

# OVERLAPPING IDEOLOGIES AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESSION IN SELECTED PLAYS BY DEREK WALCOTT, WOLE SOYINKA BATE BESONG AND BOLE BUTAKE

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This paper examines the weaknesses of leadership politics in some postcolonial societies. It also argues that the inability of some postcolonial leaders to accommodate divergent views and the excessive use of force as a leadership tool are the greatest problems faced by these societies today. The paper further stresses the fact that the plays of Derek Walcott, Wole Soyinka, Bate Besong and Bole Butake, project their societies as those that continue to witness a deliberate and systematic betrayal of the hopes and aspirations of the citizenry by both the colonialists and their neo-colonial counterparts. Marginalization, alienation, oppression, dictatorship, corruption, exploitation and tribalism amongst other autocratic tactics have become leadership political ideologies that have continuously subjected the masses to perpetual servitude. From a Marxist and Postcolonial theoretical paradigms, the analyses in this study reveal that the plays of Walcott, Soyinka, Besong, and Butake, can be read as metaphorical and satirical renditions of the gruesome realities in the Caribbean, Cameroonian and Nigerian societies and a critical exploration of the wrongs that colonial and postcolonial leadership have constantly inflicted on the pauperized masses. The vast inequality that exists between colonial and postcolonial leadership (Self) and the masses (Other) is the underlying motivation behind the sustained resistance in the plays of Walcott, Soyinka, Besong, and Butake,*

## **KEYWORDS**

*Ideology, Politics, Repression and Postcolonial Drama*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The introduction of democracy as a system of governance in Africa, like in most postcolonial societies today has since its inception encountered a series of challenges which have generated countless conflicts within and without nations. The recent political crisis in Cameroon today for example, has been attributed to the inability of leadership to accept ideological differences. The pauperized masses think they have a legitimate right to question leadership and pressed for an equitable distribution of the wealth of the nation, choose a system of education that guarantees the future of their kids and court procedures that ensure justice for all irrespective of gender and social status and above all, decide the system of governance that protects their British colonial heritage and their minority status. The leaders on their part see such demands as an attempt to incite the entire nation into chaos and destabilize leadership of its juicy privileges. The overlapping ideological differences on both sides have led to a total political impasse which has resulted in different forms of civil disobedience in the two Anglophone regions. The plays of Besong and Butake have predominately been accentuated on the consequences of these

ideological differences as it creates sense of betrayal, frustration, inferiority complex, marginalization and above all, exploitation.

Similarly, the sustained conflict in most of Derek Walcott's and Wole Soyinka's plays have been the inability of leadership to accommodate divergent views. This has led to the alienation of the masses and in some extreme cases, their complete loss of identity. While the leaders contend themselves with Centre positions, the masses are relegated to peripheral positions in the socio-political and economic life of the nation. As a result, resistance becomes a condition sine qua non through which the masses strive to reassert their loss identity and their cultural heritages. The analyses in this paper will examine oppression, dictatorship, exploitation, corruption and marginalization as dominant ideologies which are in constant confrontation with resistance and revolution as authorial ideologies.

### 1.1. Contextualization of Key Terms

"Ideology" to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1988:23) in *Manifesto of the Communists Party*, is a potent weapon in the hands of the ruling class and a coercive apparatus to protect their interest and further the exploitation, alienation and oppression of the working class. Ideology becomes a set of ideas held by a particular group of people and these ideas influence the way they act and behave. The study of literature, especially from a Marxist standpoint, is deeply rooted in the study of ideology. To Marxist critics, as Georgy Plekhanov (1977:201) stipulates, "all art spring from an ideological conception of the world and there is no such thing as a work of art entirely devoid of ideological content". In the plays of the above playwrights, the nexus of the conflict that animates the plays is deeply rooted in what I refer to as "overlapping ideologies". That is, the dominant and authorial ideologies in constant confrontation with each other. In the plays under study, while the dominant ideology is to oppress, suppress and exploit the masses, the authorial ideology is to conscientise the masses to resist and revolt against all forms of oppression and exploitation.

Furthermore, "Politics" is defined by *The Complete Reference Encyclopaedia* (1994:703) as: "Ruling by the consent of the governed, an activity whereby solutions to social and economic problems are solved and different aspirations are met by the process of discussion and compromise rather than by the application of degree or force". From this definition, politics will simply mean an activity for the resolution of problems. Conversely, George Nyamndi (2004:55) in his thought-provoking political diary, *Whether Winning Whether Losing*, says "politics has to do with choices and your choice is determined by the interest you pursue at any given moment". Nyamndi here considers politics as a game of interest and his view very much resembles that of a one-time-Prime Minister of Cameroon, Achidi Achu (1995:12), who concluded that politics is a game of "permanent interest" as he puts it "Politics nan jangi, you scratch my back I scratch your own". These definitions can only sound absurd to somebody who is not versed with neo-colonialist political agendas. Nonetheless, a vivid reading of the works of Derek Walcott. Bole Butake, Bate Besong and Wole Soyinka, validate the assertion that politics, especially within the context of colonial and postcolonial leadership is dominated by individual interest. Their political activities are designed to satisfy their individual egos and their own self-aggrandizement.

This paper considers the politics of repression simply as that which is conceived with the intentions of relegating the masses not only to peripheral positions but depriving them of all socio-political and economic privileges. The masses are considered as subalterns whose voices are not to be heard and are supposed to be passive observers of the activities of the nation. As a result, they are marginalized, discriminated upon, alienated, exploited and oppressed. It is important to note that the excesses of colonial and neocolonial leadership politics largely precipitated the emergence of postcolonial drama. Postcolonial drama therefore has continuously

represented efforts towards the liberation of post colonial societies from the chaos and shackles of imperialism by concentrating on slavery, slave trade, colonialism and neo-colonialism in all their virulent manifestations

## 2. COLONIAL BRUTALITY IN DEREK WALCOTT'S AND WOLE SOYINKA'S PLAYS

In *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (1986) (henceforth simply referred to as *Dream*) and *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* (1975) (henceforth simply referred to as *Ti Jean*), and Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horse Man* (1975) (henceforth simply referred to as *Death*) two distinct ideologies are locked in a fierce confrontation. The oppressive and exploitative ideology on the one hand, and on the other, the pauperized masses. The drama in these plays is centered on the excessive exploitation of the Caribbean and Nigerian masses by the colonialist and the neo-colonialist who represent the state, and the collective will of the masses to resist or fight against all forms of political, economic and cultural exploitation.

The management of leadership positions and the selfish ideological conception of leadership by the rulers is a major source of the raging conflict between the rulers and the ruled. The leaders, especially in the works of Walcott, consider leadership position or power as an avenue for personal aggrandizement, and not for the good of all and sundry. In order to remain in power, as noticed in the plays under study, the leaders brutalize, torture and intimidate their subjects. The colonialists in *Ti Jean* and *Dream* oppress, segregate and suppress the masses in all aspects of political life as a means to maintain their superiority. In *Death*, the colonial brutality is designed to wipe out the Yoruba belief systems and in its place, impose the culture of the Europeans.

In Walcott's *Dream*, the colonialists in order to successfully oppress and exploit the masses, use the West Indian elites as their watchdogs. The creation of a strong and vibrant secret police, mostly headed by neo-colonialists, was meant not only to check any opposition but to brutalize the masses. One of Makak's crimes in the play is his opposition to her majesty's government. Corporal Lestrade who symbolically represents neo-colonial dictatorial leadership refers to Souris, Tigre and Makak, who symbolically represent the West Indian masses as "animals, beasts, savages, cannibals, niggers" (216). Because Corporal does not consider Makak and the other inmates as human beings, he uses his baton to "creak Souris" extended wrist" (216). Corporal's inhuman treatment of the West Indian masses is reiterated in the words of Souris when he says "The man break my hand, the damn man break my hand" (218). When Makak and his friends try to plead with Corporal, he reminds them that he is simply obeying English law, "English, English! For we are observing the principles and precepts of Roman law and Roman Law is English law" (219). Furthermore, in *Dream*, Corporal Lestrade uses the gun to intimidate the district dwellers and scold them to constant fear, "No market and sanitary inspector pamphilion means sano in copore sano. The pistol is not to destroy but to protect" (259). In addition, another vivid expression of oppression in *Dream* is noticed through the image of the White Woman. The white woman becomes a symbol of oppression and enslavement. Makak's attempts to destroy the white apparition is geared towards releasing himself from physical and psychological enslavement imposed on the Caribbean masses by the white oppressors, in this case, symbolized by the White Woman. Makak therefore revolts against the tyranny of his own fantasies, choosing to destroy that which he cannot otherwise resist.

Like *Dream*, *Ti Jean*, according to Albert Ashaolu (1997:149) is a parable of mankind's various confrontations with the devil. From an ideological standpoint, the play portrays the ideological differences that exist between the black, (represented by the three Jeans) and the white devil (symbolized by Planter). The relationship is that of exploitation and oppression institutionalized by slavery. Ashaolu further argues that "the West Indies has a long tradition of slave rebellion,

characterized by bloodshed and mass murder of the slaves” (149). The three brothers are sold into slavery to Planter and they use their labour for the benefit of their master. At the very beginning of the play, the description of the house where the three Jeans and their mother live emphasizes the poverty stricken nature of the family. As Frog posits, they:

Lived in a litter house,  
Made up of wood and thatch  
On the forehead of the mountains,  
Where night and day was rain,  
Moist, cloud white as cotton  
Caught in the dripping branches,  
Where sometime it was so cold....(88)

This description shows the extent to which slavery and slave trade subjected the West Indian masses to a life of poverty. Fairly on in the play, the mother of the three Jeans presents a more pathetic picture of the exploitative nature of colonial leadership when she says:

My sons, do not quarrel,  
Here all of us are starving,  
While the Planter is eating  
From plates painted golden,  
Forks with silver tongues, ... (91)

The social and economic dichotomy between the colonial masters and the West Indian masses become very glaring through the use of juxtaposition and contrast. The effectiveness of these devices is that they arouse sympathy from the audience while at the same time, emphasizing the extent to which the masses are exploited. While the masses live in abject poverty, their masters live a life of affluence. The lines above equally portray the devastating effects of the institution of slavery in the lives of the ordinary West Indians who were considered as slaves.

Besides exploitation, the West Indian masses were equally oppressed by their colonial masters. The Balom's declarations at the prologue of the play reveal some salient aspects about colonial oppression:

The Devil my master

Who owns half the world?  
In the kingdom of night,  
Has done all that is evil  
Butchered thousands in war,  
Whispered his diseases  
In the ears of great statesmen,  
Invent human justice,  
Made anger, pride, Jealousy,  
And weakened prayer;  
Still cannot enjoy...  
Those vices he created....(99)

The colonial leadership exploited and oppressed the masses to the extent that they had no choice but to resist and fight back. The three Jeans are posed on fighting and challenging the Devil because it is the only means through which they can remedy their poverty.

In the context of the play therefore, the revolt of the three brothers against the white Devil can be considered as a revolt of the colonized against colonial oppression and exploitation. It is only by out-witting the Devil (who in this play symbolizes colonialism and all its resultant consequences), that the West Indian masses (symbolized by the three Jeans and their mother) can completely emancipate themselves from physical and mental slavery. The revolt by the three brothers against their oppressor can metaphorically be considered as any revolt against an authoritarian or tyrannical government. The conflict in this West Indian inspired folktale, like in *Dream*, is initiated by the egoistic conception of power by the rulers. Unlike in *Dream*, Walcott in *Ti-Jean* adopts the use of the prologue, which to some extent, plays a similar role as stage directions. As in classical drama, in *Ti-Jean*, the prologue kick starts the play as it formally introduces the principal characters and themes. If Walcott's dramatic style has been described as "mullato", it is partly because of his ability to exploit multiple dramatic formulas and devices. So far, the analysis above justify our claims that ideological difference lies at the center of the drama in Walcott's plays and that the inability of colonial leadership to accommodate divergent views is equally responsible for persistent conflict between the colonizers and the colonized.

Similarly, the heart of the conflict in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, a play set in colonial Nigeria, is the ideological differences between the Africans and the Western world or specifically, between the British colonial administration represented by Mr Pilkings and the Yoruba people. While Mr Pilkings sees the ritual suicide sacrifice as sacrilege and barbaric, the Yoruba people on their part see it as the only means through which their king can conveniently transit into the world beyond. Colonialism, racism and prejudice are themes that inform the raging conflict that looms throughout the play. In his desperate attempt to maintain and uphold his colonial influence over the Yoruba people, Mr Pilkings arrests Elesin, chains him and imprisons him in the cellar where slaves bound for North America were once held as a means of preventing him from carrying out the ritual sacrifice. Soyinka makes us to understand in the play that according to the Yoruba tradition, when a king dies, his burial is supposed to be accompanied by the ritual death of the King's horseman as well. Elesin suffers from the hands of the white invaders (Mr Pilkings) who want to maintain control over the Yoruba people and their customs. Mr Pilkings's worry, when he learns of Elesin's forthcoming ritual suicide is the fact that the villagers are planning this event just at a time when the colonial Prince is planning his visit to the colony. The Prince has been made to understand that the colony is relatively calm amidst the horrors of World War Two and as such, it is absolutely necessary for Mr Pilkings to suppress any action or custom that may not go down well with the Prince in order to maintain the colonial illusion that even after a century of occupation, the Yorubas are still subdued and are no longer a threat to their colonial occupiers.

Mr Plikings desecrates the Yoruba tradition by wearing the Egugun in preparation for his ball room dance with his wife Jane, he brutalizes and arrests Elesin and locks him up and succeeds to prevent the ritual suicide ceremony. Elesin in the following words laments on the negative effects of the colonial agenda on the Yoruba traditional cosmology:

I no longer blame you, You stole from my first-born, sent him to your country so you could turn him into something in your image. Did you plan it all beforehand? There are moments where it seems part of the larger plan. He who must follow my footsteps is taken from me, sent to across the ocean. Then, in my turn, I am stopped from fulfilling my destiny. Did you think it all before, this plan to push our world from its course and sever the cord that links us to the great origin? (367)

The series of rhetorical questions above do not only emphasize the extent to which the Yoruba people have been oppressed, suppressed, brutalized and victimized by the British colonial agenda, but equally, shows how colonialism has negatively affected the Yoruba culture, their

beliefs and value systems. *Death* therefore paints that particular period in Nigerian history where colonialism came, toppled the people's customs and imposed itself. The analyses above show clearly that colonial brutality had a negative effect on socio-political, economic and cultural life of the West Indian and Nigerian masses as it oppressed, suppressed, exploited and alienated the colonial masses.

## 2.1. Toxic Leadership in Bate Besong's and Bole Butake's Plays

'The African politician is a blind man, he moves only in one direction towards himself'. (Nuruddin Farah (2006:14)

A close look at the nature of leadership politics in Bate Besong's and Bole Butake's plays validate Farah's claims that African politicians are greedy, self-centered and egocentric. In his thought provoking political pamphlet, Chinua Achebe in *The Trouble with Nigeria* (1990) concludes that:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land, or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are hallmarks of true leadership. (1)

Though made with reference to Nigeria, the quotation above finds expression in almost all postcolonial societies including Cameroon. This section of this paper examines the major characters in Besong's and Butake's plays as replicas of the current political leadership in Cameroon whose leadership mission is to torture, exploit, brutalize, intimidate, marginalize and rig elections as long as these tactics succeed to maintain them in power. The basic argument here is to prove that there is a thin line between the characters presented in Besong's and Butake's plays and the current political leadership in Cameroon in terms of ideology and leadership tactics. They think, behave and act in almost similar mannerism. Their leadership politics are designed for their personal satisfaction and self-aggrandizement with little or no concern for their masses. The major theme in African drama as exemplified in the plays of Besong and Butake is the excesses of political leadership. As Hilarious Ambe (1997:94) makes us to understand, quick and rapid alliances and negotiations were forged or imposed by the new leaders as "a means of cementing and consolidating their new position: and then they settled down to a systematic and shameless looting of the collective wealth". Ambe further argues that either through improved legislation, presidential decrees/ordinances, political manipulation or outright totalitarianism, the new leaders continued trampling on their citizenry, who remained dispossessed and incapacitated. Any attempt to protest or question the neo-colonial status-quo was silenced by brute force

Unlike Walcott and Soyinka who laid a lot of emphasis on the ideological differences that exist between the colonialists and the West Indian and Nigerian masses, Besong and Butake in their plays attempt to dramatize, in plain terms, the exploitation of the workers and peasants by an evil alliance of foreign capital and indigenous middlemen under the guise of economic development. The overriding preoccupation in Besong's and Butake's plays which focuses on the excesses of neo-colonial leadership is the nature of capitalist exploitation and its implications in every facet of life amongst members of different classes in society. Chidi Amuta (1989:98) buttresses this assertion when he says "the fundamental opposition in Africa today is between imperialism and capitalism on the one hand, and national liberation and socialism on the other: between a small class of native "Haves" which is tied to international monopoly capital and the masses of the people" Exploitation and alienation in *Beasts of No Nation* (2003) , *Requiem for the Last Kaiser*(1991). *Family Saga* (2005) are objectified through the life experiences of ordinary people

on a day-to-day basis. The masses have to toil endlessly in return for a pittance and a life of squalor and chronic want. Supporting evidence emerges from the experiences of the masses in the plays under study.

*Requiem for the Last Kaiser* (henceforth simply referred to as *Requiem*) and *Beasts of No Nation* (henceforth simply referred to as *Beasts*) and *Family Saga* present a capitalist society in which the masses are relegated to the background politically, oppressed and exploited by their leadership. Akhikrikirii, Aadingingin and Kamalo in *Requiem*, *Beasts* and *Family Saga* respectively are neo-colonial tyrants who consider leadership as an avenue for self-aggrandizement. Their autocracy is manifested both in their actions and utterances.

*Requiem* for example is a play in which Besong presents in a very provocative mannerism, the excesses of neo-colonial leadership politics. Commenting on neo-colonial leadership in *Requiem*, George Nyamndi (2003:42) argues that, the Marxist dialectics is sustained in *Requiem* by a triangular construct made of white colonialist agents, their bourgeoisie surrogates and alone to face the demonic pull of these two forces, the masses. The French Ambassador and the Swiss Banker incarnate the agents of political maneuver and exploitation. The French Ambassador symbolizes a specific form of European influence in Africa, which is that of the French. Alluding to the French Ambassador, Nyamndi posits that in him can be captured the domineering cynicism, contempt and the sneering disregard that stamped the French colonial mind. As the true capitalist that he is, he considers all Africans as apes and embarrassments to nature's scheme of things. He refers to Africans as "nigger punks" and insane beasts" (26).

Similarly, Bole Butake's *Family Saga* is inundated by the themes of oppression, dictatorship and exploitation. Christopher Odhiambo Joseph (2011) in "Theatre of the Oppressor: A Reading of Butakes *Family Saga*" summarizes *Family Saga* as follows:

This play is a political allegory dramatizing the fractured history of Cameroon structured on filial conflict between twin brothers: Kamala and Kamalo. The two brothers symbolize Cameroon's Anglophone and Francophone linguistic dichotomy. The conflict between the two brothers, the play reveals, arises because one of the brothers, Kamalo, who symbolizes the Francophone is oppressing his brother Kamala who represents the Anglophone Cameroon. Kamalo is portrayed as lazy, arrogant and exploitative. Kamala on the other hand is humble but highly industrious. He does all the work but Kamalo takes all the produce of his sweat and his two children, the son Ngong and the daughter Sawa. The plotline is complicated with Kamala's family's quest for truth regarding their heritage as well as the nature of their relationship with Kamalo. This quest takes a backward glance into their history right from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial period. This journey through memory eventually reveals the truth behind their relationship with Kamalo. They find that the oppressive and exploitative relationship is a result of the falsification of their origin as a family by imperial powers, France and Britain, to cause division between the two brothers. (56)

The playwright's puppet leader sees leadership as an avenue for self-aggrandizement at the expense of the suffering masses. The heart of the drama in *Family Saga* for example is the ideological and social differences that exist between Kamalo and his brother Kamala. While Kamalo considers himself the "Conceiver", his brother Kamala is relegated to the position of the "executor" of Kamalo's conceived ideas as seen in the dialogue below:

Kamala: Kamalo, why cannot you try to be reasonable by being useful to yourself and both of us? What do you ever do in this estate except lazy around in a three piece suit, drinking and smoking and...

Kamalo: Redone is there to ensure the security of the estate. He, my other offspring and I, are already too busy working for the community. You think it is easy to think? And do I need to remind you that there is division of labour in this estate? I conceive, you execute. Period.

Kamala: I conceive, you execute. Period. Who made that rule? Who gave you the right to conceive thereby transforming me into your slave? You take what is mine and I have to do the cleaning and repair work? Who gave you the right to take what is mine? (9).

The persistent repetition of the phrase “I conceive, You execute” which runs throughout the play only justifies the extent to which Kamala is exploited, oppressed and marginalized. Pathetically, Kamala from the very beginning of the play is already aware of his own oppression and exploitation but he cannot do much but lament helplessly. This is because the two had signed a deed in which Kamala considers a deed of brotherhood whereas his brotherhood sees it as a deed of bondagehood. The conversation below between the two brothers carries a lot of significance within the context of the play:

Kamala: All right. I don't like it here. I am taking my things and going elsewhere. Where is the deed of brotherhood that we both signed? I need my share of the resources.

Kamalo: you mean the deed of bondagehood? My papa is keeping it.

Kamalo: Keeping what? Your papa is keeping what?

Kamalo: The deed of bondagehood which you signed.

Kamala: Brotherhood!

Kamalo: Bondagehood! (13)

Admittedly, the conflict and tension in the play is based on the way that the two brothers interpret the meaning of the accord/deed that they had signed differently. As such, this part of the play dramatizes with intensity the oppression and exploitation of Kamala and his children, Ngong and Sawa. This oppressive and exploitative relationship is well captured when Sawa, Kamala's daughter, asks Kamalo “...Who made such an unjust rule na? You made that master and slave rule na, uncle? That's why you are living in a very beautiful house only eating and drinking and smoking and dancing while we are toiling in the fields for your enjoyment na? (29 - 30).

The rhetorical questions imbedded in Sawa's seemingly innocent questions only highlight the intensity in which they are being exploited. It equally justify our claims that oppression and exploitation are weapons used by toxic leaders to suppress, marginalize and exploit the masses. Other vivid instances of oppression and exploitation of Kamala by Kamalo include: The rape of Sawa, the detention of Kamala and the dispossession of his family from the benefits of the family estate.

Besides oppression and dictatorship, corruption becomes an ideological leadership strategy as well. The society in *Requiem* is so corrupt to the extent that “all the waters in the ocean can never clean the filth in the country” (5). As a result of corruption, there is a vast disparity between the masses and their leaders. From Woman's declarations, one is tempted to agree with Emmanuel Doh (2008:2) who in Besong's funeral tributes, conclude that “to hate Besong because of his writings is to declare oneself an oppressor”. Besong is so violently angry with corrupt and dictatorial leadership politics in Cameroon to the extent that it has become a topical issue in almost all of his works including his poetry. In fact, as George Ngwane (1993:23) opines, Besong is extremely allergic to treachery and betrayal and spares no effort to lambast in bitter tones, leaders who betray their people. Thus, Besong's writings and style are elevated to the level that it will face his antagonists with the same dictatorial weapon they use against the masses. In other words, “the harder they rule, the harder he writes”. *Requiem* thus symbolizes Akhikrikri's



oppressive, brutal and totalitarian regime, very much under French influence. The masses in this society are subjected to total fear, and everyone seems to be at the mercy of Akhikrikiki.

In a similar manner as in *Requiem*, Besong's *Beasts* is another play in which the author exploits his talents as an experimental playwright. In this play, the playwrights in an attempt to portray and denounce the excesses of neo-colonial leadership politics makes excessive use of thought provoking and most especially, nauseating images of decay, excrement and filth. As in most of Besong's plays, *Beasts* in a typically absurdist mannerism, breaks away from obvious dramatic conventions. Once again, Besong's central pre-occupation in *Beasts* is the nature of leadership and its politics. *Beasts* is equally concerned with the socio-political, economic, cultural and social problems faced by the city of Ednouay, under the leadership of supreme mayor DealshamAadingingin. Gilbert Doho (1993:91) on his part sees the play as one that "sets out to draw attention to the physical and cultural genocide committed against Anglophone Cameroonians by their Francophone counterparts"

Politically speaking, Besong in *Beasts* once more re-awakens the inequalities that exist between the Francophones (pejoratively referred to throughout the play as "Frogs") and the Anglophones (referred to in the play as "Anglos"). The nature in which Anglophones and Francophones are portrayed in the play shows clearly that the Francophones will political and economic power, while the Anglophones are simply reduced to "carriers of shirt"(76). This assertion is equally highlighted by Emmanuel Fru Doh (1993:76) who argues that in *Beasts*, the "Anglos" of Ednouay are presented as Night-Soil -Men in charge of the city's fetid trash, the evacuation of which is their livelihood and their voices, as their cry for freedom echoes those of Anglophone Cameroonians.

The principal conflict in the play therefore becomes the excessive oppression and exploitation of the Anglophones (Night-Soil-Men) by their Francophone counterparts. While the "Frogs" are the great consumers, the "Anglos" are confined to mean, unidentified roles of carriers of the waste passed out by their Francophone masters. There are thus considered as traitors and slaves, "Anglos are traitors and slaves" (105). As slaves, their duty is to do the work while their masters eat, "monkey will do the dirty work, Gorilla go dey wack" (104). The forgone lines immediately bring into perspective, the question of inequality, marginalization and class difference. In Marxist terms, Aadingingin and his Comrade Otshma represent the superstructure and the Night-Soil-Men, Blind Man and Cripple, the base. Considered within such a context, *Beasts* could be read as a commentary on the relationship, struggles and engagement of the masses battling against a dominant, more privileged bourgeois class. The statement made by Aadingingin becomes a political statement on the inequality that beset the nature of the characters in the play's universe, and a critique of the prevailing unequal and rigged nature of their social being.

As Akhikrikiki, Aadingingin is portrayed in *Beasts* as a notorious tyrant and dictator. As mayor of the city of Ednouay, he uses torture and intimidation to maintain his leadership position. His government enjoys absolute power and tolerate no opposition and criticism. The government has forbidden and banned all sort of opposition and those suspected to be rebels are incarcerated in torture chambers:

You'll be put in torture chamber. The machine will go full swing. They'll chain your hands and feet and drag you on the floor until you faint. Bottles will be broken on your head....I will order torture with no regret. You'll be held in solitary. Your cell will be flooded with water. You'll be deprived of food and sleep. You'll be beaten and forced to drink your own urine.  
(98 / 131)

One can surmise from these declarations that Aadingingin is a typical dictator and a tyrant. The harsh nature of his tone as exemplified above equally highlights the extent to which the masses are oppressed and tortured.

### 3. CONCLUSION

The analyses in this paper have proven, using Marxism and Postcolonial theory that Walcott's, Soyinka's, Besong's and Butake's plays are vitriolic indictment of colonial and contemporary oppressive and exploitative ruling oligarchies. The analyses equally showed that the problem with colonial and postcolonial leadership politics is that of their subjective ideological conception of leadership. This is because the leaders in the plays consider ideology as a weapon in their hands and a coercive apparatus which they use to protect their interests and further the exploitation, alienation and oppression of the down trodden West Indians, Nigerian and Anglophone Cameroonian masses.

It was revealed in this paper that oppression, dictatorship, megalomania, exploitation and the excessive use of force define and sustain the nature of political leadership in the works of Walcott, Soyinka, Besong and Butake. Consequently, the plays of these playwrights become metaphorical and satirical renditions of the gruesome actualities in the West Indian, Nigerian and Cameroonian societies. The vast inequality that exists between colonial and postcolonial leadership and the masses precipitate the constant resistance that runs through the plays.

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