“If this notion of the “power of narrative” is sound, then it seems to me that Dr. Gomia’s theses in this book warrant careful and serious consideration. While technologies are morally ambiguous, it appears to me that the objectives of Development Theatre are toward sustaining community and enhancing democratization. In the context of current African political and cultural struggles, these appear to me to be very laudable objectives. I thus recommend both this work and its author.”

GEORGE W. SHIELDS, LITERATURE, LANGUAGES AND PHILOSOPHY, KENTUCKY STATE UNIVERSITY

“Path breaking in its originality and breath-taking in its coverage, this truly outstanding book critiques a variety of prevailing developmental paradigms on popular theatre practice in Africa, suggesting novel ways forward”

TAYAH MENTAN, AUTHOR OF THE STATE IN AFRICA

“This is incisive research that stretches the frontiers of options available to practitioners of Theatre for Development.”

DR. DONATUS FAI TANGEM, SENIOR LECTURER OF DRAMA AND THEATRE, UNIVERSITY OF YAOUNDE

“This book widens the frontiers of research in literary, cultural, economic, and political studies... It is a wonderful reference text for ordinary men and women, students, researchers, and scholars.”

DR. BABILA MUTIA, PLAYWRIGHT, UNIVERSITY OF YAOUNDE 1, CAMEROON

This book draws on years of rich empirical research on radio drama production in Cameroon to offer a strikingly new perspective in Development Theatre discourse in Africa. Chronicling the history and evolution of Development Theatre practice in Anglophone Africa and arguing for literary forms that address the basic everyday realities of ordinary people in a medium they understand, the book revisits the crucial question of utilitarian literature in a continent that continues to brandish a begging bowl even as it celebrates fifty years of independence. Radio Theatre’s inherent latitude to reach the masses in a manner and with matter they identify with makes of it an invaluable albeit often neglected sub-genre in the universe of Development Theatre. Radio Drama disperses the omniscience of the purportedly indispensable and all-knowing superstructure, and provides for an enormous degree of authenticity for ordinary people seeking to enhance their self-esteem. It sets out to address collective concerns in an all-embracing approach that explores interactive learning characterized by continuous questioning of and adaptation to reality. Radio Drama creates events and condenses everyday life into original, participatory dramatic constellations with a strong sense of direction in a story, a plot and a moral. These people-oriented sensitivities are fertile ground for grassroots empowerment. With plays that address the rustic, ascetic and practical realities of ordinary people seeking liberation, Radio Drama is the point of departure for feasible development initiatives in Africa.

VICTOR N. GOMIA holds a PhD. in Postcolonial Literature and an MA in Public Administration. Currently, he teaches World Literature in the Department of English and Foreign Languages at Delaware State University.
Mobilizing the Hordes
Radio Drama as Development Theatre in Sub-Saharan Africa

Victor N. Gomia
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Acknowledgements

This book is based in part on research carried out at the Sprach-und Literaturwissenschaftliche, University of Bayreuth. Numerous people gave me support in the course of this research. I am particularly grateful to my Doktorvater, Prof. Dr. Eckhard Breitinger for the assistance he offered me during my stay in Bayreuth. I am thankful for the advice given to me by Prof. Bole Butake of the University of Yaounde 1. I am profoundly grateful to the Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Delaware State University for approving my request for Academic Enrichment Program Award, an award that facilitated the field work during the last phase of this work. I am indebted to Dr. Joe Amoako, Chair of the Department of English and Foreign Languages, my colleagues in the Department and Dr. Marshall Stevenson, Dean of CAHSS for their unflinching support. This work is dedicated to my wife, Nelly Tutuwan Gomia and our daughter, Nahsima Nchuycke Gomia; the greatest support came from them.
Preface

It is with great personal pleasure that I introduce the reader to this seminal work of Dr. Victor Gomia’s on the cultural possibilities of Development Theatre delivered in the medium of African radio drama. My encounter with Dr. Gomia in August 2005 was an eventful and fortunate one, I think for both of us. While serving as Chair of the Division of Literature, Languages, and Philosophy at Kentucky State University, I was desperately on the look for an additional instructor of English at a time when our enrollment was greater than expected. Serendipitously, Prof. Gomia appeared in my office at precisely the right time, having just immigrated to the United States. He was at the point of having completed his doctoral thesis, the germ of the current book, but was awaiting his final defense for completion of the Ph.D. Having had a number of Cameroon nationals serving in our Division before, I was well aware of their tradition of rigorous academic preparation and strong work ethic, and Dr. Gomia proved to be no exception. He received the appropriate work visa and immigration papers and was welcomed into our Department of English, where he taught until the end of spring 2011. During a summer hiatus, he was able to travel to the University of Bayreuth in Germany, where he had been doing a good deal of research, and successfully defended his thesis.

My association with him was not only the normal professional relationship one would expect between an administrator and faculty member, but took a distinctive intellectual turn. As a professor of philosophy with wide interdisciplinary interests, I teach and do research not only in my field of specialization, but also in Kentucky State’s unique Integrative Studies Program (IGS), an academic division devoted to the exploration of cross-disciplinary interactions and cultural history. As part of my duties in IGS, I regularly teach an undergraduate course entitled “The Modern World,” a course required of most baccalaureate degree-seeking students, which focuses on intellectual and cultural revolutions from the
Enlightenment to the emergence of the developing world, post-colonial literature, and the global environmental crisis. During the sessions on post-colonial literature, where we read Frantz Fanon and Chinua Achebe in particular, I would consult with Dr. Gomia; moreover, I invited him to give guest lectures on the history of post-colonial thought and literature with an eye toward assaying the roles of Fanon and Achebe. These lectures were most successful in engaging student interest. Indeed, on the basis of these lectures, I found Dr. Gomia to be quite learned in the history of modern African culture, and I personally learned a great deal from him, gaining a much deeper cultural perspective and context for the study of Fanon and Achebe. While I am not a specialist in this field, I believe I can say with confidence that one of the virtues of the present work is the critical survey it contains of the relevant literatures in the African humanities. As a non-specialist, I certainly found the critical discussion of the literature to be accessible. Thus, the book will have scholarly value, irrespective of whether or not one accepts the particular theses Prof. Gomia is proposing.

In reading this work, I was struck in particular by the following passage which speaks to the essence of what he is attempting to argue:

“The communal participation occasioned by Development Theatre creates a forum for the appreciation of views that have been relegated to the background since independence in Africa. It reconsiders and takes into consideration the ‘old culture’ issue thereby creating the culture of dialogue that sees development as a process and not an imposition by the political or intellectual elite within or without the developing country. In this way, both the political and intellectual elite would recognise the political and creative potential that the people at the grassroots possess.”

For the sake of the development of democratic pluralism, health and prosperity in African nations, I hope that Dr. Gomia’s
recommendations as expressed above are taken seriously. As a number of philosophers such as Richard Rorty and Paul Ricoeur have pointed out (in their different ways), literary narrative possesses a power to reach audiences and to advance social reforms far better than theoretical treatises that speak primarily to elite intellectual audiences. To allude to one of Rorty’s examples, the “Coda” to Dickens’ *Bleak House* did far more to institute social and economic reforms in 19th century England than did any social scientific treatise of the time or any philosophical argument of J. S. Mill’s. If this notion of the “power of narrative” is sound, then it seems to me that Dr. Gomia’s theses in this book warrant careful and serious consideration. While, as I have argued in my several publications on the philosophy of technology, technologies – including media technologies – are morally ambiguous (they can render disastrous as well as very positive results), it appears to me that the objectives of Development Theatre are toward sustaining community and enhancing democratization. In the context of current African political and cultural struggles, these appear to me to be very laudable objectives. I thus recommend both this work and its author.

*George W. Shields*

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Cameroonian Radio Theatre and African Radio Theatre in general are stakeholders in the business of enhancing Participatory Development. If radio theatre serves very generally as a medium of entertainment, it also serves relevantly as a theatre of conscientisation, for it digs into the everyday experiences of the common man whom Theatre for Development seeks to relocate from the periphery to the centre of development initiatives. Radio theatre provides insights into the usually hidden traditional and cultural structures of the communities thereby informing both the common man who is the would-be beneficiary of the development initiatives occasioned by Development Theatre and the high-tech expert and academic who are coming to terms with the capacity of the common man to contribute to his/her wellbeing. The relevance of high-tech expertise and Nobel-price type of literature in development issues is put to the test by the impact of radio drama.

In this respect, radio playwrights like Nora Elu Mumba in her *Kofi the Village Doctor*, and Victor Epie Ngome in his *The first Defence*, in tandem with the respective producers draw from local events to disseminate in artistic manner the peoples’ feeling towards certain aspects of their society. These events constitute the breeding ground of socio-cultural phenomena from which the new mode of development initiatives, spearheaded by Development Theatre, draws extensively. The enactment thereof of the people’s local realities re-animates local traditions and provokes critical thinking on issues facing the common man. In highlighting these local values, the playwrights and the producers take the audience to the stage where they generate and restore confidence in themselves and their potential to effect the needed change in their daily lives. This process of relocation puts to test the utilitarian value of ‘literature of
combat’1 at the backdrop of a continent that is bleeding from the cycle of abject poverty. Radio drama is the veritable literature of combat because, in an all-inclusive manner, it seeks for social contention and relevance, thereby inviting the common man to self-inform on matters of social import.

This briefly is the thrust of this book that is divided into six chapters. The first chapter establishes the ideological premise of the claim while giving an insight into the factors that necessitate the emergence of Development Theatre in the African context and generally justifying the raison d’être of the rest of the study. Chapter Two outlines the theoretical basis and highlights the focus of available critical discourse on radio plays. In “Development Theatre as a New Theatre in Postcolonial Africa: Progress, Impediments and an Alternative Approach,” which is the focus of the third chapter, the form, content and general context of pre-colonial African theatre is explored. Attention is also given to the changes that obtained in the theatre during the colonial experience and the ultimate emergence of the New Theatre in the postcolonial setting. In this light, the potential and limitations of Development Theatre as a theatre of conscientisation in Africa is explored and radio drama proposed as a viable alternative. “Radio in Africa: A Gateway into Theatre for the Multitude” is the focus of the fourth chapter. It attempts to explore

1 The drum-beating determination of some African writers to command attention to the plight of the people has come with, amongst other resounding rubrics, “Literature of combat” which is in turn corroborated by the (in)famous clichés that hinges on ‘not chasing the rat while the house is on fire’. For more than half a century, plenty of such literature has been written and much more has been said and written about it, while the continent remains at the edge. Literature of combat assumes a hierarchy of ‘texts’, conferring admission into a small coterie of scholars, most of who are of the University culture. With the backing of the academia, this class straddles between the establishment and the common man thereby according to itself a privileged space in the society’s culture. In addition to the controversy that shrouds the goal of literature of combat, it can be argued that it has failed to achieve its longstanding goal of establishing the desired social order in the African setting. There is therefore, a need to re-think the form and content of the kind of literature that would be all-embracing, all-inclusive and therefore functional.
the relationship between literature and the media, while defining the context of African Radio Theatre. It equally traces the beginnings of African broadcasting and how radio theatre became part of this debut that yielded offspring like the Guinness-Cameroon corpus which is, incidentally, the source of most of the primary material the book draws from. A survey on radio drama in two towns in Cameroon investigates the assumptions that inspired this work. Chapter Five is titled “Radio Theatre Aesthetics: Engineering Development Initiatives on the Air”. It explores the aesthetic relevance of radio drama and the peculiarity of the sub-genre. How key African radio playwrights have employed the peculiar radio aesthetics to significantly contribute towards the reanimation of local cultural traditions and render radio drama a functional art is pursued in this chapter. How functional would radio drama be is the pre-occupation in Chapter Six that is titled “Development Discourse in Selected Cameroon Anglophone Radio Plays”. Taking into consideration the key development strategies espoused by given popular education theorists, theatre practitioners and development resource persons, the chapter culls from 1978/1979 selected Guinness Cameroon corpus to demonstrate how, even if imperceptibly, radio drama would draw from the past and the present and how it seeks social contention and relevance. The “Conclusion” re-states the factors that justify the need for such a research endeavour and validates the stated hypothetical position that guides the study with suggestions on related fertile areas of research that could be explored. A postscript restates the highlights of the entire discourse for clarity.