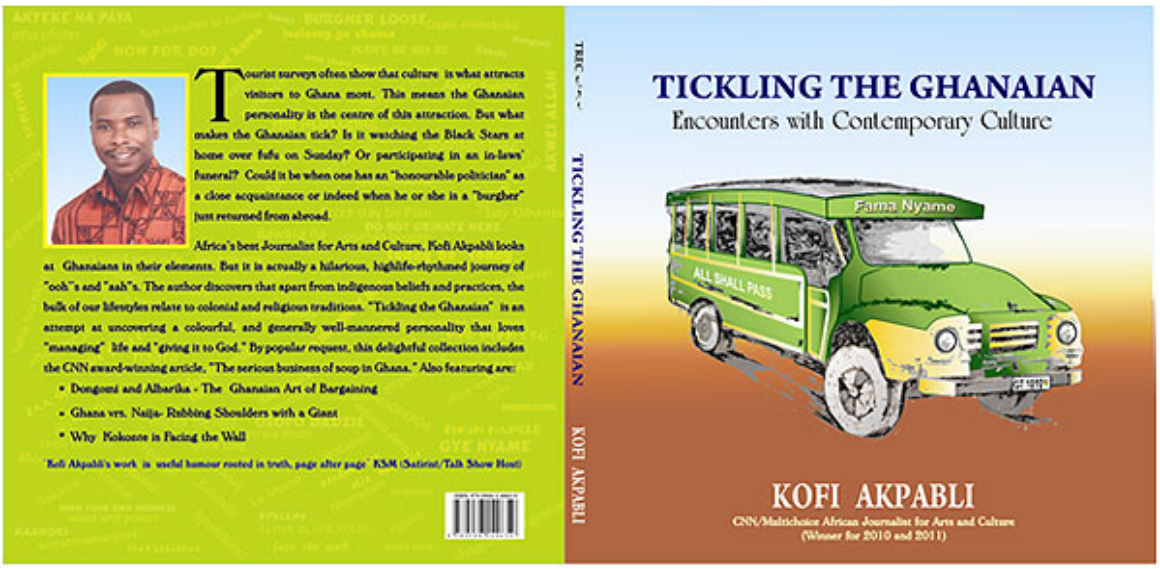

Title: Tickling the Ghanaian: Encounters with Contemporary Culture.
Author: Kofi Akpabli
Publishers: TREC
Genre: Culture/Tourism
Year of Publication: 2011
Pages: 142
Country: Ghana
Reviewer: Dr. Kwaku Adutwum Ayim Boakye

The book 'Tickling the Ghanaian' really delivers on its core mandate: making the reader laugh while asking pertinent questions about our lifestyles. In my view, the book tickles three major things: the reader's knowledge, imagination and view of the status quo. In *Tickling the Ghanaian*, Kofi Akpabli takes the reader through a 'crash course' on aspects of Ghanaian culture and heritage while posing very important development-oriented questions. The author examines some of the things we wear, eat, drink and do. For very obvious reasons (and I agree), he steers clear of one major aspect of every culture: governance.

Given the alarming disappearance of indigenous cultural norms and practices, this book serves as a refreshing documentation of cultural practices. For example, aside their ornamental roles, very few people know the other functions that cloths play in Ghanaian society.

The seeming change in culinary taste and the growing 'ordinariness' of Christmas in Ghana are cleverly brought to the fore in *Between Tinapa and Boflot- where did the old taste go*? Kofi may never be forgiven by traders for exposing their sophisticated persuasion mechanisms in *Dongomi and Albarika.*

The versatility of the human emotion is well captured throughout the book especially in *This is the way we say goodbye.*
In this chapter, the reader is treated to a classical example of how a supposedly routine narrative about somebody's death contains encrypted messages to the listener. An example will buttress the point:
"An important feature is the story surrounding the death itself…….. Every visit requires the narration

Oh everything was fine , oh, papa was very fine. You know, the last time we rushed him to the Korle Bu, I didn't have enough money but I managed with my small gari business so he was discharged and Papa has been fine since.
Oh if you saw him you would be happy. It was in the morning and he asked for his newspapers as usual, you know he doesn't play with his Daily Graphic….. Mawuli was the one who went to the room first. You know the poor boy should have been in school but where is the money? My small gari business cannot do everything. (Mawuli lowers his head. He knows the drill by now, a sob or two could earn him some small change)"

But one question: how do you describe an author who writes about death and makes you laugh?

The chapters on two very 'strategic' (not reservoirs) social drinks make not just interesting but revealing reading. The reader has given a well-researched history of Schnapps and Akpeteshie as well as their contemporary roles (both culinary and customary). Schnapps for example has more than three major socio-cultural functions and these are exhaustively elucidated. The chapters on (smocks) the batakari, soup, fufu and kokonte are so well written that it makes the reader wish to purchase a batakari or salivate to the graphic description of the dishes mentioned.

The author's style is captivating. At a time when reading seems to have become a chore owing to the 'visual-revolution', a book like *Tickling the Ghanaian* leaves people who have an aversion for reading with very little excuse. May this book mark a turning point in such peoples' lives. Its style has been carefully crafted to suit all levels of English proficiency. It appeals to all range of readers, from the emeritus professor to the six year old child who is beginning to understand what is being read.

With carefully crafted phrases like a *hair witness account, can-ny testimony to a culinary achievement, a cover cloth in hand keeps the peeping Tom away, soup-eriors,etc,* the author displays an unusual dexterity of twisting the language to grab attention to an important concept. In *Things we do for Rings* and *Ghanaman and Rastaman ,* the reader cannot fail but notice Kofi's irritation with certain attitudes in our society- the disproportional premium given to rings (and their attendant protocols) as well as the opprobrium his short stint as a rasta look-alike generated. Even here, useful lessons are learnt about the need to place greater emphasis on things that matter- such as being faithful to one's spouse instead of having an inordinate fixation with a ring. We also learn to avoid judging people just by their locks (sorry I meant looks).

Perhaps the title of the final chapter is by no means arbitrary The thought of death always has a sobering effect,- exactly the mood required after having been tickled throughout the volume. In this somber mood we are reminded, nay, challenged by the author to ask for change, change that is necessary. This work brings out the artist in the author. The Ghana map of jargons and phrases that he aptly named *Ghanakasacartograph* isone good example. The cover design and indeed the short poems he himself composed as prologue to each chapter reflects a creative literary journalist. Above all what tickles me is how someone could do a sustained prose on very sensitive and provocative topics without offending anyone.

In this tickling book, Kofi's mixture of humour and brutal frankness is a stroke of genius produced only by a master of the game who has won the prestigious CNN international awards back to back. If there is one packaged gift which sums up the essence of our Ghanaian-ness it is *Tickling the Ghanaian*. The volume is a cultural guide, a tourist's hand book and a hypertension reducer all rolled in one.

Let me start by asking a few questions of my own:

- Why aren't we celebrating persons such as the author and his illustrious forebearers in Ghana?
- Can we start teaching creative writing in our secondary or tertiary institutions?

- Why are our cultural norms disappearing at the speed of light? What can we do as a nation to preserve them?
- Were I a medical doctor and had this book been a drug I would write the following prescription:
- Dosage: 1 chapter 3 times daily, Patient's mind to be shaken vigorously before reading.

Known side effects: A cheerful disposition and a challenged mentality. Keep out of reach of people with neither a sense of humour nor the willingness to learn about and preserve Ghanaian culture. Let's keep laughing and thinking. Thank you.