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The Dialectics of Spaces and Power in John Nkemngong Nkengasong's *Across the Mongolo* and *The Widow's Might*

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Abstract

This article, seeks to examine the dialectics of spaces and power in John Nkemngong Nkengasong's *Across the Mongolo* and *The Widow's Might* and their impact on the lives of the characters and the society. Characterisation in literary works usually focuses on what the characters think, say, do, or act, and from their description by the narrator or other characters in the texts. This study proposes that the interaction of characters in varied spaces play a vital role in their perception of the world and their formation or transformation. The Spatial Literary Theory as propounded by Robert T.Tally Jr and the New Historicism and Cultural Materialism as critical approaches by Stephen Greenblatt will be employed in the interpretation of the chosen texts. Michel Foucault's conceptual framework on the omnipresence of power and its objectivity in establishing and maintaining norms in society will equally be used in this study.

Keywords: Dialectics, Spaces, Power, Culture, Politics

1. Introduction

There exists a significant relationship between space, power, and narrative development in literature. Spaces are not merely backdrops for actions; rather, they actively contribute to character formation and plot progression. In this study, "space" refers to a dynamic, open-ended, and often contested void where power circulates through social, cultural, and political institutions. Unlike a "place" which is fixed in geography and time, a "space" is fluid and defined by the activities and interactions it hosts. This paper focuses on cultural and political spaces as represented in John Nkemngong Nkengasong's *Across the Mongolo* and *The Widow's Might*, examining how power operates within these literary settings and shapes the characters' experiences.

This study therefore seeks to explore the activities in the literary settings in John Nkemngong Nkengasong's *Across the Mongolo* and *The Widow's Might* that define the spaces ascribed and the interplay of power in these spaces. The study proposes that power exists freely in structures and institutions put in place and that the experiences of the characters in these spaces play a vital role in their formation and transformation. Some of the spaces are portrayed as tools of political and patriarchal subjugation which are contested by the marginalized characters, while others are portrayed as tools of productivity that foster growth and development in the communities.

As regards the conceptual framework, Michel Foucault's notion on the free circulation of power in structures and institutions will be employed. The study will examine cases of repressive and productive circulation of power that either impact negatively

or positively on the characters. The Spatial Literary theory as propounded by Robert T. Tally Jr postulates that a space is not just a passive arena for literary events, but an active and constitutive element that influences character development, plot, themes, and societal constructs. This theory is of relevance to the study. Of importance is the New Historicism and Cultural Materialism approach by Stephen Greenblatt which correlates the text to the context and views culture as a dynamic and contested terrain where power operates in a complex, subtle, and dispersed manner in society. The comparative approach will be applied in the analysis of the texts. The ensuing paragraphs will focus on two types of spaces; the cultural and political spaces that shape the perception and transformation of the characters.

2. The Cultural Space in *Across the Mongolo*

H. L. B. Moody defines culture as the peculiar characteristic of a particular community, including its organization, institutions, laws, customs, work, play, art, religion, music and so on (qtd in Ayuk, 193). The culture of a people therefore refers to the way of life of a people that includes their language, beliefs, practices, and ideologies. The cultural space and other spaces are derived thus from the predominant activities in the ascribed spaces in question.

Across the Mongolo opens with the exposition of the beautiful topography of Attah village, their beliefs, structures, and language. Most of this is revealed through the narrator and the character's discussions about Ngwe Nkemassaah's madness in Besaadi where he went for his university studies. Attah village consists of eighteen hills, valleys, bushes, hazardous paths, dangerous streams, with routine market days and an executive council called 'troh-ndii' headed by "The Fon, the Royal Father of the land, Atemangwat Achiabieuh, the Descendant of the Lion, the one who shot the leopard and only he slaughtered, a man beyond man, [who] was most grieved" (2) about Ngwe's insanity (1). The imaginary space created is very true to life. The description of the Paramount Fon reveals his supremacy amongst his subjects put in place through institutions of power such as the Fondom, the executive council, the youth wing and the womenfolk. In an interview with Grosrichard on "The Analytics of Power" Michel Foucault ((1980) argues that "in reality power means relations, a more-or-less-organised, hierarchical, co-ordinated cluster of relations" (198) which is not located on a given spot, but a strategy put in place that circulates everywhere in society.

As customary for the Nweh people, every calamity or abnormality is caused by someone as a form of punishment or retaliation on the victim. This explains why women and men trooped into M'menyika's home day after day to console her as it was believed that the 'ndoh'--a curse was heaped on Ngwe as punishment from either his father or mother's ancestors. Some held that "Ngwe had bought medicine to know more book because book was very difficult in that big school where he was" (2) while others held that his father, Ndi Nkemasaah, died without completing the bride price of his second wife and that "Mbe Tankap, the woman's mother's mother's father [paternal grandfather] was showing signs of anger" (2). Others feared that Mbe Benu, the father's greatest enemy, might have cast a spell on Ngwe. In this dilemma, the Fon ordered for Ngwe to be brought home from Besaadi and equally concluds, "if the gods of the land are angry with him, we shall give them salt, palm oil and goats. If anyone has bewitched him, Ku'ngang will fetch and punish the traitor. If it was Lebialem's wish to sacrifice him and he was to die, let him die on the soil of his ancestors" (2-3). He then orders the youth through his elders to bring Ngwe back to the land like Alaling that raided the Germans and rescued the ancient Fon. The 'troh-ndii' stooped, clapped and chorused: 'M'moh! Achiabieuh! Descendants of the Lion! We have heard. We shall do just what His Royal Lips have spoken' (3).

The villagers see the Fon as a demi-god and pays allegiance to him. Their obedience, promptness, and collaboration with the Fon is shaped by their beliefs, core values, practices, rituals, and ideologies which shape their identity as a tribe. A historical allusion is made to the great warrior, Alaling, who defeated the Germans in the tribal wars that took place during the German annexation of Cameroon in 1884. Ngwe also makes other historical allusions to the Empire Day that they celebrated in Miemfe as pupils. The Literary locations 'Miemfe', 'Wisdom College' and 'Lebialem' share much similarity with the non-literary 'Mamfe', 'Seat of Wisdom College' and 'Lebialem'.

For Stephen Greenblatt (1989), a new historicist reading of a text situates the text in a particular social, economic, cultural and historical perspective since literature re-textualizes history and history contributes in the development of literature. A literary work is thus considered a product of time and place and circumstance. The text also presents sacred places like shrines, waterfalls, ponds and hills where some rituals are carried out with the use of items such as salt, palm oil, palm wine, peace plant, 'nkeng', camwood, human skulls and goat to either appease the gods and ancestors or to cleanse the land. All these practices contribute to the development of Ngwe who starts questioning some of his cultural practices after his exposure to formal education and Christianity, thereby transforming him into a hybrid character amongst his peers and villagers. The Fon and his subjects see Ngwe's madness as abnormal and pay frequent visits to Ngwe's mother to console her. They also seek solution from the chief priests and diviners. The community experiences some turbulence when Ngwa is mad and normalcy only returns when Ngwe is cured. Their action shows love, commitment to a joint course, and solidarity.

The free circulation of power through the cultural space is more productive than repressive where diviners such as Alabi goes to the great ponds of Lebialem and to the thorny locks of Fuandem to harvest magical leaves which are squeezed into Ngwe's eyes, nostrils, and hands. When Alabi notices he cannot handle Ngwe's health situation, he refers him to Aloh-Mbong his master. Power and knowledge are crucial concepts in Foucault's studies where knowledge provides the basis for the exercise of power (1980). Aloh-Mbong's added knowledge of the terrain and herbs privileges him over Alabi. The power to heal and expel wizards is not owned by him, but enacted through his knowledge of the herbs and terrain where power circulates freely.

He therefore responds to the power circulating in the hills, valleys, Fuandem Fall, the magical leaves, barks of trees, and herbs as the subject of power that cures the sick and expels wizards and bad spirits. For Sara Mills (2003), Foucault's work is largely concerned with the relationship between social structures and institutions and the individual" (33) and power is omnipresent.

Rahmatullah, Arlin Adam and Syamsu A. Kamaruddin (2024) hold that "Foucault's significant contribution in philosophy and politics is his concept of power. Therefore, acquiring knowledge through educational programs requires power, and gaining power too requires knowledge" (102). They also point out, that the positive, productive, and discursive relationships are a new perspective on power, which spreads within the societal relationship, not centralized in one person or institution, but generating knowledge in an intertwining relationship, where every instance of power is related to the formation of knowledge which directly shapes power relations.

Ahoh-Mbong, a chief witch hunter and diviner is said to use his guns to engage "in the complicated ritual-*ajia*-to deflect his enemies evil" (5) by entering the caves of Mbruohngwi and Schwart and combing all the hills, valleys, and cracks on the earth chasing and challenging wizards and evil spirits from the underworld to a combat. When Ngwe is brought to him for treatment, Ahoh-Mbong started the divination by calling on the ancestors and then blowing air into Ngwe's nostrils and ears before squeezing the concoction into his eyes and nostrils. After this, he takes an ancient gourd "that had lived from the beginning of time" (6) and shakes it ordering Ngwe to speak out everything before he could work on him. He again blew into Ngwe's eyes, "chewed old barks of trees mixed with alligator pepper, spat the paste in his palms then robbed it on Ngwe's face. Ngwe sneezed like one who kept bees in his nostrils, stretched out himself, and robbed his eyes like one struggling to see a vision" (6) and began narrating his ordeal in Besaadi with the power of Fuandem which cleared the rust of time that had eaten into his mind. Aloh-Mbong succeeds in restoring Ngwe from a state of insanity to sanity where he recounts his ordeal in Besaadi. Power and knowledge are inextricably linked as demonstrated by the chief diviner.

3. The Cultural Space in *The Widow's Might*

In *The Widow's Might*, Akwenoh the widow, like Ngwe, finds herself in a hybrid space informed by the forces of tradition and modernity. Even though Akwenoh is based in the urban city of Bakomba, the traditional widowhood rites are imposed on her as she is forced to sit and sleep on the bare floor after the loss of her husband. When she refused sitting on the floor after her husband's death, her sister-in-law, Ma Eseka, rains insults on her.

When Akwenoh arrives Ekaka Village for her husband's burial, Ma Eseka accuses her of not weeping enough because she is preparing for a happy widowhood. Besides formally and openly demonstrating her grief and intense feelings as regards her husband's demise, she is also expected culturally to swear by her husband to prove she has no hand in his death, since death is viewed as unnatural and always caused by someone. Even when she swears the mandatory oath before the villagers to prove her innocence, Ma Eseka still challenges the validity of her innocence.

Eunice Ngongkum (2016) holds that the factors that influence the lives of the widows especially the options available to them and the multiplicity of interests touching on their behaviour are grounded in socio-cultural parameters that shape communal consciousness. She asserts that the background that generally informs Nkengasong's *The Widows Might* is characterized by "disinheritance/deprivation and mandatory observance of culturally prescribed burial rites which inflect psychologically and physically on the widow" (140). The widows, who are generally trodden upon, are poor and least protected as their lives are determined by local, patriarchal interpretations of tradition, discrimination, and stigma. She argues, "while it is true that widowhood victimizes the woman, the widow's luminal voicelessness in social discourses seems to suggest that she does very little to respond adequately to her victim status" (138) and thus, placing herself at the margins.

Akwenoh is forced to sit and sleep on banana leaves in the village and she is prohibited from drinking water and almost starved to death. Akwenoh felt hungry, but "she feared asking for food from the village women who had taken control of her, not even to ask for some of the bread she had asked Emade to buy when they were about to leave the town . . . . She was told that she would eat only in the evening of the next day. Meanwhile she had to spend the night sitting where she was" (151).

Early the next morning, the women shaved her head, took her to the stream, bathed and rubbed her with *manyanga* [palm kernel oil]. She is given a blue gown to wear as her mourning gown for one year. They rubbed her breasts and waist with some concoction and tied a string round her neck which "was going to be the sign to all men that she was a widow and she was not going to meet with any man within one year" otherwise she and the man will face their doom (151).

The term 'widow' for Mary Njang Ghongkedze (2016), is dreaded because it comes with the connotation of anguish, misery, melancholy, gloominess, torture, loner, desolation, affliction, unattractive, loser, garbage and so on. She believes while those ominous practices prevail, more awareness and education is needed for the woman in the rural African countries because "[k]nowledge is power and the more educated the woman is, the better her chances are to challenge some of the omnious traditions" (duniamagazine.com). These cultural rites transform Akwenoh from a happy and wealthy woman to a sad and poor widow, who is considered a commodity that must be inherited by her brother-in-laws following their customs and traditions. The awful experiences in this space equally make her resolute as she refuses to sleep on the bare floor and to be inherited by her brother-in-law. Ma Eseka on her part becomes more nagging and aggressive towards Akwenoh to intimidate her from taking over her brother's wealth.

For both cultures in the texts, any calamity or death is usually attributed to someone with the difference that *Across the Mongolo* focuses on the collective effort of the Nweh tribe in restoring Ngwe from an insane to a sane state through the skills

of the diviners; thus depicting the importance of traditional herbs in handling mental disorder and restoring harmony in the community. Ngwe, the protagonist, is transformed positively from madness to a healthy state through the community's effort.

On the other hand, *The Widow's Might* depicts widowhood in a patriarchal society and how traditional beliefs can exploit and disempower women in their most grief state as well as create awareness for agency and emancipation. The women in the community unite strongly to enforce the burial rites on Akwenoh, the main character, which impact negatively on her.

4. The political Space in *Across the Mongolo*

The contested spaces in *Across the Mongolo* are the distinct Federal Republics of Kama and Ngola which are later on united into a bilingual state known as the Republic of Kamangola. Kama is occupied by the minority Anglophone speaking citizens, which is characterized by order and dignity, while Ngola is occupied by the majority Francophone speaking citizens which is portrayed as corrupt, disorderly, with filthy environments. The central symbol is "the Mongolo," a variant of the "River Mungo" that physically and metaphorically separates "Kama" the Anglophone Federal State from "Ngola" the Francophone State and thus, the West from the East Cameroon as Ngwe recounts from his history lesson. Cultural Materialism, like New Historicism, is interested in recovering lost histories and in exploring mechanisms of repression. Greenblatt holds that

> Literary criticism has a familiar set of terms for the relationship between a work of art and the historical events to which it refers: we speak of allusion, symbolization, allegorization, representation, and above all mimesis. Each of these terms has a rich history and is virtually indispensable. (*The New Historicism* 1989, 11)

Through the journey motif, the theme of political repression, identity quest, awareness, and resistance are explored. It is in the course of travelling from Kama to Ngola that Ngwe and other passengers are cruelly treated in Ngola: His observation and personal experience made him realize his identity was totally different from that of his Francophone peers in Ngola who were privileged over him. His experiences in the bus and in the University of Besaadi play a vital role in his character development and transformation. The River Mongolo demarcates the two separate states, while the Republic of Ngola epitomises the political space wrought with marginalisation of the minority group based on their cultural differences.

Robert T. Tally Jr. (2017) states, setting is a key feature of almost all stories as events take place in a given space and "distinctive locales, regions, landscapes, or other pertinent geographical features are often crucial to the meaning and the effectiveness of literary works" (1). He explains that many literary works are complemented with physical or metaphysical maps which are intended to guide the reader through the story world or geography of the text.

When Ngwe and the bus passengers cross the River Mongolo, "the Great River, the boundary between the English colony of Kama and the French colony of Ngola, the two federated states that gave birth to the Federal Republic of Kamangola" (37), he hears harsh blasts whistles "Pirrrr! Pirrrr!" that the sudden stop and the thought of the marquis terrorism came into his mind making him "confused, dizzy, and tense"(38) as he unconsciously says a prayer before passing out" and it became blank and unloving until an impudent voice at the window where he was sitting brought him back to consciousness as he uttered, "Piece! identite ! impot!" while the driver added, "wuna shu wuna book" (38). Three gendarmes with red berets came and one of them drags a man of sixty years out of the bus and orders him to seat on the ground, "Assois-toi la bas, vieux babouin!" while "slapping the old man on the face" because the picture on his identity card was molded and invisible (38). As Ngwe comes out of the car to stretch himself and take a closer look at the River Mongolo he studied in the civics and history classes of MM Mbuntsop in Wisdom College, he observed "the bridge was a master piece of metal engineering. It looked like the giant sample of the manacles and the shackles around the neck of slaves that were pulled by the slave master such as [he] had seen in pictures in History books" (39). This imagery of the Trans-Atlantic Slavery is a foreshadowing of his experience in Besaadi based on his linguistic and cultural differences.

Hardly had Ngwe finished contemplating when a hand gripped him fiercely on the collar of his shirt ordering, "impot!" when Ngwe explains, "I don't understand you sir" the gendarme officer repeats, "je dis bien, impot!" As if not enough "He gripped [his] collars so tight that [he] could not breath freely" (40). He was then dragged towards the bus and asked to sit on his buttocks with numerous slaps and kicks. The other passenger told Ngwe in pidgin he was accused of escaping control because he had no tax. When he tried to explain himself in English, the other officers fell on him hitting, cursing, and forcing him to the ground on his buttocks. When he finally presents his school and identity cards, he is accused "un fraudeur! Un Awaraien" and kicked again because the order of his names did not tie in the two cards. He is advised by the passengers to give them two thousand francs which he did not have. When the officers saw that many other buses were passing and escaping, they released Ngwe and the old man.

The Spatial Theory often investigates the connections between space and power and how these spaces are controlled, contested, or marginalised and their effects on characters' identities, freedom, and social interactions. The spaces that characters inhabit, move through, or are excluded from, profoundly influence their sense of self, their relationships, and their development.

After the hostile treatment of the Anglophone passengers in Besaadi, one of the passengers consents to the driver's accusation of the French *gendarmes* as unjust and corrupt when he states, '"It was a tricky thing, that thing called plebiscite . . . . It could never have been the will of the people. It was a commodity transaction between the colonial masters"' (41). After a pause, the passenger regretted, "O my God, how we have been tricked again into unification!"(42)

Allusions carry textual traces of the past which help in the understanding of fictional artefacts. The passengers make reference to the Plebiscite of 1961 in the Southern Cameroons, a former protectorate of Britain, organised by the United Nations to determine its future in which two options were given them to either achieve independence by joining the Independent

Federation of Nigeria or achieve independence by joining the Independent Republic of Cameroon formerly refered to as French Cameroun. However, the third option of full independence as a separate state was not offered as the Southern Cameroonian voted to join the Independent Republic of Cameroon.

According to Kashim Ibrahim Tala (1986), the former Southern Cameroons, which was administered as part of Nigeria, decided in a United Nations supervised plebiscite on 11th February 1961 to reunify with the Republic of Cameroon on 1st October 1961giving birth to the Federal Republic of Cameroooon with the West and East Cameroons having equal status. The country later on changed its status again during the Referendum of 20th May 1972 and became the United Republic of Cameroon (181). The merging of the two Federated States is probably what the passenger is lamenting on when he states, "O my God, how we have been tricked again into unification!"(42) The nation further underwent another change of status from the United Republic of Cameroon to the Republic of Cameroon in 1984 under the leadership of President Paul Biya, giving no trace of the former existence of the two federated states that came together. This to the passengers was a ploy to completely wipe out all traces of the Anglosaxon culture in the Republic of Kamangola and get them assimilated into the Francophone way of life.

In "The History of the Anecdote: Fiction and Fiction" (1989), Joel Fineman defines the anecdote "as the narration of a singular event, in the literary form or genre that uniquely refers to the real" (56). The unification of The Federal Republic of Kama to the Federal Republic of Ngola in the text shares much affinity with the unification of Southern Cameroons to the Republic of Cameroon. The incompatibility in the union is portrayed by the apt use of proverbs by one of the passengers when he questions how "water and oil could sit in the same calabash hand in hand without separation from each other" or how the scorpion and viper could parade on the same floor without exchanging jets of venom. He concludes that the union "was a tricky thing but only time could tell" (42). The author makes use of a foreshadowing device where the Anglophones in Ngola become aware of their untold marginalisation and launch a revolt and a movement for a change which also foreshadows the current unrest in the former West Cameroon.

The Anglophones in Kamangola are treated with contempt by the Francophones in Kamangola on the basis of their culture. In the lone Bilingual University of Besaadi, Dr Amboh, the Anglophone lecturer, has to defend his Ph.D again before he can be fully absorbed into the lone state bilingual university in Kamangola. In the same way, Shirila's father resigns from the public service because he is deprived of promotion as an Anglophone, while younger Francophone colleagues are always placed as bosses.

When the students riot against the non-payment of their scholarship, the policemen arrests some students and Ngwe is more tortured than the others based on his cultural background. Mimicry involves a slavish imitation of the culture of the superior on the other considered as inferior. Most of the torture and dictatorship of neo-colonialists governance is mimicry of the culture of the colonizers. Unlike hybridity, mimicry does not promote positivity in the mixture of cultures.

When Ngwe begins registration and lectures in Besaadi, he is despised and pushed to the fringes by the Francophones because of his linguistic difference. The Faculty officer barks at Ngwe and flings his document at him when he cannot understand the French language ordering him to leave his office because Anglophones cause boredom: "'Les Anglos aiment toujours les annouilles. Sort, monsieur"' (60). The other Francophone mates in the same process laugh and mock at him: "'Pauvre Anglo! Anglo for kromba. Tu ne pouvez pas rester chez vous a kromba, Anglo" (60)? He is questioned why he could not remain in the English Speaking town of Kumba, rather than be a nuisance to them. Ngwe goes on his knees and pleads before the officer could look at his file.

Similarly, "none of the Francophone lecturers seemed to have an idea in English. They stressed that all answers had to be in French and not English" (64). Ngwe feared asking questions in English in class, until when he dared get some notion in constitutional law that he did not understand. The rest of the lecture hall broke into a tremour of booing and jeering: *"'*Anglo!' 'Anglofou!''Anglobête!'" (64), while some twisted papers and objects and threw at him. Ngwe stood dumbfounded, as though the ritual of disorder had hypnotized and transformed him into a worthless object and he questioned himself if he had no right to express himself in one of the two official languages in a bilingual country (65). Ngwe is alienated in his own country because of his cultural background. The fact that Ngwe is denied equal opportunities by his francophone counterparts is oppressive and disdainful. Ngwe's language places him in a disadvantaged position in a supposed bilingual nation. Ngwa's awful experiences affect his academic performance and potentials of becoming a future Head of State, another Babajaro of his time.

For Blossom Fondo in "Minority Identity and the Question of Social Failure in John N. Nkengasong's *Across the Mongolo*", Ngwe's identity as Anglophone "singles him out for the worst forms of marginalization such as social exclusion, and dehumanization. He is ascribed an inferior citizenship which deprives him of the same right as his Francophone Kamangolan counterpart" (139-40). Ngwe's minority status serves as a platform for his humiliation by the Francophone majority, and instead of one's identity serving as a means of identification and self definition, what is witnessed here, "is that one's identity becomes an excuse for marginalization, for othering and ultimately defining him or her as an unwanted outsider who cannot--must not--be treated with equal consideration" (135).

Unlike New Historicism which concentrates on those at the top of the social hierarchy, Cultural Materialism concentrates on those at the bottom of the social hierarchy, such as women, and minority groups. The1961 Plebiscite and the 1972 Referendum discussed by the Anglophone passengers in the bus as schemes organized to destroy the minority Anglophones in Kamangola are literary events that match some historical events in the history of the Anglophone Speaking Cameroonians. New Historicism gives equal attention to the text and its context in the interpretation of works.

In the analysis of the history of the Southern Cameroon by the Anglophone Bishops to President Paul Biya, Bishop Cornelius Fontem Esau et al., provided some of the grievances that have led to The Anglophone Problem. For them, the Plebiscite of 17-

21st July 1961, as opposed to the 11th February 1961 as stated by some scholars, agreed broadly what the 'marriage' between the two Cameroons was going to look like. The Yaounde tripartite conference of 2nd -7th August 1961 put this agreement in legal form, but the draft 1961 constitution was never presented to the Southern Cameroons House of Chiefs (SCHC) and the Southern Cameroons House of Assembly (SCHA) for deliberation and approval as should have been the case.

They argued further, that the letter was signed by Ahmadou Ahidjo on the 1st of September, 1961 as President of the Republic of Cameroon when the Federal Republic of Cameroon had not yet come into existence. However, the two territories came together as a Federation of East Cameroon and West Cameroon as stipulated in Article 1-1 of the 1961 Constitution.

Power, for Foucault, is not so much conceived in terms of possession, but in terms of strategies put in place to dominate others. Stephen Greenblatt (1994) in "The Improvisation of Power" accords with Foucault's notion when he affirms that power do not lie in a king himself, or his army, but on the theory put in place. Some of the theories included an epistemic erasure of the Anglophone system of education and cultural values from Kama accompanied by assimilation into the Ngola way of life.

This is evident as Ngwe recounts that all his "lecturers were Francophones except Dr Amboh who in spite of his rich academic background in legal matters was never given a main course and so he could never have been of any influence on the Francophones" (64). Dr Amboh regretted that the country did not use him effectively because he was English speaking. He told Ngwe and his Anglophone brothers, that "since it was government policy to eliminate the Anglophone culture in the country using the university as one of its weapons, [they] had no choice but to give in to complete assimilation into the francophone culture" (64). Dr Amboh's academic credentials seem not to be of any value to the administration of the university that is interested most in his assimilation. Bernard Fonlon asserts colonialism is essentially a violent project because it repressed where it should have fostered (qtd. in Nyamnjoh, 5). The Anglophone Kamangolans are repressed by their Francophone counterparts in their scheme to completely erase their cultural instead of embracing it and getting enriched by a second culture.

Motivated by the conversation with his lecturers and his awful experiences, Ngwe through the formation of a Young Anglophone Movement emphatically informs the Anglophone Youths:

> We had the right to be full citizens and not second-class citizens, to be full Ministers and Directors and not second-class Ministers and Directors. We needed Anglo-Saxon Universities. We had to return to the federal structure as instituted by the United Nations whereby by [sic] the Republic of Kamangola was considered an independent bilingual nation with two independent states, one English and the other French. Anything short of these values, we were going to adopt the zero option. (143)

After the riot, Ngwe and his peers are arrested, cruelly treated and imprisoned. The torture is so inhuman that Ngwe goes insane.

Ngwe, a once intelligent student who did all his primary, secondary and high school studies in the English State of Kama, subsequently finds himself in the lone Bilingual University of Besaadi in the Francophone State of Ngola, where the only medium of expression is French. Ngwa and his friends from Kama spend more than six years in the university without graduating because of the injustices and marginalization of his minority group. He therefore undergoes a character change from a bright to a less bright student in academics, and from a docile to a warrior personality in his determination to liberate his minority group from bondage in Besaadi.

According to Foucault (1995), power does not lie in subjects, but circulates through institutions such as schools, prisons, hospitals, and the military through strategies put in place to establish and maintain order. Ngwe's resistance for Paul Patron is a form of power that presupposes a kind of internal division within the self which Nietzsche saw as resulting from the human will to power turned back against its subject. The acts of resistance are geared towards a change that is meant to improve the condition of the victim or victims. For Ngiewih Charles Teke (2016), "every marginal space is a centre in its own right and every centre can be marginalized, triggered by its own self-undoing portraiture" (Perspectives on Marginality 64).

5. The Political Space in *The Widow's Might*

As regards the political space in *The Widow's Might*, much is centered on party politics between the ruling party and the opposition as well as an internal fight within members of the same party. Politicians are described as always planning strategies and counter strategies especially if they had to wield power and continue to wield it till the end of time. The narrator posits that the Social Democratic Party (SDP) was forcefully launched in Bakomba, in spite of government troops that were sent to prevent the launching. They were outmaneuvered by the new party's leaders. Power is deconstructed from below as the new party leaders resist their oppression by creating an oppositional party against the wish of the ruling party in Bakomba Town.

Politicians like Honourable Mbutuku are not only insensitive to others' needs, but engage in the elimination of their rivals. Barrister Same Same, his political rival, is assassinated by Mbutuku in order to remain in power. Power can take a variety of forms as a person's power can be shown in the social order through their status, in the economic order through their class, and in the political order through their party. The Member of Parliament uses his status as the chairman of the Popular Democratic Party (PDP) to victimize his opponents. He is noted for rigging elections and molesting those who oppose the central ruling party.

Oscar C. Labang (2014), posits Nkengasong from the higher realm of the novel "exposes from a historical realist position the tricks inherent in the political scene in Cameroon" (117). Through a flashback technique, Akwenoh recounts how the Honourable Mbutuku "was an agent in charge of clandestinely stuffing ballot boxes with his party's ballot papers and removing those of the opposition" (45) during the Presidential elections in Bakomba.

When this is discovered by the Social Democratic Party (SDP) "an angry mob went in hot pursuit of him. He fled for his life. He escaped death by miracle" (45). Besides, his wife recalls how "in some elections he worked with the Senior Divisional Officer in altering results by filling different result sheets and signing for the polling officers" (45) as he was very good at imitating signatures.

When the top officials in town organised, caught, tortured and detained prominent members of the opposition party in the palace of the Nfon of Bakomba, "her husband was one of those commissioned to write the Popular Democratic Party initials on the backs of their victims with burning rubber" (47).

Besides, anyone who spoke ill of the ruling party was caught and tortured by party stalwarts led by her husband and others.

When Akwenoh is afraid the opposition might attack her famiy, she is assured not to be afraid of any harm "because the party had the law in its hands (48). In "Discipline and Punish" (1995), Foucault delineates the strategies used to maintain order in institutions such as the army and school through the striking of signals for a particular number of times which in themselves embodied specific meanings and directives (166). The ban on the Bakomba people not to speak ill of the ruling party and the incarcerations are all strategies put in place by the ruling party to maintain order. Power is not possessed by an individual or party, but conceived as techniques or strategies put in place that conditions the way people think, speak, or act in society. Unlike Max Weber and Karl Marx who perceive power from the perspective of a possession owned and imposed on others (Chiang, 2015), Foucault sees power as a set of relations and strategies dispersed throughout the society and enacted at every moment of interaction.

The tortures received by the SDP members take place in the early nineties when the Socialist Democratic Party was forcefully launched in Bamankon. The political events in the text co-relate the political background in Cameroon, where the Social Democratic Front (SDF) was forcefully launched in Mankon-Bamenda on May 26, 1990 followed by some political upheavals. Some events in the texts therefore correlate the historical context of the novel.

Akwenoh is traumatized when she suddenly finds her husband dead just when his appointment as minister is awaited. She loses all her possession before the burial of her husband and becomes more depressed with her incapacity to handle the funeral given that some of the financial support she receives is used to refund Mbutuku's unpaid debts. Her dream as an influential wife of the minister is thus deferred.

She is equally shocked when she learns Mbutuku failed to purchase an oil mill for his bossom friend, Mutase Wutoke, after Mutase had credited his account with 45 million francs during his parliamentary campaigns. Her husband had never mentioned the engagement with Mutase to her. This made her understand Mutase's cold behaviour towards her.

Mbutuku "lived in affluence while the people were deprived of the basic needs like water, electricity, good roads, etc" (18-19). The people of Bakomba were immersed in eternal suffering because of the selfishness of their politicians. To them, it was the politics of their bellies that was of interest and not politics that catered for common interest (18). The sudden death of the Member of Parliament comes as a result of his misuse of power, corrupt practices and marginalisation of the less privileged.

The author in *The Widow's Might* equally makes references to the 1961 Plebiscite and the 1972 Referendum as mentioned in *Across the Mongolo*. These historical allusions carry textual traces of the past which help in the understanding of fictional artefacts. Unlike *Across the Mongolo* that focuses on the maltreatment and assimilation of the minority Anglophones in Kamangola, *The Widow's Might* centers on party politics where politicians of the PDP ruling party like Honorable Makata Mbutuku rigs elections and eliminates the lives of other politicians in a bid to maintain their positions in the government.

Besides party politics in Bakomba, some minority immigrant groups are either alienated, rejected, or excluded from enjoying the economic resources in Bakomba. The intellectual and political elites such as Mbutuku had once championed a crusade against the 'Graffi' and the 'Bami settlers' who controlled all aspects of life in Bakomba. He called them the 'come-no-go' and showed strong bitterness over the fact that the sons of the soil were relegated to the background while foreigners prospered. The elites did everything to send the hardworking settlers away so that sons of the soil could explore their resources.

The first and third tenets of New Historicism as expressed by Aram Veeser (1994) hold that every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices and literary and non-literary texts share much similarity. The hatred for the 'Graffi', the 'Bami settlers' and the perjorative term 'come-no-go' may not be unconnected with the South Westerners hatred for the settlers from the Western and North West Regions of Cameroon who immigrated to work in the plantations in the South West Region and have no intention of returning to their regions of origin. The discrimination of the 'Come-no-Goes' in Bakomba could be said to parallel those of the Anglophones in the Republic of Kamangola. Cultural materialism emphasizes the subtle circulation of power through cultural practices and discourses, and literature as a site where power dynamics are negotiated, reinforced, or sometimes subverted.

6. Conclusion

The study set out to show the relationship between spaces and power and their role in character formation and transformation through ascribed spaces such as the cultural and political spaces from the selected texts. The Spatial Literary Theory, New Historicism and Cultural Materialism were employed as theoretical frameworks while Foucault's notion on the free circulation of power in institutions and structures such as the schools, prisons, and political parties was used. The comparative approach analysed each work separately in relation to the dominant factor. It was discovered, that the encounter between the characters and their environment shaped their personalities and that power is not a possession as often conceived, but strategies put in place to regulate, and maintain order in society.

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