



Language, Ideology and the Politics of Belonging: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Nkemngong Nkengasong's *Across the Mongolo* and Alobwed'Epie's *The Death Certificate*

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Abstract: Cameroon's official bilingualism, enshrined in the constitutions of 1961 and 1996, formally promises parity between English and French and, by extension, between Anglophone and Francophone citizens. However, the lived reality of many Anglophone Cameroonians is marked by administrative marginalisation, linguistic discrimination and a persistent sense of non-belonging. Drawing on a corpus of 132,287 words comprising the complete texts of Nkemngong's *Across the Mongolo* and Alobwed'Epie's *The Death Certificate*, this study integrates Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model with van Dijk's (2009) socio-cognitive approach to examine three categories of discursive phenomena: asymmetrical lexical labelling, derogatory naming practices and metaphors of belonging and exclusion. The findings indicate a clear asymmetry in identity representation. In *Across the Mongolo*, "Anglophone" occurs 39 times, while "Francophone" appears 10 times. In *The Death Certificate*, "Anglophone" is absent, replaced by a provincial binary in which the "First Province" encodes belonging as a form of tribal entitlement. Derogatory forms such as "Anglo", "Anglobete" and "vieux babouin" construct Anglophone subjects as socially and cognitively diminished. At the same time, metaphors such as the River Mongolo, figured as "manacles and shackles around the necks of slaves" and the umbilical cord as a marker of biological rootedness, present Anglophone belonging as both affirmed and negated within the postcolonial state. The study concludes that these novels function as counter-discourses that expose an ideological construct. They further suggest that Anglophone identity is not only marginalised within state discourse but positioned as structurally expendable, raising broader questions about recognition and political existence in the postcolonial Cameroonian state.

Keywords: Cameroon, Anglophone Identity, Politics of Belonging, Critical Discourse Analysis, Language, Ideology, *Across the Mongolo*, *The Death Certificate*.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The question of who belongs to a nation and on what terms continues to occupy a central place in

postcolonial studies, political philosophy and sociolinguistics. In multilingual postcolonial states, where colonial borders arbitrarily assembled diverse

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ethnic and linguistic groups, the politics of belonging are never settled. It is continuously negotiated, contested and renegotiated through discourse (Said, 1993; Bhabha, 1994; Mbembe, 2001). Cameroon offers a particularly instructive case. Officially bilingual in English and French, the country is home to over 270 indigenous languages, two colonial official languages, and a population of approximately 25 million people (Echu, 2004; Ngefac, 2010; Ngwa, 2021). The Anglophone minority, comprising roughly 20% of the population, has consistently articulated grievances of marginalisation, discrimination and exclusion since the 1961 reunification of the British Southern Cameroons with the French République du Cameroun (Ngoh, 1988; Fanso, 1989). As Ngefac (2010: 149) observes, “the linguistic situation of Cameroon is so complex that it defies any simplistic description”. This complexity is nowhere more acutely felt than in the lived experience of Anglophone Cameroonians who navigate a state apparatus that, in practice, is predominantly Francophone.

The Anglophone Cameroonian novel has emerged as a significant discursive site where these grievances are articulated, contested and transformed into narrative. In contexts of contested belonging, literary language does not merely reflect social realities. It also participates in shaping how authority, resistance, and identity are understood and negotiated (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2009). Within this discursive field, Nkemngong's *Across the Mongolo* (2004) and Alobwed'Epie's *The Death Certificate* (2004) stand out as illustrative texts. Both novels emerge from the Anglophone experience and are widely regarded as committed narratives that explicitly engage with the politics of belonging in postcolonial Cameroon (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 1997).

However, while the thematic concerns of these novels have received scholarly attention, the linguistic mechanisms through which they construct belonging and exclusion have not been systematically analysed. As Echu (2004: 19) points out, “the language question in Cameroon has been examined primarily from a sociolinguistic rather than a literary-discursive perspective” leaving a significant gap in our understanding of how literary language participates in the politics of belonging. It is in this light that this study sets out to investigate, first, the lexical strategies and naming practices through which Nkemngong's *Across the Mongolo* and Alobwed'Epie's *The Death Certificate* construct Anglophone identity as alien and, second, the metaphorical patterns through which these texts represent belonging and exclusion. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a particularly apt framework for this investigation, as it is explicitly concerned with the relationship between language,

ideology and social power (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2009; Wodak, 2001). The novel thus becomes a structured site of meaning production rather than a neutral artefact of storytelling. Accordingly, this study contributes to an emerging interdisciplinary dialogue between literary studies, critical linguistics and postcolonial theory. It demonstrates that Anglophone Cameroonian fiction can be read not only as narrative testimony but also as a discursive intervention in ongoing struggles over belonging, recognition and political inclusion.

2. Theoretical Framework

The relationship between language, ideology and belonging has been theorised across multiple disciplines, each contributing a distinct perspective on how discursive practices construct, maintain or challenge social identities. This study uses Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2009; Wodak, 2001) to examine how literary language constructs Anglophone identity as a site of non-belonging. Critical Discourse Analysis emerged from the recognition that language is not a neutral medium for transmitting information but a social practice that is deeply implicated in the production and reproduction of power relations (Fairclough, 1995). Fairclough's three-dimensional model integrates textual analysis (vocabulary, semantics, grammar), discursive practice (text production and consumption) and socio-cultural practice (the wider social context). This model is particularly useful for literary analysis because it insists that texts cannot be understood in isolation from the social conditions of their production and reception. As Fairclough and Wodak (1997: 258) argue, “discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned, it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people”. This suggests that literary texts do not merely reflect pre-existing social realities but actively present and shape them.

Van Dijk's (2009) socio-cognitive approach complements Fairclough's model by emphasising the cognitive mediation between discourse and society. Central to van Dijk's (ibid) framework are the concepts of *mental models* (subjective representations of events or situations) and *context models* (subjective representations of communicative situations). These concepts allow for an account of how writers and readers interpret discursive structures in terms of underlying socially shared knowledge and ideologies. This view is particularly valuable for understanding how Anglophone writers construct mental models of exclusion and how these models are shared and reproduced through literary discourse. Van Dijk (2009) also emphasises the role of *us-them polarisation* in ideological discourse, a

central concept to our analysis of the Anglophone/Francophone binary.

Wodak's (2001) discourse-historical approach adds a third dimension: the necessity of linking textual features to socio-political trajectories. Her insistence on contextual reconstruction, which situates texts within the specific historical, political, and cultural conditions of their production, resonates with this study's commitment to reading *Across the Mongolo* and *The Death Certificate* against the backdrop of postcolonial Cameroon. The Founban conference of 1961, the 1972 unitary state and the ongoing Anglophone crisis are not merely background but constitutive of the discursive field within which these novels operate.

This study integrates these three theoretical traditions into a coherent analytical framework. From Fairclough, we take the three-dimensional model of discourse (text, discursive practice, social practice). From van Dijk, we take the socio-cognitive emphasis on mental models and us-them polarisation. From Wodak, we take the insistence on contextual reconstruction. Together, these views, which constitute core elements of CDA, enable a systematic analysis of how *Across the Mongolo* and *The Death Certificate* construct Anglophone identity as a site of non-belonging and why this construction matters for understanding the politics of language in Cameroon.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Language, Ideology and the Politics of Belonging

The politics of belonging is, at its core, a politics of discourse. Said (1993, p. 78) argues that belonging is never a natural fact but a discursive achievement. Cultural narratives do not simply describe the world; they organise it, producing hierarchies of authority and exclusion. Bhabha (1994, p. 112) extends this insight through the concepts of hybridity and the "third space". Postcolonial identities, in this view, remain unsettled, shaped by negotiation rather than closure. Within the present study, this framework helps to explain Anglophone identity in Cameroon as a hybrid formation that cannot be reduced to either its colonial inheritance or its postcolonial national context. It exists in tension, not resolution. A more direct account of power in the African postcolony is offered by Mbembe (2001, p. 134), whose notion of the "aesthetics of vulgarity" captures how authority is enacted through spectacle, excess and informal networks rather than through stable institutional norms. The "First Province" construct in Alobwed'Epie's *The Death Certificate* reflects this logic with clarity. Belonging is not grounded in citizenship or rights but tied to proximity to power. The utterance, "Shit, these fellows of the First Province will ruin this country"

(Alobwed'Epie, 2004, p. 18), does more than express frustration. It reveals a structure in which recognition is unevenly distributed, while simultaneously marking the speaker's distance from that structure.

The normative implications of such exclusion are developed by Honneth (1995) and Taylor (1994). Honneth's (ibid) account of recognition shows that identity is formed through social relations across the spheres of care, rights and solidarity. Where recognition is denied, individuals experience not only exclusion but injury. Taylor (ibid) extends this argument by showing that misrecognition distorts the self-understanding of marginalised groups. Taken together, these perspectives clarify that the marginalisation of Anglophone identity is not simply linguistic or administrative but a form of structured harm that operates at both social and psychological levels. In fact, within Anglophone Cameroonian literary scholarship, several studies have begun to address these concerns. For instance, Anglophone cultural production has often developed as a response to exclusion, making literature one of several spaces through which political grievance and identity are articulated (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 1997).

Despite this progress, a clear gap remains. Much of the existing work treats language as a neutral medium, prioritizing themes and historical context over linguistic structure. This is striking given that the texts themselves foreground language as a site of struggle. The present study addresses this gap by bringing together postcolonial theory, Critical Discourse Analysis and philosophical accounts of recognition within a single analytical framework. It examines how lexical choices, naming practices and metaphorical patterns contribute to the construction of belonging and exclusion. In doing so, it treats Anglophone Cameroonian fiction not as a passive reflection of political realities but as an active intervention in the ongoing negotiation of identity and power.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study examines two Anglophone Cameroonian novels published in 2004, Nkemngong's *Across the Mongolo* (hereafter AM) and Alobwed'Epie's *The Death Certificate* (hereafter TDC). These texts were purposively selected because they engage directly with themes of Anglophone marginalisation, contested belonging and postcolonial state inequality in Cameroon (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 1997). Their contemporaneous publication also allows for a controlled comparison of discursive strategies without the interference of significant diachronic variation in language use. The study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), supported by

limited quantification to reinforce interpretive claims where necessary. Close readings were conducted on both texts, with systematic attention to three categories of discursive features: lexical choices relating to identity, including the use and evaluative framing of terms such as “Anglophone,” “Francophone,” “English,” and “French”; naming practices, particularly derogatory or ideologically loaded designations such as “Anglo,” “Pauvre Anglo,” “Anglobete,” and “vieux babouin” and metaphorical constructions of belonging and exclusion, including the River Mongolo as a symbol of bondage, the First Province as a marker of political entitlement, and the umbilical cord as a figure of biological and ontological legitimacy. These metaphors are interpreted through the cognitive metaphor framework (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) as further developed within CDA by Charteris-Black (2004).

The analysis is structured according to Fairclough’s (1995) three-dimensional model. At the textual level, attention is given to lexical selection, naming strategies and metaphorical patterning. At the level of discursive practice, the texts are examined as products that draw on and reproduce dominant narratives of Anglophone marginalisation, including historical references to the Fouban constitutional negotiations, the 1972 referendum and everyday experiences of exclusion within Francophone-dominated institutions. At the level of socio-cultural practice, these discursive patterns are

situated within the broader historical and political context of postcolonial Cameroon, particularly the structural tensions that have shaped centre-periphery relations. The study is limited in two main respects. First, it focuses on only two novels published in 2004. It therefore does not account for the wider diachronic development of Anglophone Cameroonian fiction, including recent literary responses to the post-2016 Anglophone crisis. Second, its exclusive focus on Anglophone texts excludes Francophone Cameroonian fiction, which could have provided an important comparative perspective on national identity and linguistic ideology. Despite these limitations, the study offers a systematic discourse-analytical account of how two canonical texts construct and contest the politics of belonging in postcolonial Cameroon.

5. Constructing Non-Belonging in *Across the Mongolo* and *The Death Certificate*

5.1 The Lexical Binary: “Anglophone” vs “Francophone”

One of the most immediate ways in which non-belonging is constructed in the two novels is through lexical selection, particularly the use or avoidance of identity labels. The distribution of terms such as “Anglophone” and “Francophone” is not neutral but reflects deeper ideological positioning within the texts. To establish this pattern empirically, the frequency of these identity labels across the two novels was recorded, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequency of Identity Labels in the Two Novels

Lexical Item	<i>Across the Mongolo</i> (AM)	<i>The Death Certificate</i> (TDC)
Anglophone	39	0
Francophone	10	0

The most striking lexical finding is the asymmetry between “Anglophone” and “Francophone” in *Across the Mongolo*. “Anglophone” occurs 39 times, while “Francophone” occurs only 10 times. In *The Death Certificate*, by contrast, neither term occurs at all. This asymmetry is not accidental; it reflects a fundamental difference in the two novels’ discursive strategies. In *Across the Mongolo*, the repeated use of the term “Anglophone” portrays Anglophone identity as visible, problematic, and in need of justification. The Anglophone is the one who must explain himself, who must navigate a world not designed for him. Consider the following passage:

Kamangola is a country with official bilingual status in English and French, in which both Francophones and Anglophones are supposed to have equal status. Babajoro is the proprietor of Kamangola; the man who gives life to men and women and children and takes it away without informing them. I fear that man called Babajoro. He is a killer. (Nkemngong, 2004, p. 67)

Here, the constitutional promise of equality, “both the Francophones and the Anglophones are supposed to have equal status,” is immediately juxtaposed with the reality of authoritarian power, “Babajoro is the proprietor”. The Anglophone is the one who must remind himself and others of this promise precisely because it is routinely violated.

The absence of “Anglophone” and “Francophone” in *The Death Certificate* is equally significant. Alobwed’Epie replaces the linguistic binary with a provincial binary: “First Province” versus the “9th and 10th Provinces”. This shift reflects a different articulation of the politics of belonging. In *The Death Certificate*, belonging is not primarily about language but about geography, tribe and proximity to power. The Anglophone is subsumed into the broader category of the provincial outsider. As one character remarks, “Shit, these fellows of the First Province will ruin this country. I came up here to have pepper soup at Emilienne’s, but when I got into the bar, I could not believe my eyes”

(Alobwed’Epie 18). The speaker’s provincial origin (the 9th or 10th Province) is the source of his exclusion, not his language per se.

5.2 Language as a Gatekeeper: “English” and “French”

Beyond identity labels, language itself serves as a critical mechanism for regulating belonging. The relative presence of “English” and “French” in the two novels provides insight into how linguistic hierarchies are constructed and maintained. To clarify this distribution, the occurrences of both languages were quantified, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Frequency of Language References

Language	<i>Across the Mongolo</i> (AM)	<i>The Death Certificate</i> (TDC)
English	30	1
French	40	52

The distribution of “English” and “French” across the two novels further illuminates the politics of belonging. “English” occurs 30 times in AM but only once in TDC. “French” occurs 40 times in AM and 52 times in TDC. French’s numerical dominance reflects its discursive dominance: French is the language of power, administration and the military. In AM, the most vivid representation of language as a gatekeeper occurs in the prefecture scene, where Ngwe attempts to complete his registration documents:

‘Que-ce que tu as amene de chez vous, Anglo?’ asked the man. I started a long story in English about the difficulties I faced on the road, travelling from Attah through Mbuerra and Lewola to Besaadi. I told him how my money was stolen on the train. ‘Parle en francaise, mon type. Je comprend pas ton patois là, he said getting unnerved—... ‘Non, non, non. Continue en Anglais. Non, non! Ne dit plus riens, Anglo’ he said. The whole office burst into a mocking, choking laughter. (Nkemngong, 2004, p. 57f)

This passage performs multiple ideological operations simultaneously. First, it establishes English as illegitimate in official spaces: Ngwe is told to speak French, then told to stop speaking and then mocked for his attempts. Second, it introduces “Anglo” as a derogatory naming practice, a clipped form of “Anglophone” that functions as an insult.

Third, it demonstrates the power of the Francophone official to control the interaction, to grant or withhold the right to speak. The laughter of the office is the laughter of the in-group at the out-group’s failed attempt to belong.

In TDC, the one occurrence of “English” is similarly telling. A character remarks, “It is through French banking machinery and French law that I may be deprived of my money” (Alobwed’Epie, 2004, p. 231). English is absent from this world because it is irrelevant to the exercise of power. The institutions that matter, like the banks, the courts and the military, operate in French. To be Anglophone in this context tends to be excluded from the institutional apparatus of belonging.

5.3 Naming as Ideology: “Anglo”, “Pauvre Anglo”, “Anglobete”, “Vieux Babouin”

Naming constitutes one of the most powerful discursive mechanisms through which belonging and exclusion are constructed. The recurrence of specific derogatory labels in *Across the Mongolo* suggests that naming is not incidental but systematic, and serves as a means of encoding ideological positions about Anglophone identity.

To clarify the pattern and semantic range of these naming practices, the principal derogatory terms identified in the text are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Distribution of Derogatory Naming Practices across the Mongolo

Term	Frequency	Semantic Value
Anglo	High	Neutral → derogatory (contextual)
Anglofou	Occasional	Madness/irrationality
Anglobete	Occasional	Stupidity / cognitive inferiority
Pauvre Anglo	Rare	Pity/inferiority
Vieux babouin	Rare	Animalisation/dehumanisation

Naming practices are among the most powerful discursive strategies for constructing belonging and exclusion. Giving someone a name positions them within a social hierarchy. In AM, the

derogatory naming of Anglophones is systematic and pervasive. The most common derogatory name is “Anglo”, a clipped form of “Anglophone”. It occurs repeatedly in contexts of humiliation:

As I passed through the crowd of students crammed at the door, they shouted, 'Anglo! Anglo!' and fanned me with their file jackets. (Nkemngong, 2004, p. 58)

The lecture hall broke into a tremor of booing and jeering 'Anglo!' 'Anglofou!' 'Anglobete!' (Nkemngong, 2004, p. 72)

The suffixes in “Anglofou” (Anglo-fool) and “Anglobete” (Anglo-stupid) explicitly construct Anglophones as cognitively deficient. This is not merely name-calling. It is an ideological operation that naturalises Anglophone inferiority. If Anglophones are stupid, then their exclusion from positions of power is not discrimination but common sense.

In one particularly striking passage, a gendarme addresses an elderly Anglophone man as “vieux babouin” (old baboon):

'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. (Nkemngong, 2004, p. 65)

The animal metaphor “baboon” dehumanises the old man, as it reduces him to an animal that must be made to obey through violence. The narrator’s ironic commentary, “the old man’s buttocks reasoned faster,” shows the absurdity and cruelty of the situation. The old man is structurally displaced. He is not even fully human in the eyes of the gendarme. Beyond the novel, some Francophones generally use the word “Bamenda” to mean stupid. To be from Bamenda is to be stupid. The politics of belonging could not be more directly articulated: Anglophones do not belong because they are, by definition, deficient.

5.4 Metaphors of Belonging as Bondage

Metaphors provide a deeper level of discursive organisation by translating abstract relations of power and belonging into concrete, experiential imagery. In *Across the Mongolo* and *The Death Certificate*, recurring metaphors structure the way belonging is conceptualised, often presenting it as coercive, unequal, or fundamentally impossible.

To synthesise these metaphorical patterns across the two novels, the major metaphors of belonging are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Major Metaphors of Belonging across the Two Novels

Metaphor	Novel	Conceptual Meaning
River Mongolo	AM	Belonging as bondage
Bridge (chains)	AM	Forced unity/captivity
First Province	TDC	Illegitimate concentration of power
Umbilical cord	AM	Biological/ancestral belonging

Metaphors are among the most powerful discursive devices for naturalizing ideological positions (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Charteris-Black, 2004). In AM, the central metaphor of belonging is the River Mongolo, which separates Anglophone Kama from Francophone Ngola. The bridge that crosses the river is described in terms that evoke slavery:

The bridge was a masterpiece of metal engineering. It looked like the giant sample of the manacles and the shackles around the necks of slaves that were pulled by the slave masters, such as I had seen in pictures in History books. The bridge seemed to chain two pieces of land, the piece on which my feet stood pulling the other into the ocean, into some eternal infernal destination one never could tell. (Nkemngong, 2004, p. 42–43)

The metaphor of the bridge as “manacles and shackles” transforms the infrastructure of connection into an instrument of bondage. The two pieces of land are not united; one is “pulling the other into the

ocean, into some eternal infernal destination”. Belonging, in this metaphor, is not freedom but captivity. The same passage evokes the image of slavery directly: “dark, bare-breasted mothers, hungry children and men trailing miserably and unconditionally in a queue, the staff stubborn shackles tagged with iron collars rattling on their necks.” The Anglophone experience of belonging is compared to the transatlantic slave trade, a forced transportation into bondage from which there is no return.

The plebiscite that led to reunification is also compared to a “commodity transaction between the colonial masters” (Nkemngong, 2004, p. 41). One passenger asks: “Who said the porcupine and cutting grass could share the same hole without eating up each other; that the scorpion and viper could parade on the same floor without exchanging jets of venom; that water and oil could sit in the same calabash hand in hand without separating from each other?” (Nkemngong, 2004, p. 41-42). Metaphors like

porcupine and cutting grass, scorpion and viper, water and oil all present the union as unnatural and destined for conflict. Belonging, in this view, is not possible. The two communities are fundamentally incompatible.

5.5 The “First Province” as a Metaphor for Illegitimate Belonging

In *The Death Certificate*, the politics of belonging is articulated less through language and more through spatial and political categorisation. The construct of the “First Province” operates as a central organising metaphor that encapsulates the unequal distribution of power within the state. The Republic of Ewawa is divided into ten provinces, but only the First Province matters. All key government officials, such as ministers, directors general, and security chiefs, come from the First Province. The other provinces, particularly the 9th and 10th (which represent Anglophone Cameroon), are excluded from power. This metaphor of the “First Province” performs several ideological operations. First, it naturalises the concentration of power because, if the First Province has always been first, then its dominance is not a historical accident but a natural hierarchy. Second, it makes exclusion invisible: the problem is not that Anglophones are discriminated against but that they happen to belong to the 9th and 10th Provinces. Third, it fragments opposition: citizens of the 2nd through 8th Provinces are also excluded, but they are not unified with those of the 9th and 10th Provinces.

In Alobwed’Epie’s novel, the state does not unify the nation but instead becomes an instrument of provincial exclusion, replacing national belonging with a coercive, origin-based identity. This dynamic is made explicit when the Minister of Territorial Administration, acting through his official title, not his personal name, uses state resources to summon all sons and daughters of the First Province to a tribal gathering at the bereaved family’s compound.

The Honourable Minister of Territorial Administration Requests all sons and daughters of the First Province to assemble in the compound of the bereaved family at 7.30 p.m. in Dasios, near the factory. (Alobwed’Epie, 2004, p. 16)

The public announcement transforms the state’s authority into a tool for provincial demarcation. This signals that recognition and protection flow not only from citizenship but also from regional origin. Consequently, those who fall outside the dominant provinces find themselves not merely marginalised but actively endangered.

Furthermore, the narrator, Mula (from the Tenth Province), and his friend Nchinda (from the

Ninth Province) are acutely aware of their exclusion, as he points out that:

Only Mula and myself were people of the Tenth and Ninth Provinces respectively. The rest of the people were of the First and Second Provinces. Moreover, any unkind word against the deceased or any person of their Provinces could kindle a feud. (Alobwed’Epie, 2004, p. 93-94)

The threat of violence immediately shadows their numerical isolation, as Nchinda observes that “any unkind word against the deceased or any person of their Provinces could kindle a feud” (94). This fear of retaliation is the ultimate sanction and points to the fact that belonging is enforced not through persuasion or shared values but through the implicit threat of force. Nchinda’s advice to Mula captures the gravity of their position: “My father once told me never to shoot an elephant on the forehead. He said if I did, the beast would kill me. So let us be careful” (94). The elephant metaphor encodes the First Province as a powerful, dangerous animal that cannot be confronted directly, as any challenge could be lethal. Thus, the novel argues that when the state aligns itself with provincial identity and backs that alignment with the threat of violence, belonging becomes a coercive hierarchy in which outsiders survive only through strategic silence and fear.

5.6 The Umbilical Cord Metaphor: Belonging as Biological Essentialism

While institutional mechanisms in *The Death Certificate* enforce belonging through the implicit and explicit threat of violence, *Across the Mongolo* relocates the question of belonging from the political sphere to the ontological. The umbilical cord metaphor, which recurs with notable insistence, frames belonging as an inherited and embodied condition rather than a legal or administrative status (Nkemngong, p. 4). In this framework, identity is not assigned by the state but inscribed at birth, rooted in the soil where one’s cord is buried. Ngwe’s mother articulates this ontology in stark terms when she cautions him about the world beyond Kama:

Child, the place you are going to work is far, in another country. You are going to meet different people whose umbilical cords are not buried in this land. ... Whoever heard about their umbilical cords? Their umbilical cords were lost in the earth, or swine have eaten them, leaving them soulless (4).

The excerpt constructs a form of biological essentialism in which moral capacity is tied to rootedness. Those whose cords are not buried are described as “soulless”, a term that strips them of ethical restraint and situates them outside the moral community. Within a Critical Discourse Analysis

framework, this operates at multiple levels. At the textual level, the repetition of “umbilical cord” establishes semantic cohesion and reinforces the central metaphor. At the level of discursive practice, the narrative draws on indigenous epistemology to produce a counter-discourse to state-centred definitions of belonging. At the socio-cultural level, it questions the legitimacy of a postcolonial order that disconnects power from space.

The reference to swine intensifies the metaphor through an image of desecration. It does not merely suggest loss but violation, an active severing of the bond between person and land. In line with van Dijk’s account of ideological polarisation, this hyperbolic imagery sharpens the contrast between the rooted self and the rootless other. The latter is not simply displaced but corrupted, and this corruption is linked directly to the exercise of tyranny. As the text makes clear, those whose cords are lost are “soulless, and their souls lost to the life of tyranny and intimidation of honest men” (Nkemngong, p. 4). The moral order is thus inverted. Power resides with those who lack the very grounding that would make power accountable.

However, Ngwe’s rootedness does not translate into agency. His attachment to Kama offers neither protection nor leverage. His assertion, “I have never done anyone any harm” (67), positions him within a discourse of innocence that aligns the Anglophone subject with victimhood rather than action. The umbilical cord anchors him, but it does not equip him. It marks him as one who belongs, as well as one who can be harmed without consequence. This tension is reinforced by the spatial language that surrounds the notion of “country” in the novel. The term is frequently modified by expressions such as “far away,” “strange”, and “another”, which create a persistent sense of distance and estrangement. The country is never fully inhabited as home. Instead, it appears as a site one must enter, often reluctantly, in pursuit of education or livelihood. Kama, the place of authentic belonging, lacks the institutions that confer opportunity. The Anglophone subject is therefore compelled to leave the soil that affirms his identity and move into spaces where that identity carries no weight.

The distribution of key lexical items in the thesis supports this reading. The term “Anglophone” appears thirty-nine times in *Across the Mongolo* but is absent from *The Death Certificate*. In the former, the Anglophone is named precisely because he is out of place, marked by his displacement. In the latter, he dissolves into an undifferentiated provincial mass. Similarly, the prominence of “police” in *The Death Certificate* shows the role of state apparatuses in enforcing belonging through intimidation, while its

relative absence in *Across the Mongolo* shifts attention to deeper, more enduring structures of exclusion. In this sense, *Across the Mongolo* extends the argument beyond the politics of provincial hierarchy. It suggests that the crisis of belonging is not only institutional but ontological. The Anglophone subject is constituted as someone whose deepest attachment, though real and enduring, remains irrelevant to the structures that organise power. The result is a form of internalised marginality. One belongs, but that belonging does not count. One’s cord is buried in the soil, but authority rests with those whose cords, in the novel’s stark imagery, have been lost or desecrated.

6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings presented above reveal that *across the Mongolo and the Death Certificate* construct, Anglophone non-belonging is expressed through three primary discursive strategies: asymmetrical lexical labelling, derogatory naming practices, and metaphors of belonging as bondage, essentialism, and the illegitimate concentration of power. From a linguistic perspective, the findings confirm and extend van Dijk’s (2009) theory of ideological polarisation. The asymmetry between “Anglophone” (39 occurrences) and “Francophone” (10 occurrences) exemplifies the “ideological square”: the in-group (Francophones) is de-emphasised as the unmarked norm. At the same time, the out-group (Anglophones) is emphasised, marked and negatively evaluated. This finding engages with Tajfel’s (1974) social identity theory, which demonstrates that naming a group positions it within a hierarchy of value. The derogatory names in AM, such as “Anglo”, “Anglofou”, “Anglobete”, “vieux babouin”, are not mere insults but performative acts that construct Anglophone identity as deficient. When a gendarme calls an elderly man “vieux babouin” and the man’s “buttocks reasoned faster and found their seat on the ground” (Nkemngong, p. 65), we witness the material effect of discursive violence. The distribution of “English” (30 times in AM, once in TDC) and “French” (40 times in AM, 52 in TDC) reflects the actual language hierarchy of Cameroon, where French dominates administration, the military and the courts (Echu, 2004; Ngefac, 2010). The prefecture scene where Ngwe is humiliated for speaking English is not a fictional exaggeration but a realistic depiction of linguistic gatekeeping, and the fact that “French” occurs more frequently in TDC than in AM confirms that Alobwed’Epie, writing from a different region, recognises the same structure of dominance.

From a literary perspective, the novels function as counter-discourses to the official ideology of bilingualism, which promises equality between English and French but delivers hierarchy. The River

Mongolo, described as “manacles and shackles” (Nkemngong, p. 42), performs what Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002) call “abrogation and appropriation”. The postcolonial writer takes the symbols of the state and redeploys them critically. Official discourse presents reunification as a voluntary union of brothers. The novel presents it as slavery. The “First Province” construct in *The Death Certificate* performs a similar operation. Official discourse presents Cameroon as a unitary nation of equal citizens. The novel reveals a tribal oligarchy in which belonging is determined by provincial origin. The list of officials donating to Mongo Meka’s burial, all from the First Province and all occupying key positions, exposes nepotism as the hidden constitution of the state.

The analysis equally sheds light on the dynamics of recognition and misrecognition theorised by Honneth (1995) and Taylor (1994). Honneth argues that identity formation and belonging, by extension, depend on intersubjective recognition across three spheres: love (family), rights (legal/political) and solidarity (community). When recognition is denied, the result is “disrespect”, a psychological injury that can lead to social conflict. The Anglophone experience as represented in both novels is a case study in systematic misrecognition. In the sphere of rights, Anglophones are constitutionally equal but practically excluded. For instance, Ngwe cannot get a scholarship; Dr. Amboh cannot teach major courses and citizens of the 9th and 10th provinces hold no key positions. In the sphere of solidarity, Anglophones are mocked (“Anglo! Anglo!”), dehumanised (“vieux babouin”) and reduced to animals (“dead dogs”). The quest for belonging or recognition is not a luxury but a fundamental human need, as misrecognition inflicts trauma, which can even lead to psychosis in the marginalised. This is reflected in the novels by Ngwe’s mental breakdown and the drunken young man described as “Ewawa in miniature”.

The umbilical cord metaphor engages a different philosophical tradition: Heidegger’s (1927) ontology of being-in-the-world, “Dasein”, as always already thrown into a particular historical and cultural context. From an existentialist ontological perspective, to have one’s cord buried in a particular soil is to be thrown into that world. The tragedy of the Anglophone is that he is thrown into Kama but must live in Ngola, which is an alien world to him. The “First Province” construct engages Arendt’s (1973) analysis of totalitarianism, which suggests that the most extreme exclusion is not violence but the creation of a category of people who are superfluous, whose lives and deaths are of no consequence. The use of “dead dogs in the tunnel” to capture corpses rotting while Mongo Meka’s corpse is flown to Paris

for a 1.45 billion FCFA embalming reflects such superfluous beings. Their belonging is not denied; it is irrelevant. Some belong so completely that they can loot the treasury and be buried with honours. Others do not belong at all, and their corpses can rot in a tunnel.

7. CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussion, we can deduce that the politics of belonging in Anglophone Cameroonian fiction operates at multiple levels simultaneously. Linguistically, lexical polarisation marks the Anglophone as perpetually out of place. Literarily, counter-discourse exposes the official ideology of bilingualism as discursively contradicted in practice and philosophical misrecognition reveals the psychological harm of being constituted, from birth, as someone whose deepest belonging is irrelevant to the machinery of governance. The umbilical cord that anchors the Anglophone to his ancestral soil is also the cord that binds him to irrelevance and the novels’ greatest achievement is to make this tragic paradox visible. The findings reinforce the view that literary language in the Anglophone Cameroonian novel functions not merely aesthetically but politically, as a site where contested belonging is narrated and challenged. This study has demonstrated that through lexical asymmetries, derogatory naming practices and metaphors of bondage and exclusion. Nkemngong and Alobwed’Epie have not produced merely literary narratives but discursive interventions in the ongoing struggle for belonging in Cameroon. The challenge for postcolonial Cameroon remains whether such literary critique can translate into institutional recognition of Anglophone grievances. As one character in *The Death Certificate* remarks, “We have written our pain in books. But will they read?” (Alobwed’Epie, 2004, p. 289). The present study suggests that careful and informed reading, supported by Critical Discourse Analysis and an interdisciplinary approach, is a necessary first step.

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