, Exploiting and exploiting... Albinia and their emissary Albino, are only interested in sucking the wealth of our land while Psaul Roi and song are sucking the blood of the people... Arrest them! These are the vampires who have ruined our land and brought calamity upon our people.(172)*

Butake's message in this play is that just as *Psaul Roi*, the end of any dictatorship begins with the consciousness and collective action of the masses. Like Besong, Butake proves in this play that no dictatorial regime can over shadow the collective will of the masses.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o is another playwright and novelist whose creative works have continuously sustained nationalism and revolution as an ideological standpoint. In *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, this nationalistic and revolutionary optimism is exposed through the protagonist Dedan Kimathi. As a true leader of his people, Kimathi becomes a symbol of patriotism and nationalism. Ngugi and Mugo employ extensive flashback in order to recapture the essence of Kimathi's heroism and revolutionary vision. The Nyandurua guerrilla forest scene is ostensibly a recall of the most significant episode in Kimathi's career as a nationalist guerrilla commander. More importantly, rare insight is provided into the hero's revolutionary vision:

*We must learn from our past strength, past weakness; past defeats and past victories. Here in the forest, we must plant seeds for a future society. Here in the forest armed in body, mind and soul, we must kill the lie that the black man never invented anything, lay for ever to rest that inferiority complex implanted on our minds by centuries of oppression Rise! Rise! Workers and peasants of Kenya our victory is the victory of the working people. The victory of all those in the world who today fight and struggle for total liberation. (68)*

This is the authorial vision and ideology of Ngugi and Micere. Kimathi's rallying speeches, the consciousness of Woman and the courage of Boy and Girl all lead to the final overthrow of the colonial regime as songs of victory are sung by the masses at the end of the play. *The Trial* can thus be viewed as a portrait of nationalist commitment and revolution, a flatter of ultimate independence as patriots try to destroy all "encrustations" of colonial mentality and map out a new foundation for a modern Kenyan society. Kimathi reiterates their determination to fight the whites when he says:

*The Whiteman has converted us into his private property, uncircumcised as he is, he is a clever man and we must prove to him that we were circumcised to get rid of all fear. We will fight the Whiteman until the last man is killed. There will be no rest until we expel all Europeans to their countries of origin. (qtd in Mau Mau 127)*

### **The Above Vision Has Been Thematized And Explored In Almost All Of Ngugi's Works.**

The use of female activists in *Requiem* and *The Banquet* equally highlight the ideological inclination of Besong. In terms of ideology, Women become a great positive force for change. Woman in *Requiem*, the Wokenmbeng women, the Female Voices and Belle in *The Banquet* constitute the nucleus of the revolutionary forces. This can be considered as a deliberate act, as Adedeji has suggested, to bring dynamism into the idealised role of women in the African society and to show their righteous concern about the state of affairs in contemporary society.

Even though all committed writers, Walcott and Besong, as exemplified above, share some internal differentiation in terms of regional, national, attitudinal and to some extent, ideological variations. Nevertheless, the unanimity and optimism with which nationalism and revolution, as themes, have been orchestrated by these playwrights, validates the assumption that, they succeed in using drama to take militantly patriotic stands. They can thus be qualified as playwrights who use their art to effect social changes and their plays are quite exemplary in their passionate advocacy of the liberation of human consciousness, as they battle between the dominant ideology and the ideology of resistance.

Though made with reference to African drama, the dominant ideological position of the playwrights under study is better summarised in the following lines by Amuta. The playwrights all demonstrate in their plays an:

*... anti-imperialist consciousness... characterised by a revilement refection of political independence vacuously defined in terms of the freedom of African nations, to erect their own flags and sing their own anthems. It also reflects and seeks avenues for repudiating the leadership of African nations by the comprador bourgeoisies. Its main thrust is economic and cultural independence defined in terms of the total transfer of the means of production and distribution of resources and cultural communication into the hands of the masses of Africa. It envisages political economy is socialism... necessarily its ideological slant is leftist, defined in broad democratic socialist terms. (85)*

While the dominant ideology legitimises the power of the rulers, ideology of resistance on its part or counter-ideology develops to give purpose and meaning to the social and political struggle to those wishing to reform or overthrow a given social and political structure.

### CONCLUSION

From the foregone, one can clearly observe that the way a society is organised, the operation of its machinery of power, how and by whom that power has been achieved, the class configuration and the maintenance of power, and the ends to which the power is put, are all issues in the domain of politics. In other words, there could be two forms of politics: a politics that holds back the advancement of humanity and the one that enhances it for the benefit and improvement of humanity. The latter politics is that of resistance against all forms of pressure and forces which stifle and inhibit the full realisation and development of the potentialities of human beings. This therefore pre-supposes a politics that questions the status quo and the hegemony of the exploitative ruling class and frees the masses in the process. In terms of ideology therefore, in the plays of Walcott and Besong, the interplay between external threat (through foreign invasion, occupation and control) and internal collaborators (through slavery and slave trade, colonialism and neo-colonialism) is considered as the greatest problem plaguing the postcolonial world today. The efforts toward the liberation of postcolonial Caribbean and Cameroon from the claws and shackles of imperialism and capitalism as the discussions above have proven, provoked the revolutionary undertones in Walcott's and Besong's plays as they all advocate that only a revolutionary break from the status quo can guarantee a profound transformation of the private property system, access to power of the exploited masses, and a social revolution that would break dependence and thus allows social change.

In the analyses so far, one can from an ideological standpoint, consider Walcott and Besong to share a similar vision as they all through their writings, represent the conscience of patriotic and progressive forces in the Caribbean and Cameroon. Both artistically and polemically, the playwrights have transformed the anti-imperialist struggle in their societies in particular and the third world in general into a consistent ideological position that is ultimately informed by Marxist dialectics. The plays of Walcott and Besong thus provide two sets of wills that are in conflict: the progressive nationalists will against the combined repressive and exploitative will of colonialism and contemporary capitalist imperialism.

Similarly, the playwrights all manipulate variously the revolutionary potential of theatre to sharpen social awareness as they adopt an alternative approach to the old school they find in

the body politics of their present day societies by presenting nationalism and social revolution as methods for social change. Their ideological commitment is seen in their conception that social change can come by their ability to raise mass awareness toward a revolutionary stance against inequality and social decadence. The manner in which Walcott and Besong writes, confirms the Marxist views that, the class into which an individual is born largely determines that individual's thinking and way of behaving and that it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence but their existence that determines their consciousness.

Even though written within different historical periods, the playwrights under study share similar ideological and artistic ways and means. They all ideologically advocate a radical transformation of the society and nationalism as the only means towards genuine freedom. As true disciples of Marxism, the playwrights in a classical Marxist ideological scenario all proclaim a revolutionary take over as the only way out for the masses to liberate themselves from the forces of domination. A close reading of the plays of Walcott and Besong show they all emphasise a certain projections of the masses as the real makers of history, a clamouring for a revolutionary transformation of society and the abandonment of the capitalist economic framework.

The twelve texts under study reveal opposition to slavery, slaves trade, imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism. While Walcott x-rays and satirises slavery, colonialism and the complexity of his West Indian identity by highlighting his Afro-West Indian culture, Besong, on his part questions the social system dominating postcolonial Cameroon politically and exploiting it economically through resistance and open confrontation. It is worth noting that, as far as their ideological temperaments are concerned, Walcott and Besong differ because Walcott is not as confrontational as Besong. Nevertheless, the two playwrights agitate for socialist, economic and political concerns as they frown at post independent leadership.

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