

**Introduction to Kwo Victor Elame Musinga's *Njema,*
An Invitation to God and Moka
By Francis B. Nyamnjoh**

It is my immense pleasure to write a brief introduction to *Njema, An Invitation to God and Moka*, three plays from the rich barn of the consummate and well-respected veteran playwright and actor, Kwo Victor Elame Musinga. My first encounter with Musinga was in 1975 when his Musinga Drama group visited Sacred Heart College Mankon, Bamenda, to perform *The Tragedy of Mr No Balance*, one of his early plays on bribery and corruption that has come to occupy the place of a classic in Cameroonian theatre in English. I was a Form Two student then, and privileged to be part of the audience of this first and only theatre evening in my five-year stay at the college. The performance was scintillating and I was so marked by the play and especially by Musinga's outstanding and very talented rendition of Mr No Balance, that in an English composition soon afterwards, I drew inspiration from the character, earning myself a distinction, something rather rare with me in those days. It is thanks in part to that early exposure to Musinga and his creative genius that I started toying with the idea of writing way back in secondary school. That I have since not given up is testimony to the need for early exposure to the possible influences that chart our destinies in writing and scholarship. This personal experience and vivid memory of the impact of *The Tragedy of Mr No Balance* on me as a thirteen year old, is indicative of the relevance and appeal of Musinga's plays to students and indeed to people of all ages and walks of life.

In *Njema* Musinga captures the predicament of love in a context where innocence and trust are preyed upon by deceit, dishonesty, promiscuity, waywardness, callous indifference to human life, the reckless abandon of parental authority and wisdom by youth in a hurry to celebrate sexuality, irresponsible manhood with or without the connivance of girls/women, and HIV/AIDS and its terror.

Through *Njema*, Musinga gives Cameroonians and human kind much food for thought: What hope is there for a society and its youth, when a girl turns down her mother's request to fetch water with the excuse that she is rushing to school (where, without her mother's knowledge, she has not been for almost a week despite similar rushes), only to head for an appointment "with her darling Aka," boasting how she put her mother "in her right place and disappeared"? What future is there for a society where men and women from childhood embrace promiscuity without responsibility, oblivious of the consequences in an era of HIV/AIDS and a multitude of hazards? What but disaster and hopelessness can easy virtue and a life of reckless abandon bring

a society, a community, a family or an individual? How can a society be responsible when each time a girl/woman declares “I’m pregnant,” the man who has showered her with inflated words of love and in whom she has invested her emotions, psychology and future can think of nothing better to say than scream: “I’m not convinced that I am responsible for it”? Is there a future for a society where it is normal for a girl like Njema to say: “Of course, men are all alike. They are so deceitful it may even tempt one to strangle them”? What does one make of a society where a girl would rather “simply commit simple abortion and put an end to everything” than tell the mother the truth of her pregnancy for fear that her mother would “make life unbearable” for her? What manner of society is this where a woman, to free one man of his sterility consciously deceives another man into believing that her pregnancy is not by him, however unfaithful, liar, cheat and opportunist the latter may be or however sincere the former is in his desire for a baby?

Seldom does Musinga, in his plays, leave his audience in doubt as to what the answers to the challenges of the moment or the way forward should be. In the case of *Njema*, his message to young girls is loud and clear: Since men are known to flee when trouble comes, leaving girls in misery and often in the hands of death, “If you have a lover, never mind the degree of the love, tell it all to your mother, tell it all to your father.” The play ends with a voice urging all and sundry: “Abortion, stop it! It is infanticide. It is murder and in some unfortunate cases also suicide.” Although this comes too late to save Njema, it is hoped that it comes in time to save others in similar predicament.

Kwo Victor Elame Musinga is a playwright preoccupied with social ills through themes articulating issues of morality, social justice, uprightness, corruption, callous indifference to public good, waywardness and the insensitivity of the haves towards the have-nots. In *An Invitation to God* and *Moka*, he addresses elitism and fair-weather friendship through the characters of Mandi and Ojoko respectively. To prove his majority as a Christian and earn recognition for years of service in honour of God, Mandi prays without relent for 79 days, inviting and pinning for God to come down and dine with him, but all in vain, as God, as usual gives his “sincere demand a deaf ear.” This, Mandi cannot understand, as it is the very God that has promised all and sundry that whosoever asks, knocks and seeks fervently shall have their wishes granted. And granted God’s omniscience and omnipotence, he has no reason to doubt. He blames God for being unconcerned and choosy, which he cannot understand as he is “rich in perfect love”. Little wonder that he is “fearlessly and emphatically ... terribly disappointed” in God.

Just when he is about to give up in total frustration, God reassures him in a voice, accepting to dine with him, but on condition that “four different religious dignitaries [Cardinal, Moderator, Imam, Evangelism Secretary] as well as a lay personality” are invited as well. When Mandi assembles the guests as requested, a cripple appears, and in God’s name, begs for food, much to the disappointment of Mandi who has “important

personalities in here, expecting a Heavenly Guest at table.” The cripple insists, “I go prayer God for you until you die,” and “no God dey again pass me.” “Massa give me food, and you dong give God food!” Mandi is impatient, and sends the cripple away in hunger.

After the cripple comes a blind beggar, followed by a little girl, both asking for food but in vain, because Mandi’s food is reserved for God alone and the “very important personalities” he has asked to come along and join him at dinner with God. Mandi cannot see that God, his guest of honour, has taken the form of a cripple, a blind beggar, and a little girl, until a Voice tells him: “Mandi! Mandi! Mandi! Here I am again! You invited me to dine with you. I unconditionally accepted and both of us agreed on the day and time. *(Pause)* I called at your abode here three times within the agreed hour and most embarrassingly, you outrageously turned Me back three times. Despite My being the Guest of Honour and the fact that I told how hungry I was, my entire plea fell on deaf ears.”

Most practicing Christians would be quite familiar with the theme of the play both from the Bible and the songs and sermons it has inspired over the years. The message is clear and compelling, one repeated by Jesus in many of his parables: whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters or creation, that you do unto me. When I was hungry, you gave me to eat; thirsty, you gave me to drink; homeless you gave me refuge; without clothes, you clothed me; lonely you kept me company; etc.; now come into the house of my father. And because Musinga’s is a God of forgiveness not of punishment, a God of the masses not of the elite, a God for all and sundry, the Voice reiterates: “Earthly religious dignitaries, My ways are that of humility, gentleness and mystery for I am your God. I bless the food and as you eat, I am with you. Mandi, the Host of Hosts, Heaven is truly with you. Whatever you execute on earth is solidly ordained in Heaven.”

In *Moka*, the theme of friendship is explored through the simple acts of dishonesty and greed, especially to those with whom one should be nothing but virtuous, open, generous and kind. Ojoko behaves in a similar manner to Mandi, by denying food to Esther her best friend, despite the discomfort and attempts at dissuasion of her house-boy. “I’m not here to be feeding others,” she insists, and pleads with God in prayer to “command visitors, stop all visitors from coming to my house now, until I your servant Ojoko have finished my meal; then I can prepare to serve you once more, Amen.” After the prayer she summons her food brought only to realize that it has been eaten by her own dog. This experience of disappointment by and in a friend, pushes Esther to reexamine her friendship with Ojoko, who has become “a pillar of ingratitude – Greed personified”. Ojoko recognizes with regret that she has been pushed by her greed to “forfeit my best friend for good”. Shamed by her behaviour, she tries to take it out on Moka, her long term houseboy, who would not take it lying down. In a song, he mocks at Ojoko, his Madam: “You lose your chop, Your lose your friend; You are full of shame, Cunny no good.” As a veteran playwright and actor, Kwo Victor Elame

Musinga is more than just a pioneer in popular theatre. His simple but profound messages demonstrate a depth of understanding and insight into human nature and the nature of society. The texts he crafts are universal and timeless in their content and appeal, even as the themes and situations that inspire them are localized in specific places, experiences and histories. Kwo Victor Elame Musinga seeks to nurture, through his plays, the virtues of being human, while simultaneously crusading and inviting all and sundry to crusade against the dark side of humanity. In this regard he deserves to be celebrated as everyone's playwright, regardless of race, place, creed, culture, gender or generation.