

Contemporary Anglophone Cameroon Cinema in the Mediation of an Anglophone Identity: Language and Mediums

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Background: The State of Anglophone Cameroon Cinema

- ❖ The emergence of independence in the late 1950s propelled the production of a significant corpus of films by Africans.
- ❖ Some authors (Ukadike, 1994, Bakari, and Cham, 1996) have attributed the problems encountered by African cinema to the continent's economic desperation, propelled by colonialism and neocolonialism.
- ❖ An analysis of the development of Cameroon cinema highlights the slow and huddled growth of the industry as observed by Fofie (2008) .
- ❖ **Anglophone Cameroon cinema** is in an even more precarious state of underdevelopment due to its relegation, as well as the lack of exposure and financing (Tcheuyap, 2005, Butake, 2005).
- ❖ In *Cinema and Social Discourse in Cameroon*, Alexie Tcheuyap (Ed.) and other authors (Bole Butake, Gilbert Doho, Achille Mbembe et al) discuss the development of Cameroonian cinema, with focus on pioneer filmmakers like

Dikongue Pipa, Jean-Pierre Bekolo, Jean-Marie Teno and Daniel Kamwa.

- ❖ **No Anglophone Cameroonian film** is analysed in this work, which was published in 2005.
- ❖ However, the mid-2000s witnessed an upsurge in the production of Anglophone Cameroon video films.
- ❖ A new generation of video filmmakers operating mainly in Buea and Bamenda of the South and North West regions respectively, embarked on the production of home videos, usually in partnership with producers in Nigeria and Ghana.
- ❖ Some filmmakers produce up to four movies a year (e.g. *Blood or Wine*, *Jungle of Heirs*, *Pink Poison* and *Troubled Kingdom*, directed by Lawrence Neba were all released in 2012).
- ❖ The rapidity of these productions raises questions on the quality of such movies.

- ❖ On **the quality of Anglophone cinema**, some researchers (Nyinchuo, 2014, Ateh, 2009, Tita, 2009) observe that this cinema has been left in the hands of mediocre practitioners.
- ❖ The few products of good quality are seldom consumed in the country, save at film festivals (Ateh, 2009).
- ❖ On **“quantity” of Anglophone Cameroon movies**, very little has been written.
- ❖ In “The Illegitimate State and Cinematographic Discourse in Cameroon”, Gilbert Doho contends that between 1960 and 1988 more than **248 documentaries**, propaganda tools, were produced, overshadowing a meagre **48 feature films** produced by independent filmmakers (2005). **No reference is made to Anglophone films.**
- ❖ Etienne-Marie Lassi’s filmography in *Cinema and Social Discourse in Cameroon* presents a total of **113 productions** (films, documentaries, tele-dramas, tele-series) – only **28 Anglophone films** are cited.

- ❖ 24 of these 28 are Cinema for Development films and tele-dramas with the exception of Ako Abunaw's *Yo Bro*, Victor Viyoun's *Mboutoukou* and Emmanuel Wongibe's *Fringes of Impossibility* and *Waste to Wealth* (both documentaries).
- ❖ Ashuntangtang (forthcoming) intimates that there are over 100 movies produced in English Cameroon (Bannavti, 2010).
- ❖ Nonetheless, the author specifies that the absence of legal channels for sales and record keeping makes it difficult to provide accurate data on the number of movies produced (ibid).
- ❖ Since 2008, an organisation, which goes by the appellation of **Cameroon Film Industry** serves as regulating body for the industry.
- ❖ In an interview (January 2014), Alasambom Nyingchuo, Secretary of the organisation stated that it was impossible to categorically declare the number of movies released.

- ❖ He pointed out that many filmmakers do not adhere to the body and not all members provide regular updates on their productions.
- ❖ In the course of our doctorate research, we reviewed **62 Anglophone Cameroon movies**, released between 2004 and 2014.

➤ Genres in Anglophone Cinema

- ❖ The documentary, cinema for development and fiction.
- ❖ Inasmuch as Anglophone Cameroon filmmakers grapple with film technique (**often attributed to the lack of appropriate training and finance**), they make **pertinent cultural statements** in their cinematographic representations of the Anglophone Cameroonian.

➤ Problem Statement

- ❖ The under-developed state of Anglophone Cameroon cinema is incongruous, especially when compared to the quality of Francophone productions.
- ❖ Tcheuyap (2005) attributes this tendency to **the marginalisation of the Anglophone**.
- ❖ He avers that the FODIC, which was created under the Ahmadou Ahidjo regime to provide aid for filmmakers **was principally to the advantage of Francophone filmmakers** (p. 11).

➤ Research Questions

- ❖ What **language** do Anglophone filmmakers explore in the construction of audio-visual texts in representation of the Anglophone Cameroonian?
- ❖ How emblematic are these images of the **Anglophone Cameroonian identity**?

- ❖ What **mediums** are exploited for the dissemination of this cinema to the target audience?

➤ **Hypotheses**

- ❖ Anglophone filmmakers are limited in technique, but make relevant cultural statements through the **depiction of symbolic cultural power** (aesthetic and cultural language).
- ❖ To a significant extent, Anglophone Cameroon cinema projects an identity, which is emblematic of the Anglophone through realistic and embellished cultural representations.
- ❖ Anglophone filmmakers explore the internet (web sites and social networks) for the dissemination of their productions.

➤ **Significance of Study**

- ❖ This study is relevant to the field of film studies and cultural research in general.
- ❖ It will be particularly useful to researchers who are interested in the development and practice of filmmaking in Anglophone Cameroon on which there is limited literature.

➤ Definition of Terms

- ❖ “**Anglophone Cameroon**” refers to the people who originate from the North West and South West regions of Cameroon (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 1997, Wolf, 1997, Butake, 2009);
- ❖ These regions constitute the territory which was administered as Southern Cameroons, under British trusteeship between 1918 and 1961.
- ❖ This definition of “Anglophone” is obviously **geopolitical** given the fact that “Anglophone” by dictionary definition refers to persons of English expression.
- ❖ In this context, “**Anglophone**” **transcends the linguistic factor** to signify people who were “brought up” under British administration.
- ❖ They acquired certain values and a heritage opposed to those of the Francophones (formerly under French tutelage) whose numerical (8 regions) and sociopolitical strength gives them considerable advantage.

- ❖ **Identity** is defined by Brubaker and Cooper (2000) as a specifically collective phenomenon, which **denotes** a **fundamental and consequential sameness**, **real** (objective) or **perceived** (subjective) among members of a group or category (6).
- ❖ Identity encompasses those characteristics which depict the uniqueness and specificity of an individual, group or community, usually manifested through **solidarity** and **collective action**.
- ❖ **Film Language** refers to the systematic arrangement of symbols (Monaco, 1989) through the use of devices in cognizance of the development of events in time and space.
- ❖ The language of film deconstructs the significance of the various technico-aesthetic devices explored in a film.

➤ **Methodology**

- ❖ Two main approaches:
 - Studying the form and content of contemporary Anglophone

cinema (**62 reviewed**, **4** analysed as main corpus in our thesis using the **humanist** and **social science models** (Bywater and Sobchack, 1989), **2** of the **4** have been explored in this paper);

-Analysing mediums for the dissemination of this cinema.

- ❖ The library research, movie viewing and observation methods have been employed in this study.
- ❖ Data from our doctorate research (collected from semi-structured interviews and questionnaires) have been relevant to this study.

➤ **Theoretical Framework**

- ❖ The **Identity**, **Representation** and **Perception** theories are relevant to our study.
- The identity theory considers that the self takes itself as an object, categorizes, classifies and names that self in relation to other social categories or classifications (Stets and Burke, 2000).

- ❖ Categorization and oneness could emanate from a shared history, language or culture (Venugopal, 2009, Hall, 1996).
- ❖ **Representation** is the art of building worlds within a frame for “Artworks are indeed suitable examples of worlds and worldmaking, for they are cut off in time and space from our everyday life” (Dudley, 1984).
- ❖ The theory of **perception** holds that “[...] every normal human being can perceive and identify a visual image [...] even the simplest visual images are interpreted differently in different cultures” (Monaco , 1981).

1- Deconstructing the Anglophone Cameroon Identity

❖ The Anglophone Cameroonian identity emanates from the experiences lived by this people, hinged on the impact of **language** and **colonial heritage**.

➤ Language

❖ Language is salient at a three dimensional level: **Standard English, Pidgin English and the ethnic languages**.

❖ Bole Butake concurs: “Culturally speaking [...] the Anglophone Cameroonian operates at three parallel and criss-crossing levels: the ethnic, home or local language level, the Pidgin English level and the Standard English level” (Butake, 2013).

❖ **Language loyalty** is an important tendency in the formation of identity, as Anglophones recognise English as an identification mechanism as opposed to their ethnic mother tongues (Wolf, 1997).

- ❖ The plurality of language is underscored by Fango (1999): “The official language of Anglophone culture was English although the English-based pidgin became the domestic lingua franca, operating side by side with the different mother tongues of the Southern Cameroons” (p. 285).
- ❖ The use of English, pidgin English and ethnic languages has ushered in a new ethnicity, transcending their ethnic allegiances towards a common consciousness: that of being Anglophone.

➤ Colonial Heritage

- ❖ The difference in colonial tutelage has been identified as the springboard for the cleavage between the Anglophone and Francophone in Cameroon (Anye, 2008, Jua and Konings, 2004, Fango, 1999).
- ❖ The partitioning of the territory into English and French spheres laid the historical and spatial foundation for the construction of

Anglophone and Francophone identities in the territory, (Jua and Konings, 2004);

- ❖ The populations in each sphere came to see themselves as distinct communities, defined by differences in **language** and **inherited colonial traditions** of **education, law, public administration** and worldview (ibid).
- ❖ One of the factors that made for the “**anglophoness**” of former Southern Cameroonians was the Anglo-Saxon culture (**language, education, political philosophy, freedom of speech**, an **unarmed police** and other innumerable influences) experienced under British rule (Fanco, 1999).
- ❖ Another area of difference: **Association** and **Assimilation** (France) versus Indirect Rule (Britain).
- ❖ Inasmuch as both policies were manifestations of the imperialist ambitions of Britain and France, some authors have blamed the current administrative system of Cameroon on French colonial implantation (Anye, 2008).

- ❖ In a bid to mediate their identity, Anglophone writers and critics (Alobwed'Epie, Bame Nsamenang, Bate Besong, Bole Butake, Emmanuel Yenshu, John Nkemngong, Nalova Lyonga, Nol Alembong, Peter Abety, Shadrach Ambanasom, Victor Elame Musinga, etc.) have succeeded in establishing a literature that is representative of the linguistic, territorial and colonial uniqueness of the Anglophone in Cameroon.
- ❖ Our study reveals that contemporary Anglophone filmmakers exploit accessible equipment and rich cultural content to disseminate **a passive construction** of an **uncontested** Anglophone Cameroon identity.

2-The Language of Contemporary Anglophone Cameroon Cinema

2.1- The Aesthetic Language

❖ Though different from written and spoken language, cinematic language has the same communicative functions as language (Monaco, 1981).

❖ Film syntax must include **development in time** and **space**.

➤ Montage

- Development in time is orchestrated through **montage**, the cutting, alignment and juxtaposition of images in coherence with the development of the movie.

➤ Mise en Scène

❖ Development in space is achieved through **mise en scène**, which encompasses all the elements exploited to bring the story to life, scene by scene.

❖ This involves the **movement** and **skill of the actors** and **the plastics of image**: involving the **style of the sets**, **make up**, **lighting** and the **framing of shots**.

2.2- Pension by Nyingcho Tum and The Great Obligation by Lawrence Neba



Image captured from *Pension* (2009).

- ❖ An analysis of *Pension* projects a slow paced drawn out rhythm.
- ❖ The slow rhythm does not in any way suggest boredom, but is rather relevant in depicting the excruciating process of getting Charles' pension.
- ❖ The **flashback technique** is effective in portraying the passage of time. The opening scene with Charles at the anti-corruption unit is the pivot through which the story is told.
- ❖ *Pension* displays an average use of shots, the **close up** and **establishing shot** being the most predominantly used, including the **high angle, over shoulder** and **panoramic** shots.
- ❖ The close ups are effective in communicating the **strong emotions** experienced by the characters, especially in **conflict scenes** with Charles and Mark and family scenes where frustration and tension are palpable.



Images captured from *The Great Obligation* (2011)

- ❖ In *The Great Obligation*, flashbacks effectively suggest that the cold war between Eyor and the people of his village has lasted thirty two years.
- ❖ In spite of the predominance of conflict therein, *The Great Obligation* sustains a slow rhythm. The drawn out pace is as a result of the introduction of events through the **flashback technique**.
- ❖ On mise en scene, *The Great Obligation* displays an average use of shots, predominantly the **close up**, **establishing shot** and **panoramic shot**.
- ❖ The limited use of shots results in boring and monotonous images, which could have been avoided through a calculated allocation of a wide variety of shots.

- ❖ *The Great Obligation*, sustains a narrative tonality with no special lighting effects, (here light is used simply for the illumination of subjects/objects).
- ❖ *Pension* experiments with exterior and interior dark scenes, all symbolic of Charles Atewong's ordeal.
- ❖ As is the case of many Anglophone Cameroon movies, **fades** are the staple transitions in *The Great Obligation*.
- ❖ The slow/drawn out editing pattern of the movie does not undermine the conflict.
- ❖ It rather facilitates the management of **time** and **space**, through a combination of present day happenings with past events.
- ❖ As it is the case with the average Anglophone Cameroon movie, montage tends to be perfunctory, with shallow exploitation of the three main techniques: **accelerated montage**, **montage by attraction** and **parallel montage**.

- ❖ Accelerated montage: creating the illusion of the steadily increasing speed of an object/subject by multiplying shots of ever decreasing length.
- ❖ Montage by attraction: reinforcing the meaning of one image, with another which is not necessarily related to the sequence in question.
- ❖ Parallel montage: simultaneously portraying two actions taking place in different locations by alternating shots from each, to convey a sense of connection.
- ❖ Anglophone filmmakers are experimenting with technique, where conventions of filmmaking are being predominantly sidelined, giving rise to what Ateh (2009) refers to as **paradigm shifts** in filmmaking in Cameroon.
- ❖ Though satisfactory in audio-visual language, these movies explore technique sparingly, focusing more on fashioning socio-cultural content.

2.3- The Cultural Language

- ❖ The content of contemporary Anglophone Cameroon cinema does not reflect the history and struggle of the Anglophone.
- ❖ The filmmakers mediate an **uncontested identity**, through the portrayal of realistic and embellished cultural elements.
- ❖ This approach registers processes of creation of popular culture in the movies, in addition to the manifestations of realistic cultural elements.
- ❖ The portrayal of **symbolic cultural power** is exploited in the mediation of the Anglophone identity.
- ❖ This tendency is evident in the exaggeration of certain elements in the movies (kingdoms, glamorous costumes, etc.).
- ❖ Lull (2000) concurs: symbolic power can be relevant in articulating cultural situations, where symbols are given meaning by interpretation, and every interpretation takes place in a cultural context and serves a cultural purpose.

- ❖ A study of the movies in question evidences the contention that that culture is neither monolithic nor stagnant. Sometimes it is celebrated/represented, exaggerated, criticized or idealized.
- ❖ Contemporary Anglophone Cameroon cinema portrays ethnic and cross-cultural elements and thus serves as a medium for the display of the traditions and practices of ethnic groups of the regions.
- ❖ Rich cultural displays are evidenced in video films such as Ngwana Eddie Goffi's *The Beads maker* (2013), Lawrence Neba's *Jungle of Heirs* (2012), *The Great Obligation* and *Clash of Inheritance* (2011), and *Royal Destination* (2010), Neg's *The Majority* (2010), Deric Nji's *The Wedding Corpse Smiles* (2010), Zack Orji's *The Blues Kingdom* (2008), Steeve Agbor's *Phoenix Scar* (2008), Derick Nji's *Bih Kaba* (2007), Victor Njiforti's *The Inheritance* (2007), *The Ancestry Price* (2007) and Hilary Nkafu's *Where Tradition Fails* (2004), among many others.

- ❖ Hierarchical traditional settings, elaborate costumes, pluralistic use of language (English, Pidgin English and the ethnic language) and the deference for customs are pointers to the celebration of culture.
- ❖ Simon Cottle (2000) concurs when he avers that popular culture is an effective terrain on which “hegemonic struggles for consent are ideologically conditioned and discursively played out” (p. 10).
- ❖ This cinema does not reveal any profound research into the past of Anglophone Cameroonians, neither does it manifest a struggle against oppression.
- ❖ Gilbert Doho (2005), refers to this language of representation as **self-censorship**, where recourse to themes of marriage, bride price and other traditional phenomena is emblematic of **“thematic infertility”** (27).

3- Mediums of Production and Diffusion

- ❖ Filmmaking has, since 1895 undergone the conspicuous evolutions, through the development of at first cumbersome and later more adaptable and affordable equipment.
- ❖ Actors in the cinematic business in Cameroon are benefiting from the affordability of such equipment for the dissemination of images designed by them.
- ❖ In an interview, Nyingcho Tum intimated that *Pension* was shot in **7 days**, stating that if he had the chance to do it all over again, **12 days** would be sufficient.
- ❖ Lawrence Neba stated that he would have taken less than the **two weeks** he used to shoot *The Great Obligation* if funds had been available.
- ❖ Taking cognizance of the continuum that is film and the diligence required in the three phases of production (**preproduction, production** and **postproduction**), the question of the quality of these movies must inevitably arise.

- ❖ Our research revealed that Anglophone Cameroon filmmakers have ameliorated their equipment (e.g. from Hi 8 and camcorders (between 2000 and 2006), to DV Cams (between 2007 and 2009), to HD and full HD, which offers a higher image resolution (from 2010 onwards).
- ❖ Typical of low budget movies, such equipment are preferred because of their affordability, therefore an easy means to an end.
- ❖ Inadequate scripting is a problem in Anglophone films, which is responsible for unplanned situations during shooting, coupled with continuity problems during montage.
- ❖ Anglophone Cameroon movies are ameliorating in form and style;
- ❖ While the quality of the movies is hardly concomitant with the technological evolutions, the images are definitely clearer and the plots are less disjointed.
- ❖ This study has observed the exploitation of social networks and websites for the dissemination of Anglophone video films.

- ❖ **Mboa movies** online, **Callywood** and **Tiptopstars**, for instance, display previews, trailers and downloadable links of Anglophone Cameroon movies and equally provide information on the production teams of the movies.
- ❖ Online activities on the Facebook page of the **Cameroon Film Industry** portray interaction between the artists and the audiences.

Cameroon Film Industry

1 janvier 2013 via mobile

itz been a while we kept u on the know about the happenings in your darling industry.2012 is gone.we promise to serve you all better this 2013.Happy New Year!

2J'aime · · Partager

Excerpt from Cameroon Film Industry Facebook page

- ❖ The predominance of errors is a sign of lack of seriousness, especially on the part of the administrators of the page.
- ❖ Nonetheless, the internet has become a practical medium for the dissemination of Anglophone movies.
- ❖ Through social networking sites and online video streaming, people have the possibility of sharing images and instantly commenting on what they are watching.

Conclusion

- Our research illustrates that notwithstanding the lapses in cinematic techniques, the language of the filmmakers communicates a passive depiction of an Anglophone identity through the use of montage and mise en scène, as well as the portrayal of rich cultural content, in the mediation an uncontested Anglophone identity.
- This language is opposite to the radicalism which characterises Anglophone Cameroon literature.
- The internet is serving, though not to maximum capacity, as a medium for the exhibition and appreciation of the works of Anglophone filmmakers.
- The aesthetic and technical flaws notwithstanding, contemporary Anglophone Cameroon cinema is improving in quality and quantity, facilitated by the affordability of equipment.

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