

The Dangerous Bridge: A Cameroonian Story

Timothy Epupa Ngege

AuthorHouse (Oct 23, 2012)

Softcover \$15.18 (155pp)

978-1-4772-3540-9

There are so many stories from Africa that remain untold and *The Dangerous Bridge* is one that deserves a wider audience.

Timothy Epupa Ngege is a jurist, preacher, and motivational speaker whose poems have been featured in the Wisconsin Review of African Literature. Set in the author's home country, the story focuses on a servant of the James and Sally Gray, a European couple living in 1920s Cameroon where James Gray, the first British volunteer to work in the villages around the Ekona plantations.

James's wife, Sally, becomes frightened after some local men pay the Grays a friendly visit. James decides that getting a young man from a village farther away to stay on their property would help Sally feel safer. Ikome comes highly recommended, and the couple marvels at his ability to learn their language and their ways. However, they seem blind to Ikome's hunger for power and remain unaware as he takes every opportunity to exploit his relationship with them to gain the upper hand over his countrymen.

Before living with the Grays, Ikome was locked in a power struggle with his cousin to rule their village. He lost that struggle, so working for the Grays is a chance to become a man of power and influence. With no sense of irony, Ikome adopts the name Frederick Lugard from a prominent British colonial administrator the Grays admire.

Lugard (as Ikome is known throughout the rest of the book) doesn't allow other Africans to get close to the Grays or share in his privilege. Lugard uses his ability to speak English and his knowledge of his own people to scheme and deceive Europeans and Africans alike.

After the Grays leave the country, they place their project under Lugard's supervision, and he uses his wits—along with the gun the Grays left him—to undermine the village chiefs. His elaborate deceptions land his rivals in jail and out of his way, or so he believes. When the people finally rise up against him, Lugard's jailed rivals seize this chance to tell what they know about Lugard's schemes.

Since the book concentrates on Lugard's power grabs, there are few details about James Gray's projects. While Lugard is well-drawn, it's more difficult to understand the Grays' motives. When Lugard gets caught after taking James Gray's coat and gun, Gray exacts physical punishment. While this was an accepted practice then, it didn't fit with Gray's calm nature. However, before and even after that incident, Gray is willing to trust Lugard with his home and property.

Whether due to the fact that English is the author's second language, or that Ngege was being true to the time period in which the novel was set, the word use has a somewhat formal tone. For example, when Sally Gray says she will "henceforth" follow her husband to work, he replies, "It is not yet time for you to accompany me because we are still at the primary face of a road project and it is very tedious at this stage."

The author has crafted what seems to be a well researched historical look at Cameroon in the 1920s. Those who are

curious about Cameroon or have a general interest in colonialism in Africa may find the book instructive, as it provides a view of colonialism from the perspective of the colonized.

JADA BRADLEY (April 16, 2013)

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