Feminism in the Writings of Ama Ata Aidoo and Mariama Ba

By

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has been written by me and that it is a record of my own research work. It has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree. All quotations are indicated and the sources of information are suitably acknowledged by means of references.

Signature H Shelm

Date 2nd Sept. 1987

CERTIFICATION

This Thesis entitled "Feminism in the Writings of Ama Ata Aidoo and Mariama Ba" by Halima Shehu meets the regulations governing the award of the degree of Master of Arts in Literature of Ahmadu Bello University, and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

Chairman, Supervisory Committee — Date 12/1/90

Member, Supervisory Committee — Date

Head of Department — Date 12/11/90

Dean, Postgraduate School — Date 10-9-90

DEDICATION

Dedicated

to my Father and Mother;

and

to Salihu, Fatima and

little Mariam

in appreciation.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
	Title	i
	Declaration ...	ii
	Dedication ...	iii
	Acknowledgements	iv
	Table of Contents	v
	Abstract	vi
1	Introduction	1
2	Feminism	12
3	Women in the Writings of Ama Ata Aidoo	49
4	The Writings of Mariama Ba	104
5	Conclusion	131
	Bibliography	135

ABSTRACT

Literature is said to be a reflection of society. However African literature provides an incomplete picture of society because writers and critics alike do not pay attention to the presence of women in society. This is a curious fact, and reasons for which can be found in an examination of the position of women in society.

The first two chapters of this thesis are devoted to this task. It is noted that since Africa's contact with the western world many African writers have absorbed the misconceptions of the west as regard the nature of women.

This dissertation therefore adds a new dimension to our appreciation of African literature by illuminating a neglected but very important figure in African society.

Both Ama Ata Aidoo and Mariama Ba are ardent feminist writers who demand that women be placed in their rightful perspective as important members of the human race.

Ama Ata Aidoo, it is shown, is one of the earliest writers to speak about the African woman and to place her in a prominent position. Her works are thus analysed in detail as are the works of Mariama Ba who represents recent opinions on the subject of woman.

The dissertation shows how these two writers portray love, marriage, children, and personal independence as they affect the African woman, and it is further shown that these themes arc handled with good craftsmanship. The male dominated field of African literary criticism has not surprisingly given much attention to the skill of the African woman writer and this dissertation is a contribution to this neglected field.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Before the nineteen-seventies, African female writers, and African woman as subjects of friction did not receive adequate attention from critics of African literature. Femi Ojo-Ade, one of the few critics who are showing increasing interest in African women in literature, admits that, 'African literature is a male-created, male-oriented, chauvinistic art'1. Indeed, it is names of such male writers like Chunua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Mongo Beti, Leopold Senghor, Cyprian Ekwensi, and Sembene Ousmane to mention a few, who dominate any list of West African literature. While on the list of critics of African literature we find more males names such as Gerald Moore, Eustance Palmer, Oladele Taiwo, E.N. Obiechina, and Eldred D. Jones.

The limited participation of women in written Africa literature is surprising considering the well known fact that African women were great participants in the art of literature when it was in the oral form. In traditional African society, oral literature in the forms of folktales, songs, riddles and proverbs were used to entertain, and to inculcate the norms of society into people, especially young children. Since the mother is closest to the child much of this task is left in the hands of women. But this is not to say that the oral art of literature was the exclusive monopoly of women. Both men and women were involved in the creative process, though there may have been specialization in certain genres according to gender. Ruth Finnegan who has done considerable research on oral literature in African says:

> The limitations in this general mastery of the art of story-telling arise from local conventions about age and sex of the narrators. In some societies it appears there is a definite emphasis on one or another category as being the most suitable one for the storyteller. In some areas it is the women, often old women who tend to be most gifted...2 Elsewhere it is the men who tend to be the experts.2

In traditional societies women did not only involve themselve in the narration of stories, they were also characters in the stories narrated. They had a lot of prominent roles to play as wives and mothers, and wise old women. They were witches and beautiful princesses, feared, and sought by men.

Opposed this traditional view of literature is the fact that women were not among the first set of people to achieve fame as African writers. Neither were they given important roles to play in the literature written by men. This can be blamed on the selection of males for formal education by the coloniel administrations. Yet, despite this attitude, a small number of women did manage to learn to read and write. This set of women agitated for more African women to get places in schools. Gradually, the number of educated women increased. It was from among these educated women that the first female African writers emerged.

By 1964, the work of Ama Ata Aidoo had already appeared on the literary scene. While that of Flora Nwapa appeared in 1966, soon to be followed by the works of Efua Sutherland, Zulu Sofola, and Adaora Lily Ulasi. But the existence of these female writers is almost completely ignored by critics of African literature.

The general belief among critics is that African women could not have anything new to contribute to the creative world of literature. Many critics assume African women want to merely keep up with their educated male counterparts, and also because in Europe women are achieving fame as writers.

Critics of African literature applied a critical criteria of the literary establishment which is European and male dominated in their evaluation of African literature. Initially, even female critics such as Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, and Adeola James, Utilized the same critical apparatus of approaching literary texts solely from the point of view of male experience. What interested both writers and critics were the thoughts and actions of male characters. Female characters were either ignored entirely or were considered of secondary importance.

Wilfred Cartey's Whispers From a Continent is perhaps the first critical work to acknowledge the presence of women in African literature. Using the works of writers from former West African French colonies such as, Camara Laye's The African Child; and Cheikh Hamidcu Kane's The Ambiguous Adventure, Cartey demonstrates how a number of writers 'turn to childhood to recall the bliss and easy circumstances of life'. The mother figure is used as a symbol of the beauty and strength of African nature. Mother is shown as being strong in her devotion to duty and her support of tradition. She respects and protects

what is hers and is in turn respected and protected. There comes a time when a hero thrusts mother aside but, later returns into her arms. This movement back to mother or Africa is what negritude represents. Thus in the writings of Negritude writers woman is only a symbol of the endeavours of the male characters but unlike writers from former British colonies, the role of mother is shown as being crucial for the survival of the African family.

The only time most critics pay attention to female characters is when the cultural setting of a work of fiction is being discussed. This is the kind of sociological approach E.M. Obiechina employs in Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel.[4]

Kenneth Little employs a similar approach in his research work The Sociology of Urban Women Image in African Literature.[5] Little is of the opinion that, by studying only the urban African women there will be no need to examine the image of the rural women because the latter is influenced by the former. Little goes further to categorise African women neatly into six groups - girlfriends and goodtime girls; wives; free women; mother; courtesans and prostitutes; and finally, political women and workers.

Little argues that women are faithfully represented in African literature in this way. But this is quite incorrect because though changes do occur first in the lives of urban women which then inflitrate into the villages, the traditional values of the rural people remain deeply embedded in urban women. Neither can we categorise African women the way

Little does because African women often have to play more than one role at a time. Women assure and discard different roles depending on the economic circumstances they find themselves in.

In recent times, female writing has increased in West Africa with the compelling additions of the works of Buchi Emecheta, Aminata Sow Fall, Zainab Alkali, and Mariama Ba. This comes as a welcome change because for too long society has only listened to the voices of men. These female writers reject the image of women projected by most male writers.

Female writers make women the central characters through whose eyes society is examined. Women characters are removed from the shadows of their menfolk and brought into the lime light alone, or alongside men. They are situated in various circumstances relevant to African society such as during the slave trade; the colonial period and the past independence period. The marriage institution in Africa with its emphasis on polygamy is examined from the woman's point of view. Thus for the first time in history, women are telling about themselves, about men, and about life as it treats them separately and together with men.

Feminist criticism emerges from a similar consciousness that there is something wrong with the image of the African woman as portrayed by most writers and critics of African literature. As yet, there is no exact definition of the term 'feminist criticism', but when applied to literature

It can mean a variety of activities. For instance, any criticism written by a woman on any subject matter or a criticism written by a woman about a man's book which approaches the text from a 'feminist' or 'sexist' perspective; or any criticism written by a woman about women authors.

In this paper we will concern ourselves with the last definition. That is, we will look at the works of Ama Ata Aidoo and Mariama Ba from a new, critical direction - the feminine perspective. This outlook will only contribute to the elucidation of other aspects of literary work which are neglected. This kind of criticism developed as a retort to what Mary Ellmann wittigly calls "phallic criticism"[6]

Some of the feminist criticism which is available on female writing is grossly inadequate. For instance, one such inadequate but ambitious work is Oladele Taiwo's Female Novelists of Modern Africa which is a volume of critical studies of fourteen female writers of Africa.

Oladele Taiwo's work is nothing more than a paternalistic pat of encouragement instead of an indepth critical analysis. He claims that male writers are not biased, "they have merely presented the female social situation as it is."[7] Taiwo goes on to explain that the reason why women often occupy a position of inferiority is because writers are anxious to remain faithful to the realities of the world they portray. It is obvious that inspite of his good intentions

Taiwo cannot help indulging in "phallic criticism."

Phallic criticism has served and is still serving to perpetuate the myth of the inferiority of woman. Many critics and writers stubbornly refuse to delve beneath social appearances and expectations and see what exactly the African woman is instead of what society wants her to be.

Perhaps Oladele Taiwo can be forgiven since he admits to being in a state of amazement at the variety in content and approach of female writing. What credit he gives women writers comes out in the following way:

> These writers perhaps because they are women, show great sensibility for what is necessary and proper for the moral health of the nation and the material well-being of the people.8

He does not however explain to us how being women makes them more sensitive to such important issues. He simply bases his statement on a false sexist assumption that all women are born sensitive.

Another volume of critical studies on African women is Ngambika - Studies of Women in African Literature.[9] This collection published in 1986, is one of the most recent collection of critical studies on women and literature. The anthology has the advantage of offering us diverse views from different contributors. Just as Taiwo's Female Novelists of Modern Africa does, this particular anthology takes into consideration the ethnographic, geographic, and cultural range of African literature, but

with more satisfying results. The critics who contribute to the anthology challenge the role categories promulgated for women, such as those established by Kenneth Little. They attempt to redefine the feminine presence in African literature.

The anthology is organised into three sections. The first part examines the depiction of women from the male perspective which is also that of the general society since it is the ideas of men which prevail. The articles in the second part present woman's perception of herself. Part three is devoted to examining the themes of marriage, religion, traditional and modern practices for the way they affect the lives of women. The most important aspect of this anthology is that it recognises and appreciates the position of women in Africa.

Margaret Atwood believes that female writers do not just see literature as a mirror of society but also as a map on which they point out their position and see where they are in relation to everything else.[10]

This is why Molara Ogundipe-Leslie lately acknowledges the fact that, the female writer has two major responsibilities. First to "tell about being a woman" and "to tell reality from a woman's view, a woman's perspective".[11] Thus, many critics who try to examine the writings of women take their cue from Virginia Woolf who believes that women will one day develop a literary style of their own which will be expressive of the female experience.[12]

While it is true that woman's experience of the world differs from that of men, and that women write from that different perspective, it is possible that the variations of perception among individual women may be as gfeat as between men and women. We therefore need to look at the individual female writers before we can come to conclusions about the portrayal of women in African literature. It is in this light that the writer hopes to discuss the works of Ama Ata Aidoo as one of the earliest female writers of Africa; and the more recent works of Mariama Ba.

Both writers are deeply concerned with the African woman, but they differ in the aspects of her life which they emphasise in their works. In their writings we see a preoccupation with the institution of marriage. This is because in the African society procreation and marriage are regarded as the main justification for the existence of women. Aidoo demonstrates in her works how oppressive the African society is to women when there is a case of infertility. Women are usually blamed, they are made to feel degraded and less than human.

Mariama Ba is very much concerned with the ideas of love, personal freedom, and personal dignity. Contrary to what many critics think, Mariama Ba does not see men as the enemies of women. What she tries to illustrate in her works is that the callous behaviour of men towards women is supported by society's underlying belief in the superiority of the male. Neither is the tone of Ba's writings that of bitterness but rather one of urgency. She fearlessly strips

men of their pretences and invite them to take a good look at themselves without flinching or prevarication. Ba believes that unless this is done men will be in grave danger of losing their humanity.

Aidoo and Ba examine traditional society faced with modernity, and man's savage dehumanization of women in the process. Both writers believe that before the African women can be respected by the rest of the world she must first come to an understanding with her black brother.

These two writers delve into the economic and emotional forces which influence the lives of men and women in order to understand and to reconcile them.

Both writers experiment with the poetic prose form, while Aidoo also uses the medium of drama. Aidoo and Ba use foreign languages, English and French respectively as their medium of communication. While critics agree that Aidoo employs the English language with great skill, this writer has to rely on the English translations of Mariama Ba's works which were originally written in French.

FOOTNOTES

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FEMINISM

Women liberation is a more popular term for what feminism stands for, that is, a world-wide cultural movement to secure the complete equality of women with men in the enjoyment of all human rights; moral, religious, social, economic, political, and educational.

The term 'feminism' was coined by Alexander Dumas in a pamphlet L'Homme-Femme which he wrote in 1972.[1] Long before then the movement had been in existence wherever a group of women were gathered to discuss their problems.

There is no doubt that we live in a male-dominated and male-oriented world in spite of the fact that the female sex form a large portion of the world population. Men hold the reins of power and decide what women should do or not do.

Women are often deprived of education and professional training, except for those jobs viewed as suitable for the nature of women. This is often confined to the narrow area of house work such as cooking, cleaning ghe house, and making clothes. Trapped in this role of homemaker women have not been able to utilize to the highest degree their mental and physical capabilities. They are regarded as weak and ignorant, unblessed by nature with the strength of the male physique, nor the rationality of the male mind. Women are not allowed direct participation in the political life of society and yet men complain that they are passive, sneaky and indirect in getting what they want. Women are expected to be beautiful in appearance and then they are accused of

being seductive and immodest.

Indeed, everywhere in the world masculinity is considered the superior opposite of feminity. Even the fact that jobs associated with males in one culture are those associated with females in another does not do much to bring an awareness of the equality of the sexes. Furthermore, whatever kind of work men do it is regarded as more valuable than women's work. When women take over a formerly all-malk occupation it looses status, for instance, teaching and typing. Work which is defined as female occupations like house work and child rearing are in danger of neglect because society does not acknowledge aloud their value.

Supporters of feminism, especially in contemporary times have tried to change society's negative attitude towards women. While trying to get women into male-dominated professions they also try to show the dignity and importance of the work done by women.

The fight for the rights of women has been long and difficult because supprters of feminism are up against beliefs, customs, and laws which have become entrenched over the centuries. For instance, Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher, whose theories have greatly influenced modern thought sincerely believed in the inferiority of the femal. sex. His views on woman emerged in a number of his works, He says;

> The man is master as it is right and proper, and manages everything that it falls to him to do as head of the house. But whatever can be suitably performed by the wife he hands over to her.....

> But sometimes it is the wife who takes charge, as may happen when she is an heiress. In that event authority does not go by merit but by money and influence.2

Apparent in this statement is Aristotle belief that man should and deserve to have authority in society. He does not take cognizance of the fact that men do assume authority because they control most of society's wealth in terms of money and property, and not because they know how to put power into better use. Aristotle argues that woman can only play a secondary role as helpmate of man because biologically she is incapable of doing otherwise.

> While still within the mother, the female takes longer to develop than the male does, though once birth has taken place everything reaches its perfection sooner in the females than in the male; e.g. puberty, maturity, old age, because females are weaker and colder in their nature; we should look upon the female state being as it were, a deformity, though which occurs in the ordinary course of nature.3

As far as Aristotle is concerned women can only excel in the surbodinate role for which he believes, nature has destined her. He says in yet another work that 'the courage of a man is shown in commanding and of a woman in obeying'4. Aristotle's portrat of woman is important because it became a guide for women in general in the western world. Through the ages the female sex has been regarded with varying degrees of contempt.

The theologian Thomas Aguinas whose ideas greatly influenced the christian religion shared Aristotle's belief in the inferiority of woman. He saw woman as a necessary evil because she is the preserverver of the human race.

The position of woman in Christian society is not enviable even though women played significant roles during the great events of the life of Jesus Christ; for instance, the Virgin Mary during his birth and Magdalene during his ressurection. Perhaps the fact that there was not a single woman among the closest disciples of Jesus is a significant point.

An examination of the Bible reveals an embivalent attitude towards women. In Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament there is a verse which acknowledges and proclaims the spiritual equality of the sexes. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created him, male and female."[5] But in the New Testament, woman is depicted as a temptress, seducing man to seek the pleasures of the flesh at the risk of loosing his soul. Woman is seen as cursed forever to suffer in childbirth and be subservient to man till the end of time. The first woman had destroyed the innocence of mankind when she insisted on eating from the forbidden tree in Paradise. However the crime of Eve, and therefore of her daughters was one of disobedience and desire for knowledge it was not a crime of senscusness.

For centuries men have blamed women for their sexual instincts, they accuse women of blatantly showing off their physical attributes. It is in a bid to contain the sexual power women seem to have over men that certain rules are laid down which women are expected to follow. For instance, the Islamic religion decrees the veil for women to protect men from the female sexual attributes men cannot help dwelling

upon. Very few people will admit that it is man who is weak or sexually insatiable.

Historians agree that one of the greatest events in contemporary world history is the French revolution. This great social, political, and economic upheaval turned the thoughts of mankind to an idea which was considered utopian though it was far from new. It was the principle that society is morally bound to give every man, women, and child the opportunity for the fullest self-development. It seemed to the world that women will at last be freed from the social shackles which had prevented the development of her human potential. In practice, neither the politicians, nor the rank and file of the revolutionaries seriously included women in their claims for the rights of man.

This was particularly ironic because it was women who set the revolution in motion. To understand the involvement of women in the revolution one must appreciate the important role she played in the family economy in 18th centry Europe. Among the working classes, both in the rural areas and in the cities, the family needed the economic contribution of its womenfolk. For the unmarried girl there was domestic services in which food and shelter formed a greater part of the payment. The little she was able to acquire in cash was used in purchasing household linen and utensils. These constituted the dowry of the working girl. The married women were involved in cottage industries

in the form of cotton and lace making; and wool-spinning. In towns, women were employed as seamstresses, milliners, embroideries, glove-makers and so on. The very poor women were the lowest group in the employment market. They had to take on the most menial tasks such as carrying soil, wood, water; and heavy vegetables to and from the markets. The working class women felt the poverty at their circumstances more than their menfolk. They felt the pangs at hunger first because they often deprived themselves to feed their husbands and children. The men frequently sought relief in alcohol or left home, leaving the whole burden of the family on the women. This does not mean that women did not drink, or steal, or prostitute themselves, but in general they were more devoted to their families.

Meanwhile the French aristocracy enjoyed all the advantages of wealth and property because the factors of production - land, labour, and capital were in their control. When all attempts of the working class to survive were thwarted it was the women who started the riots which led to the revolution. After the revolution the contribution of women was distregarded and no improvement was made to their position in society.

The first public outcry for the recognition of women's rights came with Mrs. Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Women in 1792. She wrote in response to Thomas Paine's The Rights of Man which many readers believed demanded social justice for the male sex alone, while neglecting the plight of women in society. Mrs. Wollstonecraft called attention to the human dignity of woman, to her right a liberal education and economic independence.

John Stuart Mill's The Subjection of Women published in 1867, stressed woman's right to vote and to hold public office. He regarded these rights as essential steps towards attaining total equality. As a result women sufferage societies which had sprang up all over Europe and the United States intensified their agitation for women sufferage.

Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter Christabel, turned the peaceful sufferage movement into a violent militant affair in England. This upset the country so much anti-feminist Prime Minister Asquith was forced to enfranchise women in 1917. In America, women did not have to resort more violent measures than street propaganda. The 19th Amendment to the Federal Constitution in 1920 peacefully gave the vote to American women. French women were only given the vote in 1944 although the French Socialist Congress of 1879 was the first political party in Europe to demand women's full social and political rights.

The 18th and 19th centuries were ages of Enlightment in Europe but science did not do much to dispel the concept of female inferiority that prevailed at that time. Instead scientific researches were conducted simply to verify the validity of the concept. The conclusions western scientists reached about women are similar to those drawn about blacks. Both women and Negroes are regarded as creatures of instincts without reasoning faculties. The theory used to account for and justify the surbodination of women and blacks is that they were believed to possess smaller brains. Such a scientist was Sir Almroth Wright, a leading midical figure who in 1913

publically expressed his belief that women, including his mother, sister, and wife were biologically and psychologically inferior to him. He forgot to take into account the societal norms that allowed the male sex to develop physically through sporting activities. He also forgot that his wife, mother, and sister did not have access to the kind of education that he was able to acquire to become a great scientist.

Sigmund Freud, a respected figure in the field of psychoanalysis argued that the lack of female achievement has a social and not a biological reason and that is, the inhibition of the female thinking process caused by sexual suppression. Freud's theory sees the unconscious as the well spring of the mind which gives rise to motivation and energy. The mind consists of three parts - the id which is the storehouse of the instincts or libido, and this is what controls sexual and aggressive drives. The ego which is the rational control mechanism; and the super-ego which is the internalized voice of authority with its rewarding and punishing aspects. All three structures represent different desires and as a result there is an inevitable war going on in every individual. The structure which often predominate in an individual is the super-ego because civilization requires the sublimation of sexual energy in people.

However, society operates a double standard which allows men some sexual freedom before marriage and tolerates extra-marital affairs for them. Women on the other hand are expected to suppress every sexual urge until their marriage. They are frowned upon when they indulge in extra-marrital affairs. Thus

it is women who suffer more from society's repression of sexual urges.

Freud's concept of penis envy explains that when a women finds she lacks this vital male organ which seems to give the male sex a great deal of pleasure, she unconsciously develope 'like a scar, a sense of inferiority.... she begins to share the contempt felt by men for a sex which is lesser in so important a respect.'[5]

Yet it cannot be simply because of the sexual pleasure which this organ gives men that causes envy in women but the obvious social advantages which go with possessing such an organ. A number of critics believe that of all modern sciences Freudian psycho-analysis is most responsible for society's negative attitude towards feminism. His concept of penis envy is seen as encouraging the myth of male superiority.

Feminist critic, Juliet Mitchell has a different opinion. She believes that an understanding of Freud's work is necessary 'for challenging the oppression of woman.... However it may have been used, psycho-analysis is not a recommendation for a patriachial society, but an analysis of one.'[7] Mitchell believes that Freud's theory explains the way the unconscious interprets the physical differences between the sexes and not as the rational mind views it that is responsible for the historical fact of male supremacy.

Later psycho-analytic writers developed a complementary idea to Freud's concept of penis envy and that is man's envy of the female womb. In many societies man has tried to cope with the important role women plays in the miracle of birth

by denying woman's contribution to conception and viewing her simply as a passive receptacle or field for man's need. Researchers believe that incidents of rape are expressions of the male sense of entitlement of access to women. Many women are raped by men they know and the closer the relationship the less women are allowed to claim it was rape. Investigations reveal that rape, incest, sexual harassment, pornography, and prostitution are, not abuses of physical force and authority, or economics, but abuses of sex because they do not rely on other forms of enforcement other than sexual.

One way of explaining the historically vehement reaction to feminism could be that while it is possible for women to take up the male role of making civilizations, men cannot return the compliment because they are biologically incapable of doing so. Men cannot take over the most important role of women, that is, giving birth to children; sharing can only mean that they get less. But even this argument is faulty because conception does require the contribution of the male. The conclusion one arrives at is that it is not a question of if women can achieve as much as men in other areas of societal activities outside the home but simply if men will allow them to do so.

However in time of stress the usual customs and laws which limit the sphere of female activity are put aside. Such a time was the period of the two world wars of 1914-1918, and 1939-1945, which indirectly gave impetus and strength to the feminist movement. The large scale destruction of lives

and property caused by these wars was without precedent in the history of mankind. A great number of men were involved in the wars and they left a vacuum in many areas of everyday like. Women had to leave the shelters of their homes to perform all kinds of serivices that were usually regarded as male jobs. Women became conductors, bus and truck drivers helping to keep the transportation system functioning.

Communication, a vital system in times of trouble was kept open largely through the efforts of women working in postal agencies and with public media like newspapers and radio. In the medical field, women were nurses, doctors, and ambulance drivers attending to the wounded both at home and abroad. Women entered into the police force and could even be found in the army. In these areas and more women performed capably enough as to remove every objection to the moral principle that woman is man's equal. A new defiant saying came into existence proclaiming that 'everything a man can do a woman can do better.'

After the wars women became more aggressive in their demands. They struggled for and acquired places in the universities to study the sciences, law, and administration. The feminist controversy has gained more active support in the 20th century, though not everyone agree with anthropologist Ashely Montagu's claim of <u>The Natural Superiority of Women</u> which is the title of his best seller published in 1954. A lot of people do believe that women should be allowed opportunities for their fullest self-development. The ever increasing

number of feminist supporters appeal to the common sense with sayings like 'what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander and what is sauce for the gander is sauce for the goose.' Apart from the superficial cosmetic allowance made to the idea of feminism in unisex fashions in dress and hair styles women have shown their ability in widely varying professional fields such as aero-engineering, nuclear-physics, surgery, hotel management, theatre, and so on. However we should not be blind to the vicious circle which begins when some male dominated industries accept one or two women as tokens of their outward acceptance of the feminist idea. Carole Offir and Carol Travis explain clearly the position of the token woman:

> If she acted friendly she was thought to be flirting. If she acted weak the men tried to infantilize her, treating her as a 'little sister', rather than a peer. If she apologised for alienating the group she was seen as a submissive young woman knowing her place. If she asked for help, she earned a 'needly female' label. If she became angry or tired to point out rationally what the group process was doing to her, she was seen as competitive, in a bitchy unfeminine way.8

It is remarkable that women who are able to reach the top of a male-dominated profession often feel contempt for women who cannot bear the frustrations they were able to endure. It is also strange that such women feel this way towards their own sex instead of towards men who do not have to bear the burden of their sex as well as the usual difficulties of their professions. Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that women do not want competition any more than their menfolk.

While feminists talk about 'liberating' women and ending discrimination against them, and getting women into seats of power where women can be involved in decision-making, we do not find a corresponding move by men to take up what are considered as female activities. For instance married men do not take over the housework from their working wives. The result being that most women have two jobs instead of one.

The marxist ideology suggests that the problem of women should be looked upon as part and parcel of the workers movement. Indeed when one comes to think of it marxism and feminism are both theories of power and its distribution. The marxist theory says that society is basically constructed on the relations people form as they make things needed to survive and in so doing are divided into different classes. Implicit in the feminist movement is a parallel theory that sexuality organises society into two sexxs men and women. As work is organised for the benefit of others so is expropriation of sexuality of some for the use of others.

Many feminists argue that analyzing society in class terms alone ignores the distinctive social experiences of the sexes. Marxist demands, they believe, could be satisfied without altering women's inequality to men. Marxists on the other hand accuse such feminists of being bourgeis in theory and in practice, especially when it seems that it is educated middle class women who form the larger section of the feminist movement. The crucial questions which both marxist and feminists refuse to answer properly is if there is a connection between the fact that a few people rule and the fact that those few have been men? Also if there is a

relationship between the power some classes have over others and that all men seem to have over all women.

The struggle of the feminists has been a long one. They have to fight against psychological, sexual, and economic attitudes entrenched in society and this struggle is reflected in literature.

ii) Literature and Feminism

These terms will be examined from different yet inextricably linked angles. That is, what is written about women, what women write about themselves, and how writers either male or female are influenced by the idea of feminism.

Before industrialization, male writers wrote a great deal on the subject of woman. They portrayed woman as different from man not only in her physical attribtes but also in elusive qualities of spirit, soul, and ability. In their writings woman was romantically worshipped as goddess; respected as the kind and wise mother; or portrayed as a protected pure virgin.

Such portrayal of women as can be found in chilvaric romances of the past such as Don Quixote by Cervantes was prompted by a belief in women as the moral guardians of the race. Women were not depicted as being involved in the business world even though we know that in reality they did so. In cases where we find working women they are portrayed as coarse, vulgar and ugly thereby demonstrating how unsuitable business is for the nature of women. The inspirational

and nuturing role which literature demonstrated as suitable for women was a convenient way of comforting women for their lack of autonomy.

A lot of women came to believe in the importance of these roles and later it proved to be one of the greatest obstacles to the emancipation of women.

Indeed, responsible and practical mothers were careful not to encourage their daughters to step outside their accepted role in society. The example virginia Woolf gives in her work A Room of One's Own is particularly pertinent. She cites at length what would have been the fate of William Shakespeare's sister if he had had one with his genius.

In the first place, Woolf says she would have had little or no education, nor would she have had the chance to read the great works of literature which existed at that time. Instead she would have been sent to mend the stockings, or to mind the stew. As a woman alone, she would have found it difficult to journey safely to London without being molested. On reaching London and joining a theatre company she would have been subjected to the sexual demands of the director. Beceived and put in the family way all her artistic ambitions would have ended. Even if she was determined enough to write a few plays they would be unacceptable, not because they lack literary merit but because they were written by a 'fallen' woman.

George Elliot (Mary Ann Evans) was ostracised by her society because she was living with the married writer G.H. Lewis. Had she been a man living with a married woman

society's double standards would have left her unhindered and uncensored.

The one-sided portrayal of women by writers who are members of the dominant ruling sex cannot be entirely relied on to give us an authentic picture of the nature of woman. Hence let us examine how female writers portrayed their own sex.

In England industrialization made the constant procreation of the human species unnecessary for the economic survival of society. This is because machines had taken over many of the jobs that needed large numbers of workmen. It also became apparent that more women were interested in joining the professional trades than in getting married and rising children. A lot of middle-class women found they had more leisure to pursue other employments, such women were Jane Austen and the Bronte sisters.

Unlike male writers, female writers did not write much about the apposite sex. They confined themselves to writing didactic moral works concerning their own sex, under such titles as The Woman of England - their Social Duty and Domestic Habits; or Wife's Duty. Female writers did not have the education nor the social acceptance that would have endouraged them to explore issues which were not of domestic nature. Indeed it was considered unfeminine to be interested in economic and political issues.

Jane Austen was perhaps the first writer to give an account of society from a woman's point of view. Her novels followed a familiar pattern of female writing, that is, they are about courtship and marriage. However it is in her

works that we find heroines who are credible, women with the capacity to think for themselves, women with ambition and the will to challenge men emotionally and intellectually for the improvement of their relationship.

The fact that Jane Austen wrote good novels is amazing considering the conditions under which she did so. In his memoirs, her nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh gives us an idea of the conditions;

> How she was able to affect all this is surprising for she had no separate study to repair to, and most of the work must have been done in the general sitting room, subject to all kinds of casual interruptions. She was careful that her occupation should not be uspected by servants or visitors or any person beyond her own family party.9

From the above statement it is obvious that a female writer who did not want to be ridiculed did not advertise her occupation. Unlike the male writer who normally had access to a private room where he could write with full concentration, the female writer had to make do with a public sittingroom or the kitchen from where she would supervise the housework or receive visitors.

In Jane Austen's novels we see a dramatization of how marriage alliance are formed between two often conflicting sexes. Since her society only permitted an exploration of approved forms of public sexuality, Austen's deep interest in the relationship between sex and character is demonstrated in her courtship scenes. Her treatment of courtship is

different from that of other didactic novelists in that she realised that the rule that a woman must not love until she is beloved is often contradicted in real life.

Jane Austen never married herself, but she was aware of the sanctity of the marriage institution. Marriage was the chief means of economic survival for women and thus marriage became the main justification of their existence. The fact that a woman could not be economically independent often forced her into marriage. Charlotte Lucas' marriage to the foolish Mr Collins in Pride and Prejudice is an example of the kind of uncongenial marriage societal conventions pressurized women into.

On a first reading of Jane Austen's novels, one is tempted to suspect her of accepting the conventional female roles of her time. But this is not true. For instance in Mansfield Parks we meet a heroine who is everything a woman is expected to be in a partriachal society. She is delicate, dependent, passive, and submissive to her menfolk. Everyone is shocked when Fanny Price refuses to marry rich Henry Crawford because she does not agree with his moral principles. She bravely stands her ground while Sir Thomas rages at her:

> You have disappointed every expectation I had formed and proved yourself of a character the very reverse of what I had supposed. I had thought you peculiarly free from wilfulness of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence of spirit which prevails so much in modern days, even in young women and which in young women is offensive and disgusting beyond all common offence.10

Austen was obviously against the victimization of women in a partriachal society. Society is warned to be careful

lest it wakes the element of rebellion in women. Neither was Austen in favour of the kind of education deemed necessary for women, such as music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages. All these exhibitionist arts turned young ladies into shallow creatures who are only interested in appearances, admiration, and catching rich husbands. Austen believed that a woman ought to 'add something more substantial in the improvement of the mind by extensive reading.'[11] In addition, women were expected to be tender, genteel, and intuitive rather than rational and aggressive. A lot of women like Mrs Bennet in Pride and Prejudice, and Lady Betram in Mansfield Parts, are extreme examples of silly women who live a vegetable kind of existence. In playing the 'feminine' role such a woman finds herself in a vicious circle; the less she exercise her freedom to understand her life the fewer resources she discovers in herself, and the less she dares to affirm herself as a person.

In Persuasion, Jane Austen reveals her views on what marriage should be like. For Austen a proper marriage is one in which the two people involved operate on a basis of mutual respect. A demonstration of this ideal can be found in the description of the way Admiral and Mrs Croft handle their carriage:

> But by coolly giving the reins a better direction herself they happily passed the danger, by once afterwards judiciously putting out her hand they neither fell into a rut, nor run foul of a dung-cart; and Anne, with some amusement at their style of driving, which she imagined no bad representation of the general guidance

> of their affairs, found herself safely deposited by them at the cottage.12

What is suggested here is that the croft's marriage has survived as they do the carriage drive because rather than blindly following her husband Mrs Croft corrects and supports her husband in his endeavours. If in Austen's works we see a great deal of interest in drawing room manners it is because she felt them to be important as they are constantly with us. She saw the family as the most important group in society and the part played by women in this area is of crucial importance to society but that does not mean Austen thought it in any absolute sense the only suitable occupation for women.

By 1800, Austen had become aware of the changing times so that unlike in earlier novels like Pride and Prejudice where the prospect of work is viewed with horror, in Persuasion women are encouraged to seek new areas of interest. Through her presentation of Mrs Croft, Austen suggests that this could be found in the areas previously reserved for men. When Admiral croft goes to sea, his wife accompanies him; when the Admiral talks to his naval friends Mrs Croft Joins in looking as 'intelligent and keen as any of the officers around her.'[13] Indeed when it comes time to rent Kellynch Hall Mrs Croft asked more questions about the house, and terms, and taxes, than the admiral himself, and seemed more conversant with business.[14] Austen believed that women should seek roles in society that will allow them to be fulfilled as fational creatures.

One fault critics find with Jane Austen's work is that she lacked a sense of history, that even though the French revolution happened during her life time there is no mention of it in her works. It is true that we occasionally meet young military men in her ballroom scenes but that is as far as the army is mentioned. Neither did they talk of war because it was hardly considered a fitting subject for female ears on such occasions. It can be argued that living in her seduded village Austen did not feel the impact of the war. Her scope was limited to her village because she had no opportunity to broaden her horizon with travel, nor is her knowledge of character more than what she saw displayed in drawing rooms.

Jane Austen's prose is completely expressive of the calm flow of life in the village. Even where she discusses what the position of women is in her society there is no hint of bitterness. Perhaps it was not in her nature to want what she could not have by gentle remonstration. However this is not true of all female writers. The dissatisfaction many female writers feel with their personal lives is often reflected in their works. For instance, in charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre we find the narrative poetic and powerful conveying deeply felt emotions. The anger and bitterness Bronte felt is barely concealed in her work. Jane Eyre tells us that instead of making jellies with Mrs Fairfax he would go to her room and look over the fields at the distant views -

> I longed for a power of vision which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen; that I desired more

> practical experience .. then I possessed; more of intercourse with my kind of acquittance with a variety of character than was here within reach... who blame me? Many no doubt, and I shall be called discontented. I could not help it, the restlessness was in my nature, it agitated me to pain sometimes... It is vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquility, they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses of like which people earth. Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and, a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer; and it is narrow minded in their more privilleged fellow creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, playing on the piano or embroidery bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them or laugh at them if they seek to do more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.[15]

Thus at length does Charlotte Bronte tell us exactly what she thinks of her limitations as a writer as well as a woman.

In A Room of Ones Own Virginia Woolf observes that such a writer like Charlotte Bronte who is very aware that she is a woman and who is also aware of the wrong done to her sex by societal norms 'will never get her genius expressed whole and entire. She will get into a rage and her books will be deformed and twisted. She will write of herself where she should write of her characters'.[16] But then the creative writer cannot run away from real life. The values and the experiences of real life are often transferred into fiction. That is why critics may say Tolstoy's War and Peace is a greater

book than say Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen. Since it is masculine values that prevail in real life, war even as a subject of fiction is regarded as more important than a novel on fashion and manners or of a young woman trying to find her place in society.

Even in the 20th century the good female writer is regarded with astonishment because she is still an unusual phenomenon. Any consideration of the quality of the work written by a woman will bear in mind the sex of the writer. Hence even the standards of criticism are adjusted to fit the sex of the writer.

The Bronte sisters were very much aware of this double standard in criticism. In the preface to the 1880 edition of Wuthering Heights Charlotte Bronte summed up the dilemma of the female writer, which is still true of present day literary criticism:

> Averse to personal publicity, we veiled our names under those of Currie, Ellis, and Action Bell. We did not like to declare ourselves women because without at that time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called 'feminine' - we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice, we had noticed how critics sometimes used for their chastisement the weapon of personality and for their reward a flattery which is not true praise.17

Charlotte Bronte was not in revolt against the status quo. Her heroines like Jane Eyre and Lucy snowe in Villette sought economic independence as teachers. In Jane Eyre independence was more than a matter of status, it meant personal identity and self-respect. Jane Eyre enjoys her work at Thornfield Hall not because of the wages it brings her

but because as she says to Rochester, 'I have not been trampled on. I have not been petrified. I have not been buried with inferior minds and excluded from every glimpse of communion with what I reverence, with what I delight in, with an original, a vigorous and expanded mind'.[18]

All the three Bronte sisters were accused of writing unwomanly books because they wrote of the deep dark side of human nature which women were supposed to be unaware of.

Charlotte and Emily Bronte were especially determined not to write novels which merely give a surface imitation of life, but serious vital works which tell of the 'tragic experience of life, be true to the experience of the whole woman and convey a sense of life's springs and under currents.'[19]

The feminist movement had started to gather force by 1840 when the Brontes were struggling to be acknowledged as writers of worth. They did not advocate for the right to vote, or to own property, but for the right of woman to enter the sexless sphere of intelligence and knowledge, and the right to an autonomous personality. Writing for the Bronte sisters was a vocation and not something to help pass the leisure hours. This attitude antagonised a number of literary critics who thought it immodest for women to want literary fame.

We do not find male writing being restricted in this way, thus the quality we find here is of a different kind. Male writing is not preoccupied with the frustrations brought upon it by its sex. It is done confidently, proudly, with full freedom to stretch in whatever direction it is inclined. It

is apparent in male writing that they are the fearless dominant sex to which no subject is taboo. For insteance, only a male writer such as D.H. Lawrence would dare write a novel like Lady Chatterly's Lover which discusses the physical side of sexual relationships frankly. A female novelist because her moral reputation is at stake would dwell more on the spiritual side of a relationship between the two sexes.

Male writers respond to the cry for women's Rights in different ways. The first male writer of note to contribute to the woman question was the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. Ibsen is commonly regarded, especially in theatre, as the pioneering spirit behind feminism. Yet, Ibsen would not call himself a feminist. The message he tries to get across in his plays is his belief that there is very little hope for the world unless every individual is regarded as a human being in his own right. He believes that people's action should be dictated by the deeper consciousness and not by social conventions. This should be applicable to women as well as to men.

The Doll's House is the most influential of Ibsen's plays. Implied in the play is the idea that men cannot be 'free' unless women are equally so. Ibsen did not believe that women should be only mothers and wives. In the play when Nora informs her husband that she is leaving him, Helmer reminds her; "Remember before all else you are a

mother, a wife and a mother". Ibsen makes Nora reply, "I believe that before all else I am a human being.... or at least I should try to become one".[20]

Nora's act of leaving her home is not really an act of defiance but a gesture of despair; despair of ever becoming a person in her own right, whose personal notions of right and wrong must be surbodinated to her husband's conventional ideas. Women also need to play other roles apart from that of wives and mothers if they were to become fully developed people.

Another great champion of Women's Rights from theatre is George Bernard Shaw. Shaw like Ibsen wanted women to liberate them from their traditional roles and traditional subservience. He argues eloquently on their behalf in The Quintessence of Ibsenism:

> Now of all idealist abominations that make society pestiferous I doubt if there be any so mean as that of forcing self-sacrifice on a woman under the pretence that she likes it; and if she ventures to contradict the pretence, declaring her no true woman.... its not true. The domestic career is natural to all men; although it may be necessary that every able-bodied woman should be called on to risk her life in childbed just as it may be necessary that everyman should called on to risk his life in the battlefield...
> We have come to think that the nursery and the kitchen are the natural sphere of a woman; we have done so exactly as English children have come to think that a cage is the natural sphere of a parrot - because they have never seen one anywhere else.21

Shaw did not entirely reject the traditional domestic role for women as long their contribution is recognised and rewarded. In his essays and plays Shoaw calls for equal opportunity in employment, equal pay for equal work; contracts for marriage; marriage free from degrading economic dependence, dignified divorce, bearing children outside marriage, and refusal to bear children, in short legal equality of every variety.

Shaw rejects romantic literature for its treatment of passionate love and female submission. He argues that industrial capitalism has changed the social and economic conditions for women. Many women in so-called honest employments like domestic work or factory work are often forced into prostitution in which the wages and working conditions were frequently superior. Shaw feel it is unreasonable and unfair to ask women to be virtuous and starve when they can easily turn to vice and plenty. In his play Shaw rejects the idea of masculine domination, In Getting Married Leo Hotchkiss desires a legal everyday husband and a sunday husband for variety. While Saint Joan leads an army in spite of the fact that she is a woman she has the instincts and ability to lead.

Shaw had no patience with idealised woman characters who conceal the true misery of the position of women. His creation of woman characters who are real people who have escaped the confines of stereotypes to triumph as individuals in the outside world is his greatest contribution to the emancipation of women.

As a member of the Fabian society Shaw preached two methods of attaining the goals of feminism - gradualism

and permeation. That is, a change in society's attitude towards women not by the violence of a revolution but by evolution and the subtle penetration of social and political institutions by supporters of feminism.

While George Bernard Shaw championed the cause of feminism another playwright August Strindberg was entirely against the movement. He saw the modern female as half-woman, half-man, a type who pushes herself forward, selling herself for power, diplomas and aggrandisement. Strindberg saw society as being in danger of degeneration because this unwholesome type of women choose their mates from among men who think like them. In his play Miss Julie he demonstrates the misery caused when a person born a woman adopts the behaviours of a man.

To appreicate the relevance of the above discussion to feminism in African literature we need to cast our minds back to Africa before the advent of colonialism. We need to examine the position of women prior to the arrival of the white man.

Before colonialism, the African woman held a respected position in society. Her most important roles were that of wife and mother, but, she was not totally cut off from the economic and political life of her community.

In the rural areas women participated in farming activities, clearing the land, planting, harvesting, and selling the produce. While in the urban areas women were invclved in trading activities, cloth weaving, pot-making and so on. Women were also responsible for looking after the family

and doing the housework.

From many parts of Africa we can find examples of women who had great influence in the political activities of their people. For instance in West Africa women like Moremi of Ife, the Amazons of Dahomey, and Queen Amina of Zaria made their presence felt in the government of their communities.

Polygamy was the accepted marriage system which prevailed in most parts of Africa. It was convenient for agricultural communities because a large number of wives and children provided more labour for the farms.

African women were the principal victims of the encounter with the west. The establishment of colonial rule brought with it a change in attitudes towards the female sex. The colonizers chose African men to help them run the affairs of the colonies and because the missionaries did not understand the position women held in the family and society, she was treated like a delicate flower.

Africans exposed to the Christian faith and western education were taught to change their attitudes towards women. The missionaries had thought the African woman was over burdened with a lot of responsibilities and sought to relieve her. Women were therefore limited to playing the roles of wives and mothers and were prohibited from participating in other aspects of communal life.

The kind of education offered to women was sewing, cooking a few European dishes, and a little reading and writing to help them understand the Bible. Mongo Beti's Poor Christ

of Bomba provides us with a vivid idea of the way missionary institution for girls were run.

Over the years the white missionaries succeeded in brain-washing women into accepting a surbodinate place in society. Female labour was no longer acknowledged as important for the survival of society and women soon lost the dignity which traditional society had invested on womanhood. Thus the probelms of modern day African women cannot be divorced from the historical context of their colonial experience which greatly changed their material condition.

African men who had been traned by the missionaries as clerks, teachers and priests were the set of people who were in the forefront of the struggle for independence because they could understand the whiteman's language and ways of doing things.

Women had also fought against the colonial government as the case of the Aba women prove. In 1929 these market women rose up against the injustice of harsh tax laws which were implemented by the colonial government. But it was men who formed the new elite after independence.

Many African countries have become oppressive neo-colonial capitalist societies breeding unemployment, illiteracy, squalor, poverty and hunger. Many women carry the double burden of their sex as well as that of the social class to which they belong.

Neo-colonial African societies have not only rendered many women employed but unemployable. Greater attention and opportunities are offered to male children when it comes

to training for a livelihood. Marriage is considered the most important work a woman should be prepared for and this made women dependent on men for their material needs. Often the dowries collected for a female child's marriage is used to educate the boys.

Since women were generally excluded from participation in decision-making women resorted to forming women associations which were voluntary religious and philanctropic organisations. The main function of these associations is welfare services for their members. In the urban areas these associations become substitutes for the extended family in which financial problems are shared, and festivals celebrated together.

However, the number of educated women has increased in recent years. But through copious imitation of western ideas many African women have trivialised a very fundamental problem. Instead of using their education to fight for their human rights they turn to wearing trounsers and smoking cigarettes to demonstrate their equality with men. Others bleech their skins and salivate after foreign curios and exotica. This attitude goes to show how deep the African woman's sense of inferiority has gone. Indeed the importance of seminars and conferences such as the women conference held in Narobi in 1985, is lost on most African women whether educated or not.

Like their western counterparts African women allow themselves to be used to promote sexist ideas, thereby reinforcing prejudices against the female sex. The result

is that women are regarded as sexual objects whose natural sphere of activity is in the kitchen and in the bedroom.

Women contributed a great deal to African literature when it was in the oral form but since literature assumed the written form it is men who dominate the literary scene.

In the works of established writers like Chinua Achebe, T.M. Aluko, Wole Soyinka, Mongo Beti, and Crprian Ekwensi, to mention some West African writers, women characters are relegated into the background. They focus their attention mainly on the activities of the malc characters. Whenever mainly on the activities of the male characters. Whenever we meet female characters they are seen only in relation to the men around them.

For instance in Achebe's Things Fall Apart we do not find women holding a central position. There are regular references by the main hero Okonkwo, and other male characters to the inferiority of women.

The most abusive term which the villagers can give an improvident man such as Okonkwo's father is 'agbala' which means old woman. In a discussion with a neighbour Okonkwo says:

> The world is large... I have heard
> that in some tribes a man's children
> belong to his wife and her family.
> 'That cannot be', said Machi.
> 'You might as well say that the
> woman lies on top of the man when
> they are making children.22

It is ironical that when Okonkwo is living in exile with his mother's people he names a child that is born 'Nneka' 'Mother is supreme'. But we soon realize that

Okonkwo did so only out of politensess to his kinsmen because soon after he names another child 'Nwofia' 'Begotten in the wilderness'.

In Wole Soyinka's writings we find the same image of women over and over again. In works set in a traditional background the stereotype is that of the submissive virgin as portrayed by Sidi in The Lion and the Jewel. In this particular play male-dominance is made clear. The title itself conforms with societal expectations, that is, the Bale who is the Lion is given qualities of strength and prowess. While Sidi the village belle is given a natural goddess-like beauty. She is portrayed as an ornament to be possessed by man.

In Soyinka's urban setting woman is depicted as a 'femme-fatals' or the courtesan with fatal sexual powers over man. In Soyinka's The Interpreters and Kongi's Harvest we meet Simi and Segi who are both portrayed as this type of woman. Cyprian Ekwensi's Jagua Nana presents a similar portrayal of women.

Very few writers involve their female characters in political matters and those who do seem to espouse the cause of a socialist revolution. It is in the works of such writers like Sembene Ousmane, Femi Osofisan, and Ngugi that we really begin to see woman as a complex being who is sometimes motivated by inner impulses which have nothing to do with their relationship with the male sex.

In Sembene Ousmane's God's Bits of Wood we are presented with women like Ramatoulaye, ghe dignified elderly woman

who has a large extended family to look after. There is Mame Sofi, a middle-aged outspoken woman; Dieynaba the leader of the market traders; and Penda who considers herself equal to any man. All these women came together to organise a mass movement of women in a march to confront the colonial owners of the railway line. These women support and rally one another, surmounting differences in language, poverty, and hunger in their commitment to a common cause. Men became aware of the latent power in women:

> The men began to understand that if the times were bringing forth a new breed of men, they were also bringing forth a new breed of women.23

In many parts of Africa women were involved in the process of overthrowing colonialism but many writers fail to portray this in their works. Ngugi like Sembene Ousmane are the exceptions. Wambui and Mumbi are Women in A Grain of wheat who are involved in the bloody struggles of the Mau-Mau.

Most of the task of using literature to uplift, inspire and encourage women is left in the hands of female writers. These female writers realise that though African writers claim to write for the African audience, they are apparently not interested in the actions and thoughts of women.

Female writers therefore depict the travails of women characters and exhibit a deep empathy for their heroines, who are to a large extent mouthpieces for their personal notions on life.

The female writer is still a rare person in Africa. She

belongs to the educated group with a professional job outside her home. She has read the works of Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf, Harriet B. Stowe, to mention a few, and found out that women can write as well as men.

Even though the rural women are in the majority the urban female writer writes comprehensively about women because while living in urban centres she is still close to the traditions of her people. Female writers are certainly influenced by the feminist movement and go all out to demand for a recognition of the rights of women and also to show that the African woman has a personality of her own. They are concerned about the relationship between man and woman; about slave trade; colonialism; and what neo-colonialism has done to the African people.

The novel, short story, and drama are the forms most favoured by female writers because they provide more space for the message they want to tell the world. A writer like Bessie Head explores the feelings of women in the oppressive conditions of life in Southern Africa. While Mariama Ba wants changes in the marriage system. Other writers like Aidoo are concerned with the liberation of not only their sex but of all people from any social system which destroys the individual.

This thesis will use the works of Ama A$_t$a Aidoo and Mariama Ba to demonstrate the commitment of female writers how they delve deep into the psychology of the African woman to reveal her to the world as she really is and, to inspire her to greater achievements.

FOOTNOTES

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13. Ibid. p. 191.

14. Ibid., p. 23

15. C. Bronte, Jane Eyre (Britain, Penguin, 1966) p. 141.

16. V. Woolf, A Room of One's Own (London Hagarth Press, 1954) p. 104.

17. E. Bronte, Wuthering Heights, (London Oxford, 1963) preface.

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19. Q.D. Leavis, Jane Eyre, Introduction.

20. H. Ibsen, A Dolla House & other plays (London Penguin Classics 1965) p. 227.

21. R. Weintraub (ed.) Fabian Feminist (U.S.A. P.S.U. 1977) p. 2.

22. C. Achebe, Things Fall Apart (London, Heinemann) 1973. p. 101.

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Chapter 3

WOMEN IN THE WRITINGS OF AMA ATA AIDOO

Ama Christiana Aṭa Aidoo is one of the earliest and most well known female writers of modern Africa. Born a Ghanaian in 1942, Ama Aṭa Aidoo became interested in writing while still an undergraduate at the University of Ghana Legon. She graduated in 1964; and joined the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana. She later taoght English at the University of Cape Coast. She was also at one time Ghana's Minister of Education. But soon after, Aidoo left GhanaIs for personal reasons. She is now living with her children in Harare, Zimbabwe; where she works for the Curriculum Development Unit of the Ministry of Education writing supplementary readers for schools.

In a recent interview about her life in socialist Zimbabwe, Aidoo speks of her concern with the situation of women which she finds rent with familiar contradictions. On the one hand, there is structural commitment to equality in the form of the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs. On the other, a glance through the newspapers and magazines reveal the usual problems of women in Africa such as rural poverty, lack of land rights, illiteracy, and baby dumping by women unable to cope. But Aidoo finds that the public commitment to finding solutions to these problems shows an awareness of the need for change in the lives of women. Hence the atmosphere is more optimistic for women than what can be found in other parts

of Africa especially West Africa.

Ama Ata Aidoo has been interested in the problems of African women long before she settled in Zimbabwe. In another earlier interview with Willy Bozimo in 1977, Aidoo spoke of the position of the African woman as she sees it -

> Women have been oppressed for too long. If you feel the man you are with doesn't want you to be witty and intelligent, then you pretend to be without wit and intelligence. Women liberation is nothing new. It is just giving voice to a deep yearning across the ages. The moment a woman ceases to comply with the general notion of being a woman, then the world threatens to fall apart.1

Aidoo is aware that in real life and in literature, men have always tried to bend women to their will regardless of the feelings of women. In self-defence some women have stood up to speak out against this male attitude. They point out the need and necessity for change in the status of women in society.

Ama Ata Aidoo has published four major works; two of which are plays titled The Dilemma of a Ghost,[2] and, Anowa.[3] The others are, a book of short stories No Sweetness Here,[4] and a novel titled Our Sister Killjoy.[5] Aidoo's central preoccupation in all her works is with the question of women. How the African woman has managed to live her life in traditional society; under the oppressive colonial system; and in Africa after independence. Aidoo explores the experiences of women as mother; the vagaries of their lives in a polygamous society; their relationship with other women;

and their struggle for economic survival. Aidoo also examines the direction modern African life is taking and warns about some of the obstacles that lie in the way to greater fulfilment.

Drama:

In traditional Africa society women could be involved in rituals and festivals, they could make music, narrate folktalse, and in fact engage in all aspects of performance. The advent of Islam and Christianity in many parts of Africa curtailed the participation of women in artistic performance. Women were reduced into mere spectators, and in some parts of Africa, especially Muslim areas, even this spectator status is not allowed because the purdah system prohibits women from venturing outside their homes.

After independence was achieved in many parts of Africa, African writers felt the need for a cultural renaissance and theatre was seen as a means of cultural decolonization, and for propagating African values and beliefs.

Female African writers such as Ama Ata Aidoo, Efua Sutherland, and Zulu Sofola, became interested in contributing to the development of an African drama. A kind of drama which employs the use of modern theatres and techniques of performance but remains relevant to the African community. However, although Aidoo writes plays she does not direct them herself as the other two female dramatists do for their works.

For both her plays and prose writings Aidoo draws her inspiration from her environment, her education, and the

history of her people. She integrated into her works the speech patterns of traditional African people, their folktales, costumes, music, and customs.

This chapter examines Aidoo's plays for the way she strikes an aesthetic balance between what she sees at the position of women in Africa and what she feels it ought to be.

The Dilemma of a Ghost

Ama Ata Aidoo wrote this play as a young playwright of twenty-two. It was written and staged in 1964, and published in 1965.

The play is about a young couple from different cultural backgrounds who meet in a University campus, fall in love, and decide to get married. But Ato Yawson, who is a young Ghanaian decides with his new wife not to have children until they both settle down to life in Ghana.

Aidoo explored the cultural differences which alienate the couple from each other and from Ato's family. The playwright uses this conflict to bring into focus the position of women in an African society.

Ato is sent to America for higher education because western education is greatly valued by his people. Education is seen as the key to success, wealth, and fame in neo-colonial Ghana. But this does not include an acceptance of all western ideas and ways of behaving. It certainly does not include marrying an American even if her skin is black. This is why Ato's family is so horrified when he informs them that he has married an American. The fact that Eulalie's skin is

black because she descends from Africans taken way to America as slaves only makes the matter worse. Ato protests that Eulalie is not a slave as her grandparents were. This makes his grandmother Nana, rebuke him in these words, 'Ato do not talk with the foolishness of your generation.'[3] Her logic is simple, the descendants of slaves is also a slave.

Ato's family is not blindly prejudiced against his marriage but they believe that they will be laughed at when they do not understand the ways of the whiteman. Neither is the whiteman interested in understanding theirs because he feels his culture is superior to that of the Africans.

Eulalie however, is delighted with the thought of living in Africa which she sees as the original homeland of all black people. She is an orphan and also a member of a race not totally accepted in America. She calls Africa the "very source"[19] and feels that by marrying Ato she will "belong to somewhere ag in....".[3] She is returning to her roots and this is her triumph. She has left behind her the despair of other black Americans who wake up in the mornings hoping their skins have turned milky-white.

Eulalie obviously believes that African will be a glorious land. An ideal land of "palmtrees, azure sea, the sun and golden beaches"[3] where everyone lives happily.

Aidoo is not attacking black Americans for romanticizing 'Mother Africa' but rather Africans who allow them to believe in this fairy-tale image of Africa. Aidoo blames the Negretudinists who paint such unrealistic pictures of Africa. Belief in such illusions is disastrous and can only be doomed

to disappointment because Africa certainly has its disagreeable aspects. Indeed Eulalie soon discovers that Africa is not the delightful place she had dreamed it would be. The sun feels unbearably hot for her; neither has she set eyes on a single lion inspite of all she has heard of Africa's wild life.

The funeral drums which she thinks are for witch-hunting frighten her. Eulalie is ready to identify with Africa without realising that though her skin is as black as the Africans' she is different from them. She is exposed to a vastly different culture and after living for a while in Africa she still finds it difficult to adjust her way of thinking. Aspects of African life like driends and relations visiting at anytime without prior invitation, and having to go to funeral services of very distant relations puzzle and anger Eulalie.

Ato does not seriously explain the African way of life to Eulalie. Instead he teases her about her fears, "If you don't (have a siesta) you will have a nervous breakdown before you've learnt enough to graduate in primitive cultures".[21] Ato succumbs to the male notion that women should be humoured and soothed instead of treating them like rational beings. His attitude causes a lot of misunderstanding among his family.

He laughs at Eulalie when she becomes apprehensive about their decision not to have children yet and quickly reassures her they would create a paradise in Africa with or without children.

Once Ato makes this statement a reader who is aware of the demands of African society begins to wonder just how Ato's and Eulalie's marriage will survive. Ato's long contact with the western way of thinking must have dulled his senses of what is acceptable in Africa and what is not.

In African society, children are regarded as a necessity. They are the main reason why people get married in Africa. The decision to have children is not a private matter but a decision which concerns the whole clan. In cases where children are not forthcoming the clan offers help to the unfortunate couple. Ato's uncle, Petu explains the concern of the clan; 'when two people marry everyone expects them to have children... Therefore my nephew if they do not have children then there is something wrong.'[41] The clan believes that the couple's childress state must be Eulalie's fault and have come prepared with some medicine to rub on her stomach.

Ato does not explain to his family why they have no child yet and the clan is angered by what they percieve as a nonchalant attitude towards such a serious matter. Ato selfishly finds it easier to let his family go on thinking Eulalie is infertile rather than explain to them that they are practising birth control. He confesses to Eulalie that his family will not understand. They "would say we are displeasing the spirits of our dead and the Almighty God for controlling birth".[42]

Ato is aware that he has offended his people's custom by marrying Eulalie who they call a 'Black-white woman.

A stronger and a slave.'[18] It is considered the job of the elders of a family to find suitable marriage partners for their children. Esikom is therefore following the dictates of custom when even before Ato's return she goes and ask for the hand of Yaw Mensa's daughter. Everyone in the village approves of her choice and are disappointed when Ato does not accept a girl they all know and like. The villagers are shocked with the way the young couple behave. For instance it is unheard of that a man should give up his chair to a woman as Ato does constantly. And the fact that they seem unconcerned about their lack of children turns the whole village against them.

Ato becomes torn between pacifying his family and trying to be loyal to his black American wife. The dream he has of the ghost at the junction not knowing which way to go is a symbol of his own conflict. The understands the African views that a child can only add to the happiness of a couple but he also appreciates the logic that one should only have children when one is psychologically and financially prepared to do so.

Meanwhile, both his wife and family condemn him for what they see as his lack of perception and understanding. Eulalie becomes bitter with the way he handles their relationship with his family. She calls him a 'damned rotten coward of a Moses' and condemns him for insisting they practice birth control when he knows it will be unacceptable to his people. In her anger and bewilderment she is driven to call his

people 'stupid narrowminded people' who understand nothing but their own 'savage custom',[44] whereupon Ato slaps her.

But in the end it is Eulalie who inspite of her insults is forgiven by the family. This is because 'No stranger ever breaks the law...'[49] unless encouraged by a townsman to do so. Eulalie is taken into the clan house while Ato is left not knowing what to do and wanders in the night like a ghost.

Aidoo presents the position of women to us by showing us the African society through Eulaie's foreign eyes.

Inspite of all Ato's assurances that they can wait before having children she feels early in the play that, ...some men do mind a lot'.[4] When she comes to live in Africa she finds that it is not only her husband who maybe worried about having children but the whole village. Eulalie finds this general concern bewildering after coming from a culture where such matters are of private concern.

The African belief in the importance or necessity of children in a marriage may have its roots in the need of men to prove their potency, virility, or manhood. In J.P. Clark's Song of a Goat we find a similar preoccupation with the theme of infertility. Tragedy occurs when the hero refuses to accept the fact of his sterility. This theme recurrs again and again in African literature because it is so important to the African sensibility infertility is regarded with scorn, hatred, and fear in Africa.

In The Dilemma of a Ghost the issue is exhaustively examined from the woman's point of view. The playwright's

inspired use of the two women who act as neighbours contribute to our understanding of the community's deep attachment to children. Children are very important because they ensure the continuation of the clan and are therefore the responsibility of the whole clan. For instance, Ato is expected to look after his nieces and nephews after all it was somebody else who looked after him in his childhood.

The second woman has a lot of children and acts as the mouthpiece of traditional communalism and prejudice while the first woman is childless. It is from her observations that we really understand the plight of the barren woman in Africa. As a childless woman she knows how hostile society can be to a woman like herself. She is therefore more sympathetic of Eulalie's supposed barreness.

The first woman has been explosed to the scorn of the villagers. She tells her friend 'But at the very last you are luckiest who have them'.[5] She knows that her people want children because they "have a lusty desire to see the tender skin on top of a child's scalp rise and fall with human life'.[36]

Africans consider children to be a far more importance than wealth of fame.

'They ask for the people of the house and not the money in it.'[16] That is why nothing can compare with being a parent. The villagers are not impressed by the fact that Eulalie has her own money and can buy all kinds of machines to make life comfortable. She is still pitied and mocked because she is childless.

Eulalie recalls to mind Flors Nwapa's heroine Efuru. Efuru is fortunate enough to be beautiful and wealthy, and happens to be well loved by her husband but the villagers are unimpressed. They observed that 'we are not going to eat happy marriages' the most important thing is for one to have a child.

This is traditional African society's subtle way of keeping women in what is supposed to be their proper place. Bearing and bringing up children ensures that women have little time to devote to activities which men have reserved for themselves.

Esikom is portrayed as the ideal African woman. She has fulfiled the obligations society sets out for women, because she is married and takes her responsibilities as a mother very seriously. It has already been mentioned how she tried to find a wife for her son. She is in debt after trying to provide the requirements of Ato's education. Everyone expects she will be rewarded for her troubles. Unfortunately, this is not what happens. Ato spends his money providing for himself and his American wife, and has nothing to spare for his mother.

Esikom cannot understand why Ato treats Eulalie as an equal. In Africa women are expected to defer to men. Esikom feels it necessary to remind Ato of the position of women in African society. She confronts him when Eulalie throws away her gifts of snails. Are your wive's taboos yours? Rather your taboos should be hers.[28] This statement is true for other aspects of African life as well.

It is believed that a woman's first duty is to cater to the desires and pleasures of her menfolk. For instance, Monka, his sister, is sent to get chairs for her brother she is made to cook for him and generally waits on him. Often the needs of female children are sacrificed for the male children.

Monka tells us of how "the oldest and most valuable of the family heirlooms, Kentes, and golden ornaments, which none of us younger generation had ever seen before, were all pawned. They never brought them into daylight... not even to celebrate the puberty or marriage of a single girl in this house. But since our master must buy coats and trousers, they brought them out on this occasion".[31]

In different ways Ato's womenfolk toil and go without things they need for themselves so that they can help Ato start life well. Monka is bitter and feels cheated because inspite of her sacrifices for her brother she gains nothing from his experiences. The second woman tells us that there are times when women feel it is better to be childless.

Esikom feels insulted when it is Ato and not Eulalie who asks about the things she brings them. She is not used to men involving themselves with the preparation of food, least of all educated men. Eulalie's belief in personal choice and personal freedom is strange to Esikom but she is ready to accept her as a daughter in-law. Esikom shows us the compassionate side of her nature when she takes Eulalie into the clan house. She tells Ato:

You have not dealt with us well
And you have not dealt with
your wife well in this...
And we must be careful with
your wife.
You tell us her mother is dead.
If she had any tenderness her
ghost must be keeping watch
over all which happen to her.50

Perhaps the only time a woman is accorded complete respect in African society is when she becomes old enough to be a grandmother. Nana is respected and venerated, her views are sought and listened to. This is because she is close to the ancestors. In African cosmology the ancestors occupy a central position in the world of the living. They are worshipped and consulted in all important matters. Nana is aware of her closeness to the ancestors and her conversations are sprinkled with references to them. For instance, when she wants the lamps lighted, she asks: 'How will he find his way around this dark place should the ghost of one of our forebearers pay us a visit'.[7]

Nana feels she will soon leave this world and pass on to the next where she will have to give an account of what is happening in the world. This is why Nana is so grieved that her grandson Ato has gone and married a black American. She laments to the neighbours:

'I am dreading my arrival there
where they will ask me news of home
shall I tell them or shall I not?
Someone should lend me a tongue
light enough with which to tell my
Royal Dead, that one of their stock
has gone and brought to their sacred
precints The Wayfarer'.4

The character of Nana is well depicted as a drowsy old woman, impatient with the ways of young people. She

does not think well of present day African women who she believes have been spoiled by whiteman's things. In her youthful days a woman immediately cleared away her pots because they were earthenware but now because pots are made of steel they are left laying around carelessly.

Language is the medium of communication in literature. It becomes of extreme importance in drama when a play is being studied as a literary text, because with no action to watch and interpret, the reader has to rely on the dialogues of the characters for the story.

In portraying the position of women in an African society Aidoo presents us with a community in which people interact very closely with each other. We are able to tell the age, sex, and educational background of each character through the way they speak. The speeches of Nana, Esikom, Ato's uncle and aunts, and the two neighbours are that of a people steeped in the tradition of their people. Even though their speeches are written in English we believe they are speaking at traditional language, probably Fanti. For instance when Esikom becomes angry at Ato's lack of appreciation for all she does for him, she tells him 'keep quiet, my son and let me speak now, for something has pricked my wound. My knees are callous with bending before the rich... How my friends must be laughing behind me now'.[30]

Aidoo captures the gossipy nature of the conversations of the two women from who we receive a lot of information about Ato's and Eulalie's marriage. This short extract will illustrate:

2nd W: I crave pardon
For snatching the word
from your mouth
But my sister, roll your
tobacco and stuff your pipe.
It has not been good going,
The roof leaks more than
ever before

1st W: But how can it be?

2nd W: If Nakedness promises
you clothes,
Ask his name.

1st W: But I ask, how can it be?

2nd W: You ask me?

1st W: But you know, my sister,
That my name is lonesome.
I have no one to go and listen
to come back and tell me.

2nd W: Then scoop your ears
of all their wax
And bring them here.
Esikom is not better
than she was.

1st W: Why?

2nd W: They never ask why'.
Is it not the young man's wife?

1st W: What has she done now?

2nd W: Listen, I hear she swallows
money as a hen does corn.

1st W: Oh, Esikom!

2nd W: One must sit down
if one wants to talk of
her affairs.

Aidoo's greatest achievement is the skilful way she achieves a synthesis of the literary potentials of two different languages English and a Ghanaian language.

John Millington Synge who wrote The Playboy of the Western world once said: 'Every speech should be as fully flavoured as a nut or apple.'[3] From the passage quoted above one can see how successfully Aidoo retains the flavour of traditional conversation in her work. This is what makes her portrait of village women so authentic.

As a black American, Eulalie's speech is different. English is her first language but the 'running-tap drawl' which Ato describes her speech does not come across in the play. Aidoo fails here because of what Dapo Adelugba describes as Aidoo's mere 'passing acquiantanceship'[4] with Afro-American English. Aidoo however succeeds with Ato's speech who speaks English as a second language as the writer does herself. Ato's immature quality is well depicted through his speech. He adopts a mocking lecturing stance when addressing the illiterate members of his family:

> Please, I beg you all, listen.
> Eulalie's ancestors were of our
> ancestors. But (warming up)
> as you all know, the white people
> came and took some away in ships
> to be slaves.12

Ato only succeeds in horrifying them even more when they hear Eulalie is a descedant of slaves. There are

other moments when his family would have been glad to have things explained to them in a way they can understand. For instance, when the clan gathers to find out why Eulalie is not pregnant Ato stupidly becomes inarticulate and says nothing. Towards the end of the play Esikom in exasperation asks him:

> But do you never know anything?
> I thought those who go to
> school know everything...

The play ends with echoes of the children's song about the ghost at the junction wondering which way to go. The song is an apt symbol of Ato's dilemma because he is still torn between two civilizations.

Aidoo's skilful use of language can be seen in all her works. But this skill is best demonstrated in the conversations of the rural people. The next play Anowa is another depiction of the status of women in a rural society. It provides us with further insight into other aspects of a woman's life such as her attitude towards work and her religious beliefs.

Anowa

This play is created from a popular folktale which can be found in many cultures of the world with slight variations. It is the story of a beautiful young girl who refuses to marry all the suitors who want her hand in marriage. Then all of a sudden, she decides to marry the most unsuitable young man who comes her way. This is usually an unknown stranger from another land, or the most handsome but untrustworthy young man from her own community. Everyone

is against the marriage, but the young girl stubbornly refuses to listen to advice until she finds out too late that her husband is not the man she thought he was, but some kind of monster who eventually destroys her.

In the prologue to the play, the village old woman tells us that Anowa is like all the 'beautiful maidens in the tales, she has refused to marry any of the sturdy men who have asked for her hand in marriage.'[7] The man Anowa decides to marry is not a stranger but a man who her mother Badua describes as 'this fool' this good for nothing cassava-man, this watery male of all watery males'. The only asset which Kofi has is his good looks - 'This - I-am - the handsome one with a stick between my teeth... in the market... This... This...'[5]

This young man is so worthless that Badua runs out of uncomplimentary names to call him. She feels he will not make a good husband for her daughter because he is not the kind of man who will work to feed his family.

Badua becomes angry when Anowa refuses to be guided by older and wiser people in choosing a husband. She tries to advise Anawa that 'marriage is like a piece of cloth its beauty passes with wear and tear'.[17] This is why one should look for enduring qualities, other then beauty in a marriage partner.

Anowa deciares her stand in shockingly disrespectful language. 'I don't care Mother. Have I not told you that this is to be my marriage and not yours?[17] Anowa feels that her marriage should concern no one but herself. She intends to help Kofi Ako make a success of his life, but Badua is not

convinced that this will happen. After all he had done nothing meaningful with the grove of plam-trees his grandfather had given him nor with the virgin land his uncle has cut for him.

Badua's last warning to Anowa is as potent as a curse:

> But remember, my lady when I am too old to move, I shall still be sitting by these walls waiting for you to come back with your nakedness.18

Anowa is however full of confidence in herself. She believes a woman can be an assistant and a guide for the man she is going to share her life with. Indeed, Anowa is a great help to her husband and he soon becomes a rich man. Their trade in skins at the coast flourishes so well Kofi Ako starts talking of buying some men to help them. For the first time in their marriage, Anowa finds herself in conflict with her husband. She hates the idea of buying slaves, and from now on they disagree on many issues relevant to their life together. Their incompatibility eventually destroys their marriage and each commits suicide.

In this play Aidoo uses a traditional folktale to examine the position of a woman with an inquiring mind in pre-colonial Africa.

The play is divided into three phases. Phase one can be described as the hopeful phase; the second phase is one of crisis; while the third, is the phase of despair.

In the prologue we are introduced to the characters of the village old man and old woman. They act as observers and represent the voices of society. The old man is the voice of reason and individual choice. While the old woman

represents the voice of prejudice and communal restrictions. These two people recall to the mind the two women of the previous play. Through their characterisation Aidoo is able to maintain a reasonable distance from the issues being discussed so that she can present them as clearly as possible.

The opening speech by the old man fixes the time of the story historically -

> When the lords of our Houses sought the protection of those that came from-beyond-the horizon against our more active kinsmen from the north. And also, when This one and That one depended for their well being on the presence of the pale stranger in our midst.[6]

In his convoluted ironical way of speaking the old man reminds us that the colonialists were welcomed by some Africans.

The old woman is more direct in her manner of speaking and gives us an idea of what most of the community thinks of Anowa. That apart from acting like the girl in the folktale, many people feel that she has just allowed her unusual beauty to cloud her vision of the world.'[7] While others think that 'her gods will surely punish Abena Badua for refusing to let a born preistess dance'.[8]

Everyone agrees that Anowa is an unusual kind of girl. The only outlet the community can provide for such an outstanding personality is in the profession of priesthood. Badua however wants her only child to live an ordinary life,

get married, and bec me a real woman of the village, 'happy to see her peppers and onions grow.'[2]

The whole society is outraged not so much by the unsuitableness of the couple as by the fact that Anowa has decided to choose her own husband in a community where marriages are arranged by the elders. The community feels insulted by Anowa's refusal to bow down to its conventions. Thus, contrary to Ojo-Ade's fond belief that feminism or the fight for women's rights only came with Africa's contact with the west the old man assures us that this is not the first time people have rebelled against societal restrictions.[8]

Anowa has her own personal principles of what she considers right and wrong. She rejects the idea of acquiring charms for protection because she humbly believes that 'to have a little something to eat and a rag on our backs is not a matter to approach a god about'.[25]

Anowa is very definite about what she believes in and stands up firmly by her beliefs. She believes that marriage should be a partnership in which the two people involved contribute their best, physically and spiritually. She shares the hardship of regular treks to the coast to sell their skins with Ako. The fact that she is not yet tied down with children makes it easy for her to do so.

Kofi Ako is so inspired by Anowa's behaviour that he promises, 'I shall be the new husband, and you t.e new wife'.[24] It is Anowa who urges them to go just little further in their trek each day. This makes Ako pay her the highest tribute he can think of: 'Anowa you ought to h-ve

been born a man'.[24] Ako is of the belief that only men are capable of such endurance. No one takes account of the harship women generally have to bear, doing the housework, working on the farms, and selling the produce; because all that is considered a woman's job and therefore not commended.

The critical point of their marriage comes when Kofi Ako suggests they buy slaves to help them with their trade. Anowa disagrees. She would rather Ako marries another woman. Coming from a polygamous society Anowa finds it easier to appreciate the advantages of a man having more than one wife. She feels free to suggest this because a person should not hinder a partnership selfishly. But when Kofi Ako keeps on talking about the advantages of buying slaves Anowa forgets her sex so far as to rebuke her husband as a friend and an equal. 'Kofi do not let me hear these words again'.[29]

Kofi Ako instantly becames angry that a mere woman should talk to him in this manner. He asserts his manhood and therefore superiority in the following speech:

> Anowa listen. Now here is something
> I am going to do whether you like it
> or not. I do not even understand
> why you want to make so much noise about
> something like this. What is wrong with
> buying one or two people to help us?
> They are cheap... Everyone does it...
> does not everyone do it? And things would
> be easier for us...
> Anowa who told you that buying men is
> wrong. You know that I like you and
> the way you are different. But Anowa,
> sometimes you are too different. I know
> I could not have started without you
> but after all, we all know you are a
> woman and I am a man.30

Ako feels that being a man gives him the right to prevail in an argument. Now that he is financially secure Ako tries to assume leadership. Moreover, he feels that a mere woman should not question the society's way of doing things. But Anowa's objection to possessing slaves has nothing to do with being a woman she is simply aware of the fact that 'no man made a slave of his friend and came to much himself'.[80] Aidoo places this conflict between the couple in the middle of the play. From now on the relationship between the two changes and deteriorates until their subsequent deaths.

The old man and woman appear at the end of each phase of the play to comment on what is happening. The old woman echoes the opinion of the whole community when she says of Anowa. 'She thinks our forefathers should have waited for her to be born so she could have upbraided them for their miseeds and shown them what actions of men are virtuous'.[41] The old woman is shocked that Anowa can question slavery. Slavery is a norm of the society and Anowa becomes too different when she questions it. Kofi Ako is therefore not being evil when he decides to buy slaves.

Anowa suffers the cruel fate of a woman with an inquiring mind who has to live in a society where a woman is regarded as an inferior creature. She fails to convince her husband that slavery is evil. The only person who tries to understand Anowa is the old man. He reasonably believes that -

> It is not too much to think the heavens might show something to children of a latter day which was hidden from them of old.41

We are given a display of Kofi's wealth. It is ironical that the slaves now carry him about, this is what he earlier promised not to do. Often he 'sits, washed, and oiled like a... bride on show or a god being celebrated'.[54] He goes about with an entourage of his slaves and music in praise of him is played. In contrast, Anowa retains the old wrapper she had worn in the days when she was actively involved with the trade in skins. She refuses to share in a wealth she has not worked for. The playwright indicates Anowa's unhappiness in her laughter which had been unaffected and happy into being hard, gratiny, and ironical. Anowa becomes a shadow of her former vibrant self. She feels there is no logic in leading an idle life when one is still in full possession of his faculties.

Anowa identifies with the slaves and like a slave she lays no claims of ownership on any belongings. Kofi Ako protests, 'but a wayfarer (slave) belongs to other people'.[36] Anowa, however, does not feel there is any difference between being a slave and being a woman. A woman belongs first to her parents and then later to her husband. She is never regarded as a person in her own right. Anowa informs us that it is possible to 'belong to oneself without belonging to a place'.[36] Women and slaves have hopes and desires laying deep within them which no one can take away from them. In the end

women and slaves triumph over their oppressors.

Anowa does not find fulfilment in merely being Kofi Ako's wife, her feeling that there is something wrong with the society makes her restless. Ako accuses her of being 'too fond of looking for the common pain and the general wrong.[33] The community also accuses her of having sold her birthseeds to acquire wealth.

Anowa is not very much concerned about having children. She even wonders if childbearing is profitable when she notices the twin-slaves fanning Ako's empty chair. She imagines how their mother must have suffered to bring them into this world:

> The hour of the breaking of the aminion,
> when the space between her life and death
> wore thin like a needy woman's hair
> thread. O the stench of old blood gone
> hot... Did she go through all that with
> her rest at the end postponed so they will
> come and fan an empty chair.32

Marsye Conde speaking of the works of Aidoo, Grace Ogot, and Flora Nwapa observes that 'in these various female writings, the barreness of the womb seems inseparable from the extreme fertility of the soul'.[9] Indeed, Anowa; Selina in Njau's Ripples in the Pool[8] and Nwapa's Efuru are all women with very strong wills but they are all childless. The explanation of one of the doctors Ako consults is that there is noting wrong with Anowa's womb except that her soul is too restless and this prevents her blood from settling.

Anowa is obssessed with the evil of slavery because of a nightmare she had when a child. In her dream she was the mother of all her people who gushed out of the pores of her

body while the sea threw up giant lobsters (her grandmother had described the while slave traders as boilie lobsters). These fell on her people and ground them into mountains of stone. The most horrifying aspect of the dream is the fact that no one called a stop to such activity. Africans are destroying each other by making slaves of their brothers. While women like Anowa have to stand by and impotently watch this destruction because no one listens to the opinions of women.

It is ronical that the slaves for whom Anowa fights so desparately do not appreciate why she makes herself miserable. Anowa becomes aware of the total isolation her objections bring upon her. The young slave girl's victim consciousness makes her cry out thus:

> Why if I were her
> what would I not do
> what would I not have?
> As much as my eye will
> fancy and the best my
> heart desires.50

Anowa realises that one who has experienced being a slave would have no scruples about enslaving others. This shows how deeply the evil ways of society gets ingrained in both the oppressors and the victims.

Aidoo employ the use of a proverb to describe Anowa's position: 'The string of orphan beads might look better on the wrist of the leopard but it is the antelope who has lost his mother'.[51] Whether or not Anowa dresses like a slave she still shares Ako's culpability in owning slaves.

Kofi Ako feels very uneasy when Anowa is near him. All through the play he feels 'my wife seems to be estraordinary in more things than one.[25] He begins to feel that maybe

people are right when they say Anowa should have been a priestess. He finds he can no longer tolerate Anowa's critical presence and yet he finds he cannot beat her into submission to his will. To get rid of her he threatens to brand her a witch. He knows he can do this because they live in a society where a man's word is always accepted before that of a woman's. The fact that Anowa is childless will simply be enough proof that she is indeed a witch.

Anowa realises that the fault of being childless cannot be hers entirely because Ako has not visited her bed for years. She suddenly stumbles on to Ako's secret. He is impotent. His manhood has been burned out in his passion for wealth. Unwittingly Anowa blurts out the truth while the slaves are listening in to their conversation and Ako is completely humiliated. For one who has little intrinsic moral strength, whose sense of superiority repose entirely in his maleness, this is the end of the road. He immediately commits suicide. The irony of his death is that Anowa finds she cannot live without Kofi Ako and she drowns herself.

Anowa is not a barren exercise in literary form. The artistic achievement lies in the relationship between the playwright's social vision and the unique dramatic way by which she portrays it.

Anowa falls into the category of art theatre. That is, theatre which is more interested in the process of creativity rather than in presenting whatever is acceptable to the tastes of the audience. Though art theatre is concerned with

quality it does not go to the extreme of being merely art for art's sake. Art theatre is also didactic and can be derived from any source. For instance J.P. Clark's Ozidi is taken from an Ijaw legend. While Ola Rotimi's The Gods Are Not To Blame is taken from a play belonging to another culture. Similarly Anowa is inspired by a traditional folktale.

Unlike the simple folktale this play addresses itself to very serious issues which are as relevant today as they were in the past. The play keeps in touch with social reality in its examination of the relationship between men and women; and woman and labour.

The tragedy of Anowa is as a result of the irreconcible characters of the protagonists. Anowa's society is a matrilineal one but it remains male-dominated. Anowa had hoped and worked for a marriage of equals only to find that this cannot be because the African man clings temaciously to the myth of male superiority.

When discussing the stories which comes to her ears about Anowa and her unhapiness, Badua says, 'she should have waited for me to tell her how to marry a man. A good woman does not have a brain or a mouth'.[33] This observation is fatly contradicted by Badua herself, she is very quick in airing her views. It seems that Anowa has inherited this trait from her.

Many African women have very strong characters and feel deeply about various issues which are part of their lives. But society does not encourage their full expression so women have to learn to repress their feelings. Anowa has heard that in 'other lands a woman is nothing. And they let her know this from the day of her birth'. But in her community a girl is allowed a certain amount of freedom until she gets married and then 'in order for her man to be a man, she must not think, she must not talk'.[52] But African women are not at all like that, and it is in reference to Badua's strong character that Anowa asks her to remove her 'witches' mouth from her marriage. Ironically Anowa is also called a witch by her husband and the old woman. This seems to be the only explanation traditional society has for a woman with extra-ordinary strength of character.

Ebele Eko says in an article that daughters like Anowa are not very different from their mothers.[10] Both mother and daughter experience similar frustrations as women in a male dominated society. The only difference being that the young daughter is more daring, more outspoken, and ready to rebel openly against societal restrictions.

Anowa's adamant stance against slavery shows her as a revolutionary fighting for the cause of freedom and justice for all oppressed people. Her rejection of an arranged marriage is part of her fight against the restrictions imposed on the individual. The tragedy of Anowa shakes the community out of its complacency and makes it re-examine its norms and values.

No Sweetness Here

In this diverse collection of short stories the problems of women are presented to us by various narrative voices in different situations. This approach allows Aidoo to pose as an observer pointing out the problems which African women have to confront. But Aidoo's feminism is not isolated from other aspects of African life such as, the superiority complex of the new African elite; Africa's political instability; the anger and impotence of radical Africans, and the problems of adjusting to modern capitalism.

The kind of colonial administration which Africans in British West Africa experienced left a large part of their traditional culture intact. Aidoo in therefore able to give us an authentic picture of the lives of women living in the rural areas. However, Aidoo does not romanticise thelives of women in traditional society.

Women are brought up to believe in the sacredness of the marriage institution, nothing is expected to viclate it. Often, women are expected to sacrifice their dignity and self-respect in order to keep their marriages intact. When Maami Ama in the title story, 'No Sweetness Here' complains of the unfair treatment she receives from her husband, she is told that in a marriage 'a woman must sometimes be a fool'[61]

Maami Ama thus gives voice to the trails of patience a woman suffers in a polygamous household. The rivalry between the wives is made worse by the husband having favourites among them. We find a similar portrayal of a polygamous family in

Mariama Ba's Scarlet Song. In Pathe Ngom's household there is lot of quarrelling among the wives during which the husband remains unconcerned and indifferent. The various wives out of self-protection must of necessity develop sharp tongues.

The price Maami Ama has to pay for her freedom is that her only child must be returned to his father. The reason given is that the boy 'must be of some service to his father too'.[68] Nobody takes in to account the fact that Maami Ama alone toiled to feed, clothe, and educate the child for so many years.

Maami Ama inspite of her rebellion is not able to shake off years of socialization completely and she accepts the decision of the court without bitterness. The decision of the court is even more surprising when we remember that in this particular society a child is supposed to belong to his mother's family. Apparently no matter what the law says judgemement is always in favour of men.

The child becomes a kind of sacrificial lamb in the conflict between man and woman when he dies from a snake bite. The hypocrisy of society is demonstrated when sympathy is for Maami Ama whose 'only water pot has broken'.[74] Earlier on this same community was prepared to deprive Maami Ama of her only child. It appears that in moments of birth and death the bond between mother and child is believed to be very strong. This is acknowledged by society which at other times completely ignores the feelings of mothers.

Ian Reid claims that a good short story 'makes a single impression on the reader, it does so by concentrating on

a crisis.'[11] This is what we find in 'In Gift From Somewhere.' In this story death threatens another child of another lonely woman. This poignant story demonstrates the enormity of the issue of childbirth in the lives of African women. All their energies are concentrated in giving birth to children:

> Now all I must do is to try and prepare myself for another pregnancy, for it seems this is the reason why I was created... to be pregnant for nine of the twelve months of every year....81

Procreation is considered the first duty of women. A woman without a child is considered to have failed herself, her husband, and the whole community. Hence the reader can imagine the despair of Maami Fanti as she sits watching her baby die. She becomes an easy victim of a religious charlatan who stops at her house. He forbids Maami Fanti from eating meat on Fridays for as long as the child lives. Contrary to all expectations the child does live, the mother cannot tell how but is simply grateful for the fact.

Aidoo allows the woman tell us about the miracle herself and we can hear the joy and wonder she feels:

> But do you know, this child did not die. It is wonderful but this child did not. Mmm.... This strange world always has something to surprise us with...81

There are times when women have children out of wedlock and they are frowned upon by the whole society. For such women their lives are ruined because their moral reputation is no longer untainted. This becomes a fault because women are expected to remain pure virgins prior to marriage.

'Something to Talk About On The Way to The Funeral' is about a resourceful woman who refuses to allow the stigma

of being an unmarried mother ruin her life. As a young woman Auntie Araba is put in the family way by the husband of a relative. We are told that Araba's mother did not behave as childishly as some would in a case like this[116], but accepts her daughter back and supports her until the baby Ato arrives. This is a better behaviour to adopt rather than the attitude of the mother who treats her daughter badly 'rained insults on her head daily, refused to give her food and then drove her out of the house'.[116] The reader is left to imagine what will happen to such a girl, bereft of family support and with a child to provide for.

Araba on the other hand went into the bread business and made a great success of it. She ends up being married to a good rich man in the village and is respected by all. This is why she is respectfully called 'Auntie'.

The atmosphere of a communal village is skilfully captured in the conversations of the two women. The writer does not specifically tell us who they are but the reader realise they are well acquainted with the deceased on whom the story is concentrated.

One of the woman informs her friend who has been away from the village about the last days of Auntie Araba. Most of the scandalous details of the story are whispered in the manner of gossipy women: 'Eh-eh, my sister. And now bring your ear nearer'.[116] Hence the reader eavesdrops on their conversation and learns how Araba's relatives were intimidated by the obvious wealth and influence of Ato's

father. He is allowed to claim Ato as his son. The implication in this is that had Ato been a female child he would have remained disowned by his father.

Twice in the story young women become premaritally pregnant and the men involved do not accept their responsibilities. It is not surprising that history repeats itself since society's double standards allow men to go unpunished for their misdeeds. The whole burden of immoral behaviour is placed on the shoulders of women.

When Ato impregnates Mansa and then refuses to marry her, Auntie Araba feels betrayed. Her indomitable spirit finally surrenders and she dies.

Modernity is an unknown quantity for village women, and when they came into contact with it they become bewildered and frightened. All the villagers share the horror of the old woman in 'The Message' when they hear that her granddaughter has had a caesarean operation:

> And anyway how can she live? What is it like even giving birth with a stomach which is whole, then how would she do whose stomach is open to the winds? 38

The fears and hopes of the old woman are revealed to us in the inner monologue she carries on by herself:

> Have they buried her... where? Or did they cut her up.... Now I have remembered I never could travel in a lorry. I always was so sick. These young people will think it is because I am old and they will laugh. At least if I know the child of my child was alive, it would have been... I will give her that set of earrings, bracelet, and chain which Odwunfo Ata made for me...42

In many of her stories Aidoo demonstrates her awareness that as women go through the motions of life, they have different thoughts running through their minds. Sometimes they are in no way connected to the actions of the person. This goes to prove Annette Kolodny's argument that 'women writers are unique for having developed to a high degree the awareness of the under life.[121]

The old woman is further shocked at the disrespectful treatment she receives in the town. In the town people 'have no use for old age so they don't respect it'.[44]

The pace of life in the city is very fast hence the values of the city are very different from that of the villages. Economy is often the push factor which makes people leave for the city. Aidoo like a number of other writers, such as Ngugi, and Bessie Head, lament the desertion of the villagers and the breaking up of families which is caused by this movement. Often the men never return to the villages as we see in 'Certain Winds From the South', and women are left to bear the burden of looking after the children and the farms.

Attacks on the decadent aspects of urban life such as its materialism and individualism are not new in African literature. Aidoo's 'In the Cutting of a Drink' is about a young man who pays a sudden visit to the city and returns with a certain picture of urban women. The story is written in the form of a report in which we find the use of traditional idiom. Even the title is such an idiom. It is a dramtic story told solely from the point of view of a young village man. The narrator acknowledges the presence and involvement of his audience:

> Ei, My little sister are you asking me a question? Oh! you want to know whether I found Mansa? I do not know... Our uncles have asked me to tell everything that happened there, you too! I am cooking the whole meal for you, why do you want to lick the ladle now? 35

The use of traditional imagery makes the report authentic of a village person. Critic John Nagenda, agrees that Aidoo's translations are so accurate 'they have a feel of the original without reference to sentimental Africanisms'[13]

The young man provides a vivid description of his sister in the city:

> I say she was as black as you and I, but her hair was very long and fell on her shoulders like that of a white woman. I did not touch it but I saw it was very soft. Her lips with that red paint looked like a fresh wound. There was no space between her skin and her dress.36

To complete the picture of decadence and immorality, this city woman dances with strange men, and smokes and drinks as well. Male chauvinism is revealed in the young man's conviction that such a woman must be bad. He does not take into account his own drinking habit because society approves drinking for men.

Village folk are ignorant of the forces which motivate women into doing all kinds of things in their attempt to survive in the city. Hence women are judged too harshly.

In the cities everyone joins in the race to accumulate wealth and the foreign goods they can buy with it. Girls like Mercy in 'Two Sisters' sacrifice morality to satisfy their desire for nice dresses and shoes, and the opportunity to ride in luxurious cars. They cannot afford all these

on their humble salaries as typists and teachers so they turn to the men who form the elite class.

Mercy therefore befriends the politicians and high ranking army officers who control the wealth of the nation. Afterall since every other girl she knows has ruined herself prosperously, why shouldn't she?[98]

The Irish playwright, George Bernard Shaw, has a similar attitude towards female prostitution. He does not believe young girls should be blamed for adjusting their moral priorities to suit the society they live in. Indeed vice appears to be more profitable materially than virtue in modern capitalist society.[14]

Nor can the respectability of marriage be recommended, because the extra-marital affairs which most husbands indulge in destroys the harmony needed for contentment. Thus neither connies marriage, nor Mercy's boy friends bring them much satisfaction.

The position of women is tied up with neo-colonial politics. It seems that only by giving out sexual favours to those in power will men allow women a share of the national wealth. There are very few alternatives left to women because not many of them are involved in the decision making. Those of them who belong to the elite class are there by virtue of being either wives or daughters of their menfolk. Thus when the political scene change as it does constantly in Africa, women change their boyfriends from politicians to men of the armed forces.

The sexual exploitation and oppression women suffer goes back a long way in time. In the old days 'the lords take the little girls they liked among the women.'[10] The whitemen did the same when they came to Africa. In present day Africa big men seduce women with their wealth and power. Women are than raped just as the land is raped of all its wealth.

Early in life women are taught to submit to societal demands and forced into being what they do not really want to be. Yaaba in 'Late Bud' is such an example. Subtle psychologisal pressure is brought to bear on her until she succumbs into becoming the kind of female accepted by society. The danger in accepting one's inferiority passively is that it encourages the oppressor to take more and more liberties.

Independence has not improved the likes of the majority of the African people. The title 'For Whom Things Did Not Change' is significant for the young doctor who inspite of his contact with western civilisation still prefers African things.

The title also refers to the old couple whose lives have not changed with the coming of independence. They still have no electricity in their living quarters and they still use a bucket in the lavatory. Things have not changed for the female sex either, women are still regarded as 'slaves of our lords'[10]

In this story Aidoo demonstrates that sexual exploitation is as bad as racial exploitation. Bessie Head in Collector of Treasures suggests that inspite of their experience with colonialism, and apartheid, African men mercilessly exploit

the situation 'which relegated to men a superior position in the tribe, while women are regarded in a congenial sense as being an inferior form of human life.'[15]

In Aidoo's portrayal of Situ we realise that there are women who are very much aware of the way women are being exploited by men and who want to do something about it.

> ... there must be something wrong when young girls who have not seen their blood not many moons gone, go sleeping with men who are old enough to be their fathers and sometimes their gradfathers. Everyone sees them in the land, and no one says anything.10

The work done by women is not appreciated. A woman cooking for the family and doing other menial jobs is regarded with contempt. The situation becomes more complex when Zirigu who has been a cook steward for fifteen years scorns the idea of cooking traditional food. He considers this a woman's job. The young doctor tries to understand such confused reasoning.

> As a man of the land and your wife's husband, you are a man and you do not cook. As a black man facing a white man, his servant, you are black not a man, therefore you can cook.17

In other words when interacting with a white man the black man forgets he belongs to the co-called superior sex. Then it is the colour and power of a man which determines his status.

Oppression caused by either capitalism, racism, or sexism are all the same in that they all deny the human dignity of the individual. Women are therefore faced with a difficult struggle because they suffer from all three forms of oppression.

Kofi in 'Other Versions' realised that women need all the support they can muster to liberate themselves. Women deserve a better status in the society for their hard work, self sacrifice, and endurance. But a lot depends on women themselves. African women must cure the tendency they have of bleaching their skins and wearing wigs because these are all acts of self-denial. 'Everything counts' when a people are trying to rebuild their dignity and belief in themselves.

Each story in this collection portrays oa facet of female life and when taken altogether we have a comprehensive picture of the African woman. From these stories we realise that the contribution of women to the family, and to society at large is neither rewarded nor appreciated. Nor are the lives of women in urban society much better than in the rural areas. In both kinds of socicties women are subjected to the injustices meted out by a male dominated society.

Our Sister Killjoy

The style of this novel is similar to Kofi Awonor's This Earth My Brother.[16] In both novels we find a mixture of actual historical events, anecdotes, autobiography, and invention, all linked together by a narrative which blends prose and poetry together.

But whereas Awoonor's poetic chapters appear to divert the reader's attention from the central plot of the story, Aidoo's poetry is relevant to the message she imparts. The poetic parts are meant to enhance the meaning of the prose passages. As we find a blend of two literary forms in this

novel thus Aidoo connect together two themes to which she is passionately committed. Aidoo links the emancipation of women with the liberation of Africa. A number of problems which confront the African women, and Africans generally are revealed through the observations of Our Sister Killjoy or Sissie. Sissie acts as the writer's mouthpiece.

Sissie goes on a trip to Europe as a member of an international aid group. The journey is partly physical and partly symbolic. In Europe Sissie rediscovers and reaffirms her identity as a woman as well as an African.

The presence of African women in some parts of the western world is still an unusual phenomenon. This is because until recently African women did not have the opportunities their black brothers had of travelling extensively in the west. Sissie is therefore gaped at and pointed out as a 'Black Girl's until she begins to notice how different the European skin is. European complexion has the look of 'pickled pig parts that used to come from foreign places to the markets at home.'[12] Deep inside her Sissie knows that the colour of a person's skin does not matter. But once she is made aware of it Sissie finds it difficult to ignore.

The assignment given to Sissie and other volunteers of the aid group is 'to cover up the bases of pine seedlings with ground turft or peat. To protect them from the coming chill of winter'.[35] This assignment leaves them with a lot of

time for doing other things such as sightseeing and making friends. Sissie becomes friendly with Marija. The reader is warned that 'to those for whom things are only what they seem, Marija is a young Bavarian woman'.[79] But Bavaria is part of Germany which brings to mind Adolf Hitler,his,belief in the superiority of the Aryan race, and his extermination camps. Marija therefore comes from an oppressive race.

In the dialogue below Aidoo establishes the racial relationship between the two women and by implication the relationship between the two women and by implication the relationship between two continents.

'Mary...Mary...Mary. Did you say in
school zey call you Mary?
'Yes'.
'Like me?'
'Yes'
'Vai'
'I come from a Christian family.
It is thename they gave me when
they baptised me.
It is also good for school, and work
and being a lady?
'Mary, Mary... and you an African?
'Yes'
'But that is a German named said Marija
.....
But my brother
They got
Far
Enough
Teaching among other things,
Many other things,
That
For a child to grow up to be a
Heaven-worthy individual
He had to have above all,
a Christian name.
And what shall it profit
a native that
He should have
systems to give
A boy
A girl

Two, Three names or
More 24-26

Here we see how the dialogue merges easily into the narrative and poetry. We realise that these two women come from vastly different backgrounds and therefore may have different ways of looking at things.

The African woman has been taught that only things which are white and European are good. Even God takes on the image of a white old man with a flowing beard. Sissie knows more about European Vegetation than she does African plants because this is what she has been taught in school.

But inspite of her western education Sissis retains her African personality. Her nickname even though dervied from the English term 'Sister' is an affectionate name for one loved and respected by her brothers and sisters. Africans love one another because 'people was all people had.'[123] They have not been side-tracked by imperialist tendencies.

Sissie is constantly invited to Marija's home, where she is plied with food and fruits. Marija's hospitality is the kind Sissie would have offered a stranger back in Africa. Yet the townspeople appear to disapprove of Marija's relationship with Sissie. A mere housewife of a mere factory hand has no right to monopolise the attention of a special visitor like Sissie.

Virginia Woolf once made the observation that a deep relationship between two women is often regarded with suspicion [17] Women are not supposed to love each other while there are men about. To enjoy cooking and serving

a fellow woman as Marija does for Sissie threatens the social order. Sissie's ironic comment to her friends portrays the role of women in society:

> It is not sound for a woman to enjoy cooking for another woman. Not under any circumstances. It is not done. It is not possible. Special meals are for men. They are the only sex to whom the Maker gave a mouth with which to enjoy eating. And woman, the eternal cook, is never so pleased as seeing a man enjoying what she has cooked.77

Relationships between woman and woman is an area of inter-personal relationships which has been neglected by African writers. Rebeka Njau and Ama Ata Aidoo are two writers who venture to explore it in their writings. In Rebeka Njau's Ripples in the Pool Selina falls in love with her sister in-law, Gaciru. Selina toys with the young girl in order to soothe her nerves. Eventually Gaciru is murdered in a fit of jealousy by Selina.

In the relationship between Sissie and Marija, Aidoo examines the circumstances which lead to lesbienism; and the reactions of the African woman when confronted with it.

The stage for the seduction of Sissie is set with great artistic efficiency. After a number of visits from Sissie to Marija's house their relationship becomes more and more intimate.

> Sometimes they sat and talked...
> At other times, they just sat, each with her own thought. Occasionally, one of them would look up at the other. If their eyes met, they would smile. At the end of each day, she returned to the castle later than she had done the previous evening. 40

All the while Sissie unconsiously assumes the role of the superior partner as in a relationship between a man and a woman. Marija becomes so vulnerable to Sissie's moods that the latter experiences 'the inhuman sweet sensation to see another human being squirming'. This has always ('been an exclusive masculine delight'.[76] Men reserve the right to be the ones to inflict pain on others.

On one of her visits Sissie is invited to inspect the house. As the two women go round to look at the bedroom Sissie feels as though 'she was moving, not up, but down into some primeval cave... Sissie was convinced she had no right to be there'.[63]

She realises that Marija has been using her when the German girl attempts to have a lesbian affair with her. Sissie complains of this unwholesome development:

> You make friends with a woman. Any woman. And she has a child. And you visit the house. Invited by the woman certainly. Every evening for many days. And you stay many hours on each occasion but you still never see the husband and one evening the woman seizes you in her embrace, her cold fingers on your breast, warm tears on your face, hot lips on your lips, do you go back to your village in Africa and say...what do you say, even from the beginning of your story that you met a married woman? No it would not be easy to talk of this white woman to just anyone at home. 64-65

Such a relationship is forbidden in African. The writer devotes a lot of attention to Sissie's relationship with Marija so that the reader becomes aware of Sissie's pyschological development. From an unquestioning acceptance

awards that Europeans get much of their information about Africa which is later used against them.

Aidoo is particularly concerned with the plight of * African women overseas. They suffer as the less privileged sex and as second class citizens in an alien country. The ridiculous way African women dress in Europe is described with an artist's eye for detail:

A blue scarf
to cover the head and the ears,
A brown coat lined with
cream synthetic fibre
some frilly blouse
its original whiteness compromised.
A red sweater
with a button missing.
An inch or two of black skirting
showing under the coat.
An umbrella,
chequered green, red, and blue.
A pair of stockings that are too
light for a chocolate skin
A pair of cheap shoes,
Never-mind-what-colour
But
cheap. 88-89

Women continue to remain in Europe suffering in climate they are not used to. Being a woman anywhere in the world is not an easy thing -

In Asia
Europe
anywhere

For here
under the sun;
Being a woman
Has not
Is not
Never will be
a child's game [61]

This is why many women like Marija prefer their children to be boys. Apart from this general attitude the African woman has little in common with her European counterparts. At one time or another all the white race has joined forces to oppress the black people.

African women should beware of the white woman who spoke with such earnestness, such frightening intensity, she could have passed for a soul sister, but for her colour and our history'.[93]

The values of black women are very different from that of Europeans. In the passage below Sissie puts forward the views of a black woman who comes from a civilization built on continuity. She speaks from within a race which has survived all harrassments:

> My Dear brother,
>
> I have been to a cold strange land where dogs and cats eat better than many many children; and yet would rather die then shake the hands of other men. Where women who say they have no time to bear children and spoil their lives would sit for hours and feed baby dogs delicate food with spoons, and make coats to cover the hairy and brothers and are 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.[105]

This passage is addressed to Sissie's African brothers who see in the famous heart transplant in a white man with the heart of a black man the sign of the universal brotherhood of man. People like Kunle see nothing wrong in a black man dying to keep a white man alive. Neither does this answer the

problem of apartheid. Apartheid is the abuse of political power, 'power to decide who is to live, who is to die, where, when, How'.[13] And because in the difference of the collur of a man's skin, the white race 'see an excuse to be mean'.[13]

Female writers such as Aidoo, Bessie Head, and some others, are very concerned about the misuse of power. Absolute power seems to go hand in hand with oppression and exploitation.

Sissie's agile mind leaps from one topic to another, from one continent to another without affecting the unity of the novel. Nothing escapes Aidoo's critical eyes. She does not forget the various atrocities perpetrated on Africa - the slave trade, colonialism, apartheid are all touched upon. The writer reveals the hypocrisy in the policies pursued by the west.

> Burning people's farms, poisoning their rivers and killing all their trees and plants as part of the effort to save them from a wicked philosophy.
>
> Supplying brothers with machine guns and other heavy arms because you want to stop them from slaughtering one another.
>
> Making dangerous weapons that can destroy all of the earth in one little minute, in order to maintain peace'.116

It is ironical that Africans flock to the west to seek salvation from their problems when Europeans seems bent on destroying not only themselves but the whole world. This is why Africans must return home after they complete their studies.

Aidoo understands the passion Africans have for certificates because back home 'they only begin to treat you like a human

being when you have a doctorate degree'. The situation in Africa is absurd, those who had barely managed to get their first degrees now insist on employing only those with three or more degrees.

There are many aspects of life in Africa which intellectuals find discouraging. The lack of facilities to carry out important projects, but worse of all is the ineptitude of African leaders. A lurid picture is painted of African leaders who spend half their time abroad with their European wives while -

> Champagne sipping Ministers and Commissioners
> sign away mineral and timber concessions
> in exchange for yellow wheat which people
> cannot eat.[33]

African is a land where the rich bourgeoisie are unconcerned with the welfare of the masses 'conscious only of riches which they gather in a coma'.[34] There is the poverty and lack of development in the rural areas and a host of other problems to which the leaders turn a blind eye 'while they live their big lives within'.[34]

Ama Ata Aidoo's heroine does not deny that there are many problems in Africa. Nor does she expect there to be easy solutions to the problems.

Indeed her list of problems recalls to the mind the works of her compatriots, Ayi Kwei Armah and Kofi Awoonor. But while Armah's writing is preoccupied with scenes of decay, frustration, and defeat; for Aidoo, the act of writing is not an act of despair but an act of faith in herself, and in her people. Her criticism is motivated by love and commitment to African and to the African woman.

Neither does Sissie suffer the insocurity of Amamu in Awoonor's This Earth, My Brother. Sissie knows who she is, where she comes from, and where she hopes to go. Sissie's man describes her as 'A concerned type, with some radical political ideas....with lots of naive enthusiasm'.[127] She is also accused of lacking 'Feminine instincts'. Men try to use chauvinistic arguments in an attempt to forestall women from criticising them.

In the past African women had to stand by and watch her children being taken away as slaves; being conscripted into foreign armies; and now, they go away to study in foreign lands. The African woman has suffered but she is now prepared to fight for what is hers. The struggle however is not so much against Europeans but against Africans themselves, especially those who have been enticed away by foreign vested interests. It seems that the best 'brains' are the ones staying away. They believe that by doing so they prove to those at home how successful they are.

Yet Sissie insists they return to Africa because the white man will never acknowledge their worth:

> Sp 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 a miracle worker. Their faith
> (will be) in your human touch.130

All the while Sissie talks to her brothers there is a white audience in the form of their white girl friends. This is when she becomes aware of the need to find a new language of communicating with her black brother. The foreign

languages used by Africans only enslaves them further and puts them under the constant observation of the west.

The black man and woman are going through a period of hate and alienation from each other. The African man feels that present day African woman has lost the virtues of meekness of the real traditional women. They have absorbed the victorian notion that African women should behave like 'the dolls the colonizers brought along with them who fainted at the sight of their own bleeding fingers'. 117 The position of the African woman is much more complex than this. She has experienced too much hardship for her to be weak now. Women cannot throw away their principles because to do so is to loose their identity. Inspite of everything their, there is still some positive aspects in the African way of life; if Africans are willing they can find them again:

> 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. Otherwise, there will be so much bitterness, we shall never know there was anything else around.115

Sissie's criticisms cause a quarrel between her man and her. Inspite of this the letter which she writes to him explaining her motives is filled with terms of endearments, 'My Love', 'My Dear', 'My Precious' and so on. Ojo-Ade agree that there is a deep love binding the African man and woman together which Aidoo has ably portrayed in this novel'.[17]

Hence Aidoo's heroine has a definite contribution to make. She awakens in African man and woman a new awareness of each other and of their civilization, so that they can assert themselves to act, imagine, and love together.

FOOTNOTES

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CHAPTER 4

THE WRITINGS OF MARIAMA BA

Mariama Ba's first novel So Long a Letter received the first Noma Award for publishing in Africa in 1980. Both So Long a Letter, and Scarlet Song, which was published posthumously after her death in August 1981, are powerful and fearless statements against social injustices suffered by women. An ardent supporter of women's rights, Ba records with great penetration the reactions of women in a polygamous society. She is concerned with the choices women make in their search for personal happiness and fulfilment.

So Long a Letter

The letter of the title narrates how Rematoulaye (Rama) survives emotionally, economically, and socially after Modu marries a second wife. The act of writing the letter to Aissatou serves as a means of assuaging the grief she feels as a result of her alienation from, and the subsequent death of Modu. Rama reflects on the life she lived with Modu in a series of fleshbacks, right from their courtship days to the time she is summoned to the hospital to identify his body. Some of her memories are sweet, others are bitter.

The friendship between Aissatou and Rama is a very special one. They have shared much of their lives together. They had 'walked the same paths from adolescence to maturity.[11] They had married men who are best of friends so that even after their marriages they are still on warm intimate terms because they continued to share their activities with each other.

Aissatou is therefore in a position to understand and sympathise with Rama.

Mariama Ba is very much interested in the idea of romantic marriage. In such a marriage a couple pledge themselves to each other, for better or for worse. But this is a western ideal which has its basis in the Christian religion and its doctrine of one man one wife. This idea is alien to Africa where the system of polygamy is practiced.

The marriages of Aissatou and Rama are contrary to traditional conventions which demand that marriages should be arranged by the elders and on the payment of dowries to the girl's family.

Roma remembers how she met Modu in a dance and the moment. She saw him she knew he was the man she had been waiting for all her life. Modu was clever , eloquent, and with the ability to 'fathom every thought, every desire'[13] of Rama's. They were perfectly suited to each other. Theirs was love at first sight. They get married against the wishes of Roma's parents and so the wedding is not celebrated with pomp. No dowry is paid either. But contrary to all expectations for twenty-five years their marriage is a happy one and they are blessed with twelve children. Aissatou's marriage is also against traditional custom. As a goldsmith's daughter she marries out of her class when she chose Mawdo for her husband.

Like Aidoo's heroine Anowa, these two women regard marriage as a matter of personal choice. This concept of choice is significant in the novels of Mariama Ba. Words such

as, 'I wished', 'to choose', 'I have decided' 'the choice' recur again and again in So Long a Letter while in Scarlet Song, though we find such words recurring with less frequency, important choices are nevertheless being made throughout the novel. Choice is important for the individual's happiness and fulfilment. The right to decide how to live their lives should be the right of all women. Ba believes that 'each woman makes of her life what she wants'[87]

Hence, when Rama and Aissatou chose to go to school they chose to become pioneers of the promotion of African women. Western education for women was not seriously considered until the arrival of female missionaries. Rama and her generation therefore feel indebted to the white headmistress. They were all 'destined for the same mission of emancipation'[15] of the African woman.

Education freed women from frustrating traditional restrictions, and taught them to make their own decisions. However, these new African women were not quite welcomed. They were called 'scatter-brained' and labelled as 'devils' but men also found them captivating. This is what makes men like Mawdo risk the displeasure of his mother by marrying Aissatou. In the mood of the new generation of Africans he declares that 'Marriage is a personal thing.[17] It is ironic that soon after this declaration he allows his mother persuade him into another marriage.

Mawdo's mother acts as a custodian of tradition when she energetically finds a 'suitable' wife for her son. She herself had brought up young Nabou in the traditional way.

Nabou has been taught that the first virtues a woman should possess is docility and obedience.

Traditional custom encourages polygamy. Earlier writers like Flora Nwapa upheld this idea in their works. In Efuru one of her characters says 'only a bad woman likes to be married alone by her husband'.[174]

The traditional heroine of Okot Bptek's Song of Lawino also suggests that there is no harm in polygamy if the competition for the husband's attention is fair. But rarely do women get a fair chance in a polygamous system.

Rama is shocked by the knowledge that Modu wants to marry another wife after all the love and devotion she has given him for years. She is further humiliated by the fact that her rival is the young friend of her daughter Daba.

In an article on Bas novels Irene Almeida explains Ba's conviction that 'happiness, woman's, man's, and the whole society's must be based on a monogamous marriage, that is a close association between two equals, the sharing of pains and joys, hopes and so on'.[3] This is indeed necessary because once a man has more than one wife he becomes totally indifferent to the other one.

The outcome of Rama's decision to remain with Modu is that she is neglected like a worn-out or out-dated Boubou'.[40] The writer uses a familiar item of clothing to describe Rama's position. Rama's decision is dictated by the love she still has for Modu, and what she understands of polygamy in a Muslim society. She therefore prepares herself for equal sharing according to the precepts of Islam.

In Islam if a man marries more than one wife then 'his treatment of each must be absolutely equal. It will be his duty to make identical provisions for each wife and her children, and spend the same period of time with them'.[4] But the Quran which is supposed to act as guide for Muslims warms against the dangers of polygamy:

> If you fear that you will not be able to do justice, then marry only one.[5]
>
> You are never able to be fair and just between women, even if it is your ardent desire but turn not away from a woman altogether so as leave her hanging in the air.6

One is therefore not convinced when Modu says that God has destined him to marry a second wife. Neither does Mawdo's claim that he married Nabou to please him mother ring true. Neither religion nor custom can force men to marry if they do not want to. The truth of the matter is when faced with the youthful freshness of girls like Nabou and Binetou men 'compare what he had with what he no longer has, what he has with what he could have'.[41] Then he r[illegible] himself ridiculous trying to hide his grey hairs and restraining his sagging waistline.

Men apparently lack a sense of loyalty and faithfulness where their wives are concerned. Women look upon marriage as a sacred institution which ensures companionship and procreation. They conceive love as a spiritual rather than a physical activity. Only such a view of marriage can ensure that the rights of women be preserved. And the work of procreation be carried out with dignity.

Man's inability to control his sexual appetites causes him to violate the marriage institution again and again. The effect of man's infidelity can be seen in yet another example Mariama Ba provides in the novel.

Jacqueline Diack forsakes parents, country, and religion to marry Samba Diack only to discover him being unfaithful to her. Ba elaborates on the idea of intermarriage in Scarlet Song where we meet a white girl who undergoes a lot of mental suffering when her husband marries a second wife. Both women end up with a nervous breakdown.

Aissatou leaves her husband when he marries Nabou. She does not believe his protestations that he only married Nabou out of duty to his mother and that he still loves only Aissatou. She finds it impossible to draw a line between heartfelt love and physical love...'. 'There can be no union of bodies without the hearts acceptance however little that may be,'[31] she says.

Ba's attitude towards polygamy is uncompromising, she feels that it is simply for the 'sake of variety'[34] that men are sexually unfaithful to their wives. Ba finds men weaker than woman in this aspect. They allow themselves to be ruled by their instincts rather than reason.

Ojo-Ade does not feel that divorce is the answer in such a situation. One wonders if the situation is reversed and it is women who are unfaithful to their husbands, if he would advocate for 'solidarity' within the couple. Ojo-Ade argues that wives should stay with their husbands even when

their love and trust are betrayed. In doing so she can go on feeling 'the presence of the human face near her late at night and in times of trouble.[17]

But, unfortunately even this is not possible, there is no difference between the lives of Aissatou who divorces her husband, and Rama who stays married to hers. Both of them and up being lonely single parents.

Working in the Senegalese Embassy in the United States, Aissatou is besieged by men 'seaking light enjoyment and easy relationships'.[54] This is because it is generally believed that single women are always ready for such relationships. For Rama after the death of her husband there is a parade of suitors who for different reasons propose marriage to her. She however stands firm by her objection to polygamy.

In refusing to marry Tamsir Rama once again fights against traditional customs which try to dictate to her what she should do with her life, and which try to restrain her freedom as an individual. Traditional custom recommends the brother of the deceased to marry the widow but Rama does not agree:

> You forget that I have a beart, a mind, that I am not an object to be passed from hand to hand. You don't know what marriage means to me: it is an act of faith and of love, the total surrender of oneself to the person one has chosen and who has chosen you.58.

For Rama marriage is more a thing of choice rather than something done in obedience to traditional demands. She

She also turns down Dieng's proporal because she does not want to be the alienating factor between Dieng and his other wife.

Jane Austen portrays in her novels the fact that economic factors often push women into contracting uncongenial marriages. Unequiped to earn their living women often have no choice but to marry men who can provide for them. Binetou and Nabon marry man who already have wives for different reasons.

Young Binetou is pushed into marrying Modu because he made it very obvious the things he could do for her poor parents. Binetou comes from one of the poor districts of Dakar where her mother is constantly shouting about her hunger and her thirst to live'.[14] By agreeing to marry Modu she and her parents could now move out of poverty into comfort.

The price Binetou has to pay is that her education is stopped and she is condemned to live with a man old enough to be her father. Hers becomes the meaningless life of a corsetted and pampered woman who is treated like a toy.

Nabou on the other hand is brought up to obey her elders. She therefore offers no resistance when she is married off, to Mawdo. Unlike Binetou, Nabou works as a midwife and thus has no time to worry about her 'state of mind'. Her exposure to the outside world and the responsibilities of her profession gives her poise and confidence in herself. She is therefore not completely dependent on her husband.

Ba says work is necessary for every individual whether male or female, because it helps one's self esteem:

> Each profession, intellectual or manual, deserves consideration wh. th.r it requires painful physical effort or manual dexterity, wide knowledge or the patience on an ant.[23]

Therefore housewives too deserve praise for the domestic work they do in the home. Ba sees the management of the home as an 'art' which has to be learnt like every other work. The art of managing the family budget to feed and clothe its members is no easy feat.

Many women apart from looking after the house and family contribute to the family budget by taking on another job outside the home. These outside jobs become of great importance when a woman is separated from her husband, or widowed and has to fend for herself and her children.

Mariama Ba gives special consideration to the teaching profession. Since this profession is regarded as feminine work it has lost much prestige in the eyes of the public when compared to for instance engineering or administration. Ba sees the teaching profession as 'a job of daily feats, never praised, never decorated but everywhere plants the flag of knowledge and morality'.[23] Ba sees women as the guardians of society's morals.

In a powerful ode to knowledge Mariama Ba acknowledge the inspiration women find in books:

> The power of books, marvellous invention of man's astute intelligence. Various signs, associated into sounds; different sounds moulding the word. Arrangement of words from which idea, thought, history, science,

> life, spring out. Unique instrument of relationship and culture, unequalled means of giving and receiving. Books knit together generations in the same continuous labour towards progress.51

This is exactly what this novel itself does for women. By writing it Ba attempt to enhance the female position in a prediminantly Moslem male-oriented society. It can also act as a record for future reference when there is need to examine what changes have developed in the status of women.

Contrary to Ojo-Ade opinion about Mariama Ba's feminism, hers is not a 'progressive striving to become a man'.[8] One of the most important [illegible] which only women can perform is being a mother. This is an aspect of feminity which women are very proud of and which they have no intention of giving up.

Rama recalls old proverbs to illustrate her role as a mother, 'The mother of a family has no time to travel. But she has time to die'. In trying to cope with the different demands of her various children, she reminds herself that 'being born of the same parents is like spending the night in the same bedroom'.[76]

In this manner Rama delves into the storehouse of her people's saying to find bits of wisdom to help her cope with her daily responsibilities. This becomes necessary when some of her daughters take up the habit of smoking and another one gets pregnant.

Rama is presented as an example of noble, dignified, and resilient womanhood She is a capable and careful

mother of her children. She feels the indiscriminate sexuality in magazines and films has done much harm to the younger generation. Modern mothers therefore take care to explain that the availability of contraceptives should not lead to indiscriminate sexual affairs. Young girls suffer most in cases of premarital sex. For instance young Aissatou is likely to be thrown out of school while the boy who made her pregnant stands no such risk. Ba feels intensely about the unfairness of this: 'when will there be a lenient law to help erring school girls whose condition is not camouflaged by long holidays'.[85] Like Ama Ata Aidoo Ba's reaction to such unfortunate cases is compassion and support for the young mother. The nobility of motherhood is poetically reaffirmed in the passage below:

> One is a mother to lighten the darkness. One is a mother to shield when lightening streaks the night, when thunder shakes the earth, when mud bogs one down. One is a mother in order to love without beginning or end.[86]

Disappointment in marriage does not destroy Rama's faith in the institution. Man and woman are complementary to each other and therefore necessary for each other. 'Love imperfect as it may be in its contents and expression remains the natural link between these two beings'.[88] Throughout the novel Ba does not hide woman's need for man but she strongly feels that women should be respected as human beings with fears, and hopes, and desires.

Ba is not as narrowminded as a number of her critics accuse her. She demonstrates an awareness that there are

men who support the rights of woman. A male character Daouda Dieng explains what she hopes for women:

> Woman must no longer be decorative accessories, objects to be moved about, companions to be flattered or calamed with promises. Women are the nation's primary, fundemental root, from which all else grows and blossoms. Women must be encouraged to take a keener interest in the destiny of the country.62

In narrating Rama's conversations with Dieng to Aissatou, the writer skifully utilize the medium of this letter to discuss matters of personal and national significance. This is the unique literary achievement of this novel.

The intimacy of a private letter is successfully maintained through the direct style of the narration:

> I know that I am shaking you, that I am twisting a knife in a wound hardly healed.55

It is a sincere kind of friendship which makes this letter possible. A friendship which has 'splendours that love knows not. It grows stronger when crossed, where obstacles kill love. Friendship resists time, which wearies and severs couples.[84]

Rama speaks of all the thoughts which occupy her mind. She is scathing about the ostentations display of wealth during births, marriages, and deaths. She is all for pan-African solidarity and regrets the breaking up of regional groupings.

Even earlier than the influence of western education is the influence of Islam on Rama. Her deepseated devotion to Islam colours her ideas on life:

> My heart concurs with the demands of religion. Reared since childhood in their strict precepts I expect not to fail.8
>
> No, I would not give in to pressure. My mind and my faith reject supernatural power.49

The writer rejects all ideas and attitudes which are to the detriment of women. Rama aspires to be a progressive modern woman but she does not advocate the complete breakdown of the old social order. She believes Islam should be kept as the sacred basis of her society but she also realises that it is often used by society to undermine the position of women.

Often Rama is torn between change and tradition. Many woman who belong to a generation which can still remember the past African way of life and who are aware of the advantages of modernity often experience this kind of confusion. There is a hint that the younger generation of women are going to be more radical in their demands. For instance Daba does not consider marriage a chain. 'It is a mutual agreement over life's programmes. So if one of the partners is no longer satisfied with the union, why should he remain? The wife can take the initiative to make the break.[75]

Daba and her husband share every aspect of their lives together and this is an optimistic sign for future harmony between man and woman.

Ba is aware that the struggle for the rights of women is difficult because 'the field of our gains is unstable,

the retention of conquests difficult: social constraints ever-present, and male egoism resists.[88] However the success of the struggle is important not only for women but for men as well becouse the success of the nation depends on the happiness of every individual.

Scarlet Song

Mariama Ba's reputation as a novelist is established beyong doubt with the publication of this second novel. Scarlet Song followw a chronological order of events. The novel is about a young Senegalese student who falls in love with a white French girl, who is a fellow student.

Ousemane Gueye comes from a poor family living in the slum district of Usine Niari Talli. This is very different from the aristocratic French background Mireile de Valee comes from. However, their differences are completely forgotten in the happiness the young couple find in each other.

Their idyllic love affair is brought sharply to an end when Mareille's father comes across a photograph of Ousmane. The inscription behind - 'To my beloved Mireille, Ousmane, reveals the kind of relationship which exists between them. Mireille's father reacts violently when she tries to explain her feelings for Ousmane. She had dreamed of the possibility of marrying Ousmane because her father had always preached for fraternization between the French and the Senegalese. He had remained silent when his colleagues in the foreign service made inide remarks about Africans.

Shocked and disillusioned, Mireille realise that the violence in her father's domineering personality is roused not by any personal dislike of Ousemane but rather by his general aversion to the whole black race. There is a difference between preaching the equality of all men, and practising it. Mireille's parents bring her up to believe in the liberal bourgeois ideals of freedom and equality of all men, only for her to find out that there are certain areas which are taboo. These include the fact that one does not marry a blackman.

Mireille is inspired by the strength of her love for Ousmane and tries to defend the African:

> Because of him and his fine qualities, I have rejected all those old assumptions that are drummed into us by racist anecdotes; the grinning primitive Negro of the 'Banania' adverts; the educationally sub-normal Negro, the pudgy-faced, round-eyed Negro! I'll take them all on.29

When Mireille refuses to give Ousemane up she is sent away to France. Yet inspite of this separation Mireille is prepared to wait until she comes of age to marry Ousemane because 'her heart was now inspeperable from the one to whom she had given her body'.[22]

At the end of their studies in their respective countries, Ousmane goes to Paris and returns with Mireille as his wife. The reactions of Ousmane's parents differ from each other. Djibril Gueye accepts his son's marriage with pious fatalism - it is the will of Allah. On the other hand his mother Yaye Khady is stunned by the event. She makes her disapproval very clear to the young couple.

The differences in colour of skin, and culture, and the desire of man to dominate woman brings about the conflict in the novel. The final crisis comes when Mireille finds out that Ousmane has married a second wife. Mireille becomes mentally deranged. The story ends tragically when Mireille poisons her son and grievously injures Ousmane.

Scarlet Song like So Long a Letter is likely to be regarded as an attack on the practice of polygamy. Such an interpretation would agree with Femi Ojo-Ade's opinion that they are attacks on male chavinism because Ba regards men as the enemies of women.

Indeed Mariama Ba is interested in the relationships between man and woman. In this novel she is particularly interested in how intermarriages affect the happiness of the individual, and the society as a whole.

The novel is divided into three parts. The first part of the novel is devoted to the romance of Ousmane and Mireille. The novelist's description of the initial love affair between the young coupe does not take into consideration the racial or cultural differences between them. This comes in the second part of the novel, when Ousmane and Mireille make their choices. In the third part, the relationship between them deteriorates until it culminates in tragedy. The novelist makes no attempt to break away from the solid tradition of the realistic linear novel.

The whole narrative revolves around the intermarriage of Ousmane and Mireille. This is a marriage which cuts across religious, racial, and cultural boundaries. The obvious difference in skin colour makes for an unfavourable

societal attitude towards the intermarried couple. Both Mireille's parents and Ousmane's people are against the marriage. Ousmane's friends and family express in various ways their 'horror and disgust at what the stranger would bring in their midst'.[38] They do not believe a couple can build a future without a shared past.

Yaye Khady's complaint is that inspite of Mireille being her daughter in-law, she will automatically assume a position of superiority over her because she is white. Yaye Khady asks, 'Has anyone ever seen a white woman pounding millet or fetching buckets of water? On the contrary the white woman explots others who have to do the jobs for her that she's not used to doing'.[73] This opinion of Mireille is as a result of those years when the wives of the colonial administrators lorded it over black men and women.

Yaye Khady wants a daughter in-law who would live in the family house and help with the domestic work. Yaye Khady is portrayed as an ordinary traditional woman who is versed in the customs of her people. Her opinion of Mirielle is therefore shared by all her people.

Mariama Ba captures the communal atmosphere of the district where Ousmane's parents live in the passage below:

> Usine Niari Talli enfolded him.
> Yaye Khady's love was echoed in
> the hearts of all the women of the
> neighbourhood, all mother's by proxy,
> ready to wipe his chronically running
> nose, surrogate mothers, always watching
> over him.37

Traditional women are very close to each other, troubles are shared as well as happy events. It is not

surprising that Yaye Khady feels Mireille will be a liability instead of an asset.

Mireille's position as a white woman is made worse by her inability to communicate directly with people. This language barrier does not help the relation between Mireille and Yaye Khady.

Yaye Khady visits the young couple frequently, intruding even the privacy of their bedroom. She deliberately spits on Mireille's carpets and causes friction between Mireille and Ousmane. However, 'Khady should not be seen as a bad woman. Everyone agrees she is full of 'sontura'. Ba often employs the use of traditional terms because this is the only way to communicate the African sensibility. 'Sontura' is the quality of decency, respectability, and sobriety all embodied in one person.

Yaye Khady assures us that she does not want to set herself up as her daughter in-law's rival. She simply wants to rescue her son from the clutches of the white woman. Khady's attitude towards Mireille is as a result of the colour of her skin, she sees the white woman as an usuper of what belongs to the African woman.

From all sides Mireille faces hostility and opposition. Ousmane's friends would visit without prior invitation and expect to be fed and waited on. Then they would talk about the disadvantages of mixed marriages and loudly praise Ousmane for remaining faithful to his friends, family, and religion inspite of having a white wife. They could not care less about Mireille's feelings. Only the feelings of

the master of the house are important.

Ali's wife comes to Mireille's aid. She tries to initiate Mireille into the Senegalese life style and supports her instructions with proverbs.

> Go and visit your parents in-law without your husband. They will appreciate the trouble you have taken and the fact that no one is behind you, forcing you... From time to time send Dijibril Gueye dishes that you have specially prepared for him. We have a saying 'The Mouth that chews is always grateful to the hand that provides.96

So Mireille gives money to her family in-law and prepares dishes of food for Djibril Gueye. But her different cultural upbringing intrude on these attempts at friendship. Yaye Khady is ashamed of the smallness of the portions of food Mireille sends to her husband.

All the while Ousmane ignores Mireille's attempts at adjusting to a different culture. He arrogantly feels it is her duty as a wife to do so; 'when you marry a man you also take on his life-style'.[86]

Being the woman, the less important partner in the marriage, Mireille is expected to do all the adapting that has to be done. He finds fault with her when she inadvertently offends his people.

His cousin Lamine describe Ousmane's attitude in a nutshell: 'You want happiness without making any sacrifices. You won't make any concessions, while demanding concessions from others'.[99]

'Intermarried persons, however capable and intelligent they maybe require far more courage and strength of spirit

to make a go of their marriage, than is true of partners in all other marriages', says Albert Gordon in his research work Intermarriage. For a couple like Ousmane and Mireille compromise becomes not only a necessity but a must. As far as cultural differences go they can be overcome by the people involved. Lamine's and Pierette's marriage succeeds because they are both prepared to compromise. Men with less perception feel that Lamine lives under his wife's domination, that he has been assimilated by his French wife. However, where Lamine is concerned his negritude 'was neither a defect to be eradicated nor a value to be proved, but something to be accepted and lived with, without obsession...'[98]

Ousmane on the other hand, feels that any compromise with Mireille will be interpreted as surrender to her western bourgeois ideas. He b comes more and more obsessed with his traditional culture. He extols the wisdom of Africa folktales, legends, and the beauty of African music:

> The tomtom is the black man's whole life bursting forth in sheaves of sound: the rhythms of the sowing season, the harvest time, rhythms of rain and baptisms and prayers; and sometimes even the rhythm of death.91.

Such effusive description of what African music means to Ousmane does not sound true. It sounds as if he is making a speech to an audience instead of talking to his wife. One begins to realise that Ousmane is merely using pride in culture to camouflage what is really the male desire to dominate woman. He brings all kinds of subtle pressure to bear on Mireille until she feels that he wants to 'bury her alive and ressurect her as another woman'.[99]

A common feature of Mariama Ba's writing is the frequent use of metaphors. The love letters Ousmane writes to Mireille during their courtship days are later described as lies which are like hideous serpents that twined round her'[163] threatening to destroy her mind.

Alone in a foreign land, forsaken by the man she loves Mireille's mind is stretched beyong the limits of endurance and she becomes mad. The first thing she destroys is their child who is a symbol of a union that has not withstood the test of time.

The title of the novel is also another metaphor. Ba poetically describes Ousmane's blood from the injuries Mireille inflicts on him as 'the blood flows from the wounds like a sad song of shattered dreams of happiness. Women need all their mental strength in their search for happiness in a male-oriented, male-dominated world.

Three important factors affect the way women see themselves. These are - their economic situation, the kind of education they are exposed to, and the cultural environment they come from. Mariama Ba's female characters especially Mireille, Yaye Khady, and Oulaymatou provide us with three different portraits of women influenced by the factors enumerated above.

Mireille has a strong will of her own. She refuses to be dominated by a man. This is demonstrated by her marrying Ousmane against the wish of her father. Being as well educated as her husband she considers herself 'as her husband's equal, she would challenge his ideas and decisions when these did not suit her. She considered she was his

partner in the marriage. She would discuss matters on an equal footing. She honoured her obligations but knew her rights and stood up for them'.[148]

Even though they come from very different backgrounds Mireille and Yaye Khady are similar in characters. Khady is the picture of a traditional African woman. She has her own individual opinion about things. The only wife of her husband, she manages the family budget alone. Her ideas on the upbringing of sons is very different from her neighbours. She taught Ousmane to help her with the domestic work. She feels free to disagree with her husband on certain issues. For instance when Djibril Gueye suggests that Ousmane marry his niece Yaye Khady disagrees vehemently. She drives her point home with a proverb 'Let the Billy goat choose his own mate'.[57] While Mireille's mother faints when her husband decides to cut Mireille out of their lives, Yaye Khady fights with every weapon at her disposal for her son.

Mireille's Mother has been brought up on the idea of female obedience to the will of man by the convent nuns. Her submission to her husband is so complete, she accepts everything her husband says and even repeats them to guests like a pet parrot. For years she waits on her husband, anticipating his slightest wish. For years she surbodinates her own personality to her husband, she 'has no thought of her own, no initiative'.[78] Her inability to stand up for herself makes her loose her daughter for ever.

The conflict between Ousmane and Mireille does not therefore have its roots in the differences of their racial background but rather in the differences of their sex. This

is demonstrated by the fact that Ousmane is contemptuous of his wife's efforts at adaptation. When Ousmane fails in moulding mireille into his personal concepttion of what a wife should be he turns to the love of his boyhood days.

Oulaymatou like Mireille's mother has been brought up to believe that man is master to be waited on by woman. As a child she had despised Ousmane for doing what she considers woman's work. That is, sweeping the house and helping with the cooking. The fact that Ousmane is already married does not bother her because she comes from a polygamous society. She has been socialized into accepting polygamy as a way of life inspite of all the disadvantages which accompany it. Sharing a man was the coomon lot of women in her circle and the idea of finding a man for herself alone never crossed her mind'.[106]

Early in the novel the writer describes the lives of women in a polygamous household:

> Every wife has charge of the 'budget' for the whole compound, every second day. That wife is overwhelmed by the task of making this sum stretch to several meals. Often she has to cadge and scrounge for the wherewithal to flatter the Master of the House's gastronomic tastes. Then to safeguard her reputation, she secs to it that the best of his leavings go into the dish reserved for the other adults. The children get the worst of this share-out of the contents of the cooking pot.7

As a child Ousmane was glad that his father has no more than one wife. Life is not always an easy one in their monogamous family but 'understanding and affection reigned'.8

All these sentimants which the writer considers important in a marriage are put aside when Ousmane decides to marry Onlaymaton. He pretends that in Onlaymatou he has found a 'kindered spirit', his 'true other half, the one in which he recognises his extension. She was at once his root, his stock...'[152] In his mind he confuses Onlaymatou with Africa. In reality he admits he is not averse to being treated as lord and master. This is how Onlaymatou treats him. She allows him to get away with all kinds of unreasonable behaviour, such as being as untidy as he wants to be, simply because he owns everything in the house.

What Ousmane clearly finds appealing is Onlaymatou's sexual charms. His senses are awakened by 'the provicative tinkle of beads, around hips, or the aphrodisiac potency of gongo powder... the suggestive wiggle of an African woman's rump wrapped in the warm colours of her pagne'.[112] Once Ousmane found Mireille's charms equally captivating but on closer intimacy he feels threatened by her intelligence and strong will.

When Mireille eventually finds out about Ousmane's unfaithfulness she realises that for most men whether black or white 'only the woman who momentarily occupies the heart and satisfies the senses of a man is important to him'.[158] Mireille's decision to remain with Ousmane and try to win him back is not for the sake of their child. This is because children are often more miserable living with estranged parents than alone with a single parent. Like Rama in So Long a Letter her decision is based on the fact that she still loves her husband.

However Mireille is neglected by her husband and the money in their joint account is all squandered on the naming ceremony of Oulaymatou's child. During a description of the ceremony Ba conveys her disapproval with the way African women are prepared to lose the savings of a lifetime during such events.

About a decade ago Dorothy Blair found the Negro-African novel in French 'on the whole a disappointing literary phenomena, lacking the vigour, originality, and imperative voice of African poetry'.[11] Mariama Ba's novels live up to Miss Blair's expectations, however, for they are poignant, vivid, and challenging stories of the lives of women. Her narrative style does not slack at any point in her story-telling. Scene after scene comes alive under the writer's pen. For instance, the grand lavish ceremony in celebration of Oulaymatou's child contrasts sharply with the indifferent way Mireille's child is welcomed.

The originality of Mariama Ba's art is in her views about marriage. Both So Long a Letter and Scarlet Song demonstrate that true happiness can only be found in the practice of monogemy. The acquisition of a mistress or a second wife are betrayals of the trust and love which bring a couple together in the first place.

The position of women is demystified by the simple diction of Ba's novels. In Mariama Ba's portrayal of women she demonstrates the way through which women can see their position in society. She wants women to direct their energies to activities which will improve their lot.

Mariama Ba implies in her novels the need for women to live and work in unity because only by so doing will the female sex win the respect of men.

FOOTNOTES

1. Mariama Ba, So Long A Letter (New Horn Press, Ibadan, 1981) All paper references to the same text.

2. Flora Nwapa, Efuru (Heinemann, London, 1986) p.174.

3. Irene Almeida, The Concept of Choice in Mariama Ba's Fiction, Ngambika C. Davies & A. Graves ed. (African Press, New Jersey, 1986) p. 161.

4. Abdurahaman Doi Women in Sharia (Gaskiya, Zaria) 1984 p. 140.

5. Quran Ch.14:3

6. Quran Ch. 4:129

7. Femi Ojo-Ade, Still A Victim, African Literature Today No.12.

8. Ibid.

9. Mariama Ba, Scarlet Song (Longman London, 1985) All page references to same text.

10. Albert Gordon, Intermarriage (Greenwood Press U.S.A. 1966) p.348.

11. Dorothy Blair, African Literature in French (Cambridge University Press, Britain 1976) p. 181.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

The image of the African woman as presented by male writers who portray her as playing a secondary but happily accepted role is seriously challenged by the writings of Ama Ata Aidoo and Mariama Ba.

These two writers present women in various roles which are of crucial importance to society. Their interest in the rights, and the position of women in society is well defined by Filomena Steady:

> ...feminism is an abnegation and a determination to be resourceful and self-reliant. The majority of the black women in Africa and the diaspora have developed these characteristics though not always by choice.1

Aidoo and Ba believe in this attitude of African women but they reject the exploitation and overburdening which turns the African woman into a beast of burden whose labour is not acknowledged or rewarded. They examine the cultural norms, social taboos, and economic restrictions which underline the status of women in their works.

The main preoccupation of both writers is with the institution of marriage and childbearing. Mariama Ba in particular, feels very intensely the injustices suffered by women in polygamous marriages. Ba is perhaps the first African writer to strongly criticise and condemn the practice of polygamy which is so rampant in many African societies.

The fact that Ba assumes such an uncompromising attitude towards a popular practice demonstrates her fearless courage in denouncing what she sees as a disadvantage for African women. Both Ba and Aidoo advocate the fair treatment of, and respect for the married women.

Aidoo feels that childbearing is overempasised in African society. The anguish caused by the desire to have children is vividly depicted in her writings. In Anowa Aidoo presents a traditional woman who has never been under western influence and yet does not see the act of childbearing as the most satisfying experience for women. Thus contrary to the opinions of critics such as Femi Ojo-Ade African women did not get their ideas of personal freedom from Europe. In the works of Aidoo and Ba women are depicted as being capable of deciding what they want out of life for themselves.

Sometimes in the writings of Aidoo we find that her concern with the African condition in general dominates her concern with the female sex. This is not surprising when it is remembered that Aidoo started writing in the 1960's: a period which produced exponents of black consciousness such as Walter Rodney, Malcom X, Angela Davies, and Frantz Fanon.

In Our Sister Killjoy Aidoo is in favour of what Jo Freeman calls the 'liberation ethic'[2], which sees the lives currently being led by women as well as men as deplorable, especially in neo-colonial Africa. She also provides a number of ideas which can be employed to improve this state of things.

Implicit in Ojo-Ade's claim that the works of female writers are often simple autobiographies is his doubt about their creative ability.[3] But one has only to read for instance, Ba's efficient prose in So Long a Letter to see the creativity of her art. Her style of writing is simple, clear, and lucid. The personal tone of So Long A letter is employed only because of the unusual medium of a letter which she adopts to tell her story.

Aidoo also uses the first person singular in her writings. This style of narration contributes a great deal to the authenticity of the story being told and hence it is deliberately adopted by both writers. It should be acknowledged that Aidoo's greatest achievement is her skilful use of language. The dialogues of her rural characters are without equal in African Literature.

The writings of Ama Ata Aidoo and Mariama Ba should be seen as an attempt of understanding themselves as members of the female sex, and their situation in society and history.

FOOTNOTES

1. Filomens Steady, The Black Woman Cross-Culturally, pp.35-36.

2. Jo Freeman, A Feminist Perspective (Califormia, Mayfield Pub. Co. 1979) p. 158.

3. Femi Ojo-Ade, Still A Victim, African Literature Today No.12.

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