ABSTRACT

The Dilemma of a Ghost is Ama Ata Aidoo’s response to the unwary Europeans who nurse the impression that Africa is savage. A lot of Europeans disparage Africa and in their individual books, they express their aversion for the continent by presenting Africa as being too primitive and without any culture and tradition. Concerned Africans, pioneered by Chinua Achebe, in his debut novel, Things Fall Apart, proves them wrong by vividly X-raying the good images of the continent so that those who nurse ill impressions about Africa will tend to have a rethink. Other Africans follow Achebe in the evangelism. Ama Ata Aidoo is one of them. Like Achebe, she has made it vivid in her play that Africa has rich cultural heritage which must not be drawn to the mud. In the comic piece, she meticulously selects plausible and credible characters to enable her to effectively pass her information. The researcher in this paper thus uses Cultural Criticism as the theoretical framework to explore the play with the aim to vivify the techniques adopted by the author in driving home her points.
1. INTRODUCTION

Ato Yawson goes to America to study. There, he sees an American Negro, Eulalia and falls in love with her. Without consulting his people, Ato marries Eulalia in America. They agree to postpone child bearing until they are willing to start having children. Back in Africa, Eulalia who does not understand Ato’s people’s language and their way of life, finds it difficult to associate with them. Because of the contrast in their ways of life, Ato’s people and Eulalia have constant misunderstandings. Ato’s people who had waited in vain to see Eulalia get pregnant, quickly conclude that Eulalia is barren and consequently, being ignorant of what the couple believes in, decide to seek solution [1,2]. They come with a certain concocted liquid substance believed to be highly potent, to wash her belly so that the evil preventing her from getting pregnant would leave her.

In parts of West Africa, when a man marries, the wife is said to be the wife of the entire family. By implication, the husband’s people have strong influence in the activities of the couple. This explains why Ato’s people come with the substance to wash Eulalia’s belly as they believe that she has been bewitched and that washing her belly would make her fruitful. In this paper, Ghana is used as a primary reference country to represent other countries in West Africa [3,4]. Ato’s refusal that Eulalia’s belly would be washed with the dirty concoction appalls his people. They wonder why he should be supporting his wife instead of helping them to wash her belly. When they have left, Ato tells Eulalia why his people had come and being unwary of the traditions of the African people, it amazes her why Ato’s people should always interfere in their marriage [5,6]. She is not happy with Ato for not being bold enough to tell his people that they are in agreement not to have children yet. She calls his people primitive and this gets Ato aggrieved and he slaps her. With fury, she leaves the house thus keeping Ato worried about her whereabouts. Ato who obviously is alone without the support of his people and now loses Eulalia in addition, goes back to his mother, Esi Kom in the midnight to report the disappearance of his wife. She blames him for his rash action and at this point, Eulalia comes back weak and tired. She is supported by Esi Kom who takes her in and further blames her son in Eulalia’s presence [7-9]. This action of Esi Kom, supporting the daughter in law, signifies total acceptance of Eulalia as her daughter in law since she has demonstrated her readiness to be for them.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The researcher adopts cultural criticism as the theoretical framework for the work. Habib [10] discloses that cultural criticism is a 20th century innovation made prominent by D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, many Marxist thinkers, F. R. Leavis, and Raymond Williams. The study theoretically, politically, and empirically engages cultural analysis that concentrates upon the political dynamics of contemporary culture, its historical foundations, defining traits, conflicts, and contingencies. As Habib puts it, cultural studies, as being practised now, have a wide designation, encompassing sociology, anthropology, history, literature, and the arts. Dobie [11] says that Cultural critics are interested in groups of people who do not belong to the dominant parties and who challenge the hegemony of the powerful. Since Aidoo’s The Dilemma of a Ghost centres on conflict of cultures, the researcher no doubts, believes that this approach is an effective theory for analyzing the work.

2.1 The Concept of Culture

Culture denotes the beliefs, customs and the totality of the way of life of a people usually passed down from one generation to another through oral tradition. Culture unites a people in a given environment. Sutherland [12], makes it categorical that culture is indispensable to any given society. He maintains that if we take culture seriously, we see that a particular people do not need merely enough to eat but a proper and particular cuisine. He goes further to describe culture simply as that which makes life worth living. Culture not only unites a people, its study enables the modern society understand how life was lived in the past as to help them to live. Ogundele [13] is aware of this hence he emphasizes that culture was (wrongly) assumed to be about stasis, about the unchanging past, dull and only of interest to anthropologists and ethnographers. According to him, “In historiography, therefore, cultural nationalism could only be of tangential interest to political historians.
2.2. The Tasks of the African Writers in Social Reformation

Achebe has in his *The Novelist as Teacher*, enjoined African writers to project the good image of the society to the world. In his *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe made it categorical to the unwary Europeans who believed that Africa was savage that Africa did not hear of culture for the first time from the Europeans. Before the white man came, Africa had her culture and the Africans had been gregarious, enjoying their rich cultural heritage which was abrogated by the white. The white man came with his own culture which he imposed on Africa and according to Chinua Achebe, things fell apart. It is obvious that the Europeans never believed that there was anything good about Africa. Conrad for instance, fiercely disparaged Africa, presenting it as egregious in his *Heart of Darkness*. Okoh [14] fails to see any justifiable reason why Africa should be harangued. He gives a chronicle of other Europeans with their diatribes about the African society. George Hegel for instance, is a 19th century German philosopher and whose submission that “… At this point we leave Africa, not even to mention it again, for it is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit.” This is not only fallacious but also aggravating. Similarly, Okoh discloses that the Greek geographer Herodotus describes Africa in his book as a land where huge serpents were found, and lions, and also wild men and wild women. It is based on these that Achebe and other concerned Africans advocate the portrayal of the positive image of the African society. Since Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, and other Europeans diatribes about Africa, African authors pioneered by Chinua Achebe have in their individual works, tried to debunk the Europeans’ notion about Africa. This is why Bernth Lindfors in her article “Politics, Culture, and Literary Forms, says that African writers in the twentieth century have woken up to use creative arts to project their culture. According to her, “Writers have served not only as chroniclers of contemporary political history but also as advocates of radical social change. Their works thus both reflect and project the course of Africa’s cultural revolution” (*African Literature* 24).

2.3 Preserving Culture through Drama

Knowledge of the past helps people to live without rancor in the contemporary society. The European who brought Christianity to Africa almost completely abrogated the culture of the African society. One of the major functions of drama in Africa is to resuscitate the dying culture. This is why African playwrights see it as their responsibility to incorporate the African culture in their plays. When this is the case, as they are performed, the young ones would tend to see and understand clearly how life was lived in the past as the understanding of the past would help the young ones to avoid taboos. Fanon [15] makes this vivid when he says that the passionate search for a national culture which existed before the colonial era finds its legitimate reason in the anxiety shared by native intellectuals to shrink away from that Western culture in which they risk being swamped (252). He observes that people in the present African society have realized that they are in danger of losing their lives and thus become lost to their people and therefore, they relentlessly determine to renew contact once more with the oldest and most pre-colonial springs of life of their people (252 – 253).

Ama Ata Aidoo is among the playwrights who believe that the onus is on them to use their works to preserve the African culture. She has so meticulously integrated the African culture in the play in such a way that the African reader reads and has the sense of belonging, the non African reads and immediately understands that Africa has rich cultural heritage that must not be swept into the carpet. Aidoo uses dramatic action and speeches effectively to demonstrate her message so that as the reader reads, he or she sees the actions as though they happen just before his or her physical eyes.

2.4 Children in the African Home

It is a fact well acknowledged that in almost all parts of West Africa as a whole, the essence of marriage is to have children. In America and other European countries, a man and a woman marry basically because they love each other. Whether they have children or not, it usually doesn’t perturb them as it does a typical African who believes that he marries a woman basically for the purpose of procreation. It is part of the tradition of the black Africa that a man should beget a male child who would keep the family name when he is gone. This is why in Africa, soon after a man has married and there is no evidence that the woman has become pregnant, the woman becomes restless; she is afraid that the husband will soon start thinking of taking another wife. The groom’s people are worried
and friends begin to advise the man to seek the black goat before it becomes dark. This is well demonstrated by Ama in the play where Ato’s people are terribly worried that Eulalia is not fast proving her worth as a woman. It is appalling however, that in any childless home, the woman is always seen as the cause and nobody takes into consideration that a man could be impotent. In the case of Ato and his wife, Ato’s people lumps the whole blame on the woman whom they believe is responsible for their childlessness. They fail to see any reason why Ato should not be perturbed that his wife could not have a child for them. This issue of blaming women for being responsible for childlessness is frowned at by African female writers. In their individual works, they make it obvious that in almost all the cases, it is only the women who seek solutions to the problem. She goes from one medicine man to another, taking whatever medicine given to her by the medicine men to get pregnant. When Ato’s wife fails to show any concern and Ato himself doesn’t seem concerned either, his people decide to do the needful. This fact has constituted a subject matter in many known novels and plays by Africans. Flora Nwapa’s Efuru and Idu suffer the fate. In Ifeoma Okoye’s Behind the Clouds, Ije Apia, despite her western education, suffers this. Her inability to have a child takes her to various hospitals, medicine men’s place and, prayer houses where she meets many other women in her condition. Ije Apia takes whatever medicine given to her.

Ato Yawson in America, having fallen in love with American Negro, tends to forget the culture of his people about the indispensability of children in marriage. He agrees with her that they would postpone child bearing until they are willing to start having children. This is seen by his people as a taboo as Africans believe that children are special gifts from God. Back in Africa, Ato’s people are worried that Eulalia is unable to get pregnant. The dialogues between the First Woman and Second Woman give a true picture of the plights suffered by women without children. The 1st woman has no child and she sees herself as being cursed. In her lamentation, she says to the second woman who has children, “You are luckiest who have them” (5). On page 35, the two women continue to talk about the condition of Eulalia and 1st woman immediately begins to sympathize with her because she knows that the worst thing that can happen to any African woman is to be childless. She keeps reiterating the word “Barren” to vividly show the trauma suffered by women presumed to be barren. 1st woman sums their plights thus

Barren!...
If it is real barrenness,
Then, oh stranger-girl,
Whom I do not know,
I weep for you.
For I know what it is
To start a marriage with barrenness.
You ought to have kept quiet
And crouched by your mother’s hearth
Wherever that is – (36).

It is the belief of the African people that the primary duty of a woman in a marriage is to have children and take care of the children. It is not expected of a woman to take the responsibility of a man in a home. Eulalia has everything she needs to make life easier but she is not regarded highly in the society because she is childless. According to 1st woman, all those are worthless without a child. She puts it in her own words that

Yes. With your machines that cook
And your machines that sweep.
They want people.
My people have lusty desire
To see the tender
On top of a child’s scalp

She discloses that one without a child is cursed for she would have nobody to dress her when she is dead. She puts it categorically that childless women are never happy; they will cry until their throats are dry and their eyes are blind with tears (36).

2.5 The Responsibilities of the Woman in an African Home

In Africa, men are the heads of their various homes and women are subordinates. As subordinates, they are helpers and part of their duties includes keeping the home alive. Even the Bible made it categorical that women should be under their husbands. In Africa, when a man marries a wife, it is expected that there should be positive changes in the life of the man and when that is not the case, the woman (the wife) is believed not to be living up to her expectations. Aidoo has meticulously X-rayed the various responsibilities of the woman in the play. This she vivified through the second woman. While trying to console the First Woman who is childless, she states that even those women
believed to be lucky because they have children still perform their responsibilities which include to cook and do other house chores. She says to the First Woman

My sister, you are not alone. But who would have thought that I, Whose house is teeming with children, my own, my husband’s, my sister’s … But this is my curse. ‘Shall I do this when this and that have nothing to do?’ No. And they all sit. With their hands between their knees. If the courtyard must be swept, It is Aba’s job. If the ampesi must be cooked, it is Aba’s (5).

The First Woman who laments incessantly about her childless condition reminds us of the fact that part of the major expectations of the African woman is to give children to the husband. When she fails in this regard, it does not gladden her heart. African people believe in maintaining the family home. A popular African saying has it that a man begets a son so that he will beget his own children who will keep the name of the family even when the man is gone. So the childless sees herself as cursed. First Woman’s lamentation consolidates the assertion. She makes her heart known when she says “Queen Mother of childbirth, how was it you went past my house without a pause, without a rest? Mighty God, when shall the cry of an infant come into my ear; for the sun has journeyed far in my sky (18). She makes it clear that in Africa, children are valued more than money. That is why it is said among the Igbo that he who has people is richer than he who has wealth. Listen to the First Woman “For were not our fathers wise who looked upon the motion of our lives and said, They ask for the people of the house and not the money in it? (16). She sums it with “There is nothing that can compare with being a parent…”

2.6 Belief in Life after Death

Some ghosts appear in the form of human beings and they live among the living. Others are invisible but through certain signs, we know that they exist. In almost all parts of Africa, the belief that ghosts exist isn’t a mirage. A lot of Africans testify to have come in contact with ghosts. Instances of people who died and appear to relatives abound; some died and migrated to other faraway places where they are not known and start living among the living. African writers mirror this fact in their individual books. Umeaiegbru Rems has two independent volumes of ghostlore. They are Ghost Stories and Abandoned Ghost Babies. Umeaiegbru, in an interview, made it vivid that the stories in the two independent volumes were not fiction. He claimed that the stories were based on history. Uche Nnyagu’s Silent Thunder has as the major character a ghost. The fact remains that writers are inspired by what happens around them, Nnyagu drew his inspiration for the novel from what he witnessed in his society. We discover that many a times, the ghosts, especially the benevolent ones, when they visit anyone, they pave way for the person to excel. Aidoo says “How will he find his way around this dark place should the ghost of one of our fore-bearers pay us a visit? (7). Again, while lamenting Ato’s rash decision, Nana says in consolidation to the fact that there is life after death, “Someone should lend me a tongue. Light enough with which to tell my Royal Dead that one of their stock has gone away and brought to their sacred precincts the wayfarer! (14). Nana’s words here show that even in death, the ghost of the ancestors are still interested in the affairs of the home they left behind. It is also worth emphasizing here that the belief in life after death keeps reminding the Africans the need to live good life as not to be haunted by the ghosts and so that they don’t die and transform into the hostile ghosts. Stories have been told about wicked persons whose corpses were exhumed and burnt because they became hostile ghosts after death.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 Gregariousness among Relations and In-laws in Africa

The African proverb that a tree does not make a forest is well demonstrated by Aidoo in this play. In many parts of Africa, relationships are well appreciated; one’s problem is a source of worry to another. This is why it is not uncommon in parts of Africa to see one striving to help one’s relation. When a person has a problem, he or she quickly runs to his or her people for assistance. In Africa, marriage is a major thing that unites various homes. Unlike in many alien countries where, when a man and a woman may meet on the way and marry, in Africa, families, relations and kindred members of both the groom and the bride must be involved for it is believed that a single person does not
marry alone. This spells why Ato’s people are worried about the presumed plights of the couple. Ato’s people are especially worried that he brings a foreign woman home as his wife. They all condemn Ato’s action which they see as aberration. They fail to leave him to his fate. First, they fiercely disparage him for rubbing potty on their faces. Akyere says to him in the presence of other relatives “But we thought that we too have found a treasure at last for our house. What have you done to us, my son?”(12). Ato’s grandmother, Nana, like other relatives wail almost incessantly for her son’s decision. In response to the First Woman who cares to know why she is moody, she makes it vivid that her son’s marriage calls for weeping and lamentation. Marriage is a thing of joy in West Africa. In almost every part of Africa, when a man gets of age and has not begun to think of marriage, his relatives would quickly remind him. Ato’s people on page 10, subtly remind him as soon as he returns from America. Esi, the mother says that she has sold her sheep to use the money to marry for her son. They want Ato to realize the joy in getting married. Marriage makes a man complete but when it is not done the correct way, it becomes a thing of lamentation. According to Nana, “Yes, I am sitting here. So you thought I was dead? No, I am not. Go home good neighbours and save your tears for my funeral. It cannot be long now…” This statement by Nana immediately gives us the impression that in Africa, one’s problem automatically, is another’s.

Nana goes further to remind the concerned women that although she is not late, something unpleasant which calls for weeping has happened to her and that, according to her is that “My grand-child has gone and brought home the offspring of slaves (13). She wonders why Ato who understands the ways of his people should bring a foreign woman home as a wife. The more pathetic is the fact she fails to appreciate the gregariousness of her husband’s people who come on regular basis to know how they fare. On each occasion, she would leave them with her husband. She fails to understand that in Africa, when a man marries, he is not detached from her parents; mothers in law visit without check. In Igbo of Nigeria and probably in some other parts of West Africa, the groom’s parents are inseparable from the new home. Eulalia frowns that her mother in law plies in her presumed affairs. In her exasperation she faces Esi Kom and cries “Ato would you care to ask your mother what she wants in our room.” Esi Kom is amazed that his son would not stand his feet to tell his wife that in Africa, a man does not solely marry a wife. Her response “Hmm… They told us when we arrived from the farm that you and your wife have come to spend today and tomorrow with us. So I thought I would bring you one or two things for I hear food is almost unbuyable in the city these days” proves her innocence (26).

Despite Eulalia’s aversion for the visit of Ato’s people, they fail to relent. They believe that with time, she would be attuned to the African culture and tradition. Part of the African culture is to assist one another. Africans believe that when a child errs, the parent should flog him with the right hand and quickly calls him back with the left hand. That is why when a parent flogs his or her child, he or she holds the cane in right hand and holds the child’s hand in the left hand to draw him or her back. He or she flogs the child for a wrong thing done as a way of correcting him or her. Aidoo presents Ato’s people as typical of African. Even when their visits are never appreciated, they fail to leave their daughter in law and their “prodigal” son to their fate. This time, Esi Kom sends her daughter Monka to go and give them snails. Esi Kom is aggrieved that Eulalia cast the gift of the snails away. She is disappointed especially with her son who tries to defend his wife that she does not know how to eat snails. She unequivocally unleashed her anger on him when she says “And what, my son? Do you not know how to eat them now? What kind of man are you growing into? (28).

### 3.2 The Fate of the Woman in an African Home

In Africa, once a man marries a wife, the woman becomes integral part of the family and she adapts to the tenets of her new home. It is therefore, a taboo for the woman to prescribe to the man how to live. We see clearly, the fate of the woman in the African culture in Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart. Okonkwo, the chief character, is polygamous. All the wives are subordinate to him; they do his biddings without complaint. Okonkwo is seen as a hero because he is never a weakling and he never allows any of his wives to rule him. All his wives respect him. In Africa, members of the extended family deride the man when he fails to live up to his expectations as a man. Esi Kom and Ato’s people are disappointed in their son when they
are told that he is in agreement with his wife not to have children yet. To them, Ato has committed a heinous crime for accepting that the woman's culture be placed above his own. As the fate of the woman is to be dependent on the husband and his people's, Ato's people come unannounced to wash Eulalia's belly as to pave way for her to be productive. They believe that there is no point seeking her or her husband's approval before doing what they see as their responsibility. Akroma, Ato's uncle is amazed that Ato demands to know why they had visited. Mansa makes it vivid to Ato that it is the responsibility of the family members to direct him where he errs. When Akroma says, "If I am not putting my mouth into an affair which does not concern me, may I ask you where your wife is?", Mansa quickly corrects him this, "If this is not your affair, whose affair is it? It's everybody's affair isn't it?" Esi Kom at this point, sums it with, "Ei, these days, one's son's marriage affair cannot always be one's affair" (39). Earlier, Esi Kom has reminded her son of the expectations of the society. She bemoans and asks her son in disappointment, “Are your wife’s taboos yours? Rather your taboos should be hers (28).

3.3 The Task of Training the Child

Africans value children. However, despite the love they have for children and procreation, Africans abhor children who constitute menace to the society. The Igbo aphorism has it that if a child behaves well, he or she is the pride of the parents and the society at large but when he or she misbehaves, the society and not the parents alone feel the pains. No Parent in Africa is happy when his or her children misbehave. It is expected that after the parents had suffered to train the children, the children would in return, cater for them in old age. If after training the child and when it is the time for the child to reciprocate the love and he or she fails to, the child is derided. Ato's people are disappointed that after they had toiled to train him, he returns from the white man's land rather a prodigal. Monka laments profusely that the money their parents spent to send her brother to the white man's land is a waste. Listen to her, "I remember the time he was preparing to go to the white man's land where he went to take up {indicating EULALIA} this 'Wonder!' The money… the money… This is something which no one should hear anything about" (31). In many occasions, relations sell their valuables just to train their children in anticipation that they would recover those things sold when their children round off their education and begin to work. Monka says that “A great part of the land was sold and even that was sufficient for nothing…” (31).

There have been high expectations that with the return of Ato from America, the family would recover all that they had spent to train him. However, through the Second Woman, we understand that Ato's return is a complete disillusionment as Esi Kom is in perennial agony. Second Woman says to the First Woman, “I crave pardon for snatching the world from your mouth. But my sister, roll your tobacco and stuff your pipe. It has not been good going, the roof leaks more than ever before (33). The image of the leaking roof denotes the state of hopelessness attached to the return of Ato.

3.4 Africans were Never Atheists

The white man claimed to have brought religion to Africa. They had always seen Africans as primitive people with no tradition and religion. To them, Africa had no historical realities and that African people were unwary of the existence of God. Many of them demonstrated this illusion in their works. For instance, Herodotus and George Hegel had made demeaning comments about Africa. Hegel for instance, had suggested that Africa should never be discussed alongside other continents claiming that it is no historical part of the world and therefore, has no culture and religion. To the chauvinistic Europeans, nothing good, including religion comes from Africa which they believed to be too primitive without any tradition.

Africans never heard of tradition for the first time from the Europeans. Africans had been gregarious folks and concerned Africans led by Chinua Achebe made it clear that before the coming of the white man, Africans had their traditional way of worshipping God. This implies that Africans were never atheists. They had their traditional religion akin to the Christian religion. Like in the white man religion, in the African religion there is the belief in Saints. In Christianity, Christians plead the Saints to mediate between them and God. This is true of the African religion. Aidoo demonstrates this fact using the characters. Petu admonishes Ato who had been disillusioned of the African culture to see everything about the culture as barbaric.
According to him, “… You know also, that we invoke our sacred dead to bring us blessings. Therefore, 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 them to bring you a child” (40). Through Petu’s words, the unware understands that Africans were never agnostics.

3.5 Triumph of the African Tradition

The play has the theme of culture contact and culture conflict. Ato and Eulalia refuse to agree with Ato’s people. Ato’s people who stand for the African tradition fail to allow the western tradition have upper hand. It has to be stated vividly here that Ato has realized his mistakes when he begins to admonish her to adapt to the tenets of her new home. He challenges her never to insult his people. He says to her, “When in Rome, do as the Romans do” (45). With this statement, Aidoo demonstrates Ato’s repentance. Soon, Ato, having been left by his people, begins to disagree with his wife and he slaps her and she leaves. Ato is worried and it now dawns on him that he is standing all alone. He goes to his people and later, Eulalia comes back too and she is accepted by the mother in law. Ato coming to his people and Eulalia coming too, signify acceptance of the African culture.

4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Africa is endowed with rich cultural heritage. However, it is appalling that many Africans are gullible and they do not value what they have. This was why the Europeans were able to defraud Africa of her enviable tradition. Achebe aptly X-rayed this fact when he painted the picture of how fellow Africans aligned with the Europeans to rob them of their tradition to impose his own tradition on Africa. Aidoo in this play, lampoons the Africans who sell their identity because they are brainwashed to see their tradition as evil. Ato goes to America to study and having acquired the western education, he becomes more Catholic than the Pope and fails to observe the tradition of his people. He fails to appreciate the effort of his people. Aidoo meticulously exaggerates his foolery so that the reader understands the need to embrace the beautiful African culture. Ato’s acts are presented to be foolish and stupid. His people toiled to train him and what he pays them with is heartbreak. The high expectations that things would change for good with his return from America is rather a disillusionment.

Aidoo’s message in this play is a very serious one; our people need to see the truth and understand why they should be attuned to their tradition. In presenting his message, Aidoo has meticulously selected her diction so that as the play is performed, the lesson is effectively passed.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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