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Ghanaian Women And Their Feminism: Reflections from Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes and Our Sister Killjoy*

Tanbir Shahnawaz
Research Scholar
Department of English,
University of Gour Banga, Maheshmati,
Roypara, Malda, India.

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Abstract:

The paper emphasizes on the connection between the culture and literature through Ama Ata Aidoo's novels. It has now become imperative due to the misapprehension about literature and the relation with the routine life. Therefore, from time to time, there is always a misunderstood concept that literature can simply be creative, unreal, and imaginative and certainly cannot be used to address any issues. So, this paper fixes this misinterpretation about the writings by examining the literary works along with the social disputes that are stressed by Aidoo in the narratives. Modern-day African emotional mien is a cultural product that has encrypted within the colonial and non-colonial stories. Aidoo's cherished novels like *Changes*, *Our Sister Killjoy*; thus this paper skims through the emotions of Ghanaian women with the help of contemporary Ghanaian literature. Through her plays and novels, she showed a glimpse of Ghanaian emotions, a realm with fascinating blend of originality and westernization.

Keywords: colonialism, globalization, Diaspora, milieu, leitmotif, Black feminism, pragmatism.

Introduction

African Literature have been attracting readers throughout the world. It proved that Africa is not a dark and gloomy continent occupied by magicians, occultists, cannibalisms and wild life but a continent rich in tradition and culture. Africa attained a new voice and phase through the literatures which strongly opposed the western portrayal of Africans. It attempted to set free Africa from the literary intricacies and stereotyping that resulted from the years of dishonor and humiliation. African literatures never failed to represent the innate culture and

customs and it was more determined in exploring the conditions of Africans. Also, it tried to describe and assess the western philosophies through African aesthetics, philosophy and moral assumptions. One needs to inspect and scrutinize the history and aesthetics of Africa that one may know Africa better. African writings aim at conserving African philosophies and eccentricity. Contemporary African literature has attained importance not just the historicity but also for providing the works in more regulated and abrupt sense, the socio-political conditions of Africa. The anthropological facts are fused into African works of fiction for the imaginative purposes. The contrast yet the unity concerning the two worlds has provided the African writings more relevancy and liveliness.

Contemporary African literatures reflect the colonial influence on the innate perception and cognizance and the novelists' swelling mindfulness of the abnormal hitches and complications antagonizing the society and the country en bloc. Migration and colonization over the centuries in African countries has ominously predisposed the native feeling and awareness. Countless irrational conflicts and consequences in the community are attributed to the effect of foreign values and customs. Subsequently, the native people were unable to completely annihilate the remnants of colonialism and so African novelists have enveloped a rational attitude for a probable consolidation of the western and innate cultures. Such novelists are intensely dedicated to rehabilitate and renew the publics and tried to delineate the conventional standards of Africa.

African fiction seen from the literatures of eminent Nigerian writers like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, T.M. Aluko, Cyprian Ekwensi, J.P. Clarke, Flora Nwapa and Amos Tutuola offered the most zealous manifestation of cultural conflict throughout the colonial era and also the influence of foreign culture over the African minds and the inhabitant's wish to control his/her own fate in a self-governing state. The development of African literary works ascribed to noteworthy historical happenings like the white men arrival and the Changes they brought along. The representation of traditional, radical and communal transformation in Africa has turned the writings more unpretentious and greatly coexistent.

The sex discrimination which was inherently interlaced into the African community and also the ingenuity and fortitude of African woman preserving her womanhood is observed as the ability to bear offspring in contradiction to the exemplified male-supremacy satisfying its desire

and hunger in woman subservience, are exquisitely illustrated in African stories. Most of the novels portray the suppression and oppression met by women are sacrificed at the altar of male-dominated society and the men's exploitation of womankind in order to maintain male dominance and thus subjecting women to struggle for their self-realization and recognition outside the inland sphere of influence. Even the characters in African novel without character growth represent some characteristic of traditional standards or vision of life.

African women normally are observed as unimportant, abandoned, oppressed and maligned. Women are lowered to rural laborers used in farms for taking care of animals over and above nurturing offspring and were never allowed to take part and speak their mind on any matters. Modern African culture, which is known to be predominantly democratic, where women have demanded proper social justice as well as political rights. Feminist thoughts and beliefs reflect selectivity on the culture, class and race. With reformed socio-political set-up at the moment and also with the budding perceptions of globalization and transformation, African women authors are campaigning about the complexities and difficulties of womankind in broad-spectrum and questioning the discriminatory laws publicized if any, distressing the African women precisely. Feminist authors and playwrights like Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa and others had an unfathomable apprehension for the misery and pain of African womenfolk and have deliberated in bringing refinement and pride on womanhood. These writers have encouraged the women to progress in all paces of life as entities and determining their own fate. They attempted to unshackle African people from the traditional captivity and mistreatment hinged on the gender, class and race.

Aidoo- The woman behind the 'womanism' of Africa

“Feminism... You know how we feel about that humiliating Western thinking? The slayer of homes.... Introduced mainly by America to destruct lovely African women”... (Ama Ata Aidoo, 1986).

African women authors as spokespersons of African women folk in the history of radical politics, rights to woman along with the deprivation and suppression have brought out the dilemma of women in Africa and America. They are bestowed with an exceptional compassion and understanding essential for creativeness. There is alternative kind of feminism which is

meticulously recognized with the Africana women all around the world. Although African feminism is a little less challenging for than is feminism in a broad-spectrum and so it is more narrowly affiliated with Africana Womanism. Africana Womanism intensely highlights that the Eurocentric explanation of woman is strange and disparaging to the woman of African tradition. Consequently, subscribers to the disparate Eurocentric and Afrocentric definitions cannot share in a common movement whose essential definition and course of action are abhorrence to the Afrocentric sphere interpretation.

Ama Ata Aidoo, a revolutionary African writer had held several positions like Consulting Lecturer to the Phelps Stokes between 1974 and 1975 in Washington. She had also compiled 11 short stories together as a volume titled 'No Sweetness Here' enlightening the effect of takeover on Africa in the cultural and economic provinces. In the course of her study in the University of Ghana in the year 1964, she had also issued many poems. Aidoo was fortunate to work with the founder of the Ghana Drama Studio, Efua Sutherland. She has written stories to effectuate a change amongst women. She was a woman who believed that the African men without women cannot establish rapport with the rest of the world.

Her play titled 'The Dilemma of a Ghost', in 1965 fetched her name and status as a playwright. It talks about encounter concerning the western and ancestral culture and values. In 1977, she was successful in publishing a novel, *Our Sister Killjoy*, depicting the effect of the relationship between Europe and Africa. Her expertise was in relation to womankind with communal disputes. Aidoo was nominated as educational minister in the year 1982 in the military government in Ghana. She then moved to Zimbabwe and focused on cultivating the women writers as well as the curriculum improvement unit. Aidoo had published a poetry as a collection called 'Some One Talking Some Time'. Similar to Emecheta, she has also written for kids. Her story titled *Changes, A Love Story* is her 2nd novel that was known to be very popular Ghanaian novel.

Changes, has won the best book award from the Commonwealth Writers committee and it also fetched her credit as a writer. Aidoo has endorsed her leitmotif of woman's position as social economic and political being in the modern African social order. Her monetary freedom stimulated her to observe and inquest the morals and ethics of her own culture. She linguistically questions against the disparity.

Aidoo has properly defined the term nationalism employed by the new leaders as a tool to subdue the people's ambitions. She ridiculed at the civilized Africans who regarded themselves as genuine flag-wavers but then again, they are enticed by material progression. She projected Africa with its distinctive individuality from a female perception.

Ama Ata Aidoo from Ghana was a widow who lived in Zimbabwe with her only daughter. She excelled as a poet, playwright, radical novelist, Ghanaian leader, socialist as well as an honest woman who came across acrimonious disapproval from her own folks. Aidoo's *Changes*, is the story of woman's experience. She had mixed the European pragmatism with mellifluous socialism in order to document her collective understanding of woman. Aidoo thinks that feminism was introduced to Africans to disrupt the friendly association amid African men and women.

“Those women who call themselves Black feminists should possess alternative word describing the concerns... Black Feminism is not a term which defines the troubles of Black women...even the white race has issues because the women were beleaguered. Black folks have same issue because black men are as troubled as their women.” (Hare, 1993)

It is illustrated that women novelists are equally apprehensive in articulating and denouncing the exploitation, poverty and disparaging practices that hindered the advancement in Africa. Also, these writers are known to indulge more intimately the leitmotifs of love and loss, divine existence and the attempt to escalate above the customary confines accountable for women's impecuniousness and suppression.

‘Changes’ that changed the world's perception

Changes: A Love Story, a novel in a bucolic background depicting the traditional values and principles of woman. The characters in the contemporary town setting appear diverse by their individualism. They are self-poised and believe in the inner voice. It was Aidoo's most honored novel that brought radical consciousness amongst women. It portrayed a young woman as a representation of African woman's pre-colonial dispute and effectively projected the difficulties of colonial radical exemption. The novelist by exalting the African history made the readers become nostalgic about the pre-colonial past. Aidoo furthermore presented the

complexities of the dispute through modernism in African society and woman and the encounter amongst the traditions and the objectives in order to overlook them. She is sardonic about the assertiveness and approach of modern African women. Contemporary Ghanaian women as well experience same difficulties obstructing their growth in life.

Characters like Esi Kom and her Nana affirm themselves in the male-controlled Akan community. The rapport between the women echoes political subdual experienced by succeeding generation belonging to Yawson tribe. The penitence and thoughtfulness of Eulalie and Esi Kom reveal the prevalent Diaspora that Aidoo appeals as Africa's obliviousness concerning the slave trade. Eulalie however portrayed as an acquiescent personality in the start, slowly turned into a tyrant who found herself a substantial spot amongst the other women of her clan. Nevertheless Esi Kom symbolized contemporary African women and held a good position and led an independent life with her family. She is displeased with her grandmother and mother since they had varied opinion on marriage. Regardless of their warnings, she parts from her husband Oko and chooses to be a second wife to Ali Kondey, her lover. Esi's financial independence tossed her into a state of confusion concerning the standards and customs of her community.

Changes is about a woman who tried to find out herself as well as her fruitless effort to balance her longing for freedom, love and acknowledgment in the Ghanaian community. Thus, the story focuses on modern African women like Fusena Kondey, Opokuya Dakwa and Esi Sekyi, their views on lives along with the approaches for self-enhancement to meet the demands of post-colonial African community. They come across many complications to wed someone of their choice. Even women who are educated are in dilemma of what to follow. This section briefs the Aidoo's characters in order to understand the African women better and know about the Changes they brought.

Esi Sekyi

Aidoo's protagonist, Esi is portrayed as an independent woman signifying female remonstrance. She is also an obedient and polite daughter and a granddaughter. African woman folks apart from being a daughter, wife, mother, courtesan, whore, prostitute and neighbor, has now turned into professionals and political leaders. Sekyi is depicted as a contemporary professional woman who is well-educated, economically independent and open-minded and

displeased about her marriage with Oko who does not give her enough freedom to do things on her own. Esi is at the end of tether in leaving her husband to enhance her career. She desired to be statistical analyst. Paradoxically and miserably, she gets the freedom she craved however she was unable to find happiness in it. ali kondey, a powerful businessman, her second husband was known for his infidelity. Even after all this, she remains strong and accepts whatever comes on her way but never goes back to her old life

Opokuya Dakwa

Opokuya, a best friend of Esi and a nurse is happily married and has four children. She serves as a foil in this novel, listening to her friend venting about her husbands. She is portrayed as an optimistic character. Her job does not look as splendid as sekyi's, who gets to travel more and thus is more exposed to the outer world. Like any other best friend she voices her opinions against Esi's desires and she stays quiet understanding that very soon, things will come to a head.

Fusena

Fusena is Ali Kondey's wife. He met her in his college. Albeit being a potential teacher who usually would have wanted to extend the educational qualifications, Fusena had opted to set her goals aside in order to make a home for Kondey and her children. Ali made sure that his wife need not work to survive and also he provided her and the children everything they wanted. Nevertheless, repressed feelings were deep buried behind the acceptance. And she goes into a state of incompleteness and unhappiness, when her husband tells about his second wife. Remarkably, Fusena character poses an interesting difference to that of Esi, since they are completely different in choosing their own destiny. Ultimately, they both are not contented as Esi gets her independence however at a price to her marriage to Kondey; whereas Fusena gets the fellow she desires, drops her ambitions and now she has to share her husband with another lady.

Nana

Nana, Esi's grandmother is a tough woman who endured so much in her life. She also aids in depicting African traditional outlook on marriage.

“You are asking me whether you should marry this Ali of yours, who already has got his wife and become one of his wives? Leave one man and marry another... What is the difference? Besides, you had a husband of your own, no? You had a husband of your own whom you have just left because you say he demanded too much of your time. But Esi, tell me, doesn't a woman's time belong to a man? My Lady Silk, that one is a very new and golden reason for leaving a man.....But remember, my lady the best husband you can ever have is he who demands all of you and all of your time. Who is a good man if not the one who eats his wife completely, and pushes her down with a good gulp of alcohol?” (*Changes*, 132-133)

In *Changes*, the author has raised loads of questions about the individuality of the African woman in discovering herself in the marriage milieu. She has posed questions like, whether should an educated woman lose her identity just for the sake of her husband. She has highlighted the marital rape in the novel.

Though the novel was published about two decades ago, the matters raised in it exceed an ordinary love story and the novel is as modern as ever. The language used is simple with a vocabulary necessary phrases and words defined in the dialect. The plot also excavates a lot about the traditional and communal norms of Ghanaian people. It is also a well-explored novel, revealing the writer's in-depth familiarity and understanding of the places and settings referred in the novel.

The politics refugee: Our Sister Killjoy

Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* describes a tale of a traveler. Sissie is an associate of the Ghanaian division of INVOLOU, a voluntary group commonly known as VOLOU. She symbolizes a part of the black women who give rein in depravity and known to be apathetic to harmony and order in community and are fascinated to European principles without correctly understanding the social integrities and virtues. She comes back to Africa unharmed since she

did not restrain herself from becoming a lesbian .Aidoo has made Sissie take her journey to the civilized lands and not the regions of obscurity. Her exodus from Ghanaian airport is a restating the parable of theoretical schisms as depicted in an ethical play by Europeans and Africans to epitomize barbarity and civilization.

Marija is the German friend of Sissie and village had a castle that was later used as a boardinghouse for the volunteers who are from afar. There was an old tale saying that a lord lived in the castle who controlled the fate of many peasants. According to her, Sissie is a sexual entity just like the Kurtz's in Conrad's Heart of Darkness. The author has aroused a besmirched black woman in a colonial literature. The link between Marija and Sissie with cultural gawkiness echoes the desolation of European society and also the European's superficial norms on morality.

One can observe the vital disproportionateness of power coinciding with Marija's and Sissie's ethnic settings and displaced concept of a catholic felinity and humanity as evocative political prospects for Aidoo's novel. The author has used their friendship to notify Africa of the magnitudes of completely relying on Europe. Africa's enslavement to Europe is recklessness. It is like a murder the victim's consent. The protagonist leaves Germany in order to meet her brothers who are in London. They settle there after their graduation and Sissie wanted them to go back to Africa. It is the time to turn back and develop their own country.

Ama Ata Aidoo has given a different image of the African woman's role signifying her generation and she did not compromise with the political revolution. Aidoo's narratives deal with the additional complications among African women. She does not portray African community as highly delusory.

"...one way or another way, going to Europe was completely more like a rehearsal for a trip to paradise." (OSK, 9)

The story starts with the appearance of protagonist as an exchange student from the University of Ghana to study in Germany. The novel proved that African can succeed more when he is exposed to the outer world more. Europe stayed as a shadow; since they offered the Africans to study abroad. Considering this opportunity, Africans strived to live in the abroad since they all wanted luxurious and comfortable life. But the protagonist was completely unlike

unlike those who lived in comfort in Europe. Despite of her squint eye, she was capable of seeing the intention of European behind those allowances.

Western Philosophy and its impact

All western matters were generally adored by Africans. The new African Government has taken over congenital complications, since the African scholarship privileged African people but they were trounced with western beliefs. Practicality and Liberation was just a part of western philosophy. It extinguished the fire of patriotism of African Intellectuals.

African students were more prone to western philosophy and they were nurtured with knowledge to become intellectuals. Together with this awareness, they have also understood the impalpable grip of European colonization in Africa. The awareness they had gotten was more enough to save Africa and invoke patriotism among the fellow Africans. An illustration of this is the character of Sissie from the postcolonial African Novel, who was privileged to be rational enough to understand it all. But something remains unknown still; leaving the own country for a sophisticated life.

Conclusion

Feminism from the radical point of view is a cry against male bigotry, everlasting deprivation, continuous mortification, unending oppression and furthermore against disparity in political and socio-economic domains. It is an expression of the beleaguered and suppressed women who strive to be free from the holds of the cultured community. It is an effort to abolish slavery, rebelliousness and manipulation of womankind and an endeavor to recognize woman as alike in circle of life. Feminism in African perspective is no exemption to this comprehensive view. A thorough examination of African literature with distinct reference to West African literary works discloses some factors accountable for the occurrence of 'feminism' and similar to other factors across the world. A better look at the literatures of several eminent female authors proposes that, not all are alike in their approach towards highlighting the women's problems. Writers vary from each other in their opinion on problems and in placing them on the picture. Their understanding on the issue differs however the dominant set up in the African communal

system is not a substantial variant. The African literature unvaryingly has a bucolic setting while the urban setting centers on the progression affecting African social identity.

The feminism in these narratives is the plea of black womenfolk's novelists to address the criticisms of black women in the present African social order. The explanation on the impact of feminism is in the rise of a renovated social order where the black women have the least to grumble or grudge against the society. Although the anticipated result cannot be attained instantly, the West African novels are sure to have smoothed the way for the revolution of agrarian community to show equability, unity and woman folks copiously co-operating with the society. These fictions shoulder a dynamic social obligation that has strived to bring consciousness amongst women for revival and restoration of community.

It is obvious that the culture and literature have a reciprocal relationship and are connected with life. It is clear that one cannot disparage life without talking about the how the life was been. It is also apparent from the scrutiny that Aidoo is a playwright with a strong insight of life in Ghana particularly the Akon society. Such ways of living offer understanding to morals and ethics like respecting the elders, providing support to the family, nurturing the children as well as leaving a proper life. Specific cultural standards are required with the aim of adopting social solidity, national harmony and ethnic individuality. Nevertheless, one has to acknowledge that additional features of the same cultural ideals do not charm the youth and those ideals should be changed.

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