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Laura Edmondson

**Performing Trauma in Central Africa:
Shadows of Empire**

Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018.

248 p. \$90.

ISBN: 978-0-253-03247-8.

Edmondson's book is an outstanding addition to the literature on theatre and performance in situations of conflict and post-conflict. It will be an indispensable work for students, academics, and activists concerned with the role of the arts in war-affected communities and within the humanitarian sector more broadly. The book makes vital reading, acting as a powerful antidote to some of the assumptions evident within these fields and a buffer to some of the more eulogizing accounts of practice. The book's salutary effect, however, should not be taken to suggest that it is simply an account of the pitfalls of the use of the creative arts in war zones. It provides a much more measured, critical, and passionately engaged account of the dynamics of the humanitarian endeavour (through the lens of a theatre academic), never slipping into easy binary categories of dismissal or validation.

Edmondson rightly questions the naivety of international efforts and the subtle imbrications of what she proposes as an 'empire of trauma' into a diverse range of arts, memorial, and interventionist strategies within the highly complex worlds of Uganda, Rwanda, and the DR Congo. However, while the analysis is detailed and at some points damning, it always feels simultaneously generous and careful. This is particularly the case when, in her penultimate chapter on 'The Branding of Post-conflict Northern Uganda', she places the participants not as hapless victims of misguided international effort, but as skilful negotiators hyper-aware of the benefits to be gleaned from engagement with the range of projects they are offered. They might never be far from the discourses of humanitarianism that construct particular roles and behaviours for aid recipients, but they also enter into the market for support as careful, sometimes eclectic consumers.

Her final chapter, amusingly called 'Confessions of a Failed Theatre Activist', resonated particularly strongly for me with my history of running a performance research project called 'In Place of War'. Thus, her account of the slow realization of the international artists' superfluousness, rang brutally true for my own work.

One reason I was so delighted to read this book was that Edmondson's article 'Marketing Trauma in Northern Uganda', originally in *Theatre Journal*, LVII, No.3, in 2005, and reworked for the second chapter here, was an inspiration to the whole research team behind 'In Place of War' as

we sought to find an approach to documenting war zone artists that hoped to respect work but also doubt some of the more aggrandizing claims. I feel that I have been waiting for this extended analysis since reading that article, and while I wish I had had this book when I started work in war zones nearly twenty years ago, I think this should be a core text for students of performance, war, and humanitarianism for some time to come.

JAMES THOMPSON

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Miriam Haughton

Staging Trauma: Bodies in Shadow

London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. 260 p. £79.00.

ISBN: 978-1-137-53662-4.

Haughton's timely and significant book is positioned at the intersection of trauma studies with contemporary theatre and performance, and sets out to investigate theatrical interventions into the suppressed histories of forgotten populations. Written in a clear and readable style, it is suitable for final-year undergraduates onwards. It offers four detailed case studies, each addressing a different key concern: sexual violence, terminal illness, imprisonment, and asylum.

The works are from the contemporary Irish and British stages. Two are scripted plays – Marina Carr's *On Raftery's Hill* (2000) and Laura Wade's *Colder Than Here* (2003). The third is an immersive site-specific performance that examined the history of the Magdalene Laundries in Ireland, ANU Productions' *Laundry* (2011), which was staged in a disused laundry and based on detailed research into the building's everyday use, its inhabitants, and its surrounding community.

The fourth piece is one of a series of 'Theatre of Witness' works staged in Northern Ireland, exploring the experience of people in the asylum system (*Sanctuary*, 2013). Theatre of Witness is a creative process developed by Teya Sepunick of gathering the stories of disempowered and marginalized people and creating stories that are performed by the people themselves, who bear witness to their audience.

Witnessing is a crucial concept for this study, and Haughton skillfully weaves together scholarly sources, theatrical criticism, and personal reflection to draw the reader into an exploration of the complexities and ethics of staging traumatic experience, its reception, and the challenges it presents to the spectator and to spectatorship. The concept of witnessing extends to the scripted plays, as Haughton skilfully draws out the ways in which Carr and Wade make visible the abject and the repressed. Carr spotlights violence hidden within the family and domestic sphere, made invisible by the power dynamics of state and