

**University of Algiers at Bouzaréah  
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**WOMEN'S POSITIONS AND ROLES IN CONTEMPORARY GHANA  
IN AMA ATA AIDOO'S NOVELS:  
ALIENATION OR SOCIAL CHANGE?**

**Magister Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Magister in English: Literature and Civilisation**

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# Declaration

I hereby declare that the substance of this dissertation is entirely the result of my investigation and that due reference or acknowledgement is made, whenever necessary, to the work of other researchers.

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Signature: *Lila Messaoudi*

# **Dedication**

To my parents who have always encouraged me to go as far as possible in my studies

# Acknowledgements

I thank my supervisor, Professor M'Hamed Bensemmane, for inspiring me to pursue the topic of this research and guiding me, during these two years and a half of postgraduate study. I would like to express my profound gratitude to you for your dedication and for accepting to make time for me out of your busy schedule. Your words of encouragement, sound advice made all the difference. I am indebted to you for the discrete reminders of deadlines to be met, and above all, your patience.

# Abstract

An examination of the existing scholarship on African women writers shows that the question of negotiating the past and the present in the contemporary period is one of the crucial discussions in African women's literature. However, this negotiation is hardly dealt with as an issue that can potentially lead to the re-evaluation of women's roles and status in contemporary Africa, so as to break away from the nostalgia for pre-colonial women's images and roles and to cast a critical eye on Western imported lifestyles. As social change occurs, women's position in Africa is undergoing an ever changing redefinition especially when it is considered within the larger scope of nationalism. This is what this dissertation proposes, a re-reading of Ama Ata Aidoo's novels, through the new prism of women's roles as part of the cultural negotiation in contemporary Ghana. In doing so, the dissertation goes beyond the paradigm of binary opposition that undergirds the critical field concerning writings by African women in favour of the innovative concept of negotiation. In addressing women's issues such as marriage, polygamy and love within the broader context of nationhood and nationalism, this study puts forward the argument that Ama Ata Aidoo has devised a space of creativity for herself through an innovative aesthetic vacuum, hitherto the preserve of men, and from which she poses, discusses and addresses through negotiation, those cultural issues affecting her and her female characters.

Chapter One presents a theoretical basis for this study by providing a frame of discussion regarding the concepts of Feminism, Womanism, Gender, Socialization as well as Aidoo's commitment to these concepts, her commitment to the nation in order to explain how she is able to negotiate her commitment to both African women's issues and nationalism. Chapter Two deals with the dilemma posed in *Our Sister Killjoy*; Nationalism is discussed specifically in relation to women's issues, as

well as to Gender and Identity. Through this association, we discuss the contentions as well as the negotiation of these two crucial issues in African literature, particularly in African women's literature. Chapter Three engages both the personal and the political in *Changes*, as it questions the notion of education and redefines the practice of polygamy to suit women's needs and identities in contemporary Ghana. Chapter Four explores Aidoo's style in handling the issues discussed in the above chapters, and her successful attempt in negotiating traditional storytelling and modernist techniques, as a vivid example of how to negotiate past and present.

Aidoo thus makes a literary compact with her bold views concerning the role of an intellectual woman in Ghana, by engaging in a mode of writing combining post modernism with traditional orature.

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# Introduction

It is a commonly accepted view that an African writer is not only an artist but also an intellectual whose creative work is related to the cultural and political issues of his/her country. Ama Ata Aidoo, just as any other African novelist, writes for the reconstruction of an African image that would depart from the ones shaped and inherited from colonialism and perpetuated by the post-colonial governments that kept much distance and disregard towards the aspirations of the masses. Aidoo's works are thus resolutely committed to social progress and welfare. Although they carry a strong ethical message issuing from tradition, they also fervently call for modernization, which must be adapted to the African context. Precisely, Aidoo is in search of an equilibrium in society which would promote a social harmony in the new post-colonial context, when women's positions and roles should be re-evaluated.

Ama Ata Aidoo is the most "activist" Ghanaian writer and perhaps the most versatile. Her works can be placed in the context of post-coloniality and read from a feminist perspective. They seem to call for a traditional continuity in culture and ethics while they take charge of the changing realities in Africa. This suggests an ambiguity, however, the maintenance of African traditions and values have at their very heart the notion of communalism as a central component, on the other hand, modernity implies a set of values perpetuated by the West and evolving around the notion of individualism and personal achievements. This apparent contradiction is even deeper when it concerns women's positions and roles in a post-colonial Ghanaian/African context. Aidoo juxtaposes two sets of values, partly separated by historical reasons, namely colonialism and its aftermath. This further mirrors her own indecisiveness about whether or not to follow the African traditions or the new ways of life brought about by a modernity which imposes itself in the context of economic competition, cultural hybridization and globalization.

Since the publication of her first play *The Dilemma of a Ghost* in 1965, Ama Ata Aidoo has proved to be an important African intellectual, as a writer, scholar, ideologue and critic who has made her fame with her poetry, drama, short stories

and novels as well as literary criticism. In *The Companion to African Literatures*, Douglas Killam and Ruth Rowe note that “Aidoo is perhaps the most versatile of Ghanaian writers”<sup>1</sup>, whose writings are inspired by her deep-seated desire to contribute to the debates and the struggles of her time and space. They reflect the breadth of her career which has certainly been influenced by both the historical events that have shaped her country and Africa at large, as well as her personal experiences. Like many of her male colleagues, she has been greatly disillusioned by the political situation after independence in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa, as it became apparent that the campaign for national liberation had failed to live up to Africans’ expectations. Hence, she tries to re-evaluate the meaning of political independence for the African, Ghanaian societies, which in the preceding eight or ten decades, had been European colonies.

Sharing the main concerns of her male counterparts, notably in Ghana, Aidoo has been a vocal figure in the struggle for both Ghanaians’ and Africans’ self-determination and national struggle in the context of colonialism and neo-colonialism as well as the broader pan-Africanist struggle against imperialism and racism. She has been undoubtedly influenced by the pan-Africanist and socialist ideas that were prevalent in the 1950s and 60s in the period leading up to, and immediately after, the independence of Ghana in 1957. Moreover, her vocal and written expressions over the plight of women in traditional Ghanaian society, combined with her commentaries on pan-Africanism left her vulnerable to scathing censorship policies and regulations. Furthermore, she has been an acid critic of the corruption and hypocrisy of the national bourgeoisie in post-independence Ghana as well as she has denounced the poverty, hunger, lack of education and the destructive practices that have impeded development in Ghana as an example of African countries at large.

Meanwhile, being a woman, Aidoo has been an outspoken proponent for women’s liberation in national and international arenas as well as for women’s active

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas Killam & Ruth Rowe (Eds.). *The Companion to African Literatures*. Oxford, Bloomington, Indianapolis: James Currey, Indiana University Press, 2000, p. 21.

roles in contemporary Ghana. Her participation in many of the debates surrounding African Literature and particularly African Women's Literature, has been extremely important, particularly in her insistence on the struggle for women's liberation and on the necessity to stress that this struggle must not be subordinated to nationalist or anti-imperialist struggles but rather must be a distinct part of these.

She insists, forcefully and successfully, that the liberation of the continent is inextricably linked with the liberation of its people. Arguably, she has no equal in the African literary tradition as an exponent of the reinvention of Africa and of the re-imagining and re-imagining of its women.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, she explores the difficulties of reconciling a Western education with African values and traditions which have been deeply disrupted by colonialism and neo-colonialism, a situation that mirrors her own experiences as an African educated woman in a male dominated environment.

Moreover, Aidoo is a writer who deals with the dilemma of social change in a context whereby tradition is part of the national project and cultural liberation from neo-colonialism and imperialism, but where modernization and more precisely education is still unavoidable and necessary for the development of the African nations.

Aidoo does not merely lament Africa's fate, past, present, and even future, by bringing her sceptical intelligence to an examination of her place within an unbroken continuum of a history of colonialism and neo-colonialism; as one of black Africa's foremost feminists she considers the oppression of modern African women in all spheres of human activity.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, being a women writer committed to Africa's social, economic and political development as well as to the active role of women in this development, Aidoo insists that women are central agents in the confrontation between traditionalism and modernity inspired by the Western models. Women are considered as the perpetuators of tradition and at the same time, they gain their

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<sup>2</sup> Douglas Killam & Ruth Rowe (Eds.). Op. Cit. p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 21.

personal liberation and become both successful and detached from tradition thanks to their education, i.e. how indeed they reconcile both roles, that is to represent permanent values in tradition and to lead a successful life in society under change.

In this dissertation, I intend to examine, in Aidoo's novels, the apparent discrepancy between supporting traditional continuity and calling for social change and modernization especially when it comes to defining the roles of Ghanaian women in this new African, Ghanaian reality. How women's positions and roles have been actually disrupted by colonialism is also noteworthy, given that Ghanaian women held important positions in pre-colonial Ghana. I will investigate how these roles have changed with the interference of modernity and Western lifestyles. This disparity in Aidoo's works is a reflection of her personal conflicts regarding the possibilities and the ways in which one can reconcile a Western education and African traditions within an ever changing social order, especially when dealing with the status and the roles of women.

Works [by Aidoo] examine the role of women within African historical space—exploring the role of women in their recently postcolonial world and in certain cases revisioning the past to make their present viable, stripping away the colonial representations of womanhood. She also investigates the double-bind they found themselves in as women in the postcolonial era, and looked to the past for answers in demarcating African women's domain for the present.<sup>4</sup>

This is the field that I will try to explore: the "double-bind" modern African women found themselves in. By due process, I shall look at the following: On the one hand, I intend to investigate Aidoo's policy concerning the kind of traditions African women should maintain in order to achieve a positive, productive and stable social change; on the other hand, I shall examine what kind of modernity Aidoo has in mind to support and boost this social change in order to achieve a societal development.

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<sup>4</sup> Gay Wilentz. "African Women's Domain: Demarcating Political Space in Nwapa, Sutherland and Aidoo". In Ada Uzoamaka Azodo & Gay Wilentz (Eds.). *Emerging Perspectives on Ama Ata Aidoo*. Trenton (N.J.): Africa World Press, 1999, p. 266.

Nevertheless, according to the writer, despite the onset of modernization as well as the new roles attributed to women in modern African societies, there are still conflicting positions and dissensions occasioned by cultural, nationalist resistance to change. She certainly embodies the dynamics she wishes for both Ghana and Africa in her strong female characters, viable in their own right as she perceives the African women in their everyday lives, arguing that women are the catalysts for development. However, women find themselves in an ambiguous situation which restricts their potential for development.

Ama Ata Aidoo deplores that in traditional African societies as well as in traditional African philosophy, women are those who perpetuate tradition; they are the keepers and preservers of culture. They are the mothers, the daughters and the wives; in sum, men's aids. In this perspective, Aidoo states the following:

and once (...) the young man, had been bold enough to go forward and take [the girl] off her mother's back, you could also take it for granted, that you had acquired

a sexual aid;  
a wet nurse and a nursemaid for your children;  
a cook-steward and  
general housekeeper;  
a listening-post;  
an economic and general consultant;  
a field-hand and,  
if you are that way inclined,  
a pinch-ball<sup>5</sup>

African male writers have often portrayed African women in this way. Therefore, the prevalence of inadequate female portrayals in male African writings have led to the emergence, in the 1960s, of many African women writings as alternative discourses

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<sup>5</sup> Ama Ata Aidoo. "Unwelcome Pals and Decorative Slaves Or Glimpses of Women as Writers and Characters in Contemporary African Literature". In Ada Uzoamaka Azodo & Gay Wilentz (Eds.). *Emerging Perspectives on Ama Ata Aidoo*. Trenton (N.J.): Africa World Press, 1999, pp. 11-12.

to redress the negative, stereotyped images attributed to African female characters by African male writers and henceforth to African women. They have rejected the images which enclose them in a type and restrict their capabilities. In the meantime, “while men writers tend to valorise the sexual allegory, women writers attempt to subvert it.”<sup>6</sup> Brenda Cooper in *To Lay These Secrets Open* affirms that these highly patriarchal images of African women presented by African male writers tend to reduce African women’s capabilities. She states that:

the language and rhetoric of African nationalism is highly patriarchal: Africa is often characterized as 'mother' and, by extension, the mothering and nurturing of children is glorified and reaffirmed as the primary defining characteristic of women. (...). [T]he role of mothering is used to paralyse women and to restrict their potential to this one role.<sup>7</sup>

Through African male portrayals of African women, we clearly notice that the latter are burdened with these heavy traditional roles, the mothering and nurturing of children, which make them the prisoners of a traditional model that keeps them out of the legitimate role they should play in modern societies. Consequently, African women writers have harshly reacted to these false and derogative attributes that have been and are still being presented in male African writings, doing thus much harm to the image of the African woman on the national, the continental and the international scenes. Among the first African women writers who have done so, one can cite Flora Nwapa, Efua Sutherland, Buchi Emecheta and Ama Ata Aidoo.

On the other hand, when girls attend formal schools and then obtain a job, they acquire independence, financial independence, which implies both physical and moral independence. As Aidoo asserts, Western education has definitely exercised an inhibiting influence on African women, especially on African intellectual women as well as their perceptions of their new social realities. This category of women seems to be more emancipated than any other group. Education has definitely brought

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<sup>6</sup> Florence Stratton. *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*. London, N.Y.: Routledge, 1994, p. 172.

<sup>7</sup> Brenda Cooper. *To lay These Secrets Open: Evaluating African Writing*. Claremont, South Africa: David Philip Publishers, 1992, p. 77.

about a new era in the African social context, freeing women from their traditional tasks and roles, prompting them to compete with men in social, economic, political and educational fields. This is the core idea running through Aidoo's works in general and her novels in particular. However, Aidoo offers no ideological formula for social reconstruction; rather she defends her cause by being committed to Africa's and Ghana's development socially, economically and politically. She combines traditional aspects and modernized ones because she perceives the latter as a necessity that imposes itself for a modernized society as well as the adaptation to Ghana's new realities.

Moreover, these portrayals have evolved throughout African literature as social changes occurred in Africa. Male African writers have often contrasted rural and urban women to dramatize the issue of culture clash, the conflict between traditionalism and modernity. Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie has depicted the attributes that male African writers often use to portray each character. She contends that

the sophisticated woman is shown as completely divorced from life in the country or from relatives and friends who are not living in her city or sharing her night life. Very often she is a prostitute (...). [T]he rural woman (...) [is] the 'pot of culture' who is static as history passes by her, who wants the old ways of life.<sup>8</sup>

Aidoo definitely rejects this distinction between traditional women's roles and the modern ones as they have been represented by African male writers. African societies are male-oriented societies in which women are considered as peripheral agents, secondary to men. By due process when these peripheral agents become independent and competitive thanks to the element of education brought by colonialism, the dissension is even more deepened.

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<sup>8</sup> Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie. "The Female Writer and Her Commitment". Eldred Durosimi Jones, Eustace Palmer & Marjorie Jones (Eds.). *African Literature Today*. N°15. U.K.: James Currey, 1987, pp. 6-7.

Additionally, being a part of an Akan descendency which is matrilineal in nature, Aidoo has a different view and conception of the traditional women's roles which have been disrupted by colonialism. Aidoo suggests a celebration of these pre-colonial ideals which valorise women as well as their adaptation of the new necessities of modern Ghana such as the element of education.

Furthermore, the nationalist ideals about post-independence African societies hold that any element brought by colonialism is detrimental to the ideological formula proposed for social reconstruction of African societies and nations. This dilemma is further explored by Aidoo; however, her conflict goes beyond. It extends to the way in which one, especially women, can reconcile these traditions with the modern way of life which is imposed on them by both education and the new realities of African, Ghanaian societies. Therefore, the nationalist project put into question this new status held by women. This modernizing aspect irritates deeply Africans - both intellectuals and non-intellectuals - because it goes against African values and at the same time, it has been brought by colonialism. In this perspective, Aidoo argues that:

in associating both female and male undergraduates, graduates, lecturers and professors, I should learn that they think, believe and insist that basically, marriage is what woman was created for?

And higher education for a woman is an unfortunate postponement of her self-fulfilment?

That any successful career outside the home is naturally for men, and a few rather "ugly" women?

That the only way for a woman to be and remain in the academic world is for her to be also married?

And if she does not marry, then her basic unattractiveness is exposed? And if she is quite obviously an attractive person, in other respects then she is just being foolish, and making other people feel uncomfortable.<sup>9</sup>

These heavy traditional roles attributed to women, especially marriage and motherhood, are specific to the African context, because procreation is the element

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<sup>9</sup> Ama Ata Aidoo. "Unwelcome Pals and Decorative Slaves". Op. Cit. pp. 12-13.

that assures the survival of the clan. To these limitations imposed by patriarchy, Aidoo and most African women writers and critics react. Additionally, despite the mothering and nurturing roles, women's most important roles have been disrupted by colonialism and even forgotten by Africans.

Aidoo was born in Ghana, in a royal Akan household. This Ghanaian ethnic group bears many features which privilege women over men, especially in issues like heritage. The Akan society is founded by matrilineages. Therefore, this endows Aidoo's perception with an innate feminist perspective reflecting thus her own vision about women as well as the roles they should perform in contemporary Ghana.

Moreover, traditional Akan values are worth preserving because they show that women's roles in traditional life, extended to outside the household, even if for the majority of African traditional tribes women were considered as men's aids. Women in traditional life managed the market places, and had a say in issues of heritage and descendency, and enjoyed financial independence as was the custom in accordance with the matrilineage principle. These features are, according to Aidoo, worth preserving, since discrimination against African women is due to the Western misrepresentation of African women, namely with the notion of "Mother Africa". This view seems to have been inculcated by colonialism, which is actually a male-oriented, a male-centred policy. In this perspective, she contends:

[I]ook at this vast continent! Look at its army of women! It is quite *ridiculous*, really that people especially educated African men, operate though women were not around. That is part of the colonial inheritance, because it wasn't like that in our societies, at least in most of them. Although, at every stage, women have not been given that headship position, our societies have not been totally oblivious of the presence and existence of women. I think it is part of that whole colonial rubbish that our men behave the way they do. It is time that they woke up and we woke up and did something about it.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Adeola James (Ed.). *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk*. London, Portsmouth: James Currey, Heinemann, 1990, p. 24.

Furthermore, colonialism has not only made of the African people, mainly men, peripheral agents, but also made women peripheral to men, i.e. peripheral to the periphery. Aidoo emphasises that women have to fight against their male hegemony in their very homes. Therefore, women suffer from a double oppression, that of colonialism and that of their male compatriots. Even women are discriminatory to other women, especially if the latter are educated.

By due process, being a product of the matrilineal Akan people of Ghana, Aidoo constructs complex representations of traditional and modern women in indigenous and modern African societies. The main protagonists in Aidoo's works often migrate from rural to urban areas, from Africa to Europe or from the village to the city, attempting to regenerate themselves and to renegotiate the space that will accommodate their hybridized identities. These conflicting identities are revealed when the main female characters experience the ever-changing dynamics associated with space displacement and gender restrictions imposed by patriarchy. Thus, Aidoo's works are an exploration of the lives of women seeking to define themselves in their own terms, both in Ghana and in their migrations abroad. They reveal their emphasis on transition, movement and the many roles in the formation of Ghanaian women's identities.

Moreover, Aidoo believes in the African identity which she perceives and conceptualizes from a female perspective; she also believes that African culture is rich and complex; she demonstrates several concerns over the plight of women in the Ghanaian society. She not only deals with the impact of Western culture on the African one, she also delves into her African, Ghanaian traditions and heritage through her literary works by endowing her female characters with distinct personalities and strong wills. Through her depiction of traditional norms of society, she helps to expose the exploitation and disenfranchisement of women, not only concerning their careers but also concerning the essence of their own identities, so as

to attempt to define the roles that should be played by them in the contemporary African situation.

In parallel, Aidoo is acutely aware of the clashes of interests reflected by the need for any African to live under a dual mode of life. She does advocate the necessity to keep traditions alive, as marks of an African identity, but how are they to coexist in a modern environment invaded by consumerism? How, in particular, do her female protagonists cope with the contradictory feelings inside them given that they have experienced the fundamentals of Western civilization?

Therefore, it takes the study of her women characters, the protagonists in particular, to examine a number of issues which perhaps in themselves, reveal the contradictions inherent in Aidoo's novels. Quite distinctly, Aidoo's female protagonists are in search of a liberation, which they undertake while being concerned with the state of their country in terms of politics and governance, but there, women are also keen on a tradition which they link with their nationalist feeling.

Hence, it would be interesting to study the concurrent ideas that can be traced in her texts and through her protagonists' experiences so as to form a coherent interpretation of her two novels *Our Sister Killjoy Or Reflections From a Black-Eyed Squint* (1977) and *Changes: A Love Story* (1991), which on the surface appear distant in terms of style and content, but still carry a thematic continuity. On the one hand, *Our Sister killjoy* is a highly political composition, on the other hand *Changes* is highly personal; nevertheless, the issues concerning Africa, women and the development of both are seen from the perspectives of female protagonists, those of Sissie and Esi. The study of style and text organisation would also yield important reading options.

All along in my work, I will discuss all the points mentioned above by focusing on Aidoo's two novels and referring to feminist theories. I will try to demonstrate how Aidoo's female characters and henceforth African women construct their identities in an ongoing social change in a post-colonial context whereby it is difficult

to make tradition meet with modernity. The texts that I will examine fall within the post-dependent African feminist discourse; therefore, my discussion will relate to it, and to women's situation. However, as Vincent Odamtten puts it in his seminal study on Ama Ata Aidoo, a "polylectic" reading is necessary for reading Aidoo's works.

A polylectic critical method demands that we approach a work of art in a self-interpellative manner, bringing to our reading and critique enough knowledge that our evaluation may account for as many of the complexities of the specific (con)text of the literary/cultural product as possible. Thus we would begin to see the text and its environment as part of the personal, local, and global dynamic. Simply put, a polylectic criticism acknowledges the *interdependencies*, even as it recognizes the *overdeterminate autonomies of writer, text, audience, and social whole*.<sup>11</sup>

The relationship between Aidoo's texts and Ghanaian history, economy, social mores and politics as well as the Ghanaian orature are essential to consider in relation to the neo-colonial moment. I shall attempt to examine how Aidoo weaves her post-colonial nationalist discourse into the feminist one, to which she refers to produce two highly original and compelling pieces of African prose fiction

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<sup>11</sup> Vincent Odamtten. *The Art of Ama Ata Aidoo: Polylectics and reading Against Neocolonialism*. Florida: University Press of Florida, 1994, p. 5.

# Chapter I

## Gender Roles and Literary Commitment in African Literature

- 1) Feminism, Womanism, Gender, and Socialization
- 2) Aidoo's Commitment to the Nation

## 1) *Feminism, Womanism, Gender, and Socialization*

In the late 1970s, the Feminist Movement emerged in Africa. The feminist or womanist writers – as some preferred to be called to distinguish them from the white, middle-class women of metropolitan feminism – challenged the nationalist project which claims to speak on behalf of homogeneous people who share a common bond of kinship, ethnicity, culture, language or history, thus erasing all the differences of class, caste, gender, locality in the name of the greater good, the transcendental signifier which is the Nation. Womanist writers challenged this reductive view which romanticised African culture and ignored the oppression of women sanctified by many traditional cultural rituals and practices. They also spoke out against the literary patriarchies that had established what they felt was a strangulating dominance over African literature and reacted to the hegemony of African men who refuse to acknowledge women's ability to contribute meaningfully to society's development. Much more than the literature of post-independence disillusionment, women's literature was more resolute in its intention to strike at the very heart of the founding premise of an ideal of modern African literature, i.e. the truth of representation.

Colonialism is (...) a factor which has influenced the development of African literature. (...) [A] dialogue on gender is also a definitive feature of the African literary tradition, that patriarchy, too, is an important factor in the development of African literature.<sup>12</sup>

Women were, in fact, saying that if the colonialists had misrepresented Africa and Africans, male African writers were also guilty of having misrepresented women. These accusations went beyond the realm of traditional patriarchal customs and cultures to the conventions of representation, the language and the vocabulary deployed in the portrayal of women in African literary texts. Prominent among the metaphors that aroused the anger of these women writers was the trope of "Mother

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<sup>12</sup> Florence Stratton. *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*. London, N.Y.: Routledge, 1994, p. 171.

Africa" and the reducing of women to the role of mothering and providing nurture and support, thus denying them their own individuality and independence.

The genesis of the Mother Africa trope, a trope that pervades the African male literary tradition from Senghor to Soyinka, can also be seen as colonial literature. Such figures illustrate the way in which colonial and African (male) literary discourse sometimes interlink. (...). For even though the figures fulfill a different function in African than they do in colonial writing (serving as means in the latter for legitimating colonialism and the former for legitimating 'post-colonial' male domination), the form of the dialogical is essentially affirmative. What is revealed by such instances of what is basically non-parodic reiteration is the patriarchal nature of both European imperialism and African nationalism, a coincidence of interests and complicity between two groups of men who share a will to power.<sup>13</sup>

In truth, the image of "Mother Africa" was a major trope of nationalist writing which had become part of the popular imagination; and in literature, according to African male writers, women emerged either as dependable wives and mothers -the Madonna figure- or, when they were single and independent, as despicable whores. Romanticized at times and demonized at others, women have had to negotiate their position in African societies in search of new ethical bearings in the post-colonial situation. Just as the earlier African writers had set out to restore the truth about their cultures and modes of life before they were distorted by colonialism, these new writers have undertaken to report on the lives of women, silenced or disfigured by patriarchy. Among these writers whose objective was to break this silence are writers like the Nigerian Buchi Emecheta, the Senegalese Mariama Bâ, the Egyptian Nawal El Saddawi, the Algerian Assia Djebar, Ama Ata Aidoo, and many others. Their works such as the ironically entitled *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), infinitely patient *So Long A Letter* (1980), the brutally stark *Women at Point Zero* (1975), the audacious autobiographical *L'Amour, la fantasia* (1985), and the polemical *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977), respectively, have since become some of the classic female texts of African literature. They represent a trend in the representation of women in African literature that has continued to grow.

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<sup>13</sup> Florence Stratton. Op. Cit. pp. 171-172.

As a result of these contentions, one of the most controversial issues in the contemporary discussion of African literature is whether or not Western critical approaches are suitable and adaptable to African literary texts and writings, especially when it comes to African women's writings. For instance, can we assess *Our Sister Killjoy* or *Changes* with the same critical tools as we would assess *Jane Eyre* or *Pride and Prejudice*? Some African critics have called for the decolonization of African literature; these critics contend that African literature emerges from a context which has its own cultural and historical specificities. Therefore, they assert that African literature requires its own Black Aesthetics in order to posit the appropriate tools for its understanding. Additionally, there is a complex network of class, gender and national liberation in which 'Third World women' are inserted. In fact, the fiction of the African woman should be understood in the light of race, gender, class, identity and the African postcolonial context.

Besides, the controversies arising in the contemporary discussion of African women's writings lie in the ambiguous relationship between African and Western Feminism due to the historical factors of colonialism and imperialism, which have set apart the two struggles. Actually, the distinction between Western Feminism and the African one, or Womanist literary criticism is that Western Feminism is fixed into a model appropriate to the Western context and ignores the postcolonial realities of African women. According to some African and African-American critics and women writers, the term "Feminist" bears a racist, narrow implication associated with main stream Feminism(s). Thus, these critics and writers reject this notion preferring African Feminism, Black Feminism, Motherism, Femalism or Stiwanism, an acronym for "Social Transformation Including Women in Africa", a term coined by Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie. However, the most widespread term referring to the African-American, African, and women of colour is womanism. In fact, the term "Womanism" is a term that has been first coined by the African-American novelist Alice Walker, in her collection of essays, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* which shed light on how Walker's background affected her creative writing and critical thinking.

Indeed, in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, Alice Walker celebrates the African-American women of the past and explains how these women have impacted her writing. She writes about the African identity found in these women, her "mothers". She expresses how they found independence thanks to their creative spirit and how in her turn she found freedom and independence thanks to the creative spirit inherited from them. She celebrates these women's lives, famous or unknown, as she sees them as inspirations to become a writer. She praises and glorifies the lives of these "mothers" because she has built her identity by learning from them. Besides, Walker refers to her mothers' gardens as an ultimate expression of art. By carefully tending the garden each day, Walker's mother showed her attachment to the land. Similarly, Walker values the connection to nature because it is a symbol of her mother's creative spirit. Walker has been inspired by her mother's successful attempt to be a creator and to create beauty. It is through analysing her mother's simple and nature-oriented life that Walker has been able to find a similar place inside her. Her mother took great pride in the creation of her gardens, and Walker takes in her mother's strength and dedication. Walker finds her mother inside of herself and finds a common identity with her African ancestors.

Naturally, Walker has been labelled a feminist writer; however, she prefers the term "Womanist" rather than "Feminist", for she believes that the term "Womanist" captures the spirit of the African-American woman. She states that a "Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender."<sup>14</sup> She defines a "Womanist" as a black feminist or feminist of colour, an outrageous and audacious woman who is interested in learning and questioning all things. A "Womanist" is a responsible woman who loves other women both sexually and non-sexually, a woman who appreciates and prefers women's culture, strength and emotional flexibility. The theory of Womanism is committed to the survival and wholeness of all people both men and women. Rather

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<sup>14</sup> Alice Walker. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*. London: The Women's Press, 1984, pp. xii.

than supporting separatism, Womanism promotes Universalism. All in all, Walker's primary dedication is always to the African-American woman.

Moreover, within the Modern Feminist Movement, white women have been accused of focusing on oppression in terms of gender and sexuality while ignoring issues of race and class. Alongside all women's experiences in terms of their own, this homogenizing excludes issues concerning the interlocking oppressors of race, class and gender. Walker speaks of "the twin afflictions" in this world: racism and sexism. In resistance to this marginalization, theories of Black Feminism and Womanism were forged. These theoretical concepts were developed to call attention to the multiple oppressions experienced by women of colour, reflecting and defining their everyday experiences in their own terms.

Accordingly, theories of Womanism created a space for black women and women of colour who found themselves incapable of identifying with both Feminism and Black Feminism which was still as elitist and exclusive to some women of colour. Thus, Womanism is seen as an affirmative and all-embracing ideology that celebrates the lives and achievements of black women and women of colour.

In the meantime, Gayatri Spivak contends that the role of the academic feminist intellectual, for whom the personal is the political, is quite different from world's women, whose lives are far removed from colonialist theory or from Western Feminist theories. Spivak's view point is that the academic feminists are privileged from one side; however, they are the ones able to speak for those women who are unheard, whatever these academic feminists have. Spivak introduces the idea of the project about un-learning of their privileges as their loss. She argues that one should behave as if she/he is part of the margin, trying to un-learn her/his privilege.<sup>15</sup>

Specifically, African women's works are either seen to champion a perspective that characterizes the evils of patriarchy as (1) not only primary but also and specifically European male (that is, colonialist) impositions, or (2) no less

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<sup>15</sup> Sarah Harasym (Ed.). *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: The Post-Colonial Critic - Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. New York, London: Routledge, 1990, p. 8.

primary oppressions arising from indigenous precolonial values and social relations. Such dichotomizing, though understandable (given the historical burden of patriarchal marginalization), leads, at worst, to the formal approval of an exclusivist feminist 'protected village' type criticism. Fortunately, this tendency has not gained much of a hold on the new criticism of African women – authored literature.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, African women share many problems with African-American women. In the United States, the history of slavery has played out the position of women. In Africa, the fact of colonialism has played out, in the same way as slavery in the United States, to the degradation of the position of women. In this connection, Aidoo contends:

[m]y understanding of Womanism is like Feminism. But because of us being African and black, because of our position in history, Womanists believe that this special component makes it a little difficult for us to say we are feminists. Womanism adds the added understanding of our position in history to the discourse. You know that we can be feminists. But, you know, on the other hand, we bring more to the discourse, which makes us Womanists (...) for me that's also a problematic, because it is essentializing our situation, which brings its own limitations. I think it is a very complex issue.<sup>17</sup>

Aidoo does not make a clear distinction between concepts. She argues that the questioning of gender inequalities have to do with gradation in levels of consciousness, as there are different needs within the same cultural group even in Africa. She contends:

[w]e are always being called upon to gain search of alternative terms – to nationalism, to feminism, to socialism. So many African leaders tried to do that. In the end, they only exposed their own unclarity when the call for alternative terms was really exposed as an excuse for not facing the absolute reality of a certain measure of political bankruptcy. I am a bit reluctant about going to look for alternative terminology.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Vincent Odamtten. *The Art of Ama Ata Aidoo: Polylectics and Reading Against Neocolonialism*. Florida: University Press of Florida, 1994, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Ada Azodo. "Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo: Facing the Millennium". Hauppauge, N.Y., March 31, 1996, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Anuradha Dingwanev Needham. "An Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo". *The Massachusetts Review*. Vol. 36, Iss. 1, Amherst: Spring 1995, p. 124.

Spivak argues that instead of throwing concepts away, one should use them without making any commitment to these concepts. Therefore, commitment to theory should not be a problem but rather used according to the needs and the goals of the critic.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, even if Aidoo adds the historical facts to the issues embracing women and their positions in society, she does not stick to the term womanism all the time. She uses as well the term feminism to evoke issues concerning African women but always having in mind the position of the African woman. In relation to the division between Western feminism and African feminism or womanism or African American feminism, Aidoo states:

there are Womanists, and Feminists and the most important thing is: what are we all trying to get at? If we are all trying to get at the development of society's awareness about the position of women to develop, that is the most important issue. If this is what we are about then, frankly, it is not relevant at all whether we are feminists, or womanists, or fundamentalists.<sup>20</sup>

Aidoo argues that African critics refuse to qualify her as a Feminist because Feminism, for African critics, is synonymous with lesbianism, and since Aidoo dealt with the issue of lesbianism in *Our Sister Killjoy*, a Feminist is a lesbian; therefore if Aidoo is a Feminist, she is a lesbian. According to these African critics, since Aidoo is not a lesbian, she cannot be a Feminist. African critics have not clarified all these concepts; therefore, they negate and deny being qualified as Feminists, and even if they do not openly state that they put Feminism and lesbianism in the same bag, they imply it and never write or talk about this issue. According to Aidoo, Feminism is an ideological view point whereas lesbianism is a sexual orientation, and the two should not be mixed. Therefore, Feminism, for Aidoo, is:

(...) a specific category, [it] is an ideological overview. It is an ideology. Feminism is an ideology (...). When we say that literature is feminist, then we

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<sup>19</sup> Sarah Harasym (Ed.). Op. Cit. p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> Maria Frias. "An Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo: I Learnt my First Feminist Lessons in Africa". *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses*. N° 16, November 2003, p. 28.

are speaking specifically of a literature produced from a feminist view point. And that means that literature, if it is feminist, has done more; it affirms women.<sup>21</sup>

Obviously, Womanism and Feminism are set apart in terms of “issues, preoccupations and priorities between Western and African women”.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, issues treated by Western Feminists should be viewed and adapted to the African cultural, social, historical, economic and political specificities, as Jane Bryce intimates in the following confession:

“Feminist writer” is a definition which begs all sorts of questions – of national identity, of the relationship between Africa and its external predators, of history and its eruptions into the contemporary, of which ways of seeing and speaking are appropriate in the rendering of subjectivity and perspective peculiar to Africa. Precisely the question, in fact, raised by [Aidoo’s] (...) texts, in unsettling and not-so-comfortable ways.<sup>23</sup>

It can also be noted that post-colonial literary criticism is directed to the colonialist text. In fact, African women find themselves dismissed from both Western, white, middle-class Feminist literary criticism, and the African, black, male-oriented post-colonial literary criticism. The latter should move beyond the everlasting opposition to the centre; it should move beyond the centre-periphery dichotomy, which is a resistance to the colonizer’s discourse, even if Africa suffers from its position on the periphery of a global system. Post-colonial literary theories ignore the internal centre-peripheries of post-colonial African societies, disregarding thus an important number of texts which deal with other issues, namely class, gender and sexuality.

Within those internal centre and peripheries of post-colonial societies, post-colonial women’s writing would require a different order of theorizing, since post-colonial women are like a fragment, an oppositional system, within an overall colonized framework. Women therefore function here as burdened by

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<sup>21</sup> Ada Azodo. “Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo: Facing the Millennium”. Op. Cit. pp. 8-9.

<sup>22</sup> Brenda Cooper. *To Lay These Secrets Open: Evaluating African Writing*. Claremont, South Africa: David Philip Publishers, 1992, p. 77.

<sup>23</sup> Jane Bryce. “Going Home is Another Story: Constructions of Nation and Gender in Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Changes*”. *West Africa Review*, Vol. 1, N° 1, 1999, p. 2.

a twice disabling discourse. (...) [W]omen are not just 'a' fragment, but multiple fragments in multiple ways.<sup>24</sup>

In fact, as Juliana Nfah Abbyeni asserts, women are often considered as being the other of Western women, the other of African men, the other of Africans and non-Africans, thus finding themselves trapped in a "chain of otherness".<sup>25</sup> Consequently, African women face many problems added to the issues they have to deal with namely gender, class and sexuality. They try to re-address the misrepresentation of both the colonialist discourse and the African male discourse. They try to locate themselves within a broader movement, the Womanist Movement, and try to posit their theorizing within the Womanist and post-colonial literary criticism. As Florence Stratton argues, "African women's writing is a multi-voiced discourse."<sup>26</sup> Nancy Hartsock adds that:

it enables [women] to connect everyday life with an analysis of the social institutions which shape that life. (...). In this way, feminism [or womanism] provides us with a way to understand our anger and direct our anger and energy toward change. (...). We can transform ourselves [by] (...) struggling to transform the social relations that define us: self-changing and changed social institutions are simply two aspects of the same process.<sup>27</sup>

Therefore, one can say that Womanism "is a mode of analysis, a method of approaching life and politics, rather than a set of political conclusions about the oppression of women."<sup>28</sup> For instance, one of the debates dealt with by African women is the gender issue. Feminist theory has introduced gender as a major aspect of analyzing literary texts especially those written by women. This concept has influenced, defined and oriented much of the Feminist discourse. Simone De Beauvoir's *Le deuxième sexe [The Second Sex]* is considered as the first Feminist work

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<sup>24</sup> Juliana Nfah Abbyeni. *Gender in African Women's Writing: Identity, Sexuality and Difference*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997, p. 19.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 31.

<sup>26</sup> Florence Stratton. Op. Cit. p. 173.

<sup>27</sup> Nancy C.M. Hartsock. *The Feminist Standpoint Revisited and Other Essays*. Boulder (Colorado, USA): Westview Press, 1998, pp. 36-37.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 35.

to give an insight into the gender question and how women became the "others" of men. In fact, the book opens with "on ne naît pas femme: on le devient"<sup>29</sup>, "one is not born a woman but becomes a woman". Throughout her essay, Simone De Beauvoir differentiates sex from gender by assigning sex to the biological categorization of maleness and femaleness whereas Gender is the group of attributes assigned by society to each of the sexes. In addition, she has elaborated in a detailed way the different steps, from childhood to adulthood, through which Gender identity is formed as well as the different cultural and social factors which perpetuate gender oppression.

The concept of Gender gained ground in African literature in the late 1980s and there, this concept has many implications: sociological, cultural, political, anthropological, and historical. "[G]ender seeks to explain and change historical systems of sexual difference, whereby "men" and "women" are socially constituted and positioned in relations of hierarchy and antagonism."<sup>30</sup> Actually, many definitions have been associated to the concept of Gender, depending on the context of its use. It has been related to women's sexuality, bodies, mothering, and women's sexual pleasure. However, the notions of motherhood and sexuality do not apply to the same degree in the African context as they are applied in the Anglo-Saxon context. The theories of Gender as developed by Western critics cannot be totally applied to African literature because African societies have their own gender relations. In fact, the disrupted gender relations which are specific to the post-colonial context create conflicting identities in women's lives and writings. Often, they must take many, different and contradictory identities to suit both traditional and modern patterns of relations and behaviours. In a constant changing social order, women create new spaces and social locations for themselves within the dominant and often oppressive culture.

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<sup>29</sup> Simone De Beauvoir. *Le deuxième sexe*. Paris : Gallimard, 1949, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> Julina Nfah Abbyeni. Op. Cit. p. 16.

Gender is a submerged category in colonial discourse, a status that it has maintained until recently in African men's literature. While African men writers challenge the racial codes of colonial discourse and attempt to subvert them, they adopt certain aspects of the gender coding of their supposed adversaries in their representation of African women.<sup>31</sup>

This falls with Spivak's approach to the text, her interest in a "feministly" oriented reading. She asserts: "in what way, in what contexts, under what kinds of race and class situations, gender is used as what sort of signifier to cover over what kinds of things."<sup>32</sup> Additionally, Spivak's definition of "a woman" rests on the word "man". This is a reactionary position. Spivak argues: "no rigorous definition of anything is ultimately possible, so that if one wants to, one could go on deconstructing the opposition between man and woman, and finally show that it is a binary opposition that displaces itself."<sup>33</sup> However, being a deconstructivist, Spivak cannot advocate such dichotomy, but she feels the necessity of attributing definitions because the latter are necessary to improve and to conceptualize positions. Therefore, she "construct[s] [her] definition as a woman not in terms of a woman's putative essence but in terms of words currently in use. Man is such a word in common use. Not *a* word but *the* word."<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, this gender oppression is perpetuated and consolidated by the process of socialization. Anthropologists use the term enculturation to refer to this process by which the individual acquires the culture of the society he/she is born into.

The general process of acquiring culture is referred to as socialization. During socialization, we learn the language of the culture we are born into as well as the roles we are to play in life. For instance, girls learn how to be daughters, sisters, friends, wives and mothers. In addition, they learn about the occupational roles that their society has instore for them. We also learn and usually adopt our culture's norms through the socialization process. Norms

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<sup>31</sup> Florence Stratton. Op. Cit. p. 171.

<sup>32</sup> Sarah Harasym (Ed.). Op. Cit. p. 52.

<sup>33</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York, London: Routledge, 1988, p. 77.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p. 77.

are the conceptions of appropriate and expected behaviour that are held by most members of the society.<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, socialization is important in the process of personality formation. It is a learning process that begins shortly after birth. Looking around the world, we see that different cultures use different techniques to socialize their children. Actually, there are two broad types of teaching methods: formal and informal. Formal education is what primarily happens in a classroom. It is usually structured, controlled, and directed primarily by adult teachers who are professional "knowers". In contrast, informal education can occur anywhere. It involves imitation of what others do and say as well as experimentation and repetitive practice of basic skills. This is what happens when children role-play adult interactions in their games.

Most of the crucial early socialization throughout the world is done informally under the supervision of women and girls. Initially, mothers and their female relatives are primarily responsible for socialization. Later, when children enter the lower school grades, they are usually under the control of women teachers. Women socialize their children in much the same way that their parents, namely mothers, have socialized them. Therefore, women are those who perpetuate and consolidate gender oppression because they are those who socialize their girls within a patriarchal system.

However, in Aidoo's novels, there is a different picture presented. Aidoo actually subverts this discourse by freeing her female characters from this socializing process, as a result of both her traditional Akan descendency and modern processes. In the meantime, Aidoo's depictions of gender relations and the position of women in particular, serve as a broader etiological discourse of accounting for the state of things. Thus, the depictions of gender relations in her novels are not the exclusive destinations of her texts but part of her discourse.

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<sup>35</sup> Denis O'Neil. "Socialisation". U.S.: Palomar University, 2006, p. 1.

## 2) Aidoo's Commitment to the Nation

The prevalence of inadequate female portrayals in male African writings have led to the emergence, in the late 1960s, of many African women writings to respond to and to redress the negative, stereotyped images attributed to African female characters and hence to African women. These images as well as women's position in society and their supposed inferiority to men have long been shared by women all over the world. Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie lists some of the stereotypes attributed to women in American literature and actually found in African male literature. "Female attributes include formlessness, passivity, instability, confinement, piety, materiality, spirituality, irrationality, compliancy, and two incorrigible figures: the shrew and the witch."<sup>36</sup>

She adds some images particular to males' portrayals of American women like "the Rose, the Lily (...) the 'Earth Mother' and the 'Great American Bitch'."<sup>37</sup> These images are again shared by African women who are often connected to the land, the continent, motherhood, and nurturing. Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie lists some of the stereotyped images typically attributed to African women in African Literature.

[T]he 'sweet mother', the all-accepting creature of fecundity and self-sacrifice. This figure is often conflated with Mother Africa, with eternal and abstract Beauty and with inspiration, artistic or otherwise. (...) . Much African poetry concerns itself with the erotism of the African woman ... [with] the love of women, not love in its larger sense but sexual, physical love.<sup>38</sup>

African male writers have thus restricted the roles of African women to those of mystified mothers and child bearers as well as erotic lovers. They do not depart markedly from the beliefs held by men about women in general and from their tendency to degrade and diminish women in the different roles they can play in

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<sup>36</sup> Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie. "The Female Writer and Her Commitment". Eldred Durosimi Eustace Palmer Jones & Marjorie Jones (Eds.). *African Literature Today*. N°15. U.K.: James Currey, 1987, p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p. 6.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p. 6.

society outside of their households. Again, this shows that “the position of women in Africa has been no less ridiculous than anywhere else. The few details that differ are interesting only in terms of local colour and particular family needs.”<sup>39</sup> In addition to their colour and particular family needs, African women writers have had to face many problematic issues when dealing with their positions and roles in a post-colonial context.

Any study of a corpus of African literature would refer to the writer’s treatment of the colonial oppression. A more discerning attitude would show, however, that women are usually the most oppressed. This gender oppression, as women writers insist, is perpetuated in the post-colonial era. Thus, national reconstruction is considered as an undertaking reserved for men. Second, national and cultural liberation require a return to the pre-colonial ideals which may represent women negatively. Third, Womanism and Feminism are set apart by historical events, namely, colonialism and imperialism, which have left a gap between Africa and Western women in terms of issues, preoccupations and priorities. Last but not least, there is a disagreement among African women themselves as to what roles should be assigned to them, and therefore what kind of education they should receive, and whether they can remain in harmony with their African/national identity. Therefore, African women writers are under two major pressures: tradition and feminism. Tradition is dominated by patriarchy and the foundation of national and cultural liberation which sets against any ideal emanating from the West.

African male literary tradition has been to reveal the strategies of containment to which men writers have resorted in their attempt to legitimate patriarchal ideology. These include the embodiment of Africa in the figure of a woman, one of the most enabling tropes of ‘post-colonial’ male domination as well as of colonialism; the portrayal of women as passive and voiceless, images that serve to rationalize and therefore to perpetuate inequality between the sexes; and the romanticization and idealization of

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<sup>39</sup> Ama Ata Aidoo. “Unwelcome Pals and Decorative Slaves Or Glimpses of Women as Writers and Characters in Contemporary African Literature”. In Ada Uzoamaka Azodo & Gay Wilentz (Eds.). *Emerging Perspectives on Ama Ata Aidoo*. Trenton (N.J.): Africa World Press, 1999, p. 12.

motherhood, a means of masking women's subordination in society. They also encompass the assignment of different roles in the anti-colonial struggle to men and women – the allocation to the former of the task of mending the breach in the historical continuum and to the latter of embodying African cultural values; the assumption of the primacy of the male subject; the objectification of women; their identification with tradition and with biological roles; the representation of female sexuality as dangerous and destructive; and the resolution of narrative tension with the theme of redemption through repatriation to the village.<sup>40</sup>

Moreover, in "The African Woman Today", Aidoo criticizes the present day picture that Western media have presented about African women since the 1990s drought onward: semi-naked, hungry, not able to take care of their children, buzz turning around their faces and those of their many children. She contends that it is a pejorative, derogatory picture presented by the West on purpose to "print" these images in the minds of the world about Africa and African people at large and for longer periods. She reminds us that African women have not always been like that. African women have fought colonizers and indigenous patriarchies, great women sacrificed their lives for independence and are still fighting to gain recognition in the post-colonial context. She further contends that:

The major historical factors that have influenced the position of the African woman today: indigenous African societal patterns; the conquest of the continent by Europe; and the apparent lack of vision, or courage, in the leadership of the postcolonial period. "Leadership" in the context does not refer to the political leadership exclusively, but to the entire spectrum of the intellectual, professional, and commercial elites in positions to make vital decisions on behalf of the entire community.<sup>41</sup>

Feminism implies a rejection of patriarchy which is at the heart of African cultural and national reconstruction, i.e. feminism set against tradition, patriarchy, national and cultural liberation. In this connection, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie lists the commitments of African women writers. According to her, "the female writer should

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<sup>40</sup> Florence Stratton. Op. Cit. p. 172.

<sup>41</sup> Ama Ata Aidoo. "The African Woman Today." Obioma Nnaemeka (Ed.). *Sisterhood, Feminism and Power: From Africa to the Diasporas*. Trenton (N.J.): Africa World Press, 1998, p. 42.

be committed in three ways: as a writer, as a woman and as a Third World person; and her biological womanhood is implicated in all the three.”<sup>42</sup> Aidoo reacts to this statement by saying:

[M]y own addition, or rather a slight suggestion, in terms of formula, is in connection with what we should be committed to as Third World people. I wish that at some point it would have been possible for Molaro to mention ‘African’. I don’t deny that we belong to a larger non-northern world and the dynamics that operate in a situation like that, but find commitment as an African nationalist, be a little more pressing. It seems there are things relating to our world, as African people, which are of a more throbbing nature in an immediate sense.<sup>43</sup>

In the midst of this, Aidoo is certainly among the most committed to women’s issues and the most politically active African woman writer. She has tried to redress, re-evaluate and reconsider the capacities, capabilities and potentials of the African woman within the post-colonial situation and its socio-political framework. She states:

I have been happy  
Being me:  
  
An African  
A woman  
And a writer.<sup>44</sup>

Therefore, in order to fully comprehend Aidoo’s novels, it is important to grasp the constant tension between Aidoo the scholar, the ideologue and the revolutionary. Aidoo’s commitments are clearly to her continent, to her womanhood and to her profession in which, as a woman, she has encountered many problems within her African male dominated environment. She reveals how much she has been discriminated against in the field of academia because she is a woman. She also reveals how much she has been frustrated and disregarded by her male intellectual

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<sup>42</sup> Molaro Ogundipe-Leslie. Op. Cit. p. 10.

<sup>43</sup> Adeola James. (Ed.). *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk*. London, Portsmouth: James Currey, Heinemann, 1990, p. 15.

<sup>44</sup> Ama Ata Aidoo. “An Angry Letter in January”. *An Angry Letter in January and Other Poems*. Coventry: Dangaroo Press, 1992, p.25.

brothers because of her commitments, activism, ideas, and her audacity to deal with women's issues and taboo topics.

Crucial to her are the issues of marriage, polygamy and education, which she considers as vital issues to address. According to her, women writers produce their works at the expense of their personal lives. A woman writer has to cope with her family obligations, as a wife, as a mother. She has to manage her activities between her career as a writer, which is a time consuming job, and that of taking care of a family, a task which is highly demanding in terms of time and devotion. For her, African women writers and African women at large "suffer a little more, simply because [they] are women, and [their] positions are nearly hopeless because [they] are African women."<sup>45</sup> Besides, she contends that African women writers share nearly all the problems of men; however, African women writers suffer from neglect and lack of interest from the critics, Africans and non-Africans, as if women writers did not deserve serious critical attention.

Moreover, she argues that the fact that women writers are being silenced has to do with their position in society generally. Because women are marginalized in society, critics, mainly men, literally lock them out of meaningful spheres of activities, such as academic or creative writing. "A woman who tries to operate in the so-called men's world excites panic dismay in other women, and except her own father, arouses anger in all men. And of course, the more exclusive the field, the greater the hatred."<sup>46</sup>

And because critics make of a writer a male writer, they deliberately dismiss women from the field of criticism perpetuating thus a male hegemony in the literary field. Men writers and critics lock women in their traditional roles; a woman for them is nothing more valuable than being a wife and a mother. For African women writers,

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<sup>45</sup> Ama Ata Aidoo. "To Be an African Woman Writer— An Overview and a Detail". Kirsten Holst Petersen (Ed.). *Criticism and Ideology: Second African Writers' Conference, Stockholm 1986*. Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1988, p. 164.

<sup>46</sup> Ama Ata Aidoo. "Unwelcome Pals and Decorative Slaves". Op. Cit. p. 15.

scholars and male writers have not done enough to help these members of the community free themselves from the female writing "ghetto". Aidoo argues that the reality of African women's writing starts to differ from that of the male African writers when it comes to the issue of criticism. Critics are very little interested in women's writing because they are women.

Until the present moment, in fact, African literary studies have been an almost exclusively masculine domain, largely because the scholars and critics who have mapped it out are nearly all men, who have tended to ignore the admittedly small but still significant number of African women writers and women related issues in African literature.<sup>47</sup>

Aidoo gives the example of a German lecturer who lectured for two hours about African literature and found it "so natural" not to mention any of the many African women writers. She enumerates a number of non-African and African critics like Gerald Moore, Chinweizu, Emmanuel Ngara, who never mentioned any African woman writer in their works, like Efua Sutherland, Bessie Head, Flora Nwapa, Micere Mugo, Mariama Bâ and many others.

Furthermore, she adds that male critics and publishers are reluctant to study and publish women writers. Aidoo's project to deal with crucial taboo issues have led to the freezing of her first novel *Our Sister Killjoy* when it was first published. She states:

[i]f *Killjoy* has received recognition someplace else, it is gratifying. But there is no solve for the hurt that my own house put a freeze on it. (...). When a critic refuses to talk about your work, that is violence. He is willing you to die as a creative person.<sup>48</sup>

Besides, many critics consider women as feminist writers just because they write about women. To this Aidoo responds by arguing that she is almost shocked that highly respectable academics hold this idea.

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<sup>47</sup> Katherine Frank. "Feminist Criticism and the African Novel". Eldred Durosimi Jones, Eustace Palmer & Marjorie Jones (Eds.). *African Literature Today: 14 Insiders and Outsiders*. London, Ibadan, Nairobi: Heinemann, 1984, p. 35.

<sup>48</sup> Ama Ata Aidoo. "Unwelcome Pals and Decorative Slaves". Op. Cit. p. 17.

I shall not protest if you call me a feminist. But I am not a feminist because I write about women. (...) no writer, female or male, is a feminist just by writing about women. Unless a particular writer commits his or her energies, actively, to exposing the sexist tragedy of women's history; protesting the on-going degradation of women; celebrating their physical and intellectual capabilities; and above all, unfolding a revolutionary vision of the role of women tomorrow, as dreamers, thinkers and doers.<sup>49</sup>

Aidoo contends that both graduate and undergraduate African women "share all, or nearly all the problems of male Africans" and that women "are also part of an articulate minority that handles the language of power. Therefore [they] are expected and expect [themselves] to articulate (...) opinions (...) and act powerful."<sup>50</sup>

Feminism for Aidoo is about gender, but also about the radical point of view and her localization in the world as a Third World person. She does not write about women simply because she is a woman writer, but rather because she is insistent that African women should demand their rights as human beings.<sup>51</sup>

Further, in addition to all the issues dealt with above, Aidoo points out the language and the aesthetic issues, arguing that African writers struggle to give expression to themselves, to their culture, to their identity, in an alien language, the colonizer's language. This dismisses the readership including the very people they are writing about. Aidoo further contends that it is important to create an aesthetic vacuum based on griots and traditional poetry, even if the majority of African writers have absorbed Western aesthetics that govern writing production "the aesthetics of good European literature and other dynamics of Western civilization (...) to suit the colonial or neo-colonial environment."<sup>52</sup>

Meantime, just like her male African compatriots, including Ayi Kwei Armah, Chinua Achebe and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Ama Ata Aidoo is an African intellectual who

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<sup>49</sup> Ama Ata Aidoo. "Unwelcome Pals and Decorative Slaves". Op. Cit. p. 21.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p. 22.

<sup>51</sup> Ada Azodo. "The Multifaceted Aidoo: Ideologue, Scholar, Writer, and Woman". Ada Uzoamaka Azodo & Gay Wilentz (Eds.). *Emerging Perspectives on Ama Ata Aidoo*. Trenton (N.J.): Africa World Press, 1999, p. 422.

<sup>52</sup> Ama Ata Aidoo. "To Be an African Woman Writer". Op. Cit. pp. 157-158.

is actively committed to the political issues of her country, Ghana, and the development of Africa at large. Aidoo is very committed as a woman writer not only to her womanhood and her profession but also to the politics of her country and continent. For instance, she has been a committed political activist in the Ghanaian revolution of 1981, when she had the office of Minister of Education in the government of Jerry Rawlings.

In her writings and essays, she definitely sets herself against the human, cultural, economic and political exploitation of Africa by the forces of imperialism and neo-colonialism. Her revolutionary ideology is “vehement against isolationism; it is passionate about knowledge based on reason, and it is adamant about pan-Africanism.”<sup>53</sup> The latter is central to Aidoo’s ideology and essential in her writings.

Kwame Nkrumah was the statesman who led his country, Ghana, to decolonisation, so that Ghana was the first African country to reach independence in 1957. Aged 17 at independence, Aidoo was one of those who benefited from the educational programmes initiated by Nkrumah. The latter was a pan-Africanist who dreamt of a United States of Africa. Aidoo argues that during Nkrumah’s days, the connection with African-Americans and Caribbeans was a thrilling experience. She recalls that in her father’s house, there had always been visitors from overseas. She contends that one should never forget that many Africans had been enslaved and sold, and the act of not forgetting is probably the key for the future of Africans, African-Americans and Caribbeans.

Moreover, pan-Africanism centres on the idea of unification of the African people and countries with the same language but not the colonizer’s language. Like many male and female African writers, Aidoo sees the pressing necessity to find a solution to the language issue to unite African people. She argues that it would be

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<sup>53</sup> Ada Azodo. “The Multifaceted Aidoo: Ideologue, Scholar, Writer, and Woman”. Op. Cit. p.416.

an excellent idea (...) one can envisage that when a language is chosen according to the question of its validity or its qualification as an African lingua franca (...). If we can be forced to speak English because some people colonized us, (...), I don't see why as people we cannot give ourselves a nice little present of a continental language.<sup>54</sup>

Furthermore, Aidoo links the language issue to the writing question. She argues that an African writer writing in his/her first language will reduce the possibilities for reading his/her works. In fact, if African writers write in their first languages, their African languages, they find themselves confined as voices, locked up in a vacuum, not even invited to communicate with others. In the meanwhile, if they write in English, French or Portuguese, they are able to communicate with non-African people and those Africans who share the same colonial language throughout the continent. She contends that the relationship between the writer and his immediate environment is most likely non-existent or rather problematic. Aidoo definitely links the necessity of language unity in Africa with one of the developmental issues facing the continent as well as a means of disfranchisement from cultural imperialism and certainly a way to "decolonize the minds" of Africans.

Additionally, Aidoo is much concerned with the issue of education; she attributes the developmental problems facing Africa mainly to the issue of education. According to her, if the field of education is to be reconsidered and given primary importance, Africa would solve half of its problems. She contends that "education is the key, the key to *everything*."<sup>55</sup>

Education is (...) on the list of issues that gained Aidoo's attention. In different African countries, the items of the curriculum do not seem to be geared towards fostering African values, though children do not seem to learn from the wisdom of their grandparents anymore. (...). Since curriculum is the means by which society transmits its values and power, it follows that the educational systems of African schools need a major and urgent overhaul if the people are mindful of maintaining mores and values.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Adeola James. Op. Cit. p. 10.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. p. 11.

<sup>56</sup> Ada Azodo. "The Multifaceted Aidoo: Ideologue, Scholar, Writer, and Woman". Op. Cit. p.413.

Besides, Aidoo argues that the issue of education is a major problem facing African women. She states that millions of African girls are prevented from realizing their full potential as human beings and as professional future generations because their basic needs like “food, shelter and maximum education”<sup>57</sup> are not met. In fact, Aidoo links the issue of education to both economic and social problems from which Africans suffer. However, women are the most exposed to this problem, because of the discrimination they are subjected to. The working towards Africa’s development should begin with the recognition of Africa’s human potential in women. In this connection, Aidoo argues that “this had nothing to do with anything that African women themselves did or failed to do. It had to do with the politics of sex and the politics of the wealthy of this earth, who grabbed it and who held it.”<sup>58</sup>

With the same insistence, Aidoo points to the urgent necessity to stop the haemorrhage of brain drain. She acknowledges that it is *the* unfortunate situation from which the continent suffers.

If Aidoo appears to belabour the point about rural exodus in Africa and the exodus of African youth to the West to study in foreign universities, it is all from first-hand knowledge about the cultural damage to these young minds and their loss to their countries, just as other youth were lost to Africa in the Atlantic slavery period. Aidoo is also saddened by the situation at home, where universities are closed for more months of the year than they are open (...). Aidoo is aware of the damage that can be done to young minds subjected to new ideologies. (...) Aidoo laments that African youths who have been educated abroad on foreign scholarships become acculturated to their host countries. They either refuse to go home thereafter or, if they are able to extricate themselves, they have become virtual strangers to their own country and people.<sup>59</sup>

The implication of this statement is that, according to Aidoo, the continent should be more attentive to the Diaspora and the brain-drain because these self-exiled people should be the ones to develop Africa’s modern technologies, its capital formation

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<sup>57</sup> Ama Ata Aidoo. “To Be an African Woman Writer”. Op. Cit. p. 156.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. p. 157.

<sup>59</sup> Ada Azodo. “The Multifaceted Aidoo: Ideologue, Scholar, Writer, and Woman”. Op. Cit. p.414.

rather than importation and exportation, i.e. generating capitals. She also blames African leaders in failing to keep intellectuals in their countries. Worse, neo-colonial governments in Africa help to consolidate the haemorrhage of brain-drain on purpose. She contends that many African intellectuals are in self-exile abroad due to their nations' governments. She argues that:

[i]f we get good leadership, confident leadership that has confidence in itself and in us as African people, so that would undertake the development of our environment meaningfully, not only will we be needing our brains, but we will create structures that would make the people with expertise want to stay.<sup>60</sup>

In a similar vein, Aidoo violently and harshly criticizes imperialism and its institutions like capitalism and international economy which operate in a core-periphery system. She also reacts against all its forms, be it cultural imperialism, social or economic imperialism, as well as its means and most importantly "humanitarian helps", political and military interventions in Africa. Worse, neo-colonial governments in Africa help the imperial machinery in consolidating Africa as a "raw material base, and at the same time a dumping ground for industrial waste" as well as consolidating "the geography of development and modernization, i.e. core-periphery"<sup>61</sup> relations.

Additionally, she contends that mismanagement and corruption in Ghana, and in Africa at large, have led to a poor output in the agriculture and industry sectors, the growing pollution, deforestation, environment degradation, overpopulation and above all, poverty, hunger and ignorance. Aidoo rejects the notion that all the problems of Africa are due to the West. She also blames African leaders for sustaining such a situation and perpetuating the Western hegemony. She contends that "Africans certainly are in need of an enlightened leadership in every one of the fifty

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<sup>60</sup> Ada Azodo. "Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo: Facing the Millennium". Op. Cit. p. 10.

<sup>61</sup> Ada Azodo. "The Multifaceted Aidoo: Ideologue, Scholar, Writer, and Woman". Op. Cit. p.401.

four nation-states,”<sup>62</sup> and education is a step toward this improvement. Therefore, Aidoo bemoans the unfortunate situation of the continent as well as the loss of leadership in African nations.

Her specific immersion in the general ideology of Gold Coast/Ghana, her unique background, and her education seem to have made her particularly sensitive to the possibility that her literary work might yield this kind of ideological message. The textual ideology, the message that arises from the interaction of form and content, style and idea, may in fact contradict the supposedly conscious authorial ideology - of the writer's expressed or implicit agenda or intention - thus producing works that are bifocal even as they collapse textual and authorial ideologies.<sup>63</sup>

Thus, one can say that Aidoo pinpoints all these issues as being crucial developmental issues which need more than energy to be solved; they need effective good will. Undeniably, Aidoo is more than a writer; she is at once a militant and an artist whose activism as a woman gave mouth to those women who have no mouth. Ada Azodo acknowledges that “Aidoo [is] known as a forceful and passionate writer (...) [and] critics find her just too aggressive and brash for a woman writer.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ada Azodo. “The Multifaceted Aidoo: Ideologue, Scholar, Writer, and Woman”. Op. Cit.p. 413.

<sup>63</sup> Vincent Odamtten. Op. Cit. p. 11.

<sup>64</sup> Ada Azodo. “The Multifaceted Aidoo: Ideologue, Scholar, Writer, and Woman”. Op. Cit. p.399.

# Chapter II

Women's Liberation and Nationalism: *Our Sister Killjoy*

- 1) Women's Issues and Nationalism
- 2) Sissie's Duty of Nationalism
- 3) Gender and Identity

## 1) Women's Issues and Nationalism

Ama Ata Aidoo is an African woman writer who writes in the wake of her African predecessors, whether women like Eflia Sutherland or men like Chinua Achebe. At the same time, her Ghanaian, Akan heritage modulates considerably the content of her works. This heritage accounts for the dynamic and responsible roles she endows her female characters with in the post-colonial situation in Africa, and more precisely in Ghana. These roles are inspired from the position women held in traditional life which have shaped social organization in a notable way. The traditional dimension indeed marks her novels but not without the intention to adapt traditional mores to today's African realities. Aidoo's major influence, that has actually shaped her novels, is her Akan descendency. This will add more significance to our understanding of what comes in the following chapters. It will also help us understand both the content and the style of her novels.

To begin with, for African people, tradition represents not only a set of beliefs moving from generation to generation, but also a way of life, a vision of life, a guide to life. It can be said that tradition shapes the lives of African people and has an influence on them all through their existence, during their lives and after. In fact, at the heart of this African tradition stands a very important component, Communalism. The community for African people is at the heart of the whole concerns of African people, of the African individual. Indeed, the individual, the restricted family constituted by the father, the mother and the children is the nucleus of modern societies; whereas the extended family, the clan, the village are the most important component of African communities. The communal value is prior to that of the individual.

In *Philosophy and an African Culture*, Kwasi Wiredu asserts that a great value is placed on communal fellowship in the traditional African society. He contends that it goes beyond the immediate blood relations to a larger community, to infuse the social life with a pervasive humanity and fullness of life. According to him, this quality

of culture should be preserved, positively developed and deepened because it represents the humanistic essence of the African culture.<sup>65</sup>

Moreover, in African societies, informal education is delivered through different values taught during the upbringing of the child, a period during which traditional values are acquired. Mothers are the ones who deliver this education to their children, whether boys or girls. They pattern the thought and behaviour of these children following male-dominated patterns, socializing them in a patriarchal system. Women in African societies are socialized; they teach their daughters to be submissive, respectful to men and silent before them. Daughters are actually silenced by their mothers before being silenced by their fathers, brothers, husbands and even sons. In the meantime, they also implicitly teach boys to behave in a superior way, to be superior to girls and hence to all women, even their mothers. Therefore, African communities are men-dominated because of women leaving thus the latter as secondary subjects.

From a conventional point of view, the traditional role of women is to perpetuate the culture and the traditions of a community. Women in villages educate and initiate future generations into the culture; they form the community through storytelling. They perpetuate the ultimate value in African life, namely the continuation of the group intellectually, spiritually, politically and physically; they contribute to the cultural elaboration and perpetuation of African culture; their central role in the community is that of being mothers which is synonymous with nurturing and bringing up children. This is a central activity for the stability of the family compound and community life. The latter point leads us to note that women's roles transcend the political role because women are those who shape the community. Then, women's role in a compound extends to the entire village communal life, to the market place especially in the case of some West African tribes like the Ibo, the Ashanti, the Akan and the Fanti. Therefore, one can say that women

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<sup>65</sup> Kwasi Wiredu. *Philosophy and an African Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980, p. 22.

are also able to reform their culture. They master it, being able to shape it and therefore shape future generations according to their needs and wishes; they are able to either maintain or reform it.

Central to Akan historical and personal identity was the matrilineal structure of society centered on the *abusua* (a term which refers to family or matrilineage as well as clan). Matrilineal descent in Akan society indicates the pattern by which Akan men and women marked their place in the continuum of ancestors by reference to the female side of the family. Matrilineages carried no special implications for the distribution of political power which as elsewhere in large-scale states worked in favor of men. The Akan concern with fertility and bearing children was a recognition of the importance of the *abusua* in acquiring individual and community identity. Individuals had recognized rights only through their positions within an *abusua*. Without the protection afforded to members, they were considered without ancestors and even without sexual identity.<sup>66</sup>

The implication of this statement is that even if matrilineal systems both empower and constraint women, even if women were not given power in traditional life, traditional societies were not totally oblivious of women. Inheritance was done through matrilineages, market places were managed by women and they enjoyed financial independence when they are members of the *abusua*. Therefore, women are capable of exerting power, directly or indirectly, to have an influence on this male-dominated environment.

In traditional West Africa, the compound was usually the unit of political organization (...). Thus, wives mothers, sisters, or daughters could exert direct political influence over males, or they themselves could play important roles by virtue of their position of authority, power or influence in their natal or affinal compounds.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Candice Goucher. "The African Family in World History: The Case of Colonial Asante". *World History Connected*. Vol. 4, N° 3, 2007, p. 3.

<sup>67</sup> Niara Surdarkasa. "Female Employment and Family Organization in West Africa". Filomina Chioma Steady (Ed.). *The Black Women Cross-Culturally*. Boston: Schenkman, 1981, p. 53. Quoted in Gay Wilentz. "African Women's Domain: Demarcating Political Space in Nwapa, Sutherland and Aidoo". Ada Uzoamaka Azodo & Gay Wilentz (Eds.). *Emerging Perspectives on Ama Ata Aidoo*. Trenton (N.J.): Africa World Press, 1999, p. 267.

In “Matriarchies as Societies of Peace: Re-thinking Matriarchy”, Heide Goettner-Abendroth asserts that matriarchal societies have existed in all continents and some of them still exist. Among these societies, she enumerates the Akan of Ghana. She asserts that the peculiarity of these societies is that “matriarchies [are] non hierarchical, horizontal societies of matrilineal kinship.”<sup>68</sup> According to her, matrilineal societies are egalitarian ones, in which there is no class nor gender domination. These societies are stabilized thanks to guidelines and codes. Unlike patriarchies, the differences between gender and generations are respected and honored through complementary activities and depend on each other at all levels of life: economic, political and cultural.

At the social level, matriarchal societies are founded on motherhood and are placed on the clan. Motherhood is the most important function in each society, for mothering creates new generations that are the future of society. (...) political practice follows the principle of consensus, which means *unanimity* for each decision.<sup>69</sup>

Such information accounts for the reasons why Aidoo looks at her past to make her present viable. West African women and more precisely, Ghanaian women occupied an advantageous, strategic position in traditional communities. These latter were matrilineal and women held important positions in it. Aidoo’s novels are explorations of the African, Ghanaian historical space and the role of women in it. She makes it clear that women can make their present viable by dismantling the colonial representation of womanhood, male African representations of womanhood as well as re-evaluating and re-visioning their past. She thus advocates

a praise of the beauty and glory of a return to Africa and her sense of human value. (...) . (...) [She] would like to see a vehement reassertion of African values and communal social system. She urges a return to African roots as a way of transcending the lingering effects of European chattel slavery and colonization. This involves a rejection of foreign rules, no matter how

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<sup>68</sup> Heide Goettner-Abendroth. Trans. Karen P. Smith. “Matriarchies as Societies of Peace: Re-thinking Matriarchy”. *Off Our Backs*. Vol. 38, N° 1, 2008, pp. 50.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* p. 50.

tantalizing, and a glorification of all that promote African unity, and all that present Africa and Africans as nobles all over the world.<sup>70</sup>

Indeed, her Akan affiliation has shaped her vision and perception of Africa and women's role in contemporary Ghana. Meanwhile, Aidoo looks at the history and the culture of Ghana and her descendency as active elements of her introspective quest.

Thus, Aidoo argues that men's positions vis-à-vis women in post-colonial Africa is part of the colonial inheritance, all of "the colonial rubbish"<sup>71</sup> left by Europe in Africa. According to her, African societies were not like that before the colonial occupation of Africa; even if women were never given headship positions, African societies have not been totally oblivious of the presence and existence of women, nor their roles in pre-colonial societies.

In the meantime, both African writers and critics argue that national culture and national reconstruction are rooted in pre-colonial images and forms standing thus against any of the colonial and imperial influence. These forms and aspects contribute to the presentation of a constraining and oppressive image of women, argue some African women writers, since the majority of pre-colonial African communities were patriarchal.

Moreover, according to Brenda Cooper, the language and the rhetoric of African nationalism are highly patriarchal. Africa is often associated and characterized as "Mother Africa"; therefore, the mother role, i.e. the mothering and nurturing, are glorified and assessed as the primary characteristics of a woman. By extension, this role paralyses and restricts women's potential, capabilities and roles. Consequently, African women are confused and undecided about their priorities and strategies, this

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<sup>70</sup> Ada Azodo. "The Multifaceted Aidoo: Ideologue, Scholar, Writer, and Woman". Ada Uzoamaka Azodo & Gay Wilentz (Eds.). *Emerging Perspectives on Ama Ata Aidoo*. Trenton (N.J.): Africa World Press, 1999, p. 416.

<sup>71</sup> Adeola James (Ed.). *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk*. London, Portsmouth: James Currey, Heinemann, 1990, p. 24.

inhibiting their capacity to resist the oppression openly and to articulate their grievances and demands. Brenda Cooper intimates that:

this shared and the resulting national struggle, first for independence and then against the neo-colonial foreigner, have added complications and ambiguities to the African woman's opposition to her exploitation at the hands of African men. There is in other words pressure on women to stand 'shoulder to shoulder' with their men against the foreign oppressor and not to bring in 'divisive' issues of gender to cut across and 'weaken' this national struggle.<sup>72</sup>

Therefore, women's struggle along the lines of feminism is considered by African men and by some African women writers and other intellectuals as a kind of betrayal of the nationalist project. For this reason, Brenda Cooper assesses *Our Sister Killjoy* rather negatively due to what national and cultural liberation require, due to the ambiguities between feminism and national liberation, due to the fact that Aidoo is caught in these ambiguities which made her unable to resist these contradictions. In the meantime, she asserts that "you cannot be a feminist if you are African without also being an African nationalist."<sup>73</sup> Therefore, even if critics assert that there are contradictions in women's search for liberation and nationalism, Aidoo contends that an African woman cannot be a feminist without being a nationalist, establishing thus an intrinsic relationship between the two.

## 2) Sissie's Duty of Nationalism

In order to study the roles of male or female characters in the works of African writers, we should look at all the conditions and influences that have impacted Africans. Moreover, one should understand these conditions, more precisely colonialism and its effect on the African mind. Frantz Fanon discusses the psychological effects of colonialism on the colonized people. In *Les damnés de la terre*

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<sup>72</sup> Brenda Cooper. *To Lay These Secrets Open: Evaluating African Writing*. Claremont, South Africa: David Philip Publishers, 1992, p. 77.

<sup>73</sup> Anuradha Dingwanee Needham. "An Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo". *The Massachusetts Review*. Vol. 36, Iss. 1, Amherst: Spring 1995, p. 123.

(*The Wretched of the Earth*), he exposes the colonial enterprise in Africa, the subjugation of the colonized people, and the consequences of this experience on the oppressed people. In *Peau noire, masques blancs*<sup>74</sup> (*Black Skin, White Masks*), he argues that the European ideals and the "superior" way of life imposed on the oppressed people have destroyed their value of the self, their culture, their African identity and led them to negate their African selves and identities from their own individualities. Thus, it leads the colonized people to embrace these European ideals and identify with their masters. As Fanon writes:

Le regard que le colonisé jette sur la ville du colon est un regard de luxure, un regard d'envie. Rêves de possession. Tous les modes de possession: s'asseoir à la table du colon, coucher dans le lit du colon, avec sa femme si possible. Le colonisé est un envieux. (...). C'est vrai, il n'y a pas un colonisé qui ne rêve au moins une fois par jour de s'installer à la place du colon.<sup>75</sup>

Fanon describes the psyche of the colonized and explains his behaviour. He asserts that all natives display an identity crisis. In *Peau noire, masques blancs*, he explains how Western educated Africans, the *been-tos*, tend to assume a superior behaviour vis-à-vis their fellow natives recreating the very relationships they have been subjected to, referring to what James Ivory calls "self-colonisation".

The term "self-colonization" refers to Aidoo's interest in and investigation of cognitive spaces which are symptomatic of the systematic destruction of cultures left behind by a history of colonisation and neocolonialism. Our *Sister Killjoy* begins some time after Ghana's independence but nevertheless reveals a cultural collective consciousness which continues to erode the foundation of Ghana's contemporary cognitive landscapes.<sup>76</sup>

Aidoo presents a challenging and complex view of Africans and oppression because she connects different forms of oppression. Her discussion does not stop at the level of slave/master relationships but is taken a bit further; it continues to

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<sup>74</sup> Frantz Fanon. *Peau noire, masques blancs*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1952.

<sup>75</sup> Frantz Fanon. *Les damnés de la terre*. Paris : François Maspero éditeur, 1961, p. 32.

<sup>76</sup> James I. Ivory. "Self-Colonization, Loneliness, and Racial Identity in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy Or Reflections From a Black-Eyed Squint*." Martin Japtok (Ed.). *Postcolonial Perspectives on Women Writers: From Africa, the Caribbean, and the U.S.* Trenton (N.J.): Africa World Press, 2003, p. 250.

explore other oppressive situations that result from the slave/master relationship experience. Even if she does present "self-colonised" Africans, alienated been-tos who want to follow their master, her protagonist is the exception.

While colonial legislation effected change on traditional African women's lives (...) Aidoo further illustrates in her works that it is only the enforcement of Euro-Christian doctrines that engendered these aberrations. Rather as the slave yearns for his master's status, he begins to imitate and enforce his oppressor's actions. Because his maleness is privileged, he could then be justified to assert power over the woman. He discovers that empowerment is granted through the act of exploitation.<sup>77</sup>

*Our Sister Killjoy* (1977)<sup>78</sup> is a deconstructive, discursive post-colonial writing in which Aidoo deals with so many issues in a very concentrated way. It "reverses Europe's gaze"<sup>79</sup>; Englishness, always presented as a "stable point of reference", is reversed by Aidoo. Via Sissie's "reverse discourse" about her travel to and within Europe, has Africa as its "stable point of reference", with Europe functioning this time around as the other of an African self.<sup>80</sup> Thus, Aidoo deconstructs the colonialist discourse in a harsh, polemical way, sometimes subtle and ironic, exploring thus the impact of the history of slavery on Ghanaians and Africans; colonialism and its outgrowth, imperialism. *Our Sister Killjoy* is thus an abrasive and self righteous moralist novel in which Aidoo shocks, provokes, calls people, ideas and attitudes polemically, by employing a mix of genres and literary devices which serve against "the 'blanchissement' of the West."<sup>81</sup> She brings a counter-discourse through which she re-evaluates the African identity and the African essence. Some critics have assessed that "Ama Ata Aidoo's acclaimed novel, *Our Sister Killjoy, or Reflections from*

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<sup>77</sup> Miriam C. Gyiamah. "The Quest for Power and Manhood: Three (Neo)Colonial Male Characters of Ama Ata Aidoo". Charles Smith (Ed.). *Journal of African Literature and Culture*. JALC 3. 2006, p.51.

<sup>78</sup> Aidoo started to write the novel by the late 1960s, when Africans experienced horrified disillusionment with promises that independence had so exhilaratingly offered.

<sup>79</sup> Anuradha Dingwaney Needham. *Using the Master's Tools: Resistance and the Literature of the African and South-Asian Diasporas*. New York: St Martin's Press, 2000, p. 73.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. p. 82.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. p. 84.

*a Black-Eyed Squint*, provides an example of how a non-racialist, non-foundational African identity might lead to Pan-African solidarity.<sup>82</sup>

This Pan-African solidarity is tied to Kwame Nkrumah's Pan-African dream. He characterized women as "still the mothers of the nation, the beauty and the graced of homes, and the gentleness that soothed the men's temper."<sup>83</sup> However, Nkrumah was amenable to the role that can be played by women to build a new nation even if as secondary to men. In this perspective:

Most histories of Nkrumah or Ghana make reference to the importance of women in the rise of nationalism in Ghana, but most refer specifically only to the "market woman". (...) In his speeches, Nkrumah is hardly more specific about the role of women in Ghana; instead, he refers to the tasks of nation building as the burden of all Ghanaians, men and women.<sup>84</sup>

Aidoo challenges this view of the role of women in developing a postcolonial, Ghanaian, national identity in both her novels. She shows a continuing engagement in the question of how women should operate and contribute to establish a national identity. Therefore, Aidoo's works "are in a constant dialogue with the legacy of Nkrumah, even as her stance towards Nkrumah becomes increasingly critical."<sup>85</sup>

*Our Sister Killjoy* is thus a baffling work. Thematically, it encompasses the history of Ghana, touching on the history of slavery, colonialism, underdevelopment, economic exploitation, political corruption, brain-drain, health, education, language as well as post-independence failure and neo-colonial regimes which have impeded development in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa, leading Sissie, the protagonist of the novel, to ironically conclude that life in Ghana is

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<sup>82</sup> Ranu Samantrai. "Caught at the Confluence of History: Ama Ata Aidoo's Necessary Nationalism". *Research in African Literatures*. Vol. 26, Summer 1995, p. 1.

<sup>83</sup> Elizabeth Willey. "National Identities, Tradition, and Feminism: The Novels of Ama Ata Aidoo Read in the context of the Works of Kwame Nkrumah." Bishrupriya Ghosh & Brind Bose (Eds.). *Interventions: Feminist Dialogues on Third World Women's Literature and Film*. N.Y., London: Garland Publishing, 1997, p. 12.

<sup>84</sup> Elizabeth Willey. Op. Cit. p. 11.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. p. 13.

*Our Sister Killjoy* opens with the dedication Aidoo makes for Nanabanyin Tandoh and Roger Genoud the son of Marcel Genoud. On the one hand, according to Vincent Odamtten, Aidoo pays tribute to these ancestors, Ghanaian and French, who played significant roles in building nationalist ideals in an international perspective. This poem places the nutinyawo (a collection of prose-poetry narratives) with a larger context, a "geopolitical frame".<sup>86</sup> Therefore, "this libation affirms Aidoo's desire to explain that which many others seem incapable of doing".<sup>87</sup> On the other hand, Chimalum Nwankwo argues that this reference to "Nanabanyin Tandoh/who knows how to build/people/structures/lives" shows that Aidoo "has no sympathy for any form of traditional structure when such structures are used for inhibiting people or artistic expression."<sup>88</sup>

In the meantime, the protagonist of the novel, Sissie, is a young Ghanaian woman, the black-eyed "squint", who travels from Ghana to Europe, Germany then England, after being granted a scholarship. Sissie's personal experiences are used to make a number of political statements. Her vision of the world is shaped by a constant awareness of the problems of Africa as well as its relation to the Western world. During her travel and interactions with other people in Europe, Sissie "forever carries Africa's problems on her shoulders" (OSK, p.118); she is able to point out many of the problems of her continent, of her country and her people as well as their relation to the rich and developed Western world. We can infer, in the wake of Florence Stratton's view that the "inversion strategy" is a major strategy used by African women writers. Thus, Aidoo reverses the patriarchal Manichæanism in her

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<sup>86</sup> Vincent Odamtten. *The Art of Ama Ata Aidoo: Polylectics and Reading Against Neocolonialism*. Florida: University Press of Florida, 1994, p. 120.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. p. 120.

<sup>88</sup> Chimalum Nwankwo. "The Feminist Impulse and Social Realism in Ama Ata Aidoo's *No Sweetness Here* and *Our Sister Killjoy*". Carole Boyce Davies & Anna Adams Graves (Eds.). *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*. Trenton (N.J.): Africa World Press, 1986, p.155.

literary discourse. Sissie holds the position which is "normally" held by a man who "normally" pinpoints and criticizes political, economic and social problems. Brenda Cooper argues that Aidoo belongs to the African fiction school which perceives the "primary political function [of a] work as resisting cultural imperialism."<sup>89</sup>

Aidoo weeps in *Our Sister Killjoy*, not only because the greatest Medieval West African Empire is gone, but also because in modern times its involvement in the global capitalist economy has exacerbated the situation of the present day Ghana and her people.<sup>90</sup>

In the opening pages of the novel, Aidoo makes a number of hostile critical comments. She tackles "the problem of the on-going neo-colonial domination of Africa by the West." (*OSK*, p.120). Aidoo introduces us to the main theme she is going to treat in her novel. It is a direct criticism of African intellectuals who have absorbed Western culture, which prevents them from considering their countries and their continent as separate entities from Europe, and in their need to achieve total freedom. It is also a criticism of all the ideas and ideals inherited from colonialism that "dazzled" African intellectuals who are still blinded by the West both culturally and intellectually. This prevents them from improving Africa from the inside; revaluing its culture, its philosophy, its knowledge, its languages, as well as the potential of its people.

In *Our Sister Killjoy*, Sissie's voyage to Europe does not only enable her to examine her place within an unbroken continuum of a history of colonialism and neo-colonialism, but it is also a protagonist activation of her place within the continuity of an African ontological system and a restatement of the continent's complex personality.<sup>91</sup>

Aidoo has her main character voicing concerns and judging those responsible for the moral and physical degradation of the continent.

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<sup>89</sup> Brenda Cooper. Op. Cit. p. 98.

<sup>90</sup>Ada Azodo. "The Multifaceted Aidoo: Ideologue, Scholar, Writer, and Woman". Op. Cit. p. 412.

<sup>91</sup>Yaw Asante. "'Good night Africa. Good morning Europe.' Europe's (Re)Discovery by a Black African Woman: Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*". *Africa Quarterly*. Vol.34, N°3, 1994, p. 65.

Moreover, Aidoo contends that the perpetuation of this domination can be found in any African, in “a nigger who is moderate” (OSK, p.6), but also in the most sensitive, important class whom she qualifies as “the academic-pseudo-intellectuals” (OSK, p.6). Aidoo adopts a Fanonian stance and develops an anti-colonialist discourse. The African behaves in the same way as Fanon’s “colonized” who tries to imitate the colonizer’s behaviour and thoughts. This shows clearly that independence did not liberate African people from their masters’ thoughts, culture and beliefs. It is “a relentless attack on the notions of exile as relief from the societal constraints of national development and freedom to live in a cultural environment suitable for creativity.”<sup>92</sup>

As an example of these “pseudo-intellectuals”, Sammy is a representative of all these “Westernized ‘évolués’”, the been-tos who were lucky to be chosen to go to Europe, whom Sammy considers “altogether as a dress rehearsal for a journey to paradise.” (OSK, p.9) At the party in the German Ambassador’s house, given in honour of Sissie, the latter comes to encounter Sammy. He is familiar with the German Ambassador’s language as well as his way of behaving. He acts like a puppet, an all accepting individual who laughs at everything, and even those things which need no smiling. This makes Sissie feel “puzzled”, almost “uneasy” before all these “Sammies” she is going to encounter in Europe. Sissie “shivers”; she stays “fidgeted in her chair”, nauseated at the look of Sammy and those who resemble him. She watches him with cautiousness, reserve, perplexity and wonder. It shows us clearly, right from the beginning, Sissie’s and hence Aidoo’s opinion vis-à-vis this kind of intellectuals; he is the kind of intellectuals that Sissie and Aidoo despise.

In fact, Aidoo opposes this kind of imitation as well as the development based on Europeans models, ideas and ideals. She severely criticizes those young people who have assimilated European culture and languages only to perpetuate the

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<sup>92</sup> Gay Wilentz. “The Politics of Exile: Reflections of a Black-Eyed Squint in *Our Sister Killjoy*”. Ada Azodo & Gay Wilentz (Eds.). *Emerging Perspectives on Ama Ata Aidoo*. Trenton (N.J.): Africa World Press, 1999, p. 79.

colonizer's hegemony. Sammy does not only imitate Europeans' behaviour, he "speaks their language", a fundamental element of neo-colonialism and imperialism.

Her criticism continues in the third part of the novel, taking place in England, Sissie's "colonial home" (*OSK*, p.85). There, Sissie is the "killjoy" because she is critical of European abundance and wealth and she takes to task those African intellectuals who have developed Western lifestyles and forgotten their own. According to Sissie, actually Aidoo's voice, these expatriates cannot contribute meaningfully to Africa's development whether intellectually or economically, because they cherish the foreign legacy and accept the European "superiority". The brain-drain has heavy consequences on the country since it deprives it of its people's skills, a situation whose repercussions are felt in all fields but most importantly, in the field of health.

However, Aidoo is objective in her presentation of these African intellectuals who have chosen to remain in the West instead of returning to their countries. She makes it clear that neo-colonial governments are partly responsible for the brain-drain since African intellectuals leave their countries in search of better socio-economic and socio-professional conditions. In a way, they are pushed to leave because they represent an intellectual threat for neo-colonial governments.

Moreover, Aidoo criticizes neo-colonial governments which perpetuate the colonizer's hegemony from which Africa suffers. According to her, the new African bourgeoisie and neo-colonial governments are just the displacement of the European bourgeoisie and its policy of segregation, discrimination, racism and exploitation which leave the rest of the population, i.e. the masses, in poverty, ignorance and hunger.

Furthermore, Aidoo via Sissie criticizes colonialism and its outgrowth, imperialism as well as its institutions, like the United Nations which hide behind deceptive slogans relating to "humanity" and "equality" among nations. In fact, for her, it is the first international institution which has been created to cover and legalize Western domination over the world, thus accepting its territorial

interventions backed by slogans like humanitarian aid and missions in Third world countries. Via Sissie, Aidoo also implies that imperialism is a modern version of colonialism as the United States is an outgrowth of the old Empire, Europe. Thus, Aidoo via Sissie curses “all those who steal continents.” (OSK, p.121) She condemns cultural imperialism perpetuated by the brain-drain, the universalizing tendency of Western thought, “Universal truth, Universal art, Universal literature.” (OSK, p.120)

Not only does Aidoo’s text try to subvert and reverse imperial Europe’s hierarchical order by interrogating the philosophical assumptions and moral values which underwrite and dictate Europe’s humanist and culturalist pretensions, it stridently insists that marginalized Africa should (re)connect with itself organically.<sup>93</sup>

In sum, an authorial discourse is carried throughout the novel, echoing Fanon’s ideology of pan-Africanism, while the criticism of the bourgeois leaders neglecting the masses is a reflection of Fanon’s observation.

On the other hand, Brenda Cooper contends that the additional weakness of Sissie’s character is that she is not aware of “the social and economic structure in which she herself and others like her are caught up”<sup>94</sup>, contrary to Ayi Kwei Armah’s protagonists whose agony derives from their knowledge of this fact. Cooper argues that “Aidoo [is linked] to the tradition of virulent but highly problematic opposition of cultural imperialism.”<sup>95</sup> This can be noticed throughout *Our Sister Killjoy*, in which Aidoo uses a corrosive imagery leading to radical polarization of the novel sweeping thus the issue of class and gender. She adds that the novel is dominated by “a polarization based on race which allows little space for other discussions along lines of either class and gender (...); the novel [being] paralysed and frozen within this crude paradigm of neo-colonial dependency.”<sup>96</sup> According to Cooper, this “corrosive

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<sup>93</sup> Yaw Asante. Op. Cit. p. 64.

<sup>94</sup> Brenda Cooper. Op. Cit. pp .87-88.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. p. 90.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. p. 88.

ethnicity” is handled through an “ethnic and corrosive imagery.”<sup>97</sup> Sissie associates whites’ skin’ colour with that of pigs; she associates Western food with Western coldness and inhumanity while she praises the African one which is warm and tastes good, reflecting thus Sissie’s pride about her culture. Besides, she criticizes white women who prefer to feed dogs rather than babies which I believe is one of the features and elements that make Aidoo distinguish Western feminism from African feminism.

Moreover, Cooper insists on the reaction of Sissie with reference to the question of the heart transplant.

The Heart Transplant. The evening papers had screeched the news in with the evening trains of the Underground. Of how the Dying White Man had received the heart of a coloured man who had collapsed on the beach and how the young coloured man had allegedly failed to respond to any efforts at resuscitation and therefore his heart had been removed from his chest, the Dying White Man's own old heart having been cleaned out of his chest and how in the meantime the Dying White Man was doing well, Blah, Blah, Blah.

It is funny. But among  
Certain rural Fantis,  
It is believed that cutting the throat  
Of a pig is simply  
Useless: the  
Only way to get your good pork  
Is to tear the heart out of the chest of a  
Squealing pig – the louder he  
Squeals, the better the pork.

(OSK, p. 95)

Cooper notices some exaggeration in Sissie’s reaction even if she does not deny the exploitation and inhumanity of apartheid. It seems that Aidoo uses a hyperbolic image of heart extortion to make her point; she demonizes this heart transplant the better to allude to the inhumanity of Apartheid. Aidoo "invents", to use Cooper’s word, this story to stress the fact that apartheid, slavery and colonialism have had a cumulative, devastating effect on African people. This situation has harmed them

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<sup>97</sup> Brenda Cooper. Op. Cit. p. 89.

psychologically and in all likelihood is responsible for their self depreciation and inferiority complex.

It is this reprehensible representation of the African woman that Aidoo subverts and reverses in *Our Sister Killjoy*, in addition to showing us a sick and panting Europe that needs a heart transplant for survival. Aidoo is able to achieve this because her protagonist, Sissie, is given access to language; she is certainly, functionally articulate and, therefore, has access to power.<sup>98</sup>

Besides, Aidoo's choice of names is very significant. By naming Marija's husband and son Big and Little Adolf, she directly refers to the dark past of Germany, to Nazism. Calling Marija's husband and son Big and Little Adolf, Aidoo flaunts her disinterest in individualizing these characters; they are deliberate caricatures of the violent past that makes Bavaria the heart of darkness of Aidoo's tale.<sup>99</sup>

Simultaneously, one should not omit that Sissie is subjected to racism right from the beginning of the novel. Sissie takes her plane from Ghana to Nigeria in order to go to Germany. Symbolically, the plane comes from South Africa, but is not allowed to stop at Accra; it stops at Lagos, the capital city of Nigeria, showing thus how neo-colonial governments support racist systems oppressing their own people. Additionally, on the plane, the hostess asks Sissie to join her "two black friends" sitting at the back of the plane who Sissie does not even know. With a good dose of irony, Aidoo complains:

But to have refused to join them would have created an awkward situation, wouldn't it? Considering too that part from the air hostess's obviously civilized upbringing, she has been trained to see the comfort of all her passengers. Naturally, she was only giving Sissie a piece of disinterested advice to make her feel at ease enough to enjoy her flight. (OSK, p.10)

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<sup>98</sup> Yaw Asante. Op. Cit. p. 66.

<sup>99</sup> Hildegard Hoeller. "Ama Ata Aidoo's Heart of Darkness". *Research in African Literatures*. Vol. 35, N° 1, Spring 2004, p.137.

This passage links the issue of racism with that of civilization and makes it clear that civilization legalises racism and the two are actually interlinked. It is a consensus that allows discrimination against black people within the norms of civilization.

Furthermore, the perpetuation of neo-colonialism is exemplified in Sissie's experience in Germany. Once Sissie is on German soil, she is subjected to racist remarks. She becomes aware of racial identification when she arrives in Germany. She becomes aware of the difference by not recognizing her "blackness" but by noticing the "whiteness" of Europeans which she qualifies as the colour of pickled pigs.

Once she [Sissie] recognises that she herself is marked by her skin colour, she links the skin colour of the other both to animals and markets, both to bestiality and colonial relations. Aidoo presents this early moment of racial recognition as a pivotal one: one her narrative rests upon.<sup>100</sup>

"Sissie is not the other of the European self; on the contrary, Europeans are the other for her firmly centred, African self"<sup>101</sup>. However, Sissie would not consider any of these racist comments because she comes to know "that someone somewhere would always see any kind of difference, an excuse to be mean." (OSK, p.13) Aidoo means by that, that racism is always hidden behind "civilizing missions" of backward, barbaric people; that the skin colour is always a justification to the plundering and the exploitation of natural resources, of raw materials and of human's exploitation, i.e. slavery. Aidoo explains also that the white man is always in quest, in greed for acquiring more land, more wealth, more power to hold the blacks down whenever and wherever they are.

In addition, Sissie is confronted to another kind of racism, the ignorance of Marija, the Aryan housewife who befriends her in Germany. Marija is ignorant of all that is not white; she has no idea of other races. She lacks knowledge of all that is not

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<sup>100</sup> Hildegard Hoeller. Op. Cit. p. 143.

<sup>101</sup> Ranu Samantrai. Op. Cit. p. 6.

European, not German. She thinks that Sissie is an Indian and Ghana near Canada.

Aidoo via Sissie makes an ironic comment on that:

Pre-Columbian South American with only a little  
Stretch of imagination  
Perhaps  
But Eskimo?  
No.  
Too wide the  
Disparity  
In  
Skin hue  
Shape of eyes –  
Thanks for the  
Compliment, Madam  
But  
No.

(OSK, p.24)

Marija knows nothing about world history and her own country's history. "Marija's a-historical and almost illiterate ignorance is contrasted with Sissie's over determined, multilingual historical consciousness."<sup>102</sup> She wonders why Sissie is named Mary because she lacks knowledge about the missionaries' civilizing and christianizing mission in Africa which was enterprised by her own continent, Europe.

Sissie's early centring (...) suggests that her claim to an African identity is not a position of defensive retreat, grounded upon a sense of one's exclusion and otherness. Rather, her eventual nationalism affirms the particularity of African experiences and the critical perspectives they provide. This is certainty what Aidoo advocates for all Africans, suggesting it especially to those who have delivered themselves into 'self exile' in the great family of man.<sup>103</sup>

What is more important is that all these depictions are made by the unique African, black woman in the novel, Sissie. In Europe, she comes across all sorts of experiences, enriching, demoralizing, positive and negative. Between what Sissie says and thinks and where people stand, especially African male intellectuals, there is a kind of gap. They look at Sissie as a "killjoy" who looks at everything with a "squint". All along the novel, Sissie tries to raise the consciousness of her male compatriots

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<sup>102</sup> Hildegard Hoeller. Op. Cit. p. 136.

<sup>103</sup> Ranu Samantrai. Op. Cit. p. 6.

staying in Europe; she disturbs thus their quiet lives. Sissie, just like Aidoo, is never satisfied. “Aidoo identifies with Sissie as a fellow woman who has always suffered at the hands of men, whether under slavery, colonialism or patriarchy.”<sup>104</sup>

The setting of the third part of the novel is England, Sissie’s colonial home. It is a ‘passage obligé’ for all those who go overseas; the colonial home *is* the overseas.

Germany is overseas.

The United States is overseas.

But England is another thing.

What this other thing is, has never been clear to anyone. (OSK, p. 85)

Once in London, Sissie witnesses the reality of black people living there. They are badly dressed; they are scavengers; they seem like beggars especially women who wear whatever they have to keep themselves warm. Sissie is profoundly hurt by this situation; she is shocked, sorry and angry at the same time. She comes to know how these black people come as students at first, and because they have not completed their studies, because they have been doing odd jobs, they have nonetheless chosen to remain in England, they come to accept that miserable life and living conditions. They prefer to remain in their "colonial home" and live like beggars rather than return to their mother countries, a fact that leads Aidoo to deduce that “there is nothing at the centre but worse slavery” (OSK, p. 88). These African people, intellectuals or not, live in poor lodgings, often in one room, in poverty and hunger, in a cold country.

Moreover, Aidoo criticises African governments for supporting, in a way, this condition by not recalling their students once their training abroad is over. Aidoo heavily criticises the African intellectuals who accept to live in such conditions, to serve the Empire and receive “imperial handouts” (OSK, p. 86) rather than return to their mother countries. These young people are not aware that they are being used and manipulated:

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<sup>104</sup> Ada Azodo. “The Multifaceted Aidoo: Ideologue, Scholar, Writer, and Woman”. Op. Cit. p.420.

Tell us about  
Your people  
Your history  
Your mind  
Your mind  
Your mind.

(OSK, pp. 86-87)

Sissie is very angry with the been-toes who never tell about the miserable conditions in which they live. They tell lies about their trips to Europe; they never mention the misery they or their black fellows endure there.

They lied  
They lied  
They lied  
The been-toes lied.

(OSK, p. 90)

Aidoo blames both the post-colonial governments who accept such a situation and African intellectuals:

Our dear  
Academic doctors  
Deserve all  
The worship  
They get from our poor administrators at home  
And more.  
They work hard for the  
Doctorates –  
They work too hard,  
Giving away  
Not only themselves, but  
All of us –  
The price is high,  
My brother,

(OSK, p. 87)

The polemical tone used by Aidoo clearly exposes the complicit attitude of intellectuals with their corrupt governments. Neither have they cared for their compatriots' well-being, while the obvious mission of African students in Europe is to return home to help for their country's development. They are made responsible by Aidoo for the social and economic stagnation of their countries and for their populations' discomfort. The tax payers' money is badly spent, since after graduation, these young people make their colonial homes their permanent dwelling places.

In this connection, Brenda Cooper argues that Aidoo addresses her black intellectual brothers and neglects the African every man as well as black women at large. According to Cooper, Aidoo neglects women's struggle against patriarchy. In fact, black women are totally inexistent in the novel. She asserts therefore that Sissie is isolated all along in the novel and muted at the end, when she writes the love letter that will never be posted.

However, this reading is reductive. I do believe that Aidoo wrote her novel at a time when almost all scholarships went to male black Africans and very few to women, as pointed out by Sissie at the beginning of the novel, when she is in Germany. Additionally, Sissie opposes and resists Western hegemony; in this perspective, Aidoo asserts that:

It did not occur to make Sissie individualistic. After all, people who resist, who oppose resistance to society, begin as individuals. Once they become a movement, of course, they move as a collective. (...) as for Sissie, I saw her as an African student who explores Europe on her own. But of course, all these women – especially Sissie – speak with a collective voice. Sissie is much of the time whining about the political situation, what is going to happen to us ... She moves collectively.<sup>105</sup>

Moreover, Sissie is the one who returns to her "crazy continent" after visiting Europe, as Aidoo herself did. She is suspended in a plane between Europe and Africa, looking from a window at the country she left, England, along with so many others. Unlike all her male compatriots met in Europe, Sissie does return to Ghana. I suppose that this is very significant about Aidoo's commitment to her nation as well as to her continent. African men intellectuals who proclaim national liberation are ultimately the ones who remain in the West and the ones who betray their nations. Nationalism seems to be feminine and matrilineal, at least in the way it is defended by Ama Ata Aidoo.

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<sup>105</sup> Maria Frias. "An Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo: I Learnt my First Feminist Lessons in Africa". *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses*. N° 16, November 2003, p. 33.

Furthermore, I believe that Aidoo addresses the élite because it is this part of the society which holds intellectual power, hence, the one which is capable of leading Africa and Ghana to development. In fact, according to Aidoo, a country without its élite invites disaster. In addition, it is doubtful whether Sissie's voice is muted at the end; on the contrary, the letter is not going to be posted because it is a symbol of disillusionment prevailing in the 1960s and the 1970s, as it can be considered as a kind of manifesto for those been-tos who should come back home. Besides, Sissie at last assumes her position as an educated African woman vis-à-vis the issues treated in the novel, since there is a shift in point of view, from third person to first person point of view. She becomes thus the narrator assuming fully her position, her thoughts and her ideas; indeed, Sissie has grown up.

The nationalism [Aidoo] proposes, though particular to black Africans, is not built upon the simple proclamation of a racial essence. On the contrary, race as a foundational identity is underdetermined by the equal compelling categories of gender and class. Aidoo accomplishes her non-racialist nationalism by juxtaposing African identity to these other salient modes of beings, acknowledging the demands of each, and refusing to fix them in a naturalized hierarchy. Her protagonist's return to Africa (specifically to Ghana) signals a racial solidarity that is grounded on her knowledge of the history of colonialism and race relations. It is solidarity capable of embracing internal differences and even conflicts, and it is permeated with lines of identification which lead outward to cross-racial, global alliances. *Our Sister Killjoy* thus provides a model for nationalism that is not essentialist or reactionary, but rather is provisional, historically conscious, and pragmatic.<sup>106</sup>

In addition to the gender issue, the notion of home is also important. At the end of *Our Sister Killjoy*, Sissie goes back home.

The way in which 'home' is characterized, as a "mixture of complete sweetness and smoky roughage", alerts us to the fact that this is a homecoming full with contradictions. (...) homecoming forces a confrontation with those "ordinary things" out of which what may emerge is far from predetermined.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Ranu Samantrai. Op. Cit. p. 5.

<sup>107</sup> Jane Bryce. "Going Home is Another Story: Constructions of Nation and Gender in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes*". *West Africa Review*, Vol. 1, N° 1, 1999, p. 2.

Vincent Odamtten reads this homecoming as an emancipation and a transformation of Africa involving both hope and capacity for transformation for good, and at the same time, it is tinted with Aidoo's realistic approach which bears a lot of doubt.

*Our Sister Killjoy* suggests a more complex and contradictory trajectory to genuine emancipation and the transformation of "Africa (...) with its unavoidable warmth and even after these thousands of years, its uncertainties." (OSK, p. 133). This closure might be described as 'pessoptimistic', since its declaration of a positive restructuring of society is tempered by a realistic acknowledgment of doubt.<sup>108</sup>

Even if Africa is full of uncertainties, Sissie does return to Ghana. She has full knowledge about the contradictions of her country, still, she goes back. Thus Aidoo implies that nationalism is feminine and matrilineal. Consequently, in the end of the novel, Sissie clarifies her thoughts and assumes her position as an African nationalist woman. Just as Nkrumah, she seeks to find a source for her African identity, revaluing the importance of past for the present and the dynamic forces for the future. "In this way, Aidoo's character acts out Nkrumah's theory on consciencism: reevaluating (...) an African view of history with the ultimate goal of establishing the African personality."<sup>109</sup> However, Sissie shows

suspicion of the rhetoric of masculinity that accompanies nationalist programs by reminding the reader that power in many contexts has been coded as masculine control over women and that this dynamic has not been challenged by nationalist thinking in Ghana.<sup>110</sup>

### 3) Gender and Identity

In postcolonial contexts, gender relations and ideologies have been replaced by less flexible ones, a matter that made power relations shift drastically and thus put women in a disadvantaged position.

Without necessarily glorifying gender relations in these societies, it must be noted that most of the flexible gender relations (...) were rigidified during

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<sup>108</sup> Vincent Odamtten. Op. Cit. p. 132.

<sup>109</sup> Elizabeth Willey. Op. Cit. p. 15.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. p. 18.

colonial rule and have become part of the post-colonial heritage in African urban communities. These more rigid, masculinist gender roles failed to assimilate the earlier gender-integrated power structures in which women played major roles.<sup>111</sup>

This is what brings to the fore problems of identity and difference in post-colonial women's writings. Therefore, African women writers have to manage between multiple identities, gender as difference, otherness within. In *Our Sister Killjoy*, Aidoo deals with the experience of exile, whereas in *Changes*, she deals with questions of place and belonging, home and identity.

According to Michel Foucault, Reformation was the major crisis of the Western experience of subjectivity. During Reformation, people were looking for a new subjectivity; they struggled against the subjectivity torn from the religious and moral powers of the middle ages. The new subjectivity, aimed for by Reformation, is taking part in the spiritual life.<sup>112</sup> Accordingly, African women look for a new subjectivity. They fight against the social and moral powers of African traditions which oppress them; they fight the post-colonial hegemony which is mainly man-dominated; they fight the legacy inherited by colonialism and perpetuated in the post-colonial era. The new subjectivity they are looking for is that of taking part in the public sphere, reconciling the personal and the private and taking part in power relations.

Right from the beginning of the novel, Sissie reflects about history. In Germany, she settles with her fellow students in a hostel which was once a place of agony.

How many  
Virgins had  
Our sovereign Lord and Master  
Unvirgined on their nuptial nights  
For their young

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<sup>111</sup> Juliana Nfah Abbyeni. *Gender in African Women's Writing: Identity, Sexuality and Difference*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997, p.23.

<sup>112</sup> Michel Foucault. "The Subject and Power". *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 8, N° 4, Summer 1982, p. 782.

Husbands in  
Red-eyed  
Teeth-gnashing  
Agony, their  
Manhoods  
Hurting ...  
But 'all the days are not equal', said the  
village wall, and

The castle is now a youth hostel

(OSK, p. 19)

This ironic passage points out the barbaric past of Europe as this medieval castle witnessed all the barbaric practices committed against women during the "Dark Ages". It is a counter discourse to the white men's "supremacy" and "civilizing mission" proclaimed on the African territories. What is more ironic is that this medieval castle has been turned into a "youth castle", obliterating thus all the atrocities that had been committed there, and ironically, it receives foreign students especially those coming from Africa. This adds to the fact that all the "modern" atrocities committed against non-European people are just the heritage of their past, dressed with new clothes.

Looking at the river, Sissie (...), sees history's reflection. But she does not see noble causes: she only sees a past of exploitation and brutal rape. (...). Sissie sees that there is no darkness that can justify exploitation, but it is the exploitation itself that constitutes such darkness. Sissie also extends the imperialist exploitation (...). Her 'black-eyed squint', a both bruised and racial perspective (...) is sceptical of those versions of history that countries advertise. As a woman, she realizes that it is not only virgin land that was raped in the name of expansion, domination, and wealth. (...). Sissie sees Germany's river the over determined, primitive history of patriarchal, feudal exploitation and rape.<sup>113</sup>

In the meantime, Brenda Cooper contends that the gender issue is a secondary one in *Killjoy* because of the overwhelmingly racial view of the world presented by Aidoo via Sissie. This is reinforced by the fact that Sissie is a lone woman in her struggles. According to Cooper, just like her male Ghanaian compatriots and fellow writers, Aidoo has "developed a strategy of 'race retrieval' which, far from liberating

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<sup>113</sup> Vincent Odamtten. Op. Cit. p. 135.

people, paralyses them within a radical and ethnic paradigm and perpetuates the enslavement of women.”<sup>114</sup>

It is doubtful that Aidoo neglects the gender problem when she criticises, through Sissie, the feudal, patriarchal setup of European civilisation. Besides, the issues discussed in *Our Sister Killjoy* are dealt with holistically. Even if Sissie is a lone woman, she is the only one, in her male surroundings, to give her personal view point and to point to crucial issues for the development of Africa. Besides, for that period, the 1960s, 1970s, that was a challenging task for an African woman to criticise a male gathering, a male audience, a male leadership.

Cooper also contends that Sissie does not consider white women as "sisters". White women are not portrayed in a sympathetic way. Rather, they are turned “into monstrous straw targets.”<sup>115</sup> This is another remark of Cooper, for Aidoo's description of Western women as lonely and unhappy goes beyond the purpose of being unsympathetic to them. Aidoo's aim is to deconstruct Western "humanism" and supremacy, by presenting a Western woman who feels unhappy and lonely even if she is married, and has a son; Aidoo is definitely not dehumanising white women. Rather, she examines a society with flaws, where loneliness is the price to pay when being part of an enlightened nation where individualism hampers healthy human interaction. In fact, Sissie and Marija's ambiguous friendship arises from this loneliness. Marija's emotional and sexual advance to Sissie is a result of her loneliness because of "the individualistic milieu of Europe, (...). Sissie[']s (...) revulsion at Marija's advance comes from a horror of lesbianism instilled in her (and her culture) by the teachings of Christian missionaries.”<sup>116</sup>

Aidoo's narrative questions the formation of homosexuality as a Western import. Her narrative demythologises this reduction of homosexuality, and specifically lesbianism, to colonialism by playing with the power of language

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<sup>114</sup> Brenda Cooper. Op. Cit. pp. 98-99.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.p. 94.

<sup>116</sup> Keith Booker. *The African Novel in English: An Introduction*. Portsmouth, Oxford: Heinemann, James Currey, 1998, p. 122.

to control bodies. The slang expression "bush" allows for a double reading of the term as a maker of African rural space and female anatomy.<sup>117</sup>

Even if Aidoo comments on the issue of lesbianism, "for Sissie (...), the German woman Marija's sexual overture was just another of those inexplicable European things."<sup>118</sup> I believe that Sissie's rejection of Marija's lesbian offer can be considered as a void, a gap between the Western woman and the African one instilled by colonialism and its legacy. In addition, Marija's loneliness "may have been the major motivation for colonial expansion as Europeans, seeking to feel the void at the heart of their lives, attempted to compensate by conquering most of the rest of the world."<sup>119</sup> There is a link between Europeans' loneliness and their perpetual wish and desire for expansion, which Aidoo represents in the way Marija wants to fill her loneliness by inviting Sissie to lesbian intercourse.

Sissie's greatest discovery is that LONELINESS is the lot of her friend, the representative German woman, Marija. (...). It is this loneliness that makes Marija proffer a lesbian sexual relationship to Sissie but which she rejects. (...). What Aidoo does is to evoke the stereotypical image of the black woman as represented in colonial fiction in order to subvert it. The relationship between Sissie and Marija, while serving as instrument of cultural self-definition, brings to the fore the sterility of European civilization and European man's facile assumptions about morality. Sissie certainly is sympathetic towards Marija in her loneliness; however, her moral revulsion at the discovery of Marija's motives in courting her friendship is unequivocal.<sup>120</sup>

Furthermore, gender questioning fills Sissie's mind. Even if she rejects Marija's invitation, she wishes, deep inside herself, to be a black man with one of his involvements with a white woman in Europe.

[I]f she, Sissie, had been a man. She had imagined and savoured the tears, their anguish at knowing that their love was doomed. But they would make promises to each other which of course would not stand a chance of getting

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<sup>117</sup> Sally Mc Williams. "'Strange As It May Seem': African Feminism in Two Novels by Ama Ata Aidoo. Ada Azodo & Gay Wilentz (Eds.). *Emerging Perspectives on Ama Ata Aidoo*. Trenton (N.J.): Africa World Press, 1999, p. 342-343.

<sup>118</sup> Mary Mackay. "Ama Ata Aidoo". *Belles Lettres*. Vol. 9, Iss. 1, Arlington: Fall 1993, p. 35.

<sup>119</sup> Keith Booker. Op. Cit. pp. 122-123.

<sup>120</sup> Yaw Asante. Op. Cit. p. 68.

fulfilled. (...) she forgot who she was, and the fact that she was a woman.  
(OSK, p.61)

Aidoo further adds: "Sissie looked at the other woman and wished again that at least, she was a boy. A man." (OSK, p.67) This refers us back to Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* in which Fanon explains the excitement of black boys and their tendencies to get involved with white European girls. This feeling is taken a little further. When Sissie announces to Marija her departure, the latter weeps and feels almost jealous that Sissie is going to meet her boyfriend in England.

Sissie felt like a bastard. Not a bitch. A bastard. (...) Suddenly, something exploded in Sissie like fire. She did not know exactly what it was. It was not painful. It did not hurt. On the contrary, it was a pleasurable heat. Because as she watched the other women standing there, now biting her lips, now gripping at the handle of her baby's pram and looking so generally disorganized, she, Sissie wanted to laugh and laugh. Clearly, she was enjoying herself to see that woman hurt. It was nothing she had desired. Nor did it seem as if she could control it, this inhuman sweet sensation to see another human being squirming. It hit her like a stone, the knowledge that there is pleasure in hurting. A strong three-dimensional pleasure, an exclusive masculine delight that is exhilarating beyond all measure. And this too is God's gift to man? She wondered. (OSK, pp.75-76)

Here, Aidoo links any kind of pleasure to the masculine gender. Pleasure and mainly sexual pleasure seems to be God's gift to man. Aidoo also comments on how the hurt can feel pleasure while hurting other people, but she comments also on the sadness and the tragedy that the hurt person can feel. Pleasure is denied to women, only if the latter transposes herself to the body of a man. Here are some critics' responses to that feeling:

The desire to feel empowered leads Sissie to abuse Marija emotionally. But Sissie decides to withdraw from such an abuse when "she became aware of the fact that she would do something quite crazy if she continued on the trail of mind" (OSK, p.76). Nevertheless, we find that quite a few of 'our men', as Aidoo would put it, do not engage in a consciousness that suggests abstinence from an abusive position. Rather, desiring to escape their reduced status, to acquire that of the master and to further sense this empowerment and "exclusive masculine delight", certain men do not only claim the authority of

the master but, by asserting their maleness, also colonise the body of their women.<sup>121</sup>

Sissie wishes she were a man in order to recreate a heterosexual dynamics; then feels empowered like a man and abuses Marija emotionally. Here, Aidoo rewrites and recreates the theory of Fanon whereby the oppressed turns oppressor. Moreover, Aidoo links this oppression with sexism and "man's delight", "God's gift to man", proving thus that oppression inherited by the colonial legacy is perpetuated by sexism. When feeling like "a bastard not a bitch", Sissie, thus, enjoys her ability to exert power and authority over Marija, enabling "Aidoo again [to] connect colonial privilege to masculine authority."<sup>122</sup> Aidoo thus connects different forms of oppression even if they may seem similar, and widely set apart because of historical factors. Even if Sissie identifies with a man, she is said to act like a woman. Does not she identify with male privileges by oppressing emotionally Marija? However, she rejects this privilege as well as the pleasure she can get from it; she rejects "the phallus as a privileged signifier."<sup>123</sup> The narcissism, egocentrism, eccentricism, Sissie felt when identifying with men's privilege is soon rejected; she is first seduced by this pleasure and the effects of identifying with the value of the other side while rejecting its validity.

In the meantime, the "plums" symbolise European abundance and materialism as well as the forbidden fruit, particularly in lesbian sexuality. The "plums are unobtainable in Africa, and yet they are black like Sissie (and just like the soil nurturing them) (...), [and] signify a glimpse into the fertility of cross-cultural exchange."<sup>124</sup> Cooper introduces here the idea of cross-culturality rather than a clear separation between what is Western and what is African. Besides, the plums are at the heart of Sissie and Marija's friendship. They "are a joyful sensuous symbol (...) the

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<sup>121</sup> Miriam C. Gyiamah. Op. Cit. p. 53.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. p. 52.

<sup>123</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Op. Cit. p. 136.

<sup>124</sup> Brenda Cooper. Op. Cit. p. 95.

biblical forbidden fruit; reinforcing Marija's role as Eve, the Temptress" and the "symbol may be exceptional for its warmth enlightenment."<sup>125</sup>

Aidoo uses the "plums" as a symbol of European food abundance, as a symbol of richness, which Sissie enjoys very much. The plums grow in the "beautiful black Bavarian soil" (*OSK*, p. 40), and their colour is almost like Sissie's skin colour; as if Aidoo shows that fertility is linked with blackness. Moreover, Aidoo points out the erotic dimension carried by the plums and by the fact that Sissie enjoys eating them. The plums seem to have the same qualities as Sissie,

Youthfulness  
Peace of mind  
Feeling free:  
Knowing you are a rare article;  
Being  
Loved.

(*OSK*, p.40)

This emphasizes the erotic, sensual aspect of Sissie and her uniqueness since the plums are selected by Marija from the single tree in the garden. Sissie is almost caressing the plums when eating them, feeling ecstasy, almost having an orgasm. The single tree in the garden from which the plums have been selected may also symbolize the forbidden fruit of the Garden of Eden and foreshadow the sexual advance of Marija to Sissie. "Ultimately, despite their succulent appeal, the plums of the *nutinya's* title are about the nature and abuse of power in a world that seems to prevent and overdetermine the realization of meaningful human relationships."<sup>126</sup> Therefore, the symbolism of the plums plays a double function but aims at the same meaning. The plums symbolise European abundance which is directly linked to Sissie, and the colour of the plums as well as the soil which produces them have the same colour of Sissie's skin. They also symbolise lesbian sexuality, the forbidden lesbian relationship, showing Marija as the "Temptress" as she is the one who proposes the plums to Sissie. However, the symbol implies another reading, that of exerting power

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<sup>125</sup> Brenda Cooper. Op. Cit.p. 95-96.

<sup>126</sup> Vincent Odamtten. Op. Cit. p. 125.

over others; Europeans exert power to acquire their wealth, whereas in reverse Sissie exerts masculine power over Marija and this power is definitely linked to patriarchy.

Further, Aidoo represents the two women in the novel, Sissie, the budding African intellectual, and Marija, the young lonely German housewife, as women sharing the same experiences. Over the course of their friendship, Sissie notes how women are under evaluated wherever they are. She notes that in Ghana particularly and in Africa in general, discrimination against women starts at birth. She notes:

'500 for a boy,  
400 for a girl.'

Why should it surprise  
That it costs a little more  
To make a baby boy?

(OSK, p.31)

Sissie comes to discover that even in Germany, baby boys are preferred over baby girls, when Marija tells her about her son

Since Adolf was going to be the only child,  
She was very happy he was a boy

And good woman  
In her senses  
With her choices  
Would say the  
Same.

In Asia  
Europe  
Anywhere (...)

So why wish a curse on your child  
Desiring her to be female  
?  
Besides, my sister,  
The ranks of the wretched are  
Full  
Are full.

(OSK, p.51)

Everywhere, boys are preferred over girls and women value men over themselves, as a sign of a socializing process. Besides, women share the same devotion and

constraints of the institution of motherhood. When Marija wants to be alone with Sissie, she wants to get rid even of her own child; both women are aware of the transgression of the institution of motherhood.

It is  
Heresy.

In  
Africa  
Europe,  
Everywhere

This is not a statement to come from a  
Good mother's lips –  
Touch wood

(OSK, p.49)

The institution of motherhood transgresses all lines of race and nationalities. Besides to the devotion to one's child, a woman, a wife should be devoted totally to her husband.

Besides, it is not sound for a woman to enjoy cooking for another woman. Not any under circumstances. It is not done. It is not possible. Special meals are for men. They are the only sex to whom the Maker gave a mouth with which to enjoy eating. And woman the eternal cook is never so pleased as seeing a man enjoying what she has cooked; eh, Marija? So give the rabbit to big Adolf and watch him enjoy it.

(OSK, p.77)

Even the act of cooking is done for men's pleasure; a woman should be totally at the service of men; any transgression is considered as a deviation, a profanation, a betrayal of men. This leads Sissie to note that:

For  
Here under the sun,  
Being a woman  
Has not  
Is not  
Cannot  
Never will be a  
Child's game.

(OSK, p.51)

However, even if Aidoo via Sissie makes connections between women all over the world, she does not mean that gender can replace race. For Aidoo, race is the fundamental unifier of identity. Sissie notes many differences between her and Marija. Sissie is African and black whereas Marija is German and white. Each is a representative of her race, each is the bearer of history that keeps the two far apart. Besides, the two women share the same name, Mary. The latter is the translation of Marija into English and Sissie's baptismal name. Thanks to this translation, the two women could be versions of each other and English is the language through which they communicate. However, Sissie rejects her baptismal, Christian name because it diverts her African identity just as she rejects Christianity. Additionally, she qualifies English as the language that "enslaved" (*OSK*, p.112) her and speaks it just for the sake of communication.

Aidoo's narrative suggests that there is no neutral ground, no place untainted by history, where women from opposite sides of the colonial divide can meet to develop the bonds that could result from the recognition of shared experience.<sup>127</sup>

Even if Sissie recognizes a level of similar gender oppression between women of different races, she also recognizes that African women are more oppressed than Western ones; African women are the "more wretched" of this Earth. She gives the example of the drugs tested on Third world women for the benefit of Western ones, showing thus the legacy of colonialism which led to different meanings of the female body according to the contexts, Africa and Europe. She notes the disparity between being a European and an African woman. "She argues that the specific demands imposed upon her by African men in the name of virtuous, pre-colonial 'African female' are Eurocentric."<sup>128</sup> She thus rebels against her "Precious Something", Kunle, by not adhering to the type of women expected by African men. She says:

[s]ometimes when they are hotly debating the virtues of the African female, I ask myself: 'But who am I? Where did I come from? (...). It seems as if much of the

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<sup>127</sup> Ranu Samantrai. *Op. Cit.* p. 10.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* p. 11.

softness and meekness you and all the brothers expect of me and all the sisters is that which is really Western. Some kind of hashed up Victorian notions, hm?

(OSK, p.117)

Therefore, Aidoo links the post-colonial ideals of femininity and women's obligations towards men are purely European and not pre-colonial. Sissie's discussions with her lover are mainly about nationalism and political issues, mainly health issues, whereas she is expected to be appropriately feminine. They disagree much about neo-colonialism and about her devotion and how a woman is "normally" expected to be. Kunle wants to silence her, but she refuses to adhere to this model of femininity which she considers to be Western. Therefore, they lose the opportunity to practice an effective nationalism together because Kunle has chosen to remain in England whereas Sissie chooses to go back home.

[Sissie] cannot, therefore, follow European feminism's path toward liberation. Her struggles must address the formation of femininity not only within an indigenous patriarchy, but also within the response of that patriarchy to the colonial encounter. (...). In this case, Pan-Africanist nationalism means respect for the black-eyed-squint of a young woman and acceptance of her leadership. (...). Aidoo advocates a nationalism that cannot do without dissent, one that recognizes internal contradictions and even thrives on the resulting complexity. So adamant is Aidoo that African nationalism does not privilege race over gender that she ends the novel with Sissie choosing to leave her lover.<sup>129</sup>

Aidoo does not give a finite solution and position. The last part of *Our Sister Killjoy* does not provide us with solutions to the problems Sissie has been dealing with all along the novel; however, it gives a first step towards the working out of a country, of a continent that needs both its men and women. The letter is thus a kind of manifesto that clarifies how nationalism should be practiced, with the acceptance of an active participation of its women as well as their integration into the scheme of social, economic, political and cultural reconstruction of Ghana and Africa at large, and most importantly, their participation in leadership.

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<sup>129</sup> Ranu Samantrai. Op. Cit. pp. 13-14.

# Chapter III

"The Personal is the Political": *Changes*

- 1) Esí's Emancipation or Alienation?
- 2) Women's Role and Status
- 3) Belonging and Identity

## 1) Esi's Emancipation or Alienation?

Aidoo's works demarcate the political nature of women's position within the Ghanaian contemporary community based on a matrilineal model. Aidoo clearly praises the political role played by women in the Akan communities. Keith Booker writes:

Aidoo builds upon the colonial and postcolonial history of Ghana from an avowedly feminine perspective, calling attention to certain aspects of African history that often receive little attention in the works of male African writers. Especially important here is the fact that many traditional Ghanaian societies (especially that of the Akan) were matrilineal in nature. (...) and [c]olonization has disturbed this tradition in many ways.<sup>130</sup>

It is a fact that a Western type of education coupled with a growing desire for consumerism, are the major elements which create a gap between traditional and "modernized" sections of societies. The problem occurs when women transcend the traditional lifestyle to adopt the modern or Western one. The formal education acquired, based on Western values, leads them to acquire jobs, and therefore contributes to their financial and moral independence. In this sense, individuality quite often emerges at the expense of the community.

However, even if education has brought a part of emancipation to women, West African women were not excluded from the scheme of social, political and economic life in pre-colonial West African societies. In fact, the colonial period has disrupted the traditional African patterns of life in which women, even if they had secondary positions compared to men, never thought of challenging this order because this was how life, the community and human relations were organised. Aidoo asserts that the oppression of women is the heritage of the colonial domination over Africa. The positions held by women in pre-colonial African communities were erased with the advent of colonialism. From then on, women's

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<sup>130</sup> Keith Booker. *The African Novel in English: An Introduction*. Portsmouth, Oxford: Heinemann, James Currey, 1998, pp. 128-129.

position in African communities has been downgraded. The situation of post-colonial community life and public affairs is dominated by male privileges, in addition to the political, economic and social restrictions imposed by both colonialism and neo-colonialism, and which have considerably diminished their influence on African community life. In her introduction to Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Aidoo makes it clear that the position of women in Ghana has always been important in the configuration of the Ghanaian society. Women, even if married, enjoy financial independence, just as the example of Esi can show. Thus, women's emancipation was brought about neither by Christianity nor by Western civilization, at a time when European women were controlled by their fathers, brothers, husbands and even their sons, and their attempts at gaining emancipation were regarded as breaches in good conduct. Therefore, Aidoo perceives Western education as a doubtful means for African women to gain their independence.

For the Ghanaian woman exposed to a Western-oriented education and ideology that disseminated idealized models of womanhood at variance with indigenous models, the confusion of identity and purpose becomes all the more problematic. The hegemonic influence of British colonialism and Western ideas made the acquisition of education desirable even as its effects on individuals were devastating, particularly on women.<sup>131</sup>

Aidoo's second novel, *Changes*, is a socially concerned novel which treats women's identities and needs in contemporary Ghana, and Africa at large. It deals with Esi Sekyi, a young, beautiful, University educated, married woman who has difficulty in reconciling her life as a mother and wife with that of a working, ambitious career woman. The novel deals with the problem of marriage and polygamy in a society where tradition and modern Western styles intermingle. The novel is thus dominated by this confrontation and all the issues dealt with are enmeshed in this confusion. We have the issue of marital rape, women's bodies and sexuality, the issue of love, marriage and motherhood, that of belonging and identity, and more

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<sup>131</sup> Vincent Odamtten. *The Art of Ama Ata Aidoo: Polylectics and Reading Against Neocolonialism*. Florida: University Press of Florida, 1994, p. 10.

importantly, the issue of education which is the core component of the dilemma between tradition and modernity. Thus "Aidoo presents us with the more 'concrete' reality of African women's limiting factors, an unadorned portrayal of the complex web of frustrations making up the everyday lives of contemporary West African women."<sup>132</sup> She depicts the factors that slow down any significant change in contemporary women's situation. She subverts the traditional, African, social expectations of African women as mothers and wives as well as the traditional division of labour within the household which allocates the burden of child bringing, cooking, washing, and cleaning to women. Therefore, a woman seeking a career is perceived as unnatural, especially when this career is not pursued in a feminine field.

Indeed, the text portrays the protagonist, Esi Sekyi, a product of Western education, as a character attempting to strike a balance between a Western inspired capitalist life style reflecting her personal desires, and her own native traditions which cannot assimilate some of the Western ideals. In fact, it is an underlying theme in the stories of Aidoo since the 1970s, where she problematises questions of biculturalism which are the result of globalization, social mobility and the imposition and sometimes the necessity of Western educational patterns. In this perspective, Ada Azodo contends:

Aidoo's women characters fight for their sovereignty in the African context. These are women engaged in a very hard struggle because the boundaries erected around them are so rigidly constructed that most women succumb at the altar of self-actualization. The new woman, formally educated and having a career and therefore her own money, finds herself with many choices, which are hard to grapple with. Worse, men are collectively not prepared to budge an inch. Relationships with men are very unstable. Often the woman is undecided as to whether to follow tradition or follow her own fantasies.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Nada Elia. "To Be an African Working Woman': Levels of Feminist Consciousness in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes*". *Research in African Literatures*. Vol. 30, N° 2, Summer 1999, p. 136.

<sup>133</sup> Ada Azodo. "The Multifaceted Aidoo: Ideologue, Scholar, Writer, and Woman". Ada Uzoamaka Azodo & Gay Wilentz (Eds.). *Emerging Perspectives on Ama Ata Aidoo*. Trenton (N.J.): Africa World Press, 1999, p. 422.

In fact, *Changes* highlights Esi's problems as a woman who wants independence, a career, and control over her body, but is emotionally torn between tradition and modernity. Aidoo perceives women like Esi as challenging, trying to struggle in a perpetual social instability. She argues that her main character, Esi

(...) tries to juggle (...). I think that the African woman who is like Esi, a woman with high education, who has a career, is going to have a hard time of it. But I suspect that she's not going to have a harder time than any woman in that kind of position anywhere. The added detail is that our society is at a stage where it is a little less tolerant of this dilemma than may be in the West. But, mind you, the greater sections of our world are in the position of Esi. (...) [W]hat is interesting to me is her willingness to even struggle (...) [as] life is dynamic.<sup>134</sup>

Obviously, the fundamental problem Esi faces is that she is torn between two antagonistic identities: her communal sense of herself as an African, and her feminist aspirations to autonomy and self-realization as a woman. Indeed, feminism by definition is a profoundly individualistic philosophy. It values personal growth and individual fulfilment over any larger communal needs, which are to assume the continuity of the clan, to work within tradition and to perpetuate the status quo.

Accordingly, the changes intimated by Aidoo's title imply a closer examination of Esi's character and the relationships with other characters in the novel in order to fully comprehend the interaction of different ideas and ideals emanating from old and young generations. In fact, the exploration of these relationships will tell us a great deal about women's positions and roles in the Ghanaian society and will help us to understand the contradictions encountered in reconstructing, reinventing and reconceptualising the contemporary roles of African, Ghanaian women.

The most challenging idea in *Changes* revolves around the idea of female sexual self determination. What does a woman want? (...) How much can a

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<sup>134</sup> Ada Azodo. "Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo: Facing the Millennium". Hauppauge, N.Y., March 31, 1996, p. 9.

woman possibly expect in this world? And doesn't Esi have it all? Not even an educated woman should expect more.<sup>135</sup>

First of all, in *Changes*, there is a primary relationship between the mother, the grandmother, and the daughter Esi. This relationship leads to a resolution of conflict and a reinterpretation of the traditional culture and customs. For instance, Esi rebels against her mother and grandmother; she rebels against tradition; she endorses a

theory of personhood where the individual exists as an independent entity rather than a group member, where she is defined by her experiences rather than her kinship relations, where she has responsibility to realize her potential for happiness rather than quantitative financial worth, and where she must reason about her values rather than fit into stereotyped tradition.<sup>136</sup>

This relationship addresses the disintegration of rural community values and the breakdown of traditional structures like the family. Esi's Western, individualized lifestyle as well as her rejection of "being happy" with her husband Oko leads her "mothers" to deduce that Esi is "insane". This generation gap exposes the loss of African daughters from the point of view of tradition.

Moreover, Esi is in a conflict with her mother and grandmother about her self-fulfilment and self-realization as a woman. For Nana, the voice of reason, who "epitomizes this capacity that the African woman has always had to formulate clear and critical opinions in order that she would understand her position and be able to deal with it"<sup>137</sup>, a woman is bound to her husband; a woman is the property of her

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<sup>135</sup> Maria Olausen. "'About Lovers in Accra' – Urban Intimacy in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*". *Research in African Literatures*. Vol. 33, N° 2, Summer 2002, p. 65.

<sup>136</sup> Beatrice Stegeman. "The Divorce Dilemma: The New Woman in Contemporary African Novels". *Critiques: Studies in Modern African Fiction*, 15. N° 3, 1974. Quoted in Katherine Frank. "Feminist Criticism in the African Novel". Eldred Durosimi Jones, Eustace Palmer & Marjorie Jones (Eds.). *African Literature Today: 14 Insiders and Outsiders*. London, Ibadan, Nairobi: Heinemann, 1984, p. 46.

<sup>137</sup> Ama Ata Aidoo. "Literature, Feminism and the African Woman Today". *African Literature Associate Conference*. Stony Brook: N.Y., March 1996. Quoted in Gay Wilentz. "African Women's Domain: Demarcating Political Space in Nwapa, Sutherland and Aidoo". Ada Uzoamaka Azodo & Gay Wilentz (Eds.). *Emerging Perspectives on Ama Ata Aidoo*. Trenton (N.J.): Africa World Press, 1999, p. 276.

husband. In contrast, Esi has a totally different view of herself and about her relationship with both her former husband, Oko, and her lover, Ali.

This is clearly shown by her reaction when she has been subjected to what she qualifies as "a marital rape". From the very beginning of the novel, Esi is presented as a beautiful, young, independent, ambitious woman. Before Oko, her former schoolmaster husband, she is the one who holds power in their couple. In the meantime, Oko positions himself as a headmaster, and Esi a schoolgirl as it is the only safe position for him while his authority and stature are not threatened. When Esi is confronted to a situation in which her husband exercises physical, sexual power over her body, she feels assaulted and violated. In this connection, Michel Foucault argues:

What defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions: An action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or in the future. A relationship of violence acts upon a body or upon things; it forces, it bends, it breaks on the wheel, it destroys, or it closes the door on all possibilities.<sup>138</sup>

Actually, Esi has been internalizing and accumulating a lot of tension because of a demanding husband. The marital rape to which she is subjected is the turning point for her marriage, for her life, for her emotions. This "assault to her body"<sup>139</sup> leads her to ask for a divorce. However, the dilemma to which African, Ghanaian women like Esi are subjected to, is that such a notion as marital rape is not viable. Marital rape in the African cultural context is not considered as rape. There is actually no word, no concept in African society that refers to marital rape since sex is something that a husband claims from his wife as a right. "[W]ithin [Esi's] cultural context, what happened between her and her husband is not considered rape. The sexual division

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<sup>138</sup> Michel Foucault. "The Subject and Power". *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 8, N° 4, Summer 1982, p. 789.

<sup>139</sup> Juliana Nfah Abbyeni. *Gender in African Women's Writing: Identity, Sexuality and Difference*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997, p. 53.

of labour assigns her body, all of it, to her husband as a right."<sup>140</sup> In fact, women in such a cultural context as Africa cannot claim or protest if they are subject to a marital rape because their bodies are their husbands' properties. Besides, there is "an age-old tradition that silences women's feelings about their own bodies".<sup>141</sup> Women are not allowed to express openly and freely how they feel about their bodies and their sexuality because they are silenced and socialized within that silence, within patriarchy.

An articulation of the concept of 'marital rape' is critical to the conscious development of African feminism, as it allows for a woman's realization of her rightful ownership of her body under any circumstances. Yet it is also problematic in the light of postcolonial Africa's desire to rid the continent of Western ideas imposed during the lengthy colonial occupation.<sup>142</sup>

Caught for a while in this dilemma, Esi tries to find an African definition to this Western concept of "marital rape". "Still Esi feels soiled, and Europe has nothing to do with it."<sup>143</sup> After the "assault" on her body, which is the last manifestation of the deteriorating relationship between Esi and Oko, and after the divorce, Esi decides to leave her daughter, with Oko's mother. Ogyaanowa, Esi's and Oko's daughter is left with Oko's mother. She lives in an "unhappy isolation".<sup>144</sup> She suffers from pain and confusion witnessing her parents' quarrels. Ogyaanowa, a combination of two "Twi" words which mean "something left behind, something originating elsewhere", appears as a problem for Esi who does not "provide her with the resources – emotional, psychological, and social – that human beings need in order to be genuinely 'cared for'".<sup>145</sup> She is the most victimised character in the novel because she suffers without being able to articulate her sufferings.

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<sup>140</sup> Juliana Nfah Abbyeni. Op. Cit. p. 53.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. p. 54.

<sup>142</sup> Nada Elia. Op. Cit. p. 141.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid. p. 142.

<sup>144</sup> Donald R. Wehrs. *African Feminist Fiction and Indigeneous Values*. Florida: The University Press of Florida, 1995, p. 9.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. pp. 8-9.

All along these steps, Esi regularly informs her mother and grandmother of her "marital rape", which her mother and grandmother cannot understand as a problem, her divorce, her remarriage and its deterioration. Actually, the conflict of behaviour and identity arises when Esi goes back to her mother's village to consult her grandmother. The view displayed by Nana clashes with Esi's view point because of her education. As can be quoted, "But Esi tell me, doesn't a woman's time belong to a man? (...) who is a good man if not the one that eats his wife completely, and pushes her down with a good gulp of alcohol?" (*Changes*, p.109) The grandmother offers a view of a woman who is always "subaltern", who is a possession of a man. Actually, Nana views marriage as "a funeral of the self that could have been" (*Changes*, p.110) The latter is the only statement Esi tries to re-write according to her needs and personal view point of what a man/woman relationship should be, a fact that leads her to enter into a polygamous marriage. However, the view displayed by Esi's mother and grandmother is not a view of socialized women or ignorant, submissive, unchanged ones. Their view is the one of experienced women who have learnt to adapt to their environment, who negotiate with the patriarchal system because they have no other options, unlike Esi who has a career and financial resources. They offer a generation-based commentary on Esi's situation and women's circumstances in Africa, noticing that education has changed nothing to the condition of African women.

They [the mothers] are not presented as outdated and out of touch with the possibilities of the modern urban women but neither is the contribution idealized. They are simply seen as women who have learned to survive and their wisdom is presented as the successful strategies for survival of the powerless. Their strength lies in their resignation and their power in their cynicism that makes it possible for them to pay lip service to high ideals while gaining what they may from any form of double morality and duplicity.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Maria Olausson. Op. Cit. p. 65.

Miriam Gyiamah contends that through *Changes*, Aidoo "writes and theorises"<sup>147</sup> through Nana's discussion about male Manichaeism and issues of "power and dominance as related to local and global politics." Most importantly, "with Nana's words, it becomes evident that the theoretical concepts of Western philosophers such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan are neither new nor are they abstract." Just as academics talk about power, "does Nana to her granddaughter within the home space for domestic applications,"<sup>148</sup> thus, enabling Aidoo to deconstruct Western theories through Nana's dialogic consciousness. Aidoo does not present an out dated, illiterate old woman, but rather, a woman who knows how to adapt her tradition to her condition.

Tradition is not static, neither it is necessary an enemy. Tradition is mutable, is in flux, just like their identities and it is their (gendered) duty as well as to participate in changing faces of tradition in modern Africa. Similarly, modernity is disabling but it can also be en-abling, it can prove to be a valuable ally in this daunting enterprise.<sup>149</sup>

In this perspective, Esi tries to redefine some of the traditional notions. Actually, the significance of reinterpretation is emphasized in Esi's choice to bear one child and her choice to enter into a polygamous marriage.

First, Esi's choice to bear one child is a reflection of her Western education, her desire to keep her job and be successful professionally. She uses contraception revealing symbolically her Western inspired desire as well as strategies for emancipation and independence as well as a refusal of the institution of motherhood as the element that defines female identity. Esi's choice to bear one child in a society where boys are preferred and valued over girls leads her to be oppressed for her ability to make choices about child bearing. Esi asserts her female body by rejecting

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<sup>147</sup> Miriam C. Gyiamah. "Sexual Politics and Phallogocentric Gaze in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*". Ada Azodo & Gay Wilentz (Eds.). *Emerging Perspectives on Ama Ata Aidoo*. Trenton (N.J.): Africa World Press, 1999, p. 380.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid. p. 381.

<sup>149</sup> Juliana Nfah Abbyeni. "Flabberwhelmed or Turning History on its Head? The Postcolonial Woman – as - Subject in Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*". Ada Azodo & Gay Wilentz (Eds.). *Emerging Perspectives on Ama Ata Aidoo*. Trenton (N.J.): Africa World Press, 1999, p. 298.

the reproductive scenario. She lives Ogyaanowa with her paternal grandmother, rejecting her role as a mother, because her daughter is a constraint for her free and independent life. However, Esi's in-laws are against this personal choice of not bearing more than one child, especially a girl. Consequently, Esi is constantly assaulted by her mother-in-law who calls her a "witch", connecting thus her ability to make choices of witchcraft.

Second, Esi's choice to remain single after divorcing Oko and then to enter into a polygamous marriage, raises many controversies in her mother and grandmother. In fact, Esi's choice falls first on singlehood and then on Ali. As a single woman, and not respected as such in her African context, Esi runs the risk of shame and loneliness. Therefore, marrying Ali, a married man with children, has a double function for Esi. She is now a married woman, no longer single in an African environment that is hostile vis-à-vis single women; and her husband, Ali, is not too demanding because he has already a "home", a life with Fusena and their children.

Through this affair, we see in Esi a ground breaking character in African fiction, the mature woman who freely enjoys her sensuality, with none of the social pressures to bear children. (...) Now, she can delight in her youthful body and carefree passionate lovemaking (...) [which] provide a refreshing breeze in an otherwise choking atmosphere of frustrations and inhibitions.<sup>150</sup>

Nevertheless, Esi chooses this lifestyle only because she is educated, financially independent and able to support herself; until she meets Ali Kondey, a Muslim, a handsome and rich womaniser, and a married man. She takes him first as a lover, with whom she is sexually satisfied and towards whom she has no marital obligations. Then she accepts marrying him; she accepts to enter into a polygamous marriage; she accepts to be second wife because he is not a demanding man, "and [is] very attached in his own patriarchal way, to his wife and children."<sup>151</sup> Thinking that "monogamy is so stifling" (*Changes*, p. 98), Esi thinks that being second wife is suitable for her career.

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<sup>150</sup> Maria Olausen. Op. Cit. p. 139.

<sup>151</sup> Nada Elia. Op. Cit. p. 139.

By proposing to Esi to marry him by offering her a ring, Aidoo uses the metaphor of an "occupied territory" (*Changes*, p. 91). Ali's decision to make Esi an "occupied territory", so that no other man will cast an eye on her, parallels with Oko wanting to place himself as a headmaster, giving both safe positions. Again, Nana both affirms and subverts this metaphor; she offers theoretical concepts in which sexual politics always indicates the domination of one group over another. Her discourse is complex; however, there is no ambiguity about her vision of matters, especially in her disapproval of Esi's and Ali's marriage. Nana's double-voiced narrative lies on the duality of the personal and the political which are both marked by failure. Her discourse is consistent with the Akan morality whereby the constraint and the value of social containment of desire is exposed. However, Nana's discourse is cynical, rather than subversive, in relation to Akan morality, when she states that "each time she gave birth, she died a little". (*Changes*, p.109), whereas the Akan morality states that if one refuses to give birth, if one refuses to die a little by having children, the community will die completely. Thus, women are sacrifices so that communities can survive, prosper; an idea which Esi opposes by refusing to have more than one child.

In sum, this modern woman redefines and adapts this traditional notion of polygamy to her necessities, circumstance, needs and desire for this new, modern situation. However, for polygamy to work, love should be given up to co-wives' alliance, to this community of women who should band together in order to survive in a polygamous marriage, and give up all their feelings of love, possessiveness, and jealousy that we find in a monogamous marriage. Tradition can be seen as a way of protecting women. By becoming allies, friends, sisters, the wives in a compound of a polygamous marriage can work together in order to survive. This is what her mother and grandmother warn her against; these are the very rules of a polygamous marriage. Esi's grandmother says: "the last man any woman should think of marrying is the man she loves." (*Changes*, p. 42), and adds: "that is why we do the serious business with our heads, and never our hearts." (*Changes*, p. 79). Thus, Esi's

grandmother does not stop the marriage, nor condemns the institution of polygamy, rather, she condemns

the potentially patriarchal Western institution of romantic heterosexual love. Through the grandmother, Aidoo argues that a traditional, Akan, matrilinear woman views this relationship as doomed (because of the presence of the element of love), independently of the influence of Western feminism (which predicates love as a sine qua non of happy matrimony).<sup>152</sup>

Esi neither fits into the traditional conventions of polygamy, living thus with Ali's first wife in a compound, nor knows about the traditions going with this practice. Esi does not even know Fusena, Ali's first wife whom she considers as an "Other".

Without a doubt, Esi brings to the fore a new notion of polygamy, a modern version of polygamy. At first, Esi is quite happy with this polygamous marriage, because it leaves her free to concentrate on her career. However, Esi soon has a nervous breakdown because she feels lonely and abandoned by Ali who is with her only for sexual relationships or for material compensations for his long absences. Her tears contrasts with Marija's one;

[t]he distinction underscores the Bird of the Wayside's view that 'Loneliness' in the social context of contemporary Europe is both physically and emotionally isolating, while in neocolonial state like Ghana, loneliness, like marriage itself, is ultimately a communal affair – isolation is almost impossible.<sup>153</sup>

By due process, she tries to redefine their relationship by drifting apart as wife and husband and remaining as lovers. Consequently, by remaining alone and not adhering to the laws governing polygamy in a traditional compound and by adapting her lifestyle to her environment, the city of Accra, and though to her education guarantees her financial independence, Esi fails in her polygamous marriage. In fact, this is not particular to Esi; it is not only a personal dilemma but a condition of contemporary life of educated women in contemporary post-colonial contexts where

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<sup>152</sup> Nada Elia. Op. Cit. p. 139.

<sup>153</sup> Vincent Odamtten. Op. Cit. p. 171.

many traditional features have been suspended but not yet replaced with appropriate ones which could fit with the new Ghanaian context, especially in the city.

The city opens up possibilities for women to create new arrangements and to challenge male authority. For the majority of women, however, the lack of established structures often means increased financial responsibility without clear ideas of where conjugal or lineage support is due. (...). By describing city life from a woman's point of view, *Changes* moves into this territory claiming subjectivity for women. The creation of a female subject inevitably brings about confrontations with the female ghosts of the male literary tradition – those female characters who already inhabit the city. This project also entails a rewriting of the rural-urban opposition and constitutes a challenge to the idea of the village as the proper place for women as well as the idea of village women as fundamentally unchanging and traditional.<sup>154</sup>

In proverbial language, Esi's mother and grandmother exchange view points about her; a discussion to which Esi has no access because she no longer belongs to the traditional stratum. Therefore, "the Bird of the Wayside" comes to ask a series of questions which are at the heart of her dilemma.

Why had they sent her to school?  
What had they hoped to gain from it?  
What had they hoped she would gain from it?  
Who had designed the educational system that had produced her sort?  
And conclude that  
all this was too high a price to pay  
to achieve the dangerous confusion she was  
now in and the country was now in. (*Changes*, p.114)

Esi as well as the reader recognize that these questions are "serious, personal, and not so personal questions" (*Changes*, p.115). Therefore, Esi's mother and grandmother are brought to question her education and whether it makes any difference for a woman. Education for a woman in the African postcolonial context can be considered as either a handicap or a strength: a handicap, because education prompts women to adopt Western lifestyles, leading them to neglect their extended families, tradition, their husbands and even their children; a strength because it is

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<sup>154</sup> Maria Olausson. Op. Cit. p. 66.

thanks to her education that Esi has a job, is financially independent and able to choose her lifestyle. Thanks to her education, Esi is capable of constantly redefining herself, her identity and locating herself in an ever changing social order. She "has been an agent of her own destruction, self-reconstruction, and self-determination. She makes many mistakes, but eventually, she redefines herself in the context of her society's relations of gender." <sup>155</sup>

The relationship between Esi and the other women is noteworthy. Aidoo focuses on the friendship between Esi and Opokuya. The emphasis is not so much on their lives and love stories as it is on their mutual understanding. Even if less developed by Aidoo, Fusena is also important for Aidoo's evocation of various aspects of African women's lives. Each of the three women manifests a different stage of feminist consciousness. Even if they represent middle-class, educated women, Aidoo does not homogenize them.

Opokuya, Esi's best friend, is another type of modern African women. Even if she does not understand why Esi complains of her "too loving" husband, she nonetheless envies her for her independence and freedom of movement. Opokuya is a woman who combines her job as a midwife, a time-consuming job, with her duties as wife and mother of four children. Being of the maternal and nurturing type, Opokuya slaves for her children and husband Kubi. None of them ever offers any help or shares in the household chores. However, Opokuya manages her conventional ideas about marriage, family responsibilities and that of a working independent woman, without being totally free, only for her choice to get her tubes tied after having four children. Once Ali gives a new car to Esi as a gift, Opokuya realizes that she envies Esi's freedom. When comparing Esi and Opokuya, we notice that they have two different personalities, different positions which make them use different strategies to adapt to their lifestyles.

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<sup>155</sup> Juliana Nfah Abbyeni. *Gender in African Women's Writing: Identity, Sexuality and Difference*. Op. Cit. p. 60.

Fusena, Ali's first wife, also accepts family responsibilities and her duty as a respectable Northern wife despite her education. She is depicted as a betrayed woman who has given up her higher education to have children and has never resumed her teaching career, because Ali's opposition and his belief that bringing up and nurturing children is much more important. When Ali tells her about his second marriage with Esi, Fusena can but continue on the trail of self-sacrifice. At no point, Fusena casts a self-negating look at her body, but rather asks herself about whether Esi has a University degree. Both in her private thoughts and her conversations with Ali, education is foremost in Fusena's mind. "Fusena is depicted as weary of the life she leads, and correct in locating the object of her anger – patriarchy, not its victim."<sup>156</sup> Fusena can do nothing about her situation. Even if she is financially successful and independent, she is trapped within her family obligations, trapped in her marriage and her traditional role as a mother and a wife. Fusena is "isolated in the traditional patriarchal structure, where a woman is a man's appendage"<sup>157</sup>, since she goes to see, complain, and weep to Ali's family rather than going to see her own family or a friend. When she is informed about Ali's plans by the women of his family, Fusena says nothing but "yes" (*Changes*, p. 107). This reveals "Fusena's defeatist attitude (...) summarized in her fatalism [and] (...) such total surrender cannot help the oppressed."<sup>158</sup> Ali's family, and more specifically, women, provide another generational commentary when coming to inform Fusena about Ali's plans. As Esi's mother and grandmother, Fusena's in-laws depict a lack of change for their daughters despite their education.

Therefore, one can say that the divergence in viewpoints within the ever changing Ghanaian society and individual needs presented by Aidoo is even present within people of the same generation. The three women characters depicted reveal Aidoo's realistic approach to women's condition in Ghana. All these characters

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<sup>156</sup> Nada Elia. Op. Cit. p. 143.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. p. 144.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid. p. 144.

represent the different strategies in operation for the sake of survival in an everlasting social order, as Aidoo intimates:

If one refuses to survive, if one refuses to 'manage', one has given in to despair. And I don't think anybody has a right to despair, because it is not possible for anyone person to have all the variables to give an answer to a particular situation. So we do the best we can and move on from day to day<sup>159</sup>

For Opokuya, it is a matter of negotiating housework, family responsibilities, a selfish husband and a job as a midwife. For Fusena, it is a matter of giving up her own ambitions and abilities to conform to the respected model of a good Northern woman, despite her education. Finally, for Esi, it is a matter of a need for self-realization which she mixes with, and mistakes for romantic love. Aidoo comments on Esi and the changes she incarnates in this character as follows:

I was trying to see how one young woman or one woman perceived herself in a non-stable environment. (...). I called the book *Changes* because I see primarily a character like Esi, the protagonist as being part of those who are trying to define, or even redefine woman as a lover, as a wife, as a mother, as a daughter, even as a granddaughter.<sup>160</sup> (...)  
[W]hen people say, "but Esi doesn't end up anywhere", I say, "but she has done part of the journey". And for me the willingness to even put her emotions out there, her mind, her desires, is in itself a good thing, a positive thing.<sup>161</sup>

In sum, all these characters face dilemmas that can be seen as personal problems but which have social dimensions. Even if Esi's character may stand for individual failure occasioned by cultural resistance to change, especially regarding women, one can say that Esi's character stands for challenge and resistance. Most importantly, Aidoo ends the novel with a note of hope; Esi prefers to preserve her friendship with Opokuya rather than going on a sexual relationship with Kubi, Opokuya's husband.

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<sup>159</sup> Adeola James (Ed.). *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk*. London, Portsmouth: James Currey, Heinemann, 1990, p. 10.

<sup>160</sup> Ada Azodo. "Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo: Facing the Millennium". Op. Cit. pp. 4-5.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid. p. 9.

Opokuya and Esi can conflate the personal and the political, a major achievement in feminist consciousness. And through this coming together of the articulate career women and the seasoned personal care-giver, we see the germs of a broader female bonding that may soon bring about the much-needed, long-overdue changes.<sup>162</sup>

Aidoo's women characters cross geographical, social, cultural and emotional boundaries and "dare to step over patriarchal borderlines, (...) violate traditional discourses on the cult of marriage and motherhood (...) [and] dramatize their vulnerability and (...) subjugation to African tradition."<sup>163</sup> From the title of the novel, Aidoo marks a "laconic reserve"<sup>164</sup>, since Esi chooses the changes when she allows a love story to change her life.

## 2) Women's Role and Status

Simultaneously, Aidoo is concerned with African people at large and more precisely with the fate and the challenging positions that African women can undertake. She is definitely committed, in her own way, to the development and the contemporary roles of African women as she perceives them operating in their daily lives.

Feminism is also about women being politically conscious and taking on significant roles in the politics of the day. (...). Although reticent about prescribing modes of behaviour and thought for modern women, she has nonetheless experimented with suggesting new options for women, like a loose association with men for the career woman following the example of Esi Sekyi in *Changes*.<sup>165</sup>

Being a woman writer, Aidoo asserts that "a woman writer should approach issues from her position in life, in society, in history as a *woman*"<sup>166</sup>. She states that

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<sup>162</sup> Nada Elia. Op. Cit. p. 146.

<sup>163</sup> Maria Frias. "An Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo: I Learnt my First Feminist Lessons in Africa". *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses*. N° 16, November 2003, p. 13.

<sup>164</sup> Donald R. Wehrs. *African Feminist Fiction and Indigenous Values*. Florida: The University Press of Florida, 1995, p. 1.

<sup>165</sup> Ada Azodo. "The Multifaceted Aidoo: Ideologue, Scholar, Writer, and Woman". Op. Cit. p.423.

<sup>166</sup> Adeola James. Op. Cit. p. 12.

Africa has been “every one’s football for more than five hundred years”<sup>167</sup> and Africans have been degraded by Westerners by all means possible and imaginable. Meanwhile, “since women everywhere at all times have been mercilessly used and abused, [one] can then imagine what it has been like, to be an African woman.”<sup>168</sup> Aidoo contends that the position of women cannot be separated from all that happened in Africa during the slave trade, during colonialism and nowadays this continent continues to suffer from imperialistic mentalities.

Aidoo’s view of women is faithful to the image of women as she sees them around her, “strong women who are viable in their own right.”<sup>169</sup> She argues that the force of women relies on their number, on their unity and capacity to handle women’s problems; a path towards resolving some of Africa’s problems. However, this view point is not shared by her male compatriots. She states that:

Our brothers feel [resentment] about any discussion on women because they feel it diverts from the ‘main issues’. On the contrary, [Aidoo] feel[s] the revolutionizing of our continent hinges on the woman question. It might be the catalyst for development. But people feel very nervous about it.<sup>170</sup>

Again, Aidoo believes that women working with other women can help to resolve some of Africa’s problems as well as the debates concerning development.

Moreover, she rejects victimization as she refuses to see her characters as victims. Her vision of her characters is very particular; she prevents her female characters from victimization. Esi is presented as a foolish woman rather than a victim. Aidoo states that only Anowa (in *Anowa*) is victimized but refuses to be a victim by committing suicide after being confronted with despair.

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<sup>167</sup> Ama Ata Aidoo. “To Be an African Woman Writer– An Overview and a Detail”. In Kirsten Holst Petersen (Ed.). *Criticism and Ideology: Second African Writers’ Conference, Stockholm 1986*. Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1988, p. 157.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid. p. 157.

<sup>169</sup> Adeola James. Op. Cit. p. 12.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. p. 26.

Furthermore, Aidoo correlates redefined traditional customs and modern lifestyles through a collective process encompassed in the relationship of daughter, mother and grandmother. "In *Changes*, Aidoo presents a different picture of African women's political domain, which resists the reconciliation between generations seen in Aidoo's earliest works."<sup>171</sup> In fact, Aidoo portrays both old and young female characters. The young ones stand for modernity and the old ones as a changed generation, not clinging to old customs as we can see in other writers' works. Rather, even old women have indeed endorsed a kind of change, an adaptation to the new Ghanaian realities and needs. However, even if both generations endorsed change, the generational continuity is still interrupted. "The act of transmission of generational continuity (...) through the 'changes' intimated in Aidoo's title, a larger challenge to questions of generational continuity, and women's political domain in a so-called 'liberated' environment."<sup>172</sup>

Obviously, Aidoo deals not only with the role of young female characters but also with the new role of the grandmother in the changing society, a revolutionary vision. This new role is tied with people's will about whether or not to keep the traditional roles of the grandmother, let them disintegrate or simply adapt them to the necessities of the present days. She argues that:

there is no replacement (...). I think that we are looking at a society which, by and large, has been in a process of collapse and disintegration, as a result of colonial intervention for some time. (...). But you see, I think that societies, even our own, are dynamic in their own way. And it is quite possible that not all the changes are going to be negative. I suspect the grandparents would be there. They may not fulfill the same roles in our lives as they've done. But the choice is ours entirely to make, whether we let the present process, which more or less sidelines grandmothers, continue or whether we do something to stop this disintegration (...). [T]he kind of energy we need to intervene in the disintegration of the role of the grandmother as we know it is the same kind of energy we need to recognize other areas in our life.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Gay Wilentz. "African Women's Domain: Demarcating Political Space in Nwapa, Sutherland and Aidoo". Ada Uzoamaka Azodo & Gay Wilentz (Eds.). *Emerging Perspectives on Ama Ata Aidoo*. Trenton (N.J.): Africa World Press, 1999, p. 271.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid. 270-271.

<sup>173</sup> Ada Azodo. "Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo: Facing the Millennium". Op. Cit. pp. 3-4.

In addition, Aidoo's female characters are challenging agents in the development of their country as well as their role in the political domain, i.e. power relationships, in the post-colonial African context.

Aidoo challenges the continual loss of women's public space through the personal act of love and the community act of marriage, certainly she once again compels us to see exactly how the political is personal within an African context.<sup>174</sup>

Women thus become central agents in Africa's reconstruction as well as in the process of freeing Africa from Imperialism. Women's role is also centred on education as a tool to unite traditional customs and modernization through a collective process. Women are thus the connectors between past and future generations. Therefore, one can side with Susan Gardner's view that *Changes* "portrays the way race, nation, culture, class and gender crisscross and clash, and [her] protagonist's evolution embodies a feminism capable of transcending both Eurocentric appropriations and sexist attacks on their works."<sup>175</sup>

Indeed, Aidoo is one of those writers who have remained true to their political ideals and commitments. Even *Changes*, which seemingly deals with a "love story", moves from its surface level of understanding. In this novel, Aidoo makes a parable, i.e. teaches a lesson, about the human nature and relationships as well as the interplay between tradition, modernity and social change. Aidoo considers that this novel moves from its love dimension, an 'a priori' personal matter, to another level which is political. She treats the private concerns of her protagonist within a broadly public, political framework. Aidoo considers the statement she made in 1967 in which she declared that she could not see herself speaking about lovers in Accra because there are so many other problems to deal with.

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<sup>174</sup> Gay Wilentz. "African Women's Domain: Demarcating Political Space in Nwapa, Sutherland and Aidoo". Op. Cit. p. 275.

<sup>175</sup> Susan Gardner. "Culture Clashes: Women's Review of Books. *Changes: A Love Story* by Ama Ata Aidoo". *Women's Review of Books*. Vol. 12, N°2, Nov. 1993, p. 8.

Aidoo portrays love as not only personal, sensual and sexual, but also as something that is political, that moves beyond personal, individualistic experience. Love is shown to depend on a more familial, collective, cultural context, governed by customs and traditions that are therefore beyond any individual's control.<sup>176</sup>

She argues all issues in society are interrelated, thus involving the personal and the political. She states that "(t)he workings of love are also political. Even when it is a so-called a-political treatment of love, if there is a-political of anything, it is very important that one explores the nature of human relationships, including sexual relationships."<sup>177</sup> In this perspective, in his discussion of Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, a book that attracted many feminist theorists who depicted Michel Foucault's work as setting against feminists' claims, Shane Phelan tries to revalue Foucault within the feminist discussions and concerns. He asserts that:

(...) sex is a product, the sign of particular organization of the (personal and political) body. (...). Modern economies required, on the one hand, increasing discipline of bodies and, on the other, the regulation and management of populations so that they might be properly productive. Sex became the locus of the production of subjects in the dual senses of this term. Thus, sex became a political issue.<sup>178</sup>

In the meantime, Aidoo's second novel, *Changes* (1991), published fourteen years after *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977) displays a different viewpoint about women. If the first novel is highly polemical, the second is softer in terms of handling the issues that Africa and people witness. As the title intimates, changes have occurred in the Ghanaian society as well as in its people's behaviour. The change also occurs in "women's political domain"<sup>179</sup>, as well as in Aidoo's handling of women's issues especially the difficulty of reconciling a family life and a career as well as the clash

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<sup>176</sup> Juliana Nfah Abbyeni. *Gender in African Women's Writing: Identity, Sexuality and Difference*. Op. Cit. pp. 57-58.

<sup>177</sup> Adeola James. Op. Cit. p. 14.

<sup>178</sup> Shane Phelan. "Foucault and Feminism". *American Journal of Political Science*. Vol. 34, N° 2, May 1990, pp. 426.

<sup>179</sup> This expression is used by Gay Wilentz to make reference to women's public role and power relationships.

between old and young generations on issues like education, polygamy and women status. In fact, Education has led women to have a different insight about their lives. Therefore, one can say that the change is not only personal but also cultural and societal. Thus, the relationship between the characters of the novel is politicized.

Feminists regard change as a process that takes place on several levels: the personal, the group or organizational, and the level of social institutions. Political change, then, involves redefining the self, building different kinds of political organizations, gaining economic power for women, and most important, a sense of how each of these arenas for change relates to the interlocking structures of patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism.<sup>180</sup>

Esi, the protagonist of *Changes*, accepts to be involved in a polygamous marriage; she accepts to be a second wife while she was first in her first marriage. As her grandmother observes, it seems that her education has not served her to have a good command of her life. However, Esi's acceptance of a polygamous marriage is due to many reasons. First, she has a man-friend with whom she gets sexual pleasure and thinks she has fallen in love. Through Aidoo's portrayal of Esi as being a sexually fulfilled woman, Aidoo subverts traditional texts that present "male and female sexuality [as being] asymmetrical."<sup>181</sup> Then, she is second wife; therefore, she enjoys plenty of free time to devote to her job, to her career. Finally, even if she is financially secure, Ali offers her gifts coming from all over the world to compensate for his absences, a matter that pleases Esi. However, "the rape is important, but it should not be confused with the narrative's central concerns; it is a symptom of much more fundamental personal, social, and political dislocations."<sup>182</sup>

Furthermore, in one of her interviews about *Changes*, Aidoo confesses that the story is not only personal but political. In this novel, "we are allowed to forget neither the personal in the political nor the political in the personal decisions of each

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<sup>180</sup> Nancy C.M. Hartsock. *The Feminist Standpoint Revisited and Other Essays*. Boulder (Colorado, USA): Westview Press, 1998, p. 18.

<sup>181</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York, London: Routledge, 1988, p. 151.

<sup>182</sup> Vincent Odamtten. Op. Cit. p. 165.

of the characters.”<sup>183</sup> This refers us back to an essay entitled “The Personal Is Political” by Carol Hanisch, published in 1969.

Carol Hanisch is an American feminist who was a member of The Women’s Liberation Movement in the United State during Second Wave of Feminism. She wrote this essay as a response to those feminist groups who suggested that "the personal" or "the therapy" as something negative in The Women’s Liberation Movement, as if this therapy is a cure for an illness. She suggested that “we need to change the objective conditions, not adjust to them. Therapy is adjusting to your bad personal alternative.”<sup>184</sup>

Aidoo seems to explore this idea of not adjusting to a custom or to a tradition and in the case of Esi, of ignoring the rules of polygamy. Esi is involved in a polygamous marriage without even knowing her husband’s first wife, Fusena. Her mother and grandmother reinforce this idea by pointing out the fact that if a woman wants to succeed in a polygamous marriage, she must not ignore its rules. Esi is definitely looking to the "objective conditions" that suit her personal desires as a woman by totally ignoring these rules, by totally ignoring the existence of the "Other" side of women's condition, represented by Fusena. Consequently, one can say that Aidoo is definitely not making her protagonist, Esi, adjust to the traditions accompanying polygamy, because adjusting is failing in the development of one’s personality, of your individuality as a woman.

Added to this, Aidoo’s main character is not socialized. Esi does not act the way she does because of some kind of sociological and cultural inheritance. Esi does not accept to enter a polygamous marriage because tradition imposes it. Rather, she does so out of a personal choice, out of what she perceives as love in the first place.

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<sup>183</sup> Vincent Odamtten. Op. Cit. p. 163.

<sup>184</sup> Carol Hanisch. “The Personal Is Political” (Feb. 1969, Introduction: Jan. 2006). *Notes from the Second Year: Women’s Liberation*, 1970, p. 3.

Equally important, as Carol Hanisch explains in her essay, talking about women's personal problems in an analytical way is also a political action because women do not talk about their problems just for the sake of talking as a therapeutical method, but as a way to be stronger, other-oriented, sacrificing and controlling their lives, saying what they really believe about their lives instead of what they have always been told and taught to say.

The practice of small-group consciousness raising, with its stress on examining and understanding experience and on connecting personal experience to the structures that define our lives, is the clearest example of the method basic to feminism. (...). We drew connections between our personal experiences and political generalities about the oppression of women; in fact, we used our personal experience to develop political generalities. We came to understand our experience, our past, in a way that transforms both our experience and ourselves.<sup>185</sup>

Aidoo handles her protagonist in the same perspective. Esi is able to admit and talk about her personal problems with Opokuya, with her mother and grandmother like the marital rape she has been subjected to. This action of "talking" is a kind of therapy which leads us to conclude that Esi is one of the many modern African, Ghanaian women; and her problems are shared by women who resemble her.

Therefore, I would say that these therapies or the therapeutic aspect of all the discussions taking place in the novel between Esi and the other women can be said to be a "political therapy": they strengthen Esi as a woman to go forward and never blame herself for her decisions, only perhaps putting into question the purpose of her education. In brief, these therapies can be seen as "collective actions" that lead to "collective solutions". As Aidoo asserts, "collective problems cannot be solved by individuals."<sup>186</sup>

Last but not least, thanks to this "political therapy", i.e. "collective therapy", thanks to her education which assures her financial independence, Esi is capable of

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<sup>185</sup> Nancy C.M. Hartsock. Op. Cit. p. 35.

<sup>186</sup> Anuradha Dingwaney Needham. "An Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo". *The Massachusetts Review*. Vol. 36, Iss. 1, Amherst: Spring 1995, p. 126.

taking decisions for herself, even if not always the right ones; at all events, she is capable of managing her life. Thus, Aidoo does not propose an alternative lifestyle or a type of a liberated woman, just as Carol Hanisch asserts that “there are only good and bad things about each bad situation; there is no ‘more liberated’ way; there are only bad alternatives.”<sup>187</sup>

In fact, the strength of Esi lies in her capacity to make choices for herself. She is able to draw conclusions and connections from her experiences and move beyond to other horizons and perspectives, just as Carol Hanisch advocates: “we all need to learn how to draw conclusions from the experiences and feelings we talk about and how to draw all kinds of connections.”<sup>188</sup>

We drew connections between personal experience and political generalities about the oppression of women: we took up our experience and transformed it through reflection. This transformation of experience by reflection and the subsequent alterations in women’s lives laid the ground work for the idea that liberation must pervade aspects of life not considered politically important in the past. (...). Stressing the links between the personal and the political led women to conclude that first, a fundamental redefinition of the self was an integral part of action for political change; and second, that the changed consciousness and changed definition of the self could occur only in conjunction with a restructuring of the social relationships in which each person was involved.<sup>189</sup>

On the whole, *Changes* is framed as a love story but goes definitely beyond this theme. The crisis Esi faces is not only a personal crisis, nor women’s crisis only but a crisis of the African individual, of African society. Indeed, it is a social crisis and women’s lives reflect a great variety of personal struggles and domestic negotiations in the context of global forces. As I have noted, it is about the changes in women’s experiences, changes in women’s political domain and power relationships mainly encompassed in Esi’s ability to decide for herself, to make choices, to manage her life as *she* wishes with both its positive and negative aspects. In fact, developing an

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<sup>187</sup> Carol Hanisch. Op. Cit. p. 4.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid. p. 5.

<sup>189</sup> Nancy C.M. Hartsock. Op. Cit. p. 19.

independent sense of the self implies a questioning on how our relations with other people can foster self definition. Equally important, “change in consciousness and in the social relations of the individual is one of the most important components of political change.”<sup>190</sup>

### 3) Belonging and Identity

*Changes* is also a novel that bears many definitions of "home" and "identity". “Aidoo dramatises for the reader the problematic of behaviour and identity in a context of social change where the old uncertainties are no longer reliable guides.”<sup>191</sup> The character whose history most explicitly fills in the outline of that confrontation is Ali Kondey, a Northerner and representative of the new internationalized West African citizen.<sup>192</sup> In fact, Ali’s character focuses on the question of national identity. Ali is from the North, but from which North? Vincent Odamtten draws attention to the intimate and complex relationship between North and South Ghana, in which “no single group of nationalities continues to be exploited as the Northern Ghanaian nationalities.”<sup>193</sup> However, Ali does not apply to this description. Ali Kondey is handsome, rich and has the capabilities to live as he does, thanks to his national transcendence but also because he is a man, a vantage position that is not afforded to any woman in the novel. Besides, he is a member of the Ghanaian élite; he has been educated abroad and follows his father’s path as a businessman by running a travel agency. His father, Musa Musa called Ali Baba, had “a wife in each of his light favourite stops on his trade routes.” (*Changes*, p.22) His grandfather’s, Musa Kondey’s, house was located “on the exact spot where Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Togo met” (*Changes*, p.23); and his father travelled in all these areas leading Ali to assume many nationalities. And there Aidoo asks, “Ali’s country. Which one was that?” (*Changes*, p.22); “Ali was the son of the world.” (*Changes*, p.22)

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<sup>190</sup> Nancy C.M. Hartsock. Op. Cit pp. 18-19.

<sup>191</sup> Jane Bryce. “Going Home is Another Story: Constructions of Nation and Gender in Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Changes*”. *West Africa Review*. Vol. 1, N° 1, 1999, p. 4.

<sup>192</sup> Vincent Odamtten. Op. Cit. p. 166.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.* p. 83.

Ali collects countries just as he collects wives. His job is very significant; he runs a travel agency which is just a modern version of the trade his father undertook. Therefore, Ali has no national boundary to stick to; he has no restrictions; he is free to choose where to live and with whom to live.

We learn much in this brief span of print. First, we understand some facts of Ali's upbringing – that he is the product of a polygamous marriage; that he has not just one, but several mothers; that he has, from infancy, a certain stubborn nature, that he's destined to be not just of the village, but of the world.<sup>194</sup>

Aidoo is thus putting into question the idea of national restriction; Ali is the only character who is not compelled to negotiate this way to survive in that social change; he differs then from Oko, Esi's first husband, who has to manage between his family, his wife and her unavailability and from Kubi, Opokuya's husband, who maintains his household by trying to maintain a patriarchal family type but fails to do because of Opokuya's rebellious temperament. Thanks to Ali's character, Aidoo questions the idea of nation, ethnic affiliation, identity tied to place, home, country and exile, so that her novel conjures up the old pan-Africanist ideal.

Ali approaches these nations as pieces of land and cultures that he can easily grant himself. In so doing, he plays the role of the colonizer who effortlessly lands in indigenous nations and claims them as his own. Ali's colonization does not end in Africa but extends to European countries. A wealthy and elite African neo-colonial, he frequently travels around the world. (...). Keeping to his role as colonizer, Ali easily claims the bodies of black women. The novel begins with Ali having one wife and, in the end, he manages to acquire another wife and a concubine, three women in all. (...). Ali's relationship with these women [Fusena, Esi and his secretary] requires that he be the dominant party and they, the subordinate. It mirrors the relationship of the coloniser and the colonised.<sup>195</sup>

Ali benefits from his heritage, from religion and tradition and put them into practice according to his desires. Additionally, Ali is rich; he can afford to have whatever he

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<sup>194</sup> Susan Gardner. Op. Cit. p. 4-5.

<sup>195</sup> Miriam C. Gyiamah. "The Quest for Power and Manhood: Three (Neo)Colonial Male Characters of Ama Ata Aidoo". Charles Smith (Ed.). *Journal of African Literature and Culture*. JALC 3. 2006, p. 64-65-67.

wants and any woman he desires, thanks to his material ease. He thus offers Esi an expensive car to compensate for his absence. "Cars" in the novel are symbols of material comfort, wealth, and attachment to rich men. They are very significant in the relationships between men and women.

The immense importance of cars for women in tales of urban adultery is naturally linked to the problems of public transport in African cities. Access to cars for women in most cases indicates a connection to a wealthy man, whereas for men, ownership of expensive, new cars equals access to attractive and sophisticated young women. Sexuality and mobility are thus connected: the men in control of the cars are usually also the ones who control the women's sexuality. (...). Ali is described as reflecting on the condition of Esi's car after their first encounter, an indication that although she is mobile, thus able to move away from her husband and take control of her own sexuality, this mobility is still limited, something expressed by the dilapidated condition of her car.<sup>196</sup>

Opokuya and her husband always debate about who will take the family car. This leads Opokuya to acquire Esi's old car for her freedom in mobility, for her independence. Thus, the "car" symbol is very significant for African women because it partly contributes to their independence.

Besides, the notion of "home" is tied to the woman who has given up her career to run a house, a home. Fusena has given Ali boys and adhered to his wishes of a husband, of a man, whereas Esi lives in her house; she does not give him children nor has she given up her career for him. Therefore, Ali's home is that of Fusena. When he mentions "his home", "my home", "home", he makes reference to his home with Fusena. Ali's "wives are kept apart, each in her own geographical location, something that reinforces the definition of womanhood as identified with place and masculinity with traversing or conquering the place."<sup>197</sup> Esi is isolated because she lives in her own house. There is a redefinition of the notion of "home" since "home" refers to the family's house. Ali's notion of "home" is tied with the woman who has given up her individuality for her husband and who has given him boys, his first wife.

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<sup>196</sup> Maria Olausson. Op. Cit. p. 67.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid. p. 66.

To conclude, one can say that Aidoo has surpassed the narrow, nationalistic focus of her male counterparts. By depicting dysfunctional marriages, due to the displacement of "home", and by analysing it in relation to female subjectivity, Aidoo makes of nationalism, identity, men/women relationships interact to create a complex web of relations, leading to multiple levels of understanding and several ways of interpreting home and identity.

# Chapter IV

Aidoo's "Write Back" Style

- 1) The Traditional Influence of Storytelling
- 2) The Epistolary "Love Letter" and the Seeming "Love Story"

## 1) The Traditional Influence of Storytelling

Aidoo combines two different modes of writing, a sort of modernist, iconoclastic composition and a traditional, griot storytelling. In effect, she approaches narration on more social and realistic grounds. This "interest in traditional form translates to a vision of the future of African literature that includes a renewal of the fundamental unity of the vast continuum of verbal discourse."<sup>198</sup> In this connection, Aidoo contends:

I totally disagree with people who feel that oral literature is one stage in the development of man's artistic genius. To me, it is an end in itself (...) We cannot tell our stories may be with the same expertise as our forefathers. But to me, all the art of the speaking voice could be brought back so easily. We are not that far from our traditions. (...) When a writer writes a (...) story, it should be possible for the writer to sit before an audience and tell them the story. (...). We do not always have to write for readers, we can write for listeners.<sup>199</sup>

One of the most important roles perpetuated by men, but also by African women is the art of storytelling. The art of storytelling is an active exchange in which the audience participates with responses and songs and "the traditional communal orientation of the storyteller's art [is] claiming the storyteller's due reward for communal service."<sup>200</sup> As such, one of the most important components of the art of storytelling in Ghanaian society is the Ananse. Ananse is a fictitious character from Akan oral literature who has both human and spider qualities. His behaviour is human but he has the form of a spider and lives in a community of animals. He is considered to be a wise, cunning, mischievous and funny character, but the spider trickster also teaches what one should not do when he is motivated by greed and takes

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<sup>198</sup> Killam Douglas & Ruth Rowe (Eds.). *The Companion to African Literatures*. Oxford, Bloomington, Indianapolis: James Currey, Indiana University Press, 2000, p. 21.

<sup>199</sup> Maxine McGregor-Lautré. "An Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo". Cosmo Pieterse & Dennis Duerden (Eds.). *African Writers Talking*. London, Ibadan, Nairobi: Heinemann, 1992, p. 23-24.

<sup>200</sup> Lloyd Brown. "Ama Ata Aidoo: The Art of the Short Story and Sexual Roles in Africa." *World Literature Written in English*. Vol. 13. N° 2, November 1974, p. 173.

inappropriate advantage on others. Ananse stories are told around the fire to entertain and teach the values of society.

Important sub-genres of the folktale are the trickster and dilemma tales. The trickster is usually an animal with a very highly developed imagination and underdevelopment scruples. The animal differs from one society to another; in Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Sierra Leone, he is the spider, known as Ananse among the Akan of Ghana, while in Benin, Nigeria, and Cameroon, he is the tortoise, the Yoruba Japa and the Kalabari Ikaki for example. Usually male, he is ever seeking advantages for himself over larger and more powerful animals, or busy extricating himself from scrapes his ill-considered antics get him into. Other characteristic traits are greed laziness, selfishness, and noisiness, although occasionally he does employ his wiles to benefit others.<sup>201</sup>

So important is the place of Ananse in Ghana is clearly illustrated in the preface to Efua Sutherland's play *The Marriage on Anansewa*, in which she reflects the popular adage: "exterminate Ananse, and society will be ruined."<sup>202</sup>

Aidoo's works are inspired by this tradition of Anansesem. By using this art of storytelling which implies an exchange between the narrator and his audience, and the participation of the audience with songs and responses, Aidoo makes her protagonists Sissie and Esi become wiser through experience. Sissie is also a kind of protector, who sees everything from a "squint". The killjoy's role is to comment on all that she sees from a distance and to try to reunify African people by the coming home of its intellectuals. Her ironic comments, sometimes sarcastic and virulent have the same characteristics as the ones of Ananse tales, for its didactic content is manifest. However, while the astuteness of the character of the Ananse is quite exaggerated, and laughter is the main purpose of the existence of such a character, the response we display vis-à-vis Sissie's character and vision is not the same but quite the reverse. Unlike the Akan proverb which states that Ananse is an example that one should not follow, Sissie is the very example of the African woman Aidoo tries to suggest not only for women but for Africans at large. Additionally, Aidoo's

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<sup>201</sup> Killam Douglas & Ruth Rowe (Eds.). Op. Cit. p. 203.

<sup>202</sup> Efua Sutherland. *The Marriage of Anansewa and Edufa*. Harlow (Essex): Longman, 1975 and 1987, p. 3.

technique of writing, her social realism and her dealing with issues relating to women, is quite relevant to the "Nnwonkoro", a female Akan verbal genre.

Nnwonkoro used to be an all-female, optional, leisure activity performed in the town square – a large, centrally located, communal area surrounded by the houses of an Akan village – when the day's work was done. Having formed a circle, participants clapped rhythmically as individuals took turns singing solos and were supported by the group in a chorus refrain. The songs commented on many aspects of female and male relationships: love, courtship, marriage, childbirth. There were also songs of gratitude, lamentation, insinuation, and social protest.<sup>203</sup>

This female group activity articulates the views of women or the whole community and treats of issues related to their life experiences and positions in society. These issues change according to their needs, attitudes and concerns just the way Aidoo presents her works and as present feminist do. In this perspective, Aidoo contends:

[s]ome of my style surely comes from my own perceptions of African oral traditions. You incorporate, unconsciously, maybe also sometimes quite deliberately; all the different mnemonic facilities at your disposal so that the readers will see what you write with their mind's eye, they will hear it, they will sometimes even taste it.<sup>204</sup>

Moreover, the role of the storyteller in Africa is of high significance. He is the artist who remembers "the stories, legends, and history of the people and pass them on to later generations in a thinking of oral and cultural continuity." He is thus a "historian-entertainer-teacher."<sup>205</sup> As for Aidoo, "storytelling represents a dynamic process of communication between the teller and the audience vis-à-vis a narrative performance."<sup>206</sup> Her goal is to make the reader as near as possible to the written word, as she employs the prose-poem technique to make us hear the stories of her characters. Aidoo "tells" her stories through writing them making her a "professional,

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<sup>203</sup> Akosua Anyidoho. "Tradition and Innovation in Nnwonkoro, an Akan Female Verbal Genre." *Research in African Literatures*. Vol. 25. N° 3, 1994, p. 142.

<sup>204</sup> Mary Mackay. "Ama Ata Aidoo". *Belles Lettres*. Vol. 9, Iss. 1, Arlington: Fall 1993, pp. 34-35.

<sup>205</sup> Mildred A. Hill-Lubin. "The Storyteller and the Audience in the Works of Ama Ata Aidoo." *Neohelicon*. Vol. 16. N° 2, 1989, p. 221.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.* p. 222.

[a] performer, and [a] psychologist." Her professionalism is shown in her high capacities in creating new forms as well as her mastery of tradition. Her role as a performer involves her capacities in the act of "telling". As a psychologist, and thanks to what have been stated before, she is able to create interaction between her text/story and the audience. Thus, the audience "enjoy (...), participate, and modify"<sup>207</sup> the story and the events as well as the characters involved in the story.

However, unlike the traditional storyteller who tries to preserve his/her local community, Aidoo tries, through her integration of Western and African techniques, to achieve a worldwide community. This modern griot tries to achieve a communal experience. Her ability to mix different genres, to shift from past to present leads her to an easiness to transmit the wisdom of ancestors, and to arrange events in order to attract the audience. Her characters always talk; she presents a voice near to the author's one; she invents other voices to tell the story but never does she use "I". The most important strength in Aidoo's artistry is that she makes her characters develop at the opposite of the storyteller whose characters "remain flat, representing one virtue or vice."<sup>208</sup>

In the meantime, Vincent Odamtten suggests a "polylectic reading" of Aidoo's works. He states that "Aidoo's works demands that the critic not only acknowledges the importance of the underguiding orature but attempt to conjoin that aesthetic to the whole critical enterprise."<sup>209</sup>

Aidoo's works of art are inspired by her cultural background, be it in terms of content or of style. Her fluid and ironic narrational voices and her crisscrossing between genres make her an outstanding figure in African literature. In fact, *Our Sister Killjoy* is the most controversial of her works. Many critics have tried to qualify this novel, thus attributing it many definitions. Thus, Vincent Odamtten asserts that

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<sup>207</sup> Mildred A. Hill-Lubin. Op. Cit. p. 223.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid. p. 226.

<sup>209</sup> Vincent Odamtten. *The Art of Ama Ata Aidoo: Polylectics and Reading Against Neocolonialism*. Florida: University Press of Florida, 1994, p. X.

*Our Sister Killjoy* has been described by many critics as a novel for lack of a better term. He contends that this novel holds many “complexities involved in distinguishing the character of the narrative voice(s), the fusion of prose and poetry and the epistolary “Love Letter” that concludes the work.”<sup>210</sup>

[OSK] utilises the very device of Ghanaian oral literature to suggest that colonialism has fractured African society so severely that art is no longer both 'a form of aesthetic expression and a mode of communication', solidly rooted in 'underlying social, cultural and religious values.'<sup>211</sup>

Aidoo qualifies *Our Sister Killjoy* as a “fiction in four episodes”<sup>212</sup> written in a mixture of prose and poetry. This style is inspired by both the Western modernist tradition and by African oral culture. Keith Booker states that this novel is deeply inspired by the African oral tradition as well as by the modernist tradition.

[t]he highly poetic *Our Sister Killjoy* draws on African oral traditions, though its formal innovation and emphasis on the subjective experience of the title character are reminiscent of the works of Western modernist writers such as Virginia Woolf.<sup>213</sup>

Brenda Cooper, for her part, qualifies *Our Sister Killjoy* as “a poetic novel, a novelistic poem, or an extended love letter.”<sup>214</sup> She adds that “the insight of *Our Sister Killjoy* into the complexities of modern African cultural issues is to be located in its form rather than in its content.”<sup>215</sup>

Aidoo starts the novel, as every good storyteller must, by exciting the reader's curiosity to discover what is going to happen or what happened. She makes the

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<sup>210</sup> Vincent Odamtten. Op. Cit. p. 119.

<sup>211</sup> Arlene Elder. "Ama Ata Aidoo and the Oral Tradition: A Paradox of Form and Substance." *African Literature Today* N°15. London, Trenton (N.J): James Currey, Africa World Press, 1987, p. 109.

<sup>212</sup> Adeola James. (Ed.). *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk*. London, Portsmouth: James Currey, Heinemann, 1990, p. 15.

<sup>213</sup> Keith Booker. *The African Novel in English: An Introduction*. Portsmouth, Oxford: Heinemann, James Currey, 1998, p. 131.

<sup>214</sup> Brenda Cooper. *To Lay These Secrets Open: Evaluating African Writing*. Claremont, South Africa: David Philip Publishers, 1992, p. 98.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid. p. 98.

reader doubtful about "the things which are working out". Then, she establishes a bond with the reader by beginning her sentences with actions and calling the reader "my brother", transforming thus a distant reader, a stranger, into a member of her community revealing "one of the characteristics of oral traditions, which relates to the narrative of performance the involvement of the community in the creative process as well as in the criticism."<sup>216</sup> Thus, the opening pages of the novel create intimacy between Aidoo and her readership, just as the love letter does at the end of the novel. Moreover, Aidoo's poems in the novel aim at confronting her reader/listener with the sense of political calumny, historical barbarism, aiming at warning her "brothers" about the post-colonial and the in-dependence from which Ghana and Africa suffer.

"Into a Bad Dream", the first part of the novel, is connected with the second one, "The Plums", by the three pages "Where", "When", "How". These pages "are equivalent of the narrator saying something like: 'Now, I will tell you *where* Sissy went, *when* she returned, and *how* her time in Europe progressed.'"<sup>217</sup> Therefore, these words, presented as statements rather than questions, are bridging two parts of the narrative. On the first two pages, only one sentence is written on the whole page; then on the three next pages, there is a paragraph on each page introducing thus the reader to the 'blank of whiteness'.

Things are working out (OSK, p.3)

Towards their dazzling conclusions (OSK, p.4)

... so it is neither here nor there,  
What ticky-tackies we have  
Saddled and surrounded ourselves with,  
Blocked our views,  
Cluttered our brains. (OSK, p.5)

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<sup>216</sup> Charles Bodunde. *Oral Traditions and Aesthetic Transfer: Creativity and Social Vision in Contemporary Black Poetry*. Bayreuth: African Studies Series, 2001, p. 1.

<sup>217</sup> Arlene Elder. Op. Cit. p. 112.

Vincent Odamtten comments on this unusual opening, in the following statement,

We are left with the rest of page one and the whole of page two as blank paper, and page two has no pagination. We are tricked, quite literally, into 'the blank of whiteness'; or perhaps we are invited to take a journey opposite to Marlow's trip into *The Heart of Darkness*. The reversal of Conrad's central metaphor for the exploration of the imperial project marks Aidoo's overt departure from the aesthetic – ideological paradigm that supports that other journey. The Bird of the Wayside knows that, despite the psychological damage wrought by that blank of whiteness in our history, there are people whose resistance, whose work, will take us out of a 'bad dream' toward those 'dazzling conclusions'.<sup>218</sup>

Gay Wilentz contends that "Aidoo deconstructs the structure of the novel by opening it with a four-page poem/political statement, an attack on the world into which Sissie will descend."<sup>219</sup> Significantly, Aidoo leaves the rest of page six and the rest of page seven white, leaving us with the "blank of whiteness."<sup>220</sup>

The third part, "From Our Sister Killjoy", takes the form of a satire, a skilled valued in traditional oral performance. This satire reaches its culminant point when Sissie is faced to the heart transplant. The critics' study of symbols and metaphors here points to the fact that Aidoo uses aesthetics to support her ideological position, which is to "write back to the Empire" and express her thirsty distinguished critique of Western hegemony. This prose-poetry pattern shows an immersion in and inspiration from African culture.

In the fourth section of the novel, "A Love Letter", Aidoo uses distancing techniques when she deals with Sissie's "brothers", who have betrayed their countries. This shows the awareness of Aidoo about "the isolating effect that colonialism has brought to the storyteller and the resulting change in the power of this art."<sup>221</sup> The section ends with a return to the voice of the third person narrator, distancing us

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<sup>218</sup> Vincent Odamtten. Op. Cit. pp. 120-121.

<sup>219</sup> Gay Wilentz. "The Politics of Exile: Reflections of a Black-Eyed Squint in *Our Sister Killjoy*". Ada Azodo & Gay Wilentz (Eds.). *Emerging Perspectives on Ama Ata Aidoo*. Trenton (N.J.): Africa World Press, 1999, p. 81.

<sup>220</sup> Vincent Odamtten. Op. Cit. p. 121.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid. p. 115.

from Sissie, as she herself feels distanced from her brothers, which is a further criticism of colonialism which has broken all the ties in the African community. In sum, Gay Wilentz asserts that

it is hard to call this compilation of poetic anger, political commentary, journal entries, oral voicings, and letter writings a "novel" in the traditional sense. Rather, it appears to be a formulation of an African prose poem which reverberates with sounds of the orature in the written language and personal dialogue.<sup>222</sup>

Therefore, Aidoo is in search of unity of meaning, via Sissie, who realises and experiences a sense of loneliness and defiance but not despair. Aidoo's artistic capacities to create structural unity for the narrative as well as the moral function of the communal oral performer she displays, has demonstrated her skilfulness to create an ethical bound between the artist/storyteller and his/her audience, even if not achieved between Sissie and her "brothers".

Thus, this reveals Aidoo's ability and art in shifting from one genre to another offering a "holistic text treatment"<sup>223</sup> which has become "her signature tune."<sup>224</sup> As noted, Aidoo is capable of shifting from prose to poetry; she is able to intertwine two different genres, two different modes of writing, traditional and modernist techniques creating thus an African aesthetic mode. Her originality is further revealed by her ability to reconcile style and content, aiming at the same target, re-evaluating women's capacities and capabilities, positions and roles, as agents of change, improvement and progress as well as excellent orators revealed by her own ease with language and stylistic devices.

[T]here is the marked idiosyncrasy of her style, its playfulness and fluidity; its disrespect for generic boundaries, its dramatic and oral qualities, above all; its elusive irony. All of this has made it difficult for a critical establishment largely

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<sup>222</sup> Gay Wilentz. "The Politics of Exile: Reflections of a Black-Eyed Squint in *Our Sister Killjoy*". Op. Cit. p. 82.

<sup>223</sup> Ada Azodo. "The Multifaceted Aidoo: Ideologue, Scholar, Writer, and Woman". In Ada Uzoamaka Azodo & Gay Wilentz (Eds.). *Emerging Perspectives on Ama Ata Aidoo*. Trenton (N.J.): Africa World Press, 1999, p.419.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid. p. 419.

based in the Western academy, to come to a consensus about her work and stature.<sup>225</sup>

Indeed, in writing her novel in four episodes, by shifting from prose to poetry and then back again to prose, and finally concluding her work with a love letter, Aidoo transcends all kinds of Western genres and styles. Her deep immersion in African Ghanaian culture and the local art of storytelling make of her an outstanding craftswoman, thus being able to play with words and with genres, in the manner of female "okyeame".

Aidoo's dramatic art and her other works make extensive use of the oral roots of African literature, particularly the art of storytelling. For her, the Western idea of separating art into disconnected genres is unreal in the African context of orality because the storyteller's art is demonstrably a contribution of poetry, acting, and narrative plot. Her art is therefore a synthesis of all elements of orature – community participation, music and dancing, and the general atmosphere – that characterize communities in which members are supportive of one another.<sup>226</sup>

Vincent Odamtten has qualified Aidoo's novels, *Our Sister Killjoy* and *Changes* as a "fefewo aloo nutinyawo kple eme nyakpakpawo", "a collection of prose-poetry narrative performances and a meditation for the audience-reader's contemplation."<sup>227</sup> The two novels are, therefore, written as if they were stories told to an audience. Both novels are structured in a way that makes the main characters grow up through experience and play a part in the changing society that Aidoo has in mind.

Moreover, each part of *Our Sister Killjoy* deals with a particular setting, Ghana, Germany, England and a Ghanaian airplane with Sissie on board returning to her "crazy old continent". These settings accompany the protagonist's growth, as she fully assumes her female nationalist African identity at the end of the novel. *Changes*

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<sup>225</sup> Jane Bryce. "Going Home is Another Story: Constructions of Nation and Gender in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes*". *West Africa Review*. Vol. 1, N° 1, 1999, p. 2.

<sup>226</sup> Killam Douglas & Ruth Rowe (Eds.). Op. Cit. p. 21.

<sup>227</sup> Vincent Odamtten. Op. Cit. p. 160.

is divided into three parts; each part deals also with the crisis Esi faces, showing us the character's growth. Aidoo's narrative comes in the form of a pastiche of voices that speak through her protagonist's increasingly critical consciousness.<sup>228</sup>

In the meantime, the form of *Changes* resembles to some extent that of *Our Sister Killjoy*, in that it is a mixture of genres, namely poems and songs, prose and drama, as in the discussions of Aba and Ama, Ena and Nana, with no description of setting and character development, just as in a performance script. These "elements of oral performance (...) [are] interspersed through the narrative [as] proverbial comments on the action. [They] are separated by indentation from the rest of the prose text."<sup>229</sup> The novel is divided into three parts, each dealing with a period of Esi's torment. In the first part, the principal characters are introduced as well as their personal histories. The decline of Esi's and Oko's is introduced as well as the love affair of Esi and Ali. In the second part, Ali decides to make Esi his second wife, his "occupied territory". In the third part, we witness the decline of Esi's and Ali's marriage. All along these parts, Nana is very much present as she comments on the anguish of her granddaughter in particular and women's condition in general, making of the personal the political.

Furthermore, Aidoo uses complex narrative voices. She shifts from one narrator to another accompanying the growth of her protagonists. The omniscient narrator narrates the story from the different points of views of the characters, and mainly, female characters. "This gives implied readers a deeper understanding of the actions of these figures. At times the voice of the narrator and the thoughts of the figures merge to drive home certain points, and sometimes, this merges voice seems

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<sup>228</sup> Hildegard Hoeller. "Ama Ata Aidoo's Heart of Darkness" *Research in African Literatures*. Vol. 35, N° 1, Spring 2004, p. 132.

<sup>229</sup> Wilentz. "The Politics of Exile: Reflections of a Black-Eyed Squint in *Our Sister Killjoy*". Op. Cit. p. 166.

to represent a communal voice."<sup>230</sup> There is a dialogue, a "choral" composition, a kind of travel implied in her composition. This adds more significance to her content as well as to the art of storytelling, as the shifting point of view is an efficient technique of storytelling. In this way Aidoo mixes an omniscient narrator, what Vincent Odamtten calls "The Bird of the Wayside" and another sort of voice, a chorus, a communal commentator. Thus, Aidoo makes a collage of different voices, of different discourses, of different genres which "crowd her 'oversensitive' historical consciousness and appear erratically on Aidoo's pages."<sup>231</sup> The omniscient narrator or "The Bird of the wayside" knows the inner thoughts of Sissie and Esi. This voice is very much like Aidoo's voice, with her insight, wit and sarcasms as well as her deeper awareness of realities and her commitment to the struggles of both Sissie and Esi, who stand for the new female intellectuals in Ghana. "The Bird of the Wayside" withdraws as Sissie and Esi write, and speak in their own voices, accompanying thus their growth.

By calling herself [Aidoo] the Bird of the Wayside, the narrator is, in the traditional context of tale-telling, making a disclaimer, for this title suggest [*The Dilemma of a Ghost*] an outcast, a stranger to the community who, ignorant of the community's laws and customs (ideological practices), may inadvertently offend in the telling of the tale.<sup>232</sup>

In sum, Aidoo introduces an unusual narrative method, a prose-poetry composite genre, which reveals one of the features of storytelling in African, Ghanaian culture, the "nutinyawo". Aidoo reproduces Ghanaian orature, with its grounding in performance and the sound of language, spoken, chanted or sung. Aidoo tries "to recapture the multiple social purposes of orature and to re-create the important aesthetic, political, religious, and psychological links it forces between

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<sup>230</sup> Edith Kohrs-Amissah. *Aspects of Feminism and Gender in the Novels of Three African Women Writers (Aidoo, Emecheta, Darko)*. Heidelberg: Jerry Bedu Addo (Books on African Studies), 2002, p. 38.

<sup>231</sup> Hildegard Hoeller. Op. Cit. p. 133.

<sup>232</sup> Vincent Odamtten. Op. Cit. p. 24.

artists and their communities and African communities and their histories."<sup>233</sup> This can also be considered as a feminist aspect in novel writing, since the art of storytelling is also a woman's preserve. As one should note that feminist criticism goes beyond the interest in women writers, women-oriented issues and women as main characters in literature. Feminist criticism is not a codified, single critical methodology. In reality, it conveys a broader spectrum of perspectives, which includes sociological, polemical, formalist and aesthetic aspects. Therefore, it reinforces the female narrative voice leading us to link it to the French Feminist concept of 'écriture féminine'.

## 2) *The Epistolary "Love Letter" and the Seeming "Love Story"*

In addition to the prose-poetry style and the shifting point of view which show clearly Aidoo's immersion into her culture, one should not omit the fact that she also makes use of Western genres, like that of the epistolary, and the subversion of the romance tradition of the "love story". The epistolary love letter, the last part of *Our Sister Killjoy*, is also a female form used to convey daily experiences and personal reflections.

While patriarchy directs female letter writing to the experiences of passion and suffering and thus puts female subjectivity in passivity, in modern epistolary fictions such as *The Colour Purple* (...), writing the letter provides women with an opportunity to write/rewrite themselves in the culture where they are the ones 'prevented (...) from acting or speaking [their] desires, the one[s] left behind at a distance from loved ones, the one[s] restricted to a private voice.'<sup>234</sup>

In fact, in this letter, Sissie rather laments and evokes African politics from a global perspective, the brain-drain and underdevelopment, black on black oppression, white on black oppression. She also explains how and why Europe owes

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<sup>233</sup> Killam Douglas & Ruth Rowe (Eds.). Op. Cit. p. 204.

<sup>234</sup> Kai-ling Liu. "Journey through the Letter: Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter*". *Journal of National Cheng Kung University*. Vol. 36, Nov. 2001, p. 1.

many reparations to Africa. She also re-enacts the horrors of slavery and the harm it has done to African men and women.

Even though Sissie does not send the letter, although her need to communicate was 'so great', it does not matter. What we are left with – and this is implied in the substance and purpose of Our Sister's 'Love Letter', is how (without becoming 'superior monkeys') we are to find a language, an effective means to compassionately communicate something *relevant* to those who have not yet been seduced and compromised by those succulent 'plums' – "the leftovers of imperial handouts" (*OSK*, p. 86); or "gone, gone, gone" (*OSK*, p. 121) irrevocably into the blank of a bad dream – so that we will have a collective vision to inform our *actions*. Through the penetrating linguistic brilliance of the Bird of the Wayside, we have been taken not only 'Into a Bad Dream', but through that nightmare.<sup>235</sup>

Thus, Sissie "rewrites herself", her African self, her thoughts and emotions, within a nationalist feeling, a nationalist stratum, assuming fully her African, woman, nationalist identity. Therefore, the letter is not just a love letter to her former boyfriend, but must be construed as a love letter to her country, to her nation, to her continent. Aidoo transcends narrow love, and imagines a broader one, a love letter to one's country, to one's nation, to one's race.

Aidoo had also dabbled into unorthodoxy to the extent that a love letter is no longer what it purports to be. A love letter does not necessarily have to be romantic only in the sense of singing about love between two human beings. A love letter can be romantic in the sense that it is a patriotic letter, from a concerned citizen about the motherland or fatherland. It could be a love letter about the Mother nature and about cosmos and the environment.<sup>236</sup>

The potency of Aidoo's message can be found in this plea of Sissie's, asking her beloved in exile to return home: "please come home, my brother. Come to our people. They are the only ones who need to know how much we are worth."(*OSK*, p. 130)

[T]he urging of 'prodigal' sons and daughters to return home is not for the sake of the salvation of their souls, at least not directly nor in those terms; it is

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<sup>235</sup> Vincent Odamtten. Op. Cit. p. 131.

<sup>236</sup> Ada Azodo. "The Multifaceted Aidoo: Ideologue, Scholar, Writer, and Woman". Op. Cit. p.419.

for the sake of the material, social and cultural needs of the lands and mothers they have left behind in pursuit of their individual ambitions.<sup>237</sup>

In sum, the letter helps Sissie to fully accept her African personality, and to "protect" herself from alienation, and from the lure of Europe. She also assumes her personality and capacity as an African woman to maintain a nationalist feeling, hence the "love letter" she supposedly writes to her former boyfriend Kunle, but which is in fact an expression of nationalist feeling, of love of the nation. She "has earned the right to her 'epiphany'"<sup>238</sup> when returning to Africa at the opposite of her "brothers" who stayed away from her.

'A Love Letter' is Sissie's sorting out of her disparate experiences, her way of understanding herself as both *sujet-en-soi* and, one hopes, the articulate and 'doing' *sujet-pour-soi*. The Bird of the Wayside frames *Our Sister Killjoy's nyakpakpa* (meditation) with a portion of a conversation overheard, fittingly enough, (...), and an account of Our Sister's return to Africa. Such framing, (...), is the hallmark of a gifted griot or narrator-actor.<sup>239</sup>

Aidoo comments on the letter as follow:

Sissie uses her boyfriend, her ex-boyfriend actually, as the conduit through which she is speaking with a communal voice, a kind of collective voice and her address really was to everybody because in the long run what hurt her most was not what happened between her boyfriend and herself – "I" and "I" –but between "them" and "them", between "We", between "us" as an African people. It is a love letter to everybody and also to herself. I did not say "let her write a love letter to herself", but in effect that is what it is, a letter to herself in an effort to clarify her own views, to state her case, and examine it to see if she agrees with the conceptions of her own mind, her thoughts. So I think that is why she tears the letter up after writing it. It becomes irrelevant once she has clarified herself to herself and realized "we'll be ok". So, it is

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<sup>237</sup> Caroline Rooney. "'Dangerous Knowledge' and the Poetics of Survival: A Reading of *Our Sister Killjoy* and *A Question of Power*." Sheila Nasta (Ed.). *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia*. London: The Women's Press, 1991, p. 122.

<sup>238</sup> Anuradha Dingwaney Needham. *Using the Master's Tools: Resistance and the Literature of the African and South-Asian Diasporas*. New York: St Martin's Press, 2000, p. 87.

<sup>239</sup> Vincent Odamtten. Op. Cit. pp. 129-130.

larger than herself, it is a message to her, to him, to both of them, to the whole of the African world.<sup>240</sup>

Sissie's "ex-lover, ex-compatriot and the ex-mother country, England, are only nominally the addressee and place of address of the love letter, which is more profoundly addressed to Africa."<sup>241</sup>

In the meantime, Aidoo's *Changes* is entitled a "Love Story", a conscious reference to romantic love which conventionally refers to heroines swept by passion and happy endings. But Aidoo parodies and subverts these conventions. "By suggesting that this is *only* a love story, Aidoo has set up for a rather rude awakening, designed to disabuse us of our often dearly hold pre(mis)conceptions about love and marriage."<sup>242</sup>

Aidoo, like major modernist Western writers, is motivated by an ethical (and thus stylistic) imperative to avoid the moralistic on the one hand and the sentimental on the other. (...). In Aidoo's case, vigilance against sentimental is inseparable from awareness that women's writing is expected to be "sweet". Refusing sweetness involves exposing the subtle mechanisms of masculinist violence, but also exposing as sentimental the desire for "feminist" stories to be easily "consumed" as contributions to a debate.<sup>243</sup>

Thus, Aidoo deploys canonical modernist techniques for this purpose "allowing authorial comment without a normative narrating voice: the arrangement of scenes, juxtaposition of details, orchestration of characters' voice, reiteration of phrases and images, use of significant omissions." In the meantime, Aidoo links this modernist tradition to that of her Akan oral discourse, "through the use of *kasakoa* (metaphor), *akutia* (innuendo), or an *ebe* (proverb)." Consequently, by merging modernist techniques with traditional griot storytelling, "Aidoo brings to the novel a mode of communication that Akan women exercise masterfully in private domestic

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<sup>240</sup> Anuradha Dingwanev Needham. "An Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo". *The Massachusetts Review*. Vol. 36, Iss. 1, Amherst: Spring 1995, p. 126.

<sup>241</sup> Caroline Rooney. Op. Cit. p. 122.

<sup>242</sup> Vincent Odamtten. Op. Cit. p. 161.

<sup>243</sup> Donald R. Wehrs. *African Feminist Fiction and Indegineous Values*. Florida: The University Press of Florida, 1995, p. 1-2.

discourse."<sup>244</sup> In her introduction to *African Love Stories: An Anthology*, which she edited, Aidoo comments on love stories as follows:

One clear problem with love stories is that the moment you describe anything as such, readers and audiences begin to look for the frivolous and the sentimental. Yet we have all heard of profoundly serious love stories: documented or not. By 'serious', we do not necessarily refer to the intensity of the emotions of the protagonists, or the levels of their commitment to one another. Rather, it is a label that speaks of the enormity of the consequences of loving, especially its impact on the lovers themselves, their families, and the entire society in which they live and love.<sup>245</sup>

Jane Bryce asserts that "Aidoo uses orature intertextuality with romance conventions, as a constant ironic counterpoint."<sup>246</sup> In fact, Aidoo's style should be contextualized within her Akan cultural background as well as the juxtaposition of Western romance elements. Thus, her combination of traditional and modernist techniques serves an ideological purpose. As stated before, the fact that Aidoo is a writer who cannot depart from her ideological position is clearly shown here. Therefore, if Aidoo entitles her novel *Changes: A Love Story*, it is for making an ironic counterpoint to this modernist tradition; it is an ironic criticism of the Western tradition that encloses love in its personal dimension and fails to link it to the political one. For Aidoo love is political in the sense that her female characters either compose with the present social and political order (like Opokuya and Fusena), or act as personae to subvert existing modes of conduct and suggest new attitudes which would be compatible with progress in a new African nation (like Esi).

This would lead to conclude, that Aidoo's style is deeply inspired by her traditional Akan, African culture and heritage. She definitely rejects the narrow impositions of Western aesthetic and ideological prescriptions. Her use of witty repartees, sarcasm and irony, and a sophisticated diction, reveals an extended range of language possibilities for this talented writer. "These oral materials occur in the

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<sup>244</sup> Donald R. Wehrs. Op. Cit. p. 2-3.

<sup>245</sup> Ama Ata Aidoo. *African Love Stories: An Anthology*. UK: Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2006, p. vii.

<sup>246</sup> Jane Bryce. "Going Home is Another Story". Op. Cit. p. 2.

text as reconstructed forms adapted to new social situations but the essence of their orality (rhythm and performance features) still survive".<sup>247</sup> Last but not least, "the textual frustrations should be seen as among Aidoo's tactics in an overall strategy of resistance,"<sup>248</sup> as she can never depart from her political, ideological commitments as well as history, as she contends that:

the oral traditions can tell you about migrations that happened about a thousand years, and yet events that happened two or three hundred years ago are completely blanketed over. (...). But definitely this is the reason why I keep coming back to this because I think it is part of what is eating up us. You can't cover up history.<sup>249</sup>

Finally, Aidoo has proven that the tradition of storytelling remains alive and effective. She has proven that storytelling, which has long been associated with orality and the spoken word, can be designed to be heard and read, and reading implies the visual as well and permits to achieve more complexity.

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<sup>247</sup> Charles Bodunde. Op. Cit. p. 5.

<sup>248</sup> Vincent Odamtten. Op. Cit. p. 12.

<sup>249</sup> Vincent Theo. "An Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo." *Seventeen Black and African Writers on Literature and Life*. Nigeria: Centre for Black and African Arts, 1981, p. 7.

# Conclusion

In sum, Aidoo is a writer who is a vocal and a critical figure, admired in Africa and abroad. She is an outspoken African writer concerning her treatment of feminist issues; she resists and subverts traditional literary boundaries. As she comes from an Akan background, she openly states that she first learnt feminism in Africa, from African women. Unlike many women writers, Aidoo subverts and challenges the voicelessness of black women, thanks to her Akan heritage. Therefore, her female characters emanate from this dynamic attitude. However, Aidoo's approach to life leads her to present a realistic picture of African women's dilemmas, far from the nostalgic pre-colonial presentation of African women. Her female protagonists deal with the schizophrenic reality of colonialism and neo-colonialism, and at the same time, they have to manage African tradition, which does not always facilitate life to women, and modern Western lifestyles, which are not always serviceable to African women. They are sometimes presented as having complex lives and behaving inconsistently because they are haunted by their African tradition, and at the same time caught in the dislocation of mentalities in post-colonial Ghana. Thus,

[h]er women, though, following the principles of the Akan society she comes from, are strong, hard-working, independent, articulate, and smart, thus deconstructing the stereotypical image of the submissive, passive, and battered African woman.<sup>250</sup>

On the whole, feminism, in the African context is a reaction to specific historical legacies, namely, colonialism and pre-colonial traditions, upon whose foundations its modern political, social and economic structures have been built. African feminists strive to achieve emancipation from these legacies, so that women will assert their role in another way than by remaining silent. Writing has provided African women with the opportunity to make their voices heard and to draw attention to their own lives, their own sufferings and their own perceptions and, in

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<sup>250</sup> Maria Frias. "An Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo: I Learnt my First Feminist Lessons in Africa". *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses*. N° 16, November 2003, p. 10.

respect of a wider readership, aspects of culture that have not been addressed or dealt with by men writers and which are the concerns of women.

Moreover, these modern concerns encompass issues of marriage, polygamy, women's bodies, and most importantly emancipation within a context which requires a return to the source and at the same time a due consideration of modern African imperatives. Therefore, this dissertation has tried to make a powerful case for the necessity to transcend the paradigm of binary oppositions in favour of the alternative concept of negotiation.

Furthermore, in modern Ghana, the role of the state cannot be understood without also understanding its attempts to subvert traditional practices, especially those related to pre-colonial Akan societies. Neo-colonial African societies have sought to regulate both the productive and reproductive roles of women. These new structures tried to extend their control to the intimate domain of sexuality, social reproduction, and economic production within the family structure. In turn, both women and men negotiate their positions through complex decisions at the most local and intimate level of locations: the family and personal relationships.

As childbearers and rearers, and all things being equal, women effectively controlled the ideological reproductive apparatus and determined the cultural and ideational direction of the traditional society. Social conditions are not static, however, and societies are always in flux. Aidoo's works investigate that dynamic relationship and suggest the need for a radical restructuring of our view of Ghanaian society and, by implication, of all societies in order to change ourselves and those societies for the better.<sup>251</sup>

Women in pre-colonial Ghana held important positions, as the Akan traditional society was matrilineal in nature. Even if women were not given top positions in society, they nonetheless enjoyed financial independence and had central roles in the workings of society. In the market place, in the abusua, in the clan or in the household, women held important status and occupied central roles in Akan society.

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<sup>251</sup> Vincent Odamtten. *The Art of Ama Ata Aidoo: Polylectics and Reading Against Neocolonialism*. Florida: University Press of Florida, 1994, p. 10.

Even if we speak more about matrilineality (descent by mothers) than matrilineages (power given to women), West African women had their say in their clans, in opposition to the male-dominated ideals issuing in large measure from the advent of colonialism. African men then took much of these Western, Victorian ideals about women which silenced them. In sum, to the silencing effect of African patriarchy, African women have been silenced by colonialism, as well as by the nationalist project in the post-colonial era; the latter trying somehow to subvert the idea of the masculinisation of colonization and the feminization of colonized people. African nationalists took patriarchy as a central component for Africa's reconstruction which totally denies the emancipation of women. However, African and Ghanaian women have succeeded to transcend all these problems and managed their lives thanks to their heritage as well as education even if it seems an alienation for any African man. This is what Aidoo recaptures in her novels.

In the meantime, as Aidoo has travelled widely in Africa and in the U.S., as she has been sensitive to the pain and trauma of the African Diaspora, as she personally experienced the conflictual encounter between African and Western cultures, Aidoo presents her female protagonists undergoing "a physical and emotional journey that is painful and traumatic though always instructive and generative."<sup>252</sup> Aidoo deals with the impact of colonialism, neo-colonialism, the dichotomy of African tradition versus Western modernity, confronted with and struggling against social norms and cultural disintegration and its impact on the psyches and bodies of African women. Even if these female characters are "psychologically injured, physically exhausted, emotionally disillusioned, and culturally alienated, [they are able to] start a new life, [and even if they are] albeit shaken – [they] retain their sanity and are able to articulate their anger."<sup>253</sup>

Additionally, Aidoo's works address not only personal but also political problems. Aidoo cannot depart from her ideological commitments. Actually, she does

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<sup>252</sup> Maria Frias. Op. Cit. p. 12.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid. p. 12.

not disassociate Africa's and Ghana's problems from those of her characters. On the continental level, she has assumed the responsibility to be the spokesperson for Africa as she recognizes the complexity of history which her texts reflect in some ways. She also addresses ideological and socio-political issues as important developmental ones.

Further, behind the revolutionary is an original thinker whose vision of a better African continent cannot be divorced from the emancipation, the liberation of women as well as the recognition of their potential and capabilities for development. According to her, women should take active part in nation-building as well as aspire to their own freedom and self-fulfilment, just as Sissie and Esi attempt to do within their respective situations.

Equally important, Aidoo produces an Africanized and compounded form of storytelling which is more representative of her cultural histories and present realities. "Aidoo's works constitute aesthetic – ideological products."<sup>254</sup> Her innovative style and ideological attitude make her contribution to African literature significant. As she has been brought up and raised in an Akan environment, respectful and proud of her African oral tradition and ancient storytelling, Aidoo's powerful language resides in her dialogues. Her female characters are thus endowed with the powerful tool of speech, as they "make use of words as weapons to the extent that they can easily and intelligently fustigate men's egos and beat them dialectically/metaphorically, at the same time gaining the respect of the other sisters in the community."<sup>255</sup> Aidoo's style brings much to her discourse, as she shapes her works with a specific "feminine" tradition in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa, the art of traditional storytelling. Her innovative style highlights collective wisdom as it expresses an African socio-linguistic reality.

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<sup>254</sup> Vincent Odamtten. Op. Cit. p. 7.

<sup>255</sup> Maria Frias. Op. Cit. p. 11.

One can thus conclude that authenticity in nationalistic feelings is perhaps the prime concern for Aidoo. This has to agree with a realistic mode of writing that this writer has elected to use, even if her stories are "modernised" by various stylistic devices whose purpose is to enhance this authenticity, and this commitment to Africa. Equally important, her works are "feminist literature with a difference"<sup>256</sup>; her

feminist concerns are not treated in isolation from Africa's political instability, the new master complex of the so-called elite, the atavistic problems of the rural African at the cross-roads of history, the fury and impotence of the radical African, [and] the lure of the western world.<sup>257</sup>

Thus, Aidoo's contribution to create an aesthetic idiom, together with her treatment of crucial developmental issues concerning Africa, Ghana, its people and more specifically, its women, have led her to realise works of African literature that fully reflect the realities of her country.

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<sup>256</sup> Chimalum Nwankwo. "The Feminist Impulse and Social Realism in Ama Ata Aidoo's *No Sweetness Here* and *Our Sister Killjoy*". Carole Boyce Davies & Anna Adams Graves (Eds.). *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*. Trenton (N.J.): Africa World Press, 1986, p.155.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.* p. 152.

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# مكانة و دور المرأة في غانا الحديثة في روايات أماتأيدو تغريب أو تغيير إجتماعي؟

تتجلى لنا من خلال اطلاعنا على النقد الأدبي للكتاب الأفارقة و خصوصا الكتابات النسوية أن إشكالية التوفيق بين الحاضر و الماضي تعد من أهم القضايا التي يطرحها الكتاب الأفارقة، لكن معظم الكتاب النقاد لا يهتمون بدور المرأة في هذا النقاش و كذا توفيق المرأة بين ماضيها و حاضرها، و بين إطلاعاتها على المعاصرة، النمو و التحرر بدافع الروح الوطنية.

هذا ما يرمي إلى البحث الذي يعيد طرح الإشكالية و يعيد النظر في روايات الكاتبة الغانية أماتأيدو بالأخذ بعين الاعتبار دور و مكانة المرأة كطرف فعال في التوفيق بين الأصالة و المعاصرة على الصعيد الثقافي و الاقتصادي و الاجتماعي و السياسي في غانا. بذلك يختلف هذا البحث عن الإشكال المطروح بين إفريقيا و العالم الغربي الذي يسود النقد الأدبي و الثقافي الإفريقي بفضل دراسة الغربي قضايا كالزواج و تعدد الزوجات و الحب في ظل الروح الوطنية . كما يهدف هذا البحث إلى إضهار قدرة أيدو على خلق فضاء للإبداع من خلال فن جديد يوفق بين المعاصرة و الأصالة الإفريقية ، إلى حد الآن في حوزة الرجال ، كما أنها خلقت فضاء لشخصياتها النسوية للتوفيق الثقافي.

يبيرر هذا البحث بحثيات واقعية و كما يظهر قدرة أماتأيدو على خلق فضاء للمرأة، و كذا قدرتها على إعادة الاعتبار لبعض القضايا التي طالما فسرت على نحو رجعي، ناهيك عن ذلك أن إعادة النظر في أعمال أماتأيدو يظهر لنا قدرتها على الإبداع الفني و الكتابي و قدرتها على التوفيق بين الماضي و الحاضر فكريا و فنيا.