

**RETURNING TO THE 'MOTHERLAND', ILLUSIONS AND
REALITIES: A STUDY OF AIDOO'S *THE DILEMMA OF A
GHOST* AND ONWUEME'S
LEGACIES/THE MISSING FACE.**

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Abstract

*Africans in the Diaspora have been coming back to Africa for centuries now. The twentieth century saw increased interest in Africa as the home of all black people, with the work of influential black revolutionaries such as Marcus Garvey and George Padmore. Individual searches for family roots and sojourns in Africa, have become increasingly common. This journey, however, has not always resulted in a satisfying experience. The reactions of Africans on the continent to their returning kin from the Diaspora also needs considering. These themes are central to Onwueme's *Legacies/The Missing Face* and form a large part of Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost*. This paper examines expectations of characters in these two plays, as they return to Africa and what they actually find once they arrive. It also highlights attitudes of Africans on the continent to the claim of kinship by Africans in the Diaspora.*

1. Introduction: Africa as the Motherland of all Black People

*This is where we are, and belong ...Son ...
Africa ... Africa ... our OWN Africa, son...'
It's Africa ...our Africa ...
Africa ... Africa ... our OWN Africa, son...'
The roots are here ...deep down here. Son,
this is Africa ... Africa ... our OWN Africa,
son...'* (Onwueme 1989: 3)

The above are the words Onwueme gives to her character Mimi in the opening scenes of her play *Legacies*. Mimi's seventeen year old son, Uli, however, needs convincing and retorts:

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Stop this mother!
It's all in your head
It's all in your mind, mum...
Look around you?
What do you see?
Trees, antiques ... some old skins, rags, rusty
implements and skulls,
Of—I don't—know what ...
No mum! If this is the Africa,
THEIR AFRICA, I forfeit it with thanks.
Let whoever will, take it
And keep the change. Mum, we gotta go back to
The states ... (Onwueme 1989:3).

Mimi and Uli, have just arrived in Idu, an African village, from the United States. Their opposing initial responses to the 'Motherland' are striking. Mimi's reaction is one of a dream come true, a deep longing fulfilled, while Uli, is bewildered and fails to understand, let alone share, in his mother's sentiments. The journey to Africa for many black people in the Diaspora provokes varied responses as exemplified in these two characters.

Black people in the Diaspora have, of course, been coming back to Africa for centuries now, since the early days of anti-slavery repatriation efforts and the founding of Sierra Leone and Liberia. Appiah (1992:3) makes reference to the beginnings of the conception of Africa as the motherland of all black people in discussing Alexander Crummell, who was 'African-American by birth,[and] Liberian by adoption', and in whose writings the 'discourse of Pan-Africanism' was launched. Appiah notes that:

At the core of Crummell's vision is a single guiding concept: race. Crummell's "Africa" is the motherland of the Negro race, and his right to act in it, to speak for it, to plot its future, derived – in his conception- from the fact that he too was a Negro. More than this, Crummell held that there was a common destiny for the people of Africa- by which we are always to understand the black people- not because they shared a common ecology, nor because they had a common historical experience or faced a common threat from imperial Europe, but because they belonged to this one race. What made Africa one for him

was that it was the home of the Negro, as England was the home of the Anglo-Saxon, or Germany the home of the Teuton (Appiah, 1992:5).

Appiah is clearly critical of this kind of aggregation of Africans based solely on race and sees this coupling of race and Pan-Africanism as burdensome.¹ However ill-conceived this link may have been, the twentieth century saw increased interest in Africa as the motherland and home of all black people. The work of other influential black revolutionaries such as Marcus Garvey, early in the century, with his 'Back to Africa' campaign, George Padmore, and W.E.B DuBois (who actually relocated to, died and was buried in Ghana) gave impetus to this idea. Individual searches for family roots and sojourns in Africa, also became more common, resulting in literary creations in the latter part of the twentieth century (for example, Alex Haley's *Roots*, 1976 and Maya Angelou's *All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes*, 1986), which in turn have inspired others to embark on this search.

This journey to the motherland, however, has not always resulted in a satisfying experience. Hill-Lubin (1999:47), recognises this and observes that, 'the return home has not always brought wholeness'. She also notes the commonality of the theme of "The Return Home" with its variations of "Back to Africa" and "Roots in Africa" among 'diaspora writers'(Ibid:47).² By contrast, this theme appears not to be very common amongst African writers on the continent. Hill-Lubin in that same essay refers to an earlier article in which she had noted that 'only a few African writers had even mentioned anything about Africans in the diaspora [whereas] Aidoo [held] a singular distinction – that of being a major African author who [had] made this subject of Africans and /in the diaspora a central issue' (p.47). Her claim is clearly evident as Aidoo's two published plays, *Anowa* and *The Dilemma of a Ghost* deal with the issues of slavery and the return to Africa respectively. Her short stories and novels also demonstrate her concerns with African and African Diaspora relations. Another female African writer, Tess Onwueme has also shown some interest in the subject. The return and search for roots is central to her play, *Legacies /The Missing Face*.³ Both writers also address the reactions of Africans on the continent to their returning kin from the Diaspora in their plays. In Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, the arrival of Eulalie Rush causes a major uproar in Ato's family. Rather than being welcomed as an acceptable wife of the educated son of the house, Eulalie is seen as

coming from 'doubtful stock' because of her slave ancestry and is initially scorned by her husband's family. (Aidoo, 1965:18-20).

It is interesting that these two African writers with concerns about the African Diaspora are both female. A feminist reading of these plays is thus tempting and perhaps inevitable. Obafemi (1994:86), in discussing some of Onwueme's plays notes that she is 'consciously feminist' and preoccupied with 'the travails and setbacks of women in a traditionally patriarchal society'. Indeed, both Aidoo and Onwueme may be regarded as feminist in outlook by virtue of their preoccupation with issues regarding women. In their plays under discussion, women are given key roles and are seen as subjects of greater agency than their male counterparts; indeed the returning African-Americans in both cases are women. Odamtten in his seminal work on Aidoo's art, however, cautions that 'strictly unqualified feminist readings' of Aidoo's work could lead to 'oversimplifications' (1994:16, his emphasis). He advocates instead an open mindedness which eschews easy or simplistic binarisms (Ibid: 3-5). As will be shown later, the works of these women, indeed cannot be read in unqualified feminist terms.

This paper addresses the subject of the search for and return to the motherland by examining characters in Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost* and Onwueme's *Legacies/The Missing Face*. It explores the gaps between the expectations with which the characters embark on their journeys and the realities they find once they arrive in Africa. It also highlights and discusses the initial intuitive resistance to the claims of kinship by Africans on the continent pointing to the complexities and contradictions imbedded in the realities of modern African societies. It raises questions about race and identity, not only of the returning African born in the Diaspora, but also of the African born, western educated and alienated individual, the 'been to', caught between two culturally opposed worlds.

2. The Search for a 'Motherland'

The search by Africans in the Diaspora for a 'Motherland' suggests that they may not consider their current abodes as their 'Motherland', or that there is a sense in which they regard themselves as still strangers where they were born. For the characters in both of the plays, there is a feeling of not quite fitting in and of the need for a more permanent place, a place to feel that one belongs. Eulalie Rush in Aidoo's, *Dilemma of a Ghost*, is an orphan and appears to have no real ties of kinship in her native New York and is eager

'to belong to somewhere again' and greatly looks forward to having her husband's people become her people. Odamtten (1994:34) notes that 'her desire to "belong somewhere again" is a desire to be a person, to be a subject, and thus fulfil her historical and existential calling to be more completely and consciously human'. This recalls the history of the treatment of black people in western societies and Euro-American imperialist hegemony that rendered black people as subhuman. This longing for a motherland may thus be seen as a longing for validation, for legitimacy. Where else may one claim legitimacy and value than in one's own motherland?

In the case of Ida Bee and Amaechi in Onwueme's *The Missing Face* (Mimi and Uli in the earlier version of the play, titled *Legacies*) the situation is further elaborated. Ida Bee was eager to prevent her son from going the way of the many other black males of their Milwaukee home. She had discovered he carried a gun, and though he claimed it belonged to a friend, she was worried that he might end up in jail. And so she comes in search of his African father, whom she believed could teach his son that 'an African man carries the power of the gun in his heart'. Ida Bee also feels burdened by the drudgery of living 'from paycheck to paycheck' and longs for a fuller life and expresses a deep spiritual longing to connect with her ancestry: 'There's got to be more to life than payin' bills. That is why we must find our place in the world. A place where we can be whole ... a place that can fill the emptiness with kinship and the spirit of our ancestors' (p.4).

Amaechi's protest that the only family they have in Milwaukee is greeted with a numeration of the dysfunctional and uncaring relations they have left behind:

All we got in Milwaukee is a bunch of fractured lives. Uncle Henry is an alcoholic. His wife and children livin' up in Kenosha with Uncle Ron, whose little Oshkosh job can hardly feed himself, let alone some extra mouths. And Uncle Charlie? Well, you know Uncle Charlie. So slick he can't keep himself out of jail. And Aunt Gloria is alone. She's got seven children and she's alone and don't even know it. Alone with no place in the world. And Uncle Mikey, the baby in the family, who carried so much promise for us, went off to college, got himself a big time corporate job and forgot all about us when he hit the Big Apple (p.4).

The lack of or the conscious rejection of kinship in their native home simultaneously translates into a claim of kinship with African peoples in the motherland. The claim of kinship by these characters, however, is more than a romantic speculation based on the fact of slavery, though that historical link remains firmly in the background. We are informed that Ida's own father had been taken as a slave from Idu and that the father of her son was an African student, also from Idu. Eulalie's hope of kinship is also to be realised concretely through her marriage to Ato. Thus both women voluntarily seek male connections in order to secure their desired ends; a contradiction of radical feminist desires of 'male less' independence. Odamtten's warning regarding unqualified feminist readings of Aidoo's work is thus reinforced.

The subversion of their idealistic and romantic expectations and claims about the motherland once these characters come face to face with the realities on the continent is the subject of the greater part of the two plays. It is evident, as the Akan proverb quoted in Aidoo's play indicates that, 'the day of planning is different from the day of battle.' These characters do not reckon fully with the reaction of the people, nor the practical circumstances on the other side of the Atlantic, or else they take them for granted and assume things would fall into place once they arrive and announce their presence.

3. Response to the Claims of Kinship: Misconceptions and Misunderstandings

The response of Africans on the continent to this claim of kinship is powerfully addressed in the second 'movement' of Onwueme's play. Ida Bee and her son are confronted by the people of Idu and are harshly questioned about their identity on their arrival. In fact they are seen as intruders, having arrived at the communal ancestral grotto during the performance of a sacred dance in celebration of the 'Iwu Festival'. Ida Bee's claim that they have 'come in search of [their] family' is greeted with incredulity as they obviously look like strangers. Their plight is further complicated because they are unable to say exactly where their family comes from, all they know is that they are from Idu. It is quickly pointed out to them that Idu has nine different clans and everyone belonged to a clan. Here, the diversity of the African continent and its peoples is highlighted, making Ida's claim to be 'from all of Africa' rather ridiculous. She is, however, not deterred but boldly claims:

We are the children of Africa ...born in the new world. Africa is our land. We do not have to claim any particular land or country because Africa was our nation ... before the whiteman came to divide ... disperse us. So why must we limit ourselves to one country...one state. No! The whole of Africa is our nationality. This is our land. We are children of Africa. We come from here... (p.10).

Her outburst is greeted with derisive laughter. The idea of the whole of Africa as one nation is ridiculed. Ironically, while Ida blames white people for having divided Africa, Odozi, the elder of Idu stresses the fact that Africa was never one nation to begin with. The diversity of the African continent is real; it was not the doing of any white man. For Odozi to subscribe to that notion would be to suggest that he did not know who he was. He protests:

What does our strange sister want me to become now? To become a Yoruba? (...) Hausa? Bini? Or what should I become? Who am I now? To start asking questions about who I am in my old age? Don't I know who I am? (...) Well, my people, in my old age, a stranger has come to tell me that I do not know who I am. She wants to tell me who I am (p.11).

This raises some pertinent issues and questions the aggregation of African peoples as one nation and perhaps the very idea of Pan-Africanism. Here, Appiah's questioning of Crummell's claim of an African motherland based solely on race is recalled. It is doubtful whether Crummell, and others like him, ever considered how the indigenous people in Liberia and other African states felt about the mass return of African freed slaves to claim land and property in their territories. They, like Odozi must have regarded their claim as an imposition. Perhaps more poignant would be their rejection of the assumed superiority of these returnees due to their brush with Euro-American culture which they had consciously or unconsciously imbibed and assumed to be superior to their African heritage.

Africans in the Diaspora often do have misconceptions about Africa today. They come with naive expectations of what real Africans are or ought to be. There have been incidences where some African Americans in particular, appear to be disappointed with Africans on the continent. They are not busy claiming the brotherhood of all Africans; indeed they do not need to do so to feel that they belong, they know where they belong already; they

are Ibo, or Ewe or Hausa, beyond being African. The situation is further complicated with educated Africans who have high aspirations. They are not confined to a pre-historic 'primitive' lifestyle. They are modern and have strivings beyond the shores of Africa, and resent suggestions that they do not know who they are, because of certain outward appearances.

An illustration of this in a more complex dimension can be found in the third 'movement' of *The Missing Face* in a flash back scene of the first meeting between Ida Bee and Momah, the African student who later became her son's father, in Milwaukee. On discovering that Momah was studying Urban Development, Ida is surprised and questions; 'Urban Development! In Africa?' To this Momah responds with passion:

And why not Africa? Perhaps you're one of those who think that Africans are like apes living on treetops, dancing naked all year round and eating other human beings. You are surprised that Africans develop cities and build houses too? Yes, we strive to turn Africa into modern Europe. ...away from this backward, burdensome African extended family system. Everyone nosing into everyone else's business- each the brother of so- and- so, mother of that great grandmother from this village and that. Ugh! African ways are so long and burdensome. American ways, so "cool" and so fast! ... We in Africa are determined to transfer American, European, and Russian technology to Africa! (p.29)

He would gladly give up 'long-winded' African names for 'JACK, TOM, DICK and HARRY'. The unfortunate irony of the contemporary 'self-enslavement' of African peoples is evident here. While black slaves were forced to give up their African names and identity, contemporary Africans in search of better economic standing abroad, voluntarily give up their African names and values in exchange for western ones. Ida Bee cannot comprehend Momah's rejection of African values and his idealising of foreign ones and attempts to reason with him: 'You don't know what you're saying. You cut off the past and you'll lose your bearings and never retrace your steps to the ancestors. Don't you know that?' (p.30) Momah completely rejects this and cannot understand why black Americans, who, from his perspective, 'have the best of all possible worlds' should think the way she does. Ida Bee attempts to explain the fallacy in his thinking and the sense of loss she feels because of her ancestry of slavery:

We are adrift on a foreign boat without a rudder. Losing confidence in our memory of past glory. Our minds clouded with distrust. Suspecting that the world that gave birth to us is our worst enemy. That our own people, brothers and sisters, are the ones we should fear most (p.30).

They are unable to fully understand each other's point of view. However, they each recognise the potential of the other to meet some longing they have. For Ida Bee, it is the need for physical love, perhaps symbolising for her some contact with the motherland. Momah, also seizes the opportunity to have his material needs met. He becomes her lover and she his provider. They thus exploit each other, but in the end, Ida Bee is betrayed and abandoned by Momah.

Again, some questions need to be asked. Is this arrangement between Ida Bee and Momah indicative of the contemporary relationship between Africans in the Diaspora and those on the continent? What price must the African in the Diaspora, in search of kinship with Africans on the continent, pay to achieve this ambition? Put in another way, does the more affluent African in the Diaspora owe her/his less affluent counterpart any favours? Are we our brother's keepers? Is there anything Africans on the continent can offer? Are Africans on the continent still betraying their kin in the Diaspora? Is this claim to kinship a realistic or fair one? Clearly, there cannot be any easy answers to these questions. A genuine search for answers would necessitate confronting certain barriers to understanding and accepting certain facts about one another which underscore our differences.

4. Barriers to Understanding and Acceptance of Differences

One major barrier to understanding and acceptance of differences between people generally is lack of adequate information. This is particularly true in the case between Africans and Africans in the Diaspora. There are African Americans and Africans from other parts of the Diaspora who still imagine, like Ida Bee, that there are no urban cities in Africa, and thus no need for an African to study Urban Development. All they know about the continent is what the mass media blurts out about war, disease and poverty. The news about Africa in the West, as is well known, is often just bad news. The only positive and appealing information about any part of Africa may be found in tourist brochures peddled by travel agents and tour organisers eager to promote their own

products; information which may not necessarily reach the ordinary person who may not have the means to embark on such tours. In Aidoo's play, Eulalie had indeed got hold of such a tourist brochure and her imagining of the motherland had been largely formed by that.

This yawning gap of information has frequently resulted in racial prejudice against Africans from the continent. Some of the most virulent racism encountered by Africans from the continent when they visit western countries is often meted out by fellow black people. There are subtle suggestions that they are somehow less human, especially if their skin colour is very dark. In extreme cases, they are referred to in all manner of demeaning terms. Niyi Osundare, the renowned Nigerian poet, captures this vividly in his hilarious poem, "Skin Love".⁴ The poem is a telephone conversation between an African woman and an African American woman who have not yet met. An excerpt from the poem will illustrate the point:

Em.. em.. by the way, tell me
which African are you:

*Congo Pygmy
Bushman Bantu
Forest Negro...?*

*Sister, which of th em
Would you rather not see?*

*Well, I just thought you sound
too educ...too civili...
for that kind of African...*

*But Sister, you sound
Like a hostage to Hollywood;
Tarzan grunts in the jungle
Of your mind...
How much of Africa do you know?*

*Oh quite a bit:
I watched Roots from Kunta Kinte
to the New Generations
did an excellent dissertation on The*

Heart of Darkness
Hey... tell me...
do you people still live on top of trees?

Pause. Shock..... Aftershock

Absolutely
Back home I teach at a university on the
tree
The national football team plays its
games
Between the branches
Our airport stands in a pretty corner
behind the leaves
And...oh yes, the American Embassy
Towers supreme on one of the tallest trees

On the other side, it must also be noted that, some Africans on the continent often associate African Americans and other Africans in the Diaspora with hard drugs and crime, most probably because of movie stereotyping. These prejudices do very little to encourage the building of bridges between Africans and other Africans in the Diaspora. Aside these prejudices are other barriers which need to be confronted if there is to be any real kinship between Africans in the Diaspora and Africans on the continent and if there is to be any real meaning to the concept of Pan-Africanism.

There are obvious differences between Africans on the continent and those in the Diaspora which must be acknowledged. Odozi calls Ida Bee and her son 'Oyibo' (white people). In Ghana white people and Africans from the Diaspora alike are referred to as 'obroni'. Clearly, these terms of reference have acquired meanings beyond the colour of the skin. 'Oyibo' or 'Obron' no longer just mean a white person, but refer to persons who are recognisably different from Africans on the continent. In fact, even persons born on the continent who have lived abroad, or who exhibit what are seen as attitudes or mannerism alien to the continent are called 'obroni'. In *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, Ato's uncles refer to him as a 'white man' (p.14 -15). Inherent in this labelling, sometimes, is the obnoxious attitude that 'white is better'! It is further accentuated by the fact of the economic chaos and

deprivation on the continent, as against the apparent affluence of western countries. Africans born in the Diaspora are, therefore, often regarded as better off where they are. The massive brain drain in recent decades and the thousands of Africans literally queuing to migrate to the West underlines this ironic situation. Many Africans are amazed that some Africans in the Diaspora would want to claim as theirs, countries they are eager to run away from in search of better lives elsewhere. For African Americans like Ida Bee, it may come as a shock to find that even here in their dear 'motherland' people have to live from 'paycheck to paycheck' and that the pay packet may not even be enough to cater for their needs for a single week.

The harsh economic realities and other rather debilitating conditions under which many Africans on the continent live cannot be ignored. Maya Angelou, in her narrative about her experiences in Nkrumah's Ghana, notes how she and other African Americans avoided talking about the negative things they saw, such as the open, filthy drains. Refusing to speak about or to face the reality will not solve any problems, unfortunately. These hard facts must be openly discussed and practical ways forward sought in the interests of both sides.

The barrier of language and cultural orientation are also real. Odozi in *The Missing Face* observes:

You look like us. You claim to be one of us. And yet you do not speak our tongue. You do not understand us, we do not understand you. ... You speak Oyibo- the white man's tongue. You talk like them, not like us. ... And if anyone were to ask me, I would tell them that you are Oyibo. You belong to the white world, where you come from. (p.12)⁵

This perhaps amounts to a disowning of kin, a rejection of the claim to kinship. Such a rejection must be painful for those eager to be welcomed and acknowledged as long lost kith and kin, especially more so, as their loss of language and culture was due to intentional and cruel acts to completely remove any vestiges of their African heritage by the slave masters. Painful as this might be, however, perhaps, Africans in the Diaspora ought to seriously face the question of where they really belong, or should belong. An African American exchange student once intimated that the biggest lesson she had learnt in coming to Ghana, was that Africa was not her home. She had discovered that her true home was America, by making that journey to her imagined 'motherland'.

That exchange students' experience and decision is just one possible

outcome of this journey, of course. Countless other Africans from the Diaspora have found 'home' on the continent. They have committed themselves to learning African languages and adjusting themselves to the realities on the ground and adopting strategies to cope with these. In many of such cases, they have been received and integrated into the lives of the communities to which they have come to belong. Others decide to shuttle between two homes. Room must be made for all these varied realities. One cannot be seen as a better option than another. What really matters in the end should be what truly brings peace of mind and a sense of belonging or of being settled. In this wise therefore, Africans in the Diaspora who feel at home in their places of birth and never feel any urge to make that journey should not be seen as rejecting their 'motherland' or their roots. It is possible to find new roots in a new place. The thousands of Africans born on the continent who chose to make western countries their permanent homes, for what ever reason, perhaps should not be faulted either, in the same spirit. As the old saying goes, 'home is where the heart is'. What makes one place more acceptable to one person as home may not be the same for another. Indeed these may range from the very practical, as material comforts and opportunities, to the more intangible, yet real reasons such as a feeling of a sense of belonging.

Cultural difference, no doubt, can serve as a serious barrier to understanding and integration. The Dilemma of a Ghost best illustrates this point. The major conflict in the play revolves around Eulalie and her Ghanaian husband, Ato's decision to postpone having children till they are ready to have them. Ato's family, however, assume they are having difficulties in childbearing when they see no signs of pregnancy several months after their marriage and attempt to perform some rituals which they believed could aid the couple. Eulalie will have none of it. Ato is totally confused and is unable to explain their decision to his people. Furthermore, they are shocked that Eulalie openly smokes cigarettes and drinks alcohol. In the Ghanaian society, it is uncommon to see women smoking in public, though they do drink publicly. Her in-laws conclude Eulalie probably could not conceive because of these habits. Eulalie in turn cannot imagine eating the snails her mother-in-law brings to them and considers Ghanaian customs as 'savage'. The beautiful drum music she had imagined turns out to be at times frightening. She also struggles with the constant interference of Ato's family in their marriage and forgets that she had once longed that his people would become hers. She laments:

Ain't I poorer here as I would ave been in New York City? (In pathetic imitation of Ato) 'Eulalie, my people say it is not good for a woman to take alcohol. Eulalie, my people say they are not pleased to see you smoke... Eulalie, my people say...My people...My people...' ...I have been drinking in spite of what your people say. ...Who married me, you or your goddam people? (p.47).

Eulalie completely misses the point that in Ghanaian custom, it is not two individuals who get married, but two families. Ato's marital affairs are thus very much the concern of his family. Eulalie's dreams of Africa and her experience of it are at total variance. Her expectations of the 'motherland' are shown to be oversimplified and idealistic. Her situation is not helped by the fact that her husband lacks the courage to play the role of an effective mediator between her and his people. He does not give her the real picture, even when she, in the prologue to the play, questions him about the acceptability of their plan to postpone having children. On the other hand also, he is unable to explain to his own people what he had come to know due to his education. He cannot explain to them the possibility of family planning as he is afraid they will think he and his wife had usurped the creator's role in determining when a child should be born. He becomes the ghost in the song caught between Elmina and Cape Coast, not knowing in which direction to turn and unable to find a convenient middle way.

This dilemma in which Ato finds himself, serves as a powerful imagery of some educated Africans who have become somewhat alienated from their own culture by virtue of their western education. They question certain traditional practices of their people and yet do not have the courage to openly challenge them, while at the same time there are elements they greatly value and do not wish to discard. Further complicating matters is their open appreciation of certain western values and practices, some of which are at variance with their own. Where do they go? Can a comfortable middle ground be found? In *The Missing Face*, this dilemma is also alluded to and briefly explored in the character of Momah. In the flashback scene in 'movement' three of the play, when we encounter him as a student in the US, he is ready to give up his African name and to become JACK. He tells Ida Bee that Africans need 'to acquire a new form of civilization' and appears ready to give up his values and culture for western ones. Back in Idu, however, he appears to be deeply engrossed in

the traditions of his people. His character is complex and not easy to comprehend. He accepts his son Amaechi, but rejects Ida Bee his son's mother and sends her off into the evil forest. He then decides to leave the village for the city but is prevailed upon to change his mind by Odozi's words:

When will you ever know yourself, MOMAH? When will you ever learn that the present must see a reflection of self in the contorted face of the past! MOMAH, you will not grow. You cannot desert your land that weeps for your soothing hands to heal her burning face, her wounded heart. No MOMAH, you cannot run away from this responsibility that we now share. How can a snail run away from its own shell? (p.43).

In his encounter with the spirit of his father Meme, he is further chided and appears to finally 'find himself' as he says to Amaechi: 'Son, I am home now. In my universe, all that we need is before us. Behold, our fatherland, our universe!' For Momah, therefore, there is a return to his 'universe'. He eventually finds his place within that universe, unlike Ato, who at the end of the play is still not sure if he should go to Elmina or to Cape Coast.

5. Acceptance and Understanding are Possible

The ending of both plays, indicate an eventual acceptance and integration of those who return. In the case of Ida Bee, her son's paternity is beyond doubt and so he is immediately accepted and a ritual naming ceremony performed for him. Momah initially rejects Ida Bee although others in the family are ready to accept her. Momah's difficulty stems from the fact that he feels humiliated by Ida's unannounced 'homecoming'. She arrives only to expose how he had exploited her in Milwaukee, and left her with a child whom he had never mentioned to his family. His actions are clearly out of guilt and an attempt to preserve his pride. But even so, Ida Bee is eventually taken into the family when it is discovered that she and Momah are in fact children of the same father.⁶ Thus kinship is restored and the long lost kin is welcomed home with open arms.

In *The Dilemma of a Ghost* also, Eulalie Rush is in the end taken by Esi Kom, Ato's mother, into the family house, an indication of her willingness to accept her into the family. Eulalie and her Ghanaian husband have had a major misunderstanding. Eulalie had called an

African custom she did not understand 'savage'. Ato in a rage slaps her. She leaves home all day and Ato is very worried as he cannot find her anywhere. In his desperation, he appeals to his mother for help. She listens to his story and finally begins to understand the situation between her son and his 'stranger wife'. She lays the blame for what had happened at Ato's doorstep as he has not properly orientated his wife to the ways of his people, nor had he explained things to his own people regarding decisions he and his wife had taken. There had been a major gap in communication which had resulted in all manner of misunderstandings. Esi kom puts it succinctly:

*No stranger ever breaks the law...Hmm...my son. You
have not dealt with us well. And you have not dealt with
your wife well in this. ...
Before the stranger should dip his finger
Into the thick palm nut soup,
It is a townsman
Must have told him to (p.51-2).*

She then turns to her African American daughter-in-law, who returns while mother and son are talking, with better understanding and sympathy she says to her, 'come my child'. A symbolic gesture signalling her acceptance of this returned daughter.

The optimistic note in both endings perhaps is an indication of the willingness of Africans on the continent to accept their lost kin, once they come to terms with the fact of their blood ties due to history and/or once a bridge of understanding, facilitated by clear communication, has been built.

6. Conclusion

This paper has sought to analyse the expectations of the 'motherland' that Africans in the Diaspora have and the realities to which they come. It has also attempted to discuss the other side of the issue, the reactions of Africans on the continent to the claims laid upon them by their returning kin. The discussion has been facilitated by Tess Onwueme's *The Missing Face* and Ama Ata Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost*; two African plays which deal with the issue of the return of the African American to the African continent. They bring to the fore, pertinent

issues regarding the relationship between Africans on the continent and those in the Diaspora. Misunderstandings and negative attitudes on both sides, cultural and language barriers are undeniable realities which cannot be merely wished away or denied. Both plays appear to suggest that when these barriers are openly confronted and solutions sought, there can be lasting solutions found.

Africans from the Diaspora who come in search of roots or some form of identity or reconciliation, and who persist, may eventually find what they came to look for, the missing piece in that puzzle of self-identity. Onwueme graphically illustrates this in her play. Ida Bee and Amaechi find the missing half of the Ikenga (a wooden staff which was given to Ida Bee by her father) in Idu, which confirmed their true identity. Amaechi, at the end of the play overcomes his initial hesitations and resistance to his mother's wishes to relocate to Idu from Milwaukee and they are both accepted with open arms. In *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, Esi Kom takes her disillusioned, broken and helpless African American daughter-in-law, Eulalie to the family house at the close of the play, symbolising the beginning of understanding and acceptance. Although Ato is left still confused and undecided on where to turn at the end of the play, there is every reason to presume that once the two most important women in his life had come together, he would also find peace at last. Momah, the educated and alienated African also finds his place within his own culture. The characters in these two plays go through difficult stages to reach such points of hopeful equilibrium.

This paper may have raised more questions than provided answers. This is inevitable as the issue of the kinship of all people of African descent is one fraught with many contradictions and difficult issues which I believe will not and cannot be easily resolved and for which multiple anecdotes must be sought. The characters in the two plays, which have served as useful illustrations, eventually reached points of understanding and co-operation. Perhaps it is apt to conclude with another question: 'How far or near are we, Africans on the continent and Africans in the Diaspora, to reaching such a stage of understanding and co-operation?'

NOTES

¹ Appiah's misgivings about this linking of the Pan- Africanism and race derive from his understanding of how this perpetuates negative images of Africa and the Negro. He argues that since African Americans like Crummell had 'inherited a set of conceptual blinders that made them unable to see virtue in Africa, ... their low opinion of Africa was not easily distinguished from a low opinion of the Negro' (1992:5). Our major interest in this essay is mainly to trace the beginnings of the conception of Africa as the motherland of all black people and a lengthy engagement with the issues raised by Appiah would be distracting.

² She makes reference to the novels of Paule Marshall, a Barbadian American and Harlem Renaissance writers such as Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen among others.

³ Onwueme's *Legacies*, published in 1989 by Heinemann Ibadan, was extensively rewritten and published as *The Missing Face* by the African Heritage Press in 2002. While the plot of the play remains pretty much the same, there are changes in the writing style. The melodramatic opening in *Legacies*, quoted in the introduction, is replaced by a more realistic dialogue between a mother (Ida Bee) and her 17 year old son, (Amaechi). For ease of reference and because the newer version is easier to read and better illustrates my points, I shall from now on in this paper refer to *The Missing Face*, rather than *Legacies*.

⁴ Osundare read this unpublished poem at the May 2006 ALA conference held in Accra.

⁵ In the play, however, Onwueme makes no distinctions in language, though there are direct exchanges between Ida Bee and Amaechi on one hand and the Africans on the other, making it less credible. Aidoo, however, creates different levels of language in her play making it clear that Eulalie speaks differently from the others, with the exception of her educated husband, Ato.

⁶ This part of the play, I find rather too contrived. Ida, we are told is 36 years old and her father had left home when she was 21. Meanwhile, the child she had had with Momah is now 17 years old, which means he was born before Ida's father left home. Implying that Momah should have met Ida's father who was in fact his own father, who had been sold into slavery (in the 20th century?). Unless we read Meme, the father, as a kind of metaphor for the African slave, and ancestor of all African people, thus emphasising the blood ties of all Africans, this does not really make much sense. The ritual scene supports this reading, where Meme appears as an ancestral spirit in masquerade. I would argue, however, that this is not very well fused into the generally realistic narrative of the play.

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