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In My Mother's House: A Study of Selected Works by Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta

By

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ABSTRACT

African women writers openly lament, question, and criticise the neglect of their work; they also attack this neglect through the act of writing. Texts by African women writers seek to reclaim women's marginal positions and show them "as spaces of strength within and between which they fluctuate" (Nfah-Abbenyi 150). Post-colonial theory and most Western feminist theories have so far failed to problematize the position of African women. Through their act of writing these women's texts also provide insight into the ongoing debate in post-colonial-theory and Western feminist theories. In these texts we also see the interrelatedness of the problems that confront women and those that face the continent. The women contemplate an African womanism.

This study looks at texts by Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta, two of Africa's prolific writers. I offer a self-interpellative reading, a reading foregrounded in the "real history" of text and (con)text (Susan Andrade 94). I weave autobiography into my reading; this strategy gives me an approach that does not convey an "un-self-conscious appropriation" (Alcoff 24) of women's experiences. The autobiographical narrative does not only enable me to know
the literature I study here through myself and myself through the literature, it also provides me with a "movement toward a politics of location," (Freedman, Frey and Murphy Zauber 10), and establishes a link between the personal and the political.

In the Introduction I argue for a critical approach that takes the cultural grounding of texts produced by African women into consideration. Chapter One is an autobiographical reading of Aidoo's *No Sweetness Here*. Chapter Two is a surveyic reading of Emecheta's *Head Above Water* and *The Joys of Motherhood*. This chapter serves as a bridge to my detailed reading of Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story* and *Our Sister Killjoy* in Chapters Three and Four. I demonstrate through the reading of these texts that while these women reclaim space for themselves in African society, they address problems that face the continent as a whole.
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While I would like to share whatever credit this study may bring with all who helped me to produce it. I take solely any infelicities that may be identified with it.
DEDICATION

In loving memory of my mother, Yaa Mansa.

Maame of the Agona clan whose totem is the parrot.
You, like the parrot, never went to school but saw the wisdom in sending me to school.

Maame, death did not allow you to reap the harvest of motherhood and mothering.

Maame, AYEKOO.

Maame, meda wo ase.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Approval page...........................................................................................................................i
Abstract........................................................................................................................................ii
Acknowledgements....................................................................................................................iv
Dedication.....................................................................................................................................vi
Table of Contents.....................................................................................................................vii

INTRODUCTION — CHARTING A CONTEXT........................................................................1
  The Critics.................................................................................................................................8
  The Writers.............................................................................................................................14
  Politics of Representation......................................................................................................23
  Women Writers and Society.................................................................................................30
  In My Mother's House...........................................................................................................32

CHAPTER ONE: IN MY MOTHER'S HOUSE...........................................................................47

CHAPTER TWO: A FEMINIST WITH A SMALL 'f' —
BUCHI EMECHETA..................................................................................................................91

CHAPTER THREE: "IMAGES OF HELL" — CHANGES:
A LOVE STORY.........................................................................................................................118

CHAPTER FOUR: "SWEETNESS AND SMOKY ROUGHAGE"
OUR SISTER KILLJOY...............................................................................................................159

CONCLUSION........................................................................................................................199

WORKS CITED.........................................................................................................................205
It was as if Maanan's face was all I would ever need to look at to know that this was a woman being pushed toward destruction and there was nothing she or I could do about it. She was smiling at me, but in myself I felt accused by a silence that belonged to millions and ages of women all bearing the face and the form of Maanan, and needing no voice at all to tell me I had failed them, I and all the others who have been content to do nothing and to be nothing at all all our lives and through all the ages of their suffering.

— Aye Kwei Armah, The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born

I think that feminism is the business of both men and women anywhere, and in Africa.

INTRODUCTION — CHARTING A CONTEXT

Much contemporary white feminist criticism typically represents itself as the outermost possible frame for understanding the place of women as they function within cultural systems. By representing itself as colour-blind and universal, however, such feminist theory neglects to examine its own inscription within a European system of thought which is saturated by imperialism.
— Susan S. Andiade (32)

African literature and its criticism testify to the historical contradictions that define the African situation. In order to resolve these contradictions in the direction of progressive change, literary criticism must be predicated on a theoretical outlook that couples cultural theory back to social practice. In this respect, literary theory and practice must form part of the anti-imperialist struggle, thus demystifying literary criticism and reintegrating it into the social experience and practice of which literature itself is very much part.
— Chidi Amuta (7)

In any case, the question of an adequate approach to the criticism of African literature can probably never be settled to any degree of satisfaction, at least in such a way as to compel universal and total agreement on one point of view. No single approach, really, is adequate . . . for we are dealing with a phenomenon which, by nature, is irreducible to any sort of common measure.
— Abiola Irele (23)

There is no sense in wasting blame on Europeans for dumping shoddy goods and rotten ideas upon us. They can’t help it. The question we might profitably ask is why we [Africans] ourselves are receptive to such junk.
— Ayi Kwei Armah (357)

We black Africans have been blandly invited to submit ourselves to a second epoch of colonization - this time by a universal-humanoid abstraction defined and conducted by individuals whose theories and prescriptions are derived from the apprehension of their world and their history, their social neuroses and their value systems. It is time, clearly, to respond to this new threat, each in his[/her] own field.
— Wole Soyinka (x)

In the introduction to her work Francophone African Women Writers: Destroying the Emptiness of Silence, Irene Assiba D’Almeida explains that the subtitle of the work comes from Calixthe Beyala, a Cameroonian writer who,
"through one of her characters, in *Tu t'appelleras Tanga* [Your Name Will Be Tanga] affirms that women must come to voice in order to "tuer le vide du silence" (destroy (literally kill) the emptiness of silence" (1). Further, linking the metaphoric silence figured in the title of her work to its frequent recurrence in feminist discourse, D'Almeida argues that silence is a representation of the "historical muting of women under the formidable institution known as patriarchy, that form of social organization in which males assume power and create for females an inferior status" (1). "Destroying the emptiness of silence," she says further, is therefore "an appropriate metaphor to describe the writing of women in Africa" (1, author's italics). Quoting Nawal Al Sadaawi, D'Almeida likens writing to killing, "because it takes a lot of courage, the same courage as when you kill, because you are killing ideas, you are killing injustices, you are killing systems that oppress you. Sometimes it is better to kill the outside world and not kill yourself" (2). D'Almeida says further that Al Sadaawi also sees writing as annihilation of silence, "as a weapon to destroy the ideas that perpetuate subjugation and inequity" (2). She links women's social possibilities with their ability to articulate their experience, understanding and
desire, "an articulation that cannot be realized unless the silence imposed upon these women is destroyed" (2). She goes on to decry "the void of written literary expression by African women," while emphasizing that the "void is not evident in orature, in which African women, both as custodians of cultural lore and educators of children, have been the choice storytellers" (2).

In a special issue of *African Literature Today*, which was "entirely devoted to African women writers and the [re/]presentation of women in African literature"(1), the editors acknowledge the scantiness of the literary output of African women "up to the end of the 1960s" (1). European colonialism which privileged male education, they argue, is mainly responsible for the disparity, since "[w]riting and education go hand in hand" (1). The editors assert the "tremendous blossoming of highly accomplished works by African women writers" since the 70s. What they deplore is the neglect of the women writers "in the largely male-authored journals, critical studies and critical anthologies" (1). Lloyd Brown shares this view of the critical neglect of African women writers. He argues that African women writers are "the voices unheard, rarely discussed and seldom accorded space in the repetitive anthologies and
predictably male-oriented studies in the field" (3). It is because of concerns like those expressed by Brown that I find a comment by Kenneth Harrow which seems to reject the argument about the lack of critical attention on African women writers troubling. In an essay, "I'm not a Western feminist . . ." — A Review of Recent Critical Writings on African Women's Literature," Harrow argues:

[The] load of African women's writing is now considerable, and it would be a mistake to attempt to continue the argument earlier made by Aidoo1 that African women's writing has suffered from a paucity of critical attention. (172)

What is apparent in the quotation above is that Harrow does not distinguish between "writing" and "critical attention."

If that distinction is made it would be realized that Aidoo's argument still has relevance; there is still little critical material on the works produced by African women.

1 In a 1990 interview with Adeola James, Aidoo had this to say: "Well, the question of the [African] woman writer's voice being muted has to do with the position of women in society generally. Women writers are just receiving the writer's version of the general neglect and disregard that woman in the larger society receive. I want to make that very clear. It is not unique. Now, as to the issue of where the female Achebues and so on are, you know that the assessment of a writer's work is in the hands of critics and it is the critics who put people on pedestals or sweep them under the carpet, or put them in a cupboard, lock the door and throw the key away. I feel that, wittingly or unwittingly, people may be doing this to African women writers; literally locking us out, because they don't care or they actively hate us" (11-12, author's italics).
writers. Part of the implicit danger in Harrow's argument is that the attention that is now being paid to the women writers may begin to evaporate.

The importance of the role of the African writer, man or woman, cannot be over-emphasized. In many African societies the writer is inevitably a public figure adopting a public stance, functioning as the eye, the conscience and the intelligence of his or her society. According to Kofi Awoonor, in Africa "where despair deepens in the practice of politics and in the lives of the ordinary people, the writers must represent the vanguard of the armies that will liberate the masses from ignorance and cultural strangulation and restore for them their earlier attachment to life" (355). In fact, Mariama Ba shares Awoonor's view when she argues:

In the task of building a democratic African society, freed from all forms of constraint, the writer has an important role to play in awakening consciousness and as guide. His (her) duty is to reflect the aspirations of all social classes, especially the most disadvantaged. To denounce the ills that plague our society and delay its full development, to denounce archaic practices, customs and mores that have nothing to do with our cultural heritage, this is the sacred mission

that the writer must carry out, come hell or high water, with faith and perseverance. (D'Almeida 29)

It is, therefore, not only African men who have "taken writing" and used its medium as a liberating force; as D'Almeida observes, women also use writing "to champion the cause of women and of a new African society" (D'Almeida x). In her essay "Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English," Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi underscores D'Almeida's position by asserting that "[b]lack [African] women writers are not limited to issues defined by their femaleness but attempt to tackle questions raised by their humanity" (68). It is because of the public stance writers in African societies take that both male and female writers like Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and Ama Ata

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1 Ayi Kwei Armah is more strident on the reconstructive role of the artist in African society. In his novel Why Are We So Blest?, he writes: "Why not simply accept the fate of an artist, and like a Western seer, close my eyes to everything around, find relief in discrete beauty, and make its elaboration my vocation? Impossible. The Western artist is blest with that atrophy of vision that can see beauty in deliberately broken-off pieces of a world sickened with oppression's ugliness. I hear the call of that art too. But in the world of my people that most important first act of creation, that rearrangement without which all attempts at creation are doomed to falseness, remains to be done. Europe hurled itself against us - not for creation, but to destroy us, to use us for creating itself. America, a growth out of Europe, now deepens that destruction. In this wreckage there is no creative art outside the destruction of the destroyers. In my people's world, revolution would be the only art, revolutionaries the only creators. All else is part of Africa's destruction."
Aidoo, just to mention a few, have been forced to live in exile.

The manifest concern of the African writer, male or female, is to speak to the immediate issues of social life "to narrate the tensions that traverse their world" (Irele xiv). It seems then that the critic of African literature is left with no choice but to give precedence to the powerful referential thrust of African literature; the critic must make clear the reference to the living context of life in which African literature is being created today. As Irele stresses, "it is only at the risk of deviating from the determined direction of this literature that one can disregard its gesture towards a focused and particularized meaning, its expressed implication in the collective experience" (xiv).

I started this section by referring to the relative dearth of writing by African women writers, but especially the critical attention given to them. It is in response to the need to give critical attention to African women writers that I am undertaking this study. Ogunyemi argues that
a black African woman writer is a "womanist." That is, she will recognize that, along with her consciousness of sexual issues, she must incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic, and political considerations into her philosophy" (64). This study is a study in womanism, a criticism of African women writers whose works articulate concerns about women of Africa as well as the societies in which they live.

**The Critics**

We must analyze the language of contemporary criticism itself, recognizing especially that hermeneutic systems are not universal, colourblind, apolitical, or neutral... No critical theory — be it Marxist, feminist, post-structuralist, Kwame Nkrumah's "consciencism," or whatever — escapes the specificity of value and ideology, no matter how mediated these may be.

—Henry Gates, Jr. (15)

Chris Weedon, in *Feminist Practice and Post-structuralist Theory*, writes, "Feminism is a politics. It is a politics directed at changing power relations between women and men in society" (1). I should, however, say with-

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Ogunyemi defines "womanism" as a "philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black womandom. It concerns itself as much with the black sexual power tussle as with the world power structure that subjugates blacks. Its ideal is for black unity where every black person has a modicum of power and so can be a 'brother' or a 'sister' or a 'father' or a 'mother' to the other." Though Alice Walker is generally credited with the term, Ogunyemi writes that she "arrived at 'womanism' independently and was pleasantly surprised to discover that [her] notion of its meaning overlaps with Alice Walker's" (72).
out any hesitation that, whereas I agree with Weedon's assumption in the first sentence, I disagree with the totaliz- ing binary opposition Weedon sets between women and men in the second sentence. It conveniently avoids the issue of race\textsuperscript{5}, which, in the words of Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in his "Writing 'Race' and the Difference It Makes," "has been an invisible quantity, a persistent yet implicit presence. . .\textsuperscript{1} In much of the thinking about the proper study of literature in this century" (2). Cheryl Johnson-Odin underscores Gates' point in an essay "Common Themes, Different Contexts: Third World Women and Feminism", when she writes:

While it is true that the oppression of impoverished and marginalized Euro-American women is linked to gen- der and class relations, that of Third World women is linked also to race relations and often imperialism. These added dimensions produce a different context in which Third World women's struggles must be under- stood. (314)

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\textsuperscript{5} In "Post-Colonial Critical Theories" Stephen Slemon problematizes the deployment of the "homogenizing nomenclature of race, class, gender, nation, sexual orientation, and the like" since they "conceal forms of division within groups" and "intersection lines and cross-over points between groups" (183). While I am aware of the homogenizing nature of the category of race and of arguments by race theorists like Anthony Appiah and Tzvetan Todorov who argue that the concept of race is an illusion (See Appiah, "The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race" and Todorov's "'Race,' Writing and Culture"), I find the deployment of the category of "race" convenient in this study since in some contexts I find the reference to, and distinction between, "black" and "white" writers or critics and the respective differences in their representation of Africa and Africans unavoidable.
Weedon's binary between men and women presupposes a universal category of men and women and also implies that all men have power and women do not. With this assumption, it becomes possible to assign an unproblematic ontological and political status to a global feminism; such an arrangement can easily collapse the voices of women of colour into those of white women and occlude the former, thereby dispensing with their burdens. If feminism or feminist theory represents itself as colour-blind and universal, it will neglect its own inscription within a Western or European system of thought with its history of imperialism. "Third World" and North American feminist critics of colour from various disciplinary contexts have articulated this problem. In her essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," Chandra Mohanty, in debunking the notion of "ethnocentric universalism," argues that "Western feminist writings on women . . . subscribe to a variety of methodologies to demonstrate the universal cross-cultural operation of male dominance and female exploitation" (66).

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6 See, for example, Audré Lord's "Open Letter to Mary Dale;" bell hook's Ain't I a Woman and Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?"
Though one can argue that Western feminist discourse is not monolithic, there is, in Chandra Mohanty's words, "a coherence of effects" resulting from the assumption of Europe/Euro-America as "a primary referent in theory and praxis" (64). This, for example, is the gist of Spivak's critique of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*, a text that takes for its radical trope the figure of a white Caribbean woman whose insanity results from geographic/racial contamination. Spivak argues that Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar see Bertha Mason "only in psychological terms, as Jane's dark double" (267). She argues further that it "is the active ideology of imperialism that provides the discursive field" of Bertha Mason's characteriziation (266).

Julia Kristeva's *About Chinese Women*, a travel narrative written after a three-week stay in the People's Republic of China, offers another example of how the "Third World" is reduced to a metonymic function. As Andrade observes, "the semiotique, her category of opposition to the phallocentric symbolique is strategically fragmented, locatable in the interstices of European hysterical and avant-garde discourse" (92), but appears to permeate all aspects of Chinese culture, which she constructs as mono-
lithic. Represented as the Law of the Father, China thus serves as the transparent passageway through which white women can locate the feminine pre-Oedipal.\(^7\)

Of course, gross generalizations about feminism (constructed as white) and the "Third World" (constructed as male) are not restricted to theorists who focus on Europe or Euro-America. Africanist Katherine Frank is unable to reconcile feminism with a monolithic Africa:

Feminism, by definition, is a profoundly individualistic philosophy: it values personal growth and individual fulfillment over any larger communal needs or goals. African society, of course, even in its most westernized forms, places the values of the group over those of the individual with the result that the notion of an African feminism almost seems a contradiction in terms. (45)

In fact, for Frank, "the African woman's degree of servitude would seem to be directly proportional to her proximity to 'darkest' Africa." For, if she seeks independence, Frank says, "she will almost certainly have to turn her back on her homeland and go, as the heroine of Emecheta's first two novels — The Bride Price and Slave Girl — does, to England or some other Western country" (492). We may

\(^7\) Spivak offers a critique of Kristeva and Cixous in her "French Feminism in an International Frame."
readily acknowledge so much of the West's significance. Yet, as Appiah observes, this significance is too often unproblematically alchemised into other kinds of supremacy, and the West then becomes a permanent representative locus of "universal value" (144). The distinguishing marker of the value of the West has been projected onto the concept of modernity, promoted ideologically as the medium within which the West finds its unique self-possession and expression, and towards which non-Western others must modularly aspire in order to find the viability of their own societies. Hence, in a discussion of nationalism within a modernist framework, Ernest Gellner can typically declare: "nationalism is, essentially, the general imposition of high culture on a society whose previously low cultures had taken up the lives of the majority, and in some cases, the totality of the population" (57). "High" and "low," as they are used here, and as Korang correctly argues, correspond putatively to the "modern" and "traditional," respectively; then again, they are categories grasped as occurring within a spatio-temporal hierarchy that arrogates originality and dynamism to the first term and opposes to it the backwardness and irrelevance of the second. Thus oppositionally defined, modernity occurs within, and takes
its measure from, "the evolutionist, forward looking codes of a Eurocentric master narrative of history" (Korang 3).

Chinua Achebe insists that "the European critic of African literature must cultivate the habit of humility appropriate to his[her] limited experience of the African world and purged of the superiority and arrogance which history so insidiously makes him[her] heir to" (6). Frank certainly did not listen to Achebe's advice.

I have discussed these critics to show how they all foreground a particular type of Western feminism or critical theory.

The Writers

The story is our escort; without it, we are blind.
—Chinua Achebe (124)

Katherine Frank, in her reference to "darkest" Africa, has her white precursors such as Joseph Conrad. This section will briefly discuss Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* with a view to foregrounding my argument for the need for black African women to establish their literary tradition in order to provide an authentic representation of the continent and especially its women.
In Conrad's novel, Marlow, the white European man, travels to Africa, "a place of darkness," and the journey, we are informed, "was like travelling back to the earliest beginning of the world" (29). He goes in search of Kurtz who is already in Africa. Kurtz, the representative European — "all Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz" (44) — gets destroyed in Africa because he "lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts" (51). This is not, perhaps, surprising, for he is among Africans, the race which "indulge[s], almost universally, in disgusting debauchery and sensuality, and display gross selfishness, indifference to the pains and pleasures of others, insensitivity to beauty and form, order and harmony, and an almost entire want of what we [Europeans] comprehend altogether under the expression of elevated sentiments, manly virtues, and moral feelings" (231).

Of particular interest in Heart of Darkness is the silencing of the black African woman. Abena Busia argues, "one of the primary characteristics in the representation of the black African woman in colonial fiction is the con-

\[1\] Bruce Harkness, Ed. Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" and the Critics (5). All page references are to this text.

\[2\] Curtin quotes one "Sir William Laurence, an anthropologist."
struction of her inactive silence"¹⁰ (86) emphasis in the original). In colonial fictional representation, the black African woman is not necessarily absent from the locus of action or power, she is deliberately denied access to language, "the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth,' 'order,' and 'reality' become established" (7). She is thought of as an "embodiment of the inferior qualities of womanhood, compounding the mindlessness of women with the mindlessness of Africans" (11).

Joyce Cary conveys this notion deftly in his *Mister Johnson* (1961):

> The [African] girls and women know that the speech is none of their business. They will do what they are told. They fix their sleepy eyes on the speaker and allow their usual train of feelings to continue. (156)

Towards the end of *Heart of Darkness* a whole page is quite unexpectedly lavished on an African woman who has been some kind of mistress to Kurtz and now presides, we are told, "like a formidable mystery over the inexorable imminence of his (Kurtz's) departure." This nameless Afri-

¹² Busia analyses texts like Margaret Laurence's *This Side Jordan* to show that some white writers, following in the tradition of their white counterparts, silence black women. She uses Sycorax as the prototypical silenced black woman.
can woman, who is an emblematic representation of the continent itself in her vagueness, is the very symbol of frenzied passion: uncontrollable, powerless, inaudible, and "certainly functionally inarticulate." The only reference to her speech reaches us thrice removed, through a statement by the "Insoluble problem"—that "impossible"... "inexplicable," and "altogether bewildering" man of patches, who says the African woman "talked like a fury to Kurtz for an hour, pointing at me now and then. I don't understand the dialect of this tribe. Luckily for me, I felt Kurtz was too ill that day to care" (54-55). Let us take a look at this Amazon:

She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent... She stood looking at me without a stir and like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose. (54)

And then her counterpart, the refined European woman, Kurtz's "Intended," who will step forth to end the story:

She came forward, all in black with a pale head, floating toward me in the dusk. She was mourning... She took both my hands and, "I had heard you were coming"... She had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering. (66)

In these passages from Heart of Darkness, the most significant difference in the treatment given to the two women by Conrad is that of the bestowal of human expression
to the one and the withholding of it from the other.\footnote{See Chinua Achebe, \textit{Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays} (13). I am indebted to Achebe for my insight into this aspect of \textit{Heart of Darkness}.} Certainly, it is not part of Conrad's purpose to confer language on the "rudimentary souls" of Africa, most especially its women.

In the "African Imagination," Abiola Irele comments on European works that take Africa as a setting and compose a corpus which "has consisted largely of the literature of exoticism; a literature in which Africa provides a theme for what amounts to no more than superficial fantasies." He argues further that even with "more serious novels," the African scene, when it is not employed as a mere backdrop, is "essentially as a symbol of moral states and existential issues." Africa itself is never an immediate reference and the African is never envisaged as anything more than an element in a landscape to which the writer has ascribed a predetermined meaning. Thus, "the continent itself is not only refracted through a European perspective, its peoples are also excluded as living figures" (59). Conrad's \textit{Heart of Darkness} is certainly one of such works.

\footnote{See Chinua Achebe, \textit{Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays} (13). I am indebted to Achebe for my insight into this aspect of \textit{Heart of Darkness}.}
Nadine Gordimer's *July's People*, set at the turn of the twenty-first century South Africa, is inhabited by excessively civilized whites and grossly primitive buffoons or common cretins labeled blacks. It is in Gordimer's work that human beings and pigs live under the same roof; human beings, blacks, eat faeces. In Gordimer's myth of conceptual polarities, there exist those values which are white, civilized, rational, progressive, even millennial, and creative; on the other are the black, savage, instinctual, regressive, even atavistic and destructive. Within the context of Gordimer's perceived values, the relationship between whites and blacks in South Africa emerges as the story of whites bestowing values on benighted blacks for mutual benefit.

July's wife, for example, who exists solely as a sexual object for July in an asphyxiating, desecralizing, dehumanizing capitalist market, cannot imagine a black ontology that does not worship at the altar of a dependency syndrome (22-23). The gods here are of course the Smales. At a point in the narrative, July's wife cannot imagine a future in which July would not work for Smales: "Without his white people back there, without the big house where he worked
for them, she would not be getting those letters . .  
There'll be no more money coming every month" (22-23).

In Gordimer's black world, it is only through the gen-
ius of the white patriarch Bam Smales, out of nothing, that 
July's black natives "could have a decent rain-water supply 
all through the rainy months" (25). Africans must necessar-
ily always depend on whites, for it does not look like they 
[Africans] are imbued with any sense of creativity, of in-
vention, of discovery, of imagination. How else could David 
Livingstone, the Scottish "missionary," have discovered the 
Zambesi river, Lakes Ngamu and Malawi, as well as the so-
called Victoria Fails, when he had to be led by human be-
ings, black Africans?

Nadine Gordimer's July's People is a celebration of 
whiteness, because, for Gordimer, blacks must constantly 
worship at the throne of whiteness. In her text the colo-
nized, victimized, exploited July and his black people are 
all too willing to be complicit in perpetuating the fantasy 
that the ruling-class white culture is the quintessential 
site of unrestricted joy, freedom, power and pleasure. In 
her novel, Africans personify degraded otherness, exemplify 
radical alterity, and embody alien difference. Operating 
within the same dominative logics are the notions of black
ugliness, cultural deficiency, and intellectual inferiority. Africans are identified with dirt, odious smell, and faeces\(^\text{12}\) (22). Gordimer unabashedly encodes all these stereotypical images in her representation of blackness. Let us look at a few passages from the novel. On one occasion, we are told that Maureen is followed by domestic pigs "in the hope of picking up her excrement" (85). In a particularly offensive paragraph, Gordimer's very refined sensibility is able to tell us that in Maureen's 39 years of existence because of her move from the city to the village that, "for the first time in her life she found that she smelled bad between her legs" (9). This implies that all the black women who live in the village are dirty. Dirt is a metaphor for blackness, for not only do July's wife's children feed on faeces, Gordimer informs us through an incredible enthymeme that "dirt didn't show nearly so badly on black children," (42). On almost every page of the text, we see and smell dirt, the dirt of stinking blacks.

\(^\text{12}\) In "Marxist Theory and the Specificity of Afro-American Oppression" Cornel West looks at the "issue of the specificity of Afro-American oppression " and argues that European culture endows African men and women "with sexual prowess; views Africans as either cruel, revengeful fathers, frivolous, carefree children, or passive, long-suffering mothers; and identify Africans with dirt, odious smell, and faeces" (23). West's essay informs my reading of Gordimer's work.
What Gordimer does is to trivialize the traditional mode of existence of July's villagers. July becomes an agent of racism, as he does not believe the herbal medicines his own children take are good enough for the Smales' children. Through the appropriation of July's voice, what Gordimer insists upon is white cultural superiority. What enables Gordimer to trivialize the very mode of life of July's villagers is her deployment of a strategic narrative of containment — the journey. Gordimer's text is a narrative of ideology (Jameson 185), which undermines the will of blacks to power while reinforcing the will of whites to dominate. On one level the narrative can be situated within "a larger system of the protextual search for the [self]" (Jameson 205), the Jungian journey to the underworld, in the white woman Maureen's growth from ignorance to recognition. This ego-psychological journey parallels the physical journey from the city to July's village. In her deployment of the narrative mode of the journey, Gordimer's text is no different from a white, male colonialist text like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

In *Heart of Darkness* Conrad uses black Africa as a backdrop to enable one petty white man to achieve his identity or, even, the break-up of mind. Gordimer's text is a
figural replay of this problematic drama of colonizing the other's space as one's own.

**Politics of Representation**

To date a few major studies have been devoted to studies of African female writers and the representation of women in African literature. Some of these studies have been done by expatriates, a fact which seem to justify the assertion by G.D. Killam that "expatriates have made and will continue to make useful contributions to the interpretation and understanding of African writing" (296). One such work is Kenneth Little's *The Sociology of Urban Women's Image in African Literature*. However, Little's work is problematic in that it defines women almost exclusively according to their relationships with men: i) girlfriends and goodtime girls, ii) wives, iii) free women, iv) mothers, v) courtesans and prostitutes, and finally vi) political women and workers (26).

In *Women Writers in Black Africa*, Lloyd W. Brown's analysis of the selected texts is insightful. His work, however, has its limitations, some of which are that he deals primarily with English-speaking writers and that each of the writers that he selects has published other major
works. For example, Aidoo has published two novels, *Our Sister Killjoy* and *Changes: A Love Story*. In addition, in his chapter "The Woman's Voice in African Literature," Brown himself becomes a victim of his own criticism — the tendency for men to define women in relation to men. For example, in a discussion of Ugandan female writer Barbara Kimenye's *Kalasanda*, he writes: "Women appear in a variety of roles in Kalasanda village life. There are prominent wives of community leaders and the Christians who fail ignominiously in their assault" (16, emphasis added). Women are defined in relation to men and do not seem to have any identity of their own.

To date, the most comprehensive work by an African male critic on African female writers and the representation of women is Oladele Taiwo's *Female Novelists of Modern Africa*. Taiwo not only directs a lot of attention to his fellow Nigerian, Buchi Emecheta, but also includes a larger cross-section of writers than does Lloyd Brown. Taiwo's work is also unable to come to terms with an independent African woman. He writes censoriously of Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*:

> It may be the intention of the author to prove that women can do without men in their private relationship... Ms. Aidoo is quite entitled to put women at
the helm of affairs in her novel. But it is an error to think that they can live a full life without men. If such a situation is tenable in Europe, it has no chance of succeeding in Africa. (26)

Taiwo's disenchantment with Aidoo's work is grounded in his thinking that feminism is imported from Europe and has no place in African society. What he resents is the resulting independence of women when they acquire power. There is an implication in his criticism of Aidoo that there have never been any women leaders in Africa. In Ghana, Yaa Asantewa led the Asanti in a war against the British in 1900. In Nigeria (his own country) there was the 1929 Igbo Women's War. The Women's War was a violent culmination of traditional manifestations of Igbo women's power called "making war on" or "sitting on" a man. Such power usually took the form of raucous and destructive behaviour by women and was directed at men who were perceived to threaten their personal or economic security.

In November 1929, tens of thousands of Igbo (and Ibibio) women "made war on" the corrupt male Warrant Chiefs who comprised the Native Courts, the British juridical system for the natives of Calabar and Owerri provinces. Although the women originally mobilized around the issue of women's taxation, their demands soon included abolition of
the Native Courts (or the inclusion of women on them) and the return of all white men to their own country.¹³

Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature, edited by Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves is the first really important contribution to the critical work on women in African literary scholarship. An anthology of eighteen essays, its editorial and ideological orientation is not directed solely towards works by women writers and critics but includes rereadings of earlier writing produced by men. In her introduction, Davies endorses Sheila Rowbotham's view in Women's Consciousness, Man's World that "a feminist movement which is confined to the specific oppression of women cannot, in isolation, end exploitation and imperialism" (123-124). Arguing that an African feminism should see the interconnectedness between race, class and gender, Davies suggests that African feminism recognizes a common struggle with African men for the removal of the yokes of European/American exploitation. Davies' position is that an African feminism acknowledges its affinities with international feminism while, at the same time, de-

¹³ See Judith Van Allen's "'Aba Riots' or Igbo 'Women's War'? Ideology Stratification, and the Invisibility of Women" and her "'Sitting on a Man': Colonialism and the Lost Institutions of Igbo Women."
lineating particular goals arising out of the concrete realities of women's lives in Africa. In short, it is a hybrid which seeks to combine African concerns with feminist concerns, in particular the double allegiance to women's emancipation and African liberation. This definition seemed to tally not only with Alice Walker's, but also with the Nigerian critic Chikwenya Okonjo Ogunyemi's definition of womanism.\textsuperscript{14}

Ngambika has received searing criticism from Kenneth Harrow. He contends that the work has weaknesses that arose from the rejection of Western theorizing, from the fears that an acceptance of anti-essentialist positions would weaken women in their claims to greater equality or authority in African society, and from the apprehension that Western feminist concern over gender occluded competing claims to attend to race, class, or political oppression. (174)

Harrow's basic criticism of the work is that it has an agenda "grounded in representation" (173, author's italics). It is as if in response to this criticism that Mineke Schipper comments, "In reality, male reactions to women's

\textsuperscript{14} In "Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Novel in English" Ogunyemi defines womanism thus: "Black womanism is a philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black womandom. It concerns itself as much with the black sexual power tussle as with the world power structure that subjugates blacks. Its ideal is for black unity where every black person has a "brother" or a "sister" or a "father" or a "mother" to the other." (72)
liberation efforts in African society are alarming, especially when the future of the society as a whole seems critical or hopeless. . . In African literature woman hardly has a mouth yet. The image of women in the novel is also very much a male writer's business, and often sadly stereotyped" (48). Ngambika at the time had to respond to the negative images of women in a male dominated literature.

Janet Zollinger Giele and Audrey Chapman Smocke in their study *Women: Roles and Status in Eight Countries* — the countries studied include Ghana and Egypt in Africa — advance the argument that life's options include: deciding whether and whom to marry; deciding to terminate a union; controlling one's sexual freedom, pre- and extra-maritally; controlling one's freedom of movement; having access to educational opportunities; enjoying a de facto share of household power; as well as having "the opportunity for political participation and cultural expression" (4). Many of these options are utopias not only for the African woman, but the African man as well. However, the plight of the African woman is decidedly worse. The African woman, according to her representation in many male produced texts should not even dream of having access to most
of these options. Here, I would like to define representa-
tion as connoting all the cultural associations
—religious, artistic, intellectual and normative—that
define what a person is expected to be and against which a
person may rebel.

Some of the recurring images of women that appear in
African male-produced literature include: women as para-
sites, goddesses, wives, mistresses or prostitutes. How-
ever, as Kathleen Mcluskie and Lynn Innes note in their in-
sightful essay, "Women and Literature", "whether as wives,
mistresses or prostitutes, African women are rarely por-
trayed except in relation to men, or their otherness to
men" (4). One rarely catches more than a glimpse of women
operating independently, although in most parts of Africa,
women in the past had their own bit of land, their own
crops, their own market stores. In Ghana, for example,
groups such as the market women had their own organizations
and elected representatives who wielded considerable eco-
nomic and political power. Despite its concern with review-
ing the historical past and the confrontation with colonial
power and culture, nowhere in Nigerian literature does one
encounter reference to the women's action of 1929, which
terrified the British administration, causing it to stop
appointing quisling chiefs and levying taxes on the women.

In Kenya, as Muthoni Likimani records in Passbook Number F. 47 927: Women and Mau Mau in Kenya, women faced many hardships — while providing for their families and while aiding their communities in the political struggle for independence. Women in Africa today are teachers, nurses, lawyers, ministers of state, ambassadors, fishers and farmers.


Women Writers and Society

Indeed, if we thought that anyone was providing us with a platform from which to prove that African women writers were different in any way from their male counterparts, or that they faced some fundamental problems which male African writers did not face, some of us would not really want to use such a platform. How could there be? Did we not all suffer the varied wickedness of colonialism, apartheid, neo-colonialism and global imperialists and fascism together?

— Ama Ata Aidoo (158)

I will not be called a feminist here, because it is European. It is as simple as that. I just resent that... I don't like being defined by them... It is just that it comes from outside and I don't like people dictating to me. I do believe in the African type of feminism. They call it womanism, because, you see, you Europeans don't worry about water, you don't worry about schooling, you are so well off. Now, I buy land, and I say, 'OK, I can't build on it, I have no money, so I give it to some woman to start planting.' That is my brand of feminism.

— Buchi Emecheta (175)
Various views have been put forth by African writers, both men and women, on the role of the writer in society. The above passage from Aidoo seems to define this role. Kofi Awoonor, the Ghanaian poet, urges that "in Africa, where despair deepens in the practice of politics and in the lives of the ordinary people, the writers must represent the vanguard of the armies that will liberate the masses from ignorance and cultural strangulation and restore for them their earlier attachment to life" (355). It seems that there is a consensus among both the writers and critics that, because of the continent's peculiar problems, even while Africans fight for their own independence, the fight should be linked with the struggle to free the continent from poverty, senseless ethnic wars, hunger, disease and neo-colonialism.

Chikwenye Ogunyemi, using Nigerian women writers for her contextual discussion of the role of women in African societies, points out that "Nigerian women writers . . . do not view the twentieth-century problem as "woman palava," that is, simply, feminism. Rather, their perspective encompasses all oppressed people, men included" (5). The African woman writer touches on national issues, colonial and post-colonial politics, and the dynamics of male-female rela-
tionships. Most African women writers aim at writing to enhance societal cohesiveness. The ideology of most is integrative rather than singularly adversarial; their visions are community centered rather than self-oriented or solely woman-centered. As Ogunyemi notes, "women's vision complements men's patriarchal view, both providing an enriched encounter with African literature" (5).

In My Mother's House

The renewed emphasis on textuality, on the strictly formal status of all linguistic manifestations, has had however as its concomitant the denial to structured language of its natural (or conventional) referential function and has promoted what amounts to a new orthodoxy in the area of literary criticism: it has led to what is visibly an extreme position in which the relation of literary expression to a lived world of human values and consciousness is being eroded.

— Abiola Irele (xiii)

Doing that kind of criticism shames me as well. It's a way of telling myself that to respond humanly to something another human being has written isn't enough, that I must hack and claw my way up above it, master it, control it; and then and only then will what I have to say be worth anything. . .

But do we have to belong to an oppressed minority in order to admit that we're in pain, that we need to grieve and to recover? Perhaps we're afraid that if we dared to talk like real human beings having real human responses — direct, emotional, personal — to literature, we would lose our professional stature. I mean couldn't just anybody do that? How would we justify ourselves as a legitimate discipline? (Fine word, "legitimate.") There could be a lot at stake. But what's at stake — at least for some of us, and I would bet a good many of us — if we insist on continuing to practice a self-abandoning style of criticism?

— Peter Carlton (241-243)

Experience is not a word we can do without, although, given its usage to essentialize identity and reify the subject, it is tempting to abandon it altogether. But experience is so much a part of everyday language, so imbricated in our narratives that it seems futile to argue for its expulsion. It serves as a way of talking about what happened, of establishing difference and similarity, of claiming knowledge that
is 'unassailable'. . . Experience is . . . not the origin of our expla-
nation, but that which we want to explain.
— Joan W. Scott (797)

In the Preface to his work The Art of Ama Ata Aidoo
Vincent Odamtten mentions how long and painful its gesta-
tion period had been. He intimates that the project was
"conceived out of love and anger." He developed the love
naturally from reading Aidoo's works and his anger stemmed
from "the partial readings of Aidoo's works" by critics.
Without the slightest attempt to suggest a comparison be-
tween my work and Odamtten's masterpiece, I would say that
the same emotions that drove him to undertake his project,
gave me the energy to do mine. The reasons behind my en-
deavour are different from Odamtten's, though. My labour
has been long and painful, extremely painful at times, be-
cause of having to remember the pain and suffering, the
poverty and deprivation, my mother had to endure to bring
ten of us up. The women characters like Mami Ama in Aidoo's
"No Sweetness Here" and Nnu Ego in Emecheta's The Joys of
Motherhood, who toiled "from morn till eve" (Aidoo 11), so
that their children would be fed ceased to be just fic-
tional characters but real women, real mothers, to me.
Reading the fiction of the women writers I discuss in this
study reminded me that there are still millions of very
poor women in Africa today like my mother, who live in villages and poor urban centers — places without basic human necessities like good drinking water, clinics, and electricity. Reading the fiction reminded me of Cornel West’s argument in Beyond Eurocentrism and Multiculturalism: Prophetic Reflections that "there is a reality that one cannot not know. The ragged edges of the Real, of Necessity, not being able to eat, not having shelter, not having health care, all this is something that one cannot know" (91, author's italics).

I had hoped to finish this degree, get a job so that I would give my mother "a good life" as she has given me. But, just like Oshia in Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood, my mother died in her poverty before I could achieve my aim. Like Oshia, all that I could do for my mother was to return to Ghana to give her "a decent burial" (Emecheta 224).

I, too, had been concerned about the paucity of critical material on works by African women writers. I had been thinking about it, but it was not until death suddenly snatched my mother away that my love for her and my anger at the cruelty of death both conflated to give wings to my thoughts.
In her essay, "Rewriting History, Motherhood, and Rebellion," Susan Andrade writes that her "provisional approach to African women's literary history concentrates on an intertextual reading of women's narratives but also involves "real" history — what Carole Boyce Davies has called the text and context necessary to reading African women's literature" (94).

The first chapter of this work is a narrative of my mother's story — or part of it — within a commentary on Aidoo's short story, "No Sweetness Here," with references to other texts like Emecheta's work with the painfully ironic title *The Joys of Motherhood*. My mother's story is the "real history" that allows me to focus on a dialogic relation to the texts I discuss: Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story* and *Our Sister Killjoy*, and Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and *Head Above Water*. Whereas I condense my discussion of Emecheta's two books into one chapter, I discuss Aidoo's texts separately. Emecheta's texts serve as the negotiating bridge between the real history and imaginative history.

Both Aidoo and Emecheta agree on the function of the African woman's literary text as a vehicle for societal transformation for both African men and women. Terry Eagle-
ton argues that "literary theory is less an object of intellectual enquiry in its own right than a particular perspective in which to view the history of our times" (194). The history of my time is an Africa in which too many people die senselessly every day while the rest of the world looks askance. The history of my time is a Mozambique eaten by voracious floods overnight. The history of my time is an Africa that pants for fresh breath in the whirlpool of suffocating tyrants and dictators. The history of my time is an Africa diarrhoeing the loss of its best brains to the West but getting nothing back in return. The history of my time is an Africa that makes no sense to me.

In her "Foreward" to Marie Umeh's *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*, Margaret Busby writes:

> Because of patriarchal arrangements of African societies, publicly and privately, most women have even less time and leisure than their Western counterparts to write, since their time is often spent waiting on others and managing other people — their husbands, their children, older relatives and visitors — in addition to managing their own lives. (xvi)

Earlier in this introduction, I quoted Chinua Achebe who cautions Western critics of African literature to cultivate "the habit of humility appropriate to [their] limited experience of the African world and purged of the superiority and arrogance which history so insidiously makes
[them] heir to" (6). I refer to Achebe again because Busby's argument above does not demonstrate enough knowledge about the women and the continent she writes about. No one denies the existence of patriarchy in many African societies; neither does anyone deny the oppression of women in African societies. Where in this world are women not oppressed? However, to attribute the relative low production of African writers solely to "patriarchal arrangements" is disingenuous. Vincent Odamten argues that "[t]he consolidation of colonialism, and its preference for a male-dominated educated African elite, led to disruptions and escalating tensions in [Ghana's] socio-economic system" (8).

Colonial traditions in all African societies privileged male education over female education, so there is some logic to the existence of more male writers than women writers, Busby argues that one of the reasons women do not get the opportunity to write is that they have to manage their "older relatives and visitors". In my country, Ghana, there are no places for seniors as I find in Canada here, for example. The young, both male and female, take care of the old. The economic conditions in many African countries simply make life unbearable for all, men and women. In her
autobiographical Head Above Water, Emecheta is able to educate herself and write because of the support she received in the form of welfare and family benefits from government. My argument is that socio-economic conditions in many African societies make life simply difficult for almost all. In fact the majority of African writers, both men and women, live in exile because of socio-economic conditions in their countries. I wonder myself if I would have been able to do this study back in (my own country) Ghana. The University of Calgary library receives copies of Research in African Literature Today published in the States on a very regular basis. The poor economy of Ghana does not enable the University of Ghana, Legon, to subscribe to Research in African Literature Today. Socio-economic conditions in almost all so-called postcolonial countries in Africa combine to stifle life for all.

The motivation for this study was, among others, the desire to respond to Western critics like Busby who read African women-authored texts with particular preconceptions, and without due regard for what the (con)texts actually say. I have already referred to the paucity of critical studies on writing by African women as another motiva-
tion for my study. I am a teacher by profession and I listen to Tillie Olsen who says in *Silences*:

You who teach, read writers who are women. There is a whole literature to be re-estimated, revalued . . . Read, listen to, living women writers; our new as well as our established, often neglected ones. Not to have an audience is a kind of death. Read the compass of women writers in our infinite variety. Not only those who tell us of ourselves as "the other half," but also those who write of other human dimensions, realms. (44)

These African women's texts tell us not only about their oppression, they tell us about "the other human dimension, the realm;" they are the surgeons that dissect the ills of Africa and tell Africa where it went wrong and continues to go wrong. In these texts, we see the multiple forms of oppression, exploitation and domination that coalesce to strangle Africans, but especially women.

Nfah-Abbenyi urges critics of African women's texts to "let ourselves be questioned by the texts themselves" (149). On a very personal note, the motivation for the study was the need to re-read my mother's life through these women's texts, so that I would never forget that there are millions of women in Africa whose lives must be improved, who continue to bear unnecessary pain and suffering. These women live in post-colonial Africa and yet unlike their white post-colonial counterparts in places like
like Canada and Australia, most of them still walk long
distances to their farms with their children strapped on
their backs, work with the cutlass or hoe, and return home
with loads on their heads.

As an approach to the study of some of the texts, my
methodology compromise autobiographical narration, close
reading of the texts and an assumption that the texts them-
selves are "theorized fictions" (Nfah-Abbenyi 149). A num-
ber of factors conflated in my decision to use autobio-
graphical narration/material in this project. One of them
was a statement I read in Peter Carlton's essay, "Reread-
ing Middlemarch, Rereading Myself." Carlton writes:

Imagine attending a professional conference where, in-
stead of listening to hyperintellectualized, alienat-
ing papers, we talked with each other as much about
ourselves, as about our literature -- about how read-
ing this poem or that novel or this play had helped us
to reread ourselves, perhaps even about how a given
work of art had served for us an occasion of grief or
outrage or joy. Our profession contains communities of
colleagues for whom something like this imagined scene
is or at least has been the case: feminists, gays and
lesbians, people of colour. (242)

The autobiographical material functions to underpin the
emancipatory, anti-colonialist political commitment of my
project, and to provide a theoretical base for my reading
of the texts I have selected, while humanizing the same
theoretical approach as both Irele and Carlton advocate in
the epigraphs above.

Peter Carlton's essay, also suggests that: "I read
myself in my . . . rereading of Dorothea . . . each reread-
ing is both a self-inscription and a rereading of previ-
ously inscribed versions of myself" (240, 239). Carlton
reads what writes him. As Jeanne Perreault characterizes
it, "self lives mutably in subject and object space" (114).
History is personal and communal, and the self, in its dia-
lectical engagement with reality, is the precise embodiment
of history" (133). The autographical material enables me to
have a dialectical engagement with the texts for my study.
And also, as D'Almeida contends, in the African context,
"auto-fiction is generally turned into socio-fiction, and
within African societies, recounting the story of an indi-
vidual life is often a pretext for reviving a historical
moment and depicting a whole society" (35). I also offer
the autobiographical narration because as the first epi-

Perreault writes in the chapter on Patricia Williams's Alchemy: "Wil-
liams wants to change how the laws of property, rights, and contracts
are read. She interprets the texts that control, influence, influence,
and reflect U.S. culture. And she reads what writes her. From student
evaluations to the contract of sale of her great-great-grandmother,
Sophie, Williams examines and rewrites documents, speaking out of the
bifurcations in her sense of self that they create " (100-101).
The role of the critic in the African oral tradition was a complex one. He was not a literary technician in search of ossified precision and foreign patterns and designs, but a spontaneous entertainer, a historian and a wordmaster - in short, an artist. Criticism was not divorced from the creative process but an essential part of and adjunct to it. Creativity and criticism enjoyed a symbiotic relationship. Critical evaluation and the composition of a work of art were regarded as facets of the same process and, in most cases, aspects of the same moment. This interrelationship formed the literary climate that fostered the production and growth of such traditional works as The Mwindo Epic, Sundiata An Epic of Mali, and the Yoruba Ijala, and nourished and shaped the creative sensibilities of the legendary poet-critic Amadou Koumba. (173 emphasis mine)

Though Iyasere deals with traditional African societies in the passage above, the fusion of the role of the critic and creator is prevalent in modern African societies and is demonstrated in the 1994 issue of African Literature Today - a special issue titled Critical Theory & African Literature Today. The editors underscore the inextricable link between the critic and writer/creator in modern African society in their editorial:

The criticism of modern African literature has developed side by side with the literature itself and though, interestingly, some of its foremost critics are among its foremost creators, it cannot be said that the latter, in Pope's phrase, turned critics
merely in their own defence. Theirs has been a genuine search for a poetic to accommodate a literature arising out of the African tradition expressed largely in non-African languages and reflecting an environment which in its mannerisms, its artefacts and even in its morality may be far removed from its traditional roots. Indeed some of the finest examples of African literary criticism are to be found in the works of these same creative writers. The negritude poets, particularly Senghor, Césaire and Damas, led the way with their theory and practice in the Paris of the 1930s.

Criticism in African society is, therefore, aimed at "the maximum expansion of a literary work and not a curtailment of it" (Iyasere 173). My project falls within this African tradition that fuses criticism and creativity.

And yet there is another important reason for my use of autobiographical material. In the Preface to her work, D'Almeida asserts that she wanted to "destroy the emptiness of silence" in the same way that Francophone African women writers do" (x). Peter Carlton in "Reading Middle-march, Reading Myself" ponders how we could use literature to talk "with each other as much about ourselves," or "how reading this poem or that novel or this play had helped us to reread ourselves, perhaps even how a given work had served for us an occasion of grief or outrage or joy." (247). Rosanne Kanhai-Brunton in her essay "The Crippling of the Third World: Shiva Naipaul's Heritage" insists that
"we need to avoid a discourse that assigns a 'master' position and instead to discover the insecurity of a group that devises machinations of oppression" (251). It is this group that Carlton characterizes as "the shame-based" academic interpreter (242). Both Carlton and Kanhai-Brunton wonder if we could not "be heard by people that are not within the academy?" (252). It is, in part, listening voices like those of D'Almeida, Carlton and Kanhai-Brunton, and in paying homage to my rich African heritage that I resort to the use of autobiographical narrative in this study. In fact, the autobiographical narrative weaves criticism, personal memoir, biography, and cultural history, and as such is not "simply' autobiography but has a pedagogical function of reminding us that these strands are not separate but are often seen as separate in some Western methodologies which would seek to give these texts (literary, personal, biographical, historical) discrete and separate functions. The first chapter teaches us that the autobiographical mode in African writing and storytelling is integrative, not separate or hierarchically "lower" than criticism. Iyasere is very clear on this point:

All in all, the traditional African considered the critical evaluation of a work of art as a vital human activity, a creative endeavour in which the whole com-
Community participated. It is aimed at the maximum expansion of a literary work and not a curtailment of it. Thus, a good critic must possess not only critical insights but, more important and in keeping with the oral form of the tradition, the ability to expand, to illuminate and to make criticism a creative and lively performance.\(^\text{16}\)\(^\text{173}\)

In the final paragraph of the Preface to *Writers in Politics*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o argues that the African writer's work reflects one or more of the intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles in her/his society. "Every [African] writer he concludes, "is a writer in politics." I would suggest further, then, that every critic is a critic in politics. My politics influenced my selection of the two writers I select and their texts. The two writers and the works I discuss allow the self-interpellative reading I offer. Secondly, my position on African feminism is that while it should certainly advocate the emancipation of women on the continent, because of the peculiar problems the continent faces in relation to the rest of the world, an African feminist agenda should em-

brace a liberation of the continent from all sources of oppression, both internal and external. These writers and the texts I discuss articulate this position. I foreground my close reading of Aidoo with a rather surveyic reading of Emecheta. The intention is to raise the issues these writers discuss broadly in Emecheta and discuss them in detail in Aidoo.
CHAPTER 1

IN MY MOTHER'S HOUSE

The listening mind is disturbed by memories from the past. So much time has gone by and still there is no sweetness here.

— Ayi Kwei Armah (67)

The ancients have said that every story has a day for its telling and this seems to be quite an appropriate occasion for the telling of this particular tale. In 1962, I wrote a short story with the title 'No Sweetness Here' which won a prize in the short competition organized by Ulli Beier and the Mbari Club. Beier subsequently published it in one of the issues of the Black Orpheus journal in 1964. When I later collected some of my short stories for re-publication as a volume, I gave that to the whole volume. That was in 1970. Meanwhile in 1965, I had met a fellow Ghanaian who had just returned from the United States, and who became a very good friend and a brother. That man is Ayi Kwei Armah, who later published The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, a novel which has become one of the best known books in all of modern African literature. In one of the passages in which there is a definitely successful 'merger between the authorial voice and (his) character's reflections,' we learn from the man that 'The listening mind is disturbed by memories from the past. So much time has gone by, and still there is no sweetness here.' The book was published in 1968, and somehow, from then, critics of African literature seemed to find the phrase 'no sweetness here' so original and just so fascinating, any time they talked of Ayi Kwei Armah's book, they commented on it. Meanwhile, a number of these same critics seemed to also have concluded that since the phrase embodies a concept that could be quite profound, it could not possibly have first come from the mind or issued from the pen of a woman. The credit should rightly go to a man. That must explain why over the years a number of critics have twisted and turned until a way was found to say against the indisputable evidence of the word and all logic of chronology, that Ama Ata Aidoo borrowed the phrase from Ayi Kwei Armah. One outstanding example has been Robert Fraser: 'only in the native township does a whole generation grow into an ingrained awareness that there is, in the phrase borrowed by Ama Ata Aidoo for her volume of stories so similar in mood, 'no sweetness here.'

—Ama Ata Aidoo (169)

Massa, Massa. You call me woman? I swear, by god, Massa, this na tough. I no be woman. God forbid!

—Ama Ata Aidoo, "For Whom Things Did Not Change" (17)

"Robert Fraser, The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah (26).
2nd Woman: . . .
But who would have thought that I,
Whose house is teeming with children,
My own, my husband's, my sister's . . .
But this is my curse.
'Shall I do this when
This and that have nothing to do?'
No. And they all sit
With their hands between their knees.
If the courtyard must be swept,
It is Aba's job.
If the ampeasi must be cooked,
It is Aba's job.
And since the common slave was away all day
There was no drop in the pot
To cool the parched throat.
— Ama Ata Aidoo (11)

The joy of being a mother was the joy of giving all to your children.
— Buchi Emecheta (224)

When I started writing this paper, I knew that I would be writing in
several voices: my adolescent self, my older self; myself as student,
myself as teacher; myself as daughter, granddaughter, sister; my per-
sonal self and my professional self. What I did not know was that
speaking in my own voice(s) also meant being silent so that other
voices could speak through me: my mother, Virginia Woolf, my grand-
mother, my teachers, Charlotte Bronte, my sister, Bertha. I began this
paper thinking it was about Jane Eyre. I now realize it is at least as
much about beautiful and wild Bertha Mason as it is about its homely
and sane protagonist: the Medusa and the plain Jane in all of us.
— Ellen Brown (234)

I offer the chapter below without any theoretical in-
terventions. Ellen Brown's passage above speaks to this
chapter. Like Brown, when I started writing the chapter, I
knew that I would be writing in several voices: my child-
hood self, my adolescent self, my older self; myself as a
student in Ghana, myself a student in Canada; myself a
teacher in Ghana, myself as a teacher in Canada; myself as
biological son, stepson, grandson, brother, uncle; my per-
sonal self and my professional self; myself as father; myself as married and divorced in Ghana, myself as black African married to a white Canadian woman. What I did not know was that speaking in my own voice(s) also meant that other voices could speak through me: my mother, biological father, stepfather, my grandmother, granduncle, nephews and nieces, wife, Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta, millions of oppressed African women and men. I am always reminded of Samuel Delaney's *Motion of Light in Water*, constantly moving, constantly changing but always present.

* * *

Writing this thesis has been difficult, incredibly difficult. And the difficulty, I know, is not the child of incompetence, or idiocy. No, mine is a difficulty that is rooted deeply in the fear of getting out of the self by the very fact of completing the doctoral degree. The fact is that I have been reading Ayi Kwei Armah very intensely lately. I have such a fascination for his works lately, especially his *Why Are We Blest* and its central character with a split personality, Modin. Modin is this fictional Ghanaian/African student studying in the United States for a doctoral degree, but who quits at the level of the dissertation. He gives two reasons for his decision, reasons
anyone, especially me, would consider crazy, at the begin-
ing of this millennium. Let me quote them, all the same.

Modin says he is quitting because:

First the security thing. The degree puts me in the elite. Guaranteed income, perks, the whole rotten deal I tell myself I don't want. Second, there's the kind of silly pride that makes me want to prove I can com-
plete it. (91)

Though I have been in Canada for eight years now and I am happily married to a very loving white, Canadian, woman, I have always felt that home is back in Ghana. And when I talk of home, I talk about the nine other siblings I have left behind, and the more than twenty nephews and nieces. And there are the good old friends, most of whom do not have the have education I have. And though I have quit drinking completely now, I still remember the times we used to gather under shady trees and drink fresh, frothy palm-
wine. And I just remember that of the nine siblings, only two have post-secondary education. I cannot explain why. And even those two, I know, at times find it difficult to understand why I continue to acquire all this knowledge, "the knowledge of the leopard skin" (Ama Ata Aidoo, The Di-
lemma of a Ghost, 14). I know they think I am alienating myself from them. And I know so, too. In fact more than four years ago, the youngest brother in the family, a boy I
personally brought up, took a telephone and calmly asked me if I was going to study till I was retired. Even if the two with some education think that I am alienating myself from them, how about the rest, what will their knowing that some people will call me Dr. So and So do to their psyches? How do I become one of the privileged few in my village? But I know that with the degree or not, I am already privileged, perhaps even before I came to Canada. And as for proving that I can get the degree, I know I do not have to prove anything to anybody. So, there must be some reasons other than those my fictional character-friend, Modin, gives for the difficulty, the mental and even physical torture I go through daily trying to complete this thesis.

I stop at this point and look around. I am working in my office at the basement of our house which is in one of the neighbourhoods considered not just expensive, but decent in Calgary. I remember my family again. And I remember that when I first mentioned my family I did not mention my mother, Yaa Mansa, the woman who gave me birth. Was it willful amnesia? I do not think so. I just wanted to avoid the pain of mentioning her name, remembering the fact that she died almost five years ago. I look around again. And I begin to remember now why writing this thesis has become so

for Baby Ekua Marguerite Prah (11)

'Nsu kyer ahina m'aa, obon!'

This is what the ancients said:

that
the purest water
turns stale,
for standing too long in
a bottle
a gourd.

They spoke out then.

And truly thanks to you,

I sit here
perched over
Boston,
in this
plush post-modernist penthouse,

watching a
120-channel TV set, and
looking for a small
soothsayer's stone
to hand to them
today. (110)
My house is certainly not a "plush post-modernist pent-house." However, I still remember the house in which I was brought up in my village. I particularly remember the room, called a bedroom, which I shared together with my mother, stepfather, two younger sisters and a younger brother; my older brother at the time lived with my biological father in our hometown. My mother was later to give birth to five additional children. The period I am talking about now is when I first started school in the village, about six years old, or a little younger. I was in the same classroom with kids of different ages, all of us supervised by one teacher like the teacher who taught and supervised three different classes in Aidoo's "No Sweetness Here." But my focus is not on the school, but home. Yes, I remember the very small bedroom with a bare, clay floor. I look around my office, the very spacious office I occupy alone. I look at the old carpet on the floor in my office. And I remember the small bedroom again and the tattered straw mat, without a mattress, without a blanket, that passed for a bed. My wife and I are thinking of replacing this carpet we walk on because we think it is too old. Just for that reason. We can afford to. Then I remember the straw mat six of us shared
in that small bedroom. We could have used this carpet for a mat at the time. And then I remember something again, the pillow my mother slept on. I visualize the king size bed in our bedroom upstairs here, the king size pillow, countless other pillows for the comfort of my wife and me. I remember again the handwoven sack filled with cotton fluff that passed for a pillow for my mother. I remember how dirty it was, and I remember the filth of urine and vomit, and everything that kids could excrete. And bugs. Tears fill my eyes, roll down. I have to continue writing this chapter. I am sad and really angry. I need to tell my mother's version here of Aidoo's "No Sweetness Here." I remember a passage from Aidoo's story, just after Kwasi, Mami Ama's only son's burial:

After the funeral, I went to the House of Mourning as one should do after a burial. No one was supposed to weep again for the rest of the day. I sat there listening to visitors who had come from the neighbouring villages.
"This is certainly sad, and it is most strange. School has become like business; those who found it earlier for their children are eating more than the children themselves. To have a schoolboy snatched away like this is unbearable indeed," one woman said. (73, emphasis mine)

My mother was the sixth of seven in the family, four girls and two boys. Her mother, my grandmother, had no formal education. But she had a brother who was educated, sort
of, and worked as a financial clerk for different companies established by the white colonizers in the then Gold Coast in the '30s and '40s. He became eminently wealthy and saw to the education of his nephews and nieces and even members of the extended family. For reasons that were never made very clear to me, my mother was the only one in the family who had no formal education at all, none at all; my grandmother was a travelling trader and so my mother was always with her. It was not that my mother was not smart enough to be in school. No, if she were not smart I would not be sitting here telling her story today. She was very smart and had an incredibly good memory. In the passage from Aidoo above, the villagers saw education as a form of investment: that is why they sent their children to school; that is why Mami Ama sent Kwesi to school. In their old age, these children would look after them in turn: that is why "those who found it[school] earlier for their children are eating more than the children themselves" (73). These villagers live in a rural economy with no hope of enjoying any benefits from any agency, private or public, in their old age and could not work on their farms anymore. Mami's tragedy in the form of her only son's death is therefore enormous. And let me state here that it is not only sons who are ex-
pected to be breadwinners for their families, but daughters too.

Let me pause here and give a short synopsis of Aidoo's story to enable me to contextualize my mother's more fully. The central character in this extremely well-written story is Mami Ama. Like most of Aidoo's middle-aged women, she lives in a typical remote village in Ghana, where accessibility to very basic essentials in life — like clinics, good infrastructure, good schools, good everything — is lacking, even forty-two years after independence. She is separated from her husband, Kodjo Fi, the deadbeat father of their only son, Kwasi. Like most rural women in Ghana, Mami Ama's livelihood is on subsistence farming. Her only friend in the story is its narrator, called Chicha, a Western-educated Ghanaian woman, solely responsible for the only school in the village. She teaches children of three different grades in the school. The common bond between Chicha and Mami Ama is the latter's son, Kwesi. They both adore him dearly. Kwesi dies suddenly on the very day Mami Ama obtains divorce from Kwadjo Fi. Mami Ama's world, naturally, is crushed.

The story has received various reviews. In an essay, "The Feminist Impulse and Social Realism in Ama Ata Aidoo's
"No Sweetness Here" and Our Sister Killjoy Chimalum Nwankwo takes issue with the what he perceives as "everything . . . as usual," being "wrong with women":

Circumspect traditional narrators play down the injustices in polygamy. So are the abuses and ill usage women suffer in marriage. Even women have been socialized into accepting their inferior status in marriage . . . We are not shown instances where men must sometimes be fools to accommodate their female counterparts. Women are the witches nonetheless, and the tragedy is not mitigated by mandatory maternal responsibilities and the value placed on the accidental ability to have male issues. Death strikes the only son of a woman in "No Sweetness Here" (154).

Lloyd Brown sees Mami Ama's attachment to her son not only as "a sign of her isolation," but also "a symptom of her insecurities and general weakness" (117). And commenting on the relationship between the narrator and Kwesi, he concludes, "The irony is that the progressive, liberated, and sophisticated image of the Western-educated woman is really a mask: underneath, there is the familiar vulnerability to the power of the male, and a new insecurity bred by the conflict between two cultural traditions" (116).

With phrases like "the familiar vulnerability to male power" and "Even women have been socialized into accepting their inferior status in marriage" Brown and Nwankwo seem to suggest that there is something wrong with Aido's concern about the plight of women in some African societies.
This seems to explain Nwankwo's obvious lack of sympathy for the death of an only child and Brown's association of a teacher's affection for a pupil, with female vulnerability. Do male teachers never have affection for their female pupils? I did, and have always done, as a teacher. Some of the girls I taught more than twenty years ago continue to write to me and send me cards and gifts. The affection I felt for them for their hard work in particular, enabled me to encourage them to work harder in pursuit of lofty ambitions.

But, to a more serious issue: Aidoo, perhaps, nowhere demonstrates the plight of the rural woman better than she does in this short story. When she writes so vividly of the heavy load of food items Mami Ama must carry from the farm, I see my mother because I grew up in the village with her and saw her do that almost every day of her adult life. And until I left Ghana for Canada, anytime I visited my mother at the village and accompanied her to the farm, I carried a big load of foodstuffs from the farm to our house. When Aidoo writes about Kwadjo Fi being a deadbeat father I know she is right because my biological father was a deadbeat father; when she writes about Kwadjo Fi's sisters calling Mami a witch, I know that she is right because both my bio-
logical father and my stepfather's sisters called my mother a witch — they simply could not stand her spirit that constantly yearned for independence, something they themselves needed but could not, or refused to stand for.

Aidoo attributes Kwasi's death to a snake-bite. This is no ploy to whip up sympathy for Mami Ama: "After what seemed an unbearably long time, the messenger who had been earlier sent to Surdo, the village next to Bamso, to summon the chief medicine man arrived, followed by the chief doctor himself" (71). I lost a favourite half-brother, Kwabena Anokye — he was a year older than I was — through a snake-bite. Kwabena's real life story so much parallels Kwasi's that I shed tears as I write it here. He went to school in the village, was playing soccer as Kwasi was. A snake bit him. There was no clinic in the village. Kwabena Anokye had to be conveyed to the nearby town, which was just thirty miles away. The only vehicle that served the village and its surroundings had already left and would not return till late in the evening.18 Kwabena had to be carried

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18 Aidoo treats a similar theme in her story, "The Message" in the collection No Sweetness Here (38-46).
on the back of a human being to the town. He died on the way. Da yie, Kwabena. We are dealing with poison here.

As I write, I have a very deep scar on my left shin. At about age five, I nearly lost my left leg to what would be considered an ordinary sore; what was so ordinary turned into a large, chronic sore because there was no clinic in my village and my mother was too poor at the time to afford to send to me to a clinic about fifty miles away. That I still have my leg remains a miracle.

Perhaps it is not only male critics who may never have experienced the harsh realities of rural life who fail to appreciate the concerns of Aidoo fully. Ogundipe-Leslie, for example, writes:

Unfortunately, it is not only African male writers who are guilty of this kind of mythification of the rural woman. One feels the same way about the rural woman in Ama Ata Aidoo's *No Sweetness Here* (1970). For after all the felicities and elegance of her narrative style and her just social perceptions, one wonders whether the rural woman actually speaks and thinks as naively and limitedly; so childishly. Is the rendering not the educated person's view of what the rural person sees, notes, values, and cares about? The truth is that the rural woman wants change and innovation. She wants power, wealth and status like the men. She wants to ride a car rather than walk; use plastics or metal instead of calabashes; use a gas or electric stove instead of firewood, despite all our middle-class nostalgia for that past. (59-60)
The truth is that Ama Ata Aidoo addresses almost all of Ogundipe-Leslie's concerns in "No Sweetness Here," even through her silences. She says as much in what she does not say as in what she says. Kwesi dies because there is no modern, well-equipped clinic in the village and there are no good roads; he also dies because of lack of supervision — there are not enough teachers to supervise the children. Those who know life in the rural areas in Ghana and in most African countries will realize that most trained teachers, especially the female ones in the narrative, would not want to be stationed in the villages because of lack of basic amenities. And then there is the usual ineptitude on the part of the educational authorities. The narrator, Chicha, laments:

It had not been laid down anywhere in the Educational Ordinance that schoolchildren were to be given holidays during local festivals. And so no matter how much I sympathized with the kids, I could not give them a holiday, although Ahobaa was such an important occasion for them: they naturally felt it a grievance to be forced to go to school while their friends at home were eating so much yam and meat. (64-65)

Aidoo even touches upon the cruel or inhumane treatment of children in the story. And a very important element of Aidoo's writing which a lot of her critics like Ogundipe-Leslie fail to perceive is the philosophical principle that
underwrites her concerns: one in which she privileges spiritualism over materialism. As the character simply named 1st Woman in The Dilemma of a Ghost asks: "were not our [ancestors] wise/Who looked upon the motion of our lives/And said,/They ask for the people of the house/And not the money in it?" (21). In Buchi Emecheta's Head Above Water, the narrator's "big mother" asks a similar question: "When has it ever been a virtue to be rich in wealth and poor in people?" (9). It is significant that Aidoo is Akan and Emecheta is Igbo but both, here, through their characters, express a basic philosophical thought that privileges human beings over material wealth in most African societies.19 It is not Aidoo's primary purpose just to portray spineless rural women, but actually to draw attention to their very existence as human beings. It is only by focusing on them that she can talk about their problems as well. And it should also be noted that in bringing the problems rural women face to the fore, she highlights societal prob-

19 Aidoo takes up the same issue in Our Sister Killjoy when Sissie tells her German friend, Marija, that it is "Humans/Not places [wealth]/Make memories" (81).
lems; if there are good roads, it is not only women who will use them, but men as well.²⁰

I have already mentioned the fact that the villagers see education as an investment in the future through their children. Certainly, educating one's children is a parental responsibility. But should that parental responsibility be predicated upon the reciprocal obligation on the part of children to become breadwinners for their parents in their old age? These children did not have a choice to be brought into this world, why should they be so obliged then? When Aidoo, through the narratorial voice says, "School has become like business" (73), she is equally asking: why are we commodifying our own children? Shouldn't children have a choice in whether they want to support their parents after their education or not? And should there not be a system in place to take care of these rural folks when they cannot till the land anymore?

²⁰ In Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women & Critical Transformations, Ogundipe-Leslie advocates "Stiwanism" instead of feminism. "Stiwa," she explains, is her acronym for Social Transformation Including Women in Africa. I would like to suggest that Aidoo's works focus on the social transformation of African societies; in other words, they respond to Ogundipe-Leslie's acronym.
Aidoo takes up this issue of children having to pay back their parents because they (parents) looked after them in her short story "Other Versions." Kofi's mother, who herself would not take any money from Kofi when he starts working after completing his secondary school education, insists that Kofi should give some of his monthly income to his father. Kofi is puzzled and reflects: "I just could not figure it out. To begin with, whose child was I? Why should I have to pay my father for sending me to school?" (130). Kofi in this short story is perhaps the most sympathetically drawn educated male character in all of her fiction. On this basis, one can argue that the questions he asks are those of the authorial voice: why should children be obliged to take care of their parents in their old age?

Answers to the questions Kofi asks and those in the penultimate paragraph should let us understand why Mami Ama is so devastated by Kwasi's death. In addition to losing a human being who happens to be male, her own future, especially the period of her old age, is ruptured. The parallel between Mami Ama and her creator can be drawn here. In the second epigraph of this chapter, Aidoo talks of how her creation of the phrase, "no sweetness here" has been credited to her Ghanaian counterpart, Ayi Kwei Armah. In an es-
say, "African Motherhood — Myth and Reality," Lauretta Ngcobo, citing Dr. Evelyn Amarteifio of Ghana, mentions the "the common male habit of letting women do the bulk of the work both in the home as in the fields, but giving them nothing for it" (144). Male critics of African literature make it possible for Armah to enjoy the fruits of Aidoo's labour.

In Aidoo's story, it is death that robs Mami Ama the joys she had hoped to enjoy as a mother. The narrator informs us of the discussion which takes place in Mami Ama's absence after the funeral and a visit she makes to her house later:

'Ah, do not speak,' his father's younger sister broke in. 'We have lost a treasure.'
'My daughter,' said the grandmother again, 'Kwesi is gone, gone forever to our forefathers. And what can we do?'
'What can we do indeed? When flour is scattered in the sand, who can sift it? But this is the saddest. I've heard, that he was mother's only one.'
'Is that so? Another visitor cried. 'I always thought she had other children. What does one do, when one's only water-pot breaks?' she whispered. The question was left hanging in the air. No one dared say anything more.
I went out. I never knew how I got there, but I saw myself approaching Maami Ama's hut. As usual, the door was open. I entered the outer room. She was not there. Only sheep and goats from the village were busy munching at the cassava and yams. I looked into the inner chamber. She was there. Still clad in the cloth she had worn to the divorce proceedings, and was not sitting, standing or lying down. She was kneeling, and
like one drowning who catches at a straw, she was clutching Kwesi's books and uniform to her breast. 'Mami Ama, Mami Ama,' I called out to her. She did not move. I left her alone. Having driven the sheep and goats away, I went out, shutting the door behind me.

(73-74)

No picture can be bleaker; the desolation, isolation and loneliness is total and haunting. Mami Ama clutches "Kwesi's books and uniforms." Kwesi's education was her "social security" in life. It was gone. And it should be noted that, in the conversation among the visitors, no one refers to Kwesi's gender -- "he was his mother's only one."

Mami Ama's future is shattered in the powerful image of the only water-pot breaking.

My mother toiled day and night, sometimes in abject poverty, to make sure that I had an education so that, when she could no longer work as hard as she did, I would support her. I continue to live, sleeping on the best of pillows, unlike the bug-infested ones she slept on just to enable her to provide for my siblings and me. Cancer snatched her away when she was sixty-eight years old. Like the 2nd Woman in Aidoo's Dilemma of a Ghost, quoted in the second epigraph to this chapter, whose house teemed with children, my mother, "the common slave," at times had to cook the am-pesi and sweep the courtyard, but when she was away, we all
had our "hands between [our] knees" and there would be no drop of water in the pot for her to drink on her return. She would have to take the pot herself, walk the long distance to the stream and carry the big pot with water in it home. Like Nnu Ego in Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, "she gave all to us. But got nothing back." She died just like Nnu Ego.

I received a phone call at about three o'clock in the morning one day while I was preparing for my candidacy examinations. My mother was going to have surgery for the removal of her gallbladder in Ghana's only military hospital in Accra. Everything had to be paid for and so my sister was wondering if I could help. With the support of my wife, fiancée then, I wired money home when the banks opened that day. After the candidacies, the irony was that I also had to have surgery for the removal of my gallbladder. I had informed my family in Ghana of my surgery. Perhaps that was my mistake. My mother had been misdiagnosed. It was only after her surgery that her doctors realized it was not a gallbladder problem; her liver was completely gone. Nothing could save her life. For the three months that my mother remained in hospital dying, my siblings decided among themselves that to protect me, they would not tell me the truth.
about her true condition. I had no reason to suspect that they were lying to me, and I was also confident that if it was gallbladder surgery, she would recover. In fact I was released from hospital just a day after my surgery and informed them that I was doing well. However, I later realized that they had not believed that I was well and feared the worst would happen to me here if they informed me my mother was dying of cancer. And of course, who would blame them for not believing that I was relatively well, since none of them had any idea of the excellent health facilities here as compared with the very poor conditions there? They knew there was a very close bond between my mother and me and thought I would die too if I heard she was dying.

In Aidoo's "No Sweetness Here," on two occasions Mami Ama tells the narrator (who is also Kwesi's teacher), "Chicha, I shall willingly submit to your canes if he [Kwesi] gets his sums wrong" (57, 64). Mami Ama would sacrifice whatever was required to make Kwesi have a good and comfortable life. My mother did the same for me while I was growing up and even when I became an adult. Her love for me and all her children was unconditional. When she was alive, she would occasionally travel the distance of close to two hundred miles from our village to Accra to make a phone
call just to ask how I was doing. My very regular letters were not enough. Only my voice would give her the assurance she needed that I was fine.

I finally managed to get the truth about my mother's condition from my sister. After numerous letters and calls to her, she finally wrote a very terse letter to me. She wrote that, if upon receipt of the letter, I knew that I was in good health, I should give her a call so that she could discuss my mother's condition with me. I gave her a call as soon as I read the letter. I flew to Accra in less than a week. And there she was on her hospital bed, dying. Not even a hug. She would have run to meet me and hug me endlessly, had she been alive. I managed to let her know that I also had surgery; nobody had told her either. Gasp- ing for breath, she calmly told me, "Yaw, you see, if you had arranged to have me over in Canada, I would not be dying." She knew she was dying, but nobody had told her the cause of her dying. Bastards. Doctors and all! How could I have told her at that time that she would have died, no matter what? And so I carry the guilt. I, her investment, had failed her. I had done nothing to save her life, though she had done everything to protect me, growing up.
And also I carry the guilt because I remember the stench, the horrible stench which engulfed the female ward at the military hospital, the best in the country, where we had paid so much to keep her. Was the stench there to hasten her excruciatingly painful death? How about all the others in the ward who were not going to die and who had to eat their meals in the stench? Not that I had never been on admission in a hospital in Ghana and was not aware of the stench. I had been admitted a good number of times before I left Ghana for Canada. And staying in Canada and being admitted to a hospital, being privileged to have a private room with everything I needed for my personal comfort, had made a lot of difference in my perception of the conditions of the hospitals back at home. And then also, I remember the male publisher Clive Allison in Emecheta's *Head Above Water* who "turned his flat into a hospital room for his dying mother, even though at the time he was wifeless" (219). I know my mother would have liked to die "in [her] son's flat with me talking as if there was no tomorrow and no pain" (Head 218).

Unlike Clive Allison, I have a loving wife who would have loved to see her mother-in-law live with us and die in our Calgary Wildwood home. But Yaa Mansa died. She died,
too soon to reap the benefits of her investment, to enjoy the fruits of the pains of mothering and motherhood. Even as she lay on her death-bed, robed like a queen, she was called a witch. Yes, only a witch could give birth to ten children, toil to bring all of them up in a village in Ghana, and not lose even one to, say, a snake-bite. Like Nnu Ego, was been given such a big funeral by her children because she was a witch:

When her children heard of her sudden death they all, even Oshia, came home. They were all sorry she had died before they were in a position to give their mother a good life. She had the noisiest and most costly second burial Ibuza had ever seen, and a shrine was made in her name, so that her grandchildren could appeal to her should they be barren. . . Stories afterwards, however, said that Nnu Ego was a wicked woman even in death . . . Poor Nnu Ego, even in death she had no peace! (Joys 224, ellipsis mine)

*Da yie, Maame Yaa Mansa.* And she was a witch only because she was a woman.

I had hoped to get this degree, get a job, earn some income and buy her a home in Ghana. It never happened. I had hoped to bring her over just for about a month or two and just tell her, "Maame, you are going to really take time off here and rest." She worked six days a week, from dawn to dusk. She did not work on Sundays because she was a Christian. But she died. My biological father, the man who
more or less abandoned me. The only thing my biological father did for me while I was growing up was buy me my school uniform at the end of every school year — I would travel to wherever he was living and working for it. There is one particular incident I never forget, no matter how hard I try. At age twelve, I travelled about one hundred miles to where he was stationed, Tease in the Afram District, at the end of the school year for my school uniform. My grandmother provided me money for the trip. It was a month's vacation. Almost every day I reminded my father about the uniform. On the morning of my departure for my home town after the vacation, he handed me a parcel telling me my school uniform was in it — boys in Ghana wore a pair of khaki shorts and a shirt to school at the time. He added that it belonged to my older brother; he bought it for him but he had refused to continue going to school so he collected it back — it was second hand then. But that was not the issue for me. I got to my home town before opening the parcel. I was a very tiny boy growing up — my older brother was about four times bigger than I was. The shirt was of a different colour from the shorts when I opened the parcel, and it was about four times my size. The shorts were about three times my size. I wore the uniform to
school. Never in my life do I remember being taunted as I was by my schoolmates. They actually would lay ambush every morning and wait for my arrival, pounce on me and take sheer pleasure in taunting me till I cried.

Even while I do not have the degree yet, has started enjoying the benefits of my mother's toil. I send him money and clothes. The last but one letter I received from him, he wrote that he needed some medication. I know conditions in Ghana and I know that he has not been well lately — a major reason I send him money. And I guess there is another reason why I respond to some of his letters. Earlier on in this chapter, I referred to Aidoo's short story "Other Versions" in which Kofi's mother insists that Kofi should give some of his monthly income to his father. There is a sense in which Kofi's mother's position reflects societal thinking. Kofi's mother tells him: "All I want is for you is to be happy and you shall not be if they say you are bad. . . If you give that to your father, you will be doing a lot. Say you will do it, Kofi" (130, emphasis mine). In the eyes of society a child who is unable to support his or her parents in their old age is considered "bad."

While I remain a student in Canada, my father knows he has society behind him, because he actually thinks I owe my
very legitimacy as a human being to him. He has tradition
behind him. In a very illuminating essay, "Wives, Children
and Intestate Succession in Ghana," in which she discusses
some of the causes of oppression women and children under
the matrilineage system among the Akan of Ghana, Tayiwa
Manuh, a prominent Ghanaian sociologist writes: "Even
though children are not considered to possess the same
blood as their fathers, there are strong bonds between fa-
thers and children in all matrilineal communities in Ghana,
arising from their common possession of a controlling
spirit (the ntoro or kra). A man's public recognition of
the infant after the birth gives the child legitimacy and
his/her cult affiliations, and also the attendant super-
natural prohibitions" (80). Part of the logic in this ar-
rangement/thinking is that children are slaves to their fa-
thers. In fact some of my own siblings write to me regu-
larly to insist that I should not ignore him. And so even
here away from home, I bow to the thinking that if I ignore
my father I will be called "bad." I looked at the name of
the drug he had written and thought he had misspelled it. I
just could not figure it out. Out of concern, I wrote back
to him by express delivery, asking him to talk to his doc-
tor so that the drug would be written on a prescription
form, in which case I could approach my family doctor about the possibility of endorsement to enable me buy it here in Canada. He wrote back almost immediately, took his time to let me know that it was a drug he knew was first produced in Germany — unlike my stepfather, my biological father had some formal education. It was not his doctor who prescribed; he went to mention that it was the drug that made him so popular among his peers that they gave him a nickname — I am too shy to write it here. It was an aphrodisiac. Yes, close to seventy-five, ill, with two wives, ignoring me while I was growing up because he wanted to chase all the women in the world, he wants me to spend my money on an aphrodisiac even now. And I know it is not because of his wives that he wants it. I believe there is something deep down in his psyche that tells him, like Niam in Mongo Beti's Mission Kala, that he is the earth on which women stand; without him they are nothing. I just ignored the

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21 I remember at times after he had had a bath, he would look himself up in the mirror and exclaim to himself, "Adwoa Asantewaa ba yi me ho ye fe" — Oh, what a handsome son Adwoa Asantewaa has. His mother was Adwoa Asantewaa. Asantewaa is the feminine form of Asante. My father named me after his mother, thus my name Asante. And anytime he said that it meant he was going out to chase women. He has never stopped.

22 Mongo Beti, Mission to Kala, (1970). The narrator tells us how Niam bluffs after beating his wife and the wife had left him: "A few days later our family heard that Niam's wife had gone back to her father. So
letter. Enough of this for now. I started school at Kyemfere a very small village in the Afram District of Ghana. At the time, it was a most inaccessible area. My mother got a divorce from my biological father soon after my birth, because she could not be a part of a polygamous family. And her mother-in-law resented what she very early perceived as her spirit of independence.

She married my now stepfather who had just returned from the Second World War with nothing. In Joys of Motherhood and Head Above Water Buchi Emecheta takes up the issue of the conscription of African men into both world wars and the devastating consequences it had on them and their families. In the latter novel she writes about "all the poor black men forced to leave their wives and children in their prime of life... to fight somebody [they] did not know called Hitler" (12, 11). In Joys, she mentions the promises that were made to these men, promises like being "promoted
in their places of work" (146) on their return, promises that were never fulfilled. My stepfather was one such black person who was conscripted and got nothing out of it.\textsuperscript{23} When he married my mother they both decided to go and start life together in this remote village where my stepfather, not formally educated himself, had a piece of land. Life was incredibly hard for them. My mother had to carry smoked fish on a tray, cry her soul out selling it every evening, after both had gone to work on the farm. That was the only way they could make a little money to buy essentials like salt. She would have to prepare the evening meal after selling the fish. And traveling to buy the fish "in bulk" about two hundred miles away every month was an ordeal in itself. The roads were terribly bad and the only truck that plied it could break down a dozen times on trip. What now is a day's return trip took about week at times. And let me not forget. No road linked our small village to the next town where my mother would catch the truck. She had to walk about six miles to catch the truck. And she had to carry a

\textsuperscript{23} One of my maternal uncles returned with a bugle, yes a bugle. Out of frustration and despair he drank himself to death, in addition to acquiring the notoriety of blowing the bugle deep into the night, every night, through the length and breadth of our home town.
huge basket with the fish in it over that distance after buying it.

I started school at quite an early age. There was only one teacher in the village teaching us all kids of different grades. Nobody taught me how to read or write at home. Nobody could do it. There was not a single book, no writing material at home. My mother told me stories though. Yes, she was a good story-teller and sang very well too. It was always a delight to listen to her tell stories and sing. For all I remember, both my stepfather and mother realized that no matter how hard they tried, they simply could not cope with the at times inhuman conditions of living in the village. I was in my second year at school. I remember always being the most poorly dressed kid and often ignored by other kids. In my second year, I remember I started doing really well and therefore started enjoying school. I seemed to love reading in particular. Kids of grades higher than mine would come to me with words to pronounce for them. The second year ended and my mother told me we were going back to our hometown. I have already mentioned a scar on my left leg; I got the scar in that village.

In her essay "African Motherhood — Myth and Reality," Ngcobo argues that, "under matriarchy women have more
rights than patriarchy. Although matriarchy in itself does not imply real social power on the part of the women, they certainly have more say in the community and within the family structure. Among the Ashanti of Ghana, a woman enjoys definite inheritance and property rights and elderly women are consulted in the making of community decisions. Whereas in patriarchal society a woman cannot own land or cattle; neither can she participate in a debate or negotiation concerning property" (145). I am not an Ashanti but I belong to the Akan ethnic group the Ashantis are part of, so Ngcobo's remarks make complete sense to me. However, while matriarchy can be liberating in a sense for some women, it can also be enslaving for others.

Under matriarchy inheritance is matrilineal as Ngcobo has stated. The implication of matrilineal inheritance is that nephews succeed and inherit uncles. Right now, I have a wife and we have a son. If I die intestate, it is my

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24 In 1985, in response to public demands the military government of Flt. Lt. J. J. Rawlings (now President Rawlings), the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) passed the Intestate Succession Law. As Takyiwa Manuh writes "The Intestate Succession Law of 1985 is part of legislation in Ghana which seeks to resolve long-standing issues affecting the inheritance of property and the status and rights of wives and children." It must be noted that the law deals with inheritance, not succession, so nephews still succeed uncles and that always brings about conflicts.
nephew who will customarily succeed me and try to inherit whatever property I have; it is not my wife, not my son. My son is supposed to have an uncle he will succeed. In most traditional African societies this system of succession inheritance worked against the interests of women since most men died intestate. And no matter how hard a woman may have worked while the husband was alive, as soon as he died and a nephew succeeded him, the wife lost everything, except in cases where the widows agreed to marry the nephew. One would understand why wives and sisters-in-law would always be in conflict. Most sisters-in-law believe that women married to their brothers are just caretakers. As Takyiwaa Manuh indicates, "[b]y definition, neither the wife nor children of an Akan male belong to his family, since they are already members of a matrilineage" (80). Caretakers have no right to enjoy ownership. Sisters believe that a brother and everything he has belongs to them — it is a son of theirs who is going to inherit the brother. And so they must make sure that it is not just the brother who must be taken care of, his property as well. My family in Ghana is aware of the health problems I suffer from here in Canada. One of my sisters wrote to my wife to thank her for "taking good care of [me] for [them]." My wife was puzzled when she
read that part of the letter. I had to explain everything to her; to my family, I belong to them, not to her. Matrilineal hierarchy affects even the naming of children. In Akan culture, children, both male and female, traditionally do not go by their father's names automatically. That some Akan children automatically assume the names of their fathers these days is part of the colonial legacy. My father is called Yaw Omari. My first name Yaw is the same as his because I was born on a Thursday just as he was — sheer coincidence. My surname is Asante because he named me after his mother. One of the pressures on married women in such a culture is that, their husbands expect them to give birth to a lot of children so that he can name them after his family members! It was upon the birth of my mother's tenth child that, for health reasons, doctors advised her against having more children. When she agreed for a procedure to be performed on her to curtail further pregnancies, my stepfather was furious. In his mind, having more children to name after his family members was more important than my mother's right over the use of her own body, more important than even her very health, not considering the fact she was more or less responsible for the upbringing of all the children. In Aidoo's story, Mami Ama tells Chicha, the narrator that
her son is "his father's child but he belongs to his family" (62). Takyiwaa Manu explains what the narrator means:

[m]atrilineal family members are united by the possession of common blood (mogya). In the matrilineal family (abusua) the blood passes exclusively through the female line, and the typical family is made up of a woman, her uterine sisters and brothers, her children (both male and female), her sisters' children, her daughters' children, and so on. It is membership in this group that determines what rights, interests, and duties an individual can possess or owe (79).

Mami Ama is part of the matrilineage. And I suspect that is a reason why Kodjo Fi did not care particularly about Kwesi's education. Kwesi was not going to inherit him, so why bother. He would rather be more concerned about a nephew's education. In fact in my particular case, one reason my biological father ignored me was that he insisted if he was looking after my older brother, it was my "family's" responsibility to look after me.

Things have changed a lot with more people being formally educated and with government enacting laws safeguarding the interests of widows and their children in the event of a husband dying intestate. There is a sense in which these changes contributed to help my mother to defy the naturalized gender roles our society assigns to women. My granduncle was wealthy by local standards at the time. Apart from huge estates he owned at the time, he owned a
huge land property at Oframase, a village about thirty miles away from our home town, Nkwatia-Kwahu, in the eastern region. Being a professed member of the Presbyterian church had not prevented him from marrying all the beautiful women he wanted to. He had given all his numerous children, nephews and nieces, as well as some members of the extended family education. He would not help me when I was of age because he rightfully said he had done enough — his nephews should continue what he had started.

But one thing he did do. He invited my mother to Nkawkaw, told her he regretted she was the only one he did not have the opportunity to help to educate, so he was transferring ownership of his property at Oframase to her. He did. That act helped my mother achieve agency. She decided to leave me with her mother, my grandmother, in our home town, together with my kid sisters and other cousins so that we all could go to school there. She went to settle at Oframase with my stepfather. The land was what appeared to be a good forest for the cultivation of cocoa, the main cash crop of Ghana. Generally, cocoa was the "man's crop" in southern Ghana, just as yam was in the north. It was cocoa that gave married men so much money and so much power over women. Men generally controlled the land because even
today men remain heads of family. In fact my older brother was the head of our family even when my mother was alive. The reason was that when the only remaining granduncle died, my older brother was selected to inherit him, though my mother and two aunties were alive then. So, when the council of mainly elders of the larger family called clan meetings, it was my older brother who represented our interests. For some reasons he did not like my mother and so his dislike for her spread among members of the council. To them therefore she was a witch. Much of the dislike emanated from the property my granduncle transferred to her. It made her powerful in their eyes. Though Ngcobo is right in asserting that in matriarchy ownership of the land is communal (144).

My mother wasted no time in embarking upon cocoa cultivation, in addition to the cultivation of plantain, cocoyam, yam, cassava and vegetables. Her implements were just the "primitive" hoe and cutlass.

At Kyemfere we lived on my stepfather's land, at Oframase power had shifted. In addition to farming she continued to sell, this time not fish but a kind of porridge made from corn called koko. It is taken with bread and sugar for breakfast and school children and workers liked
it a great deal. So, at dawn she was up preparing koko. She sold it in a big pot which she carried on her head. With one hand holding the pot on her head to keep it in balance, the other held a large plastic bag full of bread. She did not bake the bread herself; she collected it from the bakers and sold it for commission. By eight o'clock in the morning, she had finished her rounds with the koko. Her tray was ready and she headed for the farm. Everybody in the village of about three thousand people knew she worked harder on the farm than my stepfather. She held the cutlass better than most men. She stopped work to prepare lunch on the farm. By about four o'clock she was ready to return home with her tray of faggot, foodstuffs and vegetables to prepare dinner. Never did she sleep earlier than ten o'clock. I should not forget to mention that Tuesdays and Fridays were market days in the village. Traders from the surrounding towns and villagers from around converged on the village to buy and sell. On market days she made two big pots of koko. She sold one of the pots very early in the morning and settled on the market with the second one. She sold vegetables from her farm as well. During vacations, I would go and visit her.
Unfortunately, it took about five years for her to realize that the land was not suitable for the cultivation of cocoa. She had wasted all her resources, with no help from any financial institution, nothing. She concentrated on the foodstuffs and her koko. Before long she was known all over the village as kokowura.\(^2\) Ngcobo comments on how women in some African societies lose their identity after their marriage and why:

In some societies like the Nguni she will never be called by her own name. They might call her by her father's name — the father of so and so, or they may simply call her "the bride" until she has her first child. Then she will be referred to as the mother of so and so — thus living her identity through her father or her child. The fact of losing their names distances and isolates married women emotionally and further confirms the alienation in their new home. (143)

The remarks by Ngcobo above hold true for the Akan society. Before Oframase, my mother was known as Yaw Maame, Yaw's mother. She lived her identity through us — my older brother was born on a Thursday and was also called Yaw. And before Oframase, she lived in her husband's compound. At Oframase her husband lived on her compound. Her husband was known as Kokowura kunu, "kokowura's" husband.

\(^2\) Literally the owner of "koko," but more appropriately one who sells "koko."
I did very well in the elementary school and qualified for entry into the secondary school. However, she could not support me; my biological father would not and my stepfather could not. At age fifteen, therefore, I started teaching in a small village as an untrained or "pupil teacher", as the term was in Ghana. For two years I taught, saved and supported two of my siblings in school as well. They both lived with me in the very small room I rented in the village. We shared the same small bed. After two years I decided to train as a professional post-primary teacher — the four-year training qualified me to teach at any level in the elementary school. Tuition, boarding and lodging were free. However, the school I attended was about two hundred miles away from home and so I still needed some support. So together with my uncle's and my mother's support, I completed the training and was posted, ironically, to the same village where my mother lived and worked. I had no intention to marry then; so, added to the fact that I had to help with the education of my siblings, I decided to live on the same compound with my mother. I have already stated that at some point my mother lived her identity through me. I experienced the reverse after my training. Outside the school compound where I taught, nobody knew my
name. I was simply *Kokowura ba teacher* — teacher, the "kokowura's" son. Such was her popularity, the respect and power she enjoyed.

There is one incident I would like to mention before I conclude this narrative. My training prepared me only in basic Mathematics, English, Geography and History and methodology to enable me teach in the primary school. I did not study Literature, for example. The certificate I acquired was not enough to enable me enter the university. I had to pass both Ordinary and Advanced Level examinations in all the subjects I wanted to pursue at the university. I had the desire, and so I studied and prepared for these examinations through correspondence course with the Rapid Results College of London, England. There was no electricity in the village so I had to study by lantern. None of the other nine teachers in the village shared my ambition. I studied mainly in the night and at dawn. I have said that my mother could not write her own name. I did not know that she had observed that I sat up early in the morning to read. One early morning, I heard a very gentle knock on my door, followed by her gentle, sweet voice: "Yaw, why are you still in bed? Are you okay? Aren't you studying this morning? I looked through your key-hole and realized the
light was not on in your room, that's why I decided to knock on your door." I thanked her and told her I was rather tired that morning. But I have never looked back since that day. Anytime I know I should be studying and I am not, I hear that knock, I hear that gentle, sweet voice, that gentle nudge. Thanks, Ma.

Lauretta Ngcobo discusses very eloquently the problems of marriage for women in African societies and concludes that the real problem is not with the institution itself but with the children of the marriage:

It is not marriage; it is the children of the marriage; it is not the companionship, nor the love or friendship, nor the love or friendship, nor the mutual emotional satisfaction of the couple. (142)

My mother worked so hard to give all ten of us a life. She knew no rest, had her own compound in the village, but not in our home town where she stayed in her one bedroom, always with children or grandchildren. She could never make enough through subsistence farming to raise her own children and build a house in our home town. I worked hard as a teacher but was never paid enough to build one for her. My sisters started giving birth while married to men who did not care whether their children were fed or not. So, it appeared that just when her problems with raising all ten of
us were over, she had to start looking after her grandchildren. Life at Oframase could not support her. She moved to Accra, against my stepfather's wish, to invest her capital at a market called Kantamanto. She started doing well, very well. And then, suddenly, J. J. Rawlings staged a coup in 1979. Rawlings and his cronies decided that all traders on the market had encroached upon land belonging to the Ghana Railways Corporation, though traders there, including my mother, had legally obtained the land from the Accra City Council to develop it. It was a market that fed the poor workers of Accra. Overnight the entire market was destroyed. The pain, the trauma, nearly killed my mother. But as resilient as she was, in order that she would continue to feed her grandchildren who had been abandoned by their deadbeat fathers, she went to reestablish herself at Oframase. But she never was to build her dream house, she never was able to sleep on her dream bed, that bed on which she would not smell the urine or vomit of kids. She never slept on the dream pillow our ancestors say advises us in our sweet sleep. She enjoyed the bed and the pillow at her death.
A FEMINIST WITH A SMALL 'f' — BUCHI EMECHTA

I will not pretend to see the light in the rhythm of your paragraphs: illuminated pages need not contain any copy-right on history

My world has been raped and squeezed by Europe and America

AND NOW
the women of Europe and America after drinking and carousing on my sweat rise up to castigate and castrate their menfolk from the cushions of a world I have built!

Why should they be allowed to come between us? You and I were slaves together Rapes and lynchings -

the lash of the overseer and the lust of the slave-owner do your friends 'in the movement' understand these things?

... No, no, my sister, my love, first things first! Too many gangsters still stalk this continent too many pirates too many looters far too many still stalk this land -

...
When Africa
at home and across the seas
is truly free
there will be time for you
to share the cooking
and change the nappies -
till then,
first things first!
— Felix Mthali (252-253)

I did not start as a feminist. I do not think I am one now. Most
of my readers would take this to be a statement of a coward. But
it is not. I thought before that I would like to be one but after
my recent visit to the United States, when I talked to real
"Feminists with a capital "F," I think we women of African back-
ground still have a very very long way to go before we can really
rub shoulders with such women. . . . So, my sisters in America, I
am not shunning your advanced help, in fact I still think women
of Africa need your contribution, and at the same time we need
our men.
— Buchi Emecheta (116-117)

My colleagues always referred to In The Ditch as 'Buchi's poverty
book.' I had chosen to specialize in poverty and race. . . . My
seminars, when I came to give them, were always interesting and
well attended because for both subjects I took examples from
life, rather than set books. It won me the nickname of 'Champion
of poverty.'
— Buchi Emecheta, Head Above Water (36)

If you look carefully, the [African] women were never really
dealing alone with issues pertaining to women, they were dealing
with issues pertaining to society.
— Raoul Granqvist (18)

In this chapter I would like to discuss Buchi
Emecheta's Head Above Water and The Joys of Motherhood.
While the first novel is set in Britain, the second is set
in Nigeria. Emecheta's experiences both in Nigeria and
Britain give her the advantage of a comparative perspective
on the issues she writes about. Ogunyemi knows this when
she writes:
Central to Emecheta's novels . . . is the motif of the journey, the intermittent quest for a better life. Like the ogbanje/abiku, her characters are high-strung, traveling across temporal, geographical, and social planes. When they return home — or revisit, as is more often the case — they are different from those who stayed behind, with their new been-to mentality, an attitude that says, "I know things you will never fathom with your limited exposure." Been-toism registers as sophistication engendered by contact with another world, with the traveler acquiring an improved lifestyle, to confirm the vast difference between the person who has been to the other place and the stay-at-home. (221)

When Emecheta rejects the feminism of her American sisters as she does in the fifth epigraph, she does so with the knowledge and understanding of the differences in the social, economic, political and cultural lives of both men and women in America and those in her own Nigeria.

The first epigraph of this chapter is a poem Kirsten Holst Petersen uses to contextualize her discussion in her essay "First Things First: Problems of a Feminist Approach to African Literature." The essay discusses images of women in African literature by men and ends with a discussion of Buchi Emecheta and her portrayal of women in present-day Africa. Petersen concludes the discussion by observing that Buchi Emecheta:

> can recreate the situation and difficulties of women with authenticity and give a valuable insight into their thoughts and feelings. Her prime concern is not so much with cultural liberation, nor social change.
To her the object seems to be to give women access to power in the society as it exists, to beat men at their own game. She lays claim to no ideology, not even a feminist one. She simply ignores the African dilemma. (254)

Perhaps Petersen's tentativeness in her use of verbs like "seems" in drawing some of her conclusions can be understood, for Emecheta is concerned with social change, change in all aspects of life. Florence Stratton offers a perceptive reading of The Joys of Motherhood, for example, when she writes that the novel "has two major ideological functions: to valorize the emergence of a female literary tradition and to refute conventional images of women. Secondary functions include challenging the construction of motherhood and prostitution in patriarchal ideology and highlighting various aspects of colonial experience" (119).

In almost all her works, those set in her native homeland Nigeria or her exile home of England, Emecheta laments and protests against oppression and powerlessness and the myriad ways in which they are manifested in the lives of women, the poor, blacks and the analphabetic. In her autobiographical work Head Above Water (1986) which deals mainly with her experiences as a mother of five children, wife, student and a writer in Britain, she does not divorce herself from the problems that beset the African continent.
In recounting her early school days in Nigeria she takes up an issue which continues to dominate discussions in many circles in Africa and abroad — language and its role in the colonization and neo-colonization of the continent. In one incident where she recalls the tension that existed between her and one of her white British schoolteachers, Miss Humble, Emecheta writes:

If I spoke my Igbo language or any other Nigerian one in the school compound, I would be given a bad mark or asked to pay a fine. And why did she [Miss Humble] take the trouble to leave her island home and come and teach us her language in the first place? I did not know the answer to this question, and thinking about it made my headache. (22)

Many African writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o continue to provide answers to the question Emecheta poses in the quotation above. The African child, or in fact any child who uses a foreign language to acquire formal education becomes alienated from his or her cultural milieu; the child's sensibility becomes disassociated from his or her natural and social environment, this "colonial alienation," Ngugi characterizes in his Decolonizing the Mind: The Poli-

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26 Like Emecheta, when I was growing up I never understood why I was mercilessly flogged by my teachers, black Ghanaian teachers, or fined whenever I spoke my Akan language in my school compound, even after independence.
tics of the Language of African Literature. The tragedy of my own personal experience is that as difficult as it is for me to use the English language, I use it much better than my own language. I grew up being forced to use it. As Ngugi argues, colonization of the continent was achieved through the "physical violence of the battlefield" and the "psychological violence of the classroom" (9). Considering the fact that Quebec's agitation for secession from the rest of Canada is because of the fear of domination through language, then one may appreciate the role language played in the colonization of Africa and continues to play in its neo-colonization and the confusion that daily engulfs the continent.27

As far back as 1911, the Ghanaian intellectual Casely Hayford had foreseen the crisis that the continent was going to face over the issue of language and argued in his classic, *Ethiopia Unbound*, that "no people could despise

27 Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* also takes up this issue of language. She writes: "...taking a ten-year-old child from her first language — which is surely one of life's most powerful working tools — for what would turn out to be forever, then transferring her into a boarding school for seven years, then transferring her into a boarding school for three or four years, from where she was only equipped to go and roam in strange and foreign lands with no hope of ever meaningfully re-entering her mother's world... all this was too high a price to pay for the dangerous confusion she was now in and the country now was in" (114).
its own language, customs, and institutions and avoid na-
tional death" (17). Even in those early days, Hayford wrote
with great conviction about the need to establish endowed
professorships in Fanti, Yoruba, Hausa, and other major Af-
rican languages (195). It is to Emecheta's credit that even
though she does not seem to have any answer to the language
question she poses, she does pose it at all.

Emecheta also takes up the complicity of white women
in the colonization of the continent in her representation
of Miss Humble. She subverts the stereotypical representa-
tion by male African writers of "the white woman of Africa"
as the passive onlooker, while her male counterparts raped
the continent and its resources, like the Commandant's wife
in Oyono's Houseboy.

She is a nymphomaniac who has affairs with both na-
tives and her husband's subordinates; in fact the Comman-
dant's wife "who opens her legs in cars and in ditches" as
the natives put it.28 In Emecheta's representation of Miss

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Humble as an active participant in the colonial enterprise, she insists that white women cannot escape blame from the atrocities Europe committed against Africa.

Language and representation of white women are not the only ideological issue Emecheta raises in *Head Above Water*. Basil Davidson, in *The Lost Cities of Africa*, criticizes and subverts the Western, pervasive, conventional concept that Africa had no history. As part of the strategy to subvert this concept, he writes:

The Negro, many have believed, is a man without a past. Black Africa — Africa south of the Sahara desert — is on this view a continent where men by their own efforts have never raised themselves much above the level of the beasts. (viii)

Of course this concept of history stems from the parochial assumption that Europe, and therefore the West, alone changed throughout the course of time. Certainly, it is solipsistic to believe that Africa had no history because Europeans played no part in it, and even more were unaware of it. This solipsism is what, according to a Ghanaian historian, Kwame Y. Daaku, an eminent British historian,

rubbing their heads against their husbands' cheeks or their lovers' more often, sighing, not caring where they are? Who are only good in bed and can't even wash their pants or their sanitary towels . . . They say they work hard in their own country. But those who come here . . ." (81, author's ellipsis).
Trevor Roper, displayed when in 1964 his undergraduate students at the University of Cambridge asked him to include African history on his syllabus. Roper expressed surprise and told the students that Africa had been sleeping for centuries "forgotten of the world and by the world forgotten" (115-116). He went on to say that African history is nothing but "darkness" or, at best, "the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe" (116). Of course what Roper forgets is that there is no such thing as a complete history, a history which represents the past as it "truly" was. The past as a total experience of a people remains an irretrievable whole of which various accounts of history can only provide more or less accurate fragments. Nor is there any such thing as the history of a people. There is only a plurality of histories, offering its permutation of selected details, each serving the ideological needs of one group or another. It as if in response to the likes of Trevor Roper that Emecheta writes:

Big mother in Ibusa did not use a typewriter since her stories were simply for us, the children in her compound. And that was one of the misconceptions about Mother Africa: because she did not write down her stories and her experiences, people of the West are bold enough to say that she has no history. (Head Above Water 59-60)
Like Ama Ata Aidoo, what Emecheta does here is to reconstruct Africa's history; Africa's oral traditions are a rich source of her history.

In the last epigraph to this chapter, Chinua Achebe argues that African women writers do not concern themselves mainly with issues about women, but deal with issues about society, African society. What I sought to do in the preceding paragraphs was to show how Emecheta deals with issues about Africa in Head Above Water. In her Joys of Motherhood the desire to liberate not only the African woman, but also the entire society from the quagmire of oppression, poverty, ignorance and despondency is even more profound.

Referring to JanMohamed's Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa (1983), Florence Stratton argues that "essence of Emecheta's realism lies, as . . . is the case with Achebe, in her portrayal of 'the inseparability of [her] protagonists' existence from their social and historical context," (113). Stratton goes on to argue that "Nnu Ego's life begins in Ibuza in 1909 and spans almost the entire colonial period in Nigeria. As Susan Andrade states, "The Joys of Motherhood affirms Efuru's
Efuru's claim that pre-colonial Igbo women had more independence than their colonized descendants." (101) Of the difference between the two historical periods, the narrator of Emecheta's novel says: "To regard a woman who is quiet and timid as something desirable was something that came after his [Agbadi's] time, with Christianity and other changes" (10). This, however, does not suggest as Eustace Palmer — referring to the works of Achebe, Ngugi and unnamed "sociologists" — does that "the traditional African woman [did] not feel that the acceptance of her man's dominance necessarily diminishes her; on the contrary she [saw] her femininity as consisting precisely in her cheerful acceptance of and willingness to fulfill her allotted role" (38-39). Acknowledging that under colonialism Igbo women enjoyed far less freedom, however, does not blind Emecheta to women's subjection under indigenous patriarchy. Nnu Ego's mother, Ona's willful struggles with her lover, Agbadi, occasionally result in her public humiliation. And while her status as "male daughter" permits her to contribute sons to her father's lineage, it also means that

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29 In her Male Daughters, Female Husbands, Ifi Amadimum discusses the manner in which sex and gender were constructed in the Igbo village of Mnobi and how women could attain power and contribute to the lineage.
she is unable to marry. In traditional African society, women were certainly oppressed, yet the support systems they had made the oppression less severe.

In *Head Above Water*, the author/narrator, at a point in the novel a teacher, after being reprimanded by the Head of her school for ordering "a very difficult and destructive sixteen-year-old Cockney out of the class" rationalizes the situation this way:

> England is a welfare state; one does not need too much education to survive. Nigeria was then, as now, a capitalist society where one has to work very hard to survive. In Nigeria there is no dole money, no unemployment benefit, and education is highly rewarded. The gap between the rich and the not so rich is very wide indeed. (*Head Above Water* 23)

Let us not assume that Emecheta is either valorizing or condemning either of the systems she writes about. Her argument is that the boy has the luxury not to take his schooling seriously because even if he drops out, the state is there to support him at some point. As I write now, there is no kind of state support for the unemployed in my country, Ghana, and I do not know if there is in any African country for blacks, except perhaps in South Africa. Emecheta was able to pursue a university degree in Britain as a mother and single parent of five children in *Head Above Water* because of the support she received in the form
of grants and "Family Allowance, now called Family Bene-
fit," which, "was only a few pounds" but "useful in re-
stocking the fast diminishing foodstuffs in the larder" 
(65).

Emecheta underwrites the need to support individuals, 
especially the underprivileged, in both novels under dis-
cussion. It is obvious that in Head Above Water she is 
clearly disappointed with her early reception in England. 
She writes: "England gave me a cold welcome. As I said in 
Second Class Citizen, 'If I had been Jesus, I would have 
passed England by and not dropped a single blessing.' It 
felt like walking into the inside of a grave. I could see 
nothing but masses of grey, filth, and more grey, yet some-
thing was telling me that it was too late" (26-27). This 
early perception changes with time: "I had discovered that 
the English were like any other race beneath that veneer of 
stiff importance, and if one was really determined to help 
one'self, one would usually find a helper" (53). She gets 
help to educate herself and reciprocates this by acceptanc-
ing a job at the Seventies Club to enable her to provide 
service to members of her race. The dimensions of the real-
ity of the Seventies Club are both wide and worrisome, for 
the members were "free to vent their grievances on the
workers, and the Committee was to tell the workers the limit of their power in such situations or simply to ignore the members' complaints, as the case might be" (132). It was left to people like Emecheta, the narrator, to "keep the dissatisfied [black] youth in check" (133); she tells us "we blacks were employed to face our unhappy blacks" (144). The consequence of this attempt to channel feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction into useful occupations through feminine consciousness almost yields tragic results (149). But Emecheta accepts and performs her responsibilities of helping the community — which is an intrinsic element of her cultural roots that is still vibrant even though she is in a foreign land. Her determination to help is encapsulated here "seeing people of my race reduced to banging tables and shouting at each other instead of talking overpowered my other instincts. I must accept the job. I must improve the lot of these young people. I must help" (139). As Ezenwa-Ohaeto notes, Emecheta's service to the Seventies, "widens the horizon of [her] survival beyond the self to the group and to [her] race" (358).

In a chapter on The Joys of Motherhood in her Womanist and Feminist Aesthetics (1995), Tuzyline Jita Allan comments:
Loyalty and resistance characterize Emecheta's fictional voice — the former stemming from her rootedness in African culture and the latter from her opposition to women's place within it. Seeking a way out of this dilemma, she advances an individualistic concept of female emancipation that resonates more with the feminist strategies of Woolf and Drabble than with Walker's womanist tactics... As the site of undiminished male authority, thwarted female possibility, and demarcated racial realities, Emecheta's fiction eschews the womanist project of challenge and change. (97-98)

Allan insinuated here that feminism is totally a product of the Western imagination; she also crafts it as "resistance." It is problematic for Allan to suggest that Emecheta valorizes individualism and does not contest sites of patriarchal and racial hegemony in The Joys of Motherhood. As Susan Andrade observes:

"The Joys of Motherhood most thoroughly explores the possibility of an Igbo women's community and illustrates its failure through the figure of Adaku. The tension between Nnu Ego and Adaku is due partly to their competition for limited resources in the urban colonial context. (103)

The cramped single room in which Nnaife and his two wives and children live in poverty contrasts sharply with the clearly delineated women's living space, greater autonomy over their economic resources, and more control over their sexual activity described in the rural context of say
Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* or Nwapa's *Efuru*. Through the women's cooking strike, Emecheta's novel problematizes the assumption in Nwapa's *Efuru* that tradition is the only appropriate avenue to power. In an attempt to force Nnaife to give over all of his money to his starving family, Adaku instigates a strike and Nnu Ego joins her. Within a village economy, men would have no recourse other than to capitulate or do their own cooking. In Emecheta's novel, Nnaife's co-workers share their lunches with him. The women's strike has to be abandoned.

Emecheta exposes but does not endorse the alienation that the urban colonial economy imposes upon individuals. Nnu Ego's friendship with Cordelia, for example, is cut short when the latter's husband finds work far away. It is Cordelia who helps her survive the loss of her first baby and explains gender and race relations of power in Lagos to her when she first arrives there:

30 See Ifi Amadume's *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* for a discussion of how separate gender space aids in greater female autonomy and less marital rape.  
31 In her essay, "'Aba Riots' or Igbo 'Women's War'? Ideology, Stratification, and the Invisibility of Women," Van Allen explores the manner in which cooking strikes were traditionally utilized by Igbo women. She writes, "all the women refused to cook for their husbands until the request was carried out. For this boycott to be effective, all women had to cooperate so that men could not go and eat with their brothers" (170).
"You want a husband who has time to ask you if you wish to eat rice, or drink corn pap with honey? Forget it. Men here are too busy being white men's servants to be men. We women mind the home. Not our husbands. Their manhood has been taken away from them. The shame of it is that they don't know. All they see is the money, shining white man's money ... They are all slaves, including us. If their masters treat them badly, they take it on us. The only difference is that they are given some pay for their work, instead of having been bought. But the pay is just enough for us to rent an old room like this." (51)

Cordelia is like a mentor to Nnu Ego and the loss of her friendship should be especially missed. Nnu Ego's friendship with the Yoruba woman, Iyawo, who saves her son Oshia from starvation, is always tenuous because of the economic inequality of their situations.

Traditional forms of women's resistance are ineffective in this new context, and Emecheta suggests in The Joys of Motherhood that different forms of strategy have to be adopted. Adaku's departure from her husband, Nnaife's, home and her brief period of prostitution may be read as such a strategy. She is able to accumulate enough capital to begin a more prosperous cloth vending business, and move out of the cramped room, happier in her new living arrangement. Her greater economic security signifies a certain success in the context of the Igbo valorization of women as good traders and contrasts sharply with Nnu Ego's poverty.
Through Adaku, Emecheta responds to and subverts the authority of Jagua Nana in Cyprian Ekwensi's novel of that title. In Ekwensi's work, Jagua Nana, the eponymous heroine, is a "naughty" Igbo prostitute. Ekwensi's titillating representation of Jagua as a violator of traditional taboos upholds the patriarchal discourse she is supposed to subvert. In contrast, Emecheta's text does not linger over the details of Adaku's prostitution, offering only her decision and the consequent horror of the Ibuza community. As Susan Andrade comments, "by emptying prostitution of glamour, the feminist narrative thus refigures the topos of the prostitute" (103). And most importantly, unlike Jagua Nana (Efuru or Nnu Ego), Adaku is not interested in (re)marriage; rather she chooses to live outside the boundaries of patriarchal protection. She declares: "I want to be a dignified single woman. I shall work to educate my daughters, though I shall not do so without male companionship" (170-171).

There is a sense in which the fictional character Adaku in The Joys of Motherhood merges with Emecheta, the author/narrator of the autobiographical Head Above Water. Adaku will not marry but does not shun men. In Head Above Water, Emecheta divorces her husband Sylvester Onwordi. However, she too does not shun men. Indeed she and Chidi
became attached to each other. Towards the end of the novel, she writes:

When Chidi eventually left for the United States in March it was not as bad as I thought. I soon got used to his not being there. I put all my thoughts into my family and my work. The friendship between Chidi and myself moved onto a new level. It became international, with constant calls, visits, cards and letters. (228)

This is not to suggest that Emecheta is advocating that all women should not marry, or cannot live anywhere on the continent of Africa and have their independence. She brings our attention to the oppression of women on the continent, but makes us understand the problems that conspire to oppress them.

In the penultimate epigraph, when she rejects Feminism with a capital "F" and argues that African women have a long way to go and that they need their men, her argument is grounded in the realistic fact of underdevelopment and lack of resources on the continent:

I think we women of African background still have a very very long way to go before we can really rub shoulders with such women. . . . So, my sisters in America, I am not shunning your advanced help, in fact I still think women of Africa need your contribution, and at the same time we need our men.

— Buchi Emecheta (116-117)

I want to suggest that Emecheta insists that the double oppression of African women is due not just to patriar-
chy but largely to the definitions and conditions imposed on her by colonization. The support systems that traditional African societies provided for both men and women have been eroded by the urban wage/cash economy introduced by colonization.

In her very insightful analysis of Emecheta's work, Nfah-Abenyi argues that Nnu Ego "is discourteous towards Adaku and very jealous of her." She adds that Nnu Ego "treats Adaku as a rival, envies her independent spirit, sexual pleasure, and well-fed daughters" (44). And for Palmer, "The Joys of Motherhood presents one of the most compelling studies of jealousy from the female point of view in the whole history of the African novel. Both Nnu Ego and the second wife Adaku are jealous of each other suspicious of each other's children; and each one is on her guard lest the other might harm her own children" (40).

There is little evidence to support Palmer's argument that Adaku was ever jealous of Nnaife. When she makes so much noise on the first night of her arrival in Lagos, it is obvious that she is simply reacting to Nnaife's hostility towards her on her arrival. It must also be remembered that Nnu Ego was married to Amatokwu before her marriage to Nnaife. In that marriage, as this one, she is the senior
wife. Nowhere in the novel are we made to believe that Nnu Ego was ever discourteous to, or jealous of, the younger wife, even though because of her inability to give birth to children she is humiliated. As she reports to her father, "my position as senior woman of the house has been taken by a younger woman" (33). In fact, her most insensitive husband, a beast in man's clothing, tells her "I am a busy man. I have no time to waste my precious male seed on a woman who is infertile. I have to raise children for my line" (32). The narrator tells us "Nnu Ego's relationship with the other women in the Amatokwu compound was amicable." In fact Nnu Ego took a share in looking after the younger wife's son (33). Married to Amatokwu, Nnu Ego did not have to abandon her own room and bed for the younger wife as she does for Adaku when the latter arrives in Lagos: "Nnu Ego fought tears as she prepared her own bed for Nnaife and Adaku" (123). She had to abandon her own bed, and as if that is not enough, no matter how hard she tried to sleep, or "block her ears," she "could still hear Adaku's exaggerated carrying on" (124). Perhaps Palmer is
right when he argues that Emecheta makes us see "the misery that polygamy\textsuperscript{32} can bring, particularly in the urban situation" (40).

The issue is more complex than just jealousy. Emecheta is demonstrating how devastating polygamy is in an urban setting, especially for a poorly paid worker like Nnaife, "she and her husband were ill-prepared for a life like this, where only pen and not mouth could really talk" (179). The "pen" represents the new colonial order and its cash economy. Life in an urban area for the uneducated like Nnaife and his wives can be war. When Nnaife returns from the war he is informed that Nnu Ego "fought the war too here in your family" (183). The war she fought was the war to feed her children. Whatever jealousy there was between the two women was a struggle to share limited resources.

In \textit{The Joys of Motherhood} it is not only women who are oppressed because of colonization and urbanization, but also men and children are oppressed as well. In Lagos, Nnu Ego and her husband Naife live in the "boys' quarters," behind the white master's and mistress's house in an arrange-\textsuperscript{32} I discuss the issue of polygamy in the first chapter on Aidoo.
ment reminiscent of American slave plantation architecture. In fact, Nnaife underscores this point when she tells her friend Cordelia, Ubani's wife, that "my father released his slaves because the white man says it is illegal. Yet these our husbands are like slaves . . . They are all slaves, including us. If their masters treat them badly, they take it out on us" (51). Certainly, the system, with its implications of not just slavery but immaturity, ironizes the position of Nnaife, who comes from a patriarchal background where men are supposed to be "masters" and provide compounds for their wives and children. As the couple's laundryman, Nnaife is all washed out, with his pale skin and "woman's" job. His duties include laundering his mistress's underwear, something which Nnaife finds demeaning and intolerable with its sexual undertones: "But every time she saw her husband hanging out the white woman's smalls Nnu Ego would wince as someone in pain. The feeling would cut deeper when, with sickening heart, she heard Nnaife talking effusively about his treatment of dainty clothes and silk" (47). Ogunyemi writes that "The first two sons [Oshia and Adim] best him, when they marry white women" (255). I have so far not found any evidence that Adim married a white woman, though he leaves for Canada just as Oshia leaves for 113
Oshia leaves for the States. And it "was from rumours" that "she [Nnu Ego] heard Oshia had married and that his bride was a white woman."

So much has been written about the irony the title of Emecheta's work implies. For some critics like Palmer the title suggests the indictment of child bearing, in fact he characterizes Nnu Ego's children as "useless" (54). Stratton also suggests that Nnu Ego's "devotion to her children has left her with no time for friends. And 'her boys,' now university-educated men, repudiate the values she has sacrificed herself for in favour of the western-style individualism they have imbibed in Lagos" (115). After Nnu Ego's failed attempt at suicide, it is later realized that she had wanted to commit suicide because her only son had died. We are informed that "they all agreed that a woman without a child for her husband was a failed woman" (62). It is very easy to conclude with this that statement that Nnu Ego gave birth just because her husband wanted her to.

I am not trying to minimize the societal pressures on women to give birth, not only in traditional African societies but in post-colonial Africa as well. But that children are the joy of their mothers is a fact I know from growing up with my mother. We were her best friends. And just like
Emecheta in *Head Above Water*, our mother struggled for a stable life because of us (149). There is perhaps a more important reason why Nnu Ego wants children -- she sees them as security in her old age in a society that gave parents nothing like social security. During a visit to her friend Mama Abby, this is what we are told:

Mama Abby was getting on in years, though she was extremely elegant and well-dressed and had a look of satisfaction about her which had not been there before. Nnu Ego was surprised to see her surroundings. There were mirrors everywhere, and there was a separate bedroom, so that she did not have to make do with one room as before. Her son Abby had really put his mother in wealth. Nnu Ego bit her lip. O God, let some of her own children be like that, so that she would not suffer in old age (177)

And before this the narrator tells us:

When one grows old, one needs children to look after one. If you have no children, and your parents are gone, who can you call your own? (38)

We are not given the exact reason why Nnaife left Ibuza for Lagos, but one can assume from Emecheta's use of the journey motif to symbolize a better life, he left with the hope that he would improve upon his lot in the new society white colonialist had established in Lagos. The logical corollary of this is that his sons would go to that white man's land. It should not be forgotten that they both left to pursue further studies. An essential line critics
like Palmer miss when they read the novel is "It took Oshia three years to pay off the money he had borrowed to show the world what a good son he was" (224, emphasis mine).

That Oshia borrows money implies that life was not treating him well in the States, and in fact we have no idea whether he completes the studies or not. The irony of his situation is that his society would have been less forgiving if he had not attended the mother's funeral and spent huge sums of money than his not sending her money when she was alive.

In some African societies, including mine, more attention is paid to the dead than to the living, because death is considered the last rite of passage on earth.\(^{13}\)

\(^{13}\) I received the following message which appeared in a Ghanaian newspaper from a friend on Friday, February 4, 2000. Titled "Neglected Patient's Trick Against Kinmen Works to Perfection in Hospital," it read: "A 32-year-old patient who was neglected by his kinsmen while in hospital hatched a trick, which worked to perfection. Mr. Kodzo Goka was sent to the clinic on the 15\(^{th}\) of January requiring emergency surgery. Two family members who brought Mr. Goka could only pay 5000 cedis and promised to find more money. They returned on the third day with an amount of 80,000 cedis out of the 450,000 cedis being charged for the surgery, drugs and after care. When his relatives were not forthcoming, Mr. Goka advised the management of the clinic to send a message home that he was dead, to elicit a quick response. Just after they received the message the family rushed to pay 300,000 cedis being medical bills in preparation to receive the corpse. And on the first of February a family delegation drumming and weeping came with a coffin and an amount of 230,000 cedis being the mortuary fees and the remaining medical bills to collect the corpse. News agency sources say when the delegation from Adaklu Sikaman in the Ho district got to the clinic they were shocked to see their relative who was supposed to be dead from strangulated hernia, alive. According to the proprietor of the clinic Dr. A. K. Takyi the incident is the second at the clinic and appealed to rela-
The argument I am making is that Emecheta addresses the issue of oppression of women in Africa. But she does not limit herself to just that. She tries to show the social, political and historical causes of the oppression not only of women, but men and children. She does not suggest that women solve the problem only by ostracizing men. She thinks that, collectively, both African men and women can solve problems facing them. In the following passage, she insists that women can help end their oppression:

"God when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody's appendage? . . . What have I gained from all this? Yes, I have many children, but what do I have to feed them on? On my life. I have to work myself to the bone to look after them. I have to give them all.

The men make it look as if we must aspire for children or die. That's why when I lost my first son I wanted to die, because I failed to live up to the standard expected of me by the males in my life, my father and my husband -- and now I have to include my sons. But who made the law that we should not hope in our daughters? We women subscribe to that law more than anyone. Until we change this, it is still a man's world, which we women will always help to build.'

(186-187, emphasis mine)
"IMAGES OF HELL" — CHANGES: A LOVE STORY

She sat quietly in her seat and stared at the land unfolding before her. Dry land, trees, a swamp, more dry land, green, green, lots of green. She had to check herself from laughing aloud. Suddenly, she knew what she was not going to do. Once written, it was written. She had taken some of the pain away and she was glad. There was no need to mail it. It was not necessary. She was going to let things lie where they had fallen. Besides, she was back in Africa. And that felt like fresh honey on the tongue: a mixture of complete sweetness and smoky rough- age. Below was home with its unavoidable warmth and even after these thousands of years, its uncertainties.

'Oh, Africa. Crazy old continent . . .'
— Ama Ata Aidoo, Our Sister Killjoy, (133)

In [a developing nation] every effort is made to mobilize men and women as quickly as possible; the [developing nation] must guard against the danger of perpetuating [the colonial] tradition which holds sacred the superiority of the masculine element over the feminine. Women [should] have exactly the same place as men, not in the clauses of the constitution but in the life of every day: in the factory, at school, and in the parliament.
— Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth. (202)

"Besides, she was back in Africa;" the "she" in this sentence is Sissie, Aidoo's heroine in her first novel, Our Sister Killjoy. In Aidoo's novel Sissie embarks upon a voyage to Europe, a voyage which enables her to examine her place within an unbroken continuum of a history of colonialism and neo-colonialism; and it also enables her to activate her place within the continuity of an African ontological system and to restate the continent's complex personality. In Killjoy, Aidoo also interrogates masculinist prescriptions for visionary African writing and makes the
woman's voice heard. The novel then, in part, is a woman's search for an identity within an ailing and disparate African community.34

Aidoo's second novel, Changes: A Love Story, can therefore be read as a continuation of the novelist's search for woman's identity. While Aidoo berates the forces that conspire to wreak "havoc on the mind of the modern African woman: especially about herself," (Changes 75) she exposes the venality, insensitivity and ineptitude many so-called post-colonial African leaders luxuriate in, which result not only in their inability to get around the seemingly accursed heritage of Africa,35 but the dehumanization of the very people independence was supposed to liberate.

In her introduction to Ayi Akwei Armah's The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born, Aidoo quotes Fanon's haunting prophecy about the nightmare that independence would become for Africa because of its leaders. In The Wretched of the Earth Fanon writes: "When this caste has vanished, devoured by its won contradictions, it will be seen that nothing new

34 See Craig Tapping, "Voices Off: Models of Orality." (82).
35 Basil Davidson lays out the basis of the crisis facing the African continent in the subtitle of his work, Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State.
has happened since independence was proclaimed, and that everything must be started again from scratch" (176). Aidoo insists that this is the central theme of Armah's work, and it can be argued that the theme has resonances in her own work as well. For example, in a conversation with Esi, Ali informs her that his father, Musa Musa, never kept his money "in the white man's bank." When Esi asks him:

"But what about after independence?" Ali replies: "What are you talking about? . . . My father keeps telling everyone openly that he will take his money to the bank the day something changes properly. As far as he is concerned, these independences have proved to be nothing more than a trick! You should see him imitating African leaders when they are with the heads of Western governments or their representatives, as they tremble and grin with great effort to please! And Allah, he can do them all! Francophone, Anglophone, Lusophone, any kind. No, he is convinced that nothing has changed, so he sleeps on his money!" (26).

Aidoo also takes up the issue of the continued existence of the artificial boundaries which European colonialism created to balkanize Africa. She asks, for example, why Ali's father, Musa Musa, who has "assumed the nationalities of Ghana, Benin, Cote D' Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, Nigeria and Togo" carries "a passport to prove the genuineness of each" (24). What Aidoo is advocating here is a political, if not economic, unification of the continent. This is a position which was shared by Kwame Nkrumah, the
first President of Ghana. Though Nkrumah pursued this goal relentlessly, he was not able to achieve it by the time he was overthrown in a military coup d'etat in 1966.

In addition to these issues Aidoo raises about the disillusionment independence has proved to be, Aidoo raises the issue of women's oppression. When Ali's first wife, Fusenu, is informed about Ali's decision to marry a second wife, Esi, the women in Ali's own family lament:

The older women felt bad. So and understanding that had never existed between them was now born. It was a man's world. What shocked the older women though, was obviously how little had changed for their daughters — school and all. (107)

The novel, then, it may be argued, takes a look at "these images of/hell" (Someone Talking to Sometime 112) and to taste the African "mixture of complete sweetness and smoky roughage" quoted in the first epigraph of this chapter.

Divided into three parts, the novel recounts the trial and tribulations of Esi Sekyi, a young, educated, career woman caught at another kind of crossroads from that which confronted her male precursor, Ato Yawson, in Aidoo's drama, The Dilemma of a Ghost. In the play Ato Yawson, a young Ghanaian male, is sponsored by his traditional family to travel and study in the United States. Ato Yawson re-
turns home after the completion of his with an African-American wife, much to the chagrin and outrage of his family. They think he has married the "daughter of slaves who come from the white man's land" (19).

Unlike Ato Yawson, however, who was educated abroad, Aidoo's Esi acquires her education locally, making it appear then that she would not be as alienated as Ato Yawson was in the drama. Ironically, however, her gender makes her an alien in her own country. Esi is an ambitious civil servant in the Department of Urban Statistics who falls in love with Ali Kondey, a northerner for whom things seem to have changed.36 As the story begins, she is living in Accra.

36 The reference here is, of course, to Aidoo's short story with the suggestive title, "For Whom Things Did Not Change" in her collection, No Sweetness Here (1970). In it the central character, Zirigu, is a northerner like Ali Kondey. Unlike Ali Kondey, however, Zirigu is uneducated. He lived in the south before Ghana's independence doing chores for the white colonial masters. After independence one would have thought that his condition would change for the better. However, Aidoo's narrative makes it seem that Zirigu's situation worsens; he continues to slave for the new black dispensation, cook for young men some of whom are young enough to be his children.

The history of the relationship between northerners and southerners in Ghana remains a rather problematic one. In his Essays on African Society and History, (1976), Kwesi K. Prah writes: "Of all the nationalities in the geographical area called Ghana today and the Gold Coast in the past, apart from a few other African migrant minority ethnic groups from neighbouring former French colonies, no single group of nationalities continues to be exploited as the Northern Ghanaian Nationalities . . . For centuries before the era of the export of agricultural products to Europe, this part of West Africa had become notorious as a source of slaves for the Atlantic Slave Trade. . . Later when the imperialist powers decided to colonially subjugate the coastal parts of the Gold
with her first husband, Oko, and their only daughter, Ogyaanowa.

The principal characters in the novel are introduced to us in part one, which partly focuses on the evolution of Esi's love for Ali and the decay of her marriage. Obviously, these characters can be identified with Fanon's "Western bourgeoisie:" they belong to the Ghanaian elite, "the more deserving members of society. Like the users of hotel lobbies. Like Mrs. Esi Sekyi and her friend, Mrs. Opokuya Dakwa" (43). In a very insightful comment on Aidoo's central positioning of these characters in this novel, Vincent Odarttten writes:

Aidoo's examination of the personal problems, the political, social, and cultural knots that have tied up the minds and energies of the emergent neocolonial elites, should not be taken as an abandonment of the "ranks of the wretched." Rather, we should see this fictional analysis as a humble admission on Aidoo's part that, although she may speak and write about them, and about the contradictions of our collective experiences, she cannot and must not speak for them. The an-

Coast, the northern nationalities were used as cannon fodder of early colonialism. In 1852, the British decided to raise a local mercenary military force. This force was called the Gold Coast Corps. It was mainly recruited from escaped or redeemed slaves of the Gonja, Dagomba, Wangara and Grunshi tribes [all Northern nationalities]. In the Akan speaking areas of the South, these people were called "Donkorfo" [an Akan word for slave] (22-23). Also cited by Vincent O. Odarttten, (83). That Esi Sekyi, a southerner, engages in a relationship which makes her just an object to be exploited by Ali Kondey is interesting. Is this enslavement/colonization in reverse?
Nada Elia agrees with Odamten in his assessment that Aidoo is concerned with the "neocolonial elites" in this novel when she writes in her essay "'To Be an African Woman': Levels of Feminist Consciousness in Ama Ata Aidoo's Changes" that Aidoo's "characters are clearly middle-class" (137). However, it is not entirely accurate to argue that Aidoo does not speak for the "ranks of the wretched" in this work because she finds it inappropriate to do so: she does it so very well in her earlier works like No Sweetness Here and Anowa. It seems that while Aidoo's sympathies seem to be with the middle-class women, part of the reason she places the elite at the centre of this work is to expose the complicity of the "emergent neocolonial elites" in the oppression of the wretched. The entire passage in which Aidoo alludes to the presence of Esi and Opokuya at the hotel lobbies may suffice to illustrate my point:

It was night in Accra. It was not as hot as it been in the day, but it was still hot, and the atmosphere was heavy with the moisture from the gulf. The Hotel Twentieth Century was blazing with light, consuming enough electricity to light up the whole of the nearby fishing district. But the fishing villages did not have electricity. In fact, all that the fishing community
knew of that facility were the huge pylons that stood in their vegetable patches, and the massive cables passing over the roofs of their homes as these bore the electricity the more deserving members of society. Like users of hotel lobbies. Like Mrs. Esi Sekyi and her friend, Mrs. Opokuya Dakwa. (43)

There is no denying the fact that Aidoo focusses her socio-political acuity on commitment and progress in all her works; concern for the improvement of the quality of life for Africans of all classes, especially peasants, marks her politics. That concern is obvious in the above passage. The passage reminds one of Zirigu and his wife Setu in "For whom Things Did Not Change," (No Sweetness Here 25-36) who performed chores for the former white colonizers and continued to perform the same chores for the new black dispensation after independence with identical disadvantages. The villagers work to produce fish and vegetables and yet do not even enjoy a basic human necessity like electricity — they live in darkness. The Esis and Opokuyas who enjoy the hotel lobbies certainly can be identified with Fanon's "Western bourgeoisie," who "enjoy unfair advantages which are a legacy of the colonial period."37 By

37 Fanon argues in The Wretched of the Earth that "in its beginnings, the national bourgeoisie of the colonial countries identifies itself with the decadence of the bourgeoisie of the West. . . . The national

125
carefully juxtaposing the neglect of the peasant producers and the indulgence of the consuming elite, Aidoo lays bare the symptomatic cancerous disease of misplacement of priorities that has characterized the leadership in many post-colonial African countries. Like her Ghanaian counterpart, Ayi Kwei Armah, she cautions against "this great haste to consume things we have taken no care nor trouble to produce" (Amah, Fragments 199).

In an interview with Maya Jaggi, Ama Ata Aidoo remarks, "I've grown to see that life is not just politics or the liberation struggle, or even economics: love is political, and everything is intertwined." In the first part of the narrative, we cannot fail to miss the acute observations and biting wit of the narrator, not in any way tempered by the romanticizations we would normally ascribe to a love story. In fact, like Esi, we are warned that "love

bourgeoisie organizes centers of rest and relaxation and pleasure resorts to meet the wishes of the Western bourgeoisie. Such activity is given the name of tourism, and for the occasion will be built up as a national industry" (153). It is interesting to note that even as I write this chapter, the average Ghanaian cannot afford to pay for a single night's stay in a hotel in Accra, the hotel industry continues to flourish all over the country in the name of the tourist industry. In many hotels in Accra, though the local currency is called the cedi, rates are quoted in the United States dollar.

is not safe, my Lady Silk, love is dangerous. It is deceitfully sweet like the wine from a fresh palm tree at dawn. But when we need to count the pennies for food for our stomachs and cloths for our backs, love is nothing" (42). It should not be forgotten that Aidoo prefaces the novel with a disclaimer:

To the reader, a confession, and the critic, an apology.

Several years ago when I was a little older that I am now, I said in a published interview that I could never write about lovers in Accra. Because surely in our environment there are more important things to write about? Working on this story then was an exercise in words-eating! Because it is a slice from the life and loves of a somewhat privileged young woman and other fictinal characters — in Accra. It is not meant to be a contribution to any debate, however current.

The disclaimer, obviously, is a hoax, carefully crafted to disabuse us of any idealized notions we may hold about love and marriage. If Aidoo holds the view that love is political and that "everything is intertwined," then she uses the story to discuss not only personal relationships, but also social, political and economic situations in the post-independence historical juncture of Ghana and, by extension, Africa. The issues that confront Esi and all the characters in the novel inform us of how individuals try to cope with the everyday problems they face in "a neo-
colonial African city that barely managed to drag itself through one more weekday” (33). Aidoo does not allow us to forget either the personal in the political or the political as the lives of the characters evolve in the novel.

The tactic of giving us the personal histories of each of the principal characters not only places those characters in a credible narrative context but also prevents the reader from indulging his or her prejudices in the process of reading and interpretation. The narrator, like the Bird of the Wayside in Aidoo's Dilemma of a Ghost, discloses both clear and clouded motivations in the novel. We know the private thoughts of the characters, the fears and hopes that haunt them, as they race or blunder towards their individual and collective fates. It is evident in the novel that both Oko and Esi are not happy with their marriage. Esi believes that Oko demands too much of her time. Oko, a teacher and soon-to-be principal of a school, wants not only to have at least one more child, preferably a boy, but firmly believes that Esi "definitely put[s] her career well above any duties she owed as a wife. She was a great cook, who complained endlessly anytime she had to enter the kitchen" (8). Oko resents her professionalism and is frustrated. She leaves her home at dawn and returns at dusk,
sometimes bringing some work home with her, has an elderly woman as her house help, and attends numerous conferences all over the globe: "Then there are all these conferences. Geneva, Addis, Dakar one half of the year; Rome, Lusaka, Lagos the other half. Is this too, an African woman? She not only is, but there are plenty of them around these days . . . these days . . . these days" (8, Aidoo's ellipses).

Though Oko is educated, he certainly is a "home grown boy," a representative of his kind, who, but for his "lack of enthusiasm" would have agreed with his aunts to get him "'a proper wife'. . . an unspoilt young woman, properly brought up, whose eyes have not jumped over her eyebrows with too much education and too much money of her own" (39). Ironically, Oko's aunts, resent Esi's apparent economic independence.

It is to Aidoo's credit that she captures the complexity of the problems that coalesce to oppress the African woman. One of these problems is the complicity of women themselves.39 It is Oko's aunts who not only resent Esi's

39 One thought-provoking work that addresses the complicity of women in their oppression is Christina Hoff's *Who Stole Feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women*. Though the text basically speaks to feminists and feminist issues in the United States, some of its politics apply to some of
education, career and independence, but would also want him to marry another woman they consider "proper" for him. The issue Aidoo takes up here is not unlike what we encounter in some African novels (like Mariama Ba's epistolary novel, *So Long A Letter*), in which mothers play significant roles the issues that affect African women. And I personally have a horrifying story about this issue. I grew up in a very humble home; however, that I was the "pride and joy" of my mother was never in doubt. Not formally educated herself, she encouraged me to use whatever educational opportunities that came my way. Once or twice while I was teaching in a secondary school in Ghana, I wanted to marry, but my mother wouldn't have anything to do with it because she did not approve of any of the women I was going to choose. Perhaps I was spineless myself, perhaps I was too attached to my mother to disobey her — I didn't want to do anything to make her unhappy. My biological father had abandoned me, and it was mother who had supported me through school. I was busy teaching in class one day when the Assistant Headmaster of the school, who happened to be a close friend as well, walked in and told me I had a visitor waiting for me in his office. He added that he suspected it would be my mother and that she was with a young woman. When the lesson was over, I rushed over to my boss's office. It wasn't my mother, but an aunt. I went to my bungalow with my guests. I had no prior information that I was going to receive such a visit. The hell I went through to entertain them as our custom demanded is another story. After entertaining them, my aunt told her story: a very simple one. She was a friend of the mother of the young woman she had brought. She had told the woman's mother about me (I did not know the young woman or her mother) and they had agreed that she should marry me. My mother had agreed and so had the young woman. My embarrassment was beyond description. I sat down, wrote a letter, gave it to them to be sent to my mother. Out of politeness, I just told my guests that I had stated my opinion in the letter and that my mother would discuss it with them when they returned to our hometown. As custom demanded, I had to pay for their transportation back home. Since I did not have money, I had to go and borrow money from a friend. This story gives me the shakes whenever I remember it. What would have happened if I were in a relationship and living with someone when they arrived? How could this young woman commit herself when she did not know me? Did she ever know what life would have been for her marrying me? Though my mom and I continued to get on well after this ordeal, I don't think she ever forgave me fully for not marrying a woman she did not know well, but whom she had chosen for me. My mother died before I married my wife, Jocelyn. I don't think I have ever been able to imagine her reaction, were she alive, to the marriage.
in the marriages of their sons. The interference of these mothers in some cases highlight conflicts like those of tradition and modernity, race and class, which contribute towards the oppression of women.

In Ba's novel, for example, women play a significant role in breaking up Ramatoulaye's and Aissatou's respective marriages. In the latter's case, the royal mother-in-law, unable to accept that her son has married a goldsmith's daughter, schemes to have him married to Nabou whom she adopts and raises for that sole purpose. When she judges both the time and the girl "ripe," the royal lady simply presents her son with a second wife, warning that shame kills faster than disease. In Ramatoulaye's case Binetou is reluctant to marry a man so much older than herself, but her mother, "coming from a hut made of zinc sheets and with a face long faded in the smoke from the wood fire" (Ba 36), begs Binetou to marry Modou so that she, the mother, can experience some material comfort before dying. Significantly, Ramatoulaye has grudging admiration for Aissatou's royal mother-in-law but only contempt for Binetou and her mother whom she sees as a parvenu, "the latter particularly as she "wallows in her new-found luxury, eating from the trough of good food, modern comforts, and amenities" (Ba
Ramatoulaye can rationalize Aissatou having a woman from a higher class being married to her (Aissatou's) husband; she cannot accept Binetou's marriage to her husband because she, Binetou, is from a lower class.

Nadine Gordimer takes up the same class struggle among women in her *Burger's Daughter* when she describes ironically, a women's liberation meeting in South Africa, organized by Flora, a white woman, to which black women are also invited. The white women are determined that the meeting will have "nothing to do with politics," although it is apartheid politics that causes most of the country's problems. However, the economic gap, and therefore the educational and social gap, between white and black women proves too great, despite Flora's insistence on the unifying and "common possession of vaginas, wombs and breasts" (Gordimer 203). In Ba's *So Long A Letter* and in Aidoo's *Changes*, the gap is between black women who belong to two widely distanced classes. In Ba's novel, however, in spite of the obvious class struggles, she insists that the men are solely responsible for the oppression of their wives. It is to Aidoo's credit that she realistically tackles the class issue and how it contributes to compounding the problems of
If women are to be united, then the issue of class must be addressed.

Aidoo's Oko does not allow his aunts to get him a proper wife as the men in Ba's novel do. In his own way, Oko loves Esi, but has adopted "many petty and chauvinistic social attitudes." In order to assert his manhood, he takes out his anger on Esi by assaulting her sexually:

'My friends are laughing at me,' he said.
Silence.
'They think I'm not behaving like a man.'
Esi was trying to pretend she had not heard the declaration.

Oko flung the bedcloth from him, sat up, pulled her down, and moved on her. Esi started to protest. But he went on doing what he had determined to do all morning. He squeezed her breast repeatedly, thrust his tongue into her mouth, forced her unwilling legs apart, entered her, plunging in and out of her, thrashing to the left, to the right, pounding and just pounding away. Then it was all over.

For some time, neither of them spoke. There was nothing else he wanted to say, and there was nothing she could say, at least, not for a while.

Ogundipe-Leslie agrees with the view that the oppression of women in African societies goes beyond the dichotomization of "all men bad, all women good." She writes: "It would seem that this writer [Ogundipe-Leslie] is arguing that men are the enemy. No, men are not the enemy. The enemy is the total societal structure which is a jumble of neo-colonial — (that is, primitive capitalist and intermediary consumerist economic formations desperately dependent on international capital) and feudalistic, even slave-holding structures and social attitudes. . . . As women's liberation is but an aspect of the need to liberate the entire [African] society from dehumanization and the loss of fundamental human rights, it is the social system which must change" (82).

Odamten, 163.
What does one do with this much rage? This much frustration? This much deliberate provocation so early in the morning, and early in the week? (8-9)

This is the final straw that helps Esi decide to leave the marriage. It is not an easy decision, for in making it, Esi is aware that her society is not going to understand her as we are informed through the consciousness of the narrator:

"marital rape? No. The society could not possibly have an indigenous word or phrase for it. Sex is something a husband claims from his wife as his right. Any time. And at his convenience"(12). Aidoo has informed us that the concept of "marital rape" has no indigenous word or phrase. In other words, in the indigenous culture, no one would take an accusation seriously by a woman that her husband raped her. A husband can demand and have sex with his wife whether she likes it or not. What Aidoo does through Esi's asking for a divorce on the grounds of marital rape, is to subvert the commonly held notion by many African men that once they are married, it is their right to have intercourse with their wives whenever they please. What Aidoo
insists on here is that women have a right to the use of their bodies.\textsuperscript{42}

Oko fails as a husband because, despite his declaration of love, he sees Esi as an adjunct to his ego, a crutch to bolster his image in the eyes of his co-workers and himself. So, even though Esi may have cherished the illusion that "what had attracted him most about me was my air of independence," her friend Opokuya knows that men "who claim they like intelligent and active women are also interested in having such women permanently in their beds and their kitchens" (45). Oko certainly belongs to the community of men and even women who decry women's independence. In fact he seems to be genuinely confused as to how he could "fight with [his] woman's career for attention" (70). His education and cultural orientation do not seem to have

\textsuperscript{42} Nada Elia writes on this issue: "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 and all circumstances. Yet it also problematic in light of postcolonial Africa's desire to rid the continent of Western ideas imposed during the lengthy colonial occupation" (141). I must say it took me a reading of Nfah-Abbenyi's explication of the concept and a lengthy discussion with my wife to understand it. In most African traditional societies, before a man marries a woman he pays what is called the dowry or bride price, to the family of the woman. Works by African critics and writers that discuss this include Ifi Amadumee's \textit{Male Daughters}, Female \textit{Husbands}, Achebe's \textit{Arrow of God} and Emecheta's \textit{The Bride Price}. Because of the payment of this bride price by men there is the tendency for them to think that the woman has been bought and so they can be used in any way. In \textit{The Joys of Motherhood}, Nnu Ego's first husband, Amatokwu asks her: "What did you say? Did I not pay your bride price? Am I not your owner?" (48).
prepared him adequately to be in a relationship with a career woman like Esi; in fact therein lays his sense of inadequacy, deflation and marginalization, not only from his own marriage, but his family and co-workers.

Oko's ideas about the "proper" behaviour of men and husbands in relationships of the heart come from his peers, "one of his friends from boarding school days" (7). He is overly reliant on others, his "friends," for self-validation. "You don't care what my friends think of me", he whines to Esi just before he rapes her.4 In addition, Oko is inept when it comes to relating to women, even his own sisters and mother. He has been pampered and made the center of attention. As Esi explains to Ali before he goes to her family to ask for permission to marry her, Oko is "the kind of man who brings out all of a woman's mothering instincts" (88).

4 Oko's characterization reminds me of a song in Ghana by a popular musician called Koo Nimo, which does not only mock husbands who have no measure of self-will and commitment but advises that affairs of marriage should be mostly resolved by the parties involved. The song, titled "Obi Awaresem Mma Ennka Bi" in Akan (translates into something like "don't meddle in other people's marital affairs"), talks of a man who wanted to divorce his wife upon the advice of a friend. As was the custom, elders of both parties meet to listen to the man's argument for divorce. Pointing to his friend who was sitting by him, the man foolishly tells the court that he actually loved his wife but it was his friend who had advised him to divorce her. Certainly the friend is embarrassed but the final joke is on the spineless man.
Oko does not seem to grow up to understand or appreciate the worth of what his myopia has destroyed (Odamttan 164). He remains comparatively immature and has a hard time accepting that his marriage with Esi is over (71), a problem very well illustrated by his fight with Ali (121-122). It is the blinkers that Oko wears that do not allow him to realize that if his marriage to any woman is to be decent, is to succeed, there must be a clear delineation between filial love and romantic love; there must be a clear boundary between his love for his relations and his wife. "Derisively, the narrator tells us, "[i]n any case, everyone knows that a man's relationship with women other than his wife, however innocent, can always help ruin a marriage. And that includes his love for his own mother" (44). It is very ironic that when Oko's mother "deposited a breathing parcel on his doorstep, in the form of a very beautiful and very young girl" (71), as Esi's replacement, he is ex-

"I have already indicated in a footnote that I do not know what my mother's reaction to my marriage with my wife would have been if she had been alive. But even in her absence, the marriage was not without resistance from my relations back at home. My stepfather, aided by some of my sisters, wrote me a nasty condemnatory letter. I replied to him almost immediately telling him to mind his own business. He hasn't written again — more than three years now. My sisters seem to have come to terms with it, but I still wonder what the dynamics would be if my wife and I were living in Ghana. At any rate, I have made the boundary clear to them.

137
tremely flattered. Oko's spinelessness ensconces him in the continual feeding of his ego. In fact, he allows himself to be persuaded by his relatives that Esi, the mother of their daughter Ogyaanowa, was "a semi-barren witch and . . . [that Oko] was well rid of her, thank God" (70).

Critics of Aidoo's work have reacted differently to the issue of Oko's sexual assault on Esi. Bola Makanjuola thinks "Aidoo tentatively raises the issue of marital rape . . . but never really dwells on the subject. It is as if both Esi and the author realize, that in African society there could not possibly be an 'indigenous word or phrase for it.'" In an interview on the topic, Aidoo herself is reported to have said, "I had to be realistic. In terms of our African background, marital rape isn't one of the hottest topics . . . sex in marriage is the man's prerogative and a woman is considered lucky if her husband should take such an aggressive interest in her." Nfah-Abbenyi, in a rather detailed discussion of the issue, sees the issue Aidoo raises as her subversion of "an age-old tradition that

silences women's feelings about their own bodies."\textsuperscript{17}

Odamten, who seems to agree with Aidoo that in African society, "sex is a man's prerogative," argues "Oko's assault on his wife is a measure not only of his insensitivity but also the level of his love, which is purely physical."\textsuperscript{18}

Whereas I agree with the first part of Odamten's assessment, I find it difficult to agree with the second part. It seems Oko's physical attraction for Esi is his configuration of her body as an object to be desired, forcibly attained and dispensed with. As Odamten suggests, Oko feels too proud to even apologize to Esi after the assault:

\[\text{[Oko] was already feeling like telling Esi that he was sorry. But he was also convinced that he mustn't. He got out of bed, taking the entire sleeping cloth with him. Esi's anger rose to an exploding pitch. Not just because Oko taking the cloth left her completely naked, or because she was feeling uncomfortably wet between her thighs. What really finished her was her eyes catching sight of the cloth trailing behind Oko who looked like some arrogant king, as he opened the door to get into the bathroom before her. (10)}\]

Oko's insensitivity in his treatment of Esi in the passage makes her appear like an object which he thinks he can pos-

\textsuperscript{17} Nfah-Abbenyi (54).
\textsuperscript{18} Odamten, (164). He refers to page 6 of the text where Oko watching Esi's figure says to himself: "I love this body. But it is her sassy navel that kills me, thought Oko, watching the little protrusion, and feeling some heating up at the base of his own belly."
sess and discard as he wishes. Odamten, therefore, demonstrates acuity in dismissing Makanjuola's assertions as "sophistry." He goes on further to suggest that the rape is important, but "it should not be confused with the narrative's central concerns; it is a symptom of a much more fundamental personal, social, and political dislocation" (106). Odamten is rather abrupt in his treatment of this very important issue; it seems to me that to date his interpretation remains the most profound articulation of the importance or symbolism of the rape, considering it as the forcible possession and defilement of Esi, the woman's body by Oko, the man. Rape in the context of Africa's troubled history with Europe can be read as a metaphor for both the slave trade and eventual colonization of the continent. After the abolition of the inhuman traffic in slaves in Africa by European nations, the slave trade, the same Europeans systematically partitioned the entire continent among themselves. One local chief, commenting on the tragedy lamented, "a forcible possession of our land has taken the place of a forcible possession of our persons." European

19 See A. Adu Boahen, *Topics in West African History* (110).
nations, in the name of colonization literally and metaphorically raped Africa. And after independence, the new male patriarchal leadership, Armah's "elite of pompous asses," the inheritors of the colonial legacy, have not stopped raping the continent.

A lot has been written about the romanticization of the African woman and her description as "the symbol of the Earth, of the Nation, as Mother Africa." As Nfah-Abbenyi very well articulates, in African literature this idealization of the African woman "posits her status as a transcendental symbol... with a parallel stress on the supremacy of motherhood, of the fertile mother, of fecundity" (5). This Mother Africa Trope is sometimes converted into a prostitute metaphor. And even though it is revised at

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50 In his *Invention of Africa* (1988), Mudimbe writes that though the continent's name "is linked etymologically to Afer, Abraham's son, yet in contrast the continent's peculiarity is presented with powerful symbols: the black colour of a horned woman" (12). And in their chapter titled "The Strange Woman," in *The Africa That Never Was* (1970), Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow also write that "Another twentieth-century image stemming from that hardy perennial, the Dark Continent, personifies Africa as a woman. In it is expressed the quintessence of the lure of Africa, for the continent appears as an irresistible woman, but one whose beauty is a snare and an enticement to destruction" (148).

51 See Nfah-Abbenyi (5). She quotes Senghor and goes on to discuss and endorse Florence Stratton's discussion of African male writers' negative deployment of "the Mother Africa Trope."

times by some African writers by employing woman as the symbol of change within post-independence African nations, it works against the interests of women. In her treatment of the theme of rape in her novel, Aidoo cleverly employs a subversive mode of the trope to comment on oppression of women and the continued rape of the continent by its post-independence leaders.

I have elsewhere in this work suggested the common thematic concerns Aidoo and Armah share in their works. The metonymic relationship between the rape of the woman's body and the rape of the continent is one such common theme. In Armah's short story, "An African Fable," takes up this theme of rape. In this story a warrior finds a woman waiting on the shore for someone to liberate her from the endless rape of her body. Out the warrior's fragmented, "un-

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53 Nfah-Abbenyi (5).
54 Chikwenyi Okonjo Ogunyemi makes a similar argument as I about some of the works of Emecheta. Ogunyemi writes: "In her texts, especially The Bride Price (1980; first published in 1976), The Slave Girl (1977), The Joys of Motherhood (1979), Double Yoke (1982a), and Destination Biafra (1983a), the oppressed women represent the nation mismanaged or raped by colonialists, military/political leaders, egotistical males; they also exemplify the family torn apart by irresponsible men and overburdened women" (228).
connected" state lies the eternal, infinite connectedness of Africa, "before which even the foolish cannot help but have a momentary vision of the freshening cycles" (192). But the "unconnected eye' of the warrior perceives only unconnectedness, "not trusting to the wisdom of deeper intuitions " (Derek Wright 29). 55 Because they are unmonitored by any controlling moral intelligence, the impressions of this merely " beholding eye" fail to grasp the woman's deeper ideal beauty and its cyclical permanence, which call for the more penetrating discernment of the "watching' or "con nected eye". The warrior responds instead to "a different beauty, one which comes out on the way and makes of the beholder, in a sense only, a receiver of impressions already too strong to be missed" (Armah 194). The warrior feels himself drawn "not indeed against his will but as if his will itself had always been a willing part of this thing whose dwelling place was outside himself" (194).

The political dimensions of the parable now move into focus. The warrior's warped vision notes only atomized externals, "mistaking the visible form of the visible form of

55 Derek Wright offers an insightful reading of "An African Fable" in his Ayi Kwei Armah's Africa: The Sources of His Fiction (1989).
the thing for the thing itself" (Wright 30). Armah has written elsewhere of rhetoric taken for fact" in post-colonial Africa and of victims of demagogues who are persuaded "more from fascination with forms than from any appreciation of realizable content."56 Unsure whether the rape he witnesses is not really "an act of love" and the woman's cry "a call of salvation or a call to possession " (195), the warrior in the fable mistakes that cry for the beat of his own heart and, even at the moment of her liberation and the murder of her oppressor, continues to mistake the historical cycle of Africa's exploitation for a preordained process, unalterable as the seasons: "one marvelous drop in the endless cycle of waters that never end are always beginning . . . the woman was still dripping with the teary moistness of her ordained rape" ("Fable" 196). Power to protect slips into power to exploit as a result of incorrect perception of what is being defended. As Wright rightly comments, the "woman Africa is subjected to a humiliating repetition of her history" (31), and which brings no political regeneration into harmony with her seasonal

cycles of renewal: "And in her mind there was no separation between the present now and then, nothing at all between the present and the depths of ages that should long have been forgotten" ("Fable" 196). Her timeless rape is described, significantly, as a voyage through the little cycle that was not only a part of the whole, but the amazing mimic of the whole itself" (193).

Esi's rape, just like the woman in Armah's fable, therefore must be read both literally and metaphorically. In fact there is a sense in which both Oko and Ali treat her as a whore. I have already argued that Oko's fascination for Esi's physical attraction is not love but lust, and a sheer desire to possess Esi's body; for him Esi is just an object to be possessed. He arrogantly gloats after the rape. Ali does no better. When his affair with Esi is over, he buys her a car. The car is an object that can be used and dispensed with. Ali is dispensing with Esi as if she were an object that he is finished with. One would have thought that since Esi needed a new car to replace the old one she was using, she would be happy. But after she had given the old car to her friend Opokuya and Opokuya had driven it away, we are told that Esi "started to weep."
Nothing violent: just two tears rolling quietly down her cheeks:

All Esi was aware of was desolation. As for her mind, it was completely blank. She did not know what to do and was not sure whether she had been aware that her grandmother and Opokuya had tried to warn her. She had just been a real fool. What was she to do? Where did she go from here? Too tired to do anything else, she continued to sit on the edge of her bed while the tears continued streaming down her face. After a while, she thought she should get up. Go and wash her face and begin to pull herself together. But even that seemed like such a massive operation; as though someone had tasked her to rebuild the world. She continued to sit. (162, italics mine)

After leaving Oko because he raped her, Esi had put her faith in another man and that relationship has also ended nowhere. Both Oko and Ali are Armah's "deceivers" in the passage I quoted above. For both of them, Esi is a commodity to be used and dispensed with. At the symbolic level, she is the Mother Africa our leaders continue to rape. A reading of Aidoo's short story "Two Sisters" in her collection No Sweetness Here validates my interpretation. Esi's life and relationships with Oko and Ali, respectively, parallel Mercy's life and relationships with Mensah-Arthur and Captain Ashley in "Two Sisters." Mensah-Arthur, a Minister of State with a wife, countless girl friends and children exploits Mercy for sex so that he can buy gifts on his government-paid trips abroad. When a military coup topples the
government, a member of the new military government, Captain Ashley — who is ironically the chairman of a commission investigating corruption in the previous administration, and who is also married — becomes the new boy friend or "sugar daddy," as it is termed in Ghana. It is significant that this story, like the novel under discussion, is set in Accra, "a neo-colonial African city that barely managed to drag itself through one more weekday" (Changes 33). Captain Ashley also buys Mercy, a secretary whose monthly salary is barely enough for a week, gifts in exchange for sex. The following is the exchange between Connie and Mercy when the latter comes home with Captain Ashley to introduce him:

"Listen people, I brought a friend to meet you. A man."
"Where is he?" from James.
"Bring him in," from Connie.
"You know, Sissie, you are a new mother. I thought I'd come and ask you if it's all right."
"Of course," say James and Connie, and for some reason they are both very nervous.
"He is Captain Ashley."
"Which one?"
"How many do you know?"
James still thinks it is impossible. "Eh . . . do you mean the officer who has been appointed the . . . the . . ."
"Yes."
"Wasn't there a picture in The Crystal over the weekend about his daughter's wedding? And another one of him with his wife and children and grandchildren?"
"Yes."
"And he is heading a commission to investigate something or other?"
"Yes."
Connie just sits there with her mouth open that wide. . . . (101-102, italics in the text)

One of the main considerations in quoting the passage in full is that I think both Lloyd Brown in his study *Women Writers in Black Africa* (1981), and Odamtten (1994) offer problematic readings of the story "Two Sisters." Brown, for example, writes that the "plot is pointedly hackneyed, for the ultimate irony of the sisters' lives is the essentially déjà vu quality of their borrowed middle-class aspirations" (119). And Odamtten, also writing of the two sisters says, "although they share a comparable historical moment with the characters of 'Something to Talk About,' the black-skinned white-masked bourgeois aspirations of Connie and James[/Mercy], like those of the neocolony in which they live, are doomed to failure without economic independence" (112-113). Certainly Aidoo is satirizing; however, I think within the context she is asking: why are Mercy and Connie not economically independent? Why can't Mercy buy herself a pair of shoes though she works? Why is Connie shocked on knowing that Captain Ashley is chairman of a committee investigating corruption? Why is the "neocolony" not economically independent? The Mensah-Arthurs, and Captain Ashleys,
the so-called redeemers, are raping the country as they rape its women. It is pertinent that Esi, the career woman, becomes Ali's victim partly because she was not earning enough to replace her old car. In Aidoo's introduction to Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, She writes that "it is a fact that the only group of females in the country [Ghana] who may not be sure of themselves are the educated" (x). Generally, civil servants are the poorest paid workers in Ghana, both men and women. We are informed in *Changes* of an example of Opokuya's working conditions:

Endless drudgery at work. And the state, who was her employer, paying salaries so low you were convinced the aim was to get people like her to resign and go to work for doctors in private practice. (154)

Men in the private sector, like Ali, who are rich tend to take advantage of women civil servants with promises of cars, houses and even marriage. It should be noted that Oko, Esi's previous husband, a headmaster of a school, had no car. There is a sense in which though Aidoo raises the issue of poor working conditions in Ghana, she problematizes the relationship between Esi and Ali.

Certainly, in "Two Sisters," as in *Changes*, we see a clear link between the exploitation of women and the rape of the land. The women are not as economically independent
as they should be because men control the resources of the land and take advantage of it and its women.⁵⁷

In a rather rapid sequence of events, the drama of the "images of/hell" which this love story of Esi and Ali has become is unfolded to us in the final section of the novel. We hear the one-sided conversation between Ali and Esi, after one of his numerous trips. The year-old second marriage has settled into the same old routine of excuses and evasions. The narrator presents this opening replay as though it were a drama or film script⁵⁹ — Aidoo achieved her first critical attention through her play, The Drama — "Fade in the end-of-day sounds of the city and its traffic: yes, do fade them in: especially when you are in doubt" (137). Esi is aware that Ali's visits are less frequent, and she has heard rumours that he has been paying a great deal of attention to his new secretary (139). Yet, to pretend that she is not perturbed by Ali's behaviour, and to fill the

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⁵⁷ Elsewhere in chapter, I have quoted Ogundipe-Leslie as saying "men are not the enemy." She argues further "men become enemies when they seek to retard, even block . . . necessary historical changes for selfish interests in power, when they claim 'culture and heritage' as if human societies are not constructed by human beings, when they plead and laugh about the 'natural and enduring inferiority of women,' when they argue that change is impossible because history is static, which it is not" (82).

⁵⁹ Odamten 169.
void she becomes a workaholic, devoting more time to her work than she ever did. It is her discerning friend, Opokuya, who notices that "there was something slightly lost in Esi's eyes" (140).

Mrs. Opokuya Dakwa, Esi's old secondary friend, is married to Kubi Dakwa, who started out as an assistant surveyor. She has been a midwife for over fifteen years and worked in Kumasi Central Hospital when Esi and Oko were first married. She is perspicacious when it comes to dealing with her friend. Like the other women in the novel, she has a strong character. She meets her husband, Kubi, when she is a student nurse, and they are married after she graduated. Two of her four children are in secondary boarding school, while the other two are in primary school (16). Although she seems happily married, a member of the "SWI — Satisfied Wives International" — as Esi puts it (46), she is not. There are the usual problems of coping with the daily hassles of her job, of running a home, of concerned moments, of "Kubi's chronic lateness" (55), which simmer under the façade of tranquil marriage. But her "everlasting
"wahala" (author's italics, 93)\footnote{"Wahala" is a Hausa word which translates into something like "problem," but without the urgency which any serious problem should normally be attended to. Though a Hausa word as I have already indicated, and spoken in the northern region of Ghana, it seems to have become common currency in the mainly Akan south as well.} was over the issue of the family getting a second car; Kubi, the husband, usually drives the only car to work (17). Over the years of their marriage, however, she and her husband have developed a way of arguing about this issue that, although it comes close to rupturing the calm exterior of their marriage, does not go over the line, as Esi and Oko's does (55-56); yet Opopokuya envies "Esi's freedom of movement" (56).

By the end of the second year of her marriage to Ali, Esi is driven to see a doctor for tranquilizers (144). After taking them, she finally falls asleep. Some ten hours later, she is awakened by the noise of a car horn outside the gate to her house. She finally realizes that it is Ali in an unfamiliar car. As it turns out, it is her New Year's present for her (146). But Esi has learned a great deal after a disastrous monogamous marriage and the no-win situation of this modern polygamous marriage.

Ogundipe-Leslie and Nfah-Abbenyi offer two different perspectives on the issue of polygamy in modern-day African
societies. Commenting directly on Esi's situation, Nfah-Abbenyi writes:

"Esi's 'modern' marriage to Ali Kondey depersonalizes the subject and woman Esi, and redefines the traditional concept of 'home.' Traditionally, families share the same compound. If a man has more than one wife, the man has his house and each of his wives has her own house that she shares with her own children. But all these houses must be situated in one compound. In the middle of the compound is a big yard (in Beba we call it nsaa) where the children meet and play together. The situation has changed significantly in urban areas. Because most men cannot financially afford many houses in one compound, they usually rent houses with many rooms. The husband and the wives each have their respective rooms (or in lower-income homes, the husband has no room of his own but shares those of his wives), while the children share the rest of the rooms. The point of the matter is that the whole family has to live together in spite of economic restraints" (57).

Writing on polygamy in general Ogundipe-Leslie argues: "One of the most persistent myths is that polygamy is the greatest form of oppression from which the African woman suffers. Other aspects of the myth are that the polygynous form of marriage is on the wane as we move towards modernity and Westernization and that the existence of polygyny is proof of the chattel status of the African woman. Polygamy is not always oppressive to the woman. It has its economic role in guaranteeing women the autonomy and human dignity they need. As recently as September 1981, one researcher of polygamy and family planning, found that men and women even now consciously choose to enter into polygamous marriages for various reasons of culture, economic status, prestige, desire for offspring and for sexual gratification" (53).

Though I am an African, Nfah-Abbenyi, Ogundipe-Leslie and I come from different cultures — I'm Ghanaian, (Akan),
Nfah-Abbenyi is Cameroonian (Beba) and Ogundipe-Leslie is Nigerian (Yoruba). I wonder, however, as diverse as African cultures are, it will be sufficient to base the advantages of polygamy in African societies on one researcher's work as Ogundipe-Leslie does.

There is an argument to be make that polygamous relationships exist in African societies for various socio-economic reasons. In the last chapter on Aidoo, I mention that there are a lot of places in Africa where people do not have access to fertility clinics. Some men marry more that one woman because one woman was unable to produce children. Some marry more that one woman because in some traditional societies, as Achebe demonstrates in Things Fall Apart, it is prestigious to have more that one wife — in other words, women are property. Some women enter into polygamous marriages because they think it gives them economic security\(^6\) some would marry a rich man who already has

\(^6\) My mother left my biological father because he had, and still has, two other wives. My mother left because she realized there was no way she could achieve independence, however it is defined, by marrying my father. My two stepmothers remained because they thought marrying him would guarantee them at least economic security. For all I know, my mother made the right choice. To date, I still wonder how my stepmothers coped with my father's wife-beating. And I also wonder how they coped with the rivalry between them because they each wanted to please my father — he played one against the other.
a wife rather than a poor man with no wives. The issue of polygamy is a complex one. The choice remains that of the individuals. In a country like Ghana where Christianity has a stronghold, polygamy is decreasing.

The gift of the new car surprises Esi, yet "she secretly admitted that she had known even before Ali actually said the words — that he had brought the car for her, and she understood the gesture as a bribe. A very special bribe. But a bribe all the same — like all the other things he had been giving her. They were all meant to be substitutes for his presence" (147). Ironically, as Odamten eloquently argues, "this substantial gift, the very materiality of the car, becomes the catalyst that opens Esi's mind" (170) to her marriage as "a complete dead end" (149). The symbolism of the gift is not lost on Esi; she has become Ali's * like the car, a commodity that can be bought and replaced by its owner at will, she is just a sexual object.

Esi goes to the only one she can call a friend, Opo-kuya. But her friend's reaction to the information that the car is a present from Ali surprises Esi. Like those who see Ali's first wife, Fusena's kiosk as a sign of her good fortune ("They said of it that what Fusena's kiosk did not sell was not available anywhere in the country" (67)), Opo-
kuya reacts to Esi's new car from the depths of her own dissatisfaction with "marriage in these neo-colonial times" (153). She asks to buy Esi's old car, scrap though it is, and "Esi looked at her friend as if Opokuya was someone she was meeting for the first time ever" (154). Esi decides to get the car reconditioned before selling it for a nominal amount of money to her friend and fellow traveler. Six months later, the two meet to complete the transaction, but each is too preoccupied with her own emotions and recent memories to be at ease. After Opokuya leaves in her "new" car, Esi retreats into her bedroom; "then to her own surprise, she started to weep. Nothing violent: just two tears rolling quietly down her cheeks" (161). Esi's "two tears" (Odamtten 171), contrast with Marija's "tear . . . coming out of the left eye only" (Aidoo 65). The distinction underscores the narrator's view that "loneliness" in the social context of contemporary Europe is both physically and emotionally isolating, while in a neo-colonial state like Ghana, and by implication Africa, loneliness, like marriage itself, is a communal affair — isolation is almost impossible.

Although it may be argued that all the major characters — Esi, Ali, Opokuya, Kubi, and Oko — are victims of
and participants in their own fates, predicated by their insertion into this neo-colonial phase of Africa's historical continuum, Fusena, Ali's first wife, it seems, endures the most; her endurance is perhaps the result of Ali's loyalty to her as his first wife (119). For all the married women, it seems that Mma Danjuma's thoughts on the coincidence of the talk of marriage and funerals (61) echo the pathos of the narrator's poetic declaration:

They still
marry us in our
shrouds, and
bury us in the fineries of
the wedding day. (71)

Esi, like Opokuya and Fusena before her, eventually learns that:

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

From knowledge gained since — —

So why wish a curse on your child
Desiring her to be female
? (51)

Poeticizing to achieve thematic effect, Aidoo suggests the African woman is an unknown, a question mark. While insisting in her works that Africa should reinvent itself, this reinvention, as
Fanon emphasizes in the second epigraph to this chapter, must be done simultaneously with the liberation of the African woman.
CHAPTER 4

"SWEETNESS AND SMOKY ROUGHAGE" — OUR SISTER KILLJOY

And so this was it?
Bullying slavers and slave-traders.
Solitary discoverers.
Swamp-crossers and lion hunters,
Missionaries who risked the cannibal’s pot to
bring the world to the heathen hordes.
—Ama Ata Aidoo, Our Sister Killjoy (65)

Springwater flowing to the desert, where you flow there is no regeneration. The desert takes. The desert knows no giving. To the giving water of your flowing it is not in the nature of the desert to return anything but destruction. Springwater flowing to the desert, your future is extinction.
—Ayi Kwei Armah, Two Thousand Seasons (xi)

Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness begins with "The Nellie, a cruising yawl," ready to sail into "darkest Africa." On board the yawl is Marlow, who is to narrate to us the story of Kurtz's journey to Africa and his (Kurtz's) recognition of the "moral horror of having succumbed to dark temptations which African life posed for the white man" (Abrams 2223). In Heart of Darkness, then, we enter into a discourse in which Africa is interpreted in terms of her cannibalisation into "Eurocentric norms as world-historical values." It is a colonial document which graphs Africa according to the grid of Western thought and interpretation, in which alterity is a negative category of the Same;" (Mudimbe 12) — an ordering of otherness, as the above remarks by M. H. Abrams et al typify. And for the black African woman
in particular, *Heart of Darkness* remains an embodiment of colonial fiction in which she is a receptor of "two paradigms of alienation and otherness —blackness and her constructed silence or voicelessness — in a discourse," as Abena P. A. Busia argues, "in which sexuality and access to language together form part of the discourse of access to power" (84).

In Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*, we see a post-colonial text that charts counter-discursive strategies to "the configurations of domination" (Ashcroft 33) inscribed in *Heart of Darkness*. Not only does Aidoo's text try to subvert and reverse imperial Europe's hierachical order by interrogating the philosophical assumptions (33) and moral values which underwrite and dictate Europe's humanist and culturalist pretensions, but it stridently insists that marginalized Africa should (re)connect with itself organically.

Of particular interest in *Heart of Darkness* is the silencing of the black African woman. As Abena Busia argues, "one of the primary characteristics in the representation of the black African woman in colonial fiction is the construction of her inactive silence" (86, author's emphasis). In colonial fictional representation, the black African woman is not necessarily absent from the locus of
action or power; rather, she is deliberately denied access to language, "the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth,' 'order,' and 'reality' become established" (Ashcroft 7). She is thought of as an "embodiment of the inferior qualities of womanhood, compounding the mindlessness of women with the mindlessness of Africans" (Hammond and Jablow 11). Ama Ata Aidoo seeks to reinvent the black African woman and Africans in making the central character of her novel a woman.

Kwaku Larbi Korang observes with remarkable acuity in his essay, "Ama Ata Aidoo's Voyage Out: Mapping the Coordinates of Modernity and African Selfhood in Our Sister Killjoy that "The novel's counterfactual truth is that 'the expansion of Western civilization in modern times' constitutes a juggernaut phenomenon which 'choke[s] all life and even eliminates whole races of people in its path of growth'" (51). The Europe Sissie (re)discovers in Aidoo's novel is one in which we see, to borrow a phrase from Frederic Jameson, "a desacralizing capitalism;" (421) it is "a world where the need to pay mortgages and go on holidays kept married chambers empty for strangers' inspection" (Killjoy 62). Aidoo prepares us for this (re)discovery journey from
the very beginning. Sissie does not journey into Europe's heart of darkness, Joseph Conrad's "place of darkness," but into the heart of civilization. Her departure at the Ghanaian airport is a refiguration of the myth of conceptual polarities, which, as in a morality play, presents Africans and Europeans as exemplars of savagery and civilization, respectively:

The hours of the flight had been organized in such a way that they passed over the bit of Africa left in their way in the hours of the night. So that it was nearly dawn when they crossed the Mediterranean Sea. And as they left Africa, there was this other continent, lighted up with the first streaks of glorious summer sunshine. Good night Africa. Good morning Europe. (10-11)

The association of Africa with night in the above passage is an ironic evocation of the "Hobbesian picture of pre-European Africa, in which there was no account of Time; no Arts; no letters; no Society; and which is, worst of all, continued fear, and danger of violent death" (Mudimbe 1). At another level, the metaphor of "night" images a Hegelian Africa.

In his Introduction to The Philosophy of History Hegel writes of Africa: "Africa proper, as far as History goes back, has remained — for all purposes of connection with the rest of the world — shut up; it is the Gold-land compressed within itself — the land of childhood, which lying beyond the days of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night...The negro as already observed exhibits the natural man in his wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of
luxuriating in an Edenic glory, an Africa sleeping in a prelapsarian innocence and waiting to be roused by a benign Europe. The diurnal-nocturnal configuration in the passage sets up a paradigmatic opposition which underwrites the Same-Other binary that has always characterized the relationship between Europe and Africa. The paradigm foregrounds a dialectical analysis of the myth of conceptual polarities already alluded to, with a view to subverting it, for as the manipulative, intervening authorial voice echoes in Aidoo’s novel, "the [African] Elders in their infinite wisdom, declared a long time ago that the unsavoury innards of the possum may be a delicacy for somebody else somewhere" (120). Perhaps its variant form in Europe is the Nietzschean aphorism, "Whatever is, is just and unjust and is equally justifiable in both ways." The flight is organised by the German embassy in Sissie's home country — as described, reverence and morality — all that we call feeling — if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character. At this point we leave Africa never to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movement in it — that is in its northern part — belong to the Asiatic or European World ...What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's history ...The History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia the beginning" (90-99)
obviously graphs a singularization of modernity in terms of a world telescoped through Western eyes. What is the Europe Sissie (re)discovers?

Sissie arrives in Germany and stays in a Bavarian village. Perhaps her first discovery, a minor one, is that in Europe too, just as in Africa, there are natives: "for those natives, there mere fact of the presence of the African girl was phenomenal" (Aidoo *Killjoy* 43). Hasn't the mere fact of the presence of the white man in Africa always been phenomenal for its natives? The Germany that Sissie enters is, certainly, to Sissie's counterawareness, not the heartland of humanism, but of racialism and imperialism. Perhaps it has not been too soon forgotten that it was in Berlin that European men gathered in 1884 and arrogated to themselves the power to partition and forcibly possess nearly the entire continent of Africa and its peoples. Bavaria where Sissie stays, arouses memories of Adolf Hitler — in fact the name of Marija's absent husband is BIG ADOLF — of Nazis exterminating Jews, of the Aryan superman "stomping upon the bent bones of the other subhumans." (Ojo-Ade 166) Marija's village has a castle turned into a hostel for the young volunteers from abroad. With the mention of "castle" we are reminded that in such a castle once lived
some lord controlling the destiny of many serfs. The interface with serfdom and slavery is absolutely clear. Back in Sissie's Ghana or Africa, the numerous colonial castles and dungeons remind one of the thousands of virile young men and women, children and the aged, who were carried across the Atlantic by European men as slaves. The castles and dungeons are a sad reminder of Jameson's "matter of a present of time and of history in which we [black Africans] exist and struggle" (423)." The image of the castle prognosticates Aidoo, the quintessential womanist's, concern later on in the novel with the widening gulf between black Americans and their ancestral home. Listen to the narrator:

Said an anxious Afro-American student to a visiting African professor, "Sir, please, tell me: is Egypt in Africa?"

"Certainly," replied the professor.

"I mean Sir, I don't mean to kind of harass you or anything," pressed the student, "but did the Egyptians who built the pyramids, you know, the Pharaohs and all, were they African?"

"My dear young man," said the visiting professor, "to give you the decent answer your anxiety demands, I would have to tell you a detailed history of the African continent. And to do that, I shall have to speak every day, twenty-four hours a day, for at least three

" See Alice Walker, In Search of Mothers' Gardens. Womanist Prose for her definition of "Womanist". Part of Walker's definition of a womanist is that she is "committed to the survival of an entire people, male and female" (xi).
thousand years. And I don't mean to be rude to you or anything, but who has that kind of time?” (111)

In the passage, Aidoo seems to be telling the Hegels and Trevor Ropers of Europe that Africa has a long history. Her ultimate concern, however, is that closer bonds should be forged among blacks the world over. The novel insists on the need for Africans to recover and remember a forgotten archive of African values; it is also a quest for an African future that is alive with the energy of recovered vision, a future released from the trauma of a cyclonic past and the myopia of a stampeded present. Remembering a forgotten archive of African values includes a fundamental need for Africans to bond strongly with diasporic blacks, especially African-Americans; for, as Buchi Emecheta poignantly points out in her novel In the Ditch, "as long as you are black, any other black person is your people" (53). Indeed no African writer, male or female, seems to be preoccupied with the theme of the need for Africans to reconnect with African-Americans as stridently as Aidoo does in her works.
Aidoo takes up the theme of the widening gulf between Africans and African-Americans in her very first work, *The Dilemma of a Ghost*. This work, a play, is concerned with the return of the been-to, Ato Yawson, a young Ghanaian who studied in the United States of America. Ato's return is the cause of various conflicts that move the action, particularly because Ato has not informed his family of his marriage to an African-American, Eulalie Rush. His very traditional family, epitomized by his grandmother, Nana, ignorant of this marriage and of Eulalie Rush's ancestry, is naturally surprised and even antagonistic to Eulalie and the "machines" and all that she represents. Ironically, not only do they consider her as just any slave, but "the daughter of slaves who come from the white man's land."

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9One memorable line in Derek Walcott's collection of poems, *The Gulf*, is "The Gulf, your gulf, is daily widening."

10A major reason that Ato's family cannot accept Eulalie as one of them is her very name which they do not only think is foreign, but also unpronounceable. Esi Kom, Ato's mother, out of frustration tells Ato: "Ato, you know that some of us did not hear the school bell when it rang. Therefore, we will not be able to say this name. This Uhu-hu... I want her real name" (17). Ato's younger sister, Monka, is even more blunt in her sarcasm: "Oh, let us say, let us say that some of the names that are coming into the world are fearful" (17). It might be pertinent to explain that etymologically, Monka is a derivation from two words in Aidoo and Ato's Akan/Fanti language - "ma onka"— which literally means let "her say it". It is not only Aidoo who seems to be preoccupied with the issue of people of African descent who carry "foreign names"— she takes up the issue again in *Killjoy*— some of
(emphasis added, 19); for them, Eulalie is a "wayfarer," a person without a history, a tree without roots (17-19). For Ato's folks, Eulalie, who has "tourist brochure" (9) images of Africa, comes to Ghana carrying the heritage of the "New World," its historical invasion, slavery and racism, its myths and misconceptions about the "Dark Continent."

In fact, in an emotional outburst during a confrontation with Ato over the latter's inability to explain to his family that they (Eulalie and Ato) have not given birth not because Eulalie is barren (this is the family's misperception), but that they have mutually decided to use birth control, Eulalie refers to Ato's family's "prehistoric existence" and their "savage customs and standards" (47).

What is particularly striking about this very first published work by Aidoo is not only her deftness in articulating the gulf between Africans and African-Americans, and

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her male counterparts like Ayi Kwei Armah (The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born), Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Petals of Blood) and Kofi Anyidoho have take up this theme as well. In one of the poems in his collection, AnestralLogic & CaribbeanBlues, with the very suggestive title, "Lolita Jones," Anyidoho writes:

"And so they says ma Name is Lolita Jones?/ But that aint ma real Name./I never has known ma Name our Name/ I cud'a been Naita Nor-wetu/Or may be Maimouna Mkabayi/Asantewaa may be Aminata Maliaka./Ma Name cud'a been sculptered/Into colors of the Rainbow/Across the boscm of our Earth" (27).
the need for this gulf to be bridged, but her adept inter-
weaving of the themes of the suffering and oppression of
black women into her concerns.
One issue she treats very well in this work is the issue of
childlessness and its connectedness with the suffering and
oppression of women. It is very clear in this drama that one
of the main reasons that Ato's family's is hostile to Eulalie
is that they think she is barren. A woman barren in this
typically traditional African family is a taboo, more or
less. One character Aidoo interestingly and very simply names
1st Woman, on hearing that Eulalie is "barren," has this to
say:

Barren! . . .
If it is real barrenness,
Then, oh stranger-girl,
Whom I do not know,
I weep for you.
For I know what it is
To start a marriage with barrenness.
You ought to have kept quiet
And crouched by your mother's hearth
Wherever that is—
Yes. With your machines that cook
And your machines that sweep.
They want people.
My people have a lusty desire
To see the tender skin
On top of a child's scalp
Rise and fall with human life.
Your machines, my stranger-girl,
Cannot go on an errand
They have no hands to dress you when you are dead . . .
But you have one machine to buy now

169
That which will weep for you, stranger-girl
You need that most.
For my world
Which you have run to enter
Is most unkind to the barren. (emphasis added, 39-40)

I have quoted this passage at length because Aidoo, as a writer, is economic in her use of words. It is not for nothing that she devotes an entire page to lamenting the fate of the childless woman in many African societies. And not only does she lament, she also seems to be asking: why should women be treated cruelly just because, not out of their own making, they cannot have children even if they want to? Aidoo is not the only African writer, male or female, who has taken up this theme of childlessness in some of her works. In Mongo Beti's *Mission to Kala* set in the Cameroons, Medza, the male central character, has this to say:

My mother's prejudice against Niam's wife . . . was chiefly due to the fact that, after years of marriage, the woman for some inscrutable reason had failed to produce a child. It is the usual thing among our people for all childless wives to suffer a curious kind of communal anathema, the origins of which must be sought in the spiritual beliefs of our Bantu ancestors. (8)

And in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* which is "about childlessness but even more about 'child-ness.'" (Nfah-Abbenyi 37) the story begins with Nnu Ego about to commit suicide because of the death of her four-month-old son. As
Nfah-Abbenyi rightly observes, we "begin to wonder why a woman would want to kill herself just because of the loss of a child" (37). The answer is plain and simple. In Nnu Ego's Igbo traditional/rural culture, just like in my own traditional/rural Akan society and in many African traditional societies, childlessness is anathema; childbearing not only shapes a woman's identity, it is her identity.

In criticism of African women writers, Ogundipe-Leslie writes that the "[t]he theme of childlessness has been explored by African female writers so much that one would wish they would seek other themes" (61-62). It is not only female writers who have treated the theme of childlessness, male writers like Mongo Beti, J. P. Clark and Elechi Amadi have explored this theme. They do not, however, explore the theme in isolation; rather, it is explored within complex issues like domination, oppression and alienation of women. It should also be remembered that most of these works like the three I have already referred to by Aidoo, Beti and Emecheta were written in the 60s and 70s in societies that
did not have fertility clinics. And even in modern-day societies, both Western and African, do not some women lament the fact that they do not have their own biological children? It would not be illegitimate to write and use this as a theme. Since the 70s most African writers, both male and female, have moved away from the theme of childlessness to deal with other immediate societal concerns as Aidoo, for example, does in Killjoy.

65In his Myth Literature and the African World Wole Soyinka discusses the response of the mainly European audience that watched the performance of the Nigerian poet and dramatist, J. P. Clark's tragic drama, Song of a Goat, (1964) at the 1965 Commonwealth Festival of the Arts in London. Clark's drama takes place in a fishing village. The characters are a "riverine people" on the Niger Delta. Two brothers, Zifa and Tonye, Ebiere, the wife of Zifa, the older brother, and Orukorere, an old aunt of the two brothers, are the central characters. The old lady provides a Cassandra-presence throughout the unfolding tragedy which is centred on the sexual impotence of Zifa. At first Zifa sends his wife to consult the Masseur, a doctor-cum-seer who diagnoses the real problem without difficulty, recognizes that it is the husband not the wife who is the real patient. He suggests that the younger brother, Tonye, take up the marital duties of the older brother, an idea which is violently rejected by Zifa (who later consults him) just as Ebiere indignantly spurns it in her turn. But the inevitable does happen. In what Soyinka characterizes as "one of the most credible scenes of progressive sexual frustration," Ebiere goads the brother into having an affair with her. Zifa suspects, and manoeuvres the guilty pair into a revelatory ritual — this ritual is the climactic moment of the play — and tries to kill Tonye. He escapes, only to hang himself in the loft. Zifa walks out to sea and kills himself. Soyinka notes that unlike African audiences before whom this play had been staged, the European audience found itself estranged from the tragic statement. Soyinka gives many reasons for the estrangement, but the one most relevant to this discussion was this: "... sexual impotence was a curable condition in modern medicine (or psychiatry). In addition, child adoption provided one remedy, among others, for sterility; therefore sexual impotence or sterility were outside the range of tragic dimensions for a European audience" (46).
For Aidoo, the self-conscious African woman writer, a survivalist ethic is an African imperative. In *Killjoy* Aidoo declares unapologetically, uncompromisingly:

Dear Lord
I believe
Only in the
Survival of
My kind
. . . I have to --
I have to -- (98).

In a comment on *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, Karen Chapman writes that Aidoo "is always reaching toward something more universal and, as such, beyond the colour barrier (15). Chapman's comment is problematic. It is equally problematic that Nfah-Abbenyi asserts that "Ama Ata Aidoo is convinced of the importance of the 'development of women' — not only African, but all women" (12). Aidoo is certainly convinced of the development of Africa and its women, but not "all women." It seems to argue, as both Chapman and Nfah-Abbenyi do here, would certainly play into Aidoo's labelling of "[t]he academic-pseudo-intellectual . . . who in the face of reality more tangible than the massive walls of the slave forts standing along our [African] beaches, still talks of universal truth, universal art, universal literature [universal womanhood] and the Gross National Product"
(Killjoy 6). I would argue that Aidoo rejects the idea of universal bonding in any form, not only in her creative works, but also in her essay, and interviews. It might be germane to quote part of an interview she granted to the Nigerian woman critic, Adeola James here:

Adeola: Would you agree with Molara Ogundipe-Leslie's statement that: The female [African] writer should be committed in three ways: as a writer, as a woman and as a Third World person? I must hasten to say that in the same article, the critic pays tribute to you as one of the few African women writers whose commitment spans all three categories.

Ama: Molara is a critic and she can make the assertion, but my own addition, or rather a slight suggestion, in general terms of that 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 Molara 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 my commitment as an African, the need for me to be an African nationalist, to 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. (14-15, emphasis added)

I situated my discussion of The Dilemma of a Ghost within the discussion of Killjoy mainly to emphasize Aidoo's concern with the need for Africans on the mainland to reconnect with those of the diaspora. The resolution of the drama is relevant to the discussion. In spite of the hostilities between Ato's family and Eulalie, in spite of their name calling ("wayfarer," "the offspring of slaves," etc., 17-19)
it is Ato's **mother**, Esi Kom, who blames Ato for all the misunderstanding. She says: "Hrm . . . my son. You have not dealt with us well. And you have not dealt well with your wife in this" (51-52). But what is more significant is that it is Esi Kom, the mother, who not only tells Eulalie, "Come, my child" (52), but also embraces her. The embrace is not just the acceptance of Eulalie into the family, but a symbolic reconciliation between Mother Africa and a "lost" child.

This interpretation is validated not only by a reading of *Killjoy*, but also a reading of "Other Versions," one of the stories in Aidoo's collection of short stories, *No Sweetness Here*. In Aidoo's "Other Versions," Kofi, a young Ghanaian male, goes to the United States to study as the recipient of a business syndicate's scholarship, a syndicate that had been "looking out for [an] especially bright . . . African." At a dinner in the "high and mighty hut"

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*Any textual references will be to this edition. Here what Aidoo takes up by reference to Kofi as "an especially bright . . . African" is her objection to the racist stereotypical categorization of many an African student who finds her/himself studying in North America. Most such students, like myself, are often perceived as representatives of an entire race, instead of as individuals. Their success or failure is, therefore, not that of an individual, but that of a race. It is interesting to note that Aidoo's Ghanaian male counterpart, Ayi Kwei Armah, also takes up this theme in his *Why Are We So Blest?* in which another Ghana-*
of the Merrows — "Mr. Merrows is either the chairman of this syndicate which brought me here or certainly one of its top men," (132) — Kofi, "the main course of the evening" (132) meets the black cook, Mrs. Hye. In this racist situation he makes the connection between the "invisible" cook, other African-American mothers and his own mother back home in Ghana. A few days after the fateful meeting with Mrs Hye, Kofi meets another "mother" on the subway. He feels compelled, "like one goaded with a fire-brand," to acknowledge what she symbolizes by giving her twelve dollars. He says, "Eh . . . eh . . . I come from Africa and you remind me of my mother. Please would you take this from me?" (134). Like Adah in Emecheta's In the Ditch, Aidoo's Kofi also believes that "As long as you are black, any other black person is your People" (53). Politely, Kofi's newfound mother refuses the money, just as his mother back

ian male, Modin, also goes to the United States on a scholarship to study. At a meeting the committee that awarded him the scholarship, one of its members, Mr. Oppenhardt, tells Modin, "All your confidential reports say you are a most unusually intelligent African — the most intelligent, as a matter of fact." Modin responds, "That is not true, sir." And goes on to reflect, "Boakye and Kantara . . . I did not know exactly what I was going to say. I was confused. Many names filled my head, the names of all my friends these people would never know. It was stupid to judge my intelligence against them all, but how could I let these people know when they did not want to listen?" (120)
in Ghana, had done a lot of times, saying "Son, keep them dollars. I sure know you need them more than I do" (134).

I have referred, rather extensively, to Aidoo's *The Dilemma* and "Other Versions" to explore further her insistence on the need for the transvaluation of the old values of Africa, to bring them into a meaningful relationship with the present and the future, with the exigencies of an inescapable modernity. Aidoo insists that it is not simply a question of a cyclonic past and a stampeded present, or even a perfect past and a bad present, but "which factors out of the past and the present represent for us [Africans] the most dynamic forces for the future" (*Killjoy* 116). For her, a dynamic future precludes one in which African women would not be oppressed just because they decide not to, or are unable to, procreate; she insists on a future of closer bonding between Africans on the mainland and those of the diaspora. Her challenge is that Africans should will themselves out of the wreckage of history, and to wrest from that wreckage the collective agency that alone will underwrite our survival as a whole people.

Ayi Kwei Armah writes in his *Two Thousand Seasons* that "purpose gives wings to the traveller" (174). It is said with the purpose of telling both African men and women to
look to themselves, but not to Europe, for any meaningful reconstruction of the continent that Aidoo makes her heroine in *Killjoy*, Sissie, travel to Europe. The overall picture of the Europe Sissie sees is rather morbid. The Europe Sissie sees is "a land where Black men are forever regarded as children" (125). Europe, "polished steel. Polished tin. Polished brass. Cut glass. Plastic" (12). Europe, the land of white supremacy:

> From the little German that she had been advised to study for the trip, she knew that "das Schwartze Madchen" meant "black girl."
> She was somewhat puzzled.
> Black girl? Black girl?
> So she looked around her, really well this time.
> And it hit her. That all that crowd of people going and coming in all sorts of directions had the colour of the pickled pig parts that used to come from foreign places to the markets at home.
> Trotters, pig-tails, pig-ears.
> She looked at so many of such skins together.
> And she wanted to vomit.
> Then she was ashamed of her reaction.
> Something pulled inside of her.
> For the rest of her life, she was going to regret this moment when she was made to notice differences in human colouring.
> No matter where she went, what anyone said, what they did. She knew it never mattered.
> But what she also came to know was that someone somewhere would always see in any kind of difference, an excuse to be mean. (12-13)

Now, if Europe holds such glaringly negative truths for blacks, why do so many go there? Why do many insist on
staying? Sissie's quest for love among her own black folks brings her face to face with those truths, and those dilemmas. Like many of the black men she encounters in Europe, she has love, a guilty one, for Europe; she feels a certain pride in being a been-to. It must not be forgotten, just like myself, and just like most of the black men she meets in Europe, Sissie is a product of colonial education, a foster child of Europe; she belongs in the boat of Fanon's "national bourgeoisie of underdeveloped countries." The travel programme in which she gladly participates is symbolic of the West's stranglehold on her motherland. Sissie passes through England on her way back home, specifically to prove to those in Ghana that she has really been abroad. "Germany," she says, "is overseas. The United States is overseas. But England is another thing" (85).  

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67 See Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (149). Among other things, Fanon argues that "the psychology of the national bourgeoisie is that of the businessman, not a captain of an industry; and it is only too true that the settlers and the system of embargoes set up by colonialism have hardly left them any other choice" (150).  
68 One big irony in African countries is that just making a trip to any European or North American country makes one almost an instant hero, to be worshipped especially by one's friends and family members who have not had the chance of any such trip. But the resulting expectation is also obvious, at times stifling — the been-to is almost always expected to return home with a shipload of foreign goods. The following description from Ayi Kwei Armah's Fragments is of the arrival of Berempong, a character in the novel: "A strange scene greeted [Baako] as he strode
Sissie meets many of her (our) brothers in England. They are "recipients of the leftovers of imperial," sellers of their soul and their motherland:

For a few pennies a
Doctoral degree later and
Tell us about
Your people
Your history
Your mind. (86)  

All salvation, it is believed, comes from the imperial seat. Little do they know, poor brothers, that "for the slave, there is nothing at the centre but worse slavery" (86). Perhaps one of her biggest tools in her subversive

into the arrivals lounge. Three tough-looking men in white jumpers with their clothes balled around their waists were holding Brempong high above their heads. Around them a large crowd of the hero's relatives struggled to get closer to him, shouting, some singing in an ecstatic, emotional confusion. 'Eeeeee! Our white man, we saw you wave! We saw you!' 'The big man has come again.' 'Oh, they have made you a white man.' 'Complete!' . . . . . . 'The champagne! The champagne! Bring the champagne!' (26). Of course, Armah exaggerates as a tool of his satire, but the fact is that a lot of Ghanaians assume airs of importance just for going abroad. The general corollary is for such people to privilege whatever is foreign over whatever is local. There's a popular joke in Ghana, to date, of a guy who made a two-day trip to Europe, returned to Ghana, and at the airport removed his shirt, fanning himself, and shouted, 'Ghana is too hot!'  

69 Yes, I cannot remember the number of times I have been invited to dinner in Canada here when people have touched my outfit and said "what a fancy costume," and later asked me to talk about the food Ghanaians eat and even what they drink after dinner!  

70 In his poem, "Nostalgia," Kofi Anyidoho takes up a similar theme. He writes:

Above all I shall forever
arsenal is her astute reference to the famous heart transplant carried out in South Africa by the "good Christian Doctor" (Christian Barnard), on a white man, with the heart of a black woman. The thoughts and implications are overwhelmingly exciting: a great Christian performance by a devout devil; heart knows no race; a black heart in a white body; opposites attract. And the black African scientist from some free nation without a name or norms — Kunle is his

Lament the wisdom
Of those many many

Friends who disinherited their Souls
And chose the misery of alien Joys

trapped in circles among SnowFields
their spirits freeze and thaw and Frost
with constant fickleness of NorthernWinds

Once too often
they converge in smokey PartyRooms
drinking hard to prove
a point only they can see can feel
arguing endless justifications
for a choice sadly made.

Between their dreams of Fame
Their hopes of instant Wealth

the nostalgic self moans its way
through MidNight Storms
into DawnNightmares

reaching into distances silences...

Memories alone are not enough SoulGuide
Into futures filled with many Absences.

— AncestralLogic & CaribbeanBlues (31).

181
name, a seven-year Londoner — basks in the sun of Barnards's genius. Kunle babbles away on the importance of the transplant, while his country, Nigeria, is embroiled in self-destruction. He says with glee: "Such development can solve the question of apartheid and rid us, 'African negroes and all other negroes' of the Colour Problem" (96). The good Christian doctor has said that "nigger hearts are so easy to come by, because of the violence those happy and contented Bantus perpetrate against one another in their, drunken ecstasies and childlike gambols" (100).

The aftermath of the great experiment is that the black donor, nameless, is forever mired in oblivion, while the famous white recipient dies after living for over a year with the black heart. Many more blacks are ensnared in the fangs of the apartheid beast; Kunle the scientist returns home and soon dies, "killed by the car for which he had waited so long," (103) and the Christian doctor is alive and well, a living legend, transplanting hearts of dogs, cats and human beings. His land is as foreign to the African as Europe:

My dear brother,
I have been to a cold strange land where dogs and cats eat better than many many children;
Where men would sit at table and eat with animals, and yet would rather die than shake the hands of the men.
Where women who say they have no time to bear children and spoil their lives would sit for many hours and feed baby dogs delicate food with spoons, and make coats to cover the hairy animals from the same cloth they wear, as sisters and brothers and friends in our village would do on festive occasions.

My brother, I have been to a land where they treat animals like human beings and some human beings like animals because they are not Dumb enough.\(^{71}\){39}

Indubitably, the words above from *Killjoy* can emanate only from the heart of Sissie, a black woman, multiple victim of life and love, repository of a civilization built upon continuity; indeed, symbol of the survival of a harried race.

\(^{71}\) While I was still working on this chapter, the following story appeared in one of the two national newspapers published in Ghana, *The People's Daily Graphic*, of December 1, 1999: "The Ghana Bar Association (GBA) has called on the government to reject the proposals by the US-based organisation, Friends of Animals (FOA), to settle a number of chimpanzees in the Volta Region. A statement jointly signed by Messrs J. Ebow Quashie, and J. Ayikoi Otoo, President and Secretary, respectively, of the GBA said, 'we do not need to waste money on committees to advise us on the inherent dangers in the attempt to settle the chimpanzees in the country.'

It said the GBA has followed with keen interest, the discussion concerning the return of some chimpanzees to the county after they have been used for experiments in laboratories in the United States of America and described the phenomenon as a dangerous precedent which ought to be discouraged. . .

The statement said there is nothing to be enthused about the return of the animals considering the land size of Ghana compared with America. . . It said the scourge of AIDS, a laboratory disease with no cure, is still with the country and added that it is not good enough to encourage such practices . . . which would undoubtedly constitute a health risk to the people . . .

These animal lovers cannot afford to see chimpanzees exterminated after being used in laboratories for God-knows-what experiments. And so the only viable alternative? These obviously dangerously infected animals should be shipped to Ghana to be among HUMAN BEINGS! The logic is that chimpanzees in America are just as good as human beings in Africa.
Sissie's attachment to her country's emerging bourgeois class has already been referred to. There is no doubt then that she is no hypocrite; indeed she certainly is one of the most forthright characters in all of African literature. For, instead of trying to deny, to run away and hide under the cloak of revolution, she accepts her position as one of that compromising, conniving class constituting Africa's shame. For her, it is not a question of us against the bourgeoisie; it is us against ourselves, and them, with the shameful knowledge that, to an alarmingly large extent, we are Armah's "springwater" that continues to flow to the "desert;" we have remained part of them. The ultimate objective is clearly set from the start: to free us from ourselves, from them, to love ourselves; for, without that, we cannot love them. The desire is to have love between black men and women, that is why the politics of

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I have found it irresistible to compare Aidoo to Armah, her male Ghanaian counterpart, in this work. The energies both writers have spent in trying to articulate a viable visionary trajectory for the re-invention of Africa in their respective works seem unparalleled. Their concern with corruption in all its manifestations in post-colonial African nations is great. Armah's The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, for example, has no comparison in all of African literature vis-à-vis its thoroughgoing expose of corruption in a post-colonial African country, Ghana.
the novel specifies its addressee clearly as "my brother(s)" (7).

Aidoo's heroine talks and thinks, all the time, because she is genuinely concerned about us, about Africa, because she loves Africa. Sissie worries a great deal; she thinks of language, our borrowed language, "a language that enslaved me, and therefore, the messengers of my mind always come shackled" (112). She thinks of the survival of the black African race and the re-discovery of human be-

73 The debate on a common language for the continent has engaged the attention of a lot of African writers, critics, politicians, teachers, philosophers, etc. etc., for some time now. Among the prominent writers who advocate a continental language that is not a colonial language are Aidoo, Armah, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Soyinka. Those who think the colonial languages should remain include Chinua Achebe. It can be argued that a lot of the instability on the continent can be attributed to the too many different languages and dialects spoken on the continent. In my own very small country Ghana, forty-six languages and dialects are spoken in addition to English, which is the official language. A lot of ethnic conflicts in Ghana revolve around language. But a greater problem is the virtual lack of communication between the majority of the ruled and the rulers. The majority of the population cannot speak, read and write English well. And most official business is conducted in English. Currently, the President of the country, J. J. Rawlings, does not speak the language of the majority of the population — Akan. Very often he addresses the majority of the population through translators. This goes against all tenets of genuine democracy, since effective dialogue between the ruled and rulers is essential for governance. In most traditional African societies, before the advent of European colonization, chiefs communicated directly with their people. The British, for example, adopted the so-called system of indirect rule. They controlled the chiefs and in turn the chiefs controlled their subjects. It is interesting to note that when radio was first introduced into Yorubaland in Nigeria, the native people called it, "asoromagbesi," meaning "he who talks and talks and takes no reply back." For them the radio was the symbol of a government that does not communicate with the governed.
ings. A new language, in this regard, must be created "so that we shall make love with words and not fear being overheard" (116).

Sissie's man, not named in the novel, is, however, not interested in such banalities, obviously scared or infuriated by her forthrightness. To him African woman's virtues are softness and meekness — "see at home the woman knows her position" (117.) Here certainly, as in many other aspects, he fails to realize that the woman's position is "more complicated than that of the dolls the colonizers brought along with them who fainted at the sight of their own bleeding fingers and carried smelling salts around" (117). The fact is that black man needs to be taught how to love, to see beyond the bulging backside, the feminine façade, the buxom bodies. He has had far too much experience of colonial embourgeoisement for his own good. Longevity has caused loss of authenticity. Acculturation has been consequential to colonial apprenticeship. Having suffered less than black women, having been entrenched in the neo-colonial fortress, he finds it difficult to delineate himself. Like an over-zealous student, he has over-mastered the game of hypocrisy and the mania of self-aggrandizement, laying claim at once to modernity and the privileges of a
tradition that he hardly understands and which belongs to a culture overtaken by the times, a culture whose undergirding co-ordinates are individualism, capitalism and so-called civilization. For the man, civilization, consciously or otherwise, means aping white ways.\textsuperscript{74} He has stopped asking questions, he has adapted himself to, or seeks to, the situation affording him the opportunity to "live and let live."\textsuperscript{75}

Sissie and others like her would not let him be. They keep asking questions, blaming themselves and all those like him, even when, according to the male lackeys of the neo-colonial monster, "there nothing the matter with anything":

\begin{center}
\textsuperscript{74} Again Aidoo's concerns are similar to Armah's. Armah writes in \textit{The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born}: "I have seen him there, and in Accra. He lives in a way that is more painful to see than the white men have always lived here. Is it true then, that after all the talk that is possible, this is the only thing men are looking for? There is no difference then. No difference at all between the white men and their apes, the lawyers and the merchants, and now the apes of the apes, our Party men. And after their reign is over, there will be no difference ever. All new men will be like the old. Is that then the whole truth? Bungalows, white with a wounding whiteness. Cars, long and heavy, with drivers in white men's uniforms waiting ages in the sun. Women so horribly young, fucked and changed like pants, asking only for blouses and perfume from diplomatic bags and wigs of human hair scraped from which decayed white woman's hair?" (89)

\textsuperscript{75} It may be noted that many African nations like Ghana blindly imported the Marxist-Leninist form of socialism from the then Soviet Union after independence.
\end{center}
There goes Sissie again. Forever carrying Africa's problems on her shoulders as though they have paid her to do it. (118)

So, love between Sissie and her man sours, loneliness surfaces, yes:

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Forever falling like a tear out of a woman's eye. (65)

Of course, loneliness has always been there, hidden away, repulsed, even feared. Sissie knows it, so does her man. Only he is too cowardly to admit that "there is a kind of loneliness overseas which is truly bad" (119). The cold winter of white Europe bites the black skin.76 The stony faces stare at the black face, asking in loud silence when he is returning home.77 He is dogged by companions called

76 Here in Canada, I rub cocoa butter cream all over my body every morning and night, especially in the night, because the dry winter air bites so much no matter how warm the room temperature is.

77 Almost every day after an inquiry by (almost always) a white stranger as to what I am doing in Calgary/Canada, which I have answered, the question that invariably follows is "and so are you returning home when you are done?"
silence, rejection, loneliness. Africans overseas are dead, says Sissie. For their self-exile, a younger version of the old liquidation of the continent is not a state of bliss but of bankruptcy, barrenness and blight. The warmth of the woman would be a way of achieving some joy, but the man throws away the chance. Sissie laments:

They say that any female in my position would have thrown away everything to be with you, and remain with you: first her opinions, and then her own plans. But oh deliciously naive me. What did I rather do but daily and loudly criticise you and your friends for wanting to stay forever in alien places? (117)

Aidoo's Sissie does not run away from problems. She does not seek easy solutions nor does she claim to have all the answers. While preaching regularly to Africa's exiled sons to go home, she agrees that there are real problems at home. In many ways, home is hell. Aidoo's catalogue of woes reminds one not only of Armah but also of Kofi Awoonor, both illustrious Ghanaian compatriots. The difference is that

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7 Kofi Awoonor is almost as scathing in his criticism of corruption in post-colonial Ghana in his novel This Earth, My Brother (1974) as Armah is in both The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born and Fragments.
hers is an intelligence which brings a touch of love, commitment and positiveness to her criticism of Africa.

To the man with a weak heart, it would be senseless to return home. Africa is a land of the "moderate nigger," talking of universal truth, universal art, universal literature, universal nothing. Africa is the land of Power:

For this is all anything is about.
Power to decide
Who is to live.
Who is to die.
Where.
When.
How. (15-16)

Africa is the land of Christianity. And Sissie recalls that God is "a rather nice, old European gentleman with a flowing white beard" flanked by "Western, white, English angels" (26). She also remembers the missionaries' lesson: "for a child to be a Heaven-worthy individual, he had to have above all, a Christian name." (25). Africa is the

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3 In an essay on Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, while Aidoo without a doubt shows admiration for, and highly praises, the novel, she also writes: "There is something frightening about the book. And this is the clarity with which he has seen the African urban scene, as no visitor can be capable of, and the mercilessness with which he has opened it up" (16).

4 Perhaps we go back to Shakespeare's often asked question, "What's in a name?" There's everything in a name, some African writers like Aidoo, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Armah insist. Names help to give us our identity. For Armah, an African by any other name is not African. Like Aidoo he

190
land of the bourgeoisie and their "zombie dynasties," where
the poor feed on air and the glory of rich men that come
and go. Our leaders are "sleepwalkers in a nightmare asleep
to all things at all times — conscious only of riches,
which they gather in a coma" (34). Africa is the land
decries the use of spurious foreign names by Ghanaians. In The Beautiful Ones . . . he writes: "As he got farther into the hills, the man remembered bits of the same old show from the past. Young push-babies with frowning faces broke through hedges behind different kinds of carriages, turning down long, winding roads. Stewards in white uniforms moved swiftly around behind high hedges giving the intruder suspicious glances full of hate. Not everything was entirely the same, though. Here and there the names had changed. True, there were very few black names of black men, but the plates by the roadside had enough of black men with white souls and names trying mightily to be white. In the forest of white men's names, there were the signs that said almost aloud: here lives a black imitator. MILLS-HAYFORD . . . PLANGE-BANNERMAN . . . ATTOH-WHITE . . . GRANTSON . . . more and more incredible they were getting. There was someone calling himself FENTENSON in this wide world, and also a man called BINFUL" (125-126). Of course, there is history to explain why black men carry names some of which are not just non-names, but literally mean shit, like BINFUL. In Armah's Akan language, shit is "ebin, 'I variantly spelt "bin." The meaning of "binful" must be clear then. And students I taught in Ghana told me they knew people who went by that name. The Ghanaian historian, Adu Boahen writes in his Topics in West African History, "Christianity was introduced by European missionaries who, in their enthusiasm, or rather over-enthusiasm, . . . condemned everything African — African music, dancing, art, system of marriage and even names. Hence, once an African became a convert, he had to marry one wife, go and live in the mission area, and what was even more puzzling, change his name from say Kwaawo Mensah to Moses Aaron Mends" (150). One of my personal most painful experiences was when, at age twelve, I was being baptized and confirmed into the orthodox Presbyterian Church, I was taunted and jeered at by classmates because I would not take a so-called christian name. Since I could not stand the jeers of an entire class of forty-six, and, in fact, since the officiating minister would not baptize or confirm me without a christian name, my official documents still bear the white, biblical name Samuel. I still wonder why I have not had the courage as an adult to shed that name.
"where national problems stay unseen while big men live
their big lives within":

In the capitals
Ex-convicts from European
Prisons drive the city buses and
Black construction workers
Sweat under the tropical sun, making
Ice-skating rinks for
The Beautiful People
While other Niggers sit
With vacant stares
Or
Busy
Spitting their lungs out . . .
We must sing and dance
Because some African made it . . .
Our representatives and interpreters.
The low-achieving academics
In low profile politics
Have the time of their lives
Grinning at cocktail parties and around
Conference tables. (56-57)

The image of Sissie's Africa is frightening. Why then all
those letters asking the exile to return home? The news is
never encouraging: debts, misery, sickness, a cul-de-sac of
pointless prayers, and death. Home stinks "of sweat and urine

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8I remember our mailman, a really outgoing fellow, once instead of
leaving my mail in the mailbox outside, rang the door bell. When I
opened the door and saw him I thought he had something I had to sign
for. But no, he just came to say, "Yaw, you seem to be very popular
back in your country. You get a lot of 'good mail' [instead of always
bills] every day." I smiled, thanked him and replied, "Yes, I was a
teacher for a good number of years back at home and therefore know
quite a good number of people. I also have a really big family. But,
Edward [that was his name] some of these letters always come to ask for
money and things from me." I do not know if he understood what I meant,
but he smiled and went away.
and human misery" (Okri 52). Why the agitation when those at home own up to being proud that their loved ones are overseas? Here is one answer given by Kunle, the dead doctor's mother: miseries abound, but "apart from you, who else do we have?" (106). Besides, Sissie notes that the "best brains" seem to be the ones staying away. The worst, too; for it is their only way of proving to those at home that they are making something of themselves. Yet Sissie insists that it is best to return home. There is no good point in proving anything to whites with cold blue eyes:

So please come home. My brother. Come to our People. They are the only ones who need to know how much we are worth. The rewards are hardly anything. For every successful surgery, they will hail you as a miracle worker. Their faith [will] not be in the knives you wield but in your hands. (130)

Here Ama Ata Aidoo and her heroine return to the original faith of a people, where there is love, solidarity and where the community supersedes the individual—— "A long

92 Armah underscores this in his Two Thousand Seasons when he writes, "There is no beauty but in relationships. Nothing cut off by itself is beautiful. Never can things in destructive relationships be beautiful. All beauty is in the creative purpose of our relationships . . . The group that knows this, that group itself is a work of beauty, creation's work. Against such a group the destroyers will set traps for
time ago, people was all people" (28). Home has its unavoidable human touch, it warmth, its sweetness mixed with bitterness; its hope aglow, not dead, for as Okri observes, "beyond the chaos there can always be a new sunlight" (Okri 3). For all the talk of communalism and a classless society in certain quarters, Aidoo is realistic enough to state categorically that present-day Africa has a middle class, a group that has the potential to become a positive force in leading the society out of the colonial, or neo-colonial, dungeon. It is such a fact that adds to the reasons for returning home: "The aura of having been overseas at all. Belonging to the elite whatever that is" (107).

The debates between Sissie and her brothers in the third part of the novel turn around this difficult and all-important question: the self-perpetuating cycle of dependency that defines an African elite. The contemporary reality is

the body, traps for the heart, traps for the heart, traps for the mind. Such a group none of the destroyers' traps can hold" (206).

3 My basic criticism of Armah's work, while I fully endorse its symbolic enactment of collective unity, is that its ideology of a classless society seems too utopian to be achieved — viable ideologies must be credible, I think. The work, an epic by all standards, has no heroes or heroines, "single peacocks strutting against each other's neck" (p.17). A rare work of art in which style effectively sponsors thematic concerns, its opening sentence is "We are not a people of yesterday" (1). The first person plural "I" is encountered only twice in the 206-page novel, for Armah's argument is that every member of the novel's community is a leader.
that a relentless commodifying of value by a Western-sponsored capitalism has not failed to seek Africa out. Lured by Western currencies, the skilled African, who ought rightly to be the insurance of the collective, has become— as imaged in Aidoo's polemic—a symbol of its foreclosure, as he refuses to give up a privileged location in the West and return home where he is needed most.⁸⁴ Aidoo's frustration repeatedly seeks an outlet in the weighty interrogation of the fourth section of the novel. "Was it not part of the original idea," she asks:

that we should come to these alien places, study what we can of what we know and then go back home? As it has turned out, we come and clearly learn how to die... from a people whose own survival instincts have not failed them once yet. (120)

Aidoo suggests that it is not having contact with the West that is the problem, but being alienated by the contact.

⁸⁴ On December 6, 1999, I received a letter from a very good friend, who teaches in my alma mater, the Department of English, University of Ghana, Legon. A paragraph from it read: "The department is gradually grinding to a halt. Do you know because all those people who left on scholarship [for overseas]—like—, etc. — are still on our establishment list and so it is difficult to get new staff?... Now, because of the large numbers of students, we are no longer able to hold tutorials. Morale is very low but we are doing our best." (I have left out the names my friend, Mabel, supplied for good reasons.)
Some of our writers talk of frustration and no one can blame them. Others hark upon protracted stagnation, and they cannot be faulted. Ayi Kwei Armah and Kofi Awoonor underline the "shit" — as already explained in a footnote(): there is someone called Binful in Armah's The Beautiful Ones... — in the streets and in our lives, and they paint a picture too real to be denied. In Achebe's novel with the ironic title A Man of the People he emphasizes the corruption which inhibits progress in the community, and so does Ngugi wa Thiong'o in his Petals of Blood. However, it seems we need more than criticism. We need direction, we need encouragement, we need to return to certain positive aspects of our existence. Aidoo insists that we need to return to Africa; we cannot fall prey to sham universalism. Africans cannot overlook the fact that, once upon a time, there was sweetness in the land, and Aidoo tells us that there is still some sweetness here:

If the old people are right, that whatever is sweet has some bitterness in it, then we have to determine the amount of bitterness we take from the sweetness of the present.\(^{85}\) Otherwise, there'll be so much bitterness, we shall never know there was anything else around. (115)

\(^{85}\) Aidoo, in fact, has a collection of short stories with the ironic title, No Sweetness Here. In the collection, Aidoo's central theme seems to be the need for the social transformation in African societies, es-
Aidoo's message is unequivocally clear: black men and women ought to respect and love black women, for we are all victims of alien oppression and of ourselves.\textsuperscript{86} Africa is our land and it is for us to stay, or return, and free her. Our past, our present, our future, are all linked together. We cannot run away from them. The task is to evolve from misery to mirth, to change from complicity to consciousness, to find especially for rural women. In one short story after another, she rails against corrupt politicians and males who contribute to the erasure of the identity of African women. In one story with the suggestive title, "For Whom Things Did Not Change," she rails against Armah's "elite of pompous asses" who, after independence, have adopted the practices of the colonizers and continue to dehumanize ordinary workers and women. In one passage she asks: "When a black man is with his wife who cooks for him, he is a man. When he is with white folk for whom he cooks and chores, he is a woman. Dear Lord, what then is a black man who cooks and chores for black men?"\textsuperscript{(17)} The satiric tone is clear. Not only does the passage ask African males to decolonise their minds, it seeks to subvert patriarchal hegemony and to (re-) create agency/subjectivity for the African woman.\textsuperscript{86} In an essay, "A Working Paper on Black Women in Toronto: Gender, Race and Class," Dionne Brand argues: "It would not do to overstate the matriarchy, to say that Black women are not exploited in relationships with Black men. Black men exhibit male-dominant behaviour and exercise influence on the ways in which Black women live, although they cannot be said to hold the same positions of power or exercise the systemic male dominance of white men. Black men are not now and never have been privy to the power structures established during slavery, colonialism, or the current configuration of capitalism. These power structures, because they are intrinsically racist, can only accommodate Black men at the bottom" (Bannerji 234). One needs to read just a few texts like Shakespeare's \textit{The Tempest}, Conrad's \textit{Heart of Darkness}, Joyce Cary's \textit{Mister Johnson}, Margaret Laurence's \textit{This Side Jordan}, set in my own country, Ghana; Nadine Gordimer's \textit{July's People}, Buchi Emecheta's \textit{In the Ditch}, Second Class Citizen, \textit{Head Above Water}, The Joys of Motherhood; Tsitsi Dangarembga's \textit{Nervous Conditions}, Bessie Head's \textit{A Question of Power}, and Ama Ata Aidoo's \textit{Changes: A Love Story}, to agree with the validity of Dionne Brand's assertion.
out "which factors out of both the past and the present represent for us the most dynamic forces for the future" (116). The imperative is to always remember:

Wherever they are and from whatever causes,
My God,
Black [African] people still
Die
So
Uselessly!

On Thursday, December 2, 1999, I received an e-mail message forwarded by Jonathan Wilcke of the Department of English, The University of Calgary — the distribution was to all members of the department. The subject of the message was, "ABC AGREES WITH DRUG INDUSTRY: AFFORDABLE MEDICINE FOR AFRICANS IS DANGEROUS." The text went on to say that On July 8, 1999 ABC's World News Tonight aired two stories on the subject of treating AIDS in African countries. ABC's conclusion was that, "It's better for poor Africans to die than to have access to cheap AIDS drugs." Space will not allow me to go into the details of the long story, but it exemplifies the general callous attitude of the West towards Africa on issues of humanitarian concern. Perhaps one has not too soon forgotten the swiftness with which the West intervened in Kosovo, while the same West looked on in 1994 as millions of Tutsis and moderate Hutus were massacred in Rwanda. Though the Tutsi-Hutu conflict was a direct result of Belgian colonization, when the ethnic conflict broke out, the West characterised it as an African problem which should be solved by Africans.
CONCLUSION

We let everybody kick us around. So that for a rather long time, we were regarded as being at the bottom of the human pile. Consider for instance, the storm that was raging about starving Ethiopians, and the politics of famine relief. If it is humiliating enough to sing for your own supper, then at what depths of degradation must you be, when you have to have others sing for all your meals?" Definitely, if any non-sensibility had seen [Western] television and newspaper appeals in the mid-1980s for help and aid, they could not have told the difference between Africans, black rhinos and other endangered species.

—Ama Ata Aidoo (157)

There is no beauty but in relationships. Nothing cut off by itself is beautiful. Never can things in destructive relationships be beautiful.

—Ayi Kwei Armah (206)

The epigraph that adorns the cover of Ngambika is "Help me to balance this load," accompanied by an image of a woman balancing a bundle of faggots on her head while carrying a child on her back. Ngambika was published in 1986. Millions of African women continue to carry loads of all forms on their heads while carrying children on their backs. The famine in Ethiopia that Aidoo writes about eloquently in the first epigraph took place in the 70s. As I

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98 The following is the author's explanatory footnote: "There is an English nursery song, sang of course by children from more secure backgrounds about an obviously destitute youngster called "Little Tom Tucker" which exposes the contempt with which any philanthropist regards the needy:

 Little Tom Tucker
 Sings for his supper
 What shall we give him?
 White bread and butter".  

199
write this conclusion, floods continue to destroy Mozambique and everything living in it. The Western newspapers and television continue to cover the nightmarish events. Watching BBC World Service, I cannot differentiate between Africans and monkeys, or any other endangered species. Human beings are "trapped in trees" and there are not enough helicopters to rescue them. Ali's father tells us in Changes that "these independences have proved to be a trick" and that "nothing has changed" (26).

African women writers have not just openly lamented and questioned the carrying of bundles of faggots on their heads while carrying children on their backs; they have also written and diagnosed the factors that combine towards their continued carrying of these burdens. In their writings they challenge African men to help them balance the loads they carry. The image of balance on the cover on Ngambika is important. These women seek to create space for themselves, but they do not ask for all the space; equal space is sufficient. Both Aidoo and Emecheta demonstrate in their works that the act of balancing cannot be done exclusively by women.

My study suggests that contrary to the claims by critics such as Margaret Busby and Katherine Frank, African men
alone are not responsible for African women's problems; there are neo-colonial forces at work ready to ensure that Africans continue to live in subjugation. Aidoo's *Sister Killjoy* lays bare these neo-colonial forces and insists that these forces work against us through our own complicity. There is an Akan saying that translates into something like "the bug that is biting you is hiding in your own cloth." Africans need to examine the attitudes that conspire with external forces to oppress them. Emecheta's *Joys of Motherhood*, set in both pre-colonial and colonial Nigeria, indicates that the introduction of urban cash economy through the advent of colonialism has worsened the plight of Africans, but especially women.

Polygamy is an issue that both writers contemplate. Aidoo focusses on the modern, urban setting, while Emecheta focusses on both the traditional and rural settings. While Emecheta seems to suggest that polygamy in the modern, urban setting works against the interests of women, it was not as hard on them in the traditional setting. Polygamy is an issue I would like to study further in works by other African women writers like Flora Nwapa and Mariama Ba: it is a controversial topic without any clear solutions. Another issue I would like to explore further is the oppres-
sion of children. In the works I studied, it is apparent that women are always under pressure to give birth, because children are their parents' old age security. Both Aidoo's "No Sweetness Here" and Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood suggest an inter-relatedness of parents' economic dependency on children and the pressure on women to give birth.

In an interview with Harrel-Bond, the late Mariama Ba had this to say:

We cannot go forward without culture, without saying what we believe, without communicating with others, without making people think about things. Books are a weapon, a peaceful weapon perhaps, but they are a weapon. (214)

Ba wanted African women writers to portray the African women's condition within African society. She insisted on women taking charge of their destiny in order to end their oppression. She urged women to use their writing as a weapon that would transgress and shatter colonial and African male negative representations of women.

Texts by African women writers reclaim women's marginal positions and show them as spaces of strength within and between which they fluctuate. They reverse the position of the Other and invert it through the perspective of those same women who are no longer just outsiders—within, but
who also become and act as insiders-within. The texts are also opening an invaluable window into the ongoing debate in the field of post-colonial theory that has so far failed to adequately problematize the position of these women. The texts also show awareness of the interrelatedness of the problems that confront women and problems that face the continent. They urge all African women to take control of their lives.

The women reject Western feminism and insist on African womanism for the liberation of the continent and all its peoples. Texts like Aidoo's *Killjoy* are antagonistic in relation to colonial literature.

What my study offers is a self-interpellative reading, a reading foregrounded in "real history" of text and (con)text. In traditional African societies women, as story-tellers, were custodians of oral histories and indigenous forms of knowledge. The introduction of colonial education eroded the position of women as custodians of our culture. These women writers' texts repossess and maintain a tradition that colonial education eroded.

I respond to the women's story-telling with my own story-telling, thus the relevance of weaving autobiography into my reading of these women's texts. I am a man reading
women's texts. This strategy gives me an approach that does not convey an "un-self-conscious appropriation" (Alcoff 24) of women's experiences. In traditional African societies criticism existed. Story-tellers criticized other story-tellers by telling their own stories. For example, Efua Sutherland illustrates this very well in, *The Marriage of Anansewa*. It is this critical method that I have offered here, in place of Western feminist theories.
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