

African Diaspora and Cultural Hybridity in the Dilemma of a Ghost by Ama Ata Aidoo

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Abstract: The return of the African diaspora to their motherland is scrutinized by theorists and critics such as Ama Ata Aidoo in *The Dilemma of a Ghost*. This article aims at analyzing the cultural malaise of the African been-to upon their motherland and their capacity for adaptation to the new African realities. From her standing perspective, the Ghanaian playwright stresses dominant regimes of the African diaspora, cultural hybridity and identity conflict, diaspora disillusionment and resolution. Within a postcolonial critical framework relying on Stuart Hall's cultural identity and diaspora approach and Homi Bhabha's approach of hybridity and mimicry which focus on the nature of postcolonial culture as a strength rather than a weakness.

Keywords: Culture, diaspora, globalization, hybridity, identity, postcolonial theatre.

INTRODUCTION

"Mobility creates the world" (Coulibaly, 2015, p.7) with new values. This new paradigm of the world opens or puts an end to boundaries between continents, people, and cultures. Therefore, in this new world emerges notion of the migrant with multiple intersections that arise from the experience of exile, whereas "immigrant" is a word with sociocultural connotations (Nepveu, 1988, p.187). Indeed, this sociocultural connotation addressed to immigrants living away from their homeland is known as diaspora. In line with that idea, theorists and writers like Ama Ata Aidoo in *The Dilemma of a Ghost* scrutinizes diaspora, especially the return of the African diaspora to the homeland. The purpose of this contribution is to analyze the cultural malaise of the African been-to once back to their motherland and their capacity of adaptation to the profound cultural, social, and spiritual mutation of Africa. Then, how is the African been-to cultural malaise manifested in the play? In other words, how does a flexible lifestyle or civilization operate in a rigid cultural context? This study will be conducted through the postcolonial framework relying on Stuart Hall's cultural identity and diaspora approach and Homi Bhabha's approach of hybridity, mimicry, and third space which focus on the nature of postcolonial culture as a strength rather than a weakness. This analysis has a triadic basis: dominant regimes of the African diaspora, cultural hybridity and identity conflict, diaspora disillusionment and resolution.

Dominant regimes of the African diaspora

In *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, the African diaspora went through a traumatic effect and has a discontinuous point of identification. In fact, they do not have a fixed identity but always are in a

dynamic process of transformation. Thus, the return of Ato and his western influence and Eulalie's African- American identity express the ruptures and discontinuities of the African diaspora identity.

The return of Ato and his western influence

In the prelude of the play, the whole family is involved in the welcoming ceremony of Ato. He draws this particular attention because he is considered as "the one scholar" (p.2) of the family. Then, he becomes the source of family pride and joy. Ato's return to his homeland happens at a specific period in his community. That is to say

They all expect him to come down, now and then, at the weekend and on festive occasions like Christmas. And certainly, he must come home for blessings when the new yam has been harvested and the Stools are sprinkled. The ghost of the dead ancestors are invoked and there no discord, only harmony and a restoration of that which need to be restored (p.2).

This passage specifies the expected moments of Ato's return back home which are "on festive occasions like Christmas. And certainly, he must come home for blessings when the new yam has been harvested and the Stools are sprinkled". These two periods are cultural importance for the family in the sense that it is the moment when "the dead ancestors are invoked and there no discord, only harmony" in the whole family for those who stayed home and for those who went abroad. In other words, "the new yam" harvest and the "Stools" sprinkling constitute the family cultural identity. Therefore, Ato cannot be let aside of this cultural celebration because for Hall and Gay, cultural identity is a "sort of collective one true

self, hiding inside the many others [...] which people with a shared history hold in common” (1996, p.30). In one word, Ato’s expectation in these particular moments requires traditional and cultural necessity.

Fed up with his African traditions and beliefs, the been-to has come with another beliefs, the western ones. In so doing, the Ghanaian playwright stresses cultural transformation and change which can be seen through the one scholar acts. His cultural transformation is the result of being in touch with the American culture throughout his beloved, Eulalie. Ato shows his cultural transformation and adaptability to Eulalie’s western culture when he says:

‘Lalie, don’t you believe me when I tell you it’s O.K? I love you, Eulalie, and that’s what matters. Your own sweet self should be O.K, for any guy. And how can a first-born child be difficult to please? Children, who wants them? in fact, they will make me jealous. My darling, we are going to create a paradise, with or without children. We shall postpone having children for as long you would want (p.4).

In this extract, we have words from an African first-born who has integrated another cultural value to his own. One can say that Ato is influenced by the Western culture where one can create paradise with or without children and where one can postpone having children for as long, he or she wants with the use of the contraceptive methods. Ato’s attitude can be explained by the effects of mobility and its representation in the sense that displacement and circulation categorize the contemporary world and its representation (Coulibaly, *op.cit*, p.9). So, analyzing Ato’s attitude in this perspective, can allow the reader to understand his cultural transformation and change. And according to Hall, this cultural influence is caused by “the *présence américaine*” or African diaspora which resulted from immigration (quoted by Chemakh, 2015, 34). To cut it short, the one scholar returns home with an American lifestyle due to his cultural transformation, change, and adaptability. However, the second leg of dominant regimes of the African diaspora is Eulalie’s presence in Africa.

Eulalie’s African- American identity

In Ama Ata Aidoo’s work, we have the return back home of Eulalie in Africa, the continent of her ancestors when she says “I’ve come to the very source. I’ve come to Africa and I hope that

where’er you are, you sort of know and approve” (p.19). In fact, it is her first time in Africa with her beloved, Ato. Now, it rests with him to introduce her to Africa in the following:

Eu: But I will not be poor again, will I? I’ll just be ‘Sweetie Pié’. Wow! The palm trees, the azure sea, the sun and golden beaches...

Ato: Steady, woman. Where did you get hold of a tourist brochure? There are no palms where we will live. There are coconut trees... coconut palms, though. Unless of course if I take you to see my folks at home. There are real palm trees there. (p.3)

This dialogue reveals that the couple is still on the American soil and is preparing to come in Africa. Also, we notice that Eulalie is eager to be in Africa and live her best life with the palm trees, the azure seas, etc. The dialogue foreshadows Eulalie’s expectations. Now, time has come for Ato to introduce her when they reach his family. But her presence seems to be an intrusion in it. Being aware of that, Ato emphasizes on her African origin as follows:

My wife comes from America. But who says I have married a white woman? Is everyone in America white? In that country there are white men and black men. I say my wife is as black as we all are. Please, I beg you all, listen. Eulalie’s ancestors were of our ancestors. But (warming up) as you all know, the white people came and took some away in ship to be slaves... But she is not a slave. It was her grandfathers and her grandmothers who were slave (p.12).

Here, Ato shows the African status of his wife. And he even insists on the fact that she is not American by “who says I have married a white woman?”.

Beside the point, he recalls the historical background of Eulalie’s ancestors. That is to say, her ancestors were taken to America by force when the white people came otherwise “Eulalie’s ancestors were of our ancestors” and vice versa.

Next to the African identity of Eulalie, she has embodied at the same time the American one. Indeed, being born and grew up in America, she carries out their culture and identity everywhere. As an illustration of that “Eulalie comes in with a packet of cigarettes, a lighter, an ash tray and a bottle of Coca-Cola” (p.18). She feels free to show her American identity where women can openly smoke and drink Coca-Cola without it bothering

anyone. But the overlapping cultural identities of Eulalie oblige her to live in an anterior monologue as a means to reveal the inner side of her cold welcome in Africa. The only one who gets in touch with this interior monologue is the homodiegetic narrator who sees and knows everything about her. For example, he says

She sits on the terrace facing the audience. Soon the voice of her mind comes across the courtyard, later her mother's voice is heard. As the voices speak, her body relaxes except for her mouth which breaks into a light smile and her eyes which stare in front of her expressing the emotions that her thoughts arouse in her (p.18).

As the reader can notice, Ama Ata Aidoo explores Eulalie's inner thoughts. She refers to her mind and thoughts which reveal her psychological state. This interior monologue places Eulalie in a state of exile far away from her relatives.

In the light of the aforesaid, let's say that African diaspora through the return of Ato and his western influence associated to Eulalie's African-American identity unveil the dynamic process of transformation they went through. They succeed in embodying their African identity and their acquired one. Both return of Ato and Eulalie in Africa go along with the postcolonial culture as a strength rather than a weakness. However, the cohabitation of the two social values will give birth to cultural hybridity and identity conflict.

CULTURAL HYBRIDITY AND IDENTITY CONFLICT

According to Stuart Hall, "Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and differences" (1994, p.9). The transformation and differences that come from diaspora identities give rise to cultural and identity clash. In the play, there is a conflict between individualism and communalism as social values and the linguistic transgression.

Clash between individualism and African communal values

In *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, identity conflict lies on the inadaptation of the characters. They balance between individualism and communalism as social and cultural norms. This fragmentation gives birth to cultural hybridity. Considered as "the new cultural form that forms cultural exchange or mixture" (Chemakh, 2015, p.11), hybridity explores 'the paradigm of the influence of the colonial ideology (individualism) and culture on

the subaltern subject' or colonized like the African society with communal values (*idem*, p.11). In act two, there is the manifestation of the African social assistance vis-à-vis the African diaspora:

1st W: Do you ask that of me when everybody knows a son is back from the land beyond the seas? Shall he not help to look after his nephews and nieces when it was somebody else who looked after him in the days of his childhood? The left hand washed the right and the right washed the left (p.17).

This assertion explains clearly the sense of living together in the African society which refers to taking care of one another.

Better still, there is another communal belonging manifestation toward the African diaspora through Petu who welcomes Ato and his wife. He wants to be the first to welcome his nephew from abroad as follows: "Petu: I heard you are come and that is why I am coming to greet you" (p.24). Petu is rooted in the tradition, therefore, he defends it and all attached to it. However, this cultural value does not meet Eulalie's one when she reacts to Petu's visit: "Eu: (Anxious) oh, this means the whole lot of them will be coming to see us" (p.26). Also, she does not appreciate Ato's mother visit in their room: "Eu: Ato, would you care to ask your mother what she wants in our room?" (p.26). These two reactions of Eulalie bring about the clash between individualism and the African sense of communal assistance.

Furthermore, marriage and procreation are presented in the play as the manifestation of cultural identity. The marriage of a member of the family becomes the whole community affair. The exchange between Akyere and Esi Kom about Ato's marriage is a good example:

Akyere: I say, Esi, for long time I have not been seeing that sheep which you were rearing in Ato's name.

Esi: I have sold your sheep to pay the bride price for you when you make up your mind to marry... (p.10).

The interest of the whole family about Ato's marriage shows that it is a social accomplishment. In this case, marriage is no more a mere meeting between two lovers in the sense that marriage is often a symbol of fulfillment (Naumann, 2011, p.130). Even if marriage is a symbol of social accomplishment, it cannot stand only on love. For a successful marriage, love and children are

required. Being aware of that, Ato's family after the arrangement of the marriage is still involved in the couple's procreation. Tired up by the absence of children in the couple, Petu worries in this extract:

Petu: It was a couple of days ago that we met. What came out of the meeting is that we must come and ask you and your wife what is preventing you from giving your grandmother a great-grandchild before she leaves us. We are asking you to tell us what is wrong with you and your wife so that first we will wash her stomach with this, then pour the libation to ask the dead to come and remove the spirit of the evil around you and pray then to bring you a child (p.40).

However, Ato remains speechless to the questions of his uncle and what he had to say is that "Ato: Good Heavens! / Oh! / Nothing...oh/ Why do you say it is my wife's fault? / Heavens! / Nothing" (pp.40-41). In other words, Ato has a complex identity where he mimics both cultures. His attitude falls within what Homi Bhabha considered as mimicry. For him, mimicry is a sign of double articulation. This double articulation can be associated to ambivalence as similarity and difference (quoted by Chemakh, 2015, p.10).

Next, Ato's double articulations appear in the play when his wife refuses his mother's snail as gift. He also seems not to know how to eat snail and this attitude opens a sharp commentary between him and his mother:

Ato: (Defensively) She does not know how to eat them... and...

Esi: And what, my son I do you not know how to eat them now? What kind of man are you growing into? Are your wife's taboos yours? Rather your taboos should be hers" (p.28).

Esi does not recognize her son. He behaves like his wife who does not know their culture and civilization. Before his wife, he behaves like the colonized subjects who behave like the master but before his mother, his discourse is ambivalent and contradictory.

In short, the cultural hybridity and identity conflict shed light on the cultural ambivalence of the African diaspora. Also, we can find different levels of language that show the different social classes in the society throughout the variety of speech. Then, this identity conflict reaches the linguistic level.

LANGUAGE: APPROPRIATION AND ABROGATION

Language as a means of communication, can also be a carrier of culture. So, language and culture become tools of manipulation and subjugation. In *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, Ama Ata Aidoo uses the techniques of appropriation and abrogation in order to resist to the superior linguistic domination. Indeed, abrogation is "the rejection and the denial of the authority of the colonial language and the return to one's language" (Chemakh, *op.cit*, p.50) whereas appropriation is "the adaptation of a colonial language to a specific cultural context, and it consists of the twist and the distortion of this colonial language" (*idem*, p.50). In the play, the distortion of the colonial language (English) appears through the words like kerosene which becomes "kresin" (p.7), the word America for "Amrikal" or "Amrika" (p.12) and Ato's Sweetie name Eulalie which is "Hurere" or "Uhu-hu..." (p.11). The use of some Ghanaian words and the distortion of some English words is the rejection and the denial of their authority and a return to their local language that bear the burden of their own cultural experience and identity.

The play is written in English but Ato's family that represents the Ghanaian community bears African names. Among those names, there are Esi Kom, Ato, Petu, Monka, Akyere and the use of the word Nana that refers to the grandmother. Also, Ama Ata Aidoo uses the word "tribe" (p.11) which refers to the community which means that the culture is rooted into the tribe and the traditional life. Additionally, in the play, the reader can notice that characters like Esi Kom, Petu, Akyere and Nana speak a different language and tone from that of Ato and Eulalie. And in the upcoming analysis, we will focus on Nana's language that refers to some beliefs like:

Do they not that if the heavens withdraw their light, man must light his own way? How will he find his way around this dark place should the ghost of one our forebearers pay us a visit? They say they buy kresin and pay for it with money (p.7).

In this fragment, the old Nana, the representative of the old generation believes that the ancestors can visit them at any time, especially if they do wrong things. She is even ready to meet them at any moment: "My spirit Mother ought to have come for me earlier. Now what shall I tell them who are gone" (p.14).

Sometimes, the language of Nana does not reflect only beliefs, but it refreshes the young generation on the ancient way of life. one can see her anger about the attitude of the women in present day: “when we were young, a woman cleared her eating place after the last morsel had hardly touched her tongue. But now, they will allow their noise-making pans to lie around for people to trip over” (p.7). Here, Nana refers to the tactless attitude of the new generation that she tries to compare to her generation age when they used to work perfectly at home. Through the language of Nana, Ama Ata Aidoo explains that the Ghanaian society still believes in its culture with all its customs, beliefs, and belonging.

To sum up, in *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, the clash between individualism and African communal values and by the appropriation and abrogation of the language, the Ghanaian playwright exposes the cultural mixture and identity conflict. This cultural mixture and clash are perceived through the cultural ambivalence and mimicry of some characters associated to the distortion of some English words. Then, the cultural coexistence in this context needs negotiation by the African diaspora.

Diaspora disillusionment and resolution

The African diaspora experiences the overseas and homeland's realities. Their expectations do not come true and they disenchant. That is to say the experience of immigration causes insecurity and psychologically and socially problems (Moison, 2008, p.74). That is, the African diaspora live in unstable and in-between space.

Antagonistic situation of Ato and Eulalie

In the case of Ato, he is influenced by the American lifestyle and education, but still believes in his African traditions and customs. However, he does not believe as it should be and that creates trouble. In the play, Ato's trouble lies on his incapacity to defend himself during the family meeting:

Akroma: We can soon know the bird which will not do well, for his nest hang by the wayside. I always say that one can always know the man who is, civilized.

Nana: I think you should all know that Ato was always a humble one (p.9).

Here, Ato is in an uncomfortable situation. His family thinks that the long time spent in America prevented him from mastering their traditional

customs. By so doing, they deny his Africanness and this situation put him in trouble vis-à-vis his relatives. Ato was expecting a joyful and warm welcome from his parents but he received a cold welcome that put him in an antagonistic situation.

Then, his attitude creates a conflict between his family and his wife on the one hand, and himself and Eulalie on the other hand:

Ato: They came to ask why we haven't started a family.

Eu: And what did you tell them?

Ato: Nothing

Eu: What do you mean by nothing? I should have thought the answer to that question is very simple. You know all this, didn't you, my gallant black knight? Now you dare not confess it before them, can you? (p.42).

Ato does not succeed in bringing balance between his family and his wife about their decision to postpone having children. Indirectly, Ato's attitude shows that it is Eulalie who cannot bear children. But this trouble could have avoided if only Ato had explained to them that it was a common decision to postpone having children.

Moreover, Ato sees a strange dream, in which two children sing:

One early morning, when the moon was up, shining as the sun, I went to Elmina junction and there and there, I saw a wretched ghost going up and down singing to himself. Shall I go to Cape Coast, or to Elmina. I don't know, I can't tell, I don't know, I can't tell (pp.23-24).

This singing has both metaphorical and allegorical meaning. First, the metaphor refers to the title the play itself: *The Dilemma of a Ghost* that explains the cultural hybridity of the 'been-to'. They suffer from the double cultural belonging as stated by Vincent Odamtten:

The been-to is usually characterized as suffering the double estrangement of the *sujet-en soi* (one who is caught between two conflicting ideological practices) rejected by or rejecting his or her “African culture” by virtue of higher education (1994, p.40).

As far as the allegorical meaning is concerned, the playwright presents the struggle of Ato to bring balance to his family and his own life. In fact, the dilemma of going to Cape Coast or to Elmina symbolizes Ato's dilemma between his beloved and his family.

Ato's instability puts also Eulalie in antagonistic situation. In line with that, she is divided between to obey the choice of husband, or to obey her family-in-law, or to listen to her feelings as any woman who wants children. Let us illustrate this in the following dialogue between her and Ato:

Eu: Ato, isn't it time we started a family?

Ato: (Surprised) Why? I thought...

Eu: Ya, I remember I bought the idea, but I got the feeling...

Ato: Heavens, women! They are always getting feelings. First you got the feeling you needed a couple of years to settle down and now you are obviously getting a contradictory feeling. I think we better stick to our original plans (p.22).

Herefrom, instead of supporting his wife to start their family now as expected by his parents, Ato, rather ask her to stick to their original plans. This means that Eulalie should act and live according to the American lifestyle in an African traditional context. The African diaspora is disenchanted once back to their motherland. This put them in an antagonistic situation where they face a dilemma of making choice between their African traditions and their American acquired ones. Then their cultural hybridity opens the door of a new zone of contact or the third space of enunciation as coined by Homi Bhabha.

Space in-between

The third space is the result of the negotiation that occurs between two different cultures or an exchange of different cultural identities and values. (Chemakh, *Op.cit*, p.40). In the play, Esi kom, Ato's mother, presented through the story as one of the African culture defenders becomes at the end of the play, a promoter of the third space. That is to say, Esi kom accepts and forgives Eulalie's disrespect when she throws away the snail: "Esi (addressing Ato) is it true that your wife has thrown away the snails I brought?" (p.28). But her disappointment and angers do not last long. For instance, in act five, she becomes sympathetic to Eulalie and she even blames Ato who should have explained things to her in:

We are angry because we think you are both not doing what is good for yourselves and yet who can blame her? No stranger ever breaks the laws. Humm... my son. You have not dealt with us well. And you have not dealt with your wife well in this (p.49).

Here, we notice that Esi kom blames her son and tries to understand the reasons that lead to Eulalie's attitude toward their culture. By so doing, Esi Kom becomes flexible and decides to understand Eulalie's culture and tolerate her lifestyle. Esi kom accepts to let go of her own identity which may cause another cultural hybridity. This ongoing process of culture leads to the third space where "cultural statements are set in a state of negotiation and transition between the culture of the colonized and that of the colonizer" (*Ibidem*, p.12). Therefore, the tension and misunderstanding between Esi Kom and Eulalie fade away when "Esi Kom supports Eulalie through the door that leads into the old house. Ato surely stares after them" (p.50). Shortly, at the end of the play, there is a glimpse of optimism with Esi Kom who decides to help Eulalie to overcome her hidden and open struggles.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, African diaspora and cultural hybridity in *The Dilemma of a Ghost* settled around the dominant regimes of the been-to, the cultural and identity shock, disillusionment associated to their return and the way out of this cultural incertitude. This article aimed at analyzing the effects of the cultural malaise the African diaspora face once back home from abroad through a postcolonial critical thinking. In Ama Ata Aidoo's work, the reader notices the return of Ato and his western influence, Eulalie's African-American identity, the cultural clash between individualism and African communal values, the appropriation and abrogation of the English language. To these points, there are the antagonistic situation of Ato and Eulalie ended up by the glimpse of optimism with the birth of the third space where tensions and misunderstandings fade away.

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