

**AN ABRIDGED VERSION OF A SOCIOCRITICAL
STUDY OF SELECTED NOVELS BY MONGO BETI:
A DIACHRONIC PERSPECTIVE**

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Abstract

*The writings of Mongo Beti, a notable pillar of Francophone African Literature reaffirm the imperishable nature of the work of Art. His literary works span across generations, with a comprehensive coverage of pre- and post-independence Africa. They portray the social realities of his native land Cameroon, and by extension Africa, during his lifetime. His early works lay emphasis on colonisation and cultural identity. His latter works explore the progression of his satire on neocolonialism, post-independence governance and the influence of the western powers in Africa. In view of the above, this research evaluated from a diachronic point of view, the post-colonial status of Africa through the lens of Mongo Beti's writings. The texts of study include: *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* (1956), *Mission terminée* (1957), *Main basse sur le Cameroun : Autopsie d'une décolonisation* (1972) and *La France contre L'Afrique; Retour au Cameroun* (1993). As a result of a broad spectrum of his works, two theories were adopted in this research, namely, the postcolonial theory by Edward Saïd (1978) and sociocriticism theory by Lucien Goldman (1955). The study highlights Beti's satire of the society of his time. The qualitative research method was used. The study places Beti's narratives within the historical and cultural frameworks of colonial and post-colonial Africa. It explores the intricacies of African identity, resistance and the pursuit of a genuine independence and sovereignty. The study concludes that the continued influence of France and the perpetuation of corrupt leadership have hindered the development of Cameroon and other African countries.*

Keywords: Cultural identity, Diachronic perspective, Legacies, Neocolonialism, Qualitative research

Résumé

Les écrits de Mongo Beti, pilier majeur de la littérature africaine francophone, réaffirment le caractère impérissable de l'œuvre d'art. Son œuvre littéraire traverse les générations et couvre l'Afrique pré- et post-indépendance de manière exhaustive. Elle dépeint les réalités sociales de son Cameroun natal, et par extension de l'Afrique, de son vivant. Ses premières œuvres mettent l'accent sur la colonisation et l'identité culturelle. Ses œuvres plus récentes explorent la progression de sa satire du néocolonialisme, de la gouvernance post-indépendance et de l'influence des puissances occidentales en Afrique. Compte tenu de ce qui précède, cette recherche a évalué, d'un point de vue diachronique, le statut postcolonial de l'Afrique à travers le prisme des écrits de Mongo Beti. Les textes étudiés comprennent : *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* (1956), *Mission terminée* (1957), *Main basse sur le Cameroun : Autopsie d'une décolonisation* (1972) et *La France contre l'Afrique ; Retour au Cameroun* (1993). Compte tenu du large éventail de ses travaux, deux théories ont été adoptées dans cette recherche : la théorie postcoloniale d'Edward Saïd (1978) et la théorie sociocritique de Lucien Goldman (1955). L'étude met en lumière la satire de Beti envers la société de son époque. La méthode de recherche qualitative a été utilisée. L'étude replace les récits de Beti dans le contexte historique et culturel de l'Afrique coloniale et postcoloniale. Elle explore les subtilités de l'identité africaine, de la résistance et de la quête d'une véritable indépendance et souveraineté. L'étude conclut que l'influence persistante de la France et la perpétuation d'un leadership corrompu ont entravé le développement du Cameroun et d'autres pays africains.

Mots-clés : Identité culturelle, Perspective diachronique, Héritages, Néocolonialisme, Recherche qualitative

Background to the Study

Over the years African writers, including Mongo Beti, have identified colonisation as being the cause of Africa's economic stagnation and underdevelopment. Writers such as Frantz Fanon in *The wretched of the Earth* (1961), Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Sembène Ousmane in *God's bits of wood* (1960), Ayi Kwei Armah in *The Beautiful ones are not born* (1968) and even renowned academics like Akinjide Osuntokun in *Marketing Democracy work for Pro-poor*

Development (2003); Abiola Irele in *The African experience* (1981), and Asobele, Timothy '(2009)' to mention a few, have published works on themes relating to colonisation and its effects on underdevelopment. But fundamentally, colonisation was aimed at spreading religious beliefs through the doctrine of Christianity to ease the entrenchment of colonial ideologies without much resistance. This was the reason behind Mongo Beti's satirical outburst in his colonial novels, in particular, *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* (1956) and *Mission terminée* (1957).

Though some writers from Cameroon such as Louis Marie Pougá, Leon D. N. Tchinda, Rami Sid-Ahmed, Kouam Tchín, Koua etc., have written on the theme of colonisation and its implication in the underdevelopment of Cameroon and indeed Africa, and on issues related to African identity, cultural dislocation in traditional milieus, contemporary realities and their effects on human lives and concluded that Africa has been intentionally kept underdeveloped by the West. However, their works do not offer at a stretch, a wide scope of the situation as the works of Beti establish a periodisation that sectionalises them into two distinct eras: the colonial and the postcolonial. In view of this, the texts of study were selected not just for their militant nature in the fight against colonisation, neo-colonisation and social injustice in Cameroon and Africa at large, but also because they easily offer the capacity for a diachronic study of themes. Through a comparative study of selected texts of Beti, the current study highlights Beti's satire of the society of his time, with the aim of carrying out a cross examination of the evolution of contemporary post-colonial African societies through a textual dialogue.

Statement of the Problem

The historical processes of the colonisation of Africa and their aftermath continue to influence global structures, cooperations

and identities in both overt and subtle ways. the legacies of colonial rule remain embedded in the political, economic, cultural, and intellectual frameworks of the present. This is because despite achieving formal independence in the 1960s, most African nations continue to grapple with underdevelopment, insecurity, poverty, mismanagement of resources, and embezzlements by leaders in spite of the rich human capital and natural resources. Although the colonialists are more to blame for the plight of the Africans, heaping the whole blame on them alone is no longer tenable as many pieces of literatures abound in this regard, as well as political and social discourses. This is however not unconnected to the fact that political gladiators in Africa have adopted a sit-tight and recycling mechanism for their selfish desires, self-aggrandisement and perpetual enrichment across Africa. By assessing contemporary African societies, this study re-echoes the plight of the African people through the lens of Mongo Beti.

Aim and Objectives of Study

This study explored the socio-critical study of selected novels by Beti from a diachronic perspective. The objectives of the study were to:

- (i) unveil the complex realities of colonisation and neocolonialism in relation to the texts of the study;
- (ii) present literature as a great tool that illuminates the contemporary issues plaguing our societies.

Research Questions

To achieve the objectives, this study was guided by the following research questions.

- (i) What are the colonial and neo-colonial complex realities identified in the texts of the study?
- (ii) How does Literature stand as a great tool to mirror the contemporary issues plaguing our societies?

Significance of the Study

The study will encourage governments, agencies and corporate organisations to adopt and suggest new paradigms that will change colonial narratives for the emancipation of Africa. Besides, the study will be profitable to the young generation because it highlights the influence of literature for societal change, noting that literature is a reflection of social realities, and sensitizes the Gen Zees on their root and history.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

It delimits its scope to the four books under study, examining their corpus on colonialism, neocolonialism, African identity and development through socio-critical and postcolonial approaches. The comparison is handled in a distinct manner: Novels of Colonial era, *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* (1956) and *Mission terminée* (1957); and Novels of Post-colonial era, *Main basse sur le Cameroon; autopsies d'une decolonisation* (1972) and *La France contre l'Afrique* (1993), within a diachronic perspective that stimulates textual dialogues and interpretations.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts two theories: The post-colonial and sociocriticism theories. While sociocriticism illuminates the relationship between literary works and social structures, the postcolonial theory highlights the impact of colonisation on social structures and culture.

(i) Postcolonial theory

Postcolonial theory emerged in the mid-20th century, around the 1960s, when many African countries had gained their independence. The theory was influenced by both literature and political theories as a means to understand the ramifications of colonial rule. A crucial point in its evolution was marked by the publication of Edward Saïd's book *Orientalism* in 1978. It

therefore analyses the impact of colonisation on various cultures and social structures by examining the cultural, political and economic legacies of colonialism and imperialism, focusing on their continuous influence in contemporary postcolonial societies. The Postcolonial theory applies across a variety of disciplines such as literature, history, political and social sciences, sociology, cultural sciences. It fosters vital analysis on globalisation and historical injustices.

The theory explores how the literary works produced during and after the colonial period reflect and perpetuate the exercise of power within a social context. It also investigates identities and hybridity characterised by a mix of indigenous and colonial influences formed during the postcolonial era. To some extent, the postcolonial theory expresses how colonisers construct stereotypes within the society to justify colonial dominance and control. According to Akinola, Adeoye & Makombe, Ratidzo (2024), the end of physical and military rule of colonialism paved the way for the rise of post-colonial studies.

In modern literary analysis, the postcolonial theory actually aims at scrutinising the history of colonialism and how it has shaped the development of the formerly colonised nations even after its physical end. It seeks to understand how colonialism has impacted the political and economic life of colonised societies.

The application of the postcolonial theory in this research helps to analyse colonial practices, and the issue of identity, cultural discord and resistance in Beti's works. His works not only reflects Cameroon's landscape but also resonate the wider postcolonial discussions in Africa. While Beti's *The poor Christ of Bomba* (1956) presents profound perspectives on the differences between traditional african cultures and the colonial

values, as well as themes that most often portray the moral decay and deceit inter-twined with colonialism, *Mission terminée* (1957) illuminates the friction between tradition and western influence and reveals how colonial education sought to derail African identities. More often, Beti highlights the desire for self-identity among colonised societies whose cultural roots are threatened by colonial beliefs. Key components of postcolonial theory in Beti's work include, but not limited to the following: colonial critique, cultural conflict, identity and resistance.

(ii) Sociocriticism

Sociocriticism, otherwise known as socio-critical analysis, is an academic dissertation of social issues in a given society in respect of power relations or perceived injustices. It deals with both the form and content of texts to reveal the social meanings behind any work. The theory portrays how literary narratives can mirror societal standards and conflicts in order to enhance the understanding of literature in relation to its social background and significance. The theory was championed by Claude Duchet in 1971. His book, *Pour une sociocritique* (1971) explores the relationships between literature and social contexts by stressing mainly on how literary texts reflect social realities. Duchet argues that every text is influenced by societal actions. Sociocriticism theory therefore examines the relationship between literary works and social events. It portrays how literature mirrors and influences social dynamics. The key components of sociocriticism include: the social context, which examines the role of literature within the social settings, taking into consideration the historical, cultural and the ideological factors. Another key component is the ideological component, which aims to identify the ideological traces found in literature.

Mongo Beti's novels reflect the complexities of Cameroonian society before and after independence, and the wider socio-political landscape of Africa. *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* (1956), for example, depicts the struggles of indigenous people caught up in the throes of colonial oppression through the forceful implementation of Western influences against traditional values and practices. The characters in the book are the reincarnation of the populace, who, indoctrinated by the missionaries (Father Drumont) refuse to be free from religious oppression. In *Mission Terminée*, (1957), Beti portrays the nuances of cultural conflict revealing the tensions between Western education, and African values. In *Main basse sur le Cameroun* (1972), the author highlights issues relating to neo-colonialism and authoritative governance which naturally gives rise to tyranny, corruption, fraud, nepotism, exploitation etc. In his non-fiction novel, *la France contre l'Afrique* (1993), Beti critiques neo-colonial relationships that exist through economic dependence and political manipulation. The author employs socio-critical narratives to describe the infamous legacies of colonisation and the cancerous disease of neo colonialism, as well as the socio-economic disparities emanating from the new class of elites of the post-independence era. This supports René philombe's assertion in "*un sorcier blanc à zangali*" (1970) that Beti is able "to blend personal narrative with socio-political commentary" which offers insight into postcolonial ideologies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review consists of three main parts: conceptual, theoretical and empirical reviews of the themes relevant to this study.

Conceptual review

The conceptual review explores four interrelated concepts- colonisation, neocolonialism, assimilation, and decolonisation-

within the broader context of power dynamics and identity formation in postcolonial societies. These concepts are not isolated; rather, they represent a continuum of practices and responses that have shaped, and continue to shape, the experiences of individuals and nations in the postcolonial world.

Colonisation

Colonisation, as a political and cultural enterprise, represents one of the most defining forces in global history. It refers to the systematic process through which imperial powers extended their sovereignty over foreign territories, often using military conquest, settler expansion, and ideological control to establish dominance. Frantz Fanon, one of the most influential theorists of colonialism, emphasised the violent nature of colonial domination. In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), he argues that colonisation was fundamentally a violent act that attempted to reorder both the material world and the consciousness of the colonised.

The cultural dimension of colonisation was further explored by Edward Said in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978). Said identifies how European powers constructed a dichotomy between the “civilised West” and the “barbaric East” through literature, art, and academic discourse. Albert Memmi (1965) also contributed to this field by examining the psychological consequences of colonisation. In *The Coloniser and the Colonised*, he outlines the mutually constitutive identities of the coloniser, who must justify his dominance through a belief in his own superiority, and the colonised, who internalises this narrative and struggles with feelings of inadequacy. Memmi’s analysis makes clear that colonisation operates not only at the level of material oppression but also through the internalisation of imposed identities. Language and education were among the most potent tools used by colonial regimes to enforce cultural

subjugation. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), in his influential work *Decolonising the Mind*, critiques colonial education systems for promoting the language and values of the coloniser while marginalising or outright banning native languages. Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* (2000) offers a scathing critique of the moral justifications for colonial rule. Césaire links colonialism directly to fascism. His work situates colonialism within a broader critique of Western capitalism and racism, further illustrating that the colonial project was part of a larger global system of oppression.

Neocolonialism

The end of formal colonialism in 1960 did not necessarily mark the beginning of genuine autonomy. Scholars have argued that a new form of domination emerged at independence called neocolonialism. Coined and popularised by Kwame Nkrumah in his influential work *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965), the term refers to the subtle yet persistent mechanisms through which former colonial powers and global capitalist institutions maintain influence over ostensibly independent states. Neocolonialism critiques the ways in which former colonial powers, and increasingly global capitalist institutions, continue to exert control over so-called postcolonial states under the guise of development, aid, or globalisation.

Nkrumah (1965) was one of the first leaders to identify the structural continuities between colonial and postcolonial conditions. He observed that although African nations were politically sovereign, their economies remained tied to the interests of Western nations and multinational corporations. These relationships often forced postcolonial states to rely on foreign aid, loans, and investment, which came with conditions that limited their policy choices and reinforced underdevelopment.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) emphasises that the cultural dimensions of neocolonialism are deeply tied to the psychological effects of colonisation. In his view, even after political independence, colonial languages and values dominate educational systems, marginalising indigenous knowledge and reinforcing the supremacy of Western paradigms. Edward Said's analysis of Western cultural dominance in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) extends the argument by illustrating how literature and popular media continue to portray the Global South through paternalistic or exoticising lenses. These narratives contribute to the perception that formerly colonised peoples are still in need of guidance, discipline, or rescue, an idea rooted in colonial ideology but adapted for modern global politics. As Grosfoguel (2007) and Mignolo (2011) note, the notion of "coloniality of power" helps to extend Nkrumah's ideas by focusing on the ongoing epistemic and cultural dimensions of global domination, beyond mere economics or diplomacy.

Assimilation

The concept was particularly developed and implemented by the French colonial administration, which articulated a civilising mission (*mission civilisatrice*) that justified imperial rule on the basis that it was uplifting "primitive" societies by integrating them into the enlightened values of French civilisation (Betts, 2005). In theory, this model offered colonised subjects a pathway to equality through cultural conformity. In practice, however, it entrenched a rigid hierarchy, where the coloniser remained the standard and the colonised remained perpetually insufficient.

As Memmi (1965) argued, the coloniser never truly accepted the colonised as equals, even when they adopted the coloniser's language, religion, or education. This was evident in French

West Africa, where a small elite of *évolués* (assimilated Africans) gained limited rights, but only so long as they distanced themselves from their native customs and identities. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Fanon illustrates the internal conflict of the colonised individual who speaks the language of the oppressor and aspires to his values, yet remains alienated from both the coloniser and his own community. He writes, “The black man has two dimensions, one with his fellows, and the other with the white man” (Fanon, 1952, p. 17). This duality leads not to integration, but to alienation and psychological distress. In many cases, colonised peoples engaged in cultural negotiation that Homi Bhabha (1994) describes as “mimicry” a strategic imitation that appears to conform to colonial expectations but subtly subverts them.

In the contemporary context, the echoes of assimilation remain audible in debates over multiculturalism, migration, and national identity particularly in former colonial metropolises.

Whether viewed as a colonial tool of governance or a postcolonial struggle for identity, assimilation reveals the deep entanglement between power and culture. In undermining indigenous epistemologies and imposing a singular vision of humanity, assimilation did not merely civilise; it colonised the mind

Decolonisation

Decolonisation in this broader sense involves reclaiming indigenous knowledge systems, languages, histories, and ways of being that were suppressed or devalued under colonial rule (Ngũgĩ, 1986; Smith, 1999). Liberation from colonial rule entails not just political sovereignty but also cultural, psychological, and economic autonomy. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986) and Fanon (1963) have both asserted, true

decolonisation requires a re-centering of indigenous knowledge systems and a radical rejection of the coloniser's claim to epistemic and moral authority.

Fanon emphasised that decolonisation must be a violent rupture, not just politically but also psychically, as the colonised subject seeks to reclaim agency and dignity. However, he was also deeply concerned that the post-independence bourgeoisie might replace colonial rulers without challenging the exploitative structures left behind. Decolonisation remains an unfinished struggle, as institutions inherited from colonial rule continue to shape contemporary life. Former colonies remain enmeshed in global systems of trade, finance, and production that reproduce dependency. In sum, decolonisation is best understood not as an event concluded in the mid-20th century, but as an ongoing, multidimensional process.

Theoretical Review

To examine these complex and overlapping phenomena, this review is grounded in two key theories: postcolonial theory and sociocriticism. Postcolonial theory, as developed by thinkers such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha, interrogates the cultural and ideological mechanisms through which colonial power is maintained and contested (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988; Bhabha, 1994).

Postcolonial theory emerged as a critical response to the cultural, political, and psychological legacies of colonialism. Rather than viewing the end of colonial rule as a clean break, postcolonial theory interrogates how colonial structures and ideologies persist in contemporary societies, both within formerly colonised nations and in global power dynamics. It centers the voices and experiences of the formerly colonised, challenging the Eurocentric narratives that have long dominated

academia, history, and literature. As Said (1978) famously argued in *Orientalism*, the West constructed the East not as a real place but as an exotic, inferior “Other,” a projection used to justify imperial domination. Postcolonial theory thus begins with an epistemological intervention: a challenge to how knowledge is produced and whose knowledge is considered legitimate.

A foundational insight of postcolonial theory is that colonialism was never simply about territory; it was also about meaning. Through language, literature, education, and representation, colonial powers-imposed systems of classification and identity upon their subjects. Scholars such as Spivak (1988) and Bhabha (1994) have shown how these discourses continue to shape global hierarchies of race, culture, and power. Spivak’s notion of the “subaltern,” for instance, highlights how colonised peoples especially women have been systematically silenced in historical and theoretical narratives. Her book, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988), draws attention to the limitations of Western theory in recognising non-Western agency and voice. Postcolonial theory is also deeply concerned with hybridity and identity. Homi Bhabha’s concept of hybridity challenges binary divisions between coloniser and colonised. He argues that colonial encounters produced new, hybrid identities that exist in the “in-between” space, a site of negotiation and resistance. Bhabha (1994) notes that colonial authority was never absolute but always fragile, because the colonised could mimic the coloniser in ways that both conformed and disrupted.

Frantz Fanon’s psychoanalytic approach further expands postcolonial theory by exploring how colonialism penetrates the subjectivity of the colonised. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Fanon describes the psychological trauma inflicted by a racist colonial order, in which Black individuals are forced to

internalise feelings of inferiority and alienation. He writes, “I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am fixed” (Fanon, 1952, p. 95). For Fanon, decolonisation must be both a political and psychological process one that heals the fractured self and restores dignity to the formerly colonised subject.

Importantly, postcolonial theory also interrogates the persistence of colonial power in the post-independence era. This includes what Aníbal Quijano (2000) and Walter D. Mignolo (2011) have termed the “coloniality of power”, which is the continuation of colonial logics in economic systems, state institutions, and epistemic structures. Postcolonial theory, therefore, does not end with the colonial period; it seeks to understand how the residues of empire structure the present.

The theory is also methodologically diverse. It draws from literary studies, anthropology, political theory, psychoanalysis, and cultural studies to uncover the multifaceted impacts of colonialism. Through textual analysis, for instance, postcolonial critics read canonical Western literature not only for what it says but for what it silences examining how novels like *Jane Eyre* or *Heart of Darkness* rely on the marginalisation of colonised peoples to construct Western identity (Said, 1993). At the same time, postcolonial theory elevates the voices of writers from the Global South; authors like Chinua Achebe, Arundhati Roy, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o whose works articulate alternative worldviews and histories. The theory’s enduring relevance lies in its capacity to expose how power operates across cultural and historical boundaries and to imagine more equitable and inclusive futures. Ultimately, postcolonial theory is not merely about the past; it is a lens for understanding the present.

Sociocriticism, rooted in Marxist and structuralist traditions, is a critical framework that explores the intersection between literature and society. Florence de Chalonge in her article 1970-1971: *The rise of socio-criticism* stated that three articles provide a starting point for the study of sociocriticism. The articles are” “*The Critical Relation*” (1970) by Jean Starobinski, “*Literature: Generativity of the Sentence*” (1970) by Serge Doubrovsky and “*From Work to Text*” (1971) by Roland Barthes. Rather than treating literary works as isolated aesthetic objects, sociocriticism emphasises that texts are socially situated and ideologically charged. Literature, in this context, is seen both as a product of social forces and as an active participant in shaping cultural and political discourses. The primary aim of sociocriticism is to uncover how literature reflects, reproduces, or challenges dominant ideologies, power structures, and historical conditions. At the core of sociocriticism lies the Marxist notion that literature is not autonomous but deeply embedded in material conditions and class relations. Lucien Goldmann, a key figure in sociocriticism, developed what he called genetic structuralism, which attempted to link literary structures to collective social consciousness. In works like *Towards a Sociology of the Novel* (1964), Goldmann argued that literary texts are not the expression of individual authors alone, but rather reflect the worldview of a specific social class or group. Thus, a novel could be read as a symbolic representation of the struggles, values, and contradictions experienced by that group. Gold-mann’s sociocriticism focuses on historical totality, advocating that meaning in literature arises from the relationship between the text, the social class it represents, and the broader historical context (Goldmann, 1964).

The influence of Louis Althusser on sociocriticism cannot be overstated. Althusser’s theory of Ideological State Apparatuses

(ISAs) posits that institutions such as education, religion, and media function to perpetuate dominant ideologies (Althusser, 1971). Althusser's concept of interpellation-the process by which individuals are "hailed" into ideology suggests that readers are not passive recipients of meaning but are ideologically positioned by the text. A sociocritical analysis, therefore, explores how literature interpellates readers and reinforces or disrupts dominant ideological positions.

In recent decades, sociocriticism has evolved to incorporate poststructuralist and postcolonial insights, particularly regarding race, gender, and global power relations. Scholars such as Terry Eagleton (1976) have broadened the field to include how texts not only reflect class dynamics but also intersect with other axes of identity and oppression. Eagleton argues that literature serves as a battleground for competing ideologies, where meanings are not fixed but are constantly negotiated. His work underscores the importance of attending to both the form and historical context of literary texts, stressing that literature is shaped by ideological currents and can serve as a site of both domination and resistance.

Empirical Review

Most analyses of Beti's works are not done in isolation or distinctly, but in a collective manner. This is because the themes are interwoven. Beti's desire to free his country and Africa from the exploitation of the West that came in form of Religion, civilisation and of course politics is quite evident in literary discourse according to Henry K. Jick & Andrew Tata Ngeh (2015:21). In other words, political literature is a weapon he uses to fight social politics. This means political literature is irony. Beti was also political in the choice of his pseudonyms and his fiction as posited by Henry K. Jick & Andrew Tata Ngeh(2015: 21).

To corroborate the views of Henry and Ngeh, the title of our texts of study, though far from describing the origin of the writer, reveals the battles confronting the writer's continent. From *Mission to Kala*, *Poor Christ of Bomba* to *Main basse sur le Cameroon* and *La France contre L'Afrique*, the imagery reflects, the satire unfolds and arouses the curiosity and interest of the reader. Most critics allude to Beti's *Mission to Kala* as prophecies of events in post-colonial societies. Based on the preceding, David J. Mickelson (2019) in *the post-colonial Bildungsroman* argues that *Mission terminée* is "purely a postcolonial Bildungsroman with a nuanced interpretation that recognises the complexity of the protagonist struggles amidst the background of colonial influences". Others like Chinua Achebe in his essay entitled *African writer and the English language* (1964) admonished Beti for "romanticising the pre-colonial past", but David Diop in *Coups de Pilon* (1956) commended the novel for its rigorous depiction of "colonial damage". *Mission terminée* has been acknowledged not just for its humour and social commentary, and its exposition on colonialism. On the other hand, Jean-Pierre Makosso in *Human works* (2012:21) argues that *Main basse sur le Cameroon* is a "powerful critique of the authoritarian regime in Cameroon". He highlights Beti's exposure of the neocolonial dynamics that persist after independence. However, David Diop in *Frère d'âme* (2018:16) opines that *Main basse sur le Cameroon* represents a significant shift toward political engagement, highlighting Beti's realist style and its effectiveness in portraying the harsh realities of life under neocolonial rule. David Eka (2017: 12) finds Beti's work as symbols of protest against oppression and exploitation.

Most critics seem to be apologists for Beti. By comparing the works of Beti, namely, the *Poor Christ of Bomba* (1956),

Mission to Kala (1957) and 18th Century, French writer and philosopher Voltaire's *Candide*, Patricia-Pia Célérier (1995: 31) identifies some similarities in both writers.

In the same line of thought, Bernard Mouralis esteems that Mongo Beti read the classic authors of the eighteenth century - Voltaire, Montesquieu, Diderot, and Rousseau - and reflected on how a writer can express himself in a society that limits or denies the rights of expression.

Mongo Beti will always feel closer to Balzac or R. Martin du Gard than to Zola. In defense of the narrative above, Jean-François Chemain in his book entitled *Mongo Beti: Voltaire in the twentieth century* (2011:16-22), examines Beti's works and focuses on themes such as colonialism and identity within African literature. Chemain contends that neocolonialism, driven by French political and economic interest, perpetuates the same system of domination that was established during colonial period. He critiques the serious economic exploitation of Cameroon by France and likens Beti to the French writer Voltaire, a key agent of enlightenment of 18th century France. Beti thus uses critical modes of dissemination similar to those of Voltaire, i.e. satire and irony, but to his own ends and in his own particular way. *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* and *Mission terminée* share formal similarities with *Candide*. (Our translation from French)

Owono-Kouma (2012: 99) analyses the censorship against the publication of the *Poor Christ of Bomba* and links the text to a socioreligious events in Cameroon. He admits that the remote causes of the censorship of the novel are related to the war by the Catholic Church against communism represented by the political party 'Union des Populations du Cameroun' (UPC),

and an immediate cause relating to the very thematic elements of the novel.

Meanwhile Bernard Mouralis (2018) admits that *The Poor christ of Bomba* reflects the young revolutionary mind of Beti. He calls it “Journal d’adolescence” (Adolescence Journal) for according to Beti (1981:110). This resentment is also reflected in the naïve character of Denis who accompanies the priest in his tours and who was influenced by his environment. He represents the naïve African mind that has been captured by religion and needs emancipation today. Thus the relevance of Beti’s work today as stated by Tchumkam Hervé (2022: 92).

In Francophone West Africa today, Ibrahim Traoré of Burkina Faso has revived the colonial and neocolonial debates in a broader dimension that seems to unturn economic and political spheres and change narratives of diplomacy. Also, the term decoloniality is one of the watch words against the fight for self-determination by the colonised. Samaké Adama (2022:76) asserts that “decoloniality express a philosophy of liberation based on a set of ideas necessary in the struggle to annihilate colonial difference and all forms of coloniality” (Our translation from French). This decoloniality is the major discourse in Beti’s *La France contre l’Afrique* (France against Africa), in which Samaké identifies its three forms: the coloniality in French-speaking Africa: the coloniality of power, and of being and knowledge. Summing it up, coloniality simply refer to the subtle neocolonialism that keep African nations perpetually underdeveloped under the cover of aids, diplomacy defense, signed treaties and multilateral cooperations and agreements.

Gap in Literature

As shown above, most scholars analyzing Beti's works point to his consistent and unequivocal critique of colonial and postcolonial structures in Africa. Many of them posit that Beti's literature serves as a weapon against the political and economic systems that perpetuate poverty in many African societies. However, they seem to be biased in the sense that they lack nuances and neglect the diversity of experiences and perspective. The researcher discovered a one-sided analysis and critique throughout the review of the works of Mongo Beti. Almost all the analysis and critiques are centered on negativism. The highlights have always been on the negative legacies of slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism imperialism and so forth. They seem to mask up the advantages that come along with the forceful intrusion of Europeans either as slave masters or as colonisers into the African space.

Of a truth, the legacies of colonisation and the impacts of neocolonialism are hurtful and traumatising, but they do not erase the fact that much of the advancement we have today in the fields of technology, medicine, education, agricultural and otherwise are the by-products of slavery, colonisation and European imperialism. For instance, slavery brought about the forceful dislocation, and the imports of Africans to Europe and to the Americas. The off-shot of the generation of these slaves became intellectuals, academics and revolutionaries who fought for the renaissance of Africa. Their intellectualism became the weapons and the ammunition with which the colonisers were confronted with even today. Although modernity is one of factors that undermine our cultural values, it is quite unfortunate that many African historians, intellectuals and academics are yet to give credence to slavery and colonisation as means to our modernisation. There is need for a balanced argument

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology involves a systematic approach to analysing and interpreting documents to answer research questions or test hypotheses. This work falls within the domain of comparative textual analysis and adopts the qualitative research methodology. The method involves analysis of existing literature or primary texts. It also entails the analysis of secondary references on the works of Beti. The diachronic perspective of the study highlights the social and political shifts of themes and narratives before and after independence.

The primary texts include Mongo Beti's selected novels – *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* (1956), *Mission terminée* (1957), *Main basse sur le Cameroun...* (1972) and *La France Contre L'Afrique...* (1993). Secondary sources include scholarly journals, Reference books, historical documents, dissertations and thesis. This study also explores sources like historical writings and analytical essays, biographies and autobiographies that shed light on Beti's life and his socio-political orientation will form part of the secondary sources. Finally, the data was analysed thematically, contextually and comparatively, while the intertextual and intratextual structures allowed the researcher to decipher colonial and postcolonial themes

Intertextuality

Intertextuality is a major concept in literary theory. It explores how texts dialogue and relate with one another. Inspired by the works of Mikhail Bakhtine, Julia Kristeva introduced the term in the late 1960s. She maintains that: "Intertextuality is the idea that all texts are part of a large network of texts and that meaning is created through the relationship between texts". Intertextuality offers a strong framework for understanding the interconnectedness between texts.

Intratextuality

Intratextuality is the analysis of components within a text that relates to one another to enhance the overall message in a text. Alison Sharrock (2019) states that, it provides “a framework for understanding the multiplicity of meanings within a text through its internal relationship”. By exploring various analytical techniques, a deeper understanding of how texts communicate ideas and values are gained. This helps to enrich both the study of literature and also enhances the narrative complexity of the text.

The current study is an intertextual study that adopts the approach of Daniel Henry- Pageaux. It is based on comparative textual analysis of primary and other secondary texts relevant to our subject. Explaining the steps to an intertextual analysis of texts in his book entitled *La Littérature générale et comparée* (1994).

To buttress the opinion of Pageaux, Ebelechukwu (2017) alludes that ‘These titles guide the readings, justify the comparisons and demystify certain aspects of the works.... The aim is to establish an intertextual structure that makes it possible to decipher signs and symbols... (our translation from French). Based on Henri Pageaux’s method of comparative textual analysis, the texts were chosen and classified according to their eras of publication (precolonial and postcolonial) for an in-depth diachronic analysis of the social events and in relation to fiction. The intertextual and intratextual analysis present the relationship and influences in between literary works and a concept of textual dialogue. Three main phases were also considered in the selection and classification : contextualisation, intertextuality/intratextuality and cultural mediation. In the contextualisation phase, the texts were put in their historical, social and cultural contexts, while the phases

of intertextuality and intertextuality present the relationship and influences in between the literary works. A careful study of textual interactions and an exploration of intercultural dynamics as propounded by Pageaux will be explored by the researcher in the selected works of Mongo Beti.

Levels of socio-critical analysis

The analysis of the four novels devoted to our study has been done following the qualitative documentary research method and intertextuality approach of Henri Pageaux . The first two novels, *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* (1956) and *Mission terminée* (1957) were published before independence, and the other two novels, *Main basse sur le Cameroun* (1972) and *La France Contre L'Afrique* (1993) were published after the independence of Cameroon. The socio-critical analysis of these four novels are done through the three level of socio-critical studies as shown below.

3 Levels of socio-critical analysis	<i>The Poor Christ of Bomba</i> (1956)	<i>The Mission Completed</i> (1957).	<i>Cameroon Takeover: Autopsy of Decolonisation</i> (1972)	<i>France against Africa</i> (1993)
Unitary	Novel Criticism 1	Novel Criticism 2	Novel Criticism 3	Novel Criticism 4
Binary	Comparison of two colonial period Novels		Comparison of two novels from the postcolonial period	
Quadripolar	Comparison of colonial and postcolonial			

Unitary analysis involves a method of analysis that consists of studying a text by focusing on specific textual units. Binary

analysis consists of studying a text by opposing two elements on the principle of duality; and quadripolar analysis allows for exploring the multiple facets of a text taking into account varied and complementary elements. The researcher is analysing the four novels following the social, political, economic and cultural contexts to support and appreciate the socio-critical theory.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

**Tabular presentation of the texts of study Comparative
Table of the two colonial novels**

Texts	<i>Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba</i> (Novel)	<i>Mission Terminée</i> (Novel)
Era	Towards the end of the colonial era	
Narrator	Denis, Father Drumont's boy	Medza, the second son of a wealthy farmer, who dreams of producing a Blanc-Noir
Literary current	Negritude	Negritude
Plot	The 1930s	The 1940s
Publication date	1956	1957
Pages	349 pages	222 pages
Colonisation	The Church as an Institution of Colonisation	School as an institution of colonisation

		and Assimilation.
Various themes	Corruption in religion, conflict between white priest and black congregation	Conflict between son and father, conflict Between traditional Africans and Europeanised Africans,
Main characters	Denis, Father Drumont, Zacharie, Daniel, Catherine,	Daniel, Medza, Eliza, Edima, Zambo, Niam,
Narrative style – the division	The emphasis on the church and Father Drumont and religious hypocrites	The emphasis on the Catholic school, the strict and frustrated Father who wants to send his children to Europe versus two children unable to pass their baccalaureate
Common themes	Colonisation, assimilation, inferiority complex, hospitality, wealth and abundance, prostitution, clandestine and uncontrolled sex, alcohol and palm	

	wine, decline of morality, women changing towards modernity, decline of the patriarchal world, unconscious assimilation, misery of women, community life and sociality.
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Comparative table of the two postcolonial novels.

Main basse sur le Cameroun: Autopsy of a decolonisation (1972) and *La France contre l'Afrique; retour au Cameroun* (1993) are two Francophone African novels by Mongo Béti published after independence under two different regimes. Below is a comparative presentation of the novels.

Texts Genre	Main basse sur le Cameroun (1972) Essay	La France Contre L'Afrique (1993) Essay
Era: Post independence African Governments	published 12 years after years after	33
Narrator	Mongo Beti Mongo Beti	
Literary current	Post colonial movement Post colonial literary movement	
Plot	Ahmadou Ahidjo (1960-1982) & flashback (colonial era)	Paul Biya at the time of the story (1982-1993) & flashback (colonial era)
Publication date	first edition (1972) & study edition (1972)	First edition (1993) & study edition (1993),
No. of pages	252 pages	219 pages

Common themes	Decolonisation, corruption, imperialism, subjugation, local conflicts, social injustice, abuse of power, political tyranny, despotism.	
Various themes	Minorities versus majorities: the Fulanis versus the Bamilékés, the incompetence of African leaders,	Personal experience of Mongo Béti, a narrator, actor and author,
Main characters	Ahmadou Ahidjo, Mongo Béti, political parties, intellectuals, Bamilékés, journalists, Ruben Um Nyobé leader of UPC	Mongo Beti, the police, gendarmes, Beti villagers, high school students, university students, retired bankers, against corrupt politicians & Paul Biya
Narrative style – the division	Mongo Beti is outside the story but he plays the role of the narrator of the political history of Cameroon by discussing the single party and the problems of its unions and political opponents.	Mongo Beti is in the story by recounting these personal experiences, those of his compatriots, of the young unemployed generation, and of all Cameroonians. He depicts social insecurity, the wealth of politicians, cheating in the multiparty system & Corruption

Neocolonialism	France against opponents and political parties and the support of Ahmadou Ahidjo	France against all public sectors, natural resources and the young generation by supporting Paul Biya
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Textual Analysis

The textual analysis will provide answers based on the questions raised in this study. It is therefore guided by the research questions below:

Research Question 1: What are the colonial and neo-colonial complex realities identified in the study texts?

By exploring thematic concerns, narrative techniques and socio-political implication in the selected texts, this study underscores Beti's critical stand on colonialism and post-colonial realities in Cameroon. In *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*, Beti highlights religious corruption and African adaptation to Christianity. He critiques sexual immorality and the economic exploitation of the African through forced labour and unfair economic bargains. The title of the novel, *le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* speaks of a catholic priest, Father Drumont who presides over the parish in Bomba and the neighbouring towns. In Bomba, Father Drumont is seen as the Personification of God. He is worshipped and celebrated by his parishioners. But at the end of his missionary work, le père Drumont as he was fondly called, suffered greatly in the hands of some parishioners and some members of the community who rebelled against him. Both the parishioners and the community came to realise that the church or the mission was a hoax, a means of exploitation, subjugation, coercion, deprivation and repression. They realised that the "Christ" in Father Drumont who was supposed to be the saviour of the people invariably became a tormentor and a deceiver of

the people. It is not surprising he is described as “the poor Christ”. Indeed Father Drumont was poor in spiritual matters of which he was supposed to be the custodian.

Meanwhile, the title of the second novel, *Mission terminée*, translated literary as “mission accomplished” seems to signify the success or the completion of the colonisation process by the Africans who replaced the colonialists. These are the ones Frantz Fanon described as “peau noire masques Blanc – Black skin white mask (1952). These African have black skin but white mentality. Literary, *Mission terminée* would have meant that when the protagonist, Jean-Marie Medza returned from Kala with his uncle’s wife, his mission to kala would have been accomplished. But metaphorically, one sees how Medza found himself transformed by western education, and how he adopted the white man’s mentality, philosophy and their ways of life. This made him appear awkward and ostracised among the people of kala. The author therefore subtly implies that the ideology of assimilation and acculturation introduced through colonisation was finally accomplished thus giving credence to the title of the novel “Mission terminée”.

In furtherance to this analysis, *Main basse sur le Cameroun* is a scathing critique of neocolonial exploitation and the authoritarian regime of the former President of Cameroon, Ahmadou Ahidjo. The novel examines the aftermath of independence in Cameroon, highlighting the French influence in her politics. It reveals the systemic manipulation of electoral process and the attempt by colonial powers to enforce continued control to ensure political outcomes that will be in their favour. The novel is a political essay, a historical analysis that offers an incisive critique of the decolonisation process in Cameroon. In the book, the author explores the themes of neocolonialism, the betrayal of revolutionary ideals and the emergence of dictatorial

regimes not just in Cameroon, but in Postcolonial Africa. It ultimately reveals the continuity of colonial structures under new forms. In the same vein, his Essay *La France contre L'Afrique* reflects the sociopolitical contexts of post-independence Cameroon. Beti's critique becomes more radical as he condemns the economic manipulation of Cameroon and African nations through the Françafrique system. The novel focuses on post-colonial oppression, denouncing the neocolonial system that perpetrates inequality in Cameroon. It denounces both the French and the elites in Cameroon accusing them of collaborating to maintain a system of exploitation. On a broader scale, the novel is an examination of France enduring economic and political interference in her former colonies. In his works Beti highlights clearly the continued dominance of colonial institution like the catholic church, the military, the schools and most especially the institute of French Technical Assistance under the guise of 'la coopération Française en Afrique francophone. These institutions facilitated the exploitation of local resources and maintained the power dynamics that favoured the elites while disenfranchising the majority of the people.

Research Question 2: How does Literature stand as a great tool to mirror the contemporary issues plaguing our societies?

The writings of Beti vividly expose the social ills of his times, and of course, today. Through characters in the novels, he illustrates how foreign domination exacerbates existing social issues causing fractures within indigenous identities. He condemns the brutality and moral hypocrisy of colonial powers and imperialism exposing the never-ending exploitation and the shameful dehumanisation that characterises colonial relationship. These literary texts are non-univocal and are open to many interpretations, as the characters in the texts of study depict

topical issues such as religion, human misery, existential angst, interpersonal relationships, exploitation and domination.

Research Findings

Colonial Texts

Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba and *Mission terminée* critique the impact of European institutions in the colonisation of Africa through the Roman Catholic Church, the mission Schools and the colonial Administrations. Both novels explore the psychological and cultural ramifications of colonisation, the internalised inferiority complex among Africans giving rise to the issues of identity, and the moral decay fostered by colonialism. In their divergences, *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* highlights religious corruption and the forceful adoption of Africans to Christianity. In this novel, sexual immorality and exploitation, particularly the exploitation of women are central themes. Meanwhile, *Mission terminée* portrays how western education was used as a tool for cultural assimilation. It critiques how western education was used to suppress African traditions and cultures. In the book, Beti portrays the intellectual awakening of Africans and their resistance to colonial ideologies.

Postcolonial Texts

From the point of convergence, both novels share a focus on Political corruption, the interference of France in Cameroon's Political and economic affairs, and the failure of post-colonial leadership. They present a grim picture of a nation struggling with the legacies of colonisation. Viewed from a diachronic angle, the texts of study illustrate the ongoing systematic exploitation of African people and resources under neocolonial systems. There are a collection of historical facts on Cameroon between 1960 and 1993. These historical accounts are laced with the author's personal experiences to expose the political

realities of Cameroon in their struggle for true independence and sovereignty. The divergences in the books arise from different contexts and themes each providing unique insights into the challenges encountered by Cameroon and to a larger extent Africa. The main difference is that while *Main basse sur le Cameroun* (1972) centres on Cameroon post-colonial realities underscoring the battles against internal corruption, betrayal, dictatorship and colonial legacies. *La France Contre L'Afrique* is a political essay that intensely critiques France's ongoing intervention and influence in its former colonies. The novel addresses neocolonialism and exposes how France manipulates the political and economic dynamics in Cameroon, and in her former colonies to meet its interest, most often undermining the sovereignty and growth of those countries.

In its literary form and style, *Main basse sur le Cameroun...* is a fictional tale that showcases the realities of life in post-independence Cameroon. Through its characters and narrative style, the author explores the intricacies of human behaviour, societal norms and the political space. On the contrary, *La France Contre L'Afrique...* adopts a more analytical, argumentative approach advancing the discourse on France's political and economic manipulations in Africa. Whereas in *Main basse sur le Cameroun*, the theme and motifs focus on political betrayal and identity crises, in *la France Contre L'Afrique* the narratives are on neocolonialism, economic dependence, cultural infractions and the necessity for Africa to be liberated from colonial legacies.

In conclusion, although the four texts were published in different periods, they however, present in an evolutive manner chains of current realities that seem 'difficult' to unbundle or unchain to pave the way for the development of Africa, thus the recommendations below

Conclusion

Beti's works have evolved from a critique of colonial systems to a more direct confrontation with post-colonial neocolonialism. His writings reflect the changing political realities of Cameroun and Africa, offering a nuanced critique of French influence and the failure of African leadership to encourage a sustainable independence. Analysing these works through a diachronic perspective has allowed us to trace the development of Beti's critique regarding colonialism, neo-colonialism and the socio-political landscape in Cameroon and Africa as a whole.

Beti's narratives illustrate a continual exploration of the intricacies of the African identity, authority and resistance, capturing not only the historical circumstances of his era but also the lasting impacts of colonial domination and cultural conflict. The narrative evolution from the personal challenges facing the characters in these novels, showcase Beti's heightened awareness of the interconnected destinies of individuals and collective entities.

This diachronic exposé underscores the shift in Beti's viewpoint from a focus on the intimate disillusionment of individual to a wider condemnation of institutional injustices. This transformation amplifies the significance of his social critique and established him as an advocate for the marginalised and dispossessed within post-colonial narratives. In essence, Beti's works showcase the complexities surrounding post-colonial identities, challenging both African and western perspectives while calling for a resurgence of genuine African participation in the affairs of the continent. By engaging with the socio-critical analysis, we affirm the ongoing relevance of Mongo Beti's insights to current discourses surrounding postcolonial

theories, post-colonial literature and history. His works remind us of our colonial heritage and the realities posed by neocolonial forces. It also reminds us of the importance of critically engaging with our shared histories, and inspires us to aspire towards an authentic self-determination for freedom and for equity.

Recommendations

Beti's works offer a profound critique of both the colonial legacy and the postcolonial challenges faced by African nations. Based on the findings, the study concludes that the continued influence of France and the perpetuation of corrupt leadership have hindered the development of Cameroon and other African countries. To address these issues, the following recommendations are proposed:

- (i) African governments should address the complex realities of colonisation and neo-colonialism by promoting transparency and accountability in governance to reduce corruption.
- (ii) Government should revamp educational curricula to include comprehensive studies of African history, cultures and contributions to global civilization.

Contribution to Knowledge

- (i) The study established a futuristic function of literary works in contemporary African Politics, with the recent political volt face and re-alignment of Francophone Africa countries like Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger against the Western world order and their cronies in Africa.
- (ii) The thesis contributed to African literature by analyzing the diachronic dimension of Beti's works, offering insights into the changing nature of Africa socio-political struggles.

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