

**Christopher Kamlongera, Theatre for Development in Africa With Case Studies From Malawi and Zambia, (Bonn: Education Science and Documentation Centre, 1989), 278 pages.**

Since the mid-1970s a somewhat strange cultural hybrid called Theatre for Development has made remarkable progress in Africa. Equally remarkable has been the volume of publications on the subject in papers, articles, and above all, official reports.

Christopher Kamlongera's book is rather different from most of the previously published material, despite its acknowledged debts to those sources. Earlier papers have been mostly too short to place Theatre for Development in a broad historic and aesthetic context. The official reports have sometimes provided that context, but are usually vitiated by a tendency to please the donors (who normally finance the publishing of the reports), through exaggerating the success and achievements of Theatre for Development projects. **Theatre for Development in Africa** attempts to break that tradition by providing a more comprehensive aesthetic, sociological and historical context, and some kind of evaluation of popular theatre practice.

Although the subtitle of the book indicates that Malawi and Zambia provide the bulk of the examples, Kamlongera is careful to show that the issues raised refer to a wider nexus of cultural practices. The result is that the earlier chapters, which tend to be more theoretical, are fiercely eclectic. Chapter one ranges through discussion of colonial impressions of African dance, the colonial heritage of literary drama and analysis of pre-colonial "ritual" drama. Chapter 2 covers theoretical problems of committed theatre, and examines African reaction to colonialism in the fields of literary drama, popular performance and theatre architecture. Later chapters deal with equally broad issues such as Travelling Theatre, the Kamirithu popular theatre movement in Kenya, and colonial attempts at establishing didactic African language theatre.

The eclecticism allows Kamlongera to make considerable advances on some earlier accounts of Theatre for Development, by linking it to other genres such as literary drama and travelling theatre. Occasionally these lead to

very useful analysis of thorny issues, such as the distinction between ritual and drama, which he illustrates with examples from performances within **Chinamwali** rituals. Another rewarding section, traces the British colonial policy of encouraging theatre as a potent form of communication and informal education. On the other hand, the heavy load of synthesis is not always linked to clear diachronic structure; this leads to categories of periodization and class-formation which may raise a few eyebrows among historians and sociologists.

Chapters 7 and 8 give specific and very informative examples of Theatre for Development from Malawi and Zambia, with Chapter 9 providing a conclusion. The Malawi/Zambia analysis draws on two traditions influencing the tradition - theatre aesthetics and theories of development. Despite (or perhaps by compensation because of ) Kamlongera's strong background in theatre practice, it is the developmental theory and methodology which predominates. There is an impressive account, backed by statistical tables and flow-charts, of the impact which Theatre for Development has had on Primary Health Care education in Liwonde A.D.D. in Malawi, and the Malawian section on the Extension Aids Division of the Ministry of Agriculture gives a succinct account of the interface between Civil Service policies and audience reaction to puppet shows. The Zambian material, possibly because it mainly relies on secondary sources offers more balance between aesthetics and sociology.

The major polemic thrust of **Theatre for Development in Africa** is to endorse the indigenization of theatre in Africa by shifting away from literary drama, which Kamlongera associates with a Western tradition; the African theatre practitioner is urged to undo the "shackles that bind him to the colonial heritage". This argument is forcefully expressed, particularly in a section linking the deficiencies of extension workers' communication skills with a hangover of colonial elitism.

Here Kamlongera is venturing into the more complex and controversial arena of neocolonial ideology. He is obviously aware (for example in chapter 9) of the way reactionary regimes can subvert the democratising trajectory of Theatre for Development by a process of cooption, reducing it to an instrument of legitimation. Repeated references to the Kamiriithu experience in Kenya serve to remind the

reader of the way Theatre for Development can be used as a popular weapon to make a radical critique of neo-colonial hegemony, and of the repression which those authorities can unleash if they feel theatre threatens the imposed national consensus. These references accumulate suspense as the reader expects the substantive examples in the last three chapter to be analysed according to similar criteria of theatre as a methodology empowering people with the tools of genuine democracy. The conclusion of Chapter 9, however, moves adroitly but anti-climactically away from that penetrating question to a panegyric for the achievements of Theatre for Development in the vaguer, less contentious field of "conscientization".

No doubt the debate about Theatre for Development will continue, particularly the extent to which it serves to liberate or mystify the subaltern classes. The usefulness of **Theatre for Development in Africa** is to provide a fruitful matrix within which readers and future practitioners can initiate such crucial discussions.

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