

Mythologizing Post (Coloniality) in Cameroon Poetry :
The Case Study of Bate Besong's *Disgrace*, *Autobiographical Narcissus*
and *The Emany-Nkpe's Collected Poems*

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Abstract

This paper argues that Bate Besong's poetry is a recollection of world mythology and the past, a past which continues to haunt the present. The paper equally introduces the binaries between the ruled and the rulers, the oppressed and the oppressor, the good and the evil, the genuine and pseudo intellectual *vis a vis* nation building, and how the frontiers between these opposing camps can be redressed. The paper equally articulates that the *Obasinjom* cultⁱ or / and *Emany-Nkpe*ⁱⁱ are alternative fraternities for the intellectual and political guilds in postcolonial Cameroon. Thus, these cults, as he rightly points out, have been enmeshed in a plethora of mythologies, orchestrated by the colonial encounter. However, the indigenisation of the political and intellectual guilds is the leeway for Cameroonians in particular and Africans in general to come to terms with their own values, hence identity.

Keywords: Mythology, myth, Cult, Obasinjom, Emany-Nkpe, Freemasonry.

Most literary historians, scholars, and writers often argue that some of the best literary works are written against the backdrop of collective social pain and, at times, political intolerance. In such climates, writers are often actively aroused to operate not only as chroniclers of their time, but assume roles as socio-political pathfinders, as they give hope and focus to the oppressed. This is done with the available resources at their disposal. For Bate Besong, the world of myths becomes the main path through which the world's riddle can be solved. His much contested and debated poetic and "military" vision is borne out of his almost uncompromising views - that a poet must not only be a master of his craft but should stake his own life for mankind's ultimate salvation. In this process of human salvation and dencentering former spheres, Besong stakes not only his life and career in his writings, but delves into the world of mythology to redefine positions and ascertain the role of the intellectual and political elites in the intellectual and political atmosphere in which he finds himself.

The framework of mythic consciousness becomes the appropriate terrain. Thus, rather than hovering around issues related to Gayatri Charkravorty Spivak's hot-bottom question - "Can the Subaltern Speak?", the paper fittingly cuddles to George Lamming's igniting and mind searching caption: "The Occasion for Speaking", as the poet prepares his personae in the different poems to voice the injustices within his society and become evangelists - "warriors". Besong is convinced,

and he articulates that the *Obasinjom* cult or / and *Emanya Nkpe* are alternative fraternities for the intellectual and political guilds in postcolonial Cameroon. These cults, as he rightly points out, have been enmeshed in a plethora of mythologies, orchestrated by the colonial encounter. Thus the mythic bend that this work anchors on is redefining the role of occultism vis- a- vis nation building – which cult to appropriate or shun? The major cult antithetical to that proposed by Bate Besong is Freemasonry - a cult, he believes, has created cultural, intellectual and political eccentrics in postcolonial Cameroon.

Leela Gandhi in *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* intimates that the emergence of anti-colonial and ‘Independent’ nation-States after colonialism is frequently accompanied by a desire to forget the colonial past. This ‘will-to-forget’ takes a number of historical forms, and is impelled by a variety of cultural and political motivations. Principally, postcolonial amnesia is symptomatic of the urge for historical self-invention or the need to make a new start - to erase painful memories of colonial subordination. As it happens, histories, much as families, cannot be freely chosen by a simple act of will, and newly emergent postcolonial nation-States are often deluded and unsuccessful in their attempts to disown the burdens of their colonial inheritance. The mere repression of colonial memories is never, in itself, tantamount to a surpassing of or emancipation from the uncomfortable realities of the colonial encounter. In response, postcolonialism can be seen as a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath. It is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past. (4)

In this process of remembering, revisiting and interrogating the colonial past, Besong sees the necessity to reawaken the new nation’s political and intellectual elites on the eroding effects of colonialism on the identity of his people. He believes that the leeway is through his people’s tradition, a tradition that colonialism has attempted with all ramification to subvert. Despite all, this tradition continues to survive, though with less vigour, as it persistently competes with intruding traditions. The majority of the imported myths continue to plunge Cameroonians more and more into moral infamy than solving the problems created by the colonial encounter. This awakens Besong to awaken human consciousness. This is keeping with Bill Ashcroft’s, Gareth Griffiths’ and Helen Tiffin’s suggestion in *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* that “Post-colonial cultural studies have led to a general re-evaluation of the importance of orality and oral cultures.....” (151).

Besong like the aforementioned critics sees the necessity of being part of this re-evaluation process. Unlike Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, whose focus is simply re-evaluating the rapport between the written and oral tradition as forces of authentication, Besong proceeds to unearth the tradition, precipitating power transfer from western nourished politicians and intellectual to the genuine Cameroonian intellectual and politician, who are ready to reconstitute the fragmented continent. He prepares the grounds for the eventual relocation when the persona in “The playwright and the Campus Giant” intimates that

“Put them on the scale, and
They weigh nothing.
They are lighter than the ostrich’s
Feather

...
 You will soon disappear like
 Harmattan grass that dries up;
 You will die
 Like plants that vanish in the Kalahari
 ...Playwrights and scholars will possess
 This campus

And enjoy intellectual prosperity & peace. (*Disgrace*, 13, 15)

The above excerpt portends the fate that awaits cultural, political and intellectual eccentrics, trapped in the web of Freemasonry, as the persona suggests. Borrowing from Lyotard, Ghandi quips that the postcolonial approach to resolving contemporary crises may be compared with what Lyotard describes as the psychoanalytic procedure of anamnesis, or analysis—which urges patients ‘to elaborate their current problems by freely associating apparently [**consequential or**] inconsequential details with past situations—allowing them to uncover hidden meanings in their lives and their behaviour’ (Lyotard 1992, p. 93). In adopting this procedure, postcolonial theory inevitably commits itself to a complex project of historical and psychological ‘recovery’. If its scholarly task inheres in the carefully researched retrieval of historical detail, it has an equally compelling political obligation to assist the subjects of postcoloniality to live with the gaps and fissures of their condition, and thereby learn to proceed with self-understanding. (8, emphasis mine)

This process of self-understanding as Bate Besong suggests in his collection, *Disgrace, Autobiographical Narcissus and Emanyankpe Collected Poems* is evident when he recollects the memories of his fore-parents through the myth surrounding *Obasijom*, and sees it as an alternative for the myriad of cults proposed by foreign mythology and imported by the western colonizers and their agents.

Addressing a similar plight like Besong, Micheal Hechter in *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development interrogates*: “How do societies pass beyond tribalism? How do they encompass new, culturally divergent groups and yet, in the course of history, emerge to be nations?”(1). Unlike Hechter whose scope spreads to tribalism and colonialism, Besong’s lenses are on colonialism, with no attention to tribalism. Besong, at first, is worried on how societies can pass beyond colonialism, with divergent values and identities to become nations. Using his poetic arsenals to prepare himself for an occasion to speak, Besong envisages the marginalized tradition as an internal colony, whose structure is maintained by the internal colonizer (agents of imported tradition). For him, the position of this disadvantaged groups, can only be redressed if they regain control over their own cultural, political, spiritual and intellectual institutions.

Speaking on such reawakening, Besong sees nothing other than transforming the intellectual and political guilds into Obasijom warriors. Embracing the Obasijom cult and other judicial structures like the Emanyankpe, for him, will help relocate them from their former sphere to the centre.

As seen above, the centre - margin binarism, for Besong, unlike most of his contemporaries (Edward Said, Homi Bhaba, and Achebe), is not necessarily the Occident - Orient dichotomy.

Within the margins of Edward Said in *Orientalism*, new centers and margins have developed, with the colonized playing a dual role of colonized/ colonizer. Hechter notes that such binaries from within, christened internal colonization, focuses on political conflict between core and peripheral groups as mediated by the central government. From this perspective, the ‘backwardness’ of the peripheral groups can only be aggravated by a systematic increase in the transaction with the core. The peripheral collectivity is seen to be suffused with exploitative connections to the core, such that it can be deemed to be an internal colony. The core collectivity practices discrimination against culturally distinct peoples who have been forced onto less accessible inferior lands. (30)

In order not to aggravate the marginalization process, Besong sees the necessity of integrating the peripheral collectivity politically and intellectually in society through the introduction of a cult that can harbour indigenous values and aspirations.

Arguments point to the fact that Besong is not out to question the potency of these imported cults. Emphasis is laid on the nature of their worshipers’, since the product of their commitment is moral infamy. The basic question that emerges out of this is, what becomes of the new margin created in this process of relocation suggested by Besong ? In sum, he notes: they will suffer the same fate as the inhabitants of Gog and Magog.

Besong’s intellectual, cultural and cerebral experience equipped him for a multitalented experimentation with diverse forms of folklore and myths in particular. Born of the Kenyang ethnic cluster in the South West Region of Cameroon, and educated in Nigerian Universities during the glory days of Soyinka, Besong acquired enough fortification (spiritually and intellectually) that later helped him adopt warrior gods like *Obasinjom*, *Mfam*, *Emanya-Nkpe* and *Soyinka’s Ogun*, to wage a battle against the Cameroonian intellectual and political classes, whom he ardently believes are empowered and controlled by the Freemason cult (*Disgrace*, “State of the Union” 80-81, and “Their champagne Party will End” (88-89).

Besong in a critique, captioned “Post -Unification Anglophone Exile Poetry: Introducing Simon Mol and Kangsen Feka Wakai”, points out that “Poetry then, is the way in which the myth maker relates to the political and economic conditions of his society as a means of communicating shared experiences” (1/6). He was, in fact, in the process of myth making as a means of communicating “shared experiences” with a society, which he firmly believes, has fallen into apathy, and whose history, according to Kikefomo Mbulai in “Satire and Historicity in the Poetry of Bate Besong” had been “politically doctored” (Mbulai, 9) in order to perpetuate their continued suffering. Besong, like Patricia Ann Lynch in *African Mythology: A to Z* believes that Human use mythology and ritual to establish a sense of community identity, and an understanding of their place in the universe. These tools maintain the traditions of a culture and reflect what is most important in people’s lives. We read myth not only to learn about the culture in which the myth originated, but to discover what was in the hearts and minds of the myth makers. (vii)

Like myths that help to establish and create space for one in the universe, R. S. Sugirtharajah in “*Charting the Aftermath: A Review of Postcolonial Criticism*” admits that postcolonialism was an ‘intellectual symptom’ a reaction against the failure of the newly independent nation states to initiate pluralistic democratic structures and environmentally balanced development, to bridge the gap between rich and poor, and meet the needs of indigenous peoples. (16)

Besong like Lynch and Sugirtharajah espouses the creation of a structure that will satisfy the needs of his people and provide them space to fully define themselves within a pluralistic set-up. Nevertheless, he became much more profound and impatient during his last days on earth, as he constantly switch to a Biblical aura of speech much like Hebrew prophets, sounding a dissonant note to iniquitous people (Freemason malevolent worshipers) and coming to terms with his transience.

Unlike most postcolonial writers who see the West and other foreign traditions as the core of Africa's problems, Besong in his collection *Disgrace: Autobiographical Narcissus* and *the Emanyankwe Collected Poems*, without necessary rejecting or overemphasizing similar claims, sees the frontier from within. His dredging up the past and excavating the world of mythology is a step towards an interposing myth, which can empower, revivify, redefines and cleanse the intellectual and political elites or the society at large from general filth. In this vein, he draws the reader's attention to the malevolent worshipers of the Freemasonry, who have taken Cameroonian universities and state institutions hostage. This fraternity which is often said to consist branches *not in mutual regular amity*, for Besong, is not any solution to Cameroon's problems, especially in states institutions where morality is supposed to reign. As earlier mentioned, Besong's problem is not totally with the Freemason cult, but with the malevolent worshipers, whose interpretation of the conception of free will and protection, which are central tenets in Freemasonry, is exaggerated to the detriment of the politics and intellectual wellbeing of the new nation. To this, he sees the need for its destruction and eventual replacement with alternative cults, where fraternity leads to nation building and cohesion in society. For him, the Obsinjom cults, with its tributary organ like the Emanyankwe stands prime.

Ute Roschenthaler in "Obasinjom: The Discrimination of a Cult Agency in the Cross River Area" records that, unlike many witch-hunting cult among the Ejagham, Bayang, Ayang Korup Yako, Mbembe, Boki of the South West Region, Cameroon,

Obasinjom usually did not disappear after accomplishing the immediate job for which it was acquired. The owners additionally desired to possess the institution because it created wealth, influence, prestige and influence for them as well as their villages as a whole.... As intellectual property, they were owned by the buying village, and at the same time, remained the property of the selling village. Obasinjom, as well as more important institutions, created decentralized networks of owners, who had no definite knowledge of all the other participants. The recently formed pan-Obasinjom association, however, has changed this situation and, at least among some owners, created a feeling of identity and a greater sense of unity. (1)

In most of his writing, the Obasinjom cult has often been designated as a mythic force for order and justice to the deprived and victimized. With his bearing from the Cross River area of Nigeria and Cameroon, the Obasinjom is reputed to identify witches and wizards and strip them of evil. It is on this note that Besong in "The Foolishness of trusting in tribal gods," (*Disgrace*, 1) goes nuts with a self styled evil genius, who, at the University of Buea- Cameroon (which he uses a microcosm of the macrocosm) has stifled creativity, suppressed dissenters and trimmed down the administration to a faction of occultists, worshiping false "tribal gods," using ritualistic items like "internal organs/of the warthog/the liver and two kidneys with fat / on them", these are sacrificed to the "tribal adders" ("The Foolishness...", 3). He proceeds to mourn his destiny in the following

postulation: “My daughters have endured the suffering that/ should have been mine the pain that I should have borne (“The Foolishness ...”, 3). Yet, he recognizes the futility of the effort of trusting in gods made with human hands, which invariably are plastic in nature and worthless in value. He indicates this in the following words: “they who / had hired a goldsmith to make a god / of a murderer” (“The Foolishness...”, 3). These deities, he believes, by no means can attain the sublimity and potency of the Obasinjom war lords. He states:

How can you say you have not defiled yourself?
 They are not Obasinjom warriors, who
 clothe themselves with the strong
 desire to set things right
 and to punish and avenge the wrongs
 that the people suffer .(“The Foolishness....” 5)

The above excerpt portrays the vast disparity between smaller deities, often with malevolent powers and whose desires are to incessantly persecute the just, and the Obasinjom warrior whose inspirational qualities lie in avenging “the wrongs /that the people suffer (“The Foolishness....”, 5). Convinced of the primacy of his cult, the persona warns evil doers in “Collaborator” that “You can do absolutely / nothing / A stooge has no / honour. / He lives in constant disgrace” (8). These articulations forebode reminiscent of the terrifying times within which they were written.

Looking at the situation at the University of Buea heated crisis of 2005, where the former Governor Aboeum A. Tchoyi’s Commission, designated to breach the gap between the freemason manned administration and students, considered the poet “righteous” enough to pacify students on rampage. The booty carried home by the saint was persecution and witch hunting from the congregation of Freemason worshipers at the helm of power at the University. The poet, in such imbroglio, have recourse to the Obasinjom deity to dismantle the ravaging occultists within the academia so that “playwrights / and scholars will possess / this campus /and enjoy intellectual prosperity and Peace” (“The Playwright and the Campus Giants,”15). The same temperament and diction run throughout the other poems in *Disgrace* and the *Emanya-nkpe Collections*. Besong had previously opined that at a moment when unswerving expression was desirable, the poet no longer required “refuge behind aesthetics that were enigmatic and indirect” (*Disgrace*, notes pg 118). Rather, the language became synonymous with a mythology, the forum that addresses the writer’s confrontation with a politically partisan administration. In “The Mouths of Liars will be shut”, for example, the persona slams curses on the politician and intellectuals, who have taken Cameroonian State universities and institutions hostage. This takes one a trip down memory lane to one of Soyinka’s “Malediction”, a piece that curses a woman for rejoicing at the massacre of her fellow countrymen. Similarly, in “The Mouths...” the persona equally considers that the University administrators under whom he works, find fortification through the “worship of fortune-tellers / and excelled in necromancy to control events” (9). Consequently, he appends in “The Mouth of the liars will be shut” that such perpetrators of evil are reminded of the perilous times that lie ahead. He cautions:

You are doomed,
 and you have brought this upon yourself
 What you have done to others will be done to your

Children, and
Grand-children to the third and fourth
Generations. (9)

This is a prophecy that prefigures misery to successive generations of malicious administrators and intellectuals. In such circumstances, he warns the seer that the “strength of wotolo astrologers” (11) will be of no consequence to the people-power, when Obasinjom would have done justice for them.

Mbulai, in a similar vein espouses Besong’s views, when he says: he later became very versatile in his last days as he sensed his own closed world collapsing, going berserk under mammonite pressures, so in his vision to bring sanity to a society wallowing in obscurity, one gets the echoes of Yoruba Mythology, of the spell of Ogun, the promethean hero in Yoruba pantheon one of whose attributes is the shielding of orphans.(141)

Besong’s myths spread along the corridors of his resourceful cultural experience; as he is alleged to have been a disciple of some metaphysical cosmic force among the Kenyang people. In poems like “Appointments in UB” and “Confidence placed in the party comes to nothing”, where the persona is on an exorcising mission, he challenges the academia to awake from slumber and make right choices. In the same poem, he castigates “lecturers, whose/rheumy psyche still bear the scars of occult cannibalism” (22). Consequently, he dissociates himself from those who claim to be “fortified, by / the intercession of futurologists, at the champagne / party of chronic carnivores, in the firmament of power” (“Confidence placed in the party comes to nothing” 27). This is the kind of unruly spirit that characterizes the poems in *Disgrace: Auto-biographical Narcissus poems*; poems that address issues of persecution and victimization in an environment that ought to be guided by free thought, non partisanship in politics and intellectual prosperity. In an attempt to purge the society of such clutter, the persona resorts to aboriginal myths as alternatives.

The difference in the *Emanya-Nkpe Collection* and *Disgrace* is that the setting of most of the poem, in time and space, are not confined to the University of Buea. A good number of the poems, earlier published in *Just above Cameroon*, suggest the kleptocratic inclemencies of the political and intellectual elites in Cameroon. Rupture such maze, Besong fortifies himself, in line with Eunice Ngongkum’s “Revolutionary Aesthetics in Dramaturgy: Bate Besong’s *Beast of No Nation* and Bole Butake’s *Lake God*”, when she quips that a writer is “prophet, philosopher and patriot” (44). Embroiled with additional benediction from the Emanya – Nkpe cult, a cult believed to be a Leopard-like secret society open only to men, and in charge of law and order in society, the persona embarks on challenging the Freemason; a cult that host a large clique of an epicurean class of insensitive politicians and intellectuals in Cameroon to the quest and cry of the populace. In “Their Champagne Party will End”, for instance, the persona states:

Indeed, they have sworn fealty to their Masonic lodges and to each to bankrupt our national coffers.
So that they’ll take it upon themselves, for reasons best known to themselves to speak the folklore
of their free-masonry (they barricade / themselves on the coast). Their champagne party will end.
(89)

The excerpt speaks of Besong’s prophetic bent of mind, always contemplating and predicting trouble for raiders of state coffers. Mbulai in a similar vein had earlier indicated that “Their Champagne Party will End”, is “peopled by insensitive, sadistic and corrupt banditti and

their hapless, suffering citizens, watching their oil wealth sponged to feed metropolitan neo colonial coffers” (134). This citation is a summation of the scenario that Besong decries. What is worthy of note is Besong’s consciousness of imported occultism as an apparatus for political gansterism.

Flourished during the peak of economic crisis in Cameroon, where ill-gotten wealth was starched in foreign banks, the poet-prophet could not but challenge the “Freemasonry” that even Christopher Malowe’s Mephistophilis in *Dr Faustus* found useless at the end, amid his intellectual obsession. Consequently, the persona prefigures that “their champagne party will end!”, a title so potent that later became the title of a collection of poems in honour of Besong. “The Party’s Over” and “Requiem for a sycophantic Omenologist” share the similar vision of provincialising the activities of these Freemason malevolent worshipers. Mbulai also points out that “Requiem for a sycophantic Omenologist,” speaks of the “infamous political trajectory of Solomon Tandeng Muna, who rightly or wrongly, was perceived by Cameroonians West of the Mongo as having schemed with Ahidjo in dismantling the state of West-Cameroon ...” (127). The persona in this light notes:

Compatriots, the hour has come for the surrogate Omenologist of the Macabre Imam hired from the West of River Mongo.

He is to disappear soon into his voodoo mask.

Here is the time compatriot: As he jumps into his free mason.

To pull off his iron mask at once.... (97)

The footnote of this poem also indicates that the poem is dedicated to P.M. Kale and S.A. George, who, according to the persona, are some of the unsung heroes of West Cameroon. Like other pathfinders, they are once again at war with “Omenologists”, “Freemasons”: those who wear “voodoo masks” to strip the people of their rightful place in history. The persona once more, as in previous circumstances, believes that only the mythic power of Emany-Nkpe and Obasinjom, Mfam, and Ogun, can salvage them from this daunting mission. This is evident in “After Mandela’s Earth”, “Eve of Apocalypse” and “The Kaiser Lied”.

In spite of his effort in the exploration of aboriginal myths to good effect, Besong still extensively blends these African myths with other world myths, thus making his poetry somewhat difficult to tie down to a single cannon. This gives him the scope to be able to justify his claims why aboriginal myth should take precedence over imported myths. Also, it provides him the platform to point out the fate that awaits evil doers, if not in African mythology, it can be in other world mythologies. It is in this vein that Bernard Fonlon, points out in *The Genuine Intellectual* that

...a maker of great literature thanks to his scientific and philosophical bent of mind becomes a seer...into the illusive future, a light in the darkness of his days urging men towards right and rewarding achievement and rich fulfillment, or warning society should the need arise against impending cataclysm. (132-133)

Besong’s poetry is essentially fashioned within the framework of such philosophy propounded by Fonlon. Besong, warns his society, in the same pitch and articulation as Jeremiah, the ancient Hebrew prophet, who, empowered by God, spent his time struggling to get Israel out of “impending cataclysm”. Or like the Islamic scriptures summarizes: “Allah will make it to dust...” 21:95-96. The pronoun “it” here refers to evil doers or the inhabitants of Gog and Magog. This

explains why Mbulai believes that Besong is a visionary, as “... towards the closing days of his life, develop into a mature, profounder trait, even colouring his work in terms of its apocalyptic vision and his debt to the gnomic idiom and imagery of the grand tradition of Hebrew prophecy (133). Jeremiah was obsessed, with his community’s perversion and their worship of fortune tellers to the detriment of the Almighty God. Similarly, Besong speaks with much bewilderment of “The Foolishness of Trusting in Tribal gods”. Just like the puzzlement of Jeremiah 2: 23-24, that “How can you say, I have not defiled myself after the Baals...?” Besong is caught within the same web to ask similar question to an administrator – cum - fortune teller worshiper that “how / can you say you have not defiled / yourself? (“The foolishness...” (5)). These feelings are borne of frustration and disenchantment, partly because the political and intellectual elites are obsessed in their malevolent way of worship. The intellectual now believes that academic and spiritual ascend depends not on “... working night and day/ engraving, precious frescoes, carefully; souging out new/ soutanes, against mimic monstrosities they who have pinioned the state as game to be hunted...” (“Post-mortem intellectual”, 6) but believing in a temple that is ecumenical and can be taken anywhere with strict ritualistic rules to be respected. Thus the assignment as serving as the society’s Think Tank becomes questionable and is reduced to what Bate Besong Christens “... useless as a crow flying across Cameroon. You have succumbed to blackmail”(“Post motem Intellectual”, 6).

Bate Besong in “The mouth of Liars will be shut”, further draws us into Judeo-Christian and other world mythologies not as a terminus, but mostly as references to the final destination of the malevolent worshippers of Freemasonry. He notes: you offer sacrifices of fatling with incense; and/ quarantined/ the Bakassi oil wells for party of Flames; the party of infernal ophidians./ Galagoes, prostitutes, business-/ men of Gog and Magog world (ii, 9). Gog and Magog or Gog from Magog appear in varied world mythologies. Despite its recurrence in most world mythologies, it copiously figures in Judeo-Christian, Islamic, Classical, Medieval, Hindu, New Zealand, Colorado, British Columbia and Islamic mythologies. In these mythologies, Gog and Magog appear sometimes as individuals, peoples, and in other contexts, as geographical spaces. What links these mythologies concerning Gog and Magog is the negative connotation it engenders: destruction, wild, wickedness, evil. Besong’s mention of it is more geographical - a milieu that harbours evil doers. This drives us to conclude that his Gog and Magog can be ascribed to a greater extent to Judeo-Christian and Islamic Literatures, and to a lesser extent to Briton, Classical, Medieval and Hindu mythologies.

In Judeo-Christian literature the context of usage is genealogical, eschatological and apocalyptic. The books of Ezekiel 38 and 39 and Revelation 20, which are eschatological and apocalyptic, record the fate that awaits evil doers in the end time - total destruction at the battle of Armageddon. Satan, as the *Holy Bible* notes “shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the world, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the battle, the number of whom is as the sand of the sea” (Rev. 20: 8). In the similar vein, The *Qu’ran* says: Allah will make it to dust” and the people of Gog and Magog will be breached through the barrier (21: 95-96).

According to Bate Besong, what awaits Freemason worshipers, within the political and intellectual circles in Cameroon are the flames of Armageddon that will make them to dust. Gog and Magog become the four corners of the world that harbour evil doers. These “ Galagoes, prostitutes and

business men of Gog” (“The mouth of the liars will be shut, 9 ”) can be compared to the demon brothers, “Koka and Vikoka”, in Hindu mythology, the barbarian horse riders in Classical and Medieval mythologies or the two giant guardians of the city of London and the son of Japheth the Briton’s mythology.

This crusade to win souls for the devil is what has bedeviled the university milieu and the political scenario in Cameroon. These malevolent Freemason evangelists in their destructive efforts have “... terrified the trade unionist and transformed his/ prophetic / Galilee into a tribal Book of Habbakuk, now:/ Divided we ride.” In this light, Besong slams them with curses as he posits: “Indeed, they have sworn fealty to their Masonic lodges / & teach others to bankrupt our national offers/ the curse on the heads of the corrupt banditti” (‘The Champagne...’, 88).

To borrow from Judeo-Christian mythology, “... no man might buy or sell save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast or the number of his name ...six hundred three score and six” (*Revelation* 13:17/18) in a Cameroon of Freemason worshipers. This insinuates the refusal of peripheral collectivity to abide by the doctrines of Freemasonry, which makes it difficult and sometimes impossible for peripheral collectivity to fully integrate within the intellectual and political circles. However, the Obasinjom Warriors, who have vehemently refused to carry the “sign of the beast”, will pay a price, as Besong did (through persecution, and horrifying death after the lunch of *Disgrace*). What is worth noting is their emergence at the end as saints of the great tribulation to decentre and occupy the academia and the political scene. Armageddon Gog and Magog become the final destinations of “the Galogoes, prostitutes and businessmen ...” (“The mouth of the liars will be shut, 9 ”) that Besong prefigures in his poetry. These mortal battles will shut the mouths of all malevolent Freemason worshippers to usher in a millennium reign for genuine intellectuals and politicians, who are committed to nation building, and must have been sanctified, in the shrine of Obasinjom and Emany-Nkpe. Thus, the poet trails off into the self righteous Obasinjom cult and other African traditional cults as ultimate way to liberation.

The question that any reader will raise is how can this survival of traditionalism within a sea of world mythology rooted in the system be possible? Michael Hechler on this notes affirms that

One remedy is to incorporate the peripheral group into the modern industrial economy so that it becomes subject to the strains of structural differentiation. The widening of the division of labour loosens the hold of traditional authorities, creates new social needs and functions, and thus brings pressure for integration. Differentiation and upgrading processes may require the inclusion in a status of full membership in the relevant general community system of previously excluded groups which have developed legitimate capacities to “contribute” to the functioning of the system. As the peripheral collectively begins to participate in the national economic, system, changes in its structural relations should lead to rational, performance-centered, and universalistic values.(28) Thus, crushing the core at Gog and Magog can equally be viewed as the systematic shift of management from core collectivity to peripheral collectivity, with repentant core collectivity members retained within the new set-up. Unlike Hechter, who is dynamic in his integration approach, Besong is radical in his negotiation process, since he believes in the precedence of traditionalism over any imported culture.

The objective of this study was to examine Bate Besong as a socio-political and cultural pathfinder in his society. The discussion showed that after negotiating all contours of his society as

a postcolonial writer, Besong introduced a plethora of world mythology as a means of redefining the self. His exploration of world mythology, does not, in any way divert his interest from his mainstream thought, as he convincingly answers the overwhelming question on the direction that Africa should take in this global milieu where core collectivity, often influenced by western mainstream thoughts, gives no room for Africans to think and take proper control over their own values. For him indigenisation of the political and intellectual guilds is the leeway for Cameroonians in particular and Africans in general to come to terms with their own values, hence identity. Resorting to the Obasinjom and other related cults, becomes a process of intellectual and political circumcision, rejuvenation and empowerment. Alluding to the Gog and Magog entailed the eventual destruction of malevolent Freemasons worshipers, possibly, in a final battle only compared to the Judeo-Christian Armageddon. In such a process, repentant souls, like those of the tribulation age of the end times in Judeo-Christian Literature, will be integrated and transformed into Obasinjom Warriors. These warriors will operate under the shield of Emanyankpe. Such a hybrid society, with indigenous values taking primacy, helps assert the Africans better within the postcolonial world in particular and the global milieu.

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NOTES

ⁱ A witch hunting cult in the Cross River Area of Cameroon. The Obasingjom warriors and the mask come out only to stamp out evil in the society. As an intellectual property, they are owned by the buying village, and at the same time remain the property of the selling village.

ⁱⁱ The Emanyankpe cult has a male leopard spirit. It is a masculine cult that serves as a regulatory organ in the society. It carries along with it a more elaborated mask, associated with fierceness and terror. The Emanyankpe mask dances by itself, and non members scatter when it appears. The mask has the right to strike any woman who mistreated her husband while he was alive. The mask moves along with a staff (esange) and a bundle of leaves (afungbe). The spirit can punish with his staff (which has some spiritual potency) or greet with the bunch of leaves.