

flora, and to the need for preservation of the biodiversity of the area because of its rich biological resources" (p. 63). However, it is unlikely that the biodiversity of the region would be preserved due to fact that the company is "one of the biggest contributors to global warming" (p. 67). Indeed some of the damage already done cannot be undone: "approximately twenty-two square miles of mangrove has been cut by Shell in its Eastern division alone in the course of its seismic operations and a considerable amount of fauna and flora have been destroyed, expelled, or damaged beyond repair during the period" (p. 69). Bush pig, iguana, monkeys (some rare) have had to flee the destroyed and polluted forests. Some species have become extinct. Acid rains corrode not only zinc roofing but also contribute to the destruction of fauna and flora.

Creeks and swamps are not left out of the relentless assault:

In the course of separating the oil from water, Shell officials use chemicals to induce settlement in the tanks. The end product of this separation process is thick, oily sludge which combines with firefighting chemicals like Halon,

already in the tank, to form a potent mixture. This hazardous substance is then discharged into the swamps and rivers. The Bonny River estuary, the swamps around Forcados, and the Warri River near Ughelli, where Shell discharges its production water, have been contaminated after nearly four decades of receiving this cocktail of dissolved and dispersed hydrocarbons, sludge, and fighting agents (p. 87).

The above description gives a picture of what life is like in the rural areas. In major cities such as Port Harcourt, the politics of oil production has also affected the manner and quality of life as "the poor majority are banished to the sprawling waterfront slums and the other ghettos where there is no electricity, water supply, or sanitation facilities. Here also, refuse collection and dumping is inefficient and badly managed, and waste dumps have taken over whole streets, vying with human beings for space" (p. 192). Also, in cities such as Warri and Port Harcourt, "armed robbery, hooliganism, prostitution, and sudden, seemingly inexplicable explosions of street violence have become a way of life" (p. 192). Okonta and Douglas claim that Shell practices

ecological racism, as the standards the company applies in Western nations are much better than what the Niger Delta receives.

In order to cover up the violence of its activities, Shell has had to resort to spin-doctoring. The authors write: "Shell has found common cause with the trinity of Andrew Neil, former editor of the London *Sunday Times*; Donu Kogbara, another journalist, who is, incidentally, Saro-Wiwa's niece; and Richard D. North, the ex-*Independent* journalist whose controversial book, *Life on a Modern Planet: A Manifesto for Progress*, is a battering ram of the resurgent right-wing attack on the environmental movement in the United Kingdom" (p. 172).

The book is a graphic account of how global capital in collaboration with local power unleashes terror on the poor, of how it destroys human beings and the environment and also how it erects elaborate mechanisms to hide the extent and gravity of its violence. It not only destroys human lives but constructs elaborate lies to conceal from history the extent of its destructive activities. Okonta and Douglas offer a vivid description of the modes of collaboration between Shell and the Nigerian ruling class in undermining important facets of Nigerian life.

There are detailed explanations of instances of corruption and charges of ecological racism. A sentence sums up the main argument of the book: "the oil-producing minorities of the Niger Delta have become living carrion on which successive regimes in Nigeria and their foreign collaborators, like insatiable vultures, have feasted, are still feasting, without letup (p. 115).

On the whole, the book presents an angry and graphic picture of life being slowly destroyed in the Niger Delta without bothering to provide useful theoretical insights for more clues into the nature of this particular kind of structural and political violence. The nature of this kind of violence indeed has global dimensions and can be better understood via numerous critiques of neo-liberalism. Such necessary critiques of neo-liberalism are absent from the book. Okonta and Douglas write as activists and sometimes allow their anger to get the better of them. Nonetheless, their book remains one of the most engaging accounts of systematic ecological destruction available.



Francis B. Nyamnjoh's academic and creative itinerary has embraced a wide range of subjects and moods. The topography of *Mind Searching* (Kucena 1991) and its sequel, *The Disillusioned African* (Noorem Press 1995), for instance, fundamentally explore fragmented landscapes in which ethnic consciousness, bigotry, exclusivist sentiments and narrow-minded irredentism have become the determinants of an evolving material culture.

These abnormalities have given rise to the institutional and systemic defacements ingrained in the aberrant mode of national intercourse and further adumbrated by sham-democratization circuses that have brought massive concussions to the aboriginal, neo-colonial Cameroonian state structure. The lack of vision of successive francophone leaders and their legendary obduracy to utilize the gifts and gains of Re-Unification have rendered the federation artificial in structure and content.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, then, the idealism of Re-Unification has been imprisoned in an imploding time-capsule.

Like most expository prose writers and socio-cultural activists, Nyamnjoh has tried to observe, as closely and objectively as possible, the character, the patterns, and dynamics of the evolution of the killer-incisors of the Gaullist power structure in Cameroonian politics; to revisit old ideas and beliefs in line with new findings and realities in his polemical and scholarly writings.<sup>2</sup> By targeting the mediocre calibre of the national bourgeoisie emerging from the womb of the Federal behemoth since 1972, the satirical novelist of *Mind Searching* and *The Disillusioned African*, in true caricatural frenzy, was taking a poke at the idiocy of political leadership (francophone and anglophone) in which the nation's historical journey has been one of constant omissions and ineffectualities.

But, although the combative and utilitarian aspects of these novels were recognized and identified, *Mind Searching* and *The Disillusioned African* manifest no ideological commitment. At the core of the implicit philosophy of Nyamnjoh's novels is the literary manifesto that bourgeois society has not only got to liberate itself and its productive powers from prebendal hubris

## Pentecostal Hubris as Parable for the Theatre

Bate Besong

The Convert

by Francis Nyamnjoh

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and distortion, it also has to liberate these same productive capacities from their present prostration.

Conflict, which by its modus operandi suggests contrast, is important to Nyamnjoh's social novels; but it is even more vital to the unity of dramatic structure of *The Convert*, for it reinforces the exploration of the complex and ambiguous relationship between reality and illusion in the theatre.

In *The Convert* - set in Gaborone, Botswana - Nyamnjoh is fascinated with the ethically complex issue of Christian fundamentalism. The preoccupations of members of the Ultimate Church of Christ for better or worse has been the focus of his play.

Whereas in *Mind Searching* and *The Disillusioned African*, the plot is told, in *The Convert* it develops before the eyes and ears of the audience with a sense of *now-ness*. The need stemming from performance has affected plot structure in that it has obviously regulated the playwright's arrangement and grouping of his characters and the actions arising therefrom. The social problems and psychological pressures which give rise to the born-again phenomenon and the strong addiction of fundamentalist, freak religions are given full rein in *The Convert*.

The fictional Ultimate Church of Christ provides a window through which to appraise the explosion of Pentecostal belief system tapping into the deep veins of human desperation. And, since people in the theatre often define themselves by the way they handle challenge and respond to life, their hopes, their fears and their foibles, it is not surprising that *The Convert* would spring from a plot abounding with so much tension and pathos and containing so many memorable scenes of religious angst and vivid eschatological images of suffering.

Nyamnjoh's play begins with an imbalance of forces resulting in the loss of equilibrium by the tragic heroine, Charity, who seems to have repudiated material goods and sensual pleasures. The uniqueness of the drama as a performed literary art has a profound impact on structure and meaning:

CHARITY: I abused my flesh in every way as I thought myself queen of the world. I smoked cannabis, downed beer, took strong drinks, Visited medicine men and adorned myself with charms and amulets; I bought the latest dresses in fashion and chased after men to make money. As the most famous girl in town, I drove in the latest cars. Mercedes, BMW, Pajero, Hyundai, you name them. I frequented the best chicken parlours and sampled the thickest wallets in hotels of exceeding comfort. Nothing ever pricked my conscience that what I did was wrong. For I was always in time to confess my sins on Saturday in preparation for Sunday mass, where I was a permanent and privileged communicant. For I knew the priests with some of whom I smiled deep.

CHORUS: The Devil at work. What a devilous creature.

CHARITY: Then, most suddenly, most unexpectedly, I began to Reap what I sowed. My beauty began to wilt. I had used bleaching creams without knowing of their ugly and harmful side effects. I had hopped into bed with Tom, Dick and Harry, paying scant attention to the ills of lust. Fear took hold of me. But that was just the beginning. I failed my finals in college and my parents died of grief. My *sugar daddies* fled when my beauty retired. For a year

or two I was drained by pain, humbled by hunger and mastered by fear. But then came a glimmer of hope from an angle I least expected

CHORUS: Alleluia, Praise the Lord.

CHARITY: Jesus Christ offered me his bosom and tendered me the key to his heavenly mansion. I seized it with vigour and joy; for I thought I was lost. But I had been found. May the Lord be praised (*The Convert*, 12, 13)

*The Convert* has its internal laws and its own framework, which gives it shape, strength and meaning. There is a deep, engaging humanism that pervades Nyamnjoh's play but it is an emblematic humanism; to speak analogously, of the Aeschylean colouration.

Perspective in the drama is derived from the events, the conflicts and the characters involved in them, all of which have been conveyed by dialogues and non-verbal action of the dramatis personae. The playwright's blend of styles - satiric commentary, tense confrontation, and heightened ritualistic comments - challenge not only audiences but production teams as well.

In more technical terms, Nyamnjoh has paid attention to plot, character and theme. His use of choric elements, stage objects, nightmare visions, mimes and gestures in the theatre to give form to his social vision has been most effective

The theatre does not pretend to be a factual correspondence to human nature and norms. Within the cosmology of *The Convert* itself, we are primarily and unremittingly concerned with the truth of coherence, with how the parts cohere into a total, meaningful pattern. That is the truest epiphany of the theatre as a *LIE*.

### Notes

1 See Richard Joseph, *Gaullist Africa: Cameroon under Ahmadou Ahidjo* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing House, 1978) and Piet Konings and Francis Nyamnjoh, *Negotiating an Anglophone Identity: A Study of the Politics of Recognition and Representation in Cameroon*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

2 See *ibid.* and Francis Nyamnjoh, "Cameroon: A country united by ethnic ambition and difference," *African Affairs*, Vol. 98, No. 390 (1999), 1010-108.