

Book Review

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John Tiku Takem, *Theatre and Environmental Education in Cameroon*, Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies 76, 2005, pp193, ISBN 3-927510-92-0 (pb), €19.95/£15.99.

A number of books have emerged in the recent past exploring different dimensions and inflections of applied theatre. John Tiku Takem's is one such text. However, what is exciting about its happenstance in this field is that is the first one that grapples, in a sustained academic manner, with the role of theatre and environmental education in Cameroon.

The book is divided into five substantive chapters with an introduction and conclusion. The book grapples with a number of issues that have always disturbed both scholars and practitioners in the field of theatre for development. It is in this respect that Takem problematizes the very relationship between theatre for development and the attainment of the objectives of environmental education in the South-West province of Cameroon. His main argument is that for environmental education to be successful, it must take into cognizance the fact that theatre is a medium that communicates development and as such should be framed to reflect the nature of its content or message, the context in which the message is communicated and how the medium and its strategy is applied.

Chapter one maps out, in a historical sense, the development of theatre in Cameroon in general and then narrows down on the genesis of theatre for development in Cameroon; chapter grapples with politics of environmental resource management in Cameroon while highlighting the various bio diversity and conversation theories that have informed the different conservation paradigms. The chapter also grapples with the question of foreign assistance in the conservation enterprise; chapter three is a critique of the interventionist environmental education in Cameroon: the author argues

that the 'traditional' approaches to the environmental education have failed because they assume that the local population lack knowledge. He notes that: "The superimposition of rationalist environmentalism on a peripheral educational system has ensured its uncritical practice in Cameroonian schools (p.98). The author argues therefore for the privilege of indigenous knowledge in environmental education curriculum; chapter four evaluates a number of theatre projects on environmental education that have been undertaken in Cameroon and demonstrate why a number of them have not been effective; chapter five explores the myths and politics of theatre for development. This is the most interesting chapter in the entire book as it raises some of the very fundamental issues that a number of theatre for development scholars and practitioners often become evasive about. The chapter raises the question of patronage and the independence of theatre for development enterprise; it also highlights issues of ethics in the practice.

The book concludes however in a pessimistic note as the author declares that theatre in ecological pedagogy has not been effective. Though the book ends with this kind of tone, it offers theatre for development practitioners and stakeholders in environmental education with vital lesson on how to conduct more efficient and effective theatre for development programmes. This is a significant contribution in theatre for development as it is invaluable for theatre for development practitioner, donors, scholars and researchers.