

Censorship of the Creator and His Creation: a Postcolonial Reading of Mongo Beti's *Perpetua*

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Abstract

*The liberty to express one's self either in speech or in writing, since antiquity, has always been curbed by repressive governments. Even leaders of the nations who boast of freedom of expression for their citizens today were once bastions of gruelling repression against anyone who dared criticize any of their actions. African nations have not been spared from this very negative phenomenon most especially when one considers the aftermath of the quest for and gain of independence that manifested in the early nineteen sixties. In this paper we delved into a postcolonial analysis from two perspectives: censorship of the creator and his creation. The creator in this case, Mongo Beti, suffered greatly under the yoke of censorship which eventually led to self-exile from his home country, Cameroon. In one of his literary works, *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness* chosen for this analysis, we examined how Beti uses symbolism, fictional characters and setting to surreptitiously depict real individuals and places in Cameroon thus attempting, though unsuccessfully, to escape the censor's eagle eyes. In order to effectively drive home our point, we depended on post colonialism as a literary theory.*

Keywords: *Censorship, Self-exile, Post colonialism, Symbolism, Mongo Beti.*

Introduction

In literature, censorship serves as a means of repression as well as a spark for innovative resistance, particularly in postcolonial settings. Writers like Mongo Beti have continuously struggled with the restrictions placed on them by colonial and neo-colonial authorities in Francophone Africa. They have used their literary works to reveal the realities of political oppression and to question prevailing narratives (Gikandi, 2003, pp. 112–115; Mouralis, 1997, pp. 48–50). This struggle is best illustrated by Beti's *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness* (1978), which

criticizes the legacy of colonialism and the cooperation of post-independence elites in maintaining oppressive regimes.

This study explores the intricate connection between literary production and censorship in Beti's *Perpetua*, emphasizing the author's subversion and navigation of overt and covert modes of silencing. State censorship was frequently used to suppress criticism and uphold the status quo during the height of political repression in Cameroon, when Beti's work first appeared (Mbembe, 2001, pp. 34–37). Beti's previous writings, including *Main basse sur le Cameroun*, were banned, highlighting the dangers for authors who reveal power abuses and the shortcomings of postcolonial governance (Beti, 1972, pp. 12–20; Mouralis, 1997, pp. 49–51). In order to place his protagonist's suffering in a larger framework of social indifference to tyranny and moral deterioration, Beti reworks the classic "passio" form, which is connected to martyrdom, in *Perpetua* (Thomas, 2002, pp. 80–85).

The purpose of this study is to analyze how Beti swims against the currents of censorship, to expose both the silencing of the creator and the erasure of subaltern voices. Drawing on postcolonial theory, this paper argues that *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness* exposes the mechanisms of censorship and unbridled high-handedness that has been the bane of political leadership and development in sub-Saharan Africa since independence. By situating Beti's novel within the broader discourse of postcolonial resistance, this study seeks to illuminate the enduring relevance of literary dissent in the ongoing struggle for freedom and justice.

Concept of Censorship

Censorship is a phenomenon that has been with man since time immemorial. Ifeduba (2018) quoting Maxwell avers that "censorship of the printed word is older than publishing itself, and dates back to bible days when kings burned scriptures" (p. 1). It is its repressive nature that comes to mind each time the word is used. It is however worthy to note that censorship can assume a positive connotation in certain circumstances. According to Ifeduba (2018), "it is positive when it is aimed at ensuring decency, removing explicit sexual contents from children's books or withdrawing books with violent and racism contents" (p. 5).

Owing to its multifaceted character, censorship is a concept that has been variously defined. Kaminski and Prakash (2015) agree with this position when they posit that "one of the most difficult problems faced by individuals working in

this area is definitional” (p. 1). They go on to ask this pertinent question which is at the center of our discourse: “Given the broad range of speech-related tactics that different countries use, what do we mean when we use the word ‘censorship’?” (p. 1)

Balkin euphemistically refers to censorship as ‘speech regulation’ “to avoid the pejorative connotations that the word carries (Kaminski & Prakash, 2015, p. 2). They go further to distinguish two types of censorship namely “old school” and “new school”:

Old school censorship has characteristics of direct and salient use by the state of its powers to detain, block, or destroy. For instance, the police could show up at a journalist’s home, confiscate all written materials, and throw the journalist in jail. This is the type of censorship that is easily recognizable as censorship. Likewise, using a state agent to block objectionable passages in all copies of a book, or to use the court system to prevent distribution of the book altogether, is old-school censorship (Kaminski & Prakash, 2015, p. 2).

As for new-school censorship, they think that its marked difference is hinged on the fact that “it is often not performed by the state itself, but is either outsourced through third parties such as internet providers, web services, or financial intermediaries...”. It can also be done by private actors with no semblance of government involvement.

Sue Curry Jansen’s definition of censorship seems to encapsulate the concept as espoused by Kaminski and Prakash above. According to her

...the term encompasses all socially structured proscriptions or prescriptions which inhibit or prohibit dissemination of ideas, information, images, and other messages through a society’s channels of communication, whether these obstructions are secured by political, economic, religious, or other systems of authority. It includes both overt and covert proscriptions and prescriptions (1991, p. 221).

By “overt” Jansen is referring to what Kaminski and Prakash call old school censorship while “covert” has to do with new school censorship. While Kaminski

and Prakash harp mainly on government censorship in their descriptive definition, Jansen (1991) states succinctly that agents of censorship can be “political, economic, religious, or other systems of authority” (p. 221).

In his attempt to define censorship, Ifeduba’s categorization is based on when the inhibition takes place. According to him, “prior censorship occurs when a work is controlled before its release and may be done by publishers, governments, organizations, individuals and religious bodies... Post censorship takes place when a book has been made public (2018, p. 2).

While we agree with these critics so far as their opinions are concerned, it is important to stress the fact that censorship in African literature is a tragic yet revealing phenomenon. It underscores the potency of resistance. The attempts to silence voices through censorship often backfire because it forces writers into self-censorship or inventive strategies to circumvent restrictions, which shapes the literature in unique, sometimes subversive ways.

Censorship and Literature

Broadly speaking, literature refers to any written material on any subject. If any written material cannot find its way to the intended public due to government, religious or any other authority acting overtly or covertly, it means that censorship has taken place. As far back as the 7th BC “King Jehoiakim of Judah burned part of a scroll written by Baruch ben Neriah” (Ifeduba, 2018, p. 2). The same fate befell 460 Confucian scholars in 210 BC when they were burned alongside hundreds of books by the first Emperor of Qin Dynasty in China (Ifeduba, 2018, p. 2). This sort of censorship is still prevalent today even within our own climes. According to Ifeduba (2018), citing Akinsiku, “in May 2007, *A Daidaita Sahu*, the Kano State agency for the reorientation, organized a book and film burning at a local girls’ school as a prelude to a proposed anti-publication law against over 300 young writers...” (p. 5).

Censorship of books is not only limited to burning. Banning is equally used as a means of censorship. So far as African literature is concerned this phenomenon started when the first African novel, *Batouala* was published in 1921 by René Maran. According to Taoua (2015),

the repercussions of the publication and its award were multiple: 1) the backlash in the French press against René Maran was considerable and, at times, virulently

racist; 2) the colonial administration censored the novel whose preface was considered explicitly anti-colonial in an effort to limit its circulation in overseas territories; and 3) the author was forced to resign from his position as a civil servant in France's colonial administration (p. 45).

Young African and Caribbean students at the time such as Senghor, Césaire and Damas found in Maran a worthy source of inspiration. In fact, Taoua (2015) buttresses this assertion when he avers that "Maran was a mentor for Senghor who called him a guiding light and saw *Batouala* as a precursor to the elaboration of Negritude" (p. 45). Eleven years after the publication of *Batouala*, a group of mainly "Caribbean students published ... poems with a bright red cover to which they gave the title *Légitime défense*" (Taoua, 2015, p. 47). They were not spared by the heavy sledge hammer of repressive censorship. Taoua (2015) captures the events that followed thus:

Apparently, the same day the review was published the authors discovered that their scholarships had been suspended and they were forced to return to Martinique where their middle-class parents were mortified. This punishment was enough to end their collaboration on this particular review and to send a strong signal to other black students in their midst not to take similarly subversive steps (p. 47).

Quite recently some notable Nigerian writers have felt the pains of censorship. According to Ifeduba (2018), *Things Fall Apart*, a foremost African novel by Chinua Achebe which has been translated into over fifty languages was banned in Malaysia "for its negative portrayal of colonialism and its consequences" (p. 6). Another notable Nigerian writer and Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka was "imprisoned without trial...at the beginning of the Nigerian civil war for condemning the genocide committed against Igbos with the connivance and support of government, and for canvassing support for Biafra (Ifeduba, 2018, p. 6). It is also worthy to note that the fact that History is not taught in Nigerian schools is a very serious attempt by the government to bury the sad details of the civil war. This attempt was pushed a nudge higher when the film adaptation of Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* was about to be premiered in Nigeria. The novel portrays vividly the atrocities of the Nigerian civil war.

Since our work focuses on Mongo Beti, a Cameroonian, it is pertinent to understand the censorship situation in that country. Mukong (1991) aptly captures the grueling tone of censorship in Cameroon thus:

The story of Cameroon has been the story of repression and total censorship. It is the story of French colonial policy in Africa and its product. Censorship in Cameroon extends into all domains of human life. Not only are the expression and propagation of opinions censored, but even the holding of opinions (p. 24).

Mukong (1991) further avers that “the government ban on books and literature is arbitrary. The censor needs no literary training since his function is purely political” (p. 25). He claims that his book, *Prisoner Without a Crime*, which tells the story of the six years he spent in detention camps under the first president of Cameroon, Ahmadou Ahidjo, was banned, principally to deprive him of any financial returns.

I was running a small bookshop and doing well until the police harassment started. They came for my works, which were critical of government, including copies of *Prisoner without a Crime* which they took to the Commissariat Special. Other works were returned, but all copies of *Prisoner Without a Crime* were confiscated and no compensation was paid. Another book, *Gaullist Africa — Cameroon Under Ahmadou Ahidjo* by Joseph Richards, a history of Cameroon after independence which deals with the laws of repression, was confiscated in a police raid on the University Bookshop in Yaounde (Mukong, 1991, p. 25).

It was in this repressive censorship atmosphere that Mongo Beti dared to exploit his creative genius in order to unravel the many atrocities of the government of Ahmadou Ahidjo. It is equally worth mentioning that the over forty-year rule of that country by the current president, Paul Biya, is owed, in part, to perpetual repression of any contrary opinion by the masses.

Censorship and Mongo Beti

Mongo Beti, whose first pseudonym was Eza Boto, as seen in the novel, *Ville cruelle* was born Alexandre Biyidi-Awala, on the 30th of June, 1932, in Mbalmayo, Centre Region of Cameroon. He died on the 8th of October 2001 in Douala. An essayist and novelist of high repute, he was a committed writer who stood against the hypocrisy and highhandedness of colonial rule. He started his career as a writer in 1953 with the publication of the short story *Sans haine et*

sans amour. His first novel *Ville cruelle* followed a year later in 1954. Both works were published under the pseudonym, Eza Boto. Other works of Mongo Beti are *Mission terminée* (1957), *Le roi miraculé* (1958), *Perpétue et l'habitude du malheur* (1974), *Remember Ruben* (1974), *La ruine presque cocasse d'un polichinelle : Remember Ruben 2* (1979), *Les deux mères de Guillaume Ismaël Dzawatama, futur camionneur* (1982), *La revanche de Guillaume Ismael Dzawatama* (1984), *L'histoire du fou* (1994), *Trop de soleil tue l'amour* (1999) and *Branle-bas en noir et blanc* (2000). His non fictional works include : *Main basse sur le Cameroun : autopsie d'une décolonisation* (1972), *Les procès du Cameroun : autopsie d'une décolonisation* (1972), *Lettre ouverte aux Camerounais, ou, La deuxième mort de Ruben Um Nyobé* (1986), *Dictionnaire de la négritude* (avec Odile Tobner) (1989), *La France contre l'Afrique : Retour au Cameroun* (1993).

He was not alone in this literary quest to expose the shortcomings of colonialism. Briere (2016) states that “within 6 years, starting from 1954, the passionate and highly talented Alexandre Awala-Biyidi (Mongo Beti) ...and Ferdinand Oyono (1929-2010) as well as Benjamin Matip (1932-) had published eight anti-colonial novels” (p. 54).

In *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* (1956), Beti satirizes the destructive influence of French Catholic missionary activities in Cameroon. In an interview granted Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi by Ambroise Kom (2016), the latter states that “*Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* was censored, banned in Cameroon because the missionaries complained that the book was dangerous and would hamper their recruitment efforts” (p. 37). In the same interview, Kom who has worked extensively on Mongo Beti has this to say about censorship and Mongo Beti.

Someone like Mongo Beti who wrote similarly violent pieces continued to write in that vein but he was never allowed to come back to Cameroon. Because he was in France before independence, he was a French subject, he had French papers a French passport but the postcolonial regime never allowed him to come back because he didn't want to negotiate his place in the system. That is why Mongo Beti became more or less a permanent exile in France until the nineties. What happened in the fifties in terms of literary production by Cameroonians or Africans, was more or less considered by colonial as extremely dangerous and they did whatever they could to stop it or prevent it from continuing. None of these books were ever published in Cameroon. They were published in France by

French publishers because censorship in France didn't work the same way as in Cameroon (pp. 36-37).

The very fact that he decides from the beginning not to use his real name makes us to understand that he knew the consequences of censorship as a student in France. He definitely intends to express himself without being caught. After his imprisonment in 1959, just before the independence of francophone Cameroon, he returns to France and becomes more outspoken in his criticism of Cameroon. Even when he eventually returns to Cameroon Beti (1993:86) expresses his view on censorship:

Dans le domaine des arts et de la littérature, c'est bien pis encore. Par définition, tout ouvrage publié par un Camerounais, surtout s'il réside à l'étranger, ce qui est le cas de maints écrivains contraints à l'exil, est interdit. Les ouvrages écrits par des auteurs résidant au pays ne sont pas mieux traités. Il en résulte que les rares librairies camerounaises regorgent de livres d'auteurs étrangers, bénéficiaires de la meilleure exposition, tandis que les ouvrages des auteurs autochtones brillent surtout par leur absence.

In 1974 when *Perpetua* was published, Ahmadu Ahidjo was the president of Cameroon. A careful reading of the novel brings to the fore Beti's harsh criticism of a government which is even more repressive than the colonial regime. His acerbic tone makes us wonder about the source of his inspiration.

Beti and Literary Influence

Mongo Beti, inspired by the harsh socioeconomic and political realities of his country, Cameroon, uses literature to express his opinions on different subjects. At the time of writing this novel, it was very difficult for writers to directly criticize an incumbent government in Africa due to the absence of any semblance of democracy. Mongo Beti, therefore relies on the anonymity of his creative genius to tell the story of his homeland which recently gained independence. It is a story that succinctly captures the hardship in economic, social, political and psychological terms meted out to the citizens by the new regime of Ahmadou Ahidjo. Our choice of *Perpetua and the habit of unhappiness* is owed to the picture of post-colonial destruction of an African nation symbolised by the

innocence of the main character, Perpetua. It is a work that critically analyses the censorship between the creator and his creation.

Mongo Beti, being one of the ardent believers in Ruben UM Nyobe's Marxist ideologies, was also influenced by the political activities that were taking place in Cameroun before and after independence (Kom, 2001, p. 53). Though he derives his motivation from the tyranny, wickedness, oppression, suppression and exploitation of his nation by the powers that be, he owes a lot to his mother; because she was the one who helped him overcome his shyness and encouraged him to boldly speak in public especially by participating in the village presentations (Kemedjio, 2015, pp. 158-159). The boldness instilled in him from home made him stand against the injustice of neo-colonialism. Post-colonialism as a literary theory is therefore very appropriate for our analysis.

Post colonialism and *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness*

Post-colonial criticism according to Tyson (2006) did not become "a major force in literary studies until the early 1990s" (p. 418). Its relevance was even more apt "when colonial regimes began to topple after World War II" (p. 418). It is a dual pronged field: a subject matter and a theoretical framework both intricately connected. While the former "analyses literature produced by cultures that developed in response to colonial domination", the latter "seeks to understand the operations – politically, socially, culturally, and psychologically – of colonialist and anti-colonialist ideologies." (Tyson, 2006, p. 418). The fact that *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness* is a work written "in response to colonial domination" and post-colonial hegemony perpetuated by puppets of the colonial masters who still hold the strings, speak to the relevance of this theory. It is a work replete with political undertones whose harsh realities are meted out to a subdued population.

Darian-Smith (1996:292) posits that "post colonialism is used most obviously and simplistically to demarcate the transition from colonial to self-determination among formally colonized nations." This seemingly harmless ideological bent intrinsic in this definition assumes dangerous and harmful proportions in its applicability. We therefore agree with Darian-Smith only to the extent of post colonialism being a sign post of transition.

The colonialist ideology which instilled in the colonizer a sense of superiority vis-à-vis the colonized, lingered on, in the warped mentality of the stooges who took over and ruthlessly surpassed their predecessors cum mentors in the ill treatment

of fellow Africans. The concept of othering (the process by which individuals or groups are distinguished and labelled as fundamentally different from an in-group, often leading to their marginalization or exclusion) has been the bane of political and socioeconomic advancement of many African nations as those in positions of authority consider themselves superior to those they lead. This was enough fodder for the literary guns of the pioneer literary icons of African literature like Mongo Beti. It is evident that Beti's literary craftsmanship, with the use of symbols, fictitious settings, and pseudonyms, fails to escape the eagle eye of censorship despite his veiled references to Ahmadou Ahidjo. We hold this opinion because upon publication, the novel was banned in Cameroon.

Facts of History and Fictional Narrative: A Fusion

Mongo Beti juxtaposes the symbolism of the main character as analysed above with the coarse reality of political repression and economic exploitation in a nation whose fictitious settings aim to escape censorship. He fails in this enterprise because, despite the use of places and names that do not exist in real life, the storyline ties in neatly with the political happenings in Cameroon at the time. How does Mongo Beti present some instances of these irksome events that served as an inspiration? Two sub-headings provide answer to this question.

Political Repression

Essola arrives at Oyolo after a long period of incarceration in the North of Cameroon. He is released only after signing an undertaking that he would not rebel against the government: "It was ten years since Ruben had been killed and six months since he had himself signed an undertaking that he would renounce all opposition in return for a release from detention and immediate reintegration into the public service..." (Beti, 1974, p. 6).

Arriving at Oyolo, he finds out that "Nothing seemed to have changed except that the long unbroken covered terraces in front of the ground floor of the shops were now completely deserted" (Beti, 1974, p. 1). A desertion which he was tempted to assume was connected with the suppression of the Rubenists.

The villagers were discouraged from leaving their villages because they were obliged to carry a pass or identity cards. They also thought that after discovering that a support network for the Rubenists among the tailors and dressmakers, had been discovered, the government prohibited their activities. As soon as independence was declared, ... the handful of militants still active had been

denounced, tried and found guilty of terrorism by the courts of the new Republic, paraded from village to village and then shot in the town square (Betí, 1974, p. 3).

The gruesome scene captured above is a literary reflection of a historical event as presented by Emmanuel Fru Doh (2008: 23): “The last of these UPC heroes, Ernest Ouandíé, Raphaél Fotsing, and Gabriel Tebeu alias Wambo le Courant, were shot by a firing squad in Bafoussam in the Western Province in 1971.” Another historian simply known as Dr. Y (most probably a pseudonym) (2018) recounts the same event in greater details:

Ouandíé was sentenced to death and was shot by a death squad in the market on 15 January 1971, in Bafoussam. That day was a historic day in Bafoussam, as the populations were forced to witness the execution of their leader: my mother witnessed the event, she was just a child. The civil war, resulting in the destruction of villages and use of napalm is estimated to have resulted in at least 30,000 to 500,000 deaths. It has been conveniently removed from official history, both in Cameroon and in France.

This type of treatment and experience can silence the people on political matters in their country. This explains Essola’s silence as the young Greek driver tries without success to get him to discuss the nation’s politics. Owing to repression, the people prefer to keep silent each time any topic that involves politics is raised.

Amougou and Essola discuss politics in Cameroon and the effects on the citizens, but as soon as they come out of the forest, they either shut up or change the topic for fear of Brigadier Norbert who would not hesitate to arrest them. Amougou tells Essola “from this point forward, lips sealed. It won’t be long before Norbert shows up in his Jeep with his three strong-arm men. If he finds that you’re talking politics, he will pick you up” (Betí, 1974, p. 22).

In another instance Zeyang, the footballer, expresses his view about Bifanda who “was the only great revolutionary and freedom fighter...” their province had ever produced. He was caught by the ruling power (Baba Tura) as he was setting a new guerrilla front in the south-east. “Baba Tura’s henchmen executed him on the spot by chopping off his head”. (Betí, 1974, pp. 57-58). The government burnt down the city of Kola-kola “Squatters’ township” because they considered the city “a particularly impregnable strong hold of the Rubenists” (Betí, 1974, p. 60).

The manifestation of this repression is glaring from the beginning of the novel to the end: a former Rubenist does not want to discuss politics with a young Greek; Amougu warns Essola not to talk or discuss politics in the village; Anna-Maria also warns Perpetua not to discuss or talk politics in the public; the young engineer in charge of the south-west forest and waters cannot protest openly; even a highly ranked policeman M'barg Onana is tortured and killed. At the end of the novel, Zeyang, though a big fan of Ruben, but a renowned footballer and captain of their national team, was arrested, tortured and killed because he lost a pan-African match, and the government took the loss to be a deliberate sabotage of their administration: "After a swift enquiry... Zeyang was found guilty... After a long period of torture by the security police at Fort-Negre... under the direction of European Technical Assistant, he was eventually taken by the police to Oyolo to be shot there..." (Beti, 1974, p. 123).

Not only men were banned from talking or discussing politics. When Jean Dupont's wife Anna-Maria and pregnant Perpetua go to the clinic to see a doctor she warns Perpetua not to allow herself be dragged into discussing politics: "Be careful, my little Perpetua... They say the town is swarming with informers and trouble-makers. They will worm something out of you and then go and tell the police that you are a secret Rubenist... Don't talk politics in public with people you don't know" (Beti, 1974, p. 112). As if political repression was not enough torment, Beti also chronicles, with near historical exactitude the wanton destruction of the economy.

Economic Exploitation

True to Beti's intentional creation of a symbol of the ideal in the main character, Perpetua, he traces a correlation between the economic exploitation and Perpetua's death. When Essola gets to Zeyang's house in Zombotown, and meets other young men who are against Baba Toura, Zeyang tells him that "the loss of our dear Perpetua is a direct result of the assassination of our great Ruben, almost ten years ago". (Beti, 1974, p. 48). Instances of economic exploitation explained hereunder will clarify this link.

The forestry officer for the south-western provinces explains the type of fraud going on and how the European forestry companies devastate hectares of trees just to reach a small isolated patch of exportable species: "levelling plantations in pushing through access roads by brute force...such a frenzy of destruction" (Beti,

1974, p. 49). He goes on to explain that the woods were well and better preserved when a white man was at the helm of affairs. He explains further:

When I came back I had for the first few weeks as many immediate superior, a forestry officer who had apparently been on the job for nearly twenty years. He was a Whiteman, of course but he was also a competent civil servant, conscientious and what's more someone who understood the laws of nature and the need to be very careful about interfering with them (Betu, 1974, p. 49).

He goes on to explain that this Whiteman called to order powerful companies who went beyond certain limits. Unfortunately, when he left, a northerner, an official of the party, totally uninformed about forestry was appointed as Chief Forestry Officer of the province to replace him (Betu, 1974, p. 49). This corrupt party official had the whites trooping into his office greasing his palm, getting all the rubber stamps they wanted on their papers. Note that this is something they couldn't do when their fellow white was in that position. The assistant forest officer could not make any fuss about what was happening for fear of being put in prison. Stephano concludes his explanation by comparing the incidents with what happens in France. He said "When you realize the care they take in France, as a matter of course, before they will cut the most insignificant tree, it makes you shudder at the thought of what we can expect if this vandalism goes on here just for the next ten years" (Betu, 1974, p. 50). He goes on to explain that these exploiters pay next to nothing for this "ill-considered deforestation which could promote infiltration of the desert into the luxuriant heart of the African continent and expose Africa to a rapid devastation" (Betu, 1974, p. 50).

Betu's observations here, espoused through Stephano, is corroborated by factual evidence according to Ngalim and Djou (2016: 26):

Logging is one of the main factors of the degradation of the tropical forest in Dimako. Since the establishment of the saw mills in the early 1970s, there has been an increase and intensive forest exploitation. The massive exploitation by logging companies has greatly damaged the forest of Dimako, thus causing severe destruction of the environment. This implies that logging when practised intensively and in an unsustainable manner greatly contributes to the degradation of the forest in Dimako and consequently to deforestation. Another dimension of the problem is when roads are constructed by the logging companies for the

evacuation of timber. Huge expanses of land are destroyed for a road to pass, sometimes to evacuate only a few trees.

Two facts of this quotation deserve explanation. First, besides the fact that the tone sounds like Stephano's, it is important to note that saw mills were established in the early 1970s. If we consider the fact that *Perpetua* was published in 1974, then it is safe to say that Beti fuses historical facts with fictional narrative. Secondly the last sentence of the quotation above, bears Siamese-like likeness to Beti's words uttered by Stephano when he says that forestry companies devastate hectares of trees just to reach a small isolated patch of exportable species (Beti, 1974, p. 49).

Stephano's comparison of how the forests were managed then and now brings to the limelight the fact that neo-colonialism is worse than colonialism. When the colonizers were in charge, the forests were better managed and preserved, though the exploitation was in place: "Colonial forests management in Cameroon was mainly for the economic benefit of the colonizers with little or no concern for the welfare of the Cameroonian people and their environment" (Mbatu 2009, p.759).

The link between this exploitation of the forests and *Perpetua's* death becomes vivid when we are told: "well, they pay next to nothing. A ludicrously trivial tax for each cutting, often covering hundreds of hectares" (Beti, 1974, p. 50). He laments by saying that if they had at least paid a just price for the timber, the country could have afforded medical care for the pregnant women. This again portrays the direct link between economic malfeasance and lack of necessities such as medical care.

Since Baba Toura came into power, the country has been deprived of medical care, making the indigenes suffer tremendously. The president stays in his palace, enjoys all the amenities, owns properties in foreign lands, and his ministers are well-positioned. Money is wasted to ensure that the senior civil servants and their families are well taken care of. These people do not care that the ordinary citizens die of hunger and lack of medical care.

In response to Essola's quest to know the cause of his sister's death, he is told that during her first pregnancy, she waited a whole day "at the door of the gynaecological clinic, standing under the gruelling sun only to be told at the end of it that it was pointless to examine her because whatever she might need, she

couldn't be treated because there were no medical supplies" (Beti, 1974, p. 54). This treatment didn't go well with her and she was totally discouraged. In her third pregnancy, it was fatal. She was in terrible condition. Her husband kept her locked up and beat her up as he chose. The Reubenists equate the death of Perpetua with the death of their leader, which gave birth to all the sufferings they are experiencing. If Ruben had been the president, there wouldn't have been all this waste, exploitation, and deaths from lack of medical care.

Conclusion

Censorship in literature is a repressive phenomenon that will always be with man. In this paper, we focused on censorship of the creator and his creation. In *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness*, Mongo Beti spares no efforts to scathingly criticise the newly independent nation whose leadership is even more repressive than the colonial masters. He uses symbolism especially in the portraiture of the main character, Perpetua, to highlight the social, economic, moral and psychological devastation caused by the regime of Ahmadou Ahidjo whom he refers to in the novel as Baba Toura. Not only does he avoid the use of real names of persons to avoid censorship and repression, he also uses fictitious names of places like Zombotown. The deep torture and pillage vividly captured in the work assumes a sense of reality when Mongo Beti himself becomes a victim. On the 7th of October 2001, he died in a hospital in Douala, Cameroon, because he could not have access to dialysis. This sad eventuality fuses realism in the novel and reality in the nation as he died in similar circumstances as Perpetua: lack of medical attention.

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