

## Women and Social insecurity in Cameroon: a Study of Selected Poems from Some Cameroon Anglophone Writers

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**ABSTRACT:-** There is a nexus that binds the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon today that is social insecurity. These regions are conflict zones between the pro-separatist, federalist, and or unitary militia forces (cum-Ambazonian) and the state military. Blood has been shed and is still being shed, children are dying, infant mortality rate has risen, women and their progeny are being raped, killed and displaced. Hostilities abound and attempts at regaining peace advanced by the state have been abortive. Inspired by the present crises, some Cameroonian poets lament the barbarisms that have bedevilled their society. They include: Nol Alembong in “Dis War Sef”, “Soldier Pikin Dem”, and “Wartime Ladies” Nkemngong Nkengasong in “Krai For Mami Pikin” and Hans Fonka in “Blod Wusai Yua Power Don go”, “Motuari Ontop Hill” “Gos Dem Dei Taun” “Na Wu di lie” and “Wowo Nus”. The poems written in Cameroon Pidgin English demonstrate the upsurge of what has come to be known as the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon. This crisis has left women as victims; and their plights in the poem are that of triple pain. The ugly and unexpected policy outcomes of the crisis have only exacerbated rather than addressed the problem. Using the New historicist critical approach, the analysis of the above mentioned poems reveal that women bear the brunt of the crisis, and are suffering from exclusion, under representation and antediluvian sex roles stereotype.

**Keywords:** Women, insecurity, Cameroon, Anglophone crisis, victims, displaced.

### I. INTRODUCTION

The “Anglophone crisis” of Cameroon broke out in 2016 with strike actions by lawyers and eventually followed by teachers of the Northwest and Southwest Regions, expressing their discontentment. The saga ranges from poor and ineffective implementation of the 1961 Federal Constitution that brought together the segmented regions of the country together. Thereafter, the country has experienced “the churlish management of the 1972 Referendum” (Tala, 259), and the abolition of the federated states as stipulated in the Constitution to the “deliberate and systematic erosion” of the Anglophones cultural identity as stipulated in the 1961 Constitution (Tala 259). Adherents of these views explain that the effects of the above conundrums relegated the Anglophones to peripheral positions in Cameroon, positions that they claimed have infringed on their language, economy, politics and culture. These grievances were raised by the Anglophone lawyers, and supported by teachers of both Anglophone regions in 2016. The strike actions gradually degenerated into conflicts because of lack of pre-emptive and proactive actions and this got politicians and activists, especially those residing abroad involved, and some of them opted for separation as a solution. As a result, blood has been shed, and is still being shed, children are dying, infant mortality rate has risen, women and their progeny are being raped, killed, and displaced. Hostilities abound and attempts at regaining peace advanced by the state have been abortive. So, the state of Cameroon is in a quandary of an on-going armed conflict with the separatist fighters known as the Ambazonian fighters. It will be germane to note here that the word “Anglophone” as used throughout this paper has nothing to do with the use of English. It refers to the people who originate from the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon. In other words, the word “Anglophone” as used in this paper transcends linguistic frontiers as it is purely geographic.

Ambazonia is supposed to be the virtual ‘separated’ Anglophone state, born from the two regions of the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon prior to the crisis. The effects of the confrontation between the Cameroonian state military and the Ambazonian fighters have brought about human and social insecurity in the country. Edward Newman in “Critical Human Security Studies” believes that human’s fundamental freedom should be protected by the state, “using processes that build on people’s strength and aspiration. It means

creating political, social, environmental, economic, military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity” (80). The Anglophones in Cameroon from the standpoint of Newman seem to have been deprived of all means of sustenance, namely, basic human security and livelihood. There is a feeling amongst the Anglophone intelligentsia that the Anglophones in Cameroon are socially isolated, politically marginalized and economically exploited. The ramifications of the Anglophone crisis cut across the entire Cameroonian society with a greater toll on the Northwest and Southwest regions. And this critical discourse would heed literary theorists who discussing assert, “that any critical account which suppresses them—[including the effects of armed confrontations on women]—is seriously defective.” (Eagleton 182)

The upsurge of the crisis has affected women and made them the greatest victims, yet they are underrepresented from the peace building processes despite the initiatives they are taking to negotiate peace and stop the violence. This is because government’s policy thrust to enact national peace is gender insensitive. This paper’s close examination of women and insecurity in Cameroon is in line with suggestions from critic and theorist Terry Eagleton who asserts that, “what you decide to examine depends very much on the practical situation” (183). This situation in Cameroon is producing ugly and unexpected policy outcomes which will only exacerbate rather than address the problem. However, aboriginal women of North West and South West extraction in Cameroon are agents and victims of the crisis, as well as indispensable actors in peace building processes. The Security Council Resolution 1325 adopted on 31 October 2000 makes visible the important role women play in peace related issues. The resolution reiterates the essential role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction (U.S. Institute of Peace, 2015). Resolution 1325 emphasizes the importance of women’s equal participation and full involvement in peace building initiatives. This Resolution reaffirms the need to mainstream gender in peace building. Gender mainstreaming is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally. This must be what Jimenez-Munoz meant in discussing the poetry of another writer from these troubled regions of Cameroon. He writes of Ndi’s poetry, which shares similarities with the works of the authors in this study:

... Ndi devotes his art to the redemption of the oppressed, not forgetting the oppressors to all of whom the poet presents old and new truths the latter have buried and or hidden away from the former who would emerge, from reading the poems, with a true sense of ennoblement as they see in the poems a reflection of their relationship to their oppressors. (qtd. in *The Repressed Expressed*, 121)

This study therefore focuses on the effect of the crisis on women, and makes visible their pivotal role in peace building projects as interpreted in some selected poems written by Anglophone Cameroonians. Multiple reasons have been advanced for the fundamental role women play in peace building. Women are seen to be the most vulnerable in conflicts situations. Lisa Schirch and Manjrika Sewak in “The Role of Women and Peace building” (2005), suggest that women should participate in the prevention of armed conflict because of their numerical strength. As central caretakers of families, they have the capacity for both violence and peace, but are usually excluded from public decision-making. They argue that women and men have different experiences of violence and peace, because they are mediators, trauma healing, counsellors, and policymakers, educators and participants in the development process as expressed by some Anglophone Cameroonian poets. The poems were inspired by the eruption of violence between the different Anglophone federalists, unitary and separatists and government forces in 2016. This situation must have inspired the editors of *The Repressed Expressed: Novel Perspectives on African and Black Diasporic Literature* to write that, “The multiple points of resistance become the underpinnings of discords, which in themselves, are too painful not to write” (xiv).

The main objective of this study is therefore to analyse and interpret the selected poems of Nol Alembong, John Nkemngong Nkengasong and Hans Fonka against the backdrop of the new historicist critical theory in order to clearly bring out the predicament and plight experienced by women in this armed conflict, that the women are victims of the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon and are suffering from exclusion, under representation and antediluvian sex roles stereotype in the poems under study. The poems are “Dis War Sef”, “Soldier Pikin Dem”, and “Wartime Ladies” “Krai For Mami Pikin Dem” “Blod Wusai Yua Power Don go”, “Motuari Ontop Hill” “Gos Dem Dei Taun” “Na Wu di lie” and “Wowo Nus” written by Nol Alembong, John Nkemngong Nkengasong and Hans Fonka respectively.

## II. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The new historicist critical theory gained currency in the literary academia in the 1980s as a counter discourse to the American text-based approach known as New Criticism. Critics of New Criticism gave an

intrinsic analysis of literature, thereby, treating a literary text as an autonomous self-sufficient entity quite separate from society, history or any external causal agent. The new historicists, however, take the contrary view and contend that literature is the product of a particular socio-historical and cultural context and should therefore be interpreted against the background of its context. Hence, its interpretation can only be meaningful and relevant when the historical circumstances under which the text was created are taken into consideration. Proponents of this approach to criticism include Laurence Lerner, Jerome McGann, Irving Howe, Paul Ricoeur, Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher.

In summation, the co-relation between literature and history, in the area of New Historicism, is a reciprocal relationship. This approach connotes that it is not only history that influences literature; the reverse can also be true. This explains why Murfin and Ray (1979:239–240) state: “New Historicist critics assume that works of literature both influence and are influenced by historical reality, and they share a belief in referentiality, that is a belief that literature both refers and is referred to by things outside itself”

In an attempt to espouse and highlight the class system and the compartmentalization of the Cameroonian society in the spirit of Marxist critical discourse, the three poets employ Pidgin English as their medium of poetic expression. Peter Trudgill (1974) in *Socio-linguistics: An Introduction* contends that language is the property of the people. This means that language emanates from a particular cultural context, and as such it is shaped by the people in that society. A good work of art, therefore, is an amalgamation through the shaping (synonym of amalgamation) of different linguistic elements neatly brought together by the artist so that it can be artistically appealing and ideologically informing to the reader and audience. This is probably the reason why the three poets embrace the Pidgin English as their medium of poetic communication. Unlike the poetic diction of a poet like Bate Besong which sequesters the common man from the subject matter of his poetry, Alembong, Nkengasong and Fonka have sided with the people by using their own language. In *Of Grammatology*, Jacques Derrida (1978) indicates that,

... the language is the property of the people. Each derives its unity from the other. For if language has a body and a system; they inhere in the people assembled and body united. It is a people in a body that makes language....A people is thus the absolute master of the spoken language and it is an empire they possess unawares. (Pp169-170)

The selected poems under study are written in pidgin otherwise known as Cameroon pidgin creole. Hans Fonka in “Cameroon Pidgin creole (CPc): Focus on New Linguistic and Cultural Borders” stipulates that Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE) otherwise called Cameroon Pidgin creole is a contact language used by most Cameroonians for social interaction. It is commonly used by almost everybody including those who have other common languages of communication. It is the language that proves to have a national character as Mbangwana remarks in “Pidgin English in Cameroon: A Veritable Linguistic Menu.” So, the poets’ choice of Cameroon Pidgin creole (CPC) is in line with the development of knowledge production in Africa through print and audio-visual techniques. The poems in their original forms are broadcasted through community radios which communicate socio-cultural happenings/contemporary issues of the community to people, and this is one of the fortes of new historicism. As a result, the poems are for public consumption to literate, semi-literate and even illiterate persons who understand CPc.

CPc has crossed the border of a purely spoken language to a written language today. Many Cameroonian and international scholars have either written whole works in pidgin or have pidgin excerpts in some of their works. Todd (1979), Butake (1999), Nkengasong (2001) Menget (1974), Fonka (2011) Anne Tang (2000) Alembong (2018) Vakunta (2013), amongst others are some of the works that have promoted written Pidgin creole in Cameroon through creative ventures. A greater majority of the English-speaking population, especially those who have not gone to school or school dropouts are more comfortable with pidgin than with any other language. Valentine Ubanako in *Crossing Linguistic Borders in Postcolonial Anglophone Africa* argues that the domains of use of Cameroon Pidgin English are diverse. It is used in politics, the audio visual media, in church, in the market and for different social and cultural interactions (512).

The use of CPc further shows the poet’s involvement in the Cameroonian socio-political situation. The Anglophone crisis is a portion of the people’s identity, minding people’s pain at a very controversial time in the Cameroonian politics. The people’s collective pain becomes women’s burden. Therefore, the use of pidgin in itself is an attempt by the poets to share and communicate the predicaments of the masses and to appeal to their collective sentiments. For their messages to get to their target audience, there is need for them to use a language which the masses will easily identify with. As poetry of conscientisation, the poets under study consider pidgin as an artistic vehicle that appropriately, to paraphrase Achebe, carry the weight of the Anglophone experiences. The outcome of literature of conscientisation is revolt, and this is seen in the numerous groups that have emerged calling on the government military and separatists to lay their arms. The women’s task force is just one of these groups. It is therefore the contention of this paper that, the phenomenon of Pidgin English as a resource

of the Cameroonian society in the poems under reference can effectively communicate the impact of the crisis on women. This study, therefore investigates the relevance of Pidgin English as low language in a diglossic situation where there exist both low and high language. Within the theoretical framework of new historicism, Pidgin English used in the various poems studied herein is the artistic vehicle by which meaning is conveyed in its ideological essence.

Analysis

### III. THE CRISIS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON WOMEN

As mentioned earlier, the lawyers and teachers' strike action of 2016 brought to the lamplight the "discontent amongst the Anglophones who have, repeatedly cried foul of marginalisation in all sectors of life – economic, political, socio-cultural, linguistic, and sharing of the national cake" (Tala, 260) for more than five decades. Failure on the part of the government to pay attention to these grievances resulted in fear, anger, frustration and humiliation amongst Anglophones (Tala, 260). These points are presumably considered the root of the contentious Anglophone problem that has gradually crawled into what has eventually become the Anglophone crisis, which in turn poses the problem of insecurity to its people specifically and the entire country. In line with this occurrence, Newman explains that, "Human security suggests that security policy and security analysis ... must focus on the individual as the referent and primary beneficiary. In broad terms human security is 'freedom from want' and 'freedom from fear'" (78). The bottom line of Newman's observation here is 'freedom'. Apparently, the lack of the aforementioned 'freedoms' are strangled to what is known as the Anglophone problem. Alembong corroborates in 'Dis War Sef' when he says: "Why we no bin throw water for small spark when i start? See now the big fire wey i don swallow palapala field. Who go quench de fire now before I burn we all? (lines, 27 - 30). The lack of human and social security and the absence of proactive measures by the government have resulted in an armed conflict whereby women are used as pawns of wars by the combatants. Nkengasong in 'Krai fo Mami Pikin' demonstrates the lamentation of the women in the unsecured North West and South West regions thus: "Waa don do mi ting we mop no fit tok/Na mi dis fo midoro wata/Fo go bak no dey, fo go fron no dey." (lines 4 – 6)

The persona is a woman, frustrated by the outbreak of the war. She is in a dilemma and does not know the way forward. As an Anglophone, she has become a victim of double casualties; firstly, as any other marginalized Anglophone, and secondly, as a mother and wife who has lost her husband and children in the war as she wails and weeps in Cameroon Pidgin English: "Ma masa ron go yi oun sai./ Ma tri big man pikin dem ron go dem oun sai/ Ma gel pikin ron go yi oun sai." (lines 29 – 31)

War has separated her family. They have all scattered in different directions. She does not know if they will survive or not. This conflict has made them internally displaced persons in a place they considered home; they have become homeless in their own country. The sound of gunshots is even more frightening:

Gon dem hala!

Gon dem hala sote grong shek

Ma hat tu shek lek i go kot fol fo insai ma bele

A kari ma las pikin ron fo insai bush. (lines 33 – 35)

The sound of the gun is torturous to the soul. The persona is a woman who is aggrieved. She prefers peace to war. She is one of the casualties of war. She too is running with her last-born child into the forest, to make way for the state military forces and the Ambazonian fighters. In the same light, Alembong frowns at the killings of Anglophones in "Soldier Pikin Dem" when the persona decries:

You, take dis side; you, take dat side, quick quick",

"Surround de enemy, faya to faya, faya to faya, fayaaa",

Big massa pass command. Fayaaaaaaaa, fayaaaaaaaa

*Kriik kriik kriik buuum; Kriik kriik kriik buuum*

Fayaaaaaaaa, fayaaaaaaaa; *Kriik kriik kriik*

When day break, people see say war no get eye

Soldier for dis side dem die like fowl for sick time

Soldier for dat side dem die like fish for dry land

Pikin soldier dem die pass grass for dry season. (lines 33- 41)

From the above lines, it is established by the poet that war is a destroyer because "...war no get eye." In terms of human loss, the numbers are uncountable because soldiers on both sides die. The poet uses a number of poetic devices including similes, animal and horticultural imageries to paint a gruesome picture of the extent of human loss in the armed conflict. To him, on one side, some die like fowls during an epidemic and on the other side, they die like fish out of water. Worse still, child soldiers die more than grass that wither in the dry season; "Soldiers dem for dis side dem die like fowl for sick time ( they die like fowls during an epidemic) /

Soldiers dem for that side dem die like fish for dry land (They die like fish out of water) / Pikin soldier dem die pass grass for dry season.” The entire land is littered with corpses of people from the different factions where “Lion people dem lie everywhere/ Hyena people den lie everywhere/ Wolf people dem lie everywhere.” The unanswered question now is: “Who go carry who?/ Who go bury who? The idea of ‘child soldiers’ is highlighted by the poet in order to espouse child abuse in any war situation. The child soldiers are mechanised, and they are made to feel chastised in the hands of adults. They are still kids, fighting and dying. The burden is heavy on women, distressed, and forced to see their young children, both boys and girls becoming child soldiers, and dying out of inexperienced and innocence. This exposes the people’s collective pains, and the woman’s triple pain. These all bring to mind what literary critic Jimenez-Munoz writes: “Poetry lies precisely within the tension between an artificial world, where scarcity and conflict are rife, and the moral idealization of the same” (Jimenez-Munoz qtd. in Ndi, Ankumah, and Fishkin 124).

The poets seem to be very involved and engrossed in the crisis by using the scribes of their imagination. The crisis becomes a portion of the Anglophone identity, minding people’s pain at a very controversial time of the nations’ political history. The fighters of the two camps which reflect and represent a huge generational gap, namely, the adults and children generations—both have their strategies as the poet/persona in Alembong’s poem hints: “You, take dis side; you, take dat side, quick quick.. The adults might feel the repressed side of the war, meanwhile the children represent the adults in the historical narration of ‘being cheated’. This usually creates a sense of distrust of the state. The poem draws pity to the Anglophones, especially about the people who die. There is seemingly an emotional truth in the poem, as it is on ethnic violence accentuated by cultural differences. Again, Jimenez-Munoz opines that: “When a reader approaches a poem he or she listens to a voice that is half the voice of another, and yet the poem awakens sentiments to which readers are akin. Since the Romantic era, reading poetry has entailed reading outwardly so that it reverberates inwardly” (qtd in Ndi 123).

While Alembong paints a picture of the warfront, Hans Fonka paints that of the streets, towns and villages. The towns and villages are littered with corpses and smeared with blood. The children, mothers, fathers and even the elderly are not spared- “Pikin dem, mami dem, papa dem./ Oul people dem,/ Faya de kil dem, grannut an/ Pop kon de kil dem.” The poet’s concern is not only the human damage but also the cause of the deaths. He clearly states that they die from bullets that he calls ‘pop kon’ and fire that is set on the houses. Furthermore, ‘Blod Wusai Yua Pawa Don Go’? The poet paints a more graphic picture of the throes of war. People die everywhere; in the streets, markets, farms or even churches. People are killed in these places. There is blood everywhere; “Blod de trowei fo wi strit dem, / Blod de trowei fo wi maket dem, /Blod de trowei fo wi choch dem,/ Blod de trowei fo wi fam dem.”

The loss of human lives creates a situation whereby moral values are depreciating. The perpetrators’ capacity to shock and scandalize the victims is infinite. It is reprehensible that even against the backdrop of human rights violation, the perpetrators and their cronies continue to act in cavalier manner with consistent petulance by swamping the Northwest and Southwest regions with corpses and blood without regards to the pain the people experience. There is no dignity and security for the people of these two regions and their progenies.

In Africa, human life is still valued even at death but the crisis has brought about a devaluation of the respect for corpses as no befitting burials are conducted. People are buried anywhere and anyhow without graves. In ‘Motuari Ontop Hil’, Fonka reiterates the drastic change in mores regarding the treatment and burial of corpses- “Fo dis beryal, griev no dei./ Kofin no dei./ Na beryal fo sheim, na beryal wei criminal sef sef no dezev am.” At times, the corpses are abandoned to become food for scavengers. These corpses are women, their children or their husbands. As the mother of humanity, the woman is at the centre of the crisis.

Rape, violence, and other social ills that characterize crisis or war, are all directed against the girl child, as further highlighted by Alembong in ‘Pikin Soldier Dem’. The moral values of the society are gnarled when the girl child is subjected to abuse from men. She and her mates are not only conscripted but also transformed into sex machines in their teens by the commanders “For camp.../ Dem show dem (the girls) de kind bed weh big massa dem de sleep / And de kind chop weh big massa dem de chop.” There is a reign of physical and psychological terror and torture. Children are kidnapped and taken into camps. They are violated via rape and others are deflowered in the process. These young girls are not only raped off their childhood experiences/innocence, raped off their moral rectitude and cultural values, but are introduced into mysticism and war. They do not have a mind of their own, but that of their commandants. In the words below from “Pikin Soldier Dem”, Alembong laments:

“Girl pikin weh dem never start see dia moon, dem deh dey.

For camp

Dem rub girl pikin dem with lavinda

Dem tie jigida for dia neck and waste (line 5 - 8)

These children are taken away from their parents; others find themselves in the forest as internally displaced persons (IDPs). The consequences of such situations cannot be overemphasised. They are deprived of parental love and education. As a result, the separatists imposed the shutdown of schools and ground other activities in the two Anglophone regions and introduce 'ghost town'. According to Franklin S. Bayen, in *Anglophone Lawyers and Teachers Strikes in Cameroon (2016-2017)*, ghost towns were first used in Cameroon "by opposition groups during the early 1990s pro-democracy movement as an arm-twisting tactic to pressure the Government to heed their demands for political reforms (101). The present trend of ghost town was instituted by the consortium members on January 9, 2017 designed for Mondays and Tuesdays (Bayen, 101). (Ibid 101) Since 2017, these ghost towns have had their toll on all the different facets of life in the two Anglophone regions. Fonka in his poem, 'Gos Dem Dei Taun' demonstrates how the towns become more ghostly when dogs are the ones that dispose of the abandoned corpses "... dog dem de chop dai bodi fo pipol?" Children cannot go to school neither do workers go to their places of work because of the strife "Wi pikin dem wan go skul,/ Wi pipol dem wan go wok, bot smel,/ Fo blood and smel fo dai body,/ Meik am gos denai fo komot wi town." While children and workers are unable to go out, the town becomes dead. Neither socio-economic nor political activities are functional. Women's subsistence crops are destroyed; other perishable goods sold around the streets are abandoned. Hunger and poverty become endemic in many households. Women's reproductive role according to the gender division of labour becomes very challenging. Those who don't respect the 'ghost town' days are abducted, maimed and even killed. The phenomenon of ghosts greatly hampers the freedom of movement of women especially. It is not restricted to the towns as the title of the poem "Gos Dem Dei Taun" suggests, but spread its tentacles to the villages. As the speaker discloses, "Gos dem don go sote mitop / Wi mami dem and papa dem fo vileij." Consequently, the women are completely relegated to sometimes a nomadic life style engulfed by constant fear irrespective of where they are. The womenfolk is not only caged by the fear of the ghost but more importantly the probability of being caught by stray bullets that kill children, men and women indiscriminately. The gruesome experiences are chilling to all especially the women whom Essentialists say are more caring as opposed to men who are always compelled before a duty is performed. No one is safe and the women also become indiscriminate victims in the din; "Wen bullet de kot pikin yi hat, / kot papa yi hat, kot mami yi hat."

As mentioned earlier, social and other activities are halted on 'ghost towns' and 'lockdown' days. These have eventually pulled some children out of school to become what Alembong calls "Pikin soldiers dem." Fonka on his part says "Wi pikin dem wan go skul,/ Wi pipol dem wan go wok, bot smel,/ Fo blood and smel fo dai body,/ Meik am gos denai fo komot wi town." While children and workers are unable to carry out their functions, some are displaced and remain nomadic. The innocent people become wanderers as they run left and right in search of shelter and safety. In 'Blod, Wusai Yua Poa Don Go? Fonka says "Na inosen pipol dem de ron ron / Like kris pipol dem, / Defain pleis fo haid." Innocent people, the bulk of which are women become worse than mad people who seek refuge anywhere on a daily basis.

The human destruction notwithstanding is enormous and material damage is colossal. Many homes are destroyed and burnt down to ashes. One gets this picture out of the poem 'Wowo Nyus'. The fire is always that which no house is left untouched for the news is always "Faya don swalo ol haus dem fo vileij." It is the same picture painted by the poet in 'Na Wu De Lai? In this poem, houses are the material things that witness huge damage through fire: "...faya don chop dia haus dem?" against a background of blame games. People are rampantly kidnapped for ransom and Fonka raises the issue in a rhetorical question; "Na God de kidnap pipol dem,/ Sel am bak fo family memba"? In all, kidnappings have become a lucrative business amongst separatist militia popularly referred to as "Amba boys" as people are traded for financial benefits and personal score settling in utter disrespect of their human dignity.

#### IV. THE CRISIS AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS

Civil strife all over the world has always had an impact within and without the society concerned. This impact is fundamentally and significantly felt in the socio-political and the economic landscapes of the society concerned. As the population becomes affected, the economy, the political and the physical environment also suffers greatly. War engenders a generalized disruption of the social cohesion. The tentacles of the societal breakdown are spread into economic and political spheres while the social impact acts as a common denominator to the two latter components of every society. Worse of all, war is a blind adventure whose trajectory and impact cannot be foretold, freely determined or controlled by the warring factions. It is against this backdrop that Alembong, in "Pikin soldier dem" opines that, "... war no get eye." Nkengasong corroborates this in "Krai fo mami pikin" by issuing a warning that war has never and will never be of any good "Ma kontri pipu dem, waa no gud ooh!". War is consequently a blind adventure whose bearing, time lapse and the end cannot be predicted at the initial stage. More so, the impact is not restricted only to women, for there is no distinction between the non-partisans and the partisans. So everyone becomes vulnerable as either a potential victim, the afflicted or the affected as the entire society becomes caught up in an inescapable throes. The

Cameroonians cannot therefore, be an exceptional case when it is in the quandary of an on-going war. The ramifications of the current crisis cuts across the entire Cameroonian society especially the conflict zones and no section of its social strata is spared. It has led to enormous material, environmental and human damage that needs much efforts and enormous resources for reconstruction. The entire society is caught in a web which Nkengasong in "Krai fo mami pikin" says only the eyes can capture, because it is indescribable. The speaker lamentably says it is beyond verbal expression "Waa don do mi ting we mop no fit tok." The penalties are despicable. This write-up having in the earlier part examined the impact of the conflict on women, while drawing substantive evidence from the poems of Alembong, Fonka and Nkengasong, it also preoccupies itself with the following perspectives:

## V. THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE CRISIS

The entire social fabric is shattered and the casualties are colossal. The women, men and the youths are either victims or the afflicted. Apart from the casualties, there is the breakdown of social bonds and mores, and the emergence of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). In "Pikin soldier dem", it is established by the poet that war is an indiscriminate destroyer because "...war no get eye." In terms of human loss, the numbers are uncountable because soldiers on both sides die. The poet uses a number of similes to paint a picture of the extent of human loss. Worse still, child soldiers die more than grass that wither in the dry season; "Soldiers dem for dis side dem die like fowl for sick time ( they die like fowls during an epidemic) / Soldiers dem for that side dem die like fish for dry land (They die like out of water) / Pikin soldier dem die pass grass for dry season." The entire land is littered with corpses of people from the different factions as seen in "Dis War Sef" where "Lion people dem lie everywhere/ Hyena people dem lie everywhere/ Wolf people dem lie everywhere."

Apart from the rural areas, the urban areas are also hard hit by the indiscriminate carnage in which children, mothers, fathers and even grand mothers and fathers are not spared. They are either killed by bullets or a deliberate inferno. Fonka exposes this in the poem "Na wu de lai"? The poet/persona gives a pen portrait of the situation when he says; "Pikin dem, mami dem, papa dem,/ Oul people dem,/ Faya de kil dem, grannut an/ Pop kon de kil dem." It is worth noting that because of the constant and sporadic nature of the gun battles in the war torn zones, the poet has onomatopoeically likened this to the frying of popcorn and groundnuts. This underscores the deafening situation of the sounds of the guns.

The human destruction notwithstanding, another associated preoccupation has to do with who will carry out certain social responsibilities that, prior to this situation, had been more of a male activity. These duty-calls that require prompt action are rhetorically put in the poem "Dis war sef". If all are caught in the inferno, "Who go carry who?/ Who go bury who? (who will care for the wounded, sick and needy, and bury the dead)." Most of the young energetic males who prior to this situation had assumed these social responsibilities under the tutelage of the elderly and the old are now an endangered species, and facing the threat of extinction. That is why the towns and villages are littered with corpses of predominantly young people and the streets are smeared with blood. In "Blod wusai yua pawa don go?" Fonka, while corroborating this preoccupation paints a more graphic picture of the horrors of war. People die everywhere. Whether it is in the streets, markets, farms, or churches, people are killed. There is blood everywhere; "Blod de trowei fo wi strit dem, / Blod de trowei fo wi maket dem, /Blod de trowei fo wi choch dem,/ Blod de trowei fo wi fam dem." In the face of the above situation, there has been a transformation in social and gender roles as women who had hitherto not been allowed to perform certain social roles like digging of graves and burying the dead are now the ones doing it. This is traumatic and psychologically disturbing to the women as they constantly have to see bloody corpses, collect them and bury them daily. The situation painted in these poems is reminiscent of that projected in Wilfred Owen's "For the Fallen" and "Dulce et Decorum Est", in which the poet paints a horrific picture of war and bemoans the devastating effects of World Wars I and II on the British masses.

As an accompaniment to the human losses, emerges another problem whereby the cherished social and moral values are depreciating. In Africa, a corpse is usually treated with some dignity and respect even if it is that of a criminal. People are buried anywhere and anyhow without grief. A mass grave which has been a taboo to many societies within the conflict hit regions is now an acceptable practice so as to prevent any revolting odour that will emit from the corpses that are sometimes found in one place. Fonka again in "Motuari ontop hil" exposes the drastic change in mores regarding the treatment and burial of corpses- "Fo dis beryal, griev no dei./ Kofin no dei./ Na beryal fo sheim, na beryal, / Wei criminal sef sef no devez am." At times, the corpses are abandoned as food for scavengers as seen in the poem "Gos dem dei taun". The towns become more ghostly when dogs are the ones that dispose of the abandoned corpses "... dog dem de chop dai bodi fo pipol?" and in "Cry fo mami pikin", "... pikin dem don ton na chop fo tumbu?" Children have been transformed into food for maggots as the maggots tend to serve as discarding agents where there is no one to dispose of the corpses as the survivors run for safety.

In a lamentable tone, the poet in "Pikin soldier dem" bemoans, "For camp.../ Dem show dem (the girls) de kind bed weh big massa dem de sleep / And de kind chop weh big massa dem de chop." These young

girls are forced to live among a strange mixture of a breed of people made up of the stark illiterates, drug addicts, the teenage boys and (adults) men with varying temperaments. In addition to this, there is a high incidence of drug abuse as the commanders and the child soldiers tend to indulge in excessive use of drugs. Commenting on the effects of drugs on the youths, Damon Barret says “Drug use in early youth can affect development, and children and young people who use drugs are at higher risk of health harms. It is well known, that the initiation of drug use in adolescence can lead to longer-term use and dependence more readily than initiation in adulthood” (2). These combatants take drugs like tramadol, cocaine, marijuana and cannabis which make them excited to seeing human life as meaningless and a thing meant to be wasted at will for their sport like wanton boys do to flies, to borrow from William Shakespeare. The destruction of the psychic health of the combatants notwithstanding, there is enormous sums of money wasted in the purchase of these drugs. Worse still, the sources of their funding remain unknown. They are also obliged to apply a gamut of magical potions on their bodies. This has a psychological impact on them because they develop a false belief in the protective powers of these substances and magic contraptions and their assumed invincibility becomes vulnerability. In “Pikin soldier dem” the speaker points out that, “Dem rub girl pikin with lavinda/ Den tie jigida for dia neck and waste/ ...Dem cut boy pikin dem skin / And rub dem skin with odeshi./ Dem put some for dia eye / Dem put some for dia mouth/ Dem tie red and black cloth for dia skin...”

Furthermore, there is a reign of physical and psychological terror. People are frequently kidnapped for ransom and Fonka in the poem “Na wu de lai?” raises this issue in a rhetorical question; “Na God de kidnap pipol dem./ Sel am bak fo family memba”? Families are traumatized as they seek to rescue their loved ones with huge sums of ransom. What is particularly lamentable is the fact that the amount is hard to come by because the economy is in ruins and people are unstable.

Another social problem that surfaces as a result of the crisis is the emergence of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). A huge number of people are displaced and remain nomadic. The innocent people become wanderers in search of shelter and safety. In “Blod, wusai yua poa don go”?, Fonka explains that “Na inosen pipol dem de ron ron / Like kris pipol dem, / De fain pleis fo haid.” While some find a hiding place in the bushes, others move from one town or village to another as IDPs, and yet, some run across borders as refugees in neighbouring countries with the devastating consequences that accompany such displacements. Many families have been separated as they flee for safety to different directions. The woman in Nkengasong’s “Krai fo mami pikin” laments that the family bond has been shattered and no one can account for the whereabouts of the other family members. In Africa, people are one another’s keeper. However, in the present chaotic context, it is one of total indifference as the woman who happens to be the major victim narrates: “Ma masa ron go yi oun sai./ Ma tri big man pikin dem ron go dem oun sai/ Ma gel pikin ron go yi oun sai.” (Lines 29 – 31) The wife and or mother is left to her own devices and thus bemoans her inability to account for the whereabouts of her husband, three sons and a daughter. This is not the only thorny concern of the crisis as it has heavy economic implications.

## VI. THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE CRISIS

The economy of every nation only thrives when there is stability. The crisis in Cameroon has done much human destruction with its attendant ill of material damage with its devastating effects on the economy. Many homes and houses that had served as business accommodation centres have been burnt down. This is the picture one gets out of the poem “Wowo nyus” that is, “Ugly News”. The fire is always devouring to the point that no house is left untouched for the news is always “Faya don swalo ol haus dem fo vilej.” The poet paints the same picture in “Na wu de lai?” Here, houses are the material things that witness huge damage through fire that is said to eat up the houses: “...faya don chop dia haus dem?” This beautiful use of personification creates an image of a hungry man/woman swallowing houses as food. Consequently, both the reconstruction and the revamping of the destroyed economic potentials is arguably a herculean task. As an accompaniment to this huge sums of money, material and human resources will be required to put the economy back on its rail. Business activities have been grounded to near zero level. The petty traders and business women commonly called ‘buyam sellam’ for ‘buyer and reseller’ have been displaced leaving an economic vacuum between the rural areas and towns. Even those who have the zeal to do business are frequently interrupted by the calls for ghost towns and lock downs as Fonka in “Gos dem dei taun” says “ Mondei, na gos fo taun” This frequent ghost towns syndrome is gradually drifting towards being a permanent feature in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon.. Fonka further corroborates in the statement “...gos denai fo komot wi town.” It also brings to light the recalcitrance of the ghost refusing to leave town and having taken the town, city and village dwellers hostages in their own homes as they cannot leave their homes freely to carry out their day-to-day activities.

In addition to economic activities, educational activities have been grounded as a result of the war. Some of the children who would have been in school are now child soldiers whom Alembong calls “Pikin soldiers dem” and are too many as he says “Pikin soldier dem plenty pass mark.” This huge numbers do not only



increase the insecurity, but the difficulties to disarm and rehabilitate them. Fonka on his part says despite the zeal, children cannot go to school neither can workers go to work because of the fear of the unknown and the tense atmosphere and the risk of being caught either in a cross fire or by a stray bullet. “Wi pikin dem wan go skul./ Wi pipol dem wan go wok, bot smel,/ Fo blood and smel fo dai body,/ Meik am gos denai fo komot wi town.” It is worth noting that the stench of blood emitted from decomposing bodies is what the oppressed use as justification for the continued resistance to mark an end to the ghost town imposition. Resistance, as would be illustrated, propels the crisis into the political sphere.

## VII. THE POLITICAL IMPACT OF THE CRISIS

“How this power is gotten, how it is maintained, whether it becomes a source of obsession for those who wield it, often largely affects the lives of those less powerful than those who exercise it” (Tem Edwin 24). One of the things that emerges as a result of the crisis is the break down in political power. Politics is blamed for the beginning and, the failure to nib the crisis in the bud. Instead of looking for solutions to the upheavals each side is drumming for supporters. The populace is carried by emotions rather than wisdom as the political leaders lead them to thunderous show of strength and support without any justification. The politicians instead of seeking solutions to the crisis would prefer to toy with the emotions of the people urging them to support and fight without letting them know the rationale in this dog eat dog opposition. The poem “Dis war sef” exposes the slyness of politicians and the gullibility of the common people. All the political class aims at giving an illusory picture to create confusion and then benefit from it. Some of the politicians see the crisis as an opportunity to make political gains. The poet says; “Lion i roar, some people dem roar with’am/Hyena i scream, some people dem scream with’am /Wolf i howl, some people dem howl with’am./All man want go palapala field /For fight for i own man.” (lines 2-5)

The lack of decisive political good will and the minimization of the people’s determination to live free or die while fighting are projected as the political blunders responsible for the escalation of the crisis into an armed conflict. Each influential leader wants to tilt the balance of power to his/her benefit. This renders any peace building mission difficult because everyone is out to out- play or outsmart each other in the ‘roar’, ‘scream’ or ‘howl’ with his supporters. No faction wants to shift position and negotiate, adapt, and or compromise. This fractionalisation of the society and hard-line positions constitute a stumbling blocks towards sustainable and the much needed peace. The rhetorical questions raised in the poem “Dis war sef” are a key pointer to this fact as the poet asks: “Why we no bin throw water for small spark when i start?” And also seeks to know, “Who go quench de fire now before i burn we all?” (lines 28-30) These rhetorical questions bring to mind the English adage that a stitch in time saves nine. In effect, the quizzical speaker upholds that the situation could have been handled as a spark but once it became an inferno, none could handle it. Put it differently, the poet thinks that if the government had put in place proactive measures, the present socio-political imbroglio would have been averted.

Now “the fire” that started from simple bandying of words to alliances has grown out of hand by engulfing the entire “palapala field” that is, a wrestle ground or field. Against a background of massive human and material damage, the politics of victory claim is traded as the situation gets worse on a daily basis. This political battle is seen in the poem, “Dis war sef” whereby the belligerents claim to have an urge over the other. It is ironic that both sides claim victory which implies an eminent end, yet the war rages on. This victory claim strategy only shows that none is ready to sue for peace. In line with the continuous political gimmick, the speaker shows both sides asserting victory at the same time: “For palapala field all man say i de win:/Lion people say dem de win; /Hyena people say dem de win;/Wolf people say dem de win.” (lines 11-14)

But despite the claims of victory, the carnage continues unabated and this is why the poet in disgruntlement points out that this political victory chants are not of any help as he draws attention to the fact, “But bush de smell pass cat I shit” because of the many deaths that are recorded on both sides. The factions behave as if those who die are strangers. These deaths are the people for whom they claim to be fighting. The cadavers are ‘Lion’, ‘Hyena’ and ‘Wolf’ people. Politics in this context has failed to nib the crisis in the bud as sustainable peace is not evident. Secondly, it is obvious that neither the government nor the separatist leaders are ready to proffer definitive solutions. Evidently, politics in the present dispensation is neither the elixir nor the panacea to the plight of the Cameroonian woman. This situation leaves one to wonder if the fourth estate could play its role of arbiter to provide hope for the future of the women caught in this situation. But the question now is: how free is the press?

### The Role of the Media

*The news media is a curious instrument. It can be a weapon of war, or can uphold prospects for peace. In the hands of totalitarian interests, it can be a terrible device when it spreads messages of intolerance and disinformation which manipulate public sentiments. (Howard, 207)*

In the quotation above, Ross Howard highlights the role the media can play in a conflict situation. It can either be a blessing or a curse depending on who is using it and for what purpose. The Anglophone crisis escalated to the level at which it is now partly as a result of the excessive misuse of the media. Online televisions, Facebook, WhatsApp, Messenger and Telegram groups were created by separatist advocates and used purposefully to spread their propaganda and champion their political agendas. Information calling for ghost towns, street demonstrations and lockdowns were/are communicated specifically through such media platforms and the devastating effects of such media outlets on escalating the crisis cannot be overemphasized. This justifies while the government on the 17<sup>th</sup> of January to April 20, 2017 decided to temporarily shut down internet services in the crisis hit regions. While the separatists saw this act as a deliberate attempt to suppress freedom of expression and by extension, stifle and cripple socio-economic activities in the two Anglophone regions, the government on her part saw it as an apt measure to curb the spread of further violence and misleading information. The traditional role of the media to inform, educate and entertain was completely discarded as media became a tool for propaganda. The negative effects of the media are highlighted in the poems under study.

In the crisis in Cameroon, the social media has diverted from this role and instead fan the flames of the conflict. The spread of principally bad news is done through the social media gadgets like telephones. As Fonka says in the poem "Wowo nyus", that is, ugly/disturbing/nauseous/despicable news, the rate at which bad news with its destructive impact spreads from one person to another is magical and dramatic. Fonka says the bad news which people take delight in spreading, "...komot wan telefon/ Jum enta oda wan dem." The telephone is negatively used to spread news that only goes to put people on edge and create fear, anger, tension and hatred between the people. The poet concludes that the telephone has contributed enormously to make an already bad situation worse, for Wowo nyus don mek/ Pleis dem wowo". While Fonka globally talks about the telephone as a tool for the spread of bad news, Alembong identifies the other three media outlets of Facebook, WhatsApp and YouTube as social media outlets that spread varying and potentially conflicting and implicitly inciting and inflammatory information. None of the information they relay is inherently helpful in abating the intensity of the crisis. In "Dis war sef," "Facebook de talk i own for dey./ WhatsApp de talk i own for dey./ YouTube de talk i own talk for dey". Each has its own story to tell depending from which position the particular outlet user looks at the crisis. With the proliferation of these different news organs, namely, Whatsapp, Youtube, Messenger and some radical online newspapers whose leitmotif is to fuel the crisis, the state media is in jeopardy as any official information from the state media is taken with a pinch of salt; at worse, it is even described as fake news. Apart from misinformation, there is inconsistency in the information dished out. All in all, these media outlets are rooted in falsehood, inconsistency and contradictions seen through a few examples that the poet advances. Hence, such information as "Dis commander bin die last year, dis year i de shout command; / Dis colonel bin die last week, dis week i de talk for radio;/ Dis general die yesterday, today i de marry new wife (this commander died last year, this year he is giving out command./ this colonel died last week, this week he is talking on the radio./ this general died yesterday, today he is marrying a new wife)". This information and counter information only help to fuel the crisis and cause confusion and uncertainty among the vulnerable population, especially women trapped at the centre of the conflict. Further questions arise as to what would bring peace to the land.

### **Peace Building Processes of the Crisis**

Given the prevailing situation in Cameroon and its two English-speaking regions, it is unquestionable that for the country to regain its former dynamism, peace must be brokered and built. And what then is peace? Peace is a broad based concept with multiple definitions. Harun Hadzic says, "Peace is life and war is death." Though a brief definition, peace is implicative of a state of serenity marked by harmony and tolerance between a people and a nation. Armed conflicts and wars have always resulted in huge human and material damage and, this has always rendered the peace process complicated. That notwithstanding, peace is a prerequisite for any meaningful and sustainable post war reconstruction and development. The peace building process marks the first key step in conflict resolution and Bubacarr Sambou agrees with Barry and Vesna Hart that to achieve this, a certain systematic procedure must be followed. This involves "Working to establish peace between disagreeing parties through mediation, negotiation, arbitration and reconciliation process..." (7). Bubacarr Sambou further adds that peace building aims at "Working to make the world a better place for humanity to live in. It is the daily endeavours, individually or collectively, to attain the many positive changes that we all aspire to, for ourselves and all humankind. It is building of good relationships" (9). Tala I. Kashim cautions that the most important thing that can either facilitate or hamper peace building is the attitude to the crisis. He submits that, "It is true that conflict is natural, it is equally true that it is preventable. Hence, the problem is not the existence of a conflict but how it is resolved. How conflict is viewed will determine the attitude and approach to deal with it" (180). While perception is vital as a determinant to outlook and tactic towards peace, the degree of involvement and impact on the stakeholders also plays a key role towards its resolution and peace building. Consequently, it

is not only the warring factions that are involved in it, but among others, civil society actors and other organisations that need to be involved in order to end the war and to promote peace and justice.

According to Amanda Lucey and Liezelle Kumalo, any such process should have a "... people-centred vision of peace, to address the root causes of violence and promote the rule of law, good governance and human rights" (3). Any derailment from this will only help to prolong the crisis because it is a failure to recognize the incidence on the people who live the moments of the crisis and its impact. Peace building has certain obligatory steps and stages which as Lucey and Kumalo highlight must include among others: "... addressing root causes, assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development" (ibid:3). A genuine approach will therefore correct the misunderstandings and mistakes at the origin of the war. Hence, a mix-up in the above trend or ignoring the order or any other step would derail the peace objective.

Globally, to use Maya Angelou's words, the armed struggle like the one in the Cameroons constitutes "left collars of waste" which need to be cleaned up provided it is stopped. The crisis report No 8 of 30 June 2019 reveals many people have been forced out of their homes since the crisis started in 2016. Many homes have been burnt by fire causing further displacements. Harassment and kidnappings continue to be on the rise. All these cannot be allowed to go on the trot, thus it warrants a political and sustainable solution to it.

Peace making against the backdrop of the entire situation as above is therefore crucial to put a speedy end to the war. As inadvertent victims of the crisis women have championed the peace building process in the search for peace in general. Though their cries and complaints through the 'Women Task Force' and other movements have not yielded the desired fruits, they have set on motion a wakeup call and the imperative to begin a process towards ending the conflict. The protest gatherings of the women groups in the streets and town squares, the accompanying paraphernalia, and the messages are very much in line with the peace building process. The NW/SW Women's Task Force which Alembong describes as "The Gracious Doves" in "Wartime ladies" are women who brave odds to make their voices heard. Despite the "flying bullets";

The Gracious doves gathered in the town square, these ladies,  
Some with leaves of *nkeng* (peace plant), some with white handkerchiefs,  
Some beckoning to the sun, some kneeling in prayer,  
All summoning warlords to the town hall

Telling them that one cannot put out fire with fire. (lines 5-9)

The action of these women, the things they carry and their messages are all geared towards peace making. These women have so far embarked on Black Wednesday Campaigns to protest against continuous violence especially against women.

Stand Up For Cameroon on its part advocates that every Friday Cameroonian women should dress in black as a sign of protest against the on-going situation. These are those the poet in "Wartime ladies" calls, "The Gentle Dams". Like the Gracious Doves", they have campaigned and called for an end to violence and for peace to reign. This poem gives a panoramic picture of their peace crusading activities, the target settings, the audience and content of messages as:

The Gentle Dams gathered at a road junction, these other ladies,  
Some in black, some in red, all carrying fresh palm fronds,  
Calling the warlords to see what the war has done  
To see what fire has done to the nest and sent the birds fleeing.  
To see what the hurricane has done to a million egg baskets. (lines 15-19)

These women are clamouring for peace to return in Cameroons urging the warring factions to lay down their arms, embrace peace and end the violence. However, it appears that the armed conflict is beneficial to some people, whom the poet describes as "The Cream Ladies, the champagne drinkers". These are people who are apathetic to the crisis because they are unable to diagnose the Anglophone problem, or unwilling to accept the cause. The poet proverbially showcases their indifference in this rhetoric; "If the full moon loves you, why worry about the stars"? These categories of ladies fall within the realms of the first lady's syndrome/foundations, which Amina Mama in "Feminism or Femocracy? State Feminism and Democratisation in Nigeria" describes as 'femocrats.' The ladies are usually wives of state authorities or authorities themselves who have found favour in the eyes of the 'the powers that be'. They form a cohort with the first lady to represent women whose needs/want they don't know. During parties organized to commemorate some polemical history at the heat of the crisis, they need not bother themselves about the nefarious effects of the crisis. They are benefiting from the crisis in one way or the order and that is why they are soaked in the creed that "A fight between grasshoppers is a joy to the crow;/ A sheep does not lament the death of a goat's kid".

### The Creation of Commissions: Hope and Impediment?

There is a consensus amongst the critics of the presence regime that when the government is not willing to solve a problem, commissions or a commission are/is created. The creations of commissions in Cameroon are synonymous with proffering cosmetic solutions to a problem. In the heat of the Anglophone crisis which has threatened and is threatening the integrity and unity of the state, some commissions have been created which seem to be counter-productive because sustainable peace and justice is still unreachable. The creation of these committees appears to be putting the cart before the horse, because their roles will be seemingly more visible after peace must have been negotiated. The Bilingualism Commission tended to drum for the use of the two official languages and living together which at the heat of the crisis cannot significantly put an end to the war and sue for peace. The mastery of the two official languages by citizens was not the cause of the crisis, rather, it was the arrogant and predominant use of one language over the other in official circles. Citizens of the two linguistic expressions and backgrounds have coexisted largely with some degree of mutual understanding and harmony but the administrative arrogance associated with the use of French in official and unofficial issues and situations have been a threat to this long-term acquired co-existence. Besides, even when English-speaking Cameroonians choose to adopt the French language as one of their predilection, they still face unwelcomed reprisals. Emmanuel Fru Doh in his study "Bill F. Ndi's Social Angst and Humanist Vision: Politics, Alienation and the Quest for Freedom in *K'cracy, Trees in the Storm and Other Poems*" brings this to life when he notes what happens to an English-speaking Cameroonian who chooses the French language as the one in which to write his dissertation. Doh notes:

Ndi was about to defend his dissertation, "La Quête des indépendances dans le roman africain: L'exemple de *l'Harmattan* de Sembène Ousmane et de *Le cercle des tropiques* d'Alioum Fantouré," when some narrow-minded examiners refused to partake in the exercise. Ndi's crime, according to one of them, was that Ndi had written his dissertation in French because he wanted to take the place of Francophones. Yet Cameroon is a bilingual country, at least administratively, that has imposed the study of French on English-speaking Cameroonians. Unable to find any recourse, Ndi gave up. (qtd. in Fishkin, Ankumah, & Ndi 4)

Such is the linguistic quandary in which many an Anglophone Cameroonian would find himself.

It is worth mentioning that the Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Integration (DDRI) Commission created to disarm and reintegrate ex-fighters leaves much to be desired inasmuch as the war persists. All over the world, disarmament, demobilisation and re-integration of former fighters is a stage which comes after dialogue and the signing of a truce. The Cameroonian experience of a national dialogue when the DDRI commission was in existence is a novelty that needs to prove its workability and efficacy. According to the Africa Report, "DDRI should be considered in the broader developmental context, and (the Liberian DDRI process) demonstrates the importance of engaging communities (especially the women folk) from its inception (to implementation)" (7). The Cameroonian brand seems to have focus on some statesmen, but the local communities claim not to have been fully engaged in the process. Though the National Dialogue has been organised, the much expected thawing in the field is still to be admired because the conflict is ongoing. This is probably due to lack of ceasefire that could have preceded the dialogue. The content of the dialogue seemed to have swayed from the Anglophone problem to general issues of bad governance. The Africa Report of 2018 described the 'National Dialogue' as "... reflecting the narrow views of the political elite, and the compromise (resolutions) reached at among the warring factions do not address the grievances that led to the conflict in the first place" (4). It can be deduced from this assertion that the political elite has lost grounds among the masses in the conflict regions, as a result, the women continue to bear the brunt of the struggle.

In search of constructive dialogue and peace, women continue to lament on the streets in towns and villages to vent their misery and frustration. They want their voices heard, because according to them, the 'femocrats' who are representing them do not know the pain of the rural woman/victim. These 'femocrats' are female politicians whom Alembong describes in "War Time Ladies" as 'the champagne drinkers' and creamy ladies'. The creamy image projects their anglophone artificiality. Alembong also reiterates the need of a genuine dialogue in "Dis war sef" when he says "make all man sit under mboma tree, join hand and embrace'am" He recognises the imperative and the vital role of all and sundry in the peace process in order to ensure sustainable resolutions to the on-going war.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

Social instability is an epilogue to war, characterized by a generalized insecurity because war is an adventure whose trajectory and impact cannot be determined and remote-controlled by the warring factions. Because of this weakness, the womenfolk are a vulnerable group all over the world and they incessantly bear the brunt of this social strife. Women are continuously catapulted from one form of crisis offshoot of varying magnitudes to another in different societies. A majority of these social insecurity situations are not of their making but they suffer significantly. Among these is war which destabilises the entire social structure and leave

women to bear the brunt. Consequently, in addition to gender biases and noxious patriarchy, they experience both physical and psychological traumas. That notwithstanding, they still remain key actors in the drive for lasting peace through advocacy, street protest marches and dispatches to the powers that be. Unfortunately, their enormous efforts are slowed down by another category of insensitive women whom Nol Alembong describes as "...The Cream Ladies, the champagne drinkers." The action of this later group and their male acolytes are evidence of a class that is benefiting from the crisis and does not want it to end. However, the poets in their apocalyptic vision say, since they refuse to stand up for the course of peace, they will obviously be brought down by the crisis whose flames they fan.

Peace building remains a process with some oblong path in Cameroon. That is why Alembong categorically states that "If you no stand up for something you go fall for something." Since the Cameroon Anglophone crisis seemingly originates from the feeling of marginalisation and outright disparagement as well as discrimination, the poets highlight constructive dialogue as important because "...no grass for bush fit fix palava." The State might need to revisit its history to 'live again'. This is in line with Maya Angelou's opinion in "On the pulse of morning" wherein she states that "history, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be un-lived, but if faced/ With courage need not be lived again." (<https://www.justingrays.org>) The past has been that of friction, hatred and distrust, a disease for which no medication exists "No medicine fit cure bad-heart" except dialogue. In an optimistic note, Alembong concludes, "Tomorrow belongs for people whe dem prepare for'am today," and if the peace seems too difficult to approach as individuals, then collectively it will be possible. There is a call for collective approach with the women at the forefront, as he says; "Make all man sit under mboma tree (that is, the baobab tree which symbolizes wisdom, strength and unity), join hand and embrace'am."

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