

## **Filmmaking in Local Languages and the Social Change Agenda in Anglophone Cameroon: Victor Viyuh's *Nina's Dowry* Critiqued.**

By

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### **Abstract**

Until the late 2000s, filmmaking in anglophone Cameroon paid little or no attention to indigenous languages as a means of expression. Filmmaking was seen as an elitist activity and fluent English in films (or attempts thereof) perpetuated this viewpoint. Most films were neoclassical, discussing issues of national importance like bribery, corruption, nepotism, tribalism and national unity. However, the release of Victor Viyuh's *Nina's Dowry* (2012) ushered in a new dawn in the Cameroonian cinematic landscape. For the first time, Viyuh used a mix of local languages to tackle salient social issues, achieving unprecedented success. From a cultural/historical analytic perspective, this paper sets out to x-ray the effectiveness of African languages as cultural property and an effective medium for film, especially when film is used as a tool for social intervention and a vector of social change. The major findings indicate that the use of local languages in films greatly enhances the reception and impact of such films. This is evidenced by the success of Viyuh's *Nina's Dowry* and the popularity and success of films by other Cameroonian filmmakers who emulated this approach. Consequently, the major recommendation is for Cameroonian filmmakers to use local languages more assertively in their films for more authenticity and a wider local audience.

**Keywords:** Filmmaking, Social Intervention, Social change, Local languages, Creole.

### **Introduction**

One of the most common paradoxes of filmmaking is that of double language. While dialogues in a film have to be in a particular language for a specific audience, film scholars have long argued that the real language of cinema is image; as images are constructed in a way that would make meaning to the viewer and also provoke emotions, thus serving a narrative purpose. After all, the first films were "silent" as evidenced by the Charlie Chaplin era, and sound only

came later. However, this double language of the film opens up yet another paradox: Is filmmaking an elitist activity (with its norms and canons, accessible only to those who can create and interpret its sign system) or a tool at the service of society? As an elitist activity (with the camera as the principal narrative agency), it would entail a high level of instruction from the viewer and a stronger dependence on the image as a narrative instrument. As a tool at the service of the larger society, there is a need for the filmmaker to strike a balance between cinematic language and local languages to incorporate audiences with a lesser level of instruction. The latter is especially recommended when the filmmaker has a social interventionist agenda.

The above recommendation is especially useful in Africa where filmmaking has more often than not taken on a "liberationist approach", using film as a tool to castigate societal ills and for the mental liberation of Africans. It was to further this perspective that the *Federation Panafricaine de Cinema* (FEPACI) was created in 1960 in Burkina Faso, which paved the way for African cinema as we know it today (Diawara, 1992). This association of filmmakers, which in time became a very powerful lobby group, strongly believed that culture had to be national and that it had to contribute to political liberation. The Algiers chapter (1975), as quoted by (Tcheuyap, 2011), sought to promote the view that Cinema can only serve an instrumental function:

To assume a genuinely active role in the process of development, African culture must be popular, democratic and progressive in character, inspired by its own realities and responding to its own needs. It must also be in solidarity with cultural struggles all over the world. The issue is... to allow the masses to take control of means of production of their own developments, giving them back the cultural initiative by drawing on the resources of a fully liberated popular activity. Within this perspective, cinema has a very vital part to play because it is a means of education, information and consciousness raising...The stereotyped image of the solitary and marginal creator which is widespread in Western capitalist society must be rejected by the African filmmakers, who must, on the contrary, see themselves as creative artisans at the service of their people. It also demands great vigilance on their part with regard to imperialism's attempts at

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ideological recuperation as it redoubles its efforts to maintain, renew and increase its cultural ascendancy (P4-5).

This indicates that with the numerous socio-political and cultural challenges that propped up after independence, the FESPACI organization was out to encourage African filmmakers to play roles that were closer to those of journalists than artists.

From the foregoing, fulfilling this mission as laid out by the FEPACI (now FESPACO) means African filmmakers need to meet the following conditions:

- Be inspired by their realities and respond to the needs of their people,
- Allow the masses to take control of the *means* of production of their developments,
- See themselves as creative artisans at the service of their people,
- See filmmaking as a means of education, information and consciousness-raising.

To effectively meet the above conditions, it becomes clear that filmmaking needs to shun the elitist approach and adopt a popular approach that gives room for individuals with little formal instruction to participate in the cinematic experience. This can only be achieved through the adoption of local languages and creoles that are accessible to all, instead of languages of formal instruction. It does not come as a surprise therefore that Sembene Ousmane, the founder and leader of FEPACI who was known for years as the father of African cinema, produced several of his films in his native Wolof language in Senegal, tackling issues of local concern. Some of these films include *Mandabi* (1968), *Xala* (1975), *Ceddo* (1977), *Camp de Thiaroye* (1987), and *Guelwaar* (1992). His last film *Moolaade* (2004) is in the Bambara language of Burkina Faso and adheres to the same production principles. These films mostly tackled community issues and the intent is to sensitise his people on prevailing societal issues.

In Cameroon, more than 230 local groups co-exist, each with its language and traditions as well as two colonial languages (French and English). This heritage of coexistence is why Cameroon has been described as 'Africa in miniature' and 'the microcosm of Africa' (Fai 2020). This appellation is even more apt from a

linguistic perspective, given that three of the four language families in Africa are represented within her boundaries. These are the Congo-Kordofanian, Nilo-Saharan and Afro-Asiatic languages. The structures of the fourth, that is, the Khoisian have not been found in Cameroon (Achimbe 2005). Two of the regions are known as Anglophone regions (English speaking) which equals 20% of the total population and the remaining eight are Francophone regions (French Speaking) with 80% of the total population. The multiplicity of local and colonial languages has given rise to various shades of Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE), a creole that is understood by all Cameroonians, irrespective of tribe or colonial heritage. It is for this reason that CPE constitutes more than 50% of the language spoken in most films produced in Anglophone Cameroon today, a trend that was inspired by the release of Vicor Viyuoh's *Nina's Dowry* (2012).

### **1. Nina's Dowry and the Social Change Agenda in Cameroon**

Viyuoh's *Nina's Dowry* is a critical indictment of several cultural practices that have been taken out of proportion by selfish individuals in Cameroonian society and used as a pretext to exploit and maltreat others. Central in the film, is the issue of bride price. While some men believe to have 'bought' their wives after paying the bride price, thus making their wives personal property to be dealt with as they deem fit; other men give out their daughters into forced marriages as settlement of debts owed. It should be noted that the agenda for social change through the performing arts in Cameroon had already been set since the early 80s, mainly through Theatre for Development (TfD) and Film for Development (FfD). Early precursors of this practice include Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh and Bole Butake, then later Emelda Samba and Donatus Fai Tangem. The methodology consisted of identifying a social problem, moving into the community affected, and organising brainstorming workshops in collaboration with the traditional and statutory authorities that ended up with a stage performance (for TfD) or a short film (FfD). These productions had several advantages from a sensitization perspective:

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- The performers were from the community, enhancing identification on the part of the audience.
- The language of expression was the local language of the area and CPE
- The performances/projections took place at the community square, chief's palace etc, thus very close to the people and optimizing attendance.
- With the community participating fully in the brainstorming and production, then performance/projection and post-performance/projection discussions; the productions became a whole life experience in the memories of the community members, instead of just a mere event as is the case with regular performances/projections. This meant that they would remember the experience for their whole lives, thus assimilating the message for a longer period.

It is in this way that several Tfd/Ffd projects have been executed over the years in Cameroon, tackling a range of social issues like peaceful coexistence between indigenes and settlers, farmer-herder conflicts, protection of animal species, corruption, mob justice etc. Some of the most successful of these productions include:

- *Theatre, Democracy and Human Rights "Kam No Go"(Resident Aliens)* (Bole Butake and Gilbert Doho, 1999).
- *Alien in my Land* (Bole Butake and Gilbert Doho, 2000).
- *People Theatre Workshop on Civic Education - Gomen Na We (We are the government)* (Bole Butake, 2004)
- *Bush Meat Go Finish Oh! (Wild Animals are Getting Extinct!)* (Butake, 2004)

In *Ninah's Dowry*, Victor Viyuoh seems to have picked up from the Tfd-Ffd social change movement and methodology to sensitize the Cameroonian and African populace on the ills of forced marriages. Centred on the tribulations of Ninah, whose father gives her out to a cattle herdsman and wife beater called Memphi as a settlement for a debt, the film uses local languages and local realities to pass across the message. The opening scene of the film dives straight to the point as we see Ninah in a firewood kitchen struggling to fix a meal for the family, but unfortunately, they are out of basic supplies:

**Ninah:** Palm oil is finished ... even salt!

**Memphi:** Stop complaining! I told you to hold off on the cooking. God! If not for poverty, what would tie a man to a woman like you? (00:45')

Memphi's response to Ninah right at the beginning of the movie indicates clearly that theirs is not a marriage of love, and lays the groundwork for the domestic violence and wife battery that characterises the entire film. By drawing attention to such realities, Viyuoh contributes to the social change agenda set by Tfd/Ffd practitioners as he tries to raise awareness of the untold misfortunes of young girls in Cameroon and elsewhere who get forced into marriages with men who mete out inhuman treatment on them. The hope would be that every man who sees the film should never consider paying his debts with a daughter, thus helping to curb the practice. Later on in the film, we find Ninah at her father's bedside as he lies critically ill. Ninah asks him a series of questions:

**Ninah:** Dad, I wish to ask you something. What is it that I did that made you sell me to Memphi? (*silence...*) Is this zinc over your head more valuable than me? Than my life? Is a roof over your head more valuable than your own child? Was I a difficult child? Was I bringing shame to your name? Was I a bad student? I had dreams when I was growing up. But you killed them. You killed everything (*sobbing*). But worse than killing me, you sold me to an animal! You knew he was violent, yet you took his money. And every time that I ran back home, you sent me back. What kind of a father sends his child into the hands of a wife-beater? If he kills me, or any of my children, our blood will be on your hands. (14:20' - 16:22)

Her questions are met with silence until her father passes away shortly after. However, her burning questions highlight her frustrations and sufferings in a marital home she did not choose, sending a strong deterring message to all who may still consider sending their children to forced marriages an option. From her questions, we also learn that the money her father borrowed from Memphi was used to put an aluminium roof over her father's house. This is a trend in many villages in Cameroon where men either force their children into fixed marriages or ask exorbitant sums of money from their daughters' suitors because they have a family project to execute, mostly for family prestige. So, when Ninah asks her father "Is a roof over your head more valuable than your own child?", the question appeals directly to the consciences of parents who would sacrifice the happiness and dreams of their daughters to salvage their prestige.

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It is therefore not surprising when Ninah stays in the room and refuses to pay her last respects at her father's grave site. When her younger brother comes in to confront her, their conversation brings out other facets of Ninah's dilemma:

**Robert:** Sis, they are waiting for you

**Ninah:** What for?

**Robert:** To come and bury your father

**Ninah:** How can a dead person bury another?

**Robert:** What?

**Ninah:** Where did you get the money to pay for this big feast?

**Robert:** It's a funeral.

**Ninah:** He left this family penniless, yet, chickens fly left and right at his death.

**Robert:** What would you have us do?

**Ninah:** How about a quiet burial? No fanfare. How about keeping that money for something else? How about using it on people who are alive?

**Robert:** Sis, if I didn't know you, I would think you lost your mind. This is a funeral.

In the above conversation, we discover that the family is spending a lot of money on Ninah's father's funeral, though he left the family without a penny. After the funeral, Ninah decides not to go back to her husband and children, to raise money to refund Memphi and free herself from bondage. So, when she asks, "How about keeping that money for something else? How about using it on people who are alive?"; she is thinking about how the money could rather be used to refund Memphi. This is because in cases where a woman is not happy and intends to divorce her husband or remarry, tradition expects her father to return what was given to her family as bride price, either in goods or monetary value. In Ninah's case, her father is dead so she will have to refund the money herself if her family does not do so. But giving the family head a befitting burial is often a mark of prestige in Cameroon, the reason why Robert keeps replying "it's a funeral". So, family prestige takes primacy once again over Ninah's liberation from bondage, the same family prestige that sent her into bondage in the first place. Her younger brother, Robert, who now stands as the head of the family, decides to protect the family's image and dignity by using the little money they have to organise a lavish funeral service. His prerogatives are threatened psychologically by what the community will say if he does not act the way a man should act by burying

his father honourably. When Memphi finally shows up to take Ninah back, she has not succeeded in raising money. Being held hostage by Memphi and his gang, Ninah sends his brother to go borrow money but he comes back empty-handed. He calls Ninah aside and explains:

**Robert:** I couldn't find it. John didn't have it

**Ninah:** But why couldn't you...

**Robert:** No one has it. We already owe them money.

**Ninah:** I cannot go back with him

**Robert:** What about your business money?

**Ninah:** I just bought food. I have not sold anything. It wouldn't even have come close

**Robert:** How about you go until I can find the money?

**Ninah:** Where? When?

**Robert:** He wants blood, sis. Don't refuse

**Ninah:** If I go there will surely be blood. I will definitely not survive.

(Silence)

**Ninah:** Look at the money that was spent on the funeral

**Robert:** Ninah!

**Ninah:** (*throwing both hands in the air*) Thanks, dad! Even in death, you have still managed to mess me up (*She braces up and moves out to meet her captors*) (40:00-41:02')

With the dowry not refunded, Ninah remains Memphi's property. The latter and his gang drag her away by force, as family members and other villagers look on without any attempt to intervene. The heated exchange between Ninah and Memphi before Ninah sends her brother to go looking for money says it all:

**Memfi:** You are my wife ...

**Ninah:** Not any more

**Memfi:** Okay ... then pay back my dowry

**Ninah:** ... I will pay

**Memfi:** Do it now or you're coming with me.

The film seems to depict a society in which women are already constructed and defined as objects, and the term 'dowry', in this instance refers to the concept of 'bride price', a practice commonly used in Cameroon and other sub-Saharan countries (Ngum, 2016). At the age of 20 years, Ninah is a mother of three children, forced to live with a violent husband. However, it should be noted that forced marriages are at variance with the legal systems in Cameroon. As Time (2014) explains:

The June 1981 Civil Status Registration Ordinance, for instance, has legislation that advances women's courses and individuality. Notably are Articles 52(4), 61(2), 74(1), 75(1), 76(1), and 77(2). Article 52(4) recognizes a woman's right to consent to a marriage, while article 61(2) addresses issues relating to dowry and how marriages should not be stalled based on non-payment of or other issues relating to dowry. The article expressly states: "any objection based on the existence, payments or terms of payment of customary dowry, even if agreed to in advance shall be inadmissible and against public policy. (P2)

Due to weak enforcement of the law and a strong influence of local customs and traditions of the people in daily life in Cameroon, women still suffer from vices that the legal system is actively against. In *Ninah's Dowry*, Memfi takes advantage of Ninah's economic vulnerability to treat her like a slave since she is incapable of refunding her bride price. As Ngum (2016) puts it:

Memfi is thus the villain and Ninah is the victim of his villainous acts. This binary opposition of evil and good is meant to influence the audience to take a particular stance and identify with the victim. Memfi, the villainous husband, is portrayed as unkempt, rude and demented. Ninah, on the other hand, is beautiful, dignified and motherly, ...To elicit sympathy for the violated woman, Viyuoh deploys exaggerations and repetitions of both acts of violence and acts of attempted escape and resistance, as Ninah escapes into the forest, climbs a tree and jumps into a mud-covered pit at night to hide. (P52)

It can thus be said that Viyuoh uses film as a means of social intervention in Cameroon, to sensitize against forced marriages. By portraying exaggerated acts of violence on Ninah, her attempts to escape and her resistance, the film appeals directly to the consciences of parents and by changing mindsets of forced marriages, the film may succeed where the legal system failed.

## **2. Purposeful use of Local Languages in Nina's Dowry**

Viyuoh's film is primarily a sensitisation film, and like all sensitization films, there is a target audience. Having witnessed the launching of this film back in 2012, this author identified that, what stood out during the projections in different cities in Cameroon was not only the compelling story. The film is based on the real-life events of a lady who endured a forced marriage for years, and she joined the

cast and crew of the film on the launch tour. The audience always went wild when this lady was introduced at the end of the projection, and this always led to discussions, questions and answers etc. The presence of traditional and local authorities during the projections also ensured that the message touched decision-making authorities as well. The international success of the film (Best Film and Best Lead Actress in a Foreign Film (Ft Lauderdale International Film Festival 2012) Audience Choice Award, Big Muddy Film Festival (2013), Special Jury Award for Best Feature (Africa Movie Academy Awards, 2013)), also meant that the message got to international audiences, thanks to the very efficient aesthetic value of the film. By efficiently using typical African aesthetic values like social values, morals, political and economic traditions as well as music, drama, folktales, songs, myths and legends, Voyuoh's film drew critical acclaim internationally.

As Nabuife et al (2023) posit, language; as a mode of identification, plays a pivotal role in a film's reception. This is why people's language choices often reflect aspects of their identity, and for reasons like illiteracy, identification, and ease of understanding, many individuals prefer movies in their local languages. This explains why as a sensitization film that primarily targets the local Anglophone Cameroonian audience, preference was given to two local languages- the Kejom language and the Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE) as means of expression. The use of local languages increased projection and identification with the screen characters at the level of the audience, enabling them to vividly feel the tribulations of Ninah; increasing the likelihood of an ideological shift.

### **3. The Strategic Use of Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE) and Kejom Langues**

Fonyuy (2022) reports on an analysis of CPE by Mbassi-Manga (1976) and Mbangwana (1983), stating that the total lexicon of CPE is 80% English, 14% Indigenous languages, 5% French and 0.07% from other sources (among which are Portuguese, creations and innovations, etc.). Both also report that CPE is predominantly attached to the uneducated and the less privileged of society. This

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negative appraisal stems from the fact that CPE is a non-literate code; it is not taught in schools like English and French. Children in Anglophone areas of Cameroon therefore learn CPE alongside their local languages and CPE helps the less educated in the Anglophone areas to communicate amongst themselves irrespective of their tribes of origin. This also explains why CPE is often accused as the reason for the fallen and falling standards in written and spoken English and education in general. Most francophone Cameroonians also struggle to learn CPE, before they learn English in schools, such that a good majority of Cameroonians across the board understand CPE. So, although no one wants to identify with it, everyone seems to use it. So as Achimbe (2006) puts it,

It is an important dimension in identity concealment given that its users cannot be traced to given regions, like English for Anglophone regions, French for francophone regions, the native languages for their respective tribes and so forth" (p.36-37).

Viyuoh's choice of CPE as the principal language of *Ninah's Dowry* was thus, a judicious one.

As mentioned earlier, the film uses a mix of CPE, English and the Kejom language, but scenes seem to be chosen strategically for any of the three languages. Scenes in CPE are mostly between Ninah and Memphi, Memphi and his gang, Memphi's mother and any interlocutor; then interactions with and among the villages. This not only positions CPE as the "popular" language of the film but also as the language of the uneducated; as Memphi, his gang members, his mother and most of the villagers have never been to school. This also translates to the fact that the most significant dialogues in the film in terms of story development are in CPE and Kejom, while scenes in English could be considered as "additional information"; such as the romance between Ninah and her Fulani boyfriend, and when Ninah frequently meets her friend Claris to discuss her marital woes and clear her head. This interesting mix of languages is witnessed in the first and pace-setting scene of the movie between Ninah and Memphi:

**Ninah:** *Oil don finish sef...even salt...* (Palm oil is finished ... even salt!)

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**Memfi:** (*In Kejom*) Stop complaining! I told you to hold off on the cooking. God! If not for poverty, what would tie a man to a woman like you? (30'-45')

This scene immediately introduces the viewer to the major languages in the film, and for the Cameroonian viewers, it also introduces the fact that Ninah is more "modern" than her husband. The next scene between Memphi and his employer (the cattle owner) introduces yet another facet of CPE as used in the film:

**Cattle owner:** Have I not been kind to you?

**Memfi:** *Yes, massa.* (Yes Master)

**Cattle owner:** Have I not been generous?

**Memfi:** *Yes, massa.*

**Cattle owner:** Have I not provided you with a beautiful house?

**Memfi:** *Yes, massa.*

**Cattle owner:** And consistent pay?

**Memfi:** *Yes, massa.*

**Cattle owner:** Are you not farming a fertile piece of land?

**Memfi:** *Yes, massa.*

**Cattle owner:** In fact, are you not living pretty much like royalty?

**Memfi:** *Yes, massa.*

**Cattle owner:** Am I asking too much when I ask you to obey my little tiny rules?

**Memfi:** *Yes, massa.*

**Cattle owner:** Yes?

**Memfi:** *Er, no, massa.*

**Cattle owner:** Am I?

**Memfi:** *No.*

**Cattle owner:** Is it also asking you too much to keep your little runts in check? In fact, is your family too much for you to manage?

**Memfi:** *No, sir.*

**Cattle owner:** ... Then tell me what should be your punishment.

**Ninah:** Oh no!

**Cattle owner:** You should be fired!

**Memfi:** *Em ... massa!*

**Cattle owner:** It is, however, you I hired not your family. I'm a very merciful man.

**Memfi:** *Yes, massa.*

**Cattle owner:** However ... because you cannot keep that knucklehead son of yours from riding my horse ... you'll have no food money for this month.

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Here, we notice that while the cattle owner speaks English, Memphi speaks CPE, which constitutes an element of class distinction in Cameroon. Here, we find a rich and educated cattle owner talking to his cattle herder, and it is normal in Cameroon for bosses and their blue-collared employees like labourers, domestic workers etc. to converse in different languages as such. From the Cameroonian audience's perspective, therefore, this scene comes across as ordinary life playing out in front of them, thus increasing their identification with the screen characters.

Memphi and his gang also spend most of their evenings drinking local liquor at the village bar, and Memphi goes into debt even when there is no food and basic supplies in his house. All transactions in this bar are in a mix of CPE and Kejom Language, a reflection of daily life in Anglophone Cameroon. The bar scene opens with Memphi and his boys, already tipsy with Memphis singing mirthlessly:

**Memphi:** (*sings*)

<i>Even Jesus Christ, the son of God</i>	Even Jesus Christ, the son of God
<i>Na for Woman beleh e comot</i>	Was born of a woman
<i>Wether you fat, wether you thin</i>	Whether fat or thin
<i>Na for Woman beleh you comot</i>	You are born of a woman
<i>Wether you tall oo, wether you short oo,</i>	Whether tall or short,
<i>Na for Woman beleh you comot</i>	You are born of a woman (06:37'

-06:60')

In this song, Memphi is passing across a very salient message: the importance of the woman to mankind's survival as a species, CPE is a judicious language to get this message across to the local populace amongst whom the woman is often considered as property and treated poorly. It is however paradoxical coming from Memphi, a notorious wife-beater who is well known in the community. The message here however is that all men (even Memphi) know how important and delicate a woman is, but when a marriage union is not born out of love but out of debt settlement, lack of love and mutual understanding in the union will inevitably lead to domestic violence.

When Memphi finishes singing, his friends clap and cheer him, prompting him to give them drinks on credit; but the bartender will have none of it. This scene

highlights yet another contextual mix of CPE and local languages as is the daily life of anglophone Cameroonians:

**Memphi:** *Eh...Give all man one one round!* Another round for me and the boys!  
*(The boys exchange delightful looks. Silence as the bartender does not react.)*

**Memphi:** *One round for all man!* One more Round!  
*(More silence)*

**Memphi:** *(In Kejom)* Gwosang, are you losing your hearing?

**Gwosang**(Bar Tender): *(In kejom)* Your tap is full

**Memphi:** *(In Kejom)* Do you want to disgrace me in front of my friends?

**Gwosang:** *(In Kejom)* No, I just want my money

**Memphi:** *(In Kejom)* Ahhhh....my God...

**Fuh:** *Ahhhh... Na ye pikin that. E di work* His son is here. He has a job  
*E get family. E go pay.* He has a family, he will pay.  
*Give we mimbo, e go pay.* Give us drinks, he will pay you.  
*(Silence from Gwosang. Memphi stands)*

**Memphi:** *Ehhhh? They no want we for here, make we go.* We are not  
welcome here, let's go!

*Wuna cam pass!* Come on, let's go! (06:54- 07:52)

Worth noting in this scene is the strategic use of the Kejom language within the CPE-dominated scene. Memphi switches to Kejem language to indicate to Gwosang that he is serious and also to remind Gwosang that they are from the same village. By so doing, Memphi is hoping to touch a soft spot and convince Gwosang to give them drinks on credit. Sometimes, switching to the local language could also be to say something to a friend or brother in confidence, which could still be the case in this scene. This applies specifically to the question Memphi asks the bartender "Do you want to disgrace me in front of my friends?" The language dynamics in this scene is a true representation of daily life in Cameroon and makes the Cameroonian viewers feel like they are witnessing a slice of life, hence enhancing verisimilitude and passing across the message effectively.

As enunciated at the beginning of this section, language, as a mode of identification plays a pivotal role in a film's reception; it can be safely concluded that the use of local languages greatly helped in the reception of Viyuoh's *Ninah's Dowry*. Before the production of this film in 2012, the Cameroonian audience did not have a positive appraisal of locally produced films in the Anglophone regions;

since Anglophone film-makers mostly copied Nollywood with a lot of Nigerian cultural influences (Pani, 2008, Edong, 2015). This overbearing Nigerian influence on Cameroonian films in English was a result of efforts by Anglophone Cameroon filmmakers to target the larger Nigerian market, but this however estranged their very critical Cameroonian audiences. The dawn of the *Ninah's Dowry* era and the subsequent films that followed thus constituted a welcome relief for both ordinary viewers in Cameroon and critics alike.

#### **4. The Post-*Ninah's Dowry* Era and the Social Change Legacy**

This paper has positioned Viyuoh's *Ninah's Dowry* (2012) as the forerunner of a trend of filmmaking in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon that transformed the activity from a purely elitist neoclassical art to incorporate methods and aesthetic choices that made it a tool for social intervention. By introducing the extensive use of CPE and local languages while maintaining an elevated level of visual and narrative aesthetics, then articulating social issues hither-to only getting attention from the government and Non-Governmental Organizations; *Ninah's Dowry* attracted unprecedented attention from the entire Cameroonian and international public, opening the eyes of Viyuoh's peers to a new secret to success. This argument is supported by the fact that many other Anglophone filmmakers in Cameroon quickly keyed into this trend. Some of these films that followed the *Nina's Dowry* trend, won multiple awards and put Cameroon's cinema on the world map include *Shembeh* (Nkwah kingley, 2014), *Kiss of Death* (Musing Derick, 2016), *Rebel Pilgrim* (Chinepoh Corson, 2017), *Virgin Blade* (Chinepoh Corson, 2020), *The Fisherman's Diary* (Kang Quintus, 2020) and *Hidden Dreams* (Ngang Romanus, 2021). So, filmmakers in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon embraced a new trend of social change, tackling issues of forced marriage, female genital mutilation, gender-based violence, and the discrimination of the girl child in education; amongst others. Critics have largely criticised this trend as blind copying without any creativity, especially as these subsequent films focussed mostly on the plight of the young girl; ignoring other relevant socio-cultural practices that abound. However, credit needs to be given

to Victor Viyuoh for starting this trend, which is gradually expanding in thematic concerns.

It should also be noted that all the films highlighted above as well as most films produced in Anglophone Cameroon today employ the same community engagement techniques and aesthetics employed by Victor Viyuoh in *Ninah's Dowry*, such as the adoption of CPE as the lingua franca laced with strategic interjections of local languages.

### **Conclusion**

Viyuoh's *Ninah's Dowry* (2012) set a new trend for Anglophone Cameroonian filmmakers: that of using filmmaking as a tool for social intervention. Before 2012, filmmaking was seen as an elitist activity of a neo-classical stance that handled issues of national importance, like bribery, corruption, nationalism, and national unity, very much like the novels and plays studied in the Anglophone sub-system of secondary education in the country. The language of expression was English and languages like Cameroon pidgin English (CPE) and local languages had little or no consideration as they were considered as the languages of the uneducated and lower class. It is also the position of this paper as has been demonstrated, that Viyuoh's trend-setting *Ninah's Dowry* was inspired by a rich two-decade-long practice of Theatre/Film for Development (TfD/FfD) in Anglophone Cameroon. This claim is evidenced by the strong sense of community involvement in the filmmaking process (the story was that of a real woman, who informed the scripting and production, as well as participated in projections and post-projection discussions). This claim further gains credence from the language options employed in the film, consisting of extensive use of a local language most understood by the Cameroonian populace; typical of TfD/FfD productions. Given that this trend has drawn critical acclaim in Cameroon and beyond, it could be concluded that Viyuoh's *Ninah's Dowry* has made significant contributions to filmmaking and the social change agenda in Cameroon.

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