

National (Dis)Integration and Literature; A Study of Ernest Veyu's *This Poem and Other Poems*, *Tender Ties*, and *The Return: Poems, a Poem*

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Abstract

*This paper is a historical analysis of Ernest Veyu's vision of the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon as presented in his poetry collections *This Poem and Other Poems* (2021), *Tender Ties* (2022), and *The Return: Poems, a Poem* (2022). The fundamental question guiding this research is: What is Ernest Veyu's perception of national integration and the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon in the selected texts? It is hypothesized that Veyu views national unity in Cameroon as being rendered fragile by the deeds of Cameroonians that created and fuel the Anglophone crisis while posing that the situation can be remedied if some actions are put in place. This work, therefore, aims at bringing out the causes and possible solutions to the Anglophone crisis that threaten living together in Cameroon as presented by Ernest Veyu in his chosen poems. In order to achieve this, New Historicism is employed as a theoretical percept. The first part of the work, entitled "Threats to National Unity" brings out the aspects that threaten living together while the second part captioned "The Way Forward" highlights the possible solutions to such threats, as presented by Ernest Veyu. The paper concludes that the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon can be solved and national integration enhanced if the causes are mitigated and appropriate solutions applied.*

Key Words: Cameroon, National Unity, Anglophone Crisis, New Historicism

Introduction

When the Germans were ousted from Cameroon during the First World War, Britain and France partitioned the territory and ruled their respective portions using different policies and practices. Presently, due to a feeling of marginalization, some Cameroonians of the Anglophone regions have been calling for

better treatment while others have armed themselves and are fighting state forces for separation or independence for a country they refer to as Ambazonia. Ernest Veyu, like other writers, artists and stakeholders who propose solutions to end what is now known as the Anglophone crisis, uses his collection of poems *This Poem and Other Poems* (2021), *Tender Ties* (2022), and *The Return: Poems, a Poem* (2022) to warn against what he sees as the causes of the problem and to put forth pathways to end it.

Context of the Topic and Literature Review

Cameroon, like many other African countries, continues to suffer from the long term effects of colonialism.(Nwati 1) Cameroon was colonized by Germany and after the defeat of the Germans in the First World War, the colony was partitioned between France and Britain as mandatory territories of the League of Nations. When the Second World War erupted and came to a conclusion, Cameroon's status shifted from a mandatory territory of the League of Nations to a trusteeship territory of the United Nations Organization. What did not change, however, was the fact that Britain and France were still in custody of the territory. These European powers ruled their respective portions of Cameroon using different policies and practices. Consequently, Cameroonians in both parts of the Anglo-French colonial divide were exposed to different languages, cultures, legal setups and educational systems and ended up developing different identities and perceptions of society. Nzume reiterates this as follows: "The two new European powers which then ruled in their respective spheres had distinctive cultures, political traditions and colonial policies which differed from one another at least as each was different from those of Germany. The result was an increasing degree of divergence between the territory under French administration and that under British rule"(5). Ekpebisong *et al* go further to state that "The colonial policy of divide and rule instituted long lasting hatred and divisions amongst the people who by virtue of their common nationality had to co-exist"(84). Several years after independence and reunification of the two portions of Cameroon, Anglophone Cameroonians have a feeling that they are being marginalized (Konings and Nyamnjoh 207; Nkengasong 51,52,53,61,62; Pangmeshi 117; Butake 155; Ambe 162; Human Right Watch 1,13; Nkwain 48; Walter 49) and treated as second class citizens

(Nwati 3; Gould 6; Ashuntantang 125; Ekpebisong 82). This situation has degenerated in the last few years to an extent where some Cameroonians of the Anglophone regions are raising serious questions about their living together with their francophone brothers as some want a return to a federal state while others want outright independence or separation. Those seeking separation have formed armed groups to fight state forces in a bid to achieve independence for a country they refer to as Ambazonia. (Ekah 141)

This situation has devastating consequences on Cameroon as a whole and on the Anglophone regions in particular. These include not only the maiming, beheading and assassination of elements of the defense and security forces, administrative authorities and defenseless civilians as well as the destruction of public infrastructure, buildings, schools, hospitals etc (Biya, "Message to the Youths" 10); but also the killing of thousands of people, destruction of hundreds of villages, displacement of millions of people, causing of food shortages/crisis, destruction of critical assets like schools, health facilities, and productive infrastructure, reduction of Cameroon's economic activities, ineffective implementation of public investments, disruption of financial activities, rise in unemployment, decrease in tax revenue and the collapse of economic activity (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank ix). Several people, groups and stakeholders in the country have proposed and implemented several acts to end what has become the Anglophone crisis but the situation still prevails. Artists and particularly writers of literature have also been using their creative works to sensitize their readers on ways to solve the problem. One of those writers is Ernest Veyu who uses his collection of poems *This Poem and Other Poems* (2021), *Tender Ties* (2022), and *The Return: Poems, a Poem* (2022) to warn against what he sees as the causes of the problem and to put forth pathways to end it. This paper is an analysis of Veyu's vision of the Anglophone crisis as presented in the three collections of poems under study.

Research Problem, Objective, Question and Hypothesis

The problem on which this work is anchored is the threat to Cameroon's unity, and living together between Anglophone and

Francophone Cameroonians posed by the Anglophone crisis and its terrible consequences. This article is, therefore, out to examine Ernest Veyu's perspectives on national integration and the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon as brought out in his works under study. The fundamental question guiding this research is: What is Ernest Veyu's vision of living together and the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon in the selected texts? It is hypothesized that Veyu views national unity in Cameroon as being rendered fragile by the deeds of Cameroonians that created and fueled the Anglophone crisis while posing that the situation can be remedied if some actions are put in place. This work, therefore, aims at bringing out the causes and possible solutions to the Anglophone crisis that threatens living together in Cameroon as presented by Ernest Veyu in *This Poem and Other Poems* (2021), *Tender Ties* (2022), and *The Return: Poems, a Poem* (2022). To achieve this, New Historicism is employed as a theoretical percept.

Theoretical Basis

New Historicism is the theory that traces the relationship between history and literature. Literature is not produced in a vacuum and consequently, the historical realities of the place and time within which a text is produced have a bearing on the work. From another angle, literature itself can have an impact on history, especially in situations when writers examine the happenings around them and provide visions or pathways for society to follow in their texts. Brannigan highlights this when he states thus; "Literature is not, however, simply a medium for expression of historical knowledge. It is an active part of a particular historical moment" (3). Murfin and Suprya equally project this relationship between literature and history and even go further to indicate that the two are inseparable as they continuously affect one another. They opine that "Works of literature both influence and are influenced by historical reality, and they share a belief in referentiality [...]" New Historicists have also asserted that literature is not distinct from the history that is relevant to it" (240). *This Poem and Other Poems* (2021), *Tender Ties* (2022), and *The Return: Poems, a Poem* (2022) by Veyu are collections in which the poet dissects the cultural and political climate of Cameroon in the context of national integration, identifies what he thinks are factors that can undermine harmonious living together and presents solutions to such

challenges. This opens up Veyu's poems to a New Historicist analysis in line with Culler's view that "A key question for New Historicists has been the dialectic of subversion and containment, how far do texts offer a genuinely radical critique of religious and political ideologies of their day and how far are the discursive practices of literature, in their apparent subversiveness, a way of containing subversive energies"(130). Veyu's poetry is inspired by the political and cultural history of Cameroon and the poet provides his perception of what direction he thinks Cameroon should take; thus justifying the use of New Historicism in the analysis of his works. The first part of this work, entitled "Threats to National Unity" brings out the aspects that threaten living together in Cameroon while the second and last part captioned "The Way Forward" highlights the possible solutions to such threats, as presented by Ernest Veyu in the poems under study.

Threats to National Unity

This section projects the various causes of the strain on national integration in Cameroon as projected by Veyu. The president of Cameroon, Paul Biya, stated during his end-of-year speech on December 31st, 2019 that "Cameroon is standing on its feet. A country that is one and indivisible, proud of its cultural diversity and jealous of its freedom." ("End-of-Year Speech" <https://www.afrohustler.com>.) If the highly cherished oneness was genuine, all Cameroonians would have a strong sense of belonging, feel comfortable wherever they find themselves, and easily interact with any other Cameroonian irrespective of their background or the area of contact. Unfortunately, that has not been the case and Anglophones in Cameroon have particularly been expressing the difficulties they face in united Cameroon all these have been referred to as the Anglophone problem (Nkengasong 52) which, as earlier stated, has deteriorated in the past few years into an armed confrontation now referred as a crisis. H.E. Paul Biya of Cameroon highlighted it during his message to the youths on the 10th of September 2019 as follows "For close to three years now, the North-West and South-West Regions of our country have been going through a crisis that not only jeopardizes the safety and well-being of the population living there, but also has far-reaching consequences for the national

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community as a whole." ("Message to the Youths" 10). Thus national unity is hanging on a balance due to some factors.

1) Insufficient Integration Practices

When the Anglophone regions and the Francophone regions of Cameroon were reunited after independence, stakeholders did not implement policies and practices that could enhance a real spirit of oneness. Veyu hints at the challenges faced in promoting national integration in the poem "Bamenda" in which the difficulties that a francophone faces when he/she is in an Anglophone region are explicitly presented. The poet states:

Until you have been to Bamenda,
and are purely francophone,
you cannot touch national (dis)integration.

Everything is foreign: Signboards, labels, names and tongues; it is being in another nation, alien. (Veyu *This Poem* 17)
The town of Bamenda, geographically alluded to above, is one of the largest and most populous Anglophone towns in Cameroon. The fact that a francophone who finds himself/herself in an Anglophone area will feel like he/she is in a different country projects the absence of national integration in post-independent Cameroon. While citizens could be blamed for their inability to practice bilingualism as signboards, labels, and names are strange to people from other backgrounds, the government could be held responsible for failing to ensure that all signs are in both official languages and that Cameroonians are truly bilingual. This indictment of the government becomes more obvious when we consider that the citizens themselves love each other irrespective of their backgrounds. This love and willingness to help is projected thus:

They are brotherly and friendly
and want to be of help,
but you are a monkey in chimpanzee land.
You are not beyond the pale,
but like a chick among eaglets
you simply do not belong; matter of fact. (Veyu *This Poem* 17).

From this perspective, it is clear that Cameroonians generally do not have a problem with each other due to their different backgrounds. However, they cannot help being different and feeling so because successive governments have not succeeded in fully instilling genuine national unity and integration in them. This explains why despite the friendliness from the inhabitants of Bamenda, a francophone in Bamenda is metaphorically referred to as a monkey in a land habited by chimpanzees and in a blunt simile is likened to a chick amid eaglets. The poor state of national integration is further captured as follows:

The Igbo guy from Enugu,
It's in the blood, mark you
are comfier than a Baneng from Makenini.
Repelling, not repelled;
feeling apart, not Apartheid;
the chemistry just isn't compounding. (Veyu *This Poem* 17)

The serious failure of living together from the Anglophone and francophone perspective is highlighted when the poet indicates that a Nigerian who finds himself/herself in an Anglophone region in Cameroon easily integrates and is more accepted by his Anglophone background than a francophone Cameroonian. The unintended consequence is that the francophone feels isolated and excluded without the people in that area doing anything intentionally to repel them.

2) Lack of Trust

The poem "The Malaise" equally projects the difficulty in practicing national integration. In this poem, despite knowledge of the unease surrounding living together in Cameroon, the concerned choose to ignore reality instead of wholeheartedly engaging in processes that will genuinely make things better. In "The Malaise", the persona indicates: "There's some malaise, / Between us, you know. / But you've sworn silence". (Veyu *This Poem* 34) Arguably, silence can solve a good number of problems; especially those where talks or acts can make matters worse. This is one of the areas in which President Paul Biya has excelled in several instances to such an extent that some coined the term

“presidential silence” to describe his characteristic principle of maintaining dignified silence that permits some challenges to die down on their own. However, silence is far from being a successful approach when there is an open expression of frustration and agitation. Vayu is thus indicating that acknowledging the concerns related to living together and doing nothing actively to remedy the situation is one of the reasons for the exasperation of an already bad situation. This becomes even worse when pretense is added to the silence. According to the persona, some people, be they private citizens from either cultures or the government, do not just stay silent about the malaise hovering around national integration but pretend about it. The persona says:

When I am not looking,
I often feel your eyes,
All over me – looking.
When I turn to look,
You turn your eyes away,
Pretending over your work. (Veyu *This Poem* 34)

This indicates that there is a lack of trust between the two parties as one accuses the other of pretending to be busy with other things in a bid not to acknowledge its problems and make efforts towards their resolution. This can weaken national integration further.

3) Arrogance and Dictatorial Attitudes

“This Union of Ours” is another poem that presents the reasons for the lack of genuine national integration. In this poem, the persona, presumably Anglophone, laments over the arrogance and dictatorial tendencies of the other, probably Francophone. The two entities live in a union but one person dominates the other and imposes on him/her. This is captured in the lines:

I know better,
What is good for you?
So, I make the rulings.
Submission's your onus,
In this union of ours.' (Veyu *This Poem* 38)

A union of this nature where one party exercises such arrogance and domination over the other can hardly be conducive to peaceful cohabitation. The partner who feels neglected, marginalized, and dictated to will feel very much uncomfortable and unhappy in the union and this makes living together very fragile. In such a context, the ground is fertile for further deterioration of national unity as the poet says in the lines;

This arrogance,
Instills indifference,
Swells rebellion,
validates parting.
This talk brews bile within,
Cooks venom deep down,
Cracking open a volcano. (Veyu *This Poem* 38)

As seen above, national integration has been threatened by the arrogance and dictatorial attitudes of one party. When this happens, the victim feels very uncomfortable in the union and can decide to be inactive, indifferent or passive regarding issues that can build the union; or at worse can have a strong sense of exclusion and marginalization which push them to strongly consider separation when the domineering tendency reaches a level they feel they cannot bear.

4) The Language Factor

Another item that living together in the context of Anglophone and francophone Cameroonians is the failure to effectively implement bilingualism that fully valorizes both English and French and respects their speakers to the same degree. In Cameroon, one of the things that make English speakers who are predominantly Anglophones feel excluded is the disregard for English and disrespect of its speakers while the French language is being valorized. This makes some Anglophones feel uncomfortable in the union with francophone Cameroonians and consequently puts national integration on a shaky balance. This is captured in the poem "The Language of this country" thus:

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You enter,
Speak in English,
And are told "Je ne comprend pas."
You stand there,
And hear, "Suivant."
Whatever that means, it dismisses you.
When you leave,
You know you have got to learn,
To speak the language of this country. (Veyu *This Poem*
39)

When French is being valorized and English is considered unwelcome in offices and other spheres in favour of French as expressed above, Anglophones who cannot speak French find themselves humiliated and frustrated even in administrative domains and feel rejected in their own country. Many stakeholders have pointed to the failure to promote bilingualism in general and this disregard of English in particular as one of the most serious reasons why national unity is threatened. (Nwati 3) Veyu adds his voice to this using his poems.

5) Lack of Empathy

Like "The Language of this country", "Come We Stay" is a poem whose title alone is indicative of the stakes in living together. The expression "Come We Stay" is a pidgin English expression in Cameroon describing the often unwelcome concubinage. When Veyu chooses such a title for a poem in which he discusses national integration, he insinuates that living together in Cameroon is just concubinage and not marriage between Anglophones and Francophones as he states: "Come we stay. / It is also called, / Vivre Ensemble". (Veyu *Tender Ties* 2) This living together (vivre ensemble) or "come we stay" is hardly harmonious because one party is in control and the other has to bear and deal with the consequences. The dominating entity preaches living together without paying much attention to the plight of the other. The former insists that what matters is that they live together irrespective of the conditions of the latter. The persona, symbolizing the francophone entity in the union, tells the interlocutor arguably the Anglophone to accept his status in the union and should never make any demands no matter the condition. This arrogance and disregard for the conditions of

others pose a serious threat to national integration and this is what Veyu is projecting in this poem in the following lines:

Come we stay,
Whatever the conditions.
The essence is the Vivre Ensemble.

Come we stay,
Whatever I do to you.
The essence is the Vivre Ensemble.

Come we stay.
Make no demands on me.

The essence is the Vivre Ensemble. (*Veyu Tender Ties 2*)
As seen above, living together is simply decreed by the dominant power irrespective of the problems of the subaltern that the dominating persona is very much aware of but decides to overlook. As if that is not enough, the dominated entity is forbidden from complaining and told not to make any demands. This is reminiscent of the recent events in Cameroon when Anglophone lawyers were observing peaceful strikes to raise awareness of the difficulties they and other Anglophone Cameroonians were going through, and were stopped from complaining and even brutalized which further aggravated the already fragile living together as it pushed some Anglophones to seek armed solutions to what they perceived as collective disdain. This desire to silence the other is further brought out in the lines that follow:

Come we stay,
Forget all my past misdeeds.
The essence is the Vivre Ensemble.

Come we stay,
Never dream of leaving.
The essence is the Vivre Ensemble.

Come we stay,
Not even death parts us.
The essence is the Vivre Ensemble. (*Veyu Tender Ties 2*)

This decreed living together in which one party is silenced can hardly be a successful one. When one has problems and is denied the possibility to talk about them, it does not make the problems disappear. In such circumstances, living together looks more like forceful coexistence or the colonization of one by the other and can only expose national integrity to more challenges as the concerned may seek non-verbal ways like fighting or separation to express his/her predicaments.

6) Lack of Dialogue

The poem "We Lay There" further highlights the disregard for the problems of Anglophones which is one of the causes of the shaky living together. In this poem, the persona indicates that the cry of Anglophones is falling on deaf ears and nobody cares about them. At a time when civil war is raging in Syria nobody pays any attention and Americans are complaining over the leadership of President Donald Trump, the persona indicates:

That Anglophones were crying foul, foul, foul?
It did not matter,
It could not matter,
It will never matter, anymore, forever and ever. (Veyu
Tender Ties 53)

As captured here, the Anglophones are complaining but their complaint is disregarded as it does not matter to anybody. According to the poem, the cry of the Anglophones has always been emitted but unfortunately, it always falls on deaf ears, and by implication, the Anglophones will remain with their complaints and the circumstances that lead them to complain. Such a prospect indicates that living together will continue to be fragile.

In the midst of all this, the poet expresses concern in the poem "I Fear". In it, the suffering and anger of people in the context of living together is highlighted. Equally, a gloomy prospect is projected as the difficulties related to living together could explode into something sinister shortly. The persona warns:

There is weeping,
Weeping at the neighbors,
And I fear,
I fear.

Why are the people in rage, [...]
Will no one hold back the terror?
I do fear,
I fear,
The impending. (Veyu *This Poem* 3)

Veyu is cautioning against the havoc that may befall the nation if these causes and intensifiers of the challenges facing living together are not solved. Therefore, it could be seen that the poet presents what he considers as the threats to national integration so that such difficulties can be mitigated. Thus, the inability to promote true bilingualism, refusal to accept the existence of an Anglophone problem, disregard for English in favour of French, silencing of Anglophones who raise worries about the problems they face, dictating to Anglophones and arrogantly imposing on them are projected as some of the problems facing living together so that they can be corrected to promote genuine national integration.

The Way Forward

When the causes of a problem are diagnosed, the means to resolve them need to be elaborated to fully eradicate the predicament. Consequently, Veyu's poems complement what he projects as the causes and/or intensifiers of the uneasy living together in Cameroon with possible ways out.

a) Tolerance

One of these is tolerating and accepting to live peacefully with each other despite the differences in visions, practices, and cultures. The poet illustrates this using Pa Tamfu's burial in the poem "Pa Tamfu's sister came with a Pentecostal pastor" which reads thus:

Pa Tamfu's sister came with a Pentecostal pastor,
His son, converted to Islam in Libya, with an Imam,
And there was Pa Tamfuh's catholic priest, Essouah.
The Imam prayed, the pastor preached, and the remains
were driven to the Catholic Church. (Veyu *The Return* 51)

This is a perfect illustration of tolerance at the family level. Here, we see Pa Tamfuh's sister who is a Pentecostal Christian peacefully existing with his son who is a Muslim. The two who are evidently from contrary religious backgrounds come with their spiritual leaders to pray in Pa Tamfuh's burial. In addition, Pa Tamfuh himself was a catholic Christian and his priest was present to pray for his departed soul. The fact that these members of Pa Tamfuh's family accept each other despite their different views and that their religious leaders find grounds to all exist respectfully and peacefully is an indication that Cameroonians can live in harmony irrespective of their different backgrounds, visions, and cultures. President Paul Biya of Cameroon indicated this as follows; "Over the years, we have used our linguistic and cultural diversity, the talent of our sons and daughters, and our commendable efforts and sacrifices to build a solid country and a strong Nation ("Message to the Youths" 10) and a Civil Society Leader, Agbor Balla, also stated "Let us be honest, we can have unity in diversity. We can respect each other's specificity and cultural and linguistic differences. But we are people, we are one, we can build a stronger nation by being together. I don't think separation is the panacea for the time being" (Balla 02) If this is possible in a family and each family practices it, then such tolerance will extend to the villages, towns, and the nation at large. Veyu therefore uses the Tamfuh family as a symbol of Cameroon in a bid to educate Cameroonians of all backgrounds that one must not only live in harmony with another with whom they share similar backgrounds and culture; but can equally do so through tolerance and acceptance with others whose practices are different.

b) Peaceful Approach to Misunderstanding/Conflict

Furthermore, in the poem "When Brothers Fight", the poet acknowledges the fact that there can be misunderstanding and even conflict between brothers; but how the conflict is handled is pertinent because it can strengthen, weaken, or even shatter the bond between the brothers. The poet advises that whenever brothers fight, the blows and punches should be measured and extended in a brotherly manner and not as brutal as those landed on enemies. In such fights, both parties should remember that the brotherly bond will outlast the conflict as both will always remain brothers. Consequently, none should fight with the

objective of breaking the other's bone since after the fight they will still live as a family and need each other at their best forms to move the family forward. The poet states thus:

When brothers fight,
It is a brotherly fight.
Their very blow,
Is brotherly given.

When brothers fight,
They taut the bond, not break it.
When brothers fight,
Their broil doesn't last, the bond does. (Veyu *Tender Ties* 4)

As seen in this poem, a conflict may arise in Cameroon between any fractions as is the case with the Anglophone crisis. Consequently, the separatist fighters and government forces are exalted to fight with moderation and avoid unnecessary use of excessive violence which causes disproportionate damage to the other since they are not fighting a foreign body and all are bound to live together as a family after the squabble. President Paul Biya projected a similar view in his end-of-year speech on December 31st, 2016 thus; "I strongly condemn all acts of violence, regardless of their sources and their perpetrators"., ("End-of-Year Speech" <https://www.afrohustler.com>.) The poet further cautions:

But when one brother invites a friend,
And the other summonses in his friend,
The fight becomes neither brotherly nor friendly.
The blows and the bond become something else.
Keep them out, these strangers!
Send them away, these impostors!!
Bar the way to these marauding parasites!!!
We shall be fine, fine, very fine, without you. (Veyu *Tender Ties* 4)

Here, the poet indicates the dangers of involving strangers in a family conflict. When outsiders step in, they do not act with moderation as brothers do and can inflict serious damage to the

other which in the long run will harm the entire family. That is why the poet advises that outsiders be kept out of a brotherly fight. Such strangers are referred to as "impostors" because a true friend should try to reconcile two brothers and not join one to fight another. Equally, they are called "parasites" because more often than not when strangers are involved in a family conflict they have their interests which are not always for the good of the family. Linked to the conflict in Cameroon therefore, the poet is indicating that all foreign countries and international governmental and non-governmental organizations be kept out of the conflict so that Cameroonians settle their dispute among themselves. This is because such foreign bodies may either take sides or proceed in defending their interests which may be detrimental to Cameroon. Cardinal Christian Tumi corroborated this as follows; "Whereas the English people left, whereas they packed those boxes and everything and went away, Cameroon is still controlled by France. That is the problem in Cameroon". (Tumi 3)

c) Inspiration from Good-willing Third Parties

However, some strangers can play a positive role in handling a conflict between brothers. This sounds like self-contradiction by the poet but the intrigue is that such outsiders are not directly involved in the fighting but could act as councilors or advisers on ways to end the squabble. This is brought out in the poem "Learn from the UN" in which the poet mentions the UN as an organ whose approach to conflict resolution can be copied by Cameroon to handle the Anglophone crisis. Veyu applauds the UN for the fact that it hardly intervenes in the heat of a conflict whether it is national or international. The poet states:

It [the UN] lets the parties fight on,
Till they tire and waste away.
Only then may they be helped.
In the same way,
Do not try holding back a man,
At the top of his mistaken zeal. (Veyu *This Poem* 4)

Here, the poet opines that the UN generally allows fighting parties to weigh each other down before intervening and

prescribes such an approach to the Cameroonian government regarding the Anglophone crisis. In his opinion, the state should act like the UN, let the separatist fighters act “At the top of their mistaken zeal” and only step in when they are tired. This proposal is problematic because such uncontrolled acts can cause untold damage to the nation and its people before the reaction is implemented. Also, such an approach seems to go in line with the inaction the poet castigates in the poem “The Malaise” as promoting an uneasy living together.

d) Promoting Freedom of Expression

Another thing that can ameliorate national integration as presented by Veyu is the freedom to express oneself not only about positive realities but more importantly the challenges they contend with in the context of living together. The poem “The Poet” brings this out as it encourages people to speak without fear just as poets do. Like the ideas of a poet who must not remain caged in pages of books, citizens should not let their ideas die within them; but should shout them loud if things are to change for the better. “The Poet” encourages:

Someone must shout it loud,
From the square to the theatre,
In an uprising and/or as art,
Waking up dead consciences.
The poet must be mad, crazy,
Livid, angry, and complaining. (Veyu *This Poem* 41)

From this, the poet encourages people to freely speak of the difficulties they go through in the context of national integration without fear. If they have grievances and do not complain, things will never get any better as solutions will not be provided. Cameroonians who have challenges are therefore encouraged to raise them so that they are looked into. By the same token, the government is encouraged to promote freedom of expression so that citizens can feel free to peacefully express their grievances without fear of being punished.

e) Prioritizing Dialogue

When citizens or a group of citizens express their grievances as such, the next logical step towards their resolution

is to listen to them in the form of dialogue. It is this same spirit of dialogue that Veyu projects in the poem "The Malaise" in which the persona is open to dialogue and encourages the interlocutor to speak out. The persona asks: "What is happening? / Will you talk to me? / Yes, talk to me, now". (Veyu *This Poem* 34) This is an invitation to the stakeholders in the Anglophone crisis to dialogue in line with the views of President Biya who stated; "I have decided to convene, from the end of this month, a major national dialogue that will, in line with our Constitution, enable us to seek ways and means of meeting the high aspirations of the people of the North-West and South-West Regions, but also of all the other components of our Nation ("Message to the Youths" 10). Similarly, Ni John Fru Ndi, chairperson of the strongest Anglophone (opposition) political party the SDF opined that "Without dialogue and reconciliation, we cannot build our country. So if I see somebody standing up to say that he wants to see how he can struggle to see how can usher in dialogue and reconciliation, that person would have my support, because we need this in Cameroon to move forward". (Fru Ndi 08). In the case of the Anglophone crisis, the party with the human, authoritative, and logistic potential to summon a dialogue is the government and this is what happened during the Major National Dialogue mentioned above. However, since the conflict has not ended, the poet is encouraging more dialogue like the one that exists in marriage without stopping in matrimony because Anglophone Cameroon and Francophone Cameroon are in an everlasting marriage and constant dialogue is needed to peacefully solve all the problems that may arise.

f) Commitment to Living Together

The inseparable nature of the two historical portions of Cameroon is presented in the poem "Very Much Married" which is a move away from the problematic "Come We Stay" discussed earlier. It reads:

We simply knew we were meant for each other,
And, for each other, simply, we were ever to be.
We knew it, agreed to it, and got it legally sealed.
After the blessing, we moved in and lived together.
From time to time we feel strongly for each other,
But that feeling hardly abides; it comes and goes.

But the knowing, and the commitment to each other,
Has never left us, only grown; we are very much married.
(Veyu *Tender Ties* 3)

This poem indicates that the two Cameroons are very much united forever as couples swear during marriage oaths. The two parties decided to reunite and have always been together as one. However, like in any other union, there are ups and downs that at times threaten the very foundation of the alliance as the Anglophone crisis is currently doing. If both parties want to keep the commitment they made to each other of being together forever, then some practical steps are required to solve existing problems; and prevent or solve any other problems that may arise. According to Veyu, tolerance, moderating words and actions during the conflict, keeping away strangers from internal squabbles, getting appropriate guidance from well-wishing outsiders, feeling free to air grievances, and dialoguing constantly can help in this direction.

Conclusion

This paper set out to present Ernest Veyu's vision of the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon in his collections of poems *This Poem and Other Poems* (2021), *Tender Ties* (2022), and *The Return: Poems, a Poem* (2022) using New Historicism. It reveals that the poet employs poetic elements to highlight the cause factors of the problem and also project possible solutions. With regards to the trigger elements, Veyu guards against the misfortune that may continue to befall the nation if the inability to promote true bilingualism, refusal to accept the existence of an Anglophone problem, disregard for English in favour of French, silencing of Anglophones who raise worries about the problems they face, dictating to Anglophones and arrogantly imposing on them are not controlled or stopped to promote genuine national integration. Veyu goes further to prescribe tolerance, moderating words and actions during the conflict, keeping away strangers from internal squabbles, getting appropriate guidance from well-wishing outsiders, feeling free to air grievances, and dialoguing constantly as paths to end the Anglophone crisis and enhancing living together in Cameroon. It could therefore be seen that Veyu, like many other stakeholders and artists, uses his creative works

to propose ways to solve the national (dis)integration crisis that has plagued Cameroon into armed conflict thereby inflicting enormous suffering on the citizens and the country at large.

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