

Waterz Yidana

My Favourite Book

The Blinkards is my favorite book. Written in 1915 by Kobina Sekyi, *The Blinkards* is celebrated as the first Ghanaian play written by a Ghanaian. This is one of the reasons why as a playwright myself, I cannot resist a deep love for it. It sets the pace not only in discourses on classical drama in Ghana, *The Blinkards* remains evergreen in honing the talents of budding playwrights.

Among other attributes, it is most loved for the issues Sekyi addresses. It reflects the indelible impact of the cultural clash on the once unadulterated Ghanaian society through colonialism. But then, like any writer with a great depth of philosophical thoughts, Sekyi voices issues that are still instructive for reflection on present-day Ghanaian and African society. It never ceased to amaze me from when I first read the book. It speaks about issues I was already battling within my mind. Through reading this book, I began to question my beliefs, interrogate my own assumptions and challenge the status quo in the society in which I find myself.

I fell in love with both the author and the book because I thought Sekyi exhibited bravery to have touched on such sensitive issues. Even now, it's still quite difficult to openly talk about some of these themes but Sekyi dared to write about them. That was a century ago when education in Africa was so much harder to receive. Many Ghanaians or Africans were overwhelmed by the activities of our colonial masters back then.

He straight out criticized the negative attitudes of Ghanaians, especially the Fantis of Cape Coast, towards their own socio-cultural, and even political values. As it turned out, the indigenous Ghanaians clung to the values of the colonial master, rating them superior and preferable to their very own. This situation hasn't seen much change even with the current generation of Ghanaians and Africans at large. At best, what is presently happening can be said to be cosmetic and aimed at raking in hard currency under the guise of cultural exchange through tourism.

The wit and amusement of this satirical comedy are still as effective as it was back then. It ridicules the attitudes of the Western-oriented Fantis of Cape Coast who uncritically relegated their standards to the background in favor of European standards. Our traditional marriages are less preferred in favor of European weddings. Christian or European values are the toast in our society today. Hardly can the average African child speak their native language eloquently compared to foreign languages.

As a writer, a Ghanaian and an African, I find this play extremely important in our time because it focuses on the perils of embracing Western influences at the expense of the Ghanaian or African culture and traditions. Invariably, we certainly need many more of such mind-liberating books of this nature to free this current generation of Africans from mental slavery, as eloquently preached by the legendary Bob Marley in his classic entitled, "Redemption Song". The most quoted line in this song says, "Emancipate yourself from mental slavery. None but ourselves can free our minds."

ICPL and the International Writing Program Panel Series, September 9, 2022: You *Must* Read This!
Noa Suzanna Morag (Israel), Marcel Okou (Benin), Nana Abuladze (Georgia), Waterz Yidana (Ghana)
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"The Anglo-Fanti" was a short story by Kobina Sekyi now included in this volume. It was first published in 1918 and it also speaks to similar issues where the Fantis were completely consumed by European culture. They bore European names, spoke too much English, wore European clothes, ate European foods, and tried in many ways to blindly mimic the ways of the Europeans.

The situation is still not much different today because we still have the majority of Africans believing that native or African names are local and evil, they will rather prefer English or Arabic names. They still prefer to wear suits in the scorching sun and will choose English, French, or any other colonial language over their local languages. Unfortunately, English is the measure of one's intelligence in Ghana, yet you're not considered so intelligent if you speak and write very well in your native language.

This play was an eye-opener for me. It taught me so much wisdom. It made me aware that not everything from our colonial masters is good for us. It increased my pride in my heritage. We can pick the good things from foreign cultures relevant to our environment and let go of those that are of no benefit to us and go against our rich culture and traditions. This is very much in synch with the message conveyed by Kofi Awoonor in his poem, "The Anvil and the Hammer".

It reads in the second and last stanza thus,

"Sew the old days for us, our fathers,
That we can wear them under our new garment, After we have washed ourselves in
The whirlpool of the many rivers' estuary
We hear their songs and rumours everyday Determined to ignore these we use snatches From their tunes
Make ourselves new flags and anthems
While we lift high the banner of the land
And listen to the reverberation of our songs
In the splash and moan of the sea."

I strongly believe that this is the only way Africans can progress on their own without much influence from the outside world. I equally join the likes of Kobina Sekyi, who was a Ghanaian nationalist, Pan-Africanist, lawyer, and writer, who was far ahead of his time and wrote *The Blinkards*, a seminal book in the history of Ghana, to re-echo the clarion call that Africans must retrace our roots and combine them with best practices before we can turn our predicament around.

Thank you.