

**RAILED RESISTANCE: MEMORY AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN
JULIUS ANGWAH'S *BEFORE OUR EYES***

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Abstract

The quest for selfhood results to internal conflicts between Webaz and Recam after the departure of the colonial masters. Memories of colonial and post-colonial rule in Julius Angwah's *Before Our Eyes* reveal the desire for patriots from different socio-cultural, linguistic and historical backgrounds to come together under the banner of a united rainbow nation to rethink a new county. Ironically, through the visions and memories displayed by different characters in the novel, the realities in Webaz and Recam make one to interrogate and problematise the nexus of the new socio-political power that is built on deception and exploitation in the post-colony. Using the Postcolonial and Psychoanalysis theories, this paper hinges on the hypothesis that the political discourse which is revealed through memory sets the rail as a new vista for both ideological and physical resistance. Through the commingling of dreams, mysticism and memory, Angwah uses *Before Our Eyes* to fictionalise and satirise an ongoing political crisis in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon through Webaz and Recam who are in full panoply for a battle to re-write their history and carve a niche for their future in contemporary geopolitics. This crisis which is not based on retribution for decades of subservience, aims at arriving at a political resolution that would celebrate difference as a force of unity within an ideal state called WebazRecam.

Key words: *memory, political discourse, vista, spirituality, rail, post-colonial, rainbow.*

Introduction

Contemporary geopolitics of the world has pushed many former colonies to revisit their histories and interrogate the socio-political and economic conditions under which the treaties of independence were signed by the heroes of liberation. It is from this light that Julius Angwah's narrative, *Before Our Eyes*, examines the terms of independence and later reunification signed by Webazian and Recamian freedom fighters. In activating a historical memory, Angwah's W'Akere Mubere Ambe who comes from a line of Webazian warriors and freedom fighters, retells the story of two independent states that decided to unite for the good of their citizens. Ironically, greed, deception and man's

inhumanity to man motivates the non-respect for such initial agreements. This creates a theatre for protest rallies, arbitrary arrests, killing and the rise of armed groups and conflicts that transform Webaz and Recam to sworn enemies. As a writer from the Anglophone region, Angwah's *Before Our Eyes* alludes to and historicises through metaphor and subtle satire, the ongoing Anglophone crises in Cameroon that has resulted to massive destruction of human lives, properties and immeasurable displacements both internally and externally for safety.

Angwah's Socio-political Setting

The post-colonial society presented in Angwah's *Before Our Eyes* is one that exhibits a deep-seated hatred for a system characterised by bribery, corruption and segregation. The political system controlled by the Recamian administration functions on tribal and party lines. The resources of the state are also unevenly shared like road infrastructure, social amenities and education. The founding fathers of the republic of Webaz did not envisage the possibility that the deed of brotherhood signed between the English republic of Webaz and the French republic of Recam was going to be a new form of neo-colonisation in the hands of their brothers from the other side. The narrator describes the political ideology behind the union at the time of its creation thus:

They had two different cultures and worldviews. By some historical calamity, they had been united on certain terms that were to be strictly respected. The most important of which was a federal status that was to allow each member to maintain their own cultures and systems, while living together like brothers. They were to meet in Yande which was originally the capital of Recam and was officially made the new capital of the federation. The new union became known as the United Federal Republic of Recam. (6)

Unfortunately, for Webaz, shortly after the union, the Recamian government changed the constitution without their consent and transformed the country to the United Republic of Recam, thereby destroying the federation. All attempts at protests from Webazians met with the might of the military with specific orders from the central government to shoot and kill. Angwah's historicity alludes to the Cameroonian reality where the English-speaking part joined French Cameroon in a union that is the cause of a political strife - one also described by Nkemngong (2012) as:

It can be concluded from the above analysis that "reunification" was a mere neo-colonial scheme, an anathema, and an affront to cultural, social,

and political justice – designed effectively to obliterate Anglophone identity in a country where Anglophone political activism and literature have immensely reshaped national thinking. (62)

In addition to the ongoing political impasse, the economic crisis that hit the new republic is more visible in Webaz than in Recam as the narrator puts it:

While there was a relatively manageable scenario in Recam with just a few persons complaining of hardship, almost everyone was complaining in Webaz. The Recamian government had consciously deprived Webaz of its economic strength even when most of the natural resources were in Webaz. All the once vibrant economic institutions, including the Webazian Central Bank and the Webazian Development Cooperation, had been shut down. In some cases, like in tourism, the Webazian museum was transferred to Yande along with all the artefacts. The plan to suppress all economic activities in Webaz was particularly glaring when the Webazian treasury was transferred to Recam. Webazians were compelled to pay their taxes in Bafleng, a border Recamian town to Webaz. This economic frustration affected every other effort to survive in Webaz. (10)

With all the taxes going back to Recam, Webaz is left undeveloped as the narrator satirises the infrastructural decay of Webaz. Moreover, the government engages in a systematic privatisation of all social amenities like water, electricity and transport companies in the country. Social dissatisfaction and hardship pushes gives rise to revolutionary tendencies which eventually become very violent and difficult to contain.

According to Angwah's narrator, the educational and health sectors are the most affected by the exploitative central government. This is evident when the father of the protagonist, Dr Johnson W' Akere, is rushed to the government hospital in Bafu, the capital of Webaz and is diagnosed with high blood pressure. The narrator describes the dehumanising images W' Akere sees when he strolls around the hospital premises in the following terms:

As W' Akere sauntered out of the hospital, his eyes captured the terrible conditions of the other patients. Some of them lay on wiry mattresses on the nasty floor. Part of the cemented floor had shattered over time. The shattered floor blended in a rare repulsiveness with the walls that looked like they had never been painted. He felt terrible for the patients and felt that the conditions of the ward did not pledge a speedy recovery to them. He wondered why all Webazian Public Hospitals, and indeed most of their infrastructure, were in such terrible shape when most of the natural and human riches were from Webaz. The thought ceded him into the frustration of the agonising pilgrimage his people had gone through ever since they joined the Republic of Recam. He stepped out of the ward and still could not believe his sight. Some patients and carers sat in an area that looked

like a discarded knacker's yard. Looking quite closely, W'Akere could see mosquitoes congregating on piles of dirt and living fat on the blood of dying patients. The buildings were falling off already with splinters on almost all the walls like drawings. (4)

Such images of depravity push W'Akere, just like any post-colonial citizen conscious of the inhumane treatment from a corrupt regime, into rebellious tendencies. By the time Dr Johnson finally dies, W'Akere resolves from the harsh encounters with the attendants at the Public Hospital and later the nurses at Saint Maliam Catholic Hospital to help liberate his people from the shackles of Recam. This decision adheres with Ashcroft's (2001) viewpoint that:

The emancipatory drive of post-colonial excess, the drive to re-empower the disenfranchised, is too often conceived in terms of a simplistic view of colonisation, of post-colonial response, and of postcolonial identities. The consequent exhortatory tone of decolonising theory runs the risk of theorising how the world should be rather than how the world is in the ordinary actions of individuals. Transformation is a dominant mode in the post-colonial response to those colonising forces which appear constantly to suppress and control. (126)

Ashcroft's critique is against all forms of exploitation in the post-colony and like the neo-colonial leaders in Recam, the Catholic Hospital which is supposed to save lives first before asking for money ironically insists on money first before saving life. Such attitude pushes W'Akere to question the role of Christian missionaries in Webaz because they tend to exploit converted Christians.

Moreover, through W'Akere, one understands how the post-independence Recamian regime operates on dictatorial policies that stifle academics, whose intellectual ideologies criticise the system. It is a similar case with Dr Johnson W'Akere, a brilliant academic in the national university whose research interest and proposals criticise the regime. When narrating his ordeals, he mentions that:

His father was a shiny academic star whose Masters dissertation, on the marginalisation of the Common Law in the Republic of Recam had introduced him to the world of scientific writing and publication. He had been brave enough to tread on objective grounds where previous researchers in his domain did not have the gallantry to dare. His brave ink had hit the government in the face, and because his findings were popular, especially among Webazians, the government had ostentatiously offered him a job as an assistant lecturer in the University of Yande. But three years later, his PhD thesis had raised a more serious controversy in the

Republic of Recam; and that had cost him a temporary suspension in the university. He had focused on the origin and contextual practices of Common Law and Civil Law in the Republic of Recam, and had argued that the country's development was ossified by government's refusal to allow two legal and political systems, which were mutually exclusive, to operate on the same geography; and that the effort to impose the Recamian system, on Webazians, would someday create a feeling of frustration among Webazians. (5)

Conversely, while the academic community celebrates Dr Johnson through several international awards and the applauses from Common Law lawyers, the Recamian regime formally dismisses him from the university and higher education. The fact that his passport is not renewed shows a systematic disconnection from the international academic world. Dr Johnson's retreat to Webaz reveals the harshness of the regime and his uncompromising will as an intellectual who has the ability to defy social snags and stand up to the truth about himself and his environment.

Furthermore, the treatment given to Webazian intellectuals is not different from what their politicians and local authorities get. The fact that the dictatorial system imposed on Webaz by the Recamian government, which is seen through the appointments of mayors and municipal authorities, disregards all pre-unification Webazian traditions. Unfortunately, the Recamian regime imposes a Webazian politician as mayor of Bafu against the will of the people. Mr Mbimba is regarded as a cheat, a fraudster and a semi-literate person who has used his political connections and wealth to gain the favour of the President. Describing the new mayor of Bafu, the narrator posits that:

He was a Webazian who had been born in the Recamian capital of Yande and had spent his entire time there. He had all along been hearing of Webaz but had stepped his feet on the Webazian soil for the first time when he was appointed Mayor of Bafu. Almost everyone, including the old people in the village, was afraid to fall out with him. He was not physically strong, but it was said that if he got into a fight with anyone, the person could never defeat him because he had government power. (33)

Such appointees do everything possible to satisfy the President who offers them leading positions against the wishes of their constituents. The author satirises Mayor Mbimba because his arrogance makes the people angry, especially when he threatens and insults the people, instead of winning them over. The people in Bafu name him "above the law."

An instance of his arrogance is seen in the way he addresses them during his installation ceremony:

His Excellency has pitied your conditions and has sent me as a messiah to save you from poverty.” He coughed and continued. “Know that we are the creation of his Excellency. In fact, he is the way, the truth and the life. No one succeeds in the Republic of Recam without going through him. (33)

From this quotation, Angwah introduces the biblical allusion to the creation myth to illustrate how esteemed the President's followers show him regard. Rather than serving the people who vote the president, the appointees serve the President because like Mayor Mbimba, they buy their ways to political positions or engage in ritualistic and cultic practices to get to power. Nkemngong (2012) satirizes such politicians is seen when he thrusts that:

It is worth noting that the Anglophones themselves have been significant contributors to the problem, as is especially evident in the party war that raged among their leaders in West Cameroon (as the Anglophone territory was called after independence) after reunification and the readiness of some overzealous Anglophones to renounce their “Anglophoneness” in order to be favoured for administrative appointments. (53)

The narrator describes Mayor Mbimba that the Minister of Few Things and Other Things constantly preys on his dancing buttocks. The fact that the President has made himself a life President leaves no one to question his activities as he appoints and dismisses when he likes. This biblical allusion to the creation myth is further compounded in the conversation between Mama and Dr Ngonde when he says, “it is a mortal sin against the law of the Republic of Recam to say, his Excellency, God's representative in the Republic of Recam, is not someone we can trust. It is inscribed in his constitution for the republic” (53). This clearly demonstrates that he has become a god or the creator of every corrupt politician in Recam. He gives jobs only to children of the politicians he has created, instead of competent youths. This attitude of self-glorification is a sign of schizophrenia as Loewenthal (2006) articulates:

A schizophrenic delusion may involve feelings of grandeur, a belief that one is an important figure such as Jesus, Napoleon or the Messiah. Or that one is being persecuted – by germs or invisible rays, for example, or by faceless bureaucracy. Or that trivial events and signs refer to oneself and have special significance. (27)

This psychological breakdown instead makes one to believe himself a celestial being and this is attained when absolute power corrupts the mind in the post-colony. The build-up of such corruption is seen in the Advanced School of Administration where only children of politicians are admitted as Timah confesses to W' Akere that "senators and other big people have the mandate to send their children to the school even without the entrance exams" (30). W' Akere is stunned by such degree of corruption. His experiences during the registration process and the entrance exams, where his name and those of all the other hundreds of Webazians do not appear on the registration list, contribute in radicalising the youths.

From another perspective, the anger and frustration in Webaz is because the President and members of his government encourage tribalism in the way major contracts are awarded in Webaz. While Recam has very good roads, it is the reverse in Webaz because the contracts are awarded to incompetent family members like Seidou Ondo as the narrator pronounces that:

W' Akere heard that while the Chinese engineering company had won the contract to tar the Recamian roads, his Excellency's brother-in-law had won the contract to tar the Webazian roads. How that was possible was a mystery to W' Akere, especially because the First Lady's elder brother was a school dropout who had spent most of his time gambling in Yande. (147)

The fact that despite his incompetence, he keeps getting important contracts shows the degree of favouritism which is not checked by the regime in place. When questioned by journalists on the advancement of the roads, he boastfully refers to Webazian roads as "local roads" because of the existence of press censorship in the country. Curiously, any press organ or media that criticises the regime is shut down and its journalists arrested and jailed. Communication in the country is strictly checked by the Minister of Strategic News and uncooperative journalists are branded terrorists and punished under the terrorism act. Despite the poor roads in Webaz, there are numerous check points where uniform officers collect 500 francs from each passing car and bribes from Webazians who do not have valid national identity cards. The encounter between a gendarme officer and a passenger reveals one of such traumatic encounters as the narrator highlights:

"Madam, where is your identity card?" The leader asked in French. "I am sorry sir, but my ID card was stolen yesterday even along with my handbag, but I have my passport and birth certificate here with me." She showed the officer. "What do we do with that?" If you don't have your

identity card, go and pay 2000 fcfa there!” He ordered in French, gulped his beer and then turned his attention to the next victim. (146)

The double exploitation of Webaz is visible through the absence of good roads and the extortion of the people at the different check points by officers who drink to stupor while on duty. It is for this reason that Dr Ngonde, Dr Eric Atanza and Dr Pen publish a book on the corrupt activities of the state and compile documents to send to international human rights organisations against the activities of Minister Seidou Ondo. In retaliation, the government dismisses them from their universities and orders for their immediate arrests and incarceration. In prison, they are tortured and fed with faeces and urine deposited by the gendarmes on guard.

Apart from the corrupt practices of Seidou Ondo and the homosexual practices of people like the mayor, the narrator says that some members of the corrupt Recamian government, who are former graduates from the Advanced School of Administration, practice ritual rape to get appointed or consolidate their positions. This is the case with two directors recognised by W’Akere and Timah when they go out for a stroll in Freshé, the government residential area in Yande. The narrator says that a director in the Ministry of Few Things and Other Things and another from the Ministry of Matters Arising and Other Matters try to rape a young Webazian girl in the night who is fortunately saved by W’Akere and Timah after beating up the two directors. At her rescue, she tells them that:

I was kidnapped by these men in Ntodo, the Webazian community in Yande. Throughout, I could hear them saying after raping me on a particular spot in Freshé, they would be promoted the next week and that I was the last sacrifice for them to get to their dreamed offices. (100)

Surprisingly, the following week, W’Akere follows the appointments of these two directors who tried to rape the young girl to top positions as technical advisers to the President on Few Things and Other Things and Matters Arising and Other Matters. The motivation for such mystical practices that are now common with some administrators in Recam is psychoanalysed by Pine (2005) when he posits that:

Nonetheless, whatever their developmental source and history, each of these motivational forces becomes represented in mind and can be expressed in automatic/habitual behaviour and is thereafter subject to all of the vicissitudes of mental life. These forces are clung to, warded off, defended against, and acted out. In addition, they come to be endowed with additional psychological “meanings” within each person’s system of

dominant fantasies and wishes, and as such they get fully involved in intrapsychic conflict. (17)

These forces become instigators of mental life and impel mental activity through affective and behavioural offshoots, whether homoeostatic or reactive or proactive – and therefore must be recognised in any full psychoanalytic theory of human motivation. Such general belief among administrators that power is not based on hard work but on rituals and favouritism become an inhibitive force to many, which leads to corrupt leaders working for the country's undoing. These crimes against Webazians push the people to protests. This protest gives birth to the Webazian United for Justice Group that mobilises and puts pressure on the state to revise its constitution and the terms on the deed of unification or brotherhood signed by their ancestors.

The corrupt regime responds to such protest rallies with military brutality as is the case in Yande in the Webazian community hall as the speaker puts it:

They confronted the gendarmes with at least ten attacking every single gendarme at a time. That night was the bloodiest night ever recorded in Yande. Unfortunately, the blood that made it memorable were Webazians. That night alone, one hundred Webazians were shot and killed while about a hundred others were seriously injured. Twenty-eight gendarmes were also killed and about forty others wounded. (144)

With the killing of Webazians, armed protest groups now develop all over Webaz and social disorder sprouts all over their territory with Webazian youths resident in Yande going back home to join the fight for the liberation of their territory. The youths have decided to take their future into their hands because they have been exploited and discriminated upon for over half a century. A fight which is not only physical, but has its genesis from a spiritual and mystical perspective which confirms what we earlier saw about Ashcroft (2001).

Externalising Memory and Resistant Vistas

One of the techniques used by Angwah in *Before Our Eyes* is flashback. Throughout the novel, his characters go down memory lane to retell important events that contribute to the collective memory of Webazians before independence and their bond of brotherhood with Recam. It is important to note here that through these memories, character traits and style are revealed which both allude to, and fictionalise historical facts about post-

independence Cameroon. Through flashback, we see the protest march to the governor's residence when the leaders – W' Akere, Timah, Lisa, Sanda Ayala, Melo Kilo and Titi Wanjebe – granted audience to retell the history of Webaz and why they are not happy with the regime in place. W' Akere recalls:

Fifty years ago, two independent people, the Republic of Recam and Webaz, united to form the United Federal Republic of Recam on the basis of equality at all levels. Seven years after, the United Federal Republic of Recam was changed to the Federal Republic of Recam, against the terms of the union. Fourteen years later, it was again changed to the Republic of Recam, the original name of Recam, prior to the union. All these changes came along with a master agenda to kill our culture and impose the Recamian culture on us. All the identities we had as a people which were to be protected were violated, and today we the descendants of the Webazian generation that negotiated the deal with the Republic of Recam want a fresh negotiation with the Recamian authorities, and that we shall get either around a peaceful table or in a pool of blood. (163)

This incident is reported by the governor to his Recamian bosses who instead of trying to negotiate with the angry youths, orders their immediate arrest and transportation to Yande where they are branded as terrorists and locked in an underground prison. It is in this cell that they meet Dr Ngonde, Dr Eric Atanza and Dr Pen, whom W' Akere recalls had travelled to the United States of America for safety. The arrests of these leaders become the immediate cause of the rebellion that claims the lives of many, both in Recam and Webaz, the destruction of property and massive exodus. Angwah's metaphor for Recam and Webaz goes in line with Nkemngong's analysis of the history of the Anglophone problem in Cameroon. Nkemngong (2012) reiterates that:

The origin of the Anglophone problem can be traced to what Hilarious Ambe describes as “a window-dressing referendum of 1972”, which annulled the federal system in favour of a unilateral Francophone system (72). The 1972 unconstitutional reforms have been generally and frantically opposed by Anglophones, who argue that Francophone politicians have betrayed the basis of “reunification” which they initiated, stressing that the former British Cameroons was neither conquered, captured nor annexed by La République du Cameroun. Pressure groups and protest organisations include the Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL) and the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), which have long been fighting for equal status with the Francophones and a return to the federal system. But these criticisms and protests seem to have fallen on deaf ears, as is evident in the poetry of Kum Ngong and Bate Besong. (54)

Nkemngong's analysis of these pressure groups is symbolic of Angwah's Webazian United for Justice Group. Not surprisingly, the arrest of these youths had been prophesied by Balila Na'Kamba whom the Recamian regime killed several decades ago because of his activism. This prophecy is recalled by the seven-year-old Kuka who is born with the gift of clairvoyance, but is unfortunately considered mad since many questions of how such wisdom could be possessed by the lad. The speaker recalls Kuka's prophesy on the National Day when he says that:

Thrice, Balila Na'Kamba spoke the minds of the Gods! "Behold! A time shall come in faded memories; Old wizards shall stay out of the rail. And watch the glory of the sun stir the train anew. Grey hair and blood shall be a curse on the central stage. Any youth, steadfast on the rail shall see the light." The word of time has come true! Kuka stands witness to the mystery. Join the rail and save posterity from the stingy hands of the living old! Go to the narrow gate to Soka, the Bushy net of Medem! Go to the broken streets of Bafu, the dark city of Manga! Go to the French roads of Yande and English paths of Webaz! Join the rail and remain there! The light has come! He is at the end of the rail. Get on the rail and no matter what, don't step out! Listen to Kuka, the voice of Balila Na'Kamba. (55)

Although many people gather to listen to Kuka, gendarme officers do nothing because they see him as a mad boy. The rail described by Kuka is a metaphor for the battle ground where the resistance against the Recamian regime takes place. According to the narrator, the rail appeared mysteriously without ever being physically constructed, and the government sent troops there to guard it. From another perspective, the rail could be a metaphor for the new country Webazians want to build which the Recamian regime would not want to see. This is the reason why Balila Na'Kamba was killed by firing squad for advocating this change.

According to the prophecy, the youths should take responsibility over their destinies, which the gods had decreed that this ancestral burden be laid on the shoulders of W'Akere. According to the narrator, the former leaders of the justice group were buried following a particular ritual which W'Akere recalls about his late father and grandfather during their burials in the following lines:

Dr Johnson W'Akere's burial was quite similar to his father's, and W'Akere could recognise some of the faces he had seen during Alius W'Akere's burial. The Webazian United for Justice Group performed a few burial rites before the burial proper in exactly the same way they had performed before burying Alius W'Akere. W'Akere recalled that he had

closely observed the rites when Alius W' Akere had been buried, but had been way too young to understand what was going on. (20)

Dr Johnson was the president of the Webazian United for Justice Group just like his father Alius W' Akere. This means that his death immediately makes the young W' Akere the successor. That is why as part of the ritual, his late father's cap, clothes and banner are handed over to him, thereby making him the liberator of Webaz from Recam. This is a culture he needs to respect as opposed to the traditional rulers of Webaz who have desecrated their cultures because of money and politics.

Poverty and greed have largely contributed to the death of Webazian traditions and cultures. Angwah satirises this through the conversation between Mama and Dr Ngonde when he recalls the visit of the president to Webaz:

Were we not witnesses to the unholy and bizarre disposition of our kings who killed the traditions of the land and extended handshakes not only to his Excellency, but also to his wife? In fact, it wasn't just that they did that, it was more the way they did it. They were literally fighting to greet him the way fans struggle to greet celebrities. He smiled ridiculously and continued, I mean we all heard the title they gave him 'King of kings.' (51)

The fact that the kings of Webaz have been dragged into politics by the Recamian administration is justified through the little salaries government gives them monthly. He remembers how these kings who are considered agents of the administration tend to campaign for his Excellency and run elections for the president like the King of Wali. Consequently, he stuffs ballot boxes for the president and threatens his subjects to vote for the regime in place. All these acts set the kings at loggerheads with the youths who feel their tradition and the system have failed to satisfy their aspirations. Arguably, Angwah's satire confirms Ashcroft et al. (1989) argument that:

A number of younger African writers and critics have questioned the formalist nature of this project and its goal of recovering an authentic cultural essence [...]. As they see it, these societies are still bound to the continuing pressures of imperialism in its neo-colonial form and to the continuing stratification and inherited elitism of post-independence societies. It is the problems arising from this, they argue, which must be urgently addressed (128-129)

The participation of these traditional rulers in politics is biased because the corrupt central administration responsible for social hardship promises favours to these chiefs.

Consequently, voting stations are opened in palaces, making chiefs accessories in election fraud.

On the other hand, the church has also been a source of frustration to many Webazians who witness the dehumanisation and discrimination of Christians when administrative authorities come to church. After the death of Dr W' Akere, an active member of the Catholic Men's Association, his unfortunate encounter with Fr Enus, the parish priest of Saint Bate the Shoe-Mender Parish of Bafu, remains in the minds of many. The narrator remembers the treatment Dr W' Akere receives during the thanks giving mass when his seat is taken away at the arrival of the governor of Bafu in church and given to his guard. He says:

Fr Enus continued observing closely. He soon noticed that Dr W' Akere was the poorest among the Catholic men sitting on the first pew. In order to impress the rich governor, he quickly asked Dr W' Akere to surrender his sit to the guard. Everyone, especially the Christians at the back was embarrassed. (22)

It is against church laws that the priest stops mass upon the demand of the governor who wants to do a financial contribution. This incident is compounded when he asks Dr W' Akere to give up his seat. This embarrassment is not only personal, but social given that his dismissal from the university as a lecturer equally cost him his place within the church. Here, Christians tend to question the extent to which religious hypocrisy has eaten deep into Webaz. The governor and many politicians see the church as a source of spiritual pretention since part of the money they embezzle is given to the church. W' Akere recalls Senator Timah's extravagance in the following terms:

He used to give hundreds of thousands in church for major projects, when there were so many hungry families in the neighbourhood. When the Monks of Mbangi had come to raise funds through the auctioning of modern graves they had constructed at their monastery in Mbangi, he had given more than everyone, and throughout the mass, he had exhibited an exaggerated smile, typical of someone who was sure of a successful life in the hereafter [...]. In a bid to show appreciation for his generosity, the Monks had given him seven graves in that holy monastery. They had argued that everyone is destined to die, and so it was a privilege for them to have procured graves in God's vineyard. (135)

It is paradoxical that in a country where people can barely eat and lack basic social amenities, Timah's father spends huge sums of money buying graves because he thinks money will give him access to heaven. This shows the degree of extravagance among

state officials because the president himself authorises this. That is why when such an authority dies, like Minister Seidou Ondo, the government suspends salaries of civil servants for that month to prepare for the funeral of this minister. It is satirical that his corpse is kept in a special mortuary constructed only for top government officials because they do not want the corpse to be contaminated by the corpses of poor citizens in the government general hospitals. His casket is specially imported and a special church service organised. He is also claimed to be buried in a special grave with prayers for his soul to be flown first class to paradise.

Moreover, Angwah's satire is evident through his portrait of Minister Ngono who despite his embezzlement, receives special favours from the church and the President because they come from the same village. The description of the manipulative nature of his widow, Mrs Germaine Ngono, is seen when the narrator recalls the events leading to the death of her husband:

Her husband had died shortly after it was announced he would be investigated for an alleged disappearance of five hundred billion fcfa in his keeping. The money had come from a deal his Excellency had negotiated with France, which permitted the latter to exploit all the natural resources in Webaz. News had it that Minister Ngono claimed to have kept the money in his private residence in Freshé where it was stolen [...]. Since Minister Ngono had come from his Excellency's tribe and family, they had decided not to prosecute their own. (71)

With the death of the minister, a conspiracy is unravelled and some ten innocent unfortunate youths are arrested and sentenced to a thirty-year jail term. When this happens all suspicions about the whereabouts of the missing money laid to rest. But Webazians who are the immediate victims of this conspiracy know that it's a cover-up by the system - reason why they march on the streets to protest against bad roads and the whereabouts of the money collected from toll gates. W' Akere recalls that angry protest march in the following terms:

They asked critical questions with regard to the toll-gate fees drivers paid in and out of the city. Was it not meant to maintain the roads? Where was the government keeping the money? Why had the government not come up, even once, to give accurate accounts of the toll-gate revenue? Where were they taking the money to? Who was managing the money? W' Akere recalled how one of the toll-gate workers had confessed that the Minister of Everything had spread the income among diehard supporters of his Excellency, in a bid to gain his trust. Upon hearing this rumour, the entire

patriots of Bafu had marched to the toll gate and chased the workers away. They were told never to return. It was from this major show of dotted civility that the famous phrase: 'No road maintenance, no toll gate' went virile like bad news. (108-109)

This flashback brings out the extent to which state ministers systemically impoverish Webaz with absolute disregard. The people are left on their own and if they do not do something about their future, they will continue to suffer. The destruction of the toll gate leads to violent attacks from journalists in Webaz through social media, and for a dictatorial government, the solution to their questions is military brutality. The narrator recalls government's response to these media attacks in the following excerpt:

Shortly after the protest, news spread around Bafu that the editor-in-chief of *Today* had been arrested and was serving time in the state incarceration in Bondengi. For a moment, every Webazian mind wondered aloud how depraved politicians derived pleasure in setting the country on fire. This was so because the arrest of the journalist led to more tension with the deployment of government soldiers to Bafu with the killing of twenty-three Webazians and the arrest of so many others. (109)

These arrests do not deter Webazians from resisting. They continue to clamour for the release of those arrested and an amelioration of their social conditions. The prison conditions in Bondengi are so deplorable that arrested protesters are branded terrorists and for several years are sentenced without any trials. With memories of continuous state refusal to dialogue, peaceful protests transform into armed resistance and the entire Webaz becomes a war zone between government forces and different armed groups. These protests and conflicts according to Angwah's narrator's recollection move from physical conflicts to psychological and spiritual battles as discussed in the next section.

W'Akere's Visions and Spiritual Development

Angwah's *Before Our Eyes* unveils the role of tradition and mysticism in guiding a people's choice for survival. As such, the different aspects of spirituality and mysticism that are highlighted celebrate the relationship between Webazians, their customs and traditions. Culturally, the births and lives of heroes are always prophesied and guided by spirits. This is the case of W'Akere, the protagonist in *Before Our Eyes*, who is chosen by the gods to liberate the people of Webaz. In a flashback, the narrator says W'Akere starts seeing visions of spirits and spiritual books after the death of his father. These visions guide him about the leadership role he needs to play. He declares:

That night Alius W' Akere was buried, close to Justice Akere, his paternal grandfather, at the backyard, just one metre away from W' Akere's room, he had felt two strange forces holding and lifting him up in the sky, pointing down to different straight and broken walls. The broken walls were many and sad to see, because they could see wretched families sleeping in pitiable conditions and fighting with leeches in the heart of a terribly boiling night. In fact, W' Akere's fluttering in the sky that night, with the two invisible spirits, spoke volumes to him [...]. The other scenario was a sudden appearance of mysterious voluminous books under his bed. The characters on the book's cover looked real. At the top right end of every book was a partly oxidised key. (11)

He is the only one that sees these mysterious books because when he complains to Mama, she does not see them. The fact that his late father's spirit appears to him in the night and tells him the secrets in those books shows that the spirits are preparing him for leadership, which is why they take him in a flight to show the sufferings of his people. When W' Akere opens the books to read and he is hit to unconsciousness by a sudden light from the book could be a sign that the initiation by the spirits has succeeded because when he regains consciousness, he feels a different form of courage in him. The disappearance of these books after the successful initiation rite is confirmed by the strange breeze that hits him. This strange breeze blows with the following prophetic instructions about his future that "The water was spilled, but the calabash was never broken. Blood of Akere the great! The future of Webaz is on your shoulder!" (12). In order to understand the actions of a character, it is important to analyse such visions culturally. That is why Loewenthal (2006) further examines the role of visions of spirits in peoples' lives and opines that:

Visions and voices are experiences 'as if' what is seen or heard is there, although usually the person is aware that the experience is hallucinatory. Bereaved people commonly see and/or hear the loved one, for example, sitting in a customary chair, or offering advice or comment. (27)

This prophecy which was revealed twenty years before his birth is explained to W' Akere by Dr Ngonde and Atanza during a meeting in Yande to initiate him as they hand him the mantle of leadership and command of the Webazian United for Justice Group. Furthermore, W' Akere's initiation through the spiritual books and the baton of command is complemented by the lyrics of the Webazian United for Justice Group Anthem spiritually. He recalls that his father never taught him the anthem and the fact that he sings it alongside the other members of the group during the burial of Dr W' Akere confirms this spiritual rebirth and prophecy as the narrator states that:

Dr Ngonde remembered the prophesy quite well, especially because long before Alius W' Akere had taken over from Justice Akere, the members of the association had heard of the prophecy and they had been patiently waiting for the W' Akere that would come and fulfil it [...]. That W' Akere, who was only born twenty years after the prophecy, could recite the lines. (26)

During his father's burial, the spirits guide him to sing the anthem to the disbelief of everyone present especially, as they know, he was never taught the lyrics. The courage and determination with which he sings builds his identity as the divine leader who reminds them of his father and grandfather who were former leaders of the Webazian United for Justice Group. Bakhurst (2001) discusses the link between memory and identity that:

This case brings out the close relation between memory and identity. Just as the sensation reminds me intimately of who I am, so the example reminds us that our identity depends on an enduring stream of self-conscious experience that rests, in turn, on memory's power to place present experience in a temporal continuum. Our personal histories are histories of lived experience. This fact is central to our understanding of ourselves. (184)

Bakhurst's argument focuses on how identity is built through a collective memory which can be justified through history. This is evident in the novel because prior to his birth, the spirits had prepared W' Akere to lead Webazians out of bondage through the Webazian United for Justice Group. This is evident when he takes the oath of obedience and sacrifice as Dr Ngonde pronounces:

'With your total submission to putting a lasting happiness on the faces of our poor and marginalised people, we pray that the God who created life and mankind will protect you through the odds so that you will not only hope for the glory, but live the glory.' The men chorused again and Dr Ngonde coloured W' Akere with an old banner, the same banner Justice Akere wore when he began the revolution. The moment the banner settled on W' Akere's neck, he felt a new spirit in him. The spirits of his predecessors possessed him and for the first time, W' Akere felt the dire need to climb every mountain to restore the dignity of Webazians. (118)

The members of the Webazian community each greets and shakes W' Akere's hands as a sign of blessing for him to carry their cause. The spirits of the land possess and guide W' Akere in an eternal battle between good and evil. The fact that Dr Ngonde hands over the red file that contains all the atrocities of the Recamian regime on Webaz confirms his position as leader of the revolution and task that lies ahead.

Angwah's presentation of the revolution in *Before Our Eyes* is psychological because the different conflicts of liberation occur in a dream, which is an externalisation of W' Akere's inner consciousness. That is why the author metaphorically reduces the country to a rail, symbolic of the place where Recamian and Webazian ideological battles are fought. The different characters mentioned in the rail are symbolic figures, personalities and ideological blocks. Given the power to lead the people, Angwah presents W' Akere and six other Webazian youths on the rail ready to fight against Recamian forces to safeguard the future of their country as the narrator explains:

The seven of them stood on a never-ending rail, hoping to fulfil a venerable prophecy of youthful emancipation, if only they could get to the end of the rail. The prophecy had been presaged from time immemorial, but had faded in almost every memory in the republic. It was Kuka, a seven-year-old lad, who had been born with the fresh memories of those who had waited in otiose to witness the Rail Revolution. (55)

The rail becomes a place in Balila Na'Kamba's prophecy which had not been taken seriously until little Kuka reiterates this prophecy that reveals the place of emancipation. With the call for revolution, W' Akere and the six others lead millions of frustrated Webazian youths to the rail to fight for their future despite resistance and shooting from Recamian military. The description of the seven youth leaders in the rail reveals Angwah's metaphor for the different regions and political problems of Cameroon. The seven youth leaders are described thus:

Of the seven youths, still struggling to free the others, five were from Webaz and two from Recam. Of the five Webazians, two were ladies and three were men. The two Recamians were men, one from the North and the other from the Alikeé tribe that shared a boundary with Webaz in the East. (58)

This geographical positioning carries with it political ideologies because the origin of the youth leaders on the rail is an allusion to the political situation in Cameroon with each youth leader symbolising the political and ideological divide of the country. These youth leaders are fighting to better the living conditions of their regions against the harshness and exploitative hands of the Recamian central regime. Their anger is against a regime which is run by the old, who do not give the millions of intelligent youths a chance to participate in the development of their country. This is because the members of the administration send their children to study abroad and prepare them for an eventual

succession of their fathers. As such, the youths who help the old and corrupt administrators on the rail are their children as we see in W' Akere's dream:

As they moved on, the old people began falling off gradually, they were growing too weak to stand along the rail. Their ages were gradually failing them. Some healthy youths, who looked like them began taking their places. They were their children; they were not among the millions of youths who had all along been standing behind them. They were hale and hearty. Their language was soft and they spoke through their nostrils. Though they were black like everyone else, it was clear that they had spent all their lives in the cosiness of the western world, distant away from the congested flurry and bustling circles of Menda, away from the dusty air of Beta. (62)

These are the children of the rich who have never known suffering because they enjoy the money embezzled by their parents. That is why they encourage their parents to remain on the rail or readily replace them on the rail using all weapons in the state's arsenal to deter or kill the protesting Webazian youths from taking over power.

Moreover, this ideological battle draws people from all social classes and professions because the quest to liberate the country is a common issue to the Webazians. The narrator explains that some protesters actually join the rail without understanding the long-term consequences of their actions as is the case of the Black Messiah, the Law Professor, Solo Tata Wala and Bih. These and many others, join the rail due to the general frustration in the country as the narrator posits:

The last youth behind the Law Professor was a Webazian who was said to have entered the rail without any knowledge of what he was getting into. It was said that when he joined the rail, there was fog everywhere, he did not bother so much about the danger of being crushed by a train. (60)

The symbols of the train and the fog are very important. The fog shows the precarious social conditions in which the people live when the future has been taken hostage by a group of tribalistic and corrupt individuals. It is the case of a youth fighter who confesses to have attempted suicide as a way out. Furthermore, the symbol of the train that crushes people on the rail is the regime and the military. All protesters are branded terrorists, arrested and killed without trial, which is why the prophecy says that if the youths through W' Akere do not take their destiny into their hands, the future of the country will be perilous. This is confirmed through Timah's dream when he recounts it to W' Akere saying that "I had the same dream: but unlike yours, we were racing across the Atlantic

and of the multitudes of young people who began the race, just you, one lady and I got to a supposed island of freedom" (75-76). The lady in Timah's dream is Bih, and is noted for her activism for equal rights and opportunities for Webazian women. She has been arrested several times and tortured by the administration which gives her reason enough to join the rail resistance. She considers the rail a safe haven especially because of the several threats she receives from the regime in place. Bih has attained the stage described by Alschuler (2008) as self-actualisation and transformation of the system. Alschuler further theorises that:

Collective actions to transform the socio-political system replace isolated actions against individual oppressors. These actions aim at creating a society where truly human relationships are possible. In summary, concretisation describes the movement of political consciousness from dehumanisation to humanisation. (340)

Bih's participation in the revolution is to assert her personal and collective (ethnic) identity that the oppressor's ideology has rejected. The current regime does not want these protests to take place by enforcing measures to deter Webazians like arrests, beatings or shooting of protesters. This only complicates the situation for the regime.

Furthermore, *Before Our Eyes* is a satire on a regime that responds to social problems with dictatorship. This can be seen when internet connection is cut off in Webaz and by way of revenge, Webazians organise civil disobedience and ghost towns whenever government activities are scheduled in Webaz. With continuous killings, rapes and looting of goods by government soldiers, the youths create militias in the quarters of all the counties in Webaz. Their fierce resistance pushes the government troops back to the urban areas and the villages become the base of these Webazian defence groups as the narrator describes in W'Akere's dream which he encounters the Commander of one of these groups. The narrator explains that:

The Commander immediately recognised them. They were happy to see each other. They updated W'Akere on the state of the revolution. W'Akere told them all what had happened, as they ate cassava and roasted squirrel. They spent that day with the defence forces and the next day, Ngan Saloma left Gabriel Nsalam with one hundred and fifty well-armed men at the camp and took fifty well-armed others to lead W'Akere and his team to the West. (173)

Looking at the war logistics owned by Webazian defence forces, there is evidence that the revolution has become an armed conflict to the point that these forces are fortified mystically against the bullets of the government forces. To effect these, they bring in great herbalists, witch doctors who invoke the spirits of their land for protection and it is believed that the spirits of Justice Akere and the others are watching over them.

Another psychological twist brought in by Angwah is the flash forward technique when he gives projected solutions to the armed conflict through the United Nations Organisation. Given that the rail resistance drags for several years and is so intense due to heavy casualties on both sides, the United Nations intervenes and tries to mediate peace between Webaz and Recam. The United Nations asks both countries to send delegations to the United Nations' headquarters in New York. After serious negotiations, Kamdemn Gaston leads the Recamian delegation while W' Akere leads the Webazian delegation. The strength of Angwah's *Before Our Eyes* lies in his use of switch forward because the activities of the United Nations occur in W' Akere's dream. In this dream, the narrator says Kamdemn Gaston acknowledges the failures of Recam to respect the terms of the marriage between the two countries at the time of independence. He presents apologies from Recam, pleading that Webazians should give them a second chance so that they can prove their good faith and have a country that preserves both the English and French languages and all indigenous cultures. On W' Akere's part, he will accept these apologies from Recam on behalf of Webaz if two conditions are met:

First, we want to be one our own and have our Recamian brothers as good neighbours. On that basis, we shall create friendly ties with them and sign deals that will sustain them. Second, we can consider a loose confederation, with a very weak federal bureau, but very powerful and autonomous states. In this case, we shall have three anthems – two state anthems and one federal anthem. We shall also have three flags, maps and indeed emblems that clearly demonstrate that we are two people. We shall have our capital cities and create a new city, midway between the two territories to host the federal capital. (180)

W' Akere's insistence, that each section is going to manage their own resources, does not sit well with the Recamians because most of the natural resources which they have been exploiting are in Webaz. Secondly, that each country should train its military and may help the neighbour means that it will be difficult to intimidate Webaz like before. With these conditions, the Secretary General gives the floor to the Recamian delegation which

accept the second option of a two states loose federation with each having its powerful military and control of her resources. The confirmation of these new borders shows the success of Webazian nationalism, the type described by McLeod (2010) as:

Nations invent divisive borders, coercive regulations, notions of authenticity and illegitimacy which impact upon the matters of belonging and group membership. The nation is always imagined as a finite space, occupying a certain terrain, inclusive of a particular people, 'us' rather than 'them.' Inescapably then, the processes both of imagining the nation and concretising its administrative authority through the establishment of the nation-state are perhaps fated to be caught between contrary impulses: democratic, egalitarian, and inclusive, on the one hand, and domineering, chauvinistic, and exclusive on the other. (101)

W'Akere's dream about United Nations and the resolutions reached indicates the end of the rail and a turning point in the ongoing conflict which ushers the beginning of peaceful co-existence. The fact that it ends in a very mystical fog and a high wall behind symbolises the difficulties under which the Recamian delegation has, to make a decision that is going to change the history of these two countries.

According to the narrator, when W'Akere, Timah and Bih struggle and climb the wall at the end of the rail, they see a newly built country, with a bridge that links the two parts on which is written, "The Federal Republic of WebazRecam." Ironically, instead of RecamWebaz as was in the past, it is WebazRecam which means that power has changed hands. Instead of the effigies of French colonial administrators as was in RecamWebaz, they see those of heroes and martyrs who had persisted in the struggle to liberate Webaz and a new constitution that guarantees peaceful co-existence. The narrator describes the reception W'Akere and his friends receive in this new country in the proceeding quote:

W'Akere quickly realised that their actions had saved the youthful population of the country and then there was a new nation managed by the youths. 'Hail to you, your Excellency!' the people addressed W'Akere and in the farther back of the crowd, W'Akere could identify Justice Akere and Alius W'Akere nodding in appreciation of his bravery. He nodded back, with a smile. (65)

The road to this new dream country has not been an easy because several lives have been lost, families divided and unmeasurable loss in material. Despite all these, the youths have taken over and the new country defines the destiny of its citizens. This means that the colonial prestige has been destroyed, which can be corroborated by Anderson (1983) as:

The prestige of the colonial state was accordingly now intimately linked to that of its homeland superior. It is noticeable how heavily concentrated archaeological efforts were on the restoration of imposing monuments (and how these monuments began to be plotted on maps for public distribution and edification: a kind of necrological census was under way). No doubt this emphasis reflected general Orientalist fashions. (180)

Anderson's discourse on the post-colonial state celebrates freedom from any colonising forces and how their images should be replaced with those of nationalists. Angwah therefore uses this psychological novel to reveal that all events and battles that take place in W'Akere's dream allude to the ongoing political crises in the North West and South-West Regions of Cameroon. His projected solutions which are reflected through W'Akere's psychological development seen through the plot of the revolution shows the development of an individual's life through a gradual emergence out of the ego's control and into the realm of the self. This movement out of personal values into those of more impersonal and collective meaning confirm what Hart (2008) describes that:

The first half of life is normally devoted to establishing a secure base in the world: education, profession, family, a personal identity. But at midlife, that crisis threatens whose ubiquity and importance, Jung helped to clarify in the public mind. It is at bottom a spiritual crisis, the challenge to seek and to discover the meaning of life. (139)

W'Akere's challenge to liberate Webaz is more a question of exploration of soul and the familiar demands of a people dehumanised by the dictatorial Recamian regime. His memory therefore has its own powerful demand to be realised politically through the Webazian United for Justice Group, and conscious confrontation opens new meaning and possibilities for his people. W'Akere's memory therefore has helped to fictionalise the development of a resistance to the political struggle of his society which according to Jungian psychoanalysis is considered as the real work of individuation - a point where everything depends on the broadening of collective social consciousness.

Conclusion

The notion of railed resistance discussed in this paper historicises and fictionalises the ongoing political crisis in Cameroon for the past five years or so. Using literary devices like irony, metaphor, allusion, flashback, symbolism and switch forward, we have argued that Angwah's *Before Our Eyes* is an externalisation of dream thoughts and dream content of characters through the short term and long-term memories which blend both mysticism

and traditionalism in their fight to liberate Webaz from Recam. W' Akere's actions in his dream work denotes the transference of dream thoughts to dream content, which can be concluded that the dream work is not only creative, but develops the desire of the entire Webaz to witness a new political change. Our argument on memory and political discourse therefore prepares, refashions, dramatizes and proposes solutions to the ongoing conflict which Julius Angwah's *Before Our Eyes* effectively uses through the image of the rail to satirise. Therefore, it is important to revisit and redefine the terms of the union signed between the two independent federations and correct the problems caused by the greed that characterises contemporary post-colonies.

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