

Book Review: Apt, Nana Araba. Learning How to Play to Win.

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Review by:

Professor Molar Ogundipe
Professor of English and Africana Studies
Director, Writing Centre
Ashesi University College, Accra, Ghana

Professor Nana Apt does not write as a shy violet; she begins her book by calling on us to stop the culture of conferencing, work-shopping and collating gargantuan data which are never read, data that have already provided 'answers, remedies, recommendations'(Apt, 2) to, for and about the developmental problems we know we have. Consider how much data already rests at the U.N. about the issues regarding which we are still meeting and piling up paper. She opens her book with the challenge that, as intelligent and gifted people living in a richly-resourced country, we have no excuses for poverty, nationally or individually. She engages us to look at ourselves for reasons why we and our country or presumably countries are poor while she offers answers: one is our lack of knowledge, enlightenment and personal commitment to achieve that does not exculpate our leaders, what she calls 'the Ghanaian gentry'-the educated elite of the country; the other answer is that we remain poor because the poor too often accept their poverty and 'strive only to have their station in life serviced rather than aim to get out of it with any available opportunity'. Such an attitude creates an attitude of dependence on 'well-to-do members of the family' and 'economic migrant' relatives, as well as a state of 'learned helplessness', a phrase and theory she attributes to her colleague, another one-time Ashesi mind too, Dr. Abena Asantewa (5; Acknowledgements). Acknowledging one's colleagues, students and sources richly as she does throughout the book is another quality of leadership and responsible intellectual production that Prof. Apt provides.

She expresses concern about the creation of a next generation, given the regrettable values that the present elite in Ghana (and I would add, other African countries) live and perpetrate. How does the next generation build a country when they are raised by their elite parents to be alienated from that country? This is an issue that worries me too and has provoked my activist actions with some Nigerian scholars worldwide, expressed in work to retrieve and perpetuate our culture and heritage as Yoruba people. To this end I became a founding president of something we called 'The Yoruba Studies Council'. Like Prof. Apt we were troubled by the possible extinction of our language (in the next fifty years some linguists fear) and culture, if we do not raise our children to speak and understand our language. African children need to speak one or more of their local languages. Many of our elite, in West and East Africa at least, proudly announce that their children living in Accra, Lagos or Nairobi with two locally-born parents, literate in one or more of the local languages, do not speak any of them. Nana Apt rightly points out that if a child does not understand the language of birth, right away a lot of creative or intellectual potential regarding the child's own creative development is deficient. She asks: how does a child like

this grow up thinking Ghanaian or able to create something reflective of Ghanaian or African culture? (8). I enjoin us at this gathering to think carefully and long about this cultural predicament.

Although Prof. Nana Apt says that this book is not an academic work, it certainly gives us the qualities of soundness and credibility that characterise respectable intellectual work. The book is well-planned in a dialogic way along the lines of the author's argument: What is poverty? How is it defined by experts, (that is, by those who know)? Ghanaian contribution to their own poverty, (a very challenging chapter), The nature of poverty, Where are we now? Where shall we go from here? Facing the future: making administrations more democratic. In short, her chapters seek to answer the questions that trouble her about her subject while she takes care to document her data and verify her claims. She provides much educational and informative material while she offers her readers good and reliable sources. Though her discussion is held at a personal and concerned level, the bases of her passionate enquiry are researched and justified. Her intention may not be academic, that is, to write a sociological treatise only, but her achievement is certainly intellectual and academically impressive.

The language of the work is accessible to the layperson. She writes a racy, easy-to-read prose that keeps our attention on her challenging and thoughtful issues, thereby carrying her reader along. This book, as a work of public intellectualism needs to become a much-debated text in town and gown just as I hope that it becomes a text-book in social studies and other humanities disciplines and courses. I wish the book a second edition life in which case the text can be given the slight editorial brush-ups that it needs here and there. We should, however, congratulate Nana Apt for getting the work published at all, privately too, it seems, and in such an attractive volume. While the cover has attractive colours and an iconic concept that supports the theme of learning to play to win, I wish that it would have had a double-gendered picture, that is, a picture that shows women also in the act of trying to win, particularly since women need that exhortation more intensely, especially on the national front which is the domain of the text and Prof. Apt's concerns in the book. Prof. Apt is my sister in gender activism and struggle, however, so she knows what I mean!

I wish to end this review with a small but significant paragraph from her significant ending; she does not only talk, she makes suggestions and recommendations. She says:

Ghana needs to grow up (*and I can say that applies to many African countries*, my interjection). ..The discussions on what went wrong are archaic. Frankly such verbiage is boring and we deserve better. Long before the Europeans colonised us we had thriving cultures, traditions and centuries of our own civilisation. We bore our children, cultivated our fields, traded with the world, defended our territories and faced the future. If colonisation did anything lasting to us, it took away our belief that we can control our own destiny. I believe that we can (93).

If you believe that we can, say: Yes, we can.
Congratulations to Prof. Nana Araba Apt.