

# Border Crossings

National Theatre of Ghana

# The Dilemma of a Ghost

by Ama Ata Aidoo

Programme



Commonwealth  
Foundation

Marking The Bicentenary of the  
Abolition of the Slave Trade Act

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ENGLAND

Anniversaries are opportunities. They are times of remembering, both in the sense of communal recollection of the past; and in the sense of re-member-ing, taking the members of a shattered body and putting it back together. When we are dealing with colonialism and slave trade, the latter sense is the crucial one.

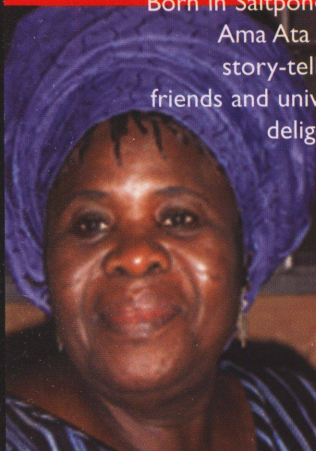
Theatre - performance - is always about remembering in some way. The performative ritual which pervades and sustains African culture mourns, recalls, and renews the relationship between past and present. Ghosts are made manifest and present. The invisible becomes visible and corporal before us.

In today's world of globalised capitalism, where everything is somehow theatricalised, the theatre can seem marginal and residual. It does not cater for mass markets. It is not technologically complex or simulated. Its reality is not virtual. And here lies its profound value in the contemporary space: that in performance we encounter real time, real bodies, lived experience, and mortality.

In commemorating 200 years since the Act Abolishing the Slave Trade in British Colonies, and 50 years since Ghana's independence, we must once again reassess, and take the opportunity to adjust, our relationship with the West African region. Theatre allows us to bring that shared history physically and spiritually into the present; and theatre presented jointly by British and Ghanaian artists acknowledges that our re-member-ing must be collaborative, democratic and egalitarian if it is to have meaning in the contemporary world.

**Michael Walling: Artistic Director**

**Ama Ata Aidoo**

A portrait of Ama Ata Aidoo, a Ghanaian writer and activist. She is wearing a blue headwrap and a blue and white striped top. She has a gentle expression and is looking directly at the camera.

Born in Saltpond in what was then the Gold Coast during the Second World War, Ama Ata Aidoo was brought up in a home that offered experiences of local story-telling as well as cosmopolitan encounters. Relatives, teachers, school friends and university contemporaries were and remain tremendously supportive, delighting in her early local triumphs as a writer and in her subsequent emergence as a continental voice.

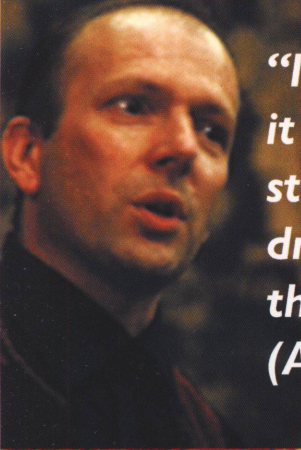
After graduating from the University of Ghana, research interests and teaching/ lecturing appointments led to Aidoo working in Kenya, Zimbabwe and the United States as well as Ghana. Wherever she has been and whatever she has been doing, she has been a committed campaigner. For example, for eighteen months in the early 1980s, she pushed forward a radical agenda as Secretary for Education in the PNDC Government in Ghana.

In addition to *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, Aidoo's publications include another play, *Anowa* (1970), short stories, novels, children's books, and poems. She continues to take robust positions on national, international and gender issues, and, in recent years has founded Mbaasem, a progressive Accra-based NGO promoting women's writing.

JG

## **Concert Party**

Ghanaian syncretic theatre has built on indigenous narrative traditions. Conventions of story-telling have been fused with a variety of influences in popular travelling theatre; the best known form being the Concert Party, which flourished from the 30s to the 80s. Small scale enterprises, the Concert Parties were influenced by silent films and American vaudeville, Empire Day Parades and informal mess-room entertainments. Kwame Nkrumah (first President of Ghana) recognised the importance of the form, and during the sixties the Workers' Brigade Concert Party drew together major talents, introduced female performers (to replace female impersonators) and, briefly, gave the form a specific political dimension. It was from this troupe that Adeline Ama Buabeng emerged as a major Ghanaian talent. Concert Parties would tour to small towns and villages, where they would erect a makeshift stage of planks and crates in the courtyards of larger houses. They employed a broad style of acting, emphasised by stylised make-up, music and dance.



**“In order for African drama to be valid it has to derive lots of its impetus, its strength, from traditional African dramatic forms, however one conceives these forms, because they exist.”  
(Ama Ata Aidoo)**

## **The Dilemma of a Ghost**

**by James Gibbs (Editor: African Theatre)**

In the heady atmosphere of post-Independence Ghana there was much talk of a National Theatre Movement in which local idioms would be combined with dialogue drama. *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, premièred at the University of Ghana in March 1965, fits into this context: it draws extensively on the conventions of narrative and song that surrounded Aidoo as she was growing up, and reflects her exposure, as a student of English literature, to European traditions.

The play is part of a body of work that provides a context in which issues confronting Ghanaians and children of the Diaspora can be explored. At the heart of the drama is a concern with the African-American experience of Ghana, and with the host community's response to a 'returnee'. Insight into the African-American presence in Ghana is provided by Maya Angelou's *All God's Chillun Need Travelling Shoes*, and a theatrical contact is suggested by Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959). Hansberry had taken her title from a stanza by Langston Hughes that reads:

**“What happens to dream deferred?  
Does it dry up  
Like a raisin in the Sun  
Or fester like a sore -  
And then run?”**

Aidoo developed a theme in Hansberry's play concerning a Black American woman who considers (dreams of?) marrying a Nigerian and moving to Africa. In her exploration of 'what happened next?', the Ghanaian playwright continues the interrogative mode of the verse just quoted, fusing her questioning with elements from African dilemma tales, and then providing some possible answers. Not surprisingly these answers reflect Aidoo's strong sense of the ways in which women support one another

*The condemned cell, Elmina Slave Castle, Ghana.*

# Akan and Fante Society: The Traditions of Ghana

## An African Matriarchy

A family line, the family name, and any family possessions pass through the mother's side of the family, not the father's. A child is more directly related to the mother's family than the father's. A child always has a very close relationship with the mother, often a close relationship to the father. A child's uncle is a strong paternal relation, sometimes more so than the actual father.

People always have close relationships with their siblings. A mother and her brothers are directly in charge of a daughter's marriage.

A father, along with his sisters and brothers, is directly in charge of his niece's marriage.

## The Role of Women

An older woman in a village is placed in such high regard that very little can be done without consulting her. On a smaller scale, a very similar situation is found in most families: a man in fact does little without consulting his wife. Women play an important role in almost every aspect of society, except that of combat.

Fante women are set apart from other Akan women because of their unique sense of pride. The largest difference between a Fante woman and other Akan women is their more elegant and complicated hairstyles.



## The Importance of Children

The presence of children in a family is the single most important goal for the majority of the society. Children are desired more than wealth, more coveted than gold, and only when one has had a child is one considered successful or having truly lived. Every child is considered the greatest treasure of the society. The parents will do whatever they can to see the child grow into happiness and social dignity. When a woman is found to be barren, her husband is likely to divorce her, as she is now virtually dead. When a man is found infertile, he may be shunned by every member of the society, treated as a woman, or even possibly killed.

## Proverbs

The Twi language of the Akan has a strong reliance on proverbs. Proverbs, a part of everyday conversation, are used to describe nearly every situation and to teach lessons. The use of proverbs is directly related to oral tradition, which is a very prominent aspect of Fante and Asante culture. Oral tradition is the method of passing the culture and the history of the society down through the generations by the use of tales and stories. Essentially, a proverb is a very short story used to teach a certain lesson or explain a small part of the society. The Dilemma of a Ghost, a proverb in itself, continues that oral tradition on the stage and utilizes proverbs in the telling of the story.

Read more in **Border Crossings'** new book: *Theatre and Slavery - Ghosts at the Crossroads*. Contributors include: Ama Ata Aidoo, Rustom Bharucha, James Gibbs, Peter Sellars and Michael Walling. Foreword by Aidan McQuade - Director of Anti-Slavery International.



**Adeline Ama Buabeng (performer)** has been performing for 35 years, starting in the Concert Party, the traditional Ghanaian theatre. She worked closely with Efua Sutherland, developing the Ghanaian theatre movement, and took the title role in the Twi version of Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*.

**Anniwaa Buachie (performer)** Anniwaa trained at East 15 Acting School, graduating this year. She recently won the coveted Alan Bates Award for most outstanding newcomer.

**Steve Collins (Assistant Director)** trained and worked in Scotland, and was Director of the National Theatre of Scotland Young Company. He has long been interested in Ghanaian theatre and recently worked with Theatre for a Change in Accra.

**Agnes Dapaah (performer)** studied at the University of Ghana's School of Performing Arts, training as a director. Since graduating she has mostly worked as an actor, winning the ECRA Best Acting Talent Award in 1991.

**Dzifa Glikpoe (performer)** is the director of the National Drama Company of Ghana. She was a founder member of the National Theatre and has travelled the world performing for the company. She won ECRAG Best Actress award in 1993 and this year won the Presidential Award for Drama.

**Seema Iqbal (costume design)** graduated from Central School of Speech and Drama. For *Border Crossings*, she designed *Orientations* and *Dis-Orientations*. Other designs include *Do I Hear a Waltz?* and *Extra Time* (Landor Theatre).

**Shonel Jackson (performer)** is a recent graduate of Rose Bruford College. Theatre credits: *Jane* in *Catastrophe* and *Josephine* in *Four* at the Lion Unicorn, *Cecile* in *Les Liaisons Dangereuse* at Greenwich Theatre, *Cheviot* in *Discontented Winter* at The Albany and *The Artist in Profit* at the White Bear.

**Victoria Johnstone (design)** trained in Theatre Design at Rose Bruford. Recent designs include *The Cow Play* (South East tour), *The Hamletmachine* (BAC/International tour), *Tom* (Arcola), *Amid the Clouds*, *Vincent River* and *A mother* (all BAC). She has worked with *Scarlet*, *Zecora Ura*, *Soho Theatre* and *Punchdrunk*.

**Osei Korankye (performer)** is a musician, composer and teacher of the *Seperewa*. He teaches at the International Centre for African Music and Dance at the University of Ghana, and is also a resident performer there. He has travelled widely in Africa and Europe and has held workshops and performed in the US.

**Nick Moran (lighting design)** Nick's lighting design work has encompassed theatre, opera, live music and television, in the UK and world wide. He teaches at Central School of Speech & Drama, is an executive member of the ALD, and his book, *Performance Lighting Design*, will be out in November. He is delighted to be working again with *Border Crossings*.

**Elsie Owusu OBE (design)** is a leading architect and a founder member of the Society of Black Architects. This is the first use of her architecture skills to create a theatre set. She is on the board of Arts Council England, and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. Major commissions include the design and art strategy for the new UK Supreme Court, and past work includes the International Centre for Performing Arts.

**Fiona Shepherd (stage manager)** After training at RSAMD, Fiona worked extensively in the West End and on tour. As resident production manager for Pineapple Performing Arts School, she has staged performance in a wide range of venues, and oversees a successful outreach programme with their hip-hop youth troupe "Y@P".

**Seun Shote (performer)** trained at Manchester Metropolitan Drama School. Acting credits include *Blue/Orange* (Duchess Theatre), *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* (Stoke-on-Trent), *Master Harold and the Boys* (Leicester Haymarket), *Little Miss Jocelyn* (BBC) and *The Cut* (E4). He is a skilled Capoeira practitioner, and is the founder member of a Capoeira Academy.

**Kate Stafford (producer)** trained as an actor with Bristol Old Vic Theatre School and has worked as an actor, director and producer in the UK, Austria and Malawi. She is currently Artistic Director of intercultural theatre company Bilimankhwe Arts.

**Michael Walling (Director)** is Artistic Director of *Border Crossings*, for whom productions include: *Dis-Orientations*, *Orientations*, *Bullie's House*, *Double Tongue*, *Mappa Mundi*, *Toufann*. Michael also directs opera, including *The Ring* (ENO).

**Border Crossings** creates new, intercultural, multi-media theatre in response to the contemporary globalised world. The company works across the borders between cultures and art forms, and between nations and peoples. *Border Crossings* is a member of The Theatre Consortium and ITC.

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Ato Yawson, a young Ghanaian graduate: Seun Shote  
Eulalie Yawson (née Rush), Afro-American graduate:  
Shonel Jackson

Esi Kom, Ato's mother: Dzifa Glikpoe

Monka, Ato's sister: Anniwaa Buachie

Nana, Ato's grandmother: Adeline Ama Buabeng

Mansa, Ato's Aunt: Agnes Dapaah

Akroma, Ato's Uncle: Osei Korankye

Chorus of Women: Adeline Ama Buabeng, Anniwaa  
Buachie, Dzifa Glikpoe

1st Woman, the Chorus Leader: Agnes Dapaah

Directed by Michael Walling

Music by Osei Korankye

Set Designed by Elsie Owusu

with Victoria Johnstone

Costumes Designed by Seema Iqbal

Lighting by Nick Moran

Stage Manager: Fiona Shepherd

Assistant Director: Steve Collins

Lighting Assistant: Dan Large

Production Assistant: Christine Jones

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Production Photography: Neil Libbert

Produced by Kate Stafford for Border Crossings

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Billy Hiscoke, Graeme Jennings (Business of Culture),

Prof. Nesta Jones (Rose Bruford College), Fraser Kent, Aidan McQuade

(Anti-Slavery International), Paddy McNulty, Dr. Alastair Niven,

Matylda Owoo, Josip Rainer, Peter Sellars, Karl Rouse (CSSD),

Eli Tetteh, Theatre for a Change, Tessa Watt (Africa Beyond)

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