

## **THEATRE AS A REFLECTION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: A STUDY OF *DILEMMA OF A GHOST AND THE BLINKARDS***

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### **ABSTRACT**

African traditional civilization has been greatly influenced by western culture in both positive and negative ways. Enculturation has resulted in strengthening the African society's core values. Of course, culture is just a people's way of life that is passed down from generation to generation. It includes concerns about language, marriage, attire, crafts, food, holidays, religion, social life, education, and the people's political system, among others. The study employed close textual reading and content analysis as the method for analyzing the plays for discussion and application. Also, through the lens of postcolonial discourse, this paper hinged on Homi Bhaba's Hybridity theory with great attention to digesting the plays *Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965), by Ama Ata Aidoo and *The Blinkards* (1915) by Kobina Sekyi, to discuss the difficulties with the concept of culture and the effects of Western culture on traditional African societies.

### **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

Literature and theater are forms of collaborative work that use words, voice, movement, and visual components to convey meaning. While transcultural theater refers to theater and literature that embraces all people of the world, intercultural literary work can be described as a hybrid process in which dramatic texts, acting styles, settings, designs, and performance traditions operate and negotiate between their respective cultural contexts in order to create a *mise-en-scene* that includes a range of aesthetic elements from the source culture and the targeted culture. In other words, multiculturalism refers to theater works with a racially mixed cast that do not actively draw attention to cultural differences among performers or to the tensions between the text and the production content. Multicultural theater and literature also refer to the theory that several different cultures rather than one national culture can coexist peacefully and equitably in a single country. The plays to be used for this study are *Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965), Ama Ata Aidoo and *The Blinkards* (1915) by Kobina Sekyi. Both plays were written by these Ghanaian scholars whose works have contributed to ensuring the sustainability of the Ghanaian theater and literature from the early twentieth century (1960's) till now. Despite the many difficulties it has experienced throughout the years, theater and literature have endured and will endure. The two plays selected for this study deal with themes that are both specific to our society and universal to Africa.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Postcolonialism, indeed entails varied approaches hence various theorists engaged in this discourse, both past and present do not always agree on specific set of definitions, nevertheless, all theorists or students of postcolonialism study may accept that it generally considers the impact of colonization on cultural, political and economic dimensional framework of the colonized. In tackling postcolonial discourse, one is highly inclined to agree with (O'Reilly, 2001), that three key issues that can't be overlooked include "the use of indigenous cultural traditions, the appropriation of English and the impact (whether cultural, psychological or political) of colonialism and its aftermath" (p.61).

Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity, which is an aspect of postcolonial discourse in general, conceives identity and the nation which questions social norms in all spheres. Bhabha comes across as a very imposing contemporary literary critic who has greatly affected the postcolonial studies discourse with his writings. He tackles the subject of colonial and postcolonial phenomenon from a novel angle which according to (Salami et al., 2018), is "due to his double emphasis on the necessity of paying attention to cultural factors and taking them as leading forces in the development of postcolonial studies" (p.61). He demonstrates how these cohesive individuals display a growth that is both highly intricate and linear. Bhabha's hybridity, in the words of (Pederson, 2016), expresses a state of "in-betweenness," as in a person who is caught between two cultures. It is clear from postcolonial studies that although the cultures can learn from one another, each person is trapped between two cultures. His research demonstrates that a person living in a postcolonial setting does not exclusively belong to one culture because colonialism created a culture that is essentially a mirror image of the culture of the colonizer. Homi K. Bhabha, a postcolonial theorist, in his book *The Location of Culture*, according to (Selden, 2007), has made significant contributions to postcolonial critique. His idea of hybridity became widely accepted in establishing the Postcolonial theory's thesis that all cultures are intermingled and cannot be distinguished from one another. In this regard, the plays understudy this theory is adopted to underpin the 'in-betweenness' of the cultural issues in the plays hence hybridity theory in a post-colonial perspective.

### **Ghanaian culture**

Cultural norms that govern social lives are deeply ingrained in traditional Ghanaian performing arts. The practice of the performing arts is characterized by a strong exhibition of culturally based behavioral norms. To guarantee that children continue to participate in the social life of the communities to which they belong, (Nketia, 1999) emphasized the significance of giving them the chance to experience the music and dance of their own environment. (Dzansi 2002), identified various Ghanaian indigenous cultures through an analysis of children's repertoire from three themes: Names and Identity in the Ghanaian Context, The Love for Natural Forms: Chewing Sticks, and Cultural Significance of Food. Through observational experiences, one discover that dramatic performances, movements in time to music, texts of folk stories and songs, and methods for moral instruction and education are all used to recount history, teach morals, and regulate the social behavior of people in societies and communities. Drumming, songs, dancing, belief systems, conventions, and practices, among other essential elements of Ghanaian culture, are perpetuated and conserved through festival celebrations, (Gbadegbe & Mensah, 2013).

### **Culture**

Skinner (cited in Agha, 2014) defines culture as the "totality of how people live and behave" (p. 38). (Akama, 2012) states that culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, society" (p. 91). (Kluchohn & Kelly, 1988) described culture "as all those

historically created designs for living, explicit and implicit, rational, irrational, which existed anytime as a potential guide for behaviors of men” (p. 44). Culture, in the eyes of (Otitte & Oginwo, 2016) is "the intricate sum of man's accumulation of knowledge, morality, beliefs, arts, customs, and technology, which are shared and transferred from generation to generation," (p. 86). Again, (Sibani 2014), also assert that "Culture is the entity that contains the totality and is associated with the people's way of existence, handed from age to age, generation to generation"(p. 107), while Obiajulu, quoted in (Onwuekwe, 2006), also believe "culture is the culmination of all human creations, including those that are intellectual, technical, artistic, physical, and moral. Human social existence is governed by a complicated component of living called culture. The things each generation must learn and to which they eventually may add" (p. 86). Culture distinguishes the human being from other animals, in that humans are able to construct patterns of behaviors for themselves, and are able to transmit this from person to person and through generations.

### **Cultural Change**

Culture has a built-in tendency toward change. No culture ever stays the same. Global social and cultural transformations are currently taking place. (Uwandu & Nwankwor, 2006) contend that cultural change must be distinguished from culture dynamism, which only refers to a culture's capacity to absorb and incorporate specific other cultural values. Culture itself develops and transforms. This happens gradually over time. Indeed, a lot of the changes in our society over time can be attributed to western civilization. There has been such an intense Western effort to change the status of women all over the world, most especially in Africa where it is obvious that women are lowly placed in the scheme of things when compared with their male counterparts. Western style of education has been entrenched in our African constitutions, styles of dispensing justice and politics.

The environment is the setting in which a human being, an animal, or a plant exists or functions. In essence, we as individuals must adapt to our surroundings. As a result, we must alter the way that we respond in our society to particular circumstances. According to (Popoola, 2016), culture changes as a result of environmental changes. The culture remains the same when the environment is constant and does not change. New concepts that appear to be more advantageous for that way of life also influence cultural change. When a culture feels that a way of life is better than the current way then it is likely the culture will adapt to those better ways and incorporate that way into their lifestyle.

### **METHODOLOGY**

Through a close textual reading and content analysis, the plays, *Dilemma of a Ghost* and *The Blinkards*, this paper critically examines the blind ways of adopting the European culture and its influence on Ghanaian culture. The study gives special consideration to the cultural, gastronomic, and linguistic details that are disclosed about the plays' characters. Additionally, it examines the significance of these words and idioms as they are used in diverse works. These two understudied plays provide us with sufficient information to paint a complete picture of the subject matter of this research. The plays are typically analyzed in the order that they are listed in the study's edition.

### **DISCUSSION**

One may argue that multiculturalism is the embodiment of social, cultural, and universal values. It is quite interesting that, the major characters in *The Blinkards*, is Mr. Brofosem and Mrs. Brofosem, have stayed in the United Kingdom for a while and returned to their home country as well as Ato Yawson and Eulalie Yawson, also major characters in *Dilemma of a Ghost*, also

been-to's, but the difference between the two couples is that the former are both Ghanaians who have been exposed to the western culture by receiving education there but with the latter, Eulalie Yawson is an African-American who seems to be lost to a typical African culture hence portray unacceptable behaviors when she visits her in-laws with her husband. However, these characters act as foil or contrast each other with the roles assigned them for instance, between Ato Yawson and Mr. Brofosem, both characters have had their education outside their original homes but, Mr. Brofosem still believe in his African and for that matter Ghanaian culture compared to Ato Yawson who seems to reject the African culture after he returned home with his wife Eulalie. This point is supported by this dialogue;

**Mr. Brofosem:** *Well. you are silly. One cannot help singing an English song. If he can sing at all in the English manner, can he? If I sang in Fanti, although I should be singing in the same voice, the intonation would be bound to be different,*

*listen (sings)*

Ntokuratow no, d3 as3m no a, Dabi 3b3y3 we!

Nto- (p.15)

The above extract provides insight about the characteristic nature of Mr. Brofosem. He is used to both European and African culture. He does not chastise his own unlike that of Ato Yawson. He believes that even though he has stayed in Europe, the weather conditions that prevail between the two countries are totally different and therefore, he wears local dresses and sandals that merits the occasion,

**Mr. Brofosem:** I am learning how to wear the native dress. The wearing of European clothes makes one too uncomfortable. (p.154)

At this point, Mr. Brofosem's attitude regarding his culture had changed since he can now declare publicly after his association and socialization with his own people. However, Ato Yawson's behaviour is quite different. He does not conform to the norms of the society for instance;

**Ato Yawson:** Heavens! Is there any reason why you should make so much fuss? All because I have married an American Negro? If you know how sweet Eulalie is [...], Now all this jacket you are putting on will bring the whole town here ... (p. 14).

From the above extract, it is very clear that Ato is so obsessed with his wife and even though the family had arranged a wife back at home for him, he refuses to accept it and rejects what his family wants to force on him. Ato's family believe that per the status of every culture, regardless of who is getting married, the family members should gather to witness the proceedings. On the other hand, Ato believe that marriage elsewhere takes a different dimension especially in the United States of America where things aren't same as in Africa. They believe Ato got it wrong here but he believes one needs to adapt to another's culture to be able to live and accomplish a task in life especially if one is domiciled in that foreign land. Again, placing the two wives side by side, Mrs. Brofosem the wife of Mr. Brofosem does things sharply in opposite to Ato's wife Eulalie Rush. For example, Mrs. Brofosem chastises and jabs her husband for singing in the local language. She holds the view that after studying and living in abroad for some time, he shouldn't behave like the local people, he should reject the local life including their local food.

**Mrs. Brofosem:** (looking shocked) Oh Jim!

**Mr Brofosem:** (surprised) Hello, what's up?

**Mrs. Brofosem:** How can you sing such a thing? It is only bushmen and fishermen and stupid and rascals who sing that song

**Mr Brofosem:** What's wrong with it? (yawns) Ah-h! (P.15)

The above conversation emanated from the local song her husband sung immediately after singing a song in the English language. Mrs. Brofosem doesn't understand why her husband should sing again in the local language just after singing in English. This makes her refer to her husband as a bushman or stupid. Interestingly, she is even a native unlike Eulalie Rush, who is a foreigner. Because she hasn't adapted to the Ghanaian culture so well and so when her husband, Ato's family brings snails, a local delicacy to Ato, Eulalie throws away the snails because she doesn't know it is consumed and this makes Ato furious, here is what ensued:

**Ato:** What's all this?

**Eulalie:** Those horrid creatures of course!

**Ato:** Where are you taking them?

**Eulalie:** Throwing them away, of course.

**Ato:** What rubbish?

**Eulalie:** What do you mean? What rubbish? If you think I am going to sleep with those creatures, then you are kidding yourself. (p.27)

The above extract demonstrates or shows Eulalie's intolerable attitude towards the African culture. Snails can be found in most part of this planet but her problem is that it is not consumed as food where she comes from and so sees everything wrong with what Ato's family has just done. Eulalie has not accustomed herself with issues in the Ghanaian environment. Although she is a foreigner, culturally she needed to adapt to the values of her new environment. Naturally, food is enjoyed by everybody on this planet but Eulalie's attitude toward her mother-in-law about food is not good. Esi Kom had gone to Accra to spend a few days with Ato and his wife but on her arrival, Eulalie threw everything she carried to the house unto her face and drove her out of the house. It is also clear that Eulalie is in a dilemma in terms of cultural manners and behavior alluding to the fact that multiculturalism permeates every sphere of human existence.

Culturally conscious stories are written to depict an authentic African American perspective and lifestyle while melting pot stories are usually written from a mainstream (European) perspective (Taylor, 1997). There is also another category of literature, a very socially conscious literature, which focuses on the conflicts that occurred between African Americans and Europeans when integration took place. The type of plays reflecting this category of literature were intended to help non-African American readers empathize with and tolerate African-Americans (Taylor, 1997), hence, certain attitudes and behaviors of such characters also constitute intercultural literature or theater. Some scholars therefore argue that, the kind of materials engaged, shows reflection required to ensure strong rights of representation that is to be undertaken, thus, the power dynamics inherent in intercultural practice require an address. The reason why (Lo & Gilbert, 2002) suggest a matrixing of interculturalism and postcolonialism. They explain that "hybridity theory has been consistently political, taking as its primary imperative the task of exposing and redressing unequal power relationships between cultures, whereas interculturalism has concerned itself more often with the aesthetics of cultural transfer" (p.44). They suggest that hybridity theory offers current debates about interculturalism as "a framework for analyzing such thorny issues as agency, hybridity, and authenticity" (p.44). It can also provide scholars with means to talk about rights of representation without succumbing to limiting and liberal definitions of culture.

From the *Blinkards*, Lawyer Onyimdze demonstrates by his appearance and mannerism that though he's lived in the UK, he can wholly merge the two cultures and live by it unlike Eulalie who sharply contrasts him. As a lawyer, he dresses in the European attire or style for work but

changes into Ghanaian or African clothes attire once he comes home. Eulalie on the other hand isn't able to do demonstrate adaptability by totally rejecting African food.

**Lawyer Onyimdze:** *The court has risen; I have no case tomorrow. I have taken off the European sacks and the inns-of-court gown which are my working-clothes. I have put on the native garb, I have withdrawn my feet from boots, I have put on sandals. Now, I shall smoke while. (p.24).*

From the above extract, Lawyer Onyimdze clearly demonstrates that his knowledge, acceptance and most importantly employment or usage of specific attire to represent and reflect a specific environment is apt. The idea here is no culture is alien to the other. However, Eulalie's cultural attitude in terms of hybridity and orientalism contrasts totally with Lawyer Onyimdze.

**Eulalie:** What a blasted mess! Well. (She shrugs her shoulders). I suppose folks must have their customs. Though if you as me, I think there has been enough messing round for one day. (She goes into the room and returns with a glass of whisky and, as usual, a packet of cigarettes and a lighter. She lights her cigarette and moving to the door on the right, peeps out into the old apartment. She makes a face. Ato enters) (p. 37).

The above extract shows Eulalie's intercultural attitude. Her cultural orientation defeats and contrast with that of Lawyer Onyimdze, who comes across a well learned Ghanaian who has received education outside of his country of birth but after returning home, he lives an ordinary life. He smokes and drinks just like Eulalie but does so at the right place and time. Smoking in the open and most especially for females is frowned upon in Africa but is accepted and common in the western world. So Eulalie engaging in this act therefore contradicts that of the African culture.

Again (Lo & Gilbert, 2002) further state: "with its insistent stress on historicity and specificity, postcolonial theory offers ways of relocating the dynamics of intercultural theatre within identifiable fields of socio-political and historical relations" (p.44). This assertion probably seek address the cosmopolitan concerns of scholars and provides a space for 'other' people and cultures to assert their right to represent themselves, as well as to challenge representations which perpetuate disempowering stereotypes. This idea is what (Stam & Spence, 1982) refers to as patronizingly positive images or propagate historically inscribed economic, social or symbolic inequalities. This implies that every culture can be seen in the other and besides, it is the individuals who can make the culture identifiable without downplaying it.

Similarly, an intercultural theatre or literature which seek to tell stories or present performance practices from 'other' places may appear to say more about other things than it does about the cultures it ostensibly represents. That is why (wa Thiong'O, 1986) prompts that colonialism's "most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship with the world" (p.16).

One can also agree to the exhibition of transculturalism in the plays. For instance, in *The Blinkards* we see members of the cosmopolitan club demonstrating pure European lifestyle at every opportune time but was in full gear at the wedding ceremony of Okadu and Tsiba.

**Press 'CC':** *Champagne! Champagne!*

*(Glass of champagne are handed round.)*

**Press 'CC'** *Ahem! The next item on the programme is the health of the bride and bridegroom which Mr. Kyerewfo will propose. (p. 115)*

Interestingly, the above extract demonstrate how colonialism and post-colonization has influenced the culture of the Africans thereby making them accept wholly some things that were originally not theirs. Drinks such as champagne was not found on the African soil but those Africans who had education outside the continent encountered it may have transferred its knowledge and usage home and today, champagne has become universally accepted element which is acknowledged and used by all. Again, members of the Cosmopolitan club enjoyed adorning suites and trousers with flying ties and other western or European adornments. However, in *Dilemma of a Ghost*, Ato and his wife Eulalie's life contrast that of the members of the Cosmopolitan club. Ato knows very well life in Africa is different as compared to the America. In Africa, the extended family among other things are cherished and valued but he failed to educate Eulalie about it which eventually created problems for her in his family. Today, extended family is celebrated by the world and we all depend on each other as a basic means of survival.

**Eulalie:** (*anxious*) *Oh, this means the whole lot of them will be coming to see us*

**Eulalie:** (*sees the woman*) *I say! (She glares at Esi Kom for a second or two and then turns to Ato)*

*Ato, would care to ask your mother what she wants in our room?*

**Ato:** *Eh ... Maami, what were you looking for us? (p.26)*

The above extract confirms Eulalie's non familiarity with the African culture and Ato's failure to school her after marrying and agreeing to bring her home to Africa. Unlike the members of the Cosmopolitan club in *The Blinkards* who saw themselves in the European culture, marrying and drinking just as the westerners, Ato and Eulalie's marriage, no family member was present to present to witness it. Eulalie's parents are known by the audience. This is a clear indication that, transculturalism encompasses, involves and combines elements of other cultures. Another important thing to note in *Dilemma of a Ghost* is the eventual acceptance of Eulalie by Ato's family. This happened when the family realized that whatever trait or way of life that she was portraying wasn't a deliberate attempt to disrespect their culture but it was purely a genuine portrayal of what she knows. Whatever she exhibited in terms of a seeming abhorrence of the way of life of Ato's family was not borne out of despise or malice but sheer ignorance. Their expectation was that, Ato should have done some schooling, either on the part of Eulalie or the family. This is an indication of what I may term as culture flexibility which has become a part of the general cultural discourse. This is where a specific culture is able to make room for pardon in situations where people goof but more importantly, the blunder shouldn't be blatant but based purely on ignorance. The culprit is expected to be guided and tread right afterwards.

### Conclusion

Generally, cultures and traditions all over the world has had some kind of influence on them by other cultures, hence the African traditional set up being substantially influenced by the Western culture is no exception. Travelling to seek knowledge, greener pastures as well as tourism have greatly enhanced this phenomenon. The maxim about the dynamism of culture may largely be deriving some impetus from this phenomenon, since man's incessant desire to keep exploring and searching will keep him/her moving to other places and this expose him/her to other cultures and traditions of other place. As the world progressively becomes a global village, where people's ability to interact with other cultures appear to be normal, then issues of multiculturalism, interculturalism and transculturalism becomes even more germane. It gives room to other considerations such as 'culture flexibility' mentioned earlier.

This necessary awareness and direction is what theatre is exposing all to. This inevitable social change is being brought to the fore through the power of theatre. One can therefore summarily

deduce that theater which can be seen as a collaborative art in terms of performance and enactment indeed transcends borders and has a universal appeal power. It therefore cannot exist in isolation, but will need other elements such as performers to be an integral part of it, and it is through performances that directions and emerging nuances of tradition and culture can be portrayed or brought to the fore.

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