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## ► To cite this version:

Sadrach A. Ambanasom. Cameroonian and Kenyan Writers in Politics : an Analysis of the Works of six Playwrights. *Alizés : Revue angliciste de La Réunion*, 2005, 25-26, pp.229-244. hal-02344077

**HAL Id: hal-02344077**

**<https://hal.univ-reunion.fr/hal-02344077>**

Submitted on 3 Nov 2019

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## ***Cameroonian and Kenyan Writers in Politics: an Analysis of the Works of six Playwrights***

It was Ngugi wa Thiong'o who made the now famous statement that 'Every writer is a writer in politics', and that there is nothing like political neutrality in literature (Ngugi: 1981 Preface). According to him the main struggle on the African continent today is the confrontation between local and foreign capitalists on the one hand, and the masses of the people, on the other. He believes that in this struggle the creative writers cannot afford to stand by idly, but must get involved because the basic subject matter of literature are the broad social, political, economic and cultural struggles going on in our societies; that African imaginative writers and intellectuals must be fully committed in helping the masses to bring about a new social order.

We will find no better examples to illustrate how every writer is a writer in politics than Ngugi wa Thiong'o's two plays which he co-authored with two other Kenyans, and the plays of three Cameroonian dramatists. The works of the six playwrights to be examined in this article are Ngugi wa Thiong'o's and Micere Githae Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976); Ngugi wa Thiong'o's and Ngugi wa Mirii's *I Will Marry When I Want* (1982); Victor Epie Ngome's *What God Has Put Asunder* (1992); Bole Butake's *And Palm-Wine Will Flow* (1999), *Dance of the Vampires* (1999); and Bate Besong's *Requiem for the Last Kaiser* (1991).

In general the dramatic conflict in all these works is drawn along ideological lines, pitting rulers against the ruled, or exploiters against the exploited. Since the works are marked by a high political content, their authors can be said to be, indeed, writers in politics. And in their politics they side with the exploited masses, to whom they deliver some subtle political lessons as well as giving them a sense of direction with regard to the transformation of their world through their own efforts.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o is Marxist in his thinking, and so pervasive are his Marxist ideas and Socialist vision of the world that a

critic once said that if one cut Ngugi wa Thiong'o, he would 'bleed politics'. It is a measure of Ngugi's Marxist commitment and conviction that his radical ideas are the intellectual framework on which the mortar and the bricks of many of his creative works are artistically worked in accordance with Socialist art.

*The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is an imaginative reconstruction of the heroic role played by the legendary Dedan Kimathi, the leader of the Mau Mau movement in Kenya. Through mime and flashback it equally shows the historic contribution of Kenyan peasants and workers when they rose up against the British colonial rulers to regain their lost lands and achieve political independence. The play reveals a colonial society in which, on the one hand, there are the colonialists like Shaw Henderson and the other whites together with their African and Indian surrogates and collaborators in whose hands rests economic and political power; and, on the other, the African peasants and workers, the exploited, from whose ranks emerge the freedom fighters led by Field Marshall Dedan Kimathi.

Here we have two conflicting ideologies: reactionary colonialism vs. radical nationalism. The one is capitalistic and exploitative; the other nationalistic and radical. As Dedan Kimathi reveals through his language and actions, his radical nationalism begins to assume a Marxist coloration; his speech becomes marked by much Marxist rhetoric. Examples include words and phrases like 'Workers and Peasants,' 'the oppressed of the land,' 'labour power,' 'our oppressors,' 'organization,' 'imperialism,' 'revolutionary struggle,' 'against all forces of imperialism,' 'Kenyan masses shall be free,' etc.

Among the major themes treated in the play are included the economic and political exploitation of Kenyans, exemplary heroism, and the relentless struggle for political freedom. Colonialism being largely a system of economic and political exploitation, we are not surprised that Shaw Henderson and the other settlers, together with their African quislings, fight to keep it in place. The theme of commendable heroism is brought out in the role, from the African perspective, of the guerrilla fighters. It is also emphasized by the praiseworthy efforts of the Woman in the rescue operations she is credited with when, at critical moments, she reportedly rescued many freedom fighters. We see her employing the same strategy in at-

tempting to save Kimathi when, after educating Boy and Girl on the virtue of joining the people's struggle for liberty and justice, she gives them a gun concealed in a parcel, to be used at a crucial moment in Kimathi's trial.

Central to the meaning of the play are the four trials Dedan Kimathi is put on. They contain much of the didactic material directed at the African (Kenyan) audiences. In that material as well as in Dedan Kimathi's response to the judge in the court early in the second movement, Dedan Kimathi sounds cocky, confident, provocative, defiant and intrepid. He identifies himself with the people's cause for which he dies without yielding to the imperialist.

**KIMATHI:** In the court of Imperialism!  
There has never and will never be  
Justice for the people  
Under imperialism:  
Justice is created  
Through a revolutionary struggle  
Against all the forces of imperialism.  
Our struggle must therefore continue.

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But our people will never surrender  
Internal and external foes  
Will be demolished  
And Kenya shall be free!  
(Ngugi and Mugo, 1976: 82 & 83)

The didactic nature of the play testifies to the authors' commitment to the cause of the exploited Kenyans. 'We believe that good theatre is that which is on the side of the people, that which without masking mistakes and weaknesses, gives people courage and urges them to higher resolves in their struggle for the liberation' (Ngugi and Mugo: 1976 Preface). Working their radical, didactic material into the play for the stage, the authors intend to mobilize popular indignation against capitalist exploitation of the peasants and workers of Kenya.

The central dramatic element in *I Will Mary When I Want* is the dispossession of Kiguunda of his one and a half acres of dry land by the wealthy Kioi. The play is about the merciless exploitation of

Kenyans by their own rich Kenyan brothers who collaborate with big foreign businessmen (capitalists). The latter employ poor Kenyans who produce so much wealth that it makes employers richer and richer while the workers get poorer and poorer because they are grossly underpaid. After the humiliation of Kiguunda by Kioi, Gicaamba, who has been educating Kiguunda in the play with regard to the cruel exploitation of the poor by the rich, mobilises all the workers and progressive forces. He enlightens them and rounds up his mass education of the deprived in a rousing, revolutionary manner.

The workers now know the methods and intentions of their enemies and are united in their common struggle against them. The play ends with a revolutionary song, calling on all workers, including those in the audience, to rise up and unite against their common enemies, the ruthless capitalist exploiters. All citizens are called upon to choose their sides in the impending revolution; to elect to be either on the side of the exploiters or on that of the exploited masses. The way capitalists like Kioi, Ndugire and Ikuua treat workers under them is, to say the least, inhuman. Kiguunda is a worker under Kioi and supposed to be the most highly paid, with a salary of 200 shillings. But with the rising cost of living the 200 shillings are a paltry sum indeed.

**KIGUUNDA:** (As if his thoughts are still on wages and price increases)

You talk about prices,  
But tell me a single item whose price has not gone up?  
In the past a mere thirty shillings,  
Could buy me clothes and shoes,  
And enough flour for my belly.  
Today I get two hundred shillings a month,  
And it can't even buy insecticide enough to kill a single bedbug.  
African employers are no different  
From Indian employers  
Or from the Boer white landlords.  
They don't know the saying  
That the hand of a worker should not be weakened.  
They don't know the phrase, 'increased wages'!

(Ngugi & Ngugi: 1982 20)

If this were a good salary, the Kiguundas' home would not look like that of people living below the poverty line: a single room, a single bed and a single chair. The Kiguundas cannot meet their minimum daily needs. Wangeci is unable to buy sugar and tea leaves at the same time. Despite their enormous wealth the Kiois and the Ikuuas are still after the dry patch of land owned by the poor Kiguunda - his one and a half acres. As soon as it is established that Kiguunda has defaulted on his bank loan which he had taken to finance his wedding in the church, his one and a half acres as surety are auctioned out. And they are bought by the person who vouched for Kiguunda's integrity, the same person who is Kiguunda's employer and director of the bank. In other words the very heartless capitalist who has been paying Kiguunda slave wages, has finally killed him by using the capitalist trick to kick him out of his own land.

Industrial capitalism is seen at its most merciless in the factory experience of Gicaamba. A conscientized factory worker, Gicaamba has learned a lot about the cruelty of the system that has got him, his family and many others hooked on to it for many years and for very little pay. His impassioned description of his regular drudgery in the factory is breath-taking. Yet, for all the workers' commitment to industrial capitalism, the system does not only underpay them; under it they are bereft of their basic humanity. Factory hands are treated as disposable objects. Some inhale industrial gas, chemical dust and other kinds of poison, and when, as a result, they become ill, grow mad or die, they are just not thought of anymore by the system. Gicaamba asks:

Remember the son of... eeeh... you know who I mean...  
The chemical dust  
Accumulated in his body  
Until his head cracked!  
Did they take him to hospital?  
Oh, no  
Was he given any compensation?  
He was summarily dismissed, instead  
(Ngugi & Ngugi: 1982 35)



So overriding is the profit motive in capitalism that Kioi can misuse religion for his personal material gain. His main reason for enticing Kiguunda into church is to have him subdued by the softening effect of religion; to render him submissive so that he will be satisfied with his lot in life, and not dare to ask for wage increases; and to make him, as a consequence, a moderating force on the other workers who have a high regard for him.

Another theme is the education of the deprived. It is developed through the experiences of Gicaamba. The Gicaambas, as workers, are more sophisticated and conscientized than the naive and ignorant Kiguundas. The authors use the Gicaambas as eye-openers to the Kiguundas and others. An old industrial hand since the colonial times, Gicaamba knows the capitalist system from within and without. An intelligent and honest person with a high sense of social justice, he is thus best placed to educate the suffering masses, preparing them for the revolution that will usher in a new social order. Thanks to Gicaamba's tireless effort in sensitising the masses, Kiguunda is liberated from his parochialism. He now knows that the answer to his poverty lies neither in the alcohol of the rosary, nor in that of the liquor. He completes his education under Gicaamba and, together with the others, is ready to face the exploiters in an imminent revolution. The exploited are aware that they are working for a new social order.

**SOLOIST:** The trumpet!

**ALL:** The trumpet of the masses has been blown.

**SOLOIST:** The trumpet –

**ALL:** Of the workers has been blown

There are two sides in the struggle,

The side of the exploiters and that of the exploited.

On which side will you be when

**SOLOIST:** The trumpet –

**ALL:** Of the workers is finally blown? (Ibid: 116)

Needless to say it now becomes crystal clear that the two Ngugis' main objective is to lead a relentless crusade against capitalist exploiters. They are bent on artistically inciting the exploited

masses to join hands, rise up, and overthrow the reactionary and exploitative agents in the Kenyan neo-colonial society.

We will begin our analysis of the Cameroonian plays with Victor Epie Ngome's *What God Has Put Asunder*. At a literal level, it is the story of Weka, a child brought up in an orphanage under Rev. Gordon and Sister Sabeth. When Weka reaches nubile age, two suitors ask her hand in marriage: one of them is Mr. Miche Garba, and the other Mr. Emeka who grew up in the orphanage together with Weka. Despite Emeka's solid claims over Weka as a childhood friend, Mr. Garba has his way, but Weka accepts him reluctantly. Their marriage is solemnised by Rev. Unor, probationally, without the matrimonial rings. The couple will live together and study each other for ten years at the end of which period if they still desire to be husband and wife, then the official ceremonies of the wedding will be conducted. But during the probational period Weka discovers that Miche Garba is no good. He maltreats and neglects her. He exploits the rich cocoa farms left by her father and squanders the money on his concubines. He does not tolerate Weka's questioning attitude.

When she can no longer stand Garba, Weka escapes with her children back to her father's compound to rebuild his dilapidated house and their shattered lives. Garba pursues her there threatening to forcefully take them back to his house. Once more the matter is brought to the court to take a decision on. And the court's decision is that the couple will live in physical separation although united in a 'simulated wedlock', and that the marriage remains subject to the confirmation by husband and wife only, to the exclusion of any other parties; that the marriage will become null and void once any of the two parties objects to it; that until the confirmation is carried out under the supervision of the court, the couple will continue to live under physical separation but to show decency and decorum towards each other in order to avoid an unfortunate intervention by the court. Here is part of the court's declaration:

And finally, given that, the final confirmation of the marriage following the compatibility test, voices other than that of the concerned party were enlisted, and that these voices influenced the outcome of the consultation; the court decides as follows:



One, that the marriage remains subject to confirmation between husband and wife — on a one-to-one basis, and to the total exclusion of all other parties. It shall become void once any one of the two parties concerned objects thereto. (Ngome: 1992 58)

The main theme emerging from the play is the incompatibility of the couple Garba and Weka. Theirs is an uneasy union: at best it is a precarious marriage; at worst, an unworkable one. Weka cannot put up with Garba's philosophy and philandering life style. The other theme is economic exploitation. Garba seems to have married Weka largely out of economic interest. For he takes over and exploits the cocoa farms left by Weka's father, deriving enormous wealth from them without ploughing back some of the profit to develop the farms. At another level of economic exploitation, we find Garba feeding fat on the wealth of the cooperative society, the wealth of the nation. He is the unconscionable General Director of the Cooperative Society. With cheques to this or that girl, with mounting hotel bills to settle in support of his sensual lifestyle, Garba dips his hands into the cooperative funds with reckless abandon, eventually draining them dry of cash.

But within the Cameroonian context the play and its themes have a greater symbolic significance. For instance, the marriage metaphor relates to the political union of Anglophone Cameroon and its Francophone counterpart. Hence, Weka stands for the former Southern Cameroons, and Garba for La République du Cameroun. Weka's parents represent the British government that relinquished responsibility over Southern Cameroons; Rev. Geodon and the orphanage stand for the U.N. trusteeship mandate over Southern Cameroons; the Louis mentioned in the play is France; Emerka is Nigeria, etc. Garba's neglectful but exploitative attitude towards Weka represents the attitude of the Francophone leadership towards Anglophones in present day Cameroon, a behaviour that has come to represent the central grievance in what Anglophone Cameroonians have identified as the "Anglophone Problem in Cameroon."<sup>1</sup> Now if one

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<sup>1</sup> It is a fact of history that since 1961, the year of the union between the former French and British Cameroons English and French bilingualism has become a national policy in the Republic of Cameroon. Out of a total population of 15 mil-

transfers the literal themes discussed above to the symbolic level, they will constitute an important aspect of the Anglophone problem. The ultimate social relevance of *What God Has Put Asunder* to the Anglophone Cameroonian community lies in the fact it has contributed in no small way to the overall education of the Anglophones. Of course, it may be too much of a claim to suggest that the present state of the critical consciousness of the Anglophone Cameroonians is the work of a single play alone. The play is only one part, albeit an important part, of a large process that came in with the limited freedom of the press.

Bole Butake's *And Palm-Wine Will Flow* is set in Ewana, an imaginary local *fondom*,<sup>2</sup> and a metaphor for Cameroon. Its pivotal dramatic element involves two ideologically opposed camps, two different approaches to life. On the one hand, we have the *Fon*,<sup>3</sup> the epitome of pleasure and hedonism, surrounded by stooges, bootlickers and flatterers. He dispenses favours to fawners, promoting some to higher nobility, but tortures and brutalizes dissenters. Palm-wine and drunkenness are worshipped. On the other hand, there is Shey Ngong, the Chief Priest of Nyombbom, the moral pillar and the symbol of spiritual values. He is critical of the *Fon* and strongly opposed to his lifestyle. He turns down scornfully appeals made to him to pay respect to the *Fon*.

The result to Shey Ngong's arrogance towards the *Fon* is the seizure of his wife's farmland, now given to Kibanya, recently raised to higher nobility by the *Fon*. There is a plan under way by the *Fon*

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lion Cameroonians, Anglophones make up about 4 million, constituting thus a linguistic and cultural minority. And their minority status places them at a socio-political disadvantage vis-à-vis their majority Francophone compatriots. Anglophones often catalogue a list or "wrongs" committed on them by their Francophone brothers, a litany of woes that covers all areas of national life. The sum total of these grievances makes up what has now come to be known in Cameroon as the "Anglophone problem," summed up in one word, "marginalization," or "neglect," a theme that, as in the present work, runs through some literary works by Anglophone Cameroonians.

<sup>2</sup> In the North-West Province of Cameroon, *Fon* is the title of a traditional ruler, higher than the title "chief" and roughly equivalent to the title "king" in English. The traditional domain ruled by the *Fon* is called *Fondom*. In English, the rough equivalent of *Fondom* is "kingdom."

<sup>3</sup> See previous note.

to destroy the sacred grove where Shey Kgong worships Nyombbom. But the gods and ancestors of the land cannot tolerate the desecration of the land by immoral and mediocre elements.

The Earth-goddess makes a terrible pronouncement – there will be a drought and an earthquake, including other abnormal occurrences. On his part, Kibaranko, the destructive spiritual force, lays bare the *Fon*'s palace while the *Fon* takes to his heels. The women make a horrible concoction which they intend to force the *Fon* to drink, and later they pronounce death on him. His death puts an end to force the tradition of *Fons* ruling the village single-handed, in total disregard of the councillors. Henceforth the village will be ruled by a council of elders led by Shey Ngong who will be replaced as soon as he himself becomes high-handed. From now onward power will come from the people, and not from any self-seeking, power-hungry, ambitious dictator.

**Kwengong:** He cannot be a Fon. The women have decided. No more Fons in the land!

**Tapper:** So what will happen?

**Kwengong:** The people will rule through the council of elders led by Shey, here. The day that he takes the wrong decision, that same day, the people shall meet in the market place and put another at the head of the council of elders.

**Shey Ngong:** And the affairs of the land shall be debated in the market place. (Butake: 1999 113)

From the point of view of themes, the play deals with dictatorial rule in a local *Fondom*, examining the use or misuse of power. It is a study of unconscionable leadership, with equal focus on the fostering of mediocrity and hedonism. But above all, the play expresses the need for people with moral conviction to keep up the fight against all the forces of evil in this world. A central thesis of the play is that this fight is carried out with courage, conviction and determination, the result will ultimately be victory for the forces of good, a victory in which women play a very crucial role.

In *Shoes and Four Men in Arms*, Butake looks at the negative effects of a military dictatorship on civilian population. Following the confiscation of the political and economic structures of the

land by a tiny military junta, there reigns a season of anomie in the country. Business enterprises have been forced to close down and there is misery, joblessness and penury in the land. The only job openings available are in the military and the police, a practice artificially induced to ensure the junta's tyrannical grip on the population.

The play opens with four soldiers, armed to the teeth, guarding shoes seized from a dispersed group of pro-democracy protesters. Through a vicious manipulation the shoes are reported missing and, on a trumped-up charge, a state of emergency is declared in the area of the activists branded vandals, terrorists and traitors. Under the guise of the search for missing military equipment, unarmed citizens are brutalized, and women and girls raped by the dictator's security guards. Not even the soldiers are spared by the general malaise in the land as they themselves are reduced to penury. Their salaries are no longer coming, and they are on short rations. It eventually dawns on them that the country is in the hands of only a few – the General and his security guards. Educated and enlightened, the disenchanted soldiers join rank with pro-democracy activists, burying their arms in anticipation of a future revolution:

First: Sergeant, take my hand. I am glad you know that we were all being manipulated; You are our man. I think I have enough clothes in my bag to go round. I suggest we go into the bushes over there. We will dig a hole and hide our uniforms and arms inside. We might be needing them in the future for the liberation struggle.

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Alright, alright; however, before I humour you, let me warn that out there, with the people, we must abandon the wanton violence against others that was our way of life in the army. From this moment we must demonstrate a deep respect for human life and the basic rights of each and every individual. (Ibid 141-42)

In this play, old women in their stark nakedness, chase away marauding security guards. According to traditional belief it is a curse for a man to set eyes on the nakedness of an old woman. The consequence of such bravado would be the loss of his manhood, a malediction no sane soldier would dare incur upon himself. These elderly women are on the side of the leaders of pro-democracy dem-

onstrators, the progressive forces of the society in whose hands the future seems to lie, given that they also have the support of the disillusioned soldiers.

If *Shoes and Four Men in Arms* deals with a military dictator, *Dance of the Vampires* concerns a tyrant of a different kind, an absolute monarch, Psaul Roi. The play is a classical illustration of the maxim that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Psaul Roi would go to any length to rule and reign supreme, even if it means emptying his kingdom of its human souls. Indeed, he does give away the land and its people to the devil in exchange for absolute power.

There exists a cult of vampires to which he is a co-opted but not an initiated member. With all his powerful royal acts, Psaul Roi cannot destitute his own powerful Town Crier, Chambiay, because the latter is the Chief Vampire. The monarch therefore seeks complete membership within the cult. The central cult members refuse to initiate him for two reasons: firstly a vampire monarch would automatically become the chief vampire, a factor that would neutralise the power of the other vampires; secondly, the price to pay for a vampire monarch would be too high for the kingdom. It would entail such disasters as earthquakes, fires and the spilling of human blood. But Psaul Roi waves aside all this and corrupts his way to initiation by showering money on one of the cult members, Song, and promising him a share of power in the kingdom. Having been disguised and smuggled into the vampire temple, Psaul Roi is inevitably initiated, following the governing rules of the cult. In the wake of his induction, however, calamities begin to visit the sins of the despot on his people. There is an earthquake in a mountainous region of the country in which 2000 people perish. Then a big market in another part of the country goes up in flames. The dictator orders that the salvaged goofs from the market be taken to his palace.

When some of the citizens in the large crowd he is addressing wonder how he can be so unfeeling and inhuman, Psaul Roi orders his soldiers to open fire on them. They obey and the streets are littered with thousands of bodies. Many survivors flee the country, leaving virtually an empty kingdom behind.



Then a patriotic and an enlightened army General, Nformi, aware of the pernicious, neo-colonial grip of Albania on the rich forests of the country, arrests and expels the Albanian emissary who has come to rebuild the destroyed country. The General also arrests and puts in a cage, with a bunch of ripe bananas suspended above them, Psaul Roi and Song, to be taken to the market place for public display and chastisement. A patriot had thus rid the country of a monster, and the suffering masses can now heave a sight of relief.

**Nformi:** Now, Song, as Chief of Protocol, you have the honour and duty to precede your king into your new palace. (Song is pushed into cage). Your Most Royal Majesty, your turn. Bear the cage to the market place where these monstrosities shall be exposed to the wrath and glowing vengeance of the people they were supposed to serve. They will spend the rest of their days counting their guilt on the faces of their victims; and so measure the consequences of the macabre dance of the vampires. Away to the market place! Away! (ibid. 173)

Bate Besong's *Requiem for the Last Kaiser* is about a popular uprising against a dictatorship; about the education of the deprived and their stand against a tyrant. It dramatizes two distinct ideologies locked in a fierce confrontation. On the one hand, we have an oppressive, exploitative and essentially capitalist or bourgeois way of life, represented by Akhikrikirii and his tribal clique, including the Western Ambassador and the Swiss Banker. Agidigidi is a neo-colonial state, and Akhikrikirii, a neo-colonial agent, subjected to easy manipulation by his European neo-colonial masters. The consequences of this neo-colonial stranglehold on the state of Agidigidi is the cruel exploitation and pauperisation of the masses for the benefit of the local ruling clique and compradors, and their foreign masters. The latter's survival depends on their keeping things as they are, admitting neither radical changes nor non-conformist tendencies. As a result, their administration is characterised by coercion, threat, imprisonment and torture.

On the other hand, there are the exploited, the oppressed, represented by Woman, Student, Poet, workers, market women, the unemployed academics, and former infantrymen. As a group, they



constitute the progressive forces, working for a change of the status quo. Their approach is basically radical, and their general attitude socialistic. They are out to seize power from the tyrannical minority and give it to the people. This comes through to the audience from the steady education given by the Women, the Student and soldiers in particular, and the sensitisation of the masses in general. Woman spells out the basic ideological difference between the two opposed groups:

### **Woman**

The real problem is between the two irreconcilable camps: the allies and customers of Imperialism: those who sign unequal treaties and agreements whereby their puppet-masters enjoy special privileges (*pause*). See? The proprietors of corporate stores of political intrigue and ambition; who, to nourish their gargantuan greed barter the patriotic minded progressive forces prepared to stand up against them. (Besong: 1998 8)

The Woman and Dr Akonchong roughly represent theory; the Student, soldiers and other workers, the potential for action. The ones represent reflection, the others, praxis. Thus brain and brawn become necessary for a successful revolution which occurs at the end of the play. The masses take over power after the dictator has committed suicide.

Although it is difficult to detect a playwright's tone of voice in a play, the quality of characters conceived in a dramatic conflict and the manner in which that conflict is resolved are pointers to the author's moral inclination. Generally speaking, all the Kenyan and Cameroonian plays analysed in this article offer hope for the oppressed masses. The six playwrights are not neutral but clearly on the side of the oppressed. They are therefore engaged in the subtle education of the masses, education for critical consciousness so that, through their efforts, the oppressed masses can begin to effect change in their environment for their own good. The Kenyan plays end on a revolutionary note, with the masses having the last word. With regard to the Cameroonian plays, the court's final decision in V. E. Ngome's *What God Has Put Asunder* gives Weka an edge over Garba. Henceforth she only needs to say no for their strained rela-

tionship to be baseless, and her troubles put to rest. At the end of Butake's *And Palm-Wine Will Flow*, the cruel and unconscionable *Fon* dies, putting an end to the tradition of one-male rule, while *Dance of the Vampire* ends with the absolute monarch having been arrested and caged as if he were a monkey. At the end of Bate Besong's *Requiem for the Last Kaiser*, the dictator takes his own life, and the progressive forces move into the Marble Palace and take over.

Thus the six playwrights are optimistic in the struggles of the people. But ideologically speaking, the Kenyan writers are a lot more radical than their Cameroonian counterparts. The Kenyan are Marxist-oriented in their thinking, and their art is consciously conceived from a Socialist vision of the world. By the same token, and in the final analysis, the exploited but progressive masses in the Kenyan works are more highly conscientised and more conscious of working toward a new social order than in those in the Cameroonian plays.

The Cameroonian playwrights, on the other hand, are writing in a critical realist mode, and of the three, Bate Besong is the most radical and the one closest to the Kenyan in spirit, although one would not readily classify him as a Marxist in the same category with Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Bates Besong's play, whether consciously or not, has been influenced by Marxist thought and can be appreciated from a Marxist critical perspective. For all their optimism, however, these writers in politics are not naïve to think that the revolution is for tomorrow. The Cameroonian Bate Besong is only too aware on the limitations of the writer, as he says:

The power of the writer is not always strong enough to change the political and social situation of his time but his art can become a fighting literature; he can write works which are artistically profound and politically correct. He can write works that show how his world is and could be (Besong: 1993 18)

However, it is evident that the committed writer alone may not have the power to bring about immediate political change, but he and the writers of other forms of political literature, a buoyant private press, the appropriate political opinion leaders and parties can all, together, bring about effective political change. The committed play-

wright need not be a wheel alone, but he is an essential spoke in the wheel of socio-political change. This is where the works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Micere Githae Mugo and Ngugi wa Mirii, on the one hand, and Victor Epie Ngome, Bole Butake and Bate Besong on the other, become important in the emergence of nationalist consciousness in their respective national literatures.

*Shadrach A. AMBANASOM<sup>4</sup>*

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