

Dehumanisation, Resistance and Hope in John Nkemngong Nkengasong's *Across the Mongolo* (2004)

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Abstract

This paper focuses on John Nkemngong Nkengasong's *Across the Mongolo* and aims at analyzing the dehumanizing tendencies, resistance dynamics as well as rekindling of hope in the novel. It argues that though the world of the text seems gloomy for the Anglophone Kamangolans as reflected in the protagonist's life, with Ngwe's resistance and steadfastness, all hope is not lost. The analysis benefits from the psycho-social theory of dehumanization that like the postcolonial theory, focuses on binarisms such as the in-group and out-group discrimination, centre/margin otherness, and inferiority/superiority complexes that account for the victim's degradation, and hence hopelessness on the part of the dehumanised. Although Ngwe goes through pain and trauma that puts him in distress, his persistence raises hope not only for him but also for the dejected Anglophone Kamangolans. The study concludes that the full integration of all as full citizens without biases of cultural or ethnic background—the humanization of Anglophones will lead to a stable society which will definitely be enjoyed by all: Francophones and Anglophones alike.

Keywords

Dehumanization, Despair, Marginalization, Resistance, Hope

1. Introduction

Studies in dehumanization are taking centre stage because of its effects on individuals and society as a whole. Vaes (2023) confirms the recent focus on dehumanisation thus: “over the past two decades, a consistent body of research has shown how people tend to dehumanize members of certain outgroups” (p. 01). The interest in this field of study is reflective of the direction in which the world

is moving. Dehumanisation is generally considered a psycho-social phenomenon with serious consequences because it affects one's mind and consequently their social interactions as with the different forms of othering such as those based on race, gender, ethnicity, among others. Haslam and Loughnan (2014) indicate that: "theorists and researchers have established that perceiving people as less than human is surprisingly common, complex and broad in its implications for social life, both everyday and *in extremis*" (p. 418). Thus, despite the fact that the repercussions of dehumanization are far-reaching, it is still very much practised in our societies. Haslam and Loughman (2014) equally assert that dehumanization "is the most striking violation of our belief in a common humanity: our Enlightenment assumption that we are all, essentially one and the same. It can be blatant or subtle; driven by hate, lust, or indifference; collectively organized or intensely personal" (p. 401). Therefore, the moment one begins to think lowly of other human beings, dehumanization is likely to occur.

Although dehumanisation can happen between individuals, it especially exists between groups and is a form of othering of one group by another where the in-group attributes certain characteristics to the out-group as in the inferior-superior paradigm respectively. Haslam (2006) says that "most social-psychology accounts present dehumanization as an inter-group phenomenon in which out-groups and their members are denied full humanness" (p. 259). The denial of humanness to a group or an individual could be in any form: words, actions or even passivity and indifference. In the face of dehumanisation, writers may present assertive characters with positive attitudes to inspire hope.

Hope on the other hand, has to do with desire, faith and possibility and most of time in Literature, a possibility of positive change in the individual or society. Leboeuf (2021) quoting Katie Stockdale in *Hope Under Oppression*, says hope is: "(1) the desire for an outcome, (2) the belief that the outcomes obtaining is possible but not certain, (3) seeing or perceiving in a favorable light the possibility that the desired outcome obtains, and (4) an explicit or implicit recognition of the limitations of one's own agency in bringing about the hoped-for end" (p. 2). Hope generally addresses and mitigates issues of anxiety about the uncertainty of the future because it is difficult to talk about hope without wrestling with despair. Bock (2016) avers that "hope goes along with suffering, meaning it is born from the ashes of despair, and something new is born out of the remnants of something that has died"

(<https://chericebock.com/2016/04/23/hope-in-ancient-greek-pandora-and-the-greek-goddess-elpis/> Par 13). Thus, characters hold on to hope when confronted with seemingly impossible odds.

In "Literary Hope" (2012), it is stated that hope is closely related to desire, faith and possibility. Stories about hope are central not to the study of literature but also to disciplines such as psychology, social movements and religious studies. In literature, hope tends to center on the belief that there will be positive change, either in the individual or the society. The author asserts that:

Hope is an exceptionally common theme in literary works for several reasons. The theme of hope directly addresses some of the foremost characteristics of human experiences: anxiety about the uncertainty of the future. Furthermore, many literary works have plot events spurred on by characters that pursue something they want. Hope of attaining a goal is thus, a central part of almost any traditionally structured novel or play. (Par. 1)

Thus, out of the anxieties of the world, hope is born. It is known that in Greek mythology, hope was one of the elements in the Pandora's box. When Pandora, out of curiosity opened the box containing all the world's evil such as vengeance, diseases and envy and loosed them upon the human race, she managed to close the box before hope escaped. This explains why when evil and other challenges are overwhelming, what human beings are left with is hope. If hope escapes from human possession, human beings are likely to have no way to cope with the ill and problems of society, because without hope human existence would be unbearable. Consequently, hope arises or is built in the face of despair. That is why this paper focuses not only on the despair that is brought about by dehumanisation but also on the issues that rekindle hope in the face of such circumstances.

2. Contextualising *Across the Mongolo*

John Nkemngong Nkengasong's (2004) *Across the Mongolo* is one of the Cameroonian novels that focuses on dehumanization and when read in the context of Cameroon, it reveals much about the history of Cameroon and the struggles of assertion of the marginalised against dehumanisation. Its protagonist, Ngwe like some other Anglophones, go through marginalisation, abuse and torture as a result of the domination and positioning of the Francophone-dominated government which marginalises and dehumanises Anglophones. This marginalisation stems from the colonial history of the arbitrary partitioning of Cameroon into two unequal parts by the British and French. This partitioning had serious consequences which have evolved very negatively in diverse ways and has continued to hamper unity and peace in Cameroon especially on the side of Anglophones. Connecting dehumanisation to long histories of connection, Haslam and Loughnan (2014) submit that "many dehumanizing perceptions are rooted in stereotypes and intergroup relations that have long histories" (p. 417). This assertion is true of the context presented in *Across the Mongolo* (2004) where such dehumanization is rooted in the history of colonialism of Cameroon. Doh (1993) contends that:

The Anglophone Cameroonian, earlier colonised by the white man is once again a victim of 'colonisation' but this time, his coloniser is his former partner with whom he served, and were together tormented and exploited by the colonialists. The Anglophone is being given the impression that he is at home but he has to toil very hard to survive.... It is mainly against this black second cousin of colonialism – horizontal colonialism that genuine Cameroon authors...are struggling. (p. 78)

Writers who write from this background are therefore influenced by this colonial legacy from which they draw their inspiration and which becomes a quarry for their creative imaginative writing. *Across the Mongolo* (2004) emanates from this experience and presents a fictional Kamangolan society wherein the Francophones scheme the destruction of Anglophone identity and consciousness. The Francophones inflict physical and psychological pain on Anglophones. In the face of this violence, despair is so evident in the lives of the Anglophone Kamangolans. They struggle against social, political and cultural marginalisation. Nkwi (2004) defines an Anglophone as:

an indigene in Cameroon whose first foreign culture is Anglo-Saxon and whose first problem is that of identity within a cultural milieu which is 85 percent Gaullic; the second problem is that of language; and thirdly, equal opportunities with his/her fellow Francophone counterpart. His problem is the fear of both cultural extinction and politico-economic marginalization. (p. 188)

As true as Nkwi puts it, these are the issues that Ngwe in the text under study suffers and grapples with and against the backdrop from which he seeks to liberate himself from dehumanisation and become a veritable member of the country, with a feeling that he should not feel like a stranger in what he should be his home. Although the persistence in marginalisation almost kills his dreams, what keeps him going, against all odds is hope. Hope is very much visible in Ngwe's life and being representative of Anglophone Cameroonians, he can be considered the symbol of Anglophone Cameroon hope in the world of John Nkemngong Nkengasong's (2004) *Across the Mongolo*. The ways in which Ngwe is dehumanised and excluded and his determination at reintegration in the society will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

3. Exclusion and Dehumanisation

Ngwe's dream and ambitions in *Across the Mongolo* (2004) are to become the Babajoro of Kamangolo, that is the head of state or to say the least, a very successful person in his country. He dreams this way because he initially believes that every Kamangolan in Kamangola has an equal opportunity to become the Babajoro, who symbolizes the president of the Country and of course, greatness. He firmly believes that with hard work and determination, anyone can achieve their desired goals. This accounts for why he is bent on studying hard, erroneously and ironically believing that hard work is the only sure way to success for every Kamangolan. However, the moment he sets foot on Ngola, he begins to experience dehumanisation. He is quick to realise that he is in another world when immediately he gets to the boundary between Kama and Ngola, he is gripped by fear. He says: "as soon as the vast expanse of the plantations ended, a huge arched steel structure appeared before us. It seemed that it chained two worlds together" (p. 37). Forbang-Looh (2018) in line with this posits that "The

fear that grips him as he crosses the River Mongolo is symbolic of the unwelcome place he is coming into. His appraisal of the bridge symbolises the contrast between the two worlds, the one he is from, and the one he is getting into” (p. 86). To confirm his feeling, he and his co-passenger, an elderly Anglophone, are unjustly physically assaulted and humiliated because they seem not to understand the types of documents that are requested from them such as *pièces identité, impôt* (p. 38). The unjust humiliation of the old man is just because he is an anglophone and is unable to understand the French language which seems to be the master’s language and everyone must make an effort to communicate in it without which they should be ready to bear the consequences. Thus, the lack of knowledge in French translates to being considered an outsider and being dehumanised. That is why the old man is pulled out of the car and the gendarmes furiously command:

Assois-toi la bas, vieux babouin! thundered the gendarme, slapping the old man on the face. The old man’s buttocks reasoned faster and found their seat on the ground, as if to say that if the head remained stubborn, it would continue to receive the blows but the buttocks had already obeyed the government man. (p. 38)

Vieux babouin, which is translated as “old baboon” in English, is an insult on the Anglophone elderly man. It is a form of animalistic dehumanization. His assault confirms this insult as he is treated even less than an undesirable animal. Even when Ngwe attempts to complain about the ill-treatment and presents his identification documents, he is struck on the head and forcibly pushed to the ground onto his buttocks, while insults are hurled at him: “*Un fraudeur, un awarien*” (p. 40).

Even in lecture halls at the University, Ngwe is dehumanised. At one point in time when he attempts to ask a question in English, he is booed and jeered at with insults as they twist papers and throw at him. He says: “I gathered courage to ask to be explained a notion in Constitutional Law that I did not understand. Soon as I started the first words in English, the lecture hall broke into a tremor of booing and jeering “*Anglo, Anglofou, Anglobête*” (p. 64) which is translated as “*Anglo, Anglofool, Anglobeast.*” It is interesting that the word Anglophone which should simply give an orientation of a person’s identity should be taken as an insult as one finds in Ngola. It is also ironical that in a class where students have to freely express their opinions, ask and be clarified about issues being taught, Ngwe has to gather courage to speak in class. Haslam (2006) states and rightly so, that likening human beings to animals is one way of dehumanizing them. To corroborate this, he says “in racist descriptions, Africans are compared to apes and sometimes explicitly denied membership of the human species. Other groups are compared to dogs, pigs, rats, parasites, or insects. Visual depictions caricature physical features to make ethnic others look animal-like” (pp. 252-253). If this is read in the context of Kamangola and by extension Cameroon which it likely represents, it will be understood that the Francophone gen-

darmes, like the students, use such derogatory and animal-like insults to dehumanize Anglophones. Quiamzade and Lalot (2023) posit that “animalising an outgroup would constitute a very long and lasting justification for mistreatment” (p. 3). This is true because in the various instances where Ngwe and other Anglophones have been marginalised, there has been no intervention by anyone, not even the administration or university officials. At this particular instance in the lecture room, no student or lecturer attempts to intervene in Ngwe’s favour. The University in particular and society in general has normalised seeing Anglophones as beasts and therefore seem justified in their animalisation. Such dehumanisation and animalisation has a serious effect on Ngwe as he says:

I stood transfixed, bemused and dumbfounded as though the ritual of disorder had hypnotised me and transformed me into a worthless object. For the rest of the two hour lecture, I thought deeply over the humiliation I faced from my own country men. I asked myself where the intellectual *dic-tum* and *decorum* which I had heard of Universities had been kept. I asked myself if I had no right to express myself in one of the two official languages in a bilingual country. I deeply regretted the uproar I had caused. I decided to go into my shell, to avoid speaking English in public places, during lectures or on campus. I did not want to be recognised all the time as a second class citizen.... (p. 65)

His decision to retreat and not identify himself as an Anglophone is understood, considering that every time he has been recognized or has identified himself as such, he has been dehumanized and treated with contempt. Freire (2005) says “...the results of an unjust order... engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed” (p. 44), like it does to Ngwe.

Even before the above incident, Ngwe has been dehumanized by the University officials. When he goes for registration at the University of Besaadi, the Francophone administrator who receives him orders him to speak in French, and the only words he can utter in very poor French are “*je suis dit que*” (p. 61) translated as “*I am say that*” which earns him mocking laughter from the others around him. Although this use of language may be appraised as resistance from domination in postcolonial discourse, it is still about dehumanisation. Also the fact that these kinds of dehumanising practices happen even at the University brings to question the kind of education that is acquired in such a setting because a university should be one of those cultured environments from where moral values emanate and extend to the society. Ironically, it serves the opposite function.

Ngwe’s branding as a strike leader whereas he is not involved in the strike action and his merciless torture at the Cinquieme simply due to his identity as an anglophone does not go unnoticed. Haslam and Loughnan (2014) assert that “dehumanization is sometimes associated with predatory forms of aggression that are not direct responses to provocation” (p. 415). This is true of Ngwe because he is neither responsible nor is he a partaker of the strike action but he has

to bear the brutality and aggression of the policemen. When they realise that he is an Anglophone as he struggles to plead about his innocence and for mercy in English, the police become even more furious and violent. Ngwe narrates that once his identity is discovered, one of the police officer says:

C'est un Anglo même. Lá tu est morte! he grunted and stared at me as if to fish out sin from my soul before my lips ever said a word. He tightened the grip on my neck and pushed me towards the other policeman who blocked the road leading to the Cite Universitaire. '*Un Anglo, Chef!*' he told them confidently as though he had captured the commander of the Queen's army.... *Anglofou, esclave, idiot, salaud, Anglo!* The words fell from different voices as they pounded my jawbones....I wailed aloud but they continued hitting all over my body, saying I had left Kama to cause disorder in the University of Besaadi. (p. 108)

The ruthless brutality from the uniform officers does not only indicate that they consider Anglophones as sub-humans but also as people void of feelings. The first two sentences, loosely translated in English are: "*It is even an Anglophone. At that, you are dead.*" The implication here is that Anglophones do not belong here and should be the last people to clamour for change in case of any injustice. Notice also that 'Anglo' which is the shortened form of Anglophone is used as an insult as it falls in the same line and category as: *Anglofou, esclave, idiot, salaud*, translated as, *Anglofool, slave, idiot, bastard*. The cruelty of these police officers seems to align with how [Haslam and Loughnan \(2014\)](#) see dehumanisation: "an extreme phenomenon, observed in conditions of conflict, and it is primarily called upon to explain and enable acts of violence" (p. 401). It is even interesting here that the conflict that they are using to justify their violence has nothing to do with Ngwe. Even if going on a strike deserves punishment, he is not one of the strikers and should therefore not be subjected to such ridicule and dehumanisation.

Although Ngwe is the lead character who suffers from gross dehumanisation in various instances, there are other Anglophones who share about the same fate as Ngwe. For instance, at the University, there is Dr Amboh who is a very sound lecturer but is not given main courses to teach because he is an Anglophone. Shirila's father is unable to make any progress in his career for some reason. At his job site, younger and less qualified Francophones get promoted and he is fixed on the same spot. Anglophones in general, never occupy top positions in government and therefore, can hardly have any influence neither on their people, nor the Francophones. Although, the Anglophones experience marginalisation and dehumanisation and try in their various spaces to resist it in different and subtle ways like Ngwe does in some instances, it is Ngwe who takes very bold steps to redress the situation and it is on him that the effects of such resistance are visible and that is why focus is mainly on him in this paper. His attempts at bringing back the Anglophones to the limelight are commendable and he therefore represents Anglophone hope in a generally hopeless society. His struggles at

rehumanisation are discussed in the next part of this paper.

4. The Quest for Rehumanisation and Hope

In the face of dehumanization, there is generally resistance with the hope that the situation will change. Alexander Pope (1993) in “Essay on Man” writes: “Hope springs eternal in the human breast” (Norton p. 2265) which brings to light the view that people are generally optimistic as they always hope for the better. However, hope is sometimes lost as a consequence of persistent oppression, marginalisation, suppression and bad governance, among other factors. Raising hope in some of these situations is one of the duties of writers who present seemingly worthless and pessimistic lives and settings to those who seem helpless to change their situations. As such, these writers make despair bearable to, most of the time, the oppressed, deprived, marginalised and underprivileged of the society who have been deprived of their humanity. Freire (2005) refers to this as dehumanization where the dehumanized more often than not fights against it. He goes ahead to state that:

...while humanization and dehumanization are real alternatives, only the first is the people’s vocation. This vocation is constantly negated, yet, it is affirmed by that very negation. It is thwarted by injustice, exploitation, oppression, and the violence of the oppressors; it is affirmed by the yearning of the oppressed for freedom and justice and by their struggle to recover their lost humanity. (pp. 40-41)

Freire considers humanisation as the people’s vocation though it is often negated by dehumanization. This probably explains why writers who act like the voices of the voiceless despaired masses take up this challenge of giving humanity or promoting causes of humanization to instill hope in them, not only for the benefit of the victims but also for those who are dehumanised. Dehumanisation is not only an issue to those who are dehumanised but also to those who dehumanise. To Freire, the dehumanisers are going against the human vocation. Thus, while the perpetrator makes others to feel inhuman, he or she is also making him/herself look less human. Therefore, the restoration of humanity affects both. Freire (2005) stated that “Dehumanization which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human” (p. 44). Dehumanisation is therefore a two-way sword that negatively affects both the victim and the perpetrator. The issue we grapple with in this section is how John Nkemngong Nkengasong in *Across the Mongolo* presents the oppressed and marginalised on a quest to recover their lost humanity, thereby inspiring hope not only for his characters but also for those that they represent and the entire society.

Even when Ngwe’s hopes of becoming Babajoro are dying down due to the seemingly impenetrable barriers that he encounters, he still keeps on trying to succeed in his studies. His dreams and determination to succeed and be the

leading statesman or successful in the country brings hope to Anglophone Kamangolans: leaving from the marginal position to the centre which is the position they have been denied since their attainment of independence and reunification with Francophone Kamangolans with equal status. In the face of oppression, the consciousness of being oppressed and consequently taking action to redress it becomes primordial. The fact that Ngwe becomes fully aware of his marginalisation as that of other Anglophones can be analogous to discovering an illness in one's body. The discovery of it necessitates the search for solutions to redress the situation. Ngwe has a choice of either getting assimilated or resisting the Francophone domination and dehumanisation. He chooses the latter. Though Besaadi in particular and Ngola in general is corrupt, Ngwe does not get acculturated to this lifestyle. He maintains the values and virtues he has all along grown up with in Kama. Seeing that the present lifestyle is so drastically different, he takes solace in nostalgia. For instance, he constantly has flashbacks about his days in Wysdom College and the College of Arts. These two institutions instilled in him a sense of meritocracy and dignity so that he is terribly shocked to see students offering bribes with impunity at the University Registration Office. He even prefers to fail his exam and lose the most cherished 'mandat' against his girlfriend, Shirila's advice to engage in buying questions well ahead of time and fraudulently succeeding in the exam. He will proudly fail than engage in fraud which is characteristic of the French system in Ngola. Although he spends several years at the University without obtaining a degree because he doesn't subscribe to corruption, his identity as an Anglophone is preserved. Even though he doesn't succeed, he sets the pace for other Anglophones to follow and believe in hard work as the only sure way to success.

The issue of language comes up severally in the novel. Ngwe keeps his identity by speaking English. Not at any point in the novel do we find him speak or write French fluently. He tries to use it when it is absolutely necessary for survival. Nkengasong certainly takes sides with Ngwe as he makes him speak only the most porous French to the mockery of those that he comes in contact with. Of course, he has neither been motivated by their way of life nor the means of acculturating him to speak French. Unlike Mr Kwentu, a fellow Anglophone who collects bribes and proudly speaks French and Minister Wankili who affirms his dissociation with Anglophones during his reception party at his appointment as Minister in charge of Special Duties at the Presidency, which most Anglophones believe is a position to spy on Anglophones, Ngwe remains faithful to his cultural identity and moral values throughout the world of Nkengasong's novel. Ngwe's character therefore inspires hope for the Anglophones that their identity will be maintained against all odds.

It is often said that the youths are leaders of tomorrow. Just the fact that Ngwe is a youth shows that he has time to strategise and even re-strategise to overturn the tables and bring Anglophones to the limelight to be at the same level with their Francophone compatriots. He is described in the novel as the gem of the clan. From the history of Cameroon that *Across the Mongolo* (2004) somehow

represents, it is evident that the older generation and leaders of Anglophone Cameroon had failed to secure the rightful position of Anglophones in the Kama-Ngola union. This is noticed in the lamentations of Dr Amboh and other Anglophones at Minister Wankili's party. Their hope is in the younger generation which the informed and determined Ngwe represents.

Leboeuf (2021) reviewing Stockdale's *Hope Under Oppression* states that for Stockdale, "oppression is "a threat to hope." Hoping presents a particular risk to the oppressed since their hopes are often "unrealized" and the bitterness that may result from disappointed expectations can undermine struggles to resist oppression" (Par 1). It is true that oppression threatens Ngwe's dream of becoming a great man in his country. However, his bitterness against this oppression though at some point in time undermines his struggles to resist it gets to a point where he can no longer just sit and watch or shy away from the injustices and dehumanisation. Niyi Osundare's (*The News: Literary Crossroads*, 2017) echo of Frantz Fanon words that: "every generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfil it or betray it"

(<https://thenewsnigeria.com.ng/2017/12/18/niyi-osundare-at-literary-crossroads-in-lagos-sings-of-change/>) tallies with Ngwe's quest for self. Ngwe represents a generation which has discovered its mission, to free his people from oppression and does his best to fulfill it, though with a lot of challenges.

Apparently, the most radical step that Ngwe takes in the hope of the restoration of the Anglophone identity is the formation of the Young Anglophone Movement (YAM) whose aim is to fight for the rights of Anglophone students in Besaadi and consequently pave the way for the general recognition of Anglophones as citizens of Kamangola. To engage in this is to show how revolutionary, hopeful and determined Ngwe is. In "*Literary Hope*" (2012), it is found that

Holding on to hope when confronting seemingly impossible odds is another important theme in many texts; hope in these cases may be closely related to faith in human nature, faith in oneself, or religious or spiritual faith. Additionally, faith can be both an emotional state and also a perspective on reality; as the latter, hope is an example of how a world-view can shape one's actions, often in profound and life-affirming ways. (Par. 1)

In the case of Ngwe, his world view that Anglophones should have a place determines his actions. The once calm Ngwe, who had previously attempted to be more cautious and avoid situations where he might be ridiculed for his Anglophone identity, such as refraining from asking questions in class, decides to assert his identity more confidently in Ngola. At his young age, Ngwe takes the initiative of planning and leading a protest against the marginalisation of the Anglophones. His action brings forth the themes of struggle and determination, thus assuring Anglophone Kamangolans that there is hope for Anglophones in the future.

The fact that Babajoro sends his men after Ngwe and his fellow Anglo-

phones for inciting this rebellion is indicative of the fact that it is a serious threat to the Francophone dominance that does not go unnoticed. Even though the Movement does not succeed as a whole, it has succeeded in telling the powers that be that there is a serious problem which needs to be looked into without which there can be social destabilisation. West (2008) posits that: “When ordinary people wake up, elites begin to tremble in their boots. They can’t get away with their abuse. They can’t get away with subjection. They can’t get away with subjugation. They can’t get away with exploitation. They can’t get away with domination. It takes courage for folks to stand up” (Par 1). This is especially true in societies where there is oppression and suppression and where the oppressed and suppressed get to a point where they have to fight back. The elites in the context of this novel may be referred to the Francophones. Ngwe has all along acted very sober till now where he has to develop courage and stand up for what he believes is right. Thus, his decision in forming a union to fight for Anglophone rights and freedom are evident of his hope and determination to ameliorate the condition of Anglophones, at re-humanising them. West (2015) asserts that “it is a beautiful thing to be on fire for justice... there is no greater joy than inspiring and empowering others--especially the least of these, the precious and priceless wretched of the earth!” (Par 1) Ngwe succeeds to inspire his people towards justice.

Ngwe equally proves his worth and assertive nature in the ‘cold war’ that ensues between him and Monsieur Abeso over Ngwe’s girlfriend, Shirila when he eats up the gizzard served for Monsieur Abeso. The gizzard is a symbol of authority and honour in most Cameroonian settings and is generally served to the oldest man of the household or the title owners of the land. So, by eating not only the food but also the gizzard in food that had been prepared for Monsieur Abeso in his presence is a ridicule of Monsieur Abeso’s authority as a Francophone in Kamangola. No doubt, Abeso feels threatened as he screams out: “quoi? Devant moi?...Quoi? ici a Besaadi? Un petit Anglo? Un salaud? Un idiot? Non, non, non” (p. 193), translated as “...What? Here in Besaadi? A small Anglo? A bastard? An idiot? No, no, no.” Abeso’s shock and consternation justifies his all time superiority that has been challenged by the “inferior” Ngwe justifying that things will not always be the same. It is indicative that power will not always be in the hands of the Francophones and there should therefore be consideration as to how the other compatriots are treated. Ngwe therefore has become assertive to the point of challenging Francophone authority in different areas and the shock and reactions to such assertive tendencies towards rehumanisation of Anglophones gives them hope.

5. Ngwe’s Insanity: Defeat or Power?

Ngwe’s insanity in the novel results from his dreams which are deferred as a result of injustice and dehumanisation. Due to the injustice of the Francophone dominated state, Ngwe’s dreams are killed. Langston Hughes (1951) asks what happens to a dream deferred, unrealized, owing to forces for which the dreamer

is not responsible and that he is unable to control. Ngwe's seemingly deferred dream does not just "dry up like a raisin in the sun" as questioned by the poem but also leads to insanity. His dream is to become the Babajoro of Kamangola and he believes he can make it because he is very hard-working and determined. He says "the thought of becoming Babajoro one day made me feel elated...I could become the president of the country one day. I could become the Babajoro one day" (pp. 23-24). As he is in Ngola, he is still convinced and reiterates his dreams of greatness: "I was getting closer to Babajoro...seeing myself becoming the Babajoro of Kamangola one day" (p. 33). When Ngwe realizes after his police custody that he has failed his exams, and therefore burnt his *mandat*, he is terribly disappointed and he says: "four years squandered in an intellectual wilderness, in the turbulence of an unrefined visionless existence, of hopelessness and anguish" (p.161). His crushed aspirations bring in pessimism and trauma in his life which are heightened by his recurrent failure and consequently madness. It is not because he is not intelligent or hardworking but for the fact that he does not belong in the Ngola society. In the University of Besaadi which is supposed to be bilingual, success is not based on hard work and merit but curiously on whether one can take lectures, ask and answer questions, and above all, write exams in French. Ngwe is not versed with French and is therefore, bound not to make it. Also, as Shirila notes, in the University of Besaadi, one can only gamble to succeed. She says: "success in the University and the whole country depends on gambling and not on merit.... Here, you gamble to succeed. It is not how much you know that makes you to pass examinations" (pp. 170-171). Thus Ngwe is disappointed as he rhetorically asks: "Did life have any meaning where perpetual disorder, fraudulence and rash hopelessness were the order of the day?" (p. 172). Surely, it does not have. With all these, Ngwe becomes psychologically depressed, traumatized and consequently mad.

Ngwe therefore, goes insane when he is unable to bear the traumas that have been caused by suffering, poverty, marginalization, humiliation, injustice and dehumanization at the University in particular and Ngola in general. The last straw that breaks the camel's back is when he fails to get to the third year in the Department of History of the Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences. When Ngwe realizes that he has failed AGAIN, he says, "I was shocked, vexed, infuriated. I could not understand. I knew I had done my best during the examination. Something terrible might have happened. It could not be my own illusion" (p. 197). When he sets out to find out why he failed, the scripts are sorted and behold, "Docteur Atebba who taught two main courses and in whose courses I had always done better than others, had given me zero in both scripts" (p. 197). He had been very reluctant to take to Shirila's advice to move from the Faculty of Law where he had burnt his *mandat* after four wasted years. But her encouraging words coupled with the little optimism that he still had in him urged him on. Spending four years in the Faculty of law and now two, pulling on to the third, thereby spending at least eight years to get a degree is to his mind a very heavy load to carry. When he discovers the scripts, he says:

A dreary feeling invaded my whole being. I did not know on which ground I felt my feet. I left the Dean's office dreary and drunk. I stood at the balcony and peered in the bizarre world of falsity and viciousness. A knot clicked in my brain. The giant blocks of the faculty, the concentrated aluminium roofs in the plateau beneath, shadows of invisible persons, voices of drunkards, thousands of pestles pounding in my head, my mother, Shirila, give me water...food...Dr Mballape...thirst...water...." (pp. 197-198).

Apparently, Ngwe has gone mad. His mind is not able to withstand the pressure it is subjected to. According to Jud Evan's classification on the various types of madness, Ngwe is suffering from degenerative madness, that is, mental "defects caused by tissue changes within the brain leading to partial or complete memory loss and behaviour considered by the majority to be bizarre" (Par. 7). This type of madness is usually as a result of unbearable societal pressures. Some traumatized people may feel permanently damaged when trauma symptoms do not go away and they do not believe their situation will improve. Ngwe has certainly been dehumanized beyond what he could ever imagine. His madness is a message not only to victim but also to the perpetrator and symbolically signifies the dilapidated society which if not considered for rebuilding by its oppressors will lead to a collapse that will affect both.

The description of Ngwe's insanity seems to present a hopeless situation. The general talk in the village is that "they heard he no longer slept under a roof; that he slept at the roadside; that he picked things from the rubbish heap to eat like the dog that owns no master; that he wore rags and was wretched like the dog that sends thunder, dirty like the pig that bathes in mud" (p. 1). The intensity of Ngwe's insanity makes him to be compared with an animal. This is reminiscent of the hardship he has gone through and under normal circumstances, regaining sanity seems a bleak possibility. However, when the Fon of the Land declares to his Executive Council that: "Ngwe is no small child of the land. He is the descendant of great warriors of Anambat" (p. 2), hope is rekindled. There is a Kom proverb which states that "A chick will never be a hawk." The implication is that one will always take after the parents, and if Ngwe's forefathers had successfully protected their land from savage invasions, Ngwe can do the same; in this case, he can salvage the Anglophone community from the oppressive grip of the Francophone-dominated government.

Furthermore, Aloh-Mbong, the diviner's declaration, from the gods of the land suggests a bright future for Ngwe. After a serious confrontation with the bad spirits in the forest, valleys and hills and strong concoctions of leaves, barks and roots of trees given to him for several days in a bid to resolve Ngwe's problems, the Prince of Concealed Secrets says: "the child is of a powerful breed. He comes from a generation of brave warriors. No man born of a penis can hurt him. His anguish is the beginning of his mission in the world, a mission to rescue his people trapped into slavery in a far away land" (p. 199). Ngwe's strength as can be observed in this declaration is evident in the fact that despite the

trauma, starvation, imprisonment and torture in various forms, one would expect death to be the outcome but the fact that he survives all of this is testimony to his bravery. Also, the declaration that he will go through a lot of stress and difficulties to rescue his people brings to the limelight the symbol of the mythical hero in the traditional African context who undertakes a risky journey to bring back good things to the community. When this mythical hero enters the mysterious jungle, it is believed, he contends with beasts and monsters. If he succeeds in defeating them and comes back alive, it is believed by the community that he has learnt some lessons about life which will eventually be useful to the community. In this connection, Ngola can be considered the mysterious jungle. The beasts and monsters he encounters are the Francophones and Anglophones alike who embarrass, humiliate and torture him in diverse ways. The fact that the reader is hopeful that Ngwe will survive, having learnt his lessons and obviously going to re-strategise to liberate the Anglophones qualifies him as a mythical hero and gives hope to the Anglophones that they will one day occupy the centre of Kamangola like their Francophone counterparts.

6. Conclusion

Ngwe, the protagonist of *Across the Mongolo*, represents the plight of many Anglophones who face injustice and humiliation due to their linguistic and cultural minority in Kamangola. They are dehumanized and made to feel inferior leading to feelings of unbelonging, frustration and despair. However, Ngwe's persistence in succeeding and the quest for justice and making things right give hope to the Anglophone community. His struggles and challenges reflect the Anglophones' challenges and the zeal for equal status in Kamangola. Despite his sometimes radical actions, such as creating the Young Anglophone Movement, there is no indication that Ngwe wants to become an oppressor. He simply wants the Anglophones to belong and feel at home. It is important to note that the oppression of the marginalized can sometimes lead to a desire for revenge, which may result in the oppressed becoming oppressors themselves. However, this is hardly the solution. In seeking to regain their humanity, the oppressed should not become oppressors but rather restorers of the humanity for both the perpetrator and the victim. It is only through denouncing marginalization and dehumanization that justice, equality, and peace can be achieved, benefiting not only Anglophones but the entire nation. Hope, therefore, is not rekindled only for the Anglophones but for the Francophones as well.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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