

UNIVERSIDAD DE LA LAGUNA

TESIS DOCTORAL

**The Re-Presentation of Africa and
the African in Anglophone West
African Literature:
Buchi Emecheta and Ama Ata Aidoo**

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For too long in our history, Africa has spoken through the voices of others. Now, what I have called an African Personality in international affairs will have a chance of making its proper impact and will let the world know it through the voices of Africa's own sons.

(Kwame Nkrumah, 1961)

TRIBUTE

This is a tribute to Ghana and the rest of Africa.

It is also a tribute to my father Hani Hassan Jojo Nahle, who was born in Dakar and lived for most of his life in diverse West African countries.

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Dedicated to:

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In Summary:

To all those whose presence has made my life rich and meaningful,

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INTRODUCTION

The scarcity of scholarly essays and accurate information on African women writers in the 1990s, in addition to the non-inclusion of many of them in anthologies and other academic literary resources, has reinforced my decision to particularly work on Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta. The hope of changing the course of this lack of critical attention to some African women writers is a firm motivation here. My concern is to analyze them using the ongoing and growing postcolonial theoretical framework, in spite of the fact that these writers have already been tackled by diverse feminist approaches. It is time they become visible under the light of that other illuminating theory.

Undoubtedly, there were some other African women writers who wrote before Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta. Nevertheless, African critics seem not to take into account the work of their women authors. Instead, the international scholars working with feminist theory launched most of the first critical essays on the doubly-marginalised condition of these writers: as women and from peripheral Africa. Since I graduated in English philology, my special link is with English-speaking African literature. Particularly, I have focused on Ama Ata Aidoo, whose works have also been chosen by feminist scholars for classes and seminars on women African literature after the mid 1980s. The other significant writer I have selected is Buchi Emecheta, who is already a famous writer with many works translated into many languages. Moreover, some of her novels or excerpts of her writing have been included as part of the syllabi at different education institutions, not only in African countries but also in other countries as well such as England and Spain.

My interest in these significant contemporary writers is based on the fact that their works are widely read and their representations have a wide scope of receptive readers. Moreover, their works examine the idea of re-presenting Africa and Africans as a first chance, after the independence of Ghana and Nigeria, so as to project self-representation. My choice tilted towards these women writers' works, which was hardly assessed within the first decade of their publishing dates. African critics were concentrated on the works of African male writers. These were particularly busy with

the inception of an African criticism (cf. Jojo, “Arenas”). At the same time, they were engaged in the creation of an African aesthetics, which could develop an original African literary canon away from Western prescriptions.

Although the corpus for this research is limited to some English-speaking West African countries and their peoples, the expansion I have allowed myself accomplishes into other parts of Africa, including the French-speaking African world and some of their writing. These texts have exerted a significant impact on the concepts and ideologies that meant change or challenge for Africans. Indeed, any knowledge associated with the intellectual tri-continental anti-colonialism mostly belongs to the English-speaking Africans.¹ I must clarify that I have chosen the term “Africa” to stand, almost continuously, as a metaphor every time I refer to the different countries that belong to the whole African continent, since the writers I work with and their characters themselves do the same. This can also be applied to the term “African” whenever it is used.

This corpus is limited to two literary genres in these authors: the novel and short story. Among the works I have chosen for this research, some were published and others written from the 1960s to the beginning of the 1980s. I have selected Ama Ata Aidoo’s novel and short stories published within the limits of this selected period. For example, since Aidoo’s *Anowa* (1970) is a play, I automatically excluded it. Then I focus on *No Sweetness Here*, published for the first time in 1970 by Longman, which is a compilation of eleven short stories, ten of which appeared previously in diverse journals and literary magazines, plus the radio play, *Two Sisters*, which was transcribed later as a short story. According to Margaret Busby, Aidoo’s short story “The Message” was first published in 1967 in Ezekiel Mphahlele’s *African Writing Today* before its inclusion in the short story collection *No Sweetness Here* published in 1970. I also include two other short stories in my corpus, “Satisfaction?” (1971) and “Nowhere Cool” (1974), which were published in Aidoo’s second collection of short stories in 1997, entitled *The Girl Who Can and Other Stories*. The first one was revised and re-entitled “Payments,” after appearing for the first time in *Imaginative Writing: University of Cape Coast English Department Workpapers* under the title of “Satisfaction?” in 1971. Whereas the second short story, “Nowhere Cool” (1974), was re-structured in 1990 and re-published under the same title in 1997. I have to say that I

¹ The term “tri-continental” is used, after Young (2001), to avoid the use of the term “Third World” and to encapsulate the diverse peoples that belong to these three continents: Africa, America, and Asia.

cannot add this 1990 new edition to my corpus, since I have not been able to get the original edition of this short story, which according to the acknowledgements section in *The Girl Who Can and Other Stories* was published in *Asemka*—a journal of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana—in 1974. Moreover, to my disappointment, the version of this short story that appeared in *Callaloo* in 1990 was already the re-structured version. Another book I have chosen for the study of Aidoo’s creation is her novel *Our Sister Killjoy: or Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint*, first published in 1977 by Longman.

In the case of Buchi Emecheta, I have mainly analyzed her three works in which she re-presents Africa and Africans: *The Bride Price* published in 1976, *The Slave Girl* in 1977, and *The Joys of Motherhood* in 1979. Even though *In the Ditch* was published in 1972, that is, within my focused timeline, I have decided to exclude it because it is considered to be one of Emecheta’s “London Novels” following Christine W. Sizemore’s approach. Sizemore confesses that she agrees with Maureen Duffy, who in turn believes that Emecheta’s characters in the London novels are “true Londoners” (367). This assertion reinforces my decision to exclude the novel mentioned above since it represents the new inhabitants of a multicultural London after the independence of the British colonies. This would require other theories that take into account the Euro-born Africans, and this means a digression from my main point in the framework of this research.

The cornerstone of this research is the idea behind the hyphenated term “re-presentation” accomplished by African women writers who set their stories into a real or imaginary place called Africa, and their main characters clearly associated with African peoples.

The representation of Africa in African narratives, previous to the independence of most African countries, was one of the fields that does not exclusively belong to the African peoples, since it does not originally emanate from the indigenous inhabitants of this continent. Many travellers, missionaries, scientists, geographers, and other people concerned with different kinds of religious, commercial, economic and political possibilities, and coming from different parts of the world have written varied texts about Africa and the Africans. But I am interested in some English-speaking narratives about Africa and how “representation” works there. It is a common knowledge that there is a long history of British writing, in which Africa and Africans have been the object of reflection. These texts mostly expressed observations of what they could have

seen there, biased by their own political, religious, and economical interests. They were representing an *other*.

On the threshold of independence, African male writers expressed their resistance to these representations and started writing back. They had the chance to present what they believed and rectify what the colonialists had wrongly represented. Correspondingly, when those African male writers were free to redress the mistakes in their writing they were questioned for misrepresenting an important group of Africans: women. In the wake of independence, women had also already been writing to “re-present” their own reality and their side of the private histories in Africa. These women writers had the chance to work on a new re-presentation. This turned into an opportunity to deploy their stories and images about their own experience and life. Therefore, I insist on the use of the hyphenated term “re-presentation” to stand for this third stage of writing about Africa and the Africans.²

This starting point focuses my research on the years after the independence of Ghana and Nigeria, in which Aidoo and Emecheta published significant work from the 1960s to the 1980s, a period when most of Africans already tasted independence and its flaws. Moreover, this was a period when Africans started to rediscover themselves, and in addition to this, the rest of the peoples from all over the world were anxious to know and learn about Africans from Africans themselves.

What also encouraged me to use the hyphenated term “re-presentation” is the critical reception of Aidoo’s and Emecheta’s work in Africa. Or, I would rather say, the non-reception of these authors by their coeval African critics. Tracing back any information or critical works on both writers, I can only find works about African literature, in which women writers are hardly mentioned or absolutely obliterated. The most significant authors are all male African writers.

The Library of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana in Legon became the ideal place to find newspapers, magazines, and other kinds of collectible journals. In addition to the short stories and poetry I found there, my expectations turned into despair. Where were the critics’ analytical approaches on Ama Ata Aidoo’s and Buchi Emecheta’s works in the 1970s and 1980s?

² Readers should not confuse the idea behind the use of the term “third stage” with the well-known labelling of “third generation” of African writers. The first one alludes to a stage of the development of new corpus of writing after the first two corpora, which were produced by non-African and male African groups; and the second term refers to a generation of writers within the same African group.

I did not give up. Continuing on my researching and reading I found Maryse Conde's short essay on Flora Nwapa, Ama Ata Aidoo and Grace Ogot. Conde reviews Aidoo's prize-winning *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, a play not included in the corpus of this research. I also found Femi Ojo-Ade's piece of criticism assessing Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* and *Idu*, and Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*. Ojo-Ade's final paragraph acknowledges that women writers may want to "even tell the male critic to shove his pen in his mouth, chew it, digest it and reproduce it after seven months, prematurely. And they may be right. Only, one hopes, they will always remember that—"Black People still/Die/So/Uselessly [*Our Sister Killjoy* 8]!" (178-179).

Oladele Taiwo's *Female Novelists of Modern Africa* dedicates a whole chapter to Buchi Emecheta and all her works published until 1984. He also includes Flora Nwapa, Bessi Head and Grace Ogot, each of them with a detailed chapter on their novels. Whereas he allocates a whole section devoted to Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* and other writers, who had just written one novel until then. He also puts together in another chapter writers who had written two novels. I say this because I cannot find any other reason for this distribution of authors. He approves of Buchi Emecheta's works and deduces that she focuses on the need for change. However, his sanctimonious attitude towards some of Emecheta's main characters is an intentional gesture to bring down the main issues that set her to writing. In the case of Ama Ata Aidoo, Taiwo sweeps through her novel and superficially comments whatever he observes at a first look. Aidoo carefully read Taiwo's book and commented on the flaws that she found in it. She questions Taiwo's work: "Sometimes, one cannot help wondering whether this particular critic really reads the books he comments on" ("To Be" 167). Nevertheless, Aidoo affirms that "It has also to be granted that perhaps, Taiwo never really meant any harm. In fact, considering that to date his is the only full-length study of books by African women at all" ("To Be" 168). She is grateful but her irony bites when she mentions that he affirmed he wrote his book to "celebrate" the African women novelists.

Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi's seminal work *Africa Wo/Man Palava* highlights how the first critical reception of African women's writing in the 1970s was problematic. She reverses the meaning of this rejection and explains "This image of the novelist as trouble maker, subversive, and at the worst, feminist, at least acknowledges and grudgingly gives recognition to female perspective" (112). Ogunyemi also relies on

Houston A. Baker Jr.'s idea of naming all the works of art that are left out by the literary canon as the "remainders." She asserts that the object of her study:

The Nigerian novel by women is a crucial "remainder" not accounted for in many African discourses, especially the theory of decolonization, since we are still very much colonized economically and culturally, most telling in the language we have chosen for writing about and generating literary discourse. (8-9)

I can generalize and add to this affirmation above that not only Nigerian novels but also the rest of the African novels written by women, so as not to leave behind remainders of the initial "remainders" Ogunyemi mentions. Hence, I defend Ama Ata Aidoo's and Buchi Emecheta's work as providing a necessary postcolonial position, which deserves further comprehensive analysis.

Ama Ata Aidoo has complained about the way her works were overlooked by her African colleagues (cf. "Unwelcome" 23). This is her intellectual cry from the heart, in which the author recounts how she has often been belittled by her African male colleagues. She expresses the hard situation of an educated woman. To start with, a woman is not expected to be educated, and less, become an intellectual active university lecturer, and writer. Whatever a woman does well is rather classified as "masculine" or attributed to her "ugliness." If she is in her thirties and not married yet, she has "no right to look well to wit, well-dressed (with a slight plumpness, or reedy thin) a good skin, a smiling face, because scholarly spinster are normally sour with discontent and wizened for lack of semen in their system!" ("Unwelcome" 13). Aidoo adds that whenever a woman seems "well-being" was due to her husband's affection and his success in life: "But the real puzzle is where you got your nerve from, a woman, to encroach on male territory" ("Unwelcome" 13).

However, Aidoo alludes to her experience of being a writer as more painful than as a university teacher: "Like an internal wound and therefore immeasurably dangerous, it also causes a ceaseless emotional haemorrhage" ("Unwelcome" 15). She highlights that a comment coming from one of her good friends, and writer himself, on *Our Sister Killjoy*, made her "bleed," because he could only think of the book as a product for "women studies programmes springing in universities all over the United States of America" ("Unwelcome" 16). She defends that although the main character was a young woman, this does not mean that the book has to be only approached from a feminist point of view since "her [Sissie's] main concerns are only partially feminist, if at all"

(“Unwelcome”16). Here, I agree and I set out my research to read further than the typical reading of her work at the end of the 1980s framed by feminist theory, though recognizing that this kind of approach has developed a very valuable critical work. Moreover, Aidoo is grateful for any acknowledgement coming from other places, “but there is no salve for the hurt that [her] own house has put a freeze on it” (“Unwelcome” 17). She vehemently asserts, “When a critic refuses to talk about your work, that is violence. He is willing you to die—as a creative person” (“Unwelcome”17). She also addresses some scholars who consider her a feminist, “simply because [she] writes about women” (“Unwelcome” 21). This simplistic consideration downgrades her idea of feminism:

Unless a particular writer commits his or her energies, actively, to exposing the sexist tragedy of women’s history; protesting the on-going degradation of women; celebrating their physical and intellectual capabilities; and above all, unfolding a revolutionary vision of the role of women tomorrow, as dreamers, thinkers and doers; they cannot be described as feminist writers. (“Unwelcome” 21)

Astoundingly, in 1988 she still has complains about the critical reception of her writing and other works by African women: “What we are saying though, is that it is especially pathetic to keep on writing without having any consistent active critical intelligence that is interested in you as an artist (or creator)” (“To Be”158). She exemplifies this with the void that she has encountered in lectures or conferences about African writing, in which African women writers were not taken into account. For example, she mentions Neil McEwan’s omission of women African writers in his volume *Africa and the Novel* (1975). Furthermore, she adds a list of names of critics and their work that spans from 1972 to 1983, obliterating the work of African women writers. She quotes from Lloyd W. Brown’s *Women Writers in Black Africa* to reinforce this obliteration. Brown said that African literature was becoming a trend in early 1980s and the voice of the African writer was heard and studied “as artist, social analyst, and literary critic” (3):

But in all of this, African literature has to be understood as literature by African men, for interest in African literature has, with very rare exceptions, excluded women writers. The women writers of Africa are the other voices, *the unheard voices, rarely discussed and seldom accorded space in the repetitive anthologies and the predictably male-oriented studies in the field* (emphasis added). (3)

Aidoo assures that sometimes it is worse to mention her *en passant* than not mentioning at all, as seen in Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike's *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*. For Aidoo, these radical authors sweepingly mentioned both her and Flora Nwapa. Moreover, Aidoo highlights that African women's literary work was not relevant in 1985 to the intellectual debate, exemplified through Emmanuel Ngarra's not mentioning any in *Art and Ideology in the African Novel*.

Aidoo also explains how women writers have to cope with their roles as wives and mothers and still find the time to write. Aidoo avers that "All art is subsidised by artists with their lives" insisting that "The stuff [they] write deserves to be looked at and judged, seriously, like those by [their] male counterparts, because the very act of creating has cost [them] too much" ("To Be" 163). Then, she exemplifies this with Buchi Emecheta's effort to bring up her five children single-handed and write nine novels until then (cf. "To Be" 164).

However, it is worth mentioning she points out that even though she and all women writers hunger for scholarly attention, she is not willing to accept the wrong or "damaging critical recognition," exemplified in William Thackeray's chauvinistic assessment of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* ("To Be" 165). Aidoo boldly wonders if male critics really read women's books before launching their critical evaluations. Furthermore, she lambasts those critics who write condescending critical texts, in which they remark about the women writers' intelligence and their story-telling aptitudes in the best "'dancing dog' tradition" ("To Be" 166).

Intentionally enough, Ama Ata Aidoo finds the opportunity, once and for all, to explain how Robert Fraser harassingly affirmed Ayi Kwei Armah's influence on her titles and names of characters. Aidoo provides a chronological proof of not borrowing the phrase "no sweetness here" but rather lending it to Armah. Her short story, "No Sweetness Here," won the Mbari Club prize in 1962 and was published in the journal *Black Orpheus* in 1964. Whereas, Armah's book *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, which contained this phrase, was published in 1968. She also explains some other Fraser's mistakes regarding the names of her characters in her plays. She ends this uncomfortable situation asserting that she is sure that Armah has no idea about what is going on, while she insists:

I am genuinely frightened by the sheer primeval weight of the attacks. For instance, one almost gets the feeling that Fraser thinks that in order

for him to evoke the true stature of Armah as a novelist, he had to diminish me, a Ghanaian woman writer, somehow and he gets as petty as consistently misspelling my name, in spite of the fact that we were colleagues in the same university and the same department. (“To Be” 170)

Finally, Ama Ata Aidoo invites readers to read more works by African women writers and playwrights. After consciously spilling up her expression of pain, she still hopes for some improvement:

In any case, malign or benign, the long term effect of disinterested comment and/or vicious disregard of African women writers and their works is bound to be diminishing and stultifying, with a possible loss of collective confidence. (171)

From Buchi Emecheta’s autobiography, *Head Above Water*, we learn that she discovered very soon—when her first book *Second-class Citizen* was published in 1975—that the public opinion was “fickle” and she should not worry about what readers think, “because public opinion is such a difficult horse to ride” (174). Later, she reaffirms the impossibility of controlling the critical reception of a book, “A book is akin to a child on his mother’s back. The mother knows she is carrying a baby on her back but the child can use its hand to lift anything that passes by, without the mother knowing” (“Feminism” 552-553).

In this regard, some scholars have established a negative attitude towards this Nigerian author. For example, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi has accused Emecheta of being torn apart by the tensions generated from her internal fight between her African innateness and the pressure of adopting English social and intellectual demands. For this critic, the harm is extended to Emecheta’s creative work, in which readers can contemplate the traces of her “emotional³ and intellectual crisis” (“Buchi” 65). Moreover, she affirms that Emecheta can only consolidate her status as a writer once she has re-adjusted her life and overcome the difficulties in her personal relationships. Ogunyemi refers to Emecheta’s first three published works to exemplify and demonstrate her shortcomings as an African writer. Ogunyemi also criticises how Emecheta has exceeded in the use of animal images in *The Bride Price* by using similes between some Igbo characters and the African fauna: “These images are not carefully

³ Emecheta’s marriage failed and she divorced from her husband who declared at the court that she was not his wife according to the Igbo traditions, since he never paid her bride price. At the age of 22 she already had her five children. For the details about her life see her autobiography, *Head Above Water*, and the novels *In the Ditch*, and *Second-class Citizen* also based on her own biography.

worked out to support, for example, a feminist stance. Rather they betray Emecheta's half-conscious attitude towards Africans, male and female" ("Buchi" 69). Ogunyemi bases her argument to highlight Emecheta's frailties on the fact that she herself is both African and Nigerian and, therefore, she masters the nuances between the two ethnic groups that Emecheta refers to in *The Bride Price*. Furthermore, this novelist is accused of mixing the customs and traditions of the Igbos with the proverbs of the Yoruba, and worse of all, tricking foreign readers, who cannot distinguish each cultural background in this story. This demonstrates how hard it is for African women writers to become accepted in their own countries.

Kirsten Holst Petersen has affirmed that Flora Nwapa, the Nigerian female writer is an evident case of "cultural dislocation" ("Unpopular" 112). whereas Buchi Emecheta presents "A less precarious and less contradictory rebellion" ("Unpopular" 115). She concludes her comparison:

It is impossible to sum up neatly the ideas and developments of these woman writers. One of the points I have been trying to make is precisely that: that their achievements lie not in the solutions they offer—they often seem confusing—but in the courage and determination they show in dealing with unpopular subjects and having unpopular opinions. (120)

Oladele Taiwo develops some condescending conclusions regarding Buchi Emecheta's African novels such as "[...] the novelist has shown how competently she can handle a variety of topics" (*Female* 126); or "She has demonstrated her ability to portray human beings of different classes and situations of life" (*Female* 126). Eustace Palmer also follows this same positive line on Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*:

There will be many who will find Emecheta's analysis of female situation controversial; her presentation may not be able to stand up to sociological scrutiny. But *The Joys of Motherhood* is an imaginative and not a scientific work, and the artist is surely within her rights to exaggerate or even to depart from sociological authenticity. The novel must be judged as a work of art and it is difficult to deny the accomplishment of the artistry. (55)

This whole quotation turns into a song praising women's imagination and artistry at a time when most critics thought or said the contrary. It reinforces the idea of the women's right to write, decide what to write about, and write not only attached to reality but also from imagination itself. Last though not least, here is the affirmation of accepting the novels written by women as works of art.

One would be able to reproduce the list of articles and books on Ama Ata Aidoo's and Buchi Emecheta's works such as *Emerging Perspectives on Ama Ata Aidoo* (1999) or *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta* (1996), to mention the most representative. Most recently, an exhaustive record of publications gathered by James Gibbs has been published as "A Bibliography of Writing by and on Ama Ata Aidoo: A Compilation in Progress" in *Essays in Honour of Ama Ata Aidoo at 70* (2012).

It is not my aim to simply provide the readers of this research with the list of reviews, critical works and other essays on these writers' works. However, I would like to mention a few seminal works that have changed the panorama of the critical approaches to the Aidoo's and Emecheta's work included in the corpus of my research by diverse specialists and scholars. I have already mentioned Lloyd W. Brown's *Women Writers in Black Africa* (1981), in which this author dedicates a chapter to assess Buchi Emecheta's works included in my research, except for *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979). He also dedicates a chapter to assess Ama Ata Aidoo's two plays and the collection of short stories included here, *No Sweetness Here* (1970).

Another important collection of critical essays, *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*, was edited by Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves in 1986. This is the first analysis to deal with the growing number of African women's writing, which was disregarded by some schools of literary criticism. It contains some shortcomings because it does not include every possible field of study, but it is the forerunner of many critical texts to appear in the 1990s and onwards. In the introduction to this book, Davies invites African women critics to pick out the best aspects that suit their own ethos differentiated from the European feminist mainstream theory. Moreover, she presents this project under clear-cut divisions, which will facilitate future critical frameworks:

African feminist criticism so far has engaged in a number of critical activities which can be conveniently categorized as follows: 1) Developing the canon of African women writers; 2) Examining stereotypical images of women in African literature; 3) Studying African women writers and the development of an African female aesthetic; and 4) Examining women in oral traditional literature. (13-14)

Ngambika contains Chimalum Nwankwo's essay on Aidoo's work, "The Feminist Impulse and Social Realism in Ama Ata Aidoo's *No Sweetness Here* and *Our Sister Killjoy*," and Carole Boyce Davies's on Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of*

Motherhood, entitled “Motherhood in the Works of Male and Female Igbo Writers: Achebe, Emecheta, Nwapa and Nzekwu.”

Davies’s main activities mentioned in the quotation above have been developed in later books. In the light of the feminist approach, Susheila Nasta edited *Motherlands: Black Women’s Writing from African, the Caribbean and South Asia*. The title unveils the main issues under analysis. Here, we find Caroline Rooney’s “‘Dangerous Knowledge’ and the Poetics of Survival: A Reading of *Our Sister Killjoy* and *A Question of Power*”; C. L. Innes “Mothers or Sisters? Identity, Discourse and Audience in the Writing of Ama Ata Aidoo and Mariama Bâ”; and in the last section Elaine Savory Fido analyzes Buchi Emecheta’s work in “Mother/lands: Self and Separation in the Work of Buchi Emecheta, Bessie Head and Jean Rhys.”

In Spain, Bibiana Pérez Ruiz has published a book on African women’s writing, *Lo lejano y lo bello: feminismo y maternidades africanas a través de su literatura*, including her approach to Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* and both Aidoo’s *Our Sister Killjoy* and *No Sweetness Here*.

From the point of view of the development of an African women writers’s aesthetics, Vincent O. Odamtten’s work *The Art of Ama Ata Aidoo: Polylectics and Reading Against Neocolonialism* provides an analysis on Aidoo’s works following a polylectic criticism that he defines in these terms:

A polylectic critical method demands that we approach a work of art in a self-interpellative manner, bringing to our reading and critique enough knowledge that our evaluation may account for as many of the complexities of the specific (con)text of the literary/ cultural products as possible. (5)

Katherine Fishburn describes her work, *Reading Buchi Emecheta: Cross-cultural Conversations*, as her “rebuttal to much of the (white) Western feminist criticism that has been generated on Buchi Emecheta and her fiction” (ix). Fishburn proposes a postmodern approach to these works and mainly relies on both Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutics and Mikhail Bakhtin’s ideas related to the dialogic heteroglossia. She emphasizes that it is important to focus on the gaps produced when a white reader/scholar like herself, lacking what I would call a holistic African experience, discovers her misunderstandings of the African texts (cf. xi). Susan Arndt’s work *African Women’s Literature: Orature and Intertextuality* has been seminal for my discussion about the Igbo women writers and their interactivity with the Igbo traditional

oral corpus. Arndt believes that the Igbo women narratives are close to the type of writing-back texts. She dedicates two sections to Buchi Emecheta's works: "Myth versus Rationality: Buchi Emecheta's novel *The Bride Price*" and "On the Sorrows of a Mother: Buchi Emecheta's Novel *The Joys of Motherhood*." This research relies on Arndt's terminology regarding the particularities of the Igbo oral narratives.

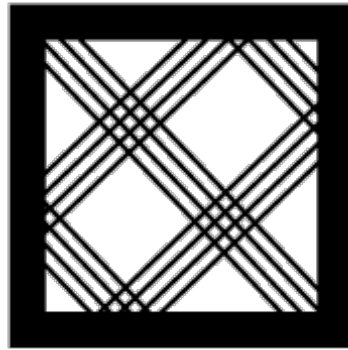
Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, who was not able to comprehensively assess Emecheta's novels in 1983, changed completely her approach in 1996 after researching in depth more works by Nigerian women writers. Her masterpiece *African Wo/Man Palava: The Nigerian Novel by Women* is an elucidation of a new vernacular theory that she elaborates as if she were responding to Davies's third and first points consecutively in the quotation above: "Studying African women writers and the development of an African female aesthetic, and developing the canon of African women writers." Furthermore, in this research I adhere myself to some aspects of her theory to elaborate my work. In part one of this book, "Kwenu: A Vernacular Theory," she divulges valuable knowledge about the Igbo society and its particularities, in which traditions, beliefs, and myths meet to allow her create a specific vernacular theory. She ends this part presenting the concept of "palava" in Nigerian society when used for women. The term "palaver" is described in the preface of a publication by the UNESCO as: "organized and open debates on various issues in which everybody, regardless of age or sex, is encouraged to participate, with a view of reaching consensus and keeping the community closely linked" (Ogunyemi, *Africa* 98). Ogunyemi comments that this definition conceals the negative aspects of the palaver. The word "palaver" is not as simple and as positive as the idea mentioned above. In her words:

In spite of this limitation, palaver emerges as critical discourse—serious as well as trifling, logical and rambling, orderly and haphazard, written and spoken, a celebration of the contradictions of life with the principled use of word power for communal good. (*Africa* 98)

This critic attests that in Nigeria one can find such sentences as "Woman na palava," which means "woman is trouble" in slogans painted on buses or written on stickers (cf. *Africa* 98). She keeps on elaborating her discussion till she gets to the point where she explains that the female novelists are perceived as trouble-makers (cf. *Africa* 112). She affirms that women's texts address problems and this is in essence "palava" (cf. 104). However, this Nigerian critic affirms that women writers confront not only gender problems but also oppression. Hence, she invites men to participate and hear

what women have to say in these texts/“palava,” disclosing the four principles that predominate as womanist tenets: “Conciliation, collaboration, consensus, and complementarity between women and men” (*Africa* 126).

In addition to these specific texts, there are more articles on the works that I have chosen for my research, which are listed in the “*Emerging Perspectives on.....*” series on both writers. Most of these critical works focus on the aspect of gender relations and the importance of motherhood in African culture. There are also other essays on Buchi Emecheta’s works that deal with the Igbo culture, poetic voices; and on also on Ama Ata Aidoo’s works that analyse the role of the critical voice, history, language, indigenous influence, and her radical feminism. I have tried to go further than this and approached both Ama Ata Aidoo’s and Buchi Emecheta’s works in holistic depth taking into account the historical moment, social, and political context to analyze the contents and formal aspects of their texts. Indeed, I hope this research reveals the complexity of these authors and how they definitely helped to observe how some women African writers were able to re-present Africa and Africans through their enriching social perspective and imaginative originality.



PART I: *NKYIMU*

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

1. THE MEANING OF THE ADINKRA SYMBOL *NKYIMU*

G.F. Kojo Arthur identifies this ideogram as the symbol of “fractional parts, precision, skill, dexterity, intelligence and adroitness” (184). The literal translation Bruce W. Willis presents of this term in his dictionary is: “the crossed divisions made on Adinkra cloth before printing” (146). I compile from both authors and understand that African craftsmen draw intersecting straight lines on the cloth with a wooden comb or any other suitable tool, previously plunged into a natural dye, to produce perfect divisions, in which the Adinkra symbols will be printed to convey some message. The sectioning of an Adinkra cloth is decisive for the best results of the stamping and whole design. I have decided that this symbol could best represent this Part I, in which I focus on the methodology, theoretical framework, and organization of the sections in this research, mimicking Ghanaian craftsmen.

1.1. A SHORT BACKGROUND FOR MY RESEARCH

In 2004 I had the opportunity of being invited to the presentation and defence of a PhD dissertation at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, in Legon. Such a fortuitous academic experience encouraged me to make some methodological decisions in relation to potential theoretical options for my own research. The African PhD candidate had to face questions concerning his choice for African theoretical frameworks, and his dissertation’s dependence on oral information taken from old people who served as live embodiments of the very subject of his research. One of the invited members to the board was European, who expressed his concerns about the compass of African epistemology. He challenged the Ghanaian student’s use of African critical art theory given its divergence from the Western canon. While oral traditions have legitimacy among scholars of literature, the certainly more fragile character of constructing research blocks based on the memories of the elderly, apparently lacked authenticity. Instead of an irretrievable loss, a lot remains to be recuperated from old villagers, valuable guardians of the treasured knowledge either from the oral traditions or particular memories of their own culture. The PhD candidate passed that hard exam, having been able to gain the European professor’s willingness to accept African theories as valid theoretical frameworks for carrying out academic research. To discredit the validity of interviews where written sources do not exist is a difficult criticism to sustain.

A month later, I presented a paper in the AFSAAP International Conference at the West Australia University, in which I raised the issue about choosing African theories as framework for critical analyses and other academic research. The debate and feedback generated in the lecturers and participants from many African universities, as well as various universities from all over the world, were very enriching and served to address, if not always respond, many of my questions.

My PhD dissertation concerns re-presentation, understood as a “new” chance for discussion, departing from the conceptualizations of Africa and Africans that Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta provide in their literary works. My approach heeds diverse African theoreticians and their capacity to promote a fresh vision, sprouting or emanating from African experience. Likewise, the postcolonial and neo-colonial theories remain fundamentally supportive.⁴ Hence, the process for framing my research was reflective and carefully measured. I was not only weighing ideas, perspectives, and concepts based on wide-ranging reading, but using what I gleaned from those efforts to bring informed thinking and careful analysis to the works I have chosen for my corpus. The divisions I adopt for the diverse parts and chapters are not accidental. They depend on the main social, political, and cultural messages Aidoo and Emecheta disclose in their work. Every part in this PhD dissertation features a particular Adinkra symbol in their original Akan (Twi) language, which is used as heading in order to clarify the scheme of this dissertation. Each stands for the main ideas that coincide with the elements the authors re-present in their works and I analyze in the diverse chapters.

1.2. FROM REPRESENTATION TO RE-PRESENTATION

Stuart Hall defines the concept of representation in these terms:

Representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enable us to refer to either the ‘real’ world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events. (“Work” 17)

⁴ I have in mind non-African seminal ideas and theories as found in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin’s *The Empire Writes Back*, as well as in Edward W. Said’s *Orientalism*, and *Culture and Imperialism*, or in Homi Bhabha’s *Nation and Narration* and *The Location of Culture*. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak” and *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, enlarge this list of cornerstones, just to mention a few. These texts are the foundation texts for most of the basic ideas cited from other postcolonial-theorists’ works.

Hall insists on the importance of the participants of culture, because they are “who give meaning to people, objects and events” (“Introduction” 3). Moreover, he explains that the meaning of things depend on the way they are represented and on “the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualize, the values we place on them” (“Introduction” 3). This means that all kinds of elements are essential in the composition of texts, and I am interested in the concept of representation emanating not only from the literary but also from any other source. Hall adds that meaning is directly related to the construction of identity, “it is tied up with questions of how culture is used to mark out and maintain identity within and difference between groups” (“Introduction” 3). He supports this view describing the evolution of the concept of representation from Saussure’s linguistic theory to Barthes’ semiotics.

Furthermore, Hall refers to Michel Foucault’s crucial contribution to the advancement of the concept of representation, highlighting how this French philosopher diverged his attention to the importance of the production of knowledge and not only meaning in language. Hence, Foucault changed his object of study—a corpus of language—and substitutes it by what he calls “discourse,” in which historical particulars and contexts, as well as the relations of power, play an important factor in representing and thus producing social knowledge. For him, representation at this point is the production of knowledge, about something or someone, under the constraints of the historical moment and political power. Additionally, Foucault, who was interested in the observation of how the production of knowledge regulates the working of power in social practice, challenges the position of the subject.

Hall uses Foucault’s discussion of Velazquez’s *Las Meninas* to expound the idea that: “We take up the position indicated by the discourse, identify with them, subject ourselves to its meanings, and become its ‘subjects’” (“Work” 60). For him, Foucault’s powerful argument is that the meaning of this painting is always involved in a process of emerging and thus, never fixed. Moreover, “Meaning is therefore constructed in the dialogue between the painting and the spectator” (“Work” 60). That being so implies that “For the painting to work, the spectator, whoever he or she may be, must first ‘subject’ himself/ herself to the painting’s discourse and, in this way, become the painting’s ideal viewer, the producer of its meanings-its subject” (“Work” 60).

In the case of this research I use the term “representation” with a hyphen “re-presentation” to highlight that there is a second chance, afresh, anew with respect to any

previous idea or situation. African women writers try to bring forward female characters and their realms by writing back to their male peers, who mostly present female women characters either as silenced women or completely absent from any social and political scenario in their work. It was an ordeal for African women to write and when they did, it was difficult to publish. If they did, it was even harder to be read. Though what turned out to be the worst of all was that critics took no heed of their texts. Consequently, the term “re-presentation” also refers to the courageous act of many women writers, who had to try more than once. They did not give up writing, rather they kept on doing it until they got to be acknowledged as writers.

Kadiatu Kanneh agrees with Hall’s explanation on the evolution of the concept of representation mentioned above. She explores texts that have installed biased discourses around race, depending on the historical time, the political ideology, and economic aims. She observes how these discourses, associated to different fields and disciplines, have constructed with words, metaphors, and images a corpus of knowledge about African peoples and their continent in diverse historical moments. She studies the cross-references that appear in different, and sometimes contradicting narratives, which shed light on her suspicion of how many texts have been the launching pads for all sorts of ideas and images. Sometimes, these have interpreted and inevitably invented an idea of Africa and her peoples to suit the colonial machinery. Kanneh adds the element of race to Foucault’s theoretical approach. Therefore, the addition of this aspect makes her theory suitable to explore the specific African experience. In this sense, I follow her strategy of bringing together the factors that constitute the cornerstones for the construction of an authorised image of Africa by outsiders. For example, I focus on the issue of race and its effects on the representations of Africa and Africans, which have triggered the need of the Africans to restore their identity, especially visible in Aidoo’s *Our Sister Killjoy* and Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood*.

Kadiatu Kanneh not only relies on scientific or commercial texts but also on ethnographical works and historical narratives. Before her, Edward Said already asserted that—as he concentrated on the 19th- and 20th-century modern Western empires—he has especially “looked at cultural forms like the novel, which [he] believes were immensely important in the formation of imperial attitudes, references, and experiences” (*Culture* xii). Moreover, Said insists on the need to not only focus on narrative fiction, but also pay attention to those cultural forms “position in the history

and world of empire” (*Culture* xii). He highlights the importance of the effect of narratives of these stories:

my basic point being that stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world; they also become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own histories. The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future—these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative. (*Culture* xii-xiii)

Kadiatu Kanneh has also inferred that those texts underscored the idea of the existence of different races and turned into a body of discourse on racism. Firstly, she believes in the process of connecting time and comparing the narratives produced in the 19th century with those in early 20th century. Secondly, she also thinks that it is important to examine the places in which those texts were produced. And finally, she takes into account the diverse disciplines that framed writing into particular ideologies of the historical period with the corresponding authors’ political engagement. This approach unveiled how the meaning of Africa was defined through the establishment of a corpus of narrative, which produced descriptions and definitions about Africa engrossing an imaginative concept and a body of knowledge about the continent and its peoples for diverse purposes. We should not forget that those texts were written mostly by non-Africans in the past:

The movement between African and European contexts reveals how Africa and its identities have been crucially informed by the impact of knowledges and interests from *outside* the continent. The reading of literary texts alongside and against theoretical, political and ethnographic writings is intended to emphasise, [...] the necessity of approaching literary texts as a nexus for the re-articulation of—culturally and socially mediated—ideological material. (Kanneh 1)

It is also significant to highlight Homi K. Bhabha’s influence on Kanneh regarding the problem of confusing cultural diversity with cultural difference. I stand by her deduction that:

Encounter *between* cultures is precisely the moment at which the articulation of signs becomes apparent, caught between the ambivalence, the “in-between space,”⁵ of contesting projections and linguistic negotiation. Cultural representation relies, inevitably, on this

⁵ Kanneh borrows this expression from Homi K. Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* (34).

conjunction, this clash of signification on the borders and limits of cultures, which acknowledge and mediate cultural meaning always as the articulation of difference and otherness. (Kanneh 17)

This last quotation can be taken into account as a twofold opportunity to approach, on the one hand, diverse texts from more than one discipline in order to study and compare the representations of Africa and Africans, scrutinising the question of race. And on the other hand, to pin down the idea behind this research: a hyphenated “re-presentation” as explained above.

Hence, I rely on the authority of Kanneh’s research as I share her idea of including any literary narrative, since my starting point is to consider both Ama Ata Aidoo’s and Buchi Emecheta’s diverse sources. As seen below, I also use texts that belong to other disciplines such as travel writing, ethno-philosophy, anthropology, ethnography, and colonial literary works to accomplish my analysis.

1.3. OGUNYEMI’S VERNACULAR THEORY

In developing my approach, I have always preferred to search for an adequate framework that can suit the African experience and its particularity. Theories dealing with Africa and African texts are mostly emerging from the postcolonial theory. For example, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, has elaborated a vernacular literary theory, which has allowed critics and scholars to read African women’s texts under a new light. In contrast to *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* (1985), in which the authors Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike—the “Bolekaja” group—prescribe, guide, and criticise some African authors, Ogunyemi’s book *Africa Wo/Man Palava* recompiles facts from the Nigerian ethnic groups’ original oral myths, and compares them with her studies on some African women writers’ early literary works. She elaborates a vernacular literary theory based on a multicultural and multilingual literary tradition. This theory springs from the oral Yoruba and the Igbo ethnic groups’ myths, unavoidably intertwined with the pidgin and the English realities of the colonial and the post-colonial experience (cf. *Africa* 7).

Ogunyemi’s main trope for the creation of this approach is motherhood or mothering (cf. *Africa* 9). She highlights the similarities among some African myths and Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Christian ones (cf. *Africa* 23). To explore the African vernacular myths she starts with *Osun*, worshiped in the pre-colonial Yoruba-land as the water goddess. She is the variation “on the theme of the great, ancestral mother in a

hostile universe. Her greatness lies in her policy of containment of her anguish for the good of all” (*Africa* 23). In short, the story is based on how *Osun* was not consulted by the male members of her colony—a group of seventeen *orisa*—to guarantee its optimal functioning. She withdrew from them and impeded the rain to fall. The colony suffered from shortage of water and plantations withered. Meanwhile, she got pregnant but there is uncertainty about who and what circumstances propitiated this. In her isolation she did not get depressed, instead she sat in silence and observed. She concentrated on beautifying herself with her own hands by plaiting her hair. However, she had promised that if she had a baby girl they would both withdraw far from men and maintain their dissimilarity. If she had a baby boy he would become the conciliator between her and the male members of the colony. The *orisa* male group amazed by the impossibility of discovering, before the nine-month gestation, the mysterious secret that the dark and silent womb hid, implored for a baby boy (cf. *Africa* 22). To restore peace and normality the supreme deity, *Olodumare*, compelled them to reconcile with *Osun*, because only through unity a community can succeed and advance. Ogunyemi thinks that the men’s obsession to have baby boys comes from this myth. *Osun* had a boy, *Osetura/Esu*, who became the negotiator between men and women in the colony. Therefore he, inevitably, has a divided personality to meet the needs of his mother’s agenda on the one hand, and on the other hand to comply with his father’s requirements (cf. *Africa* 24). For Ogunyemi, *Osun*’s myth is a blueprint for Nigerian women writers, and this can be expanded to many African women authors, who started to write in the second half of the 20th century:

Osun’s story encapsulates several principles: motherhood, gender problems, woman’s independence, fe/male interdependency, woman’s career, economics, aesthetics, domesticity, sustenance, fertility to ensure the future, interest in the environment, quarrel and mediation, *siddon look* tactics, that is, “sit down and cogitate,” a belligerent form of pacifism. (*Africa* 26)

The truth and role of umpire or peacemaker that *Osetura/Esu* was expected to perform in this myth could be the same founding ground for African womanism, since Ogunyemi displays the idea behind this ideology in a very clear statement: “In the womanist venture, four principles, call them the four C’s—conciliation, collaboration, consensus, and complementarity between women and men—predominate” (*Africa* 126).

Ogunyemi also introduces the Yoruba divination text composed of 256 verses, known as *Odu*, whom as she explains is the wife of the divination *orisa*, *Orunmila/Ifa*.

In another version, she is *Obatala's* wife, the creating *orisa*. Hence Ogunyemi infers that *Odu* that “is a female essence” is at once connected with “divination and creativity through wifhood” (*Africa* 27). Through her reading of Judith Gleason’s *Oya: In Praise of the Goddess*, she becomes convinced that *Odu's* calabash is the sacrosanct container that contains all texts (cf. *Africa* 27), and stands for the entire universe: cosmos, earth, and sky. It becomes also the symbol of “secrecy, of the primal egg” (*Africa* 28). Indeed, this critic brings forward from *Odu's* myth the idea that “The female packaging of the rounded calabash as womb/egg establishes *Odu* “as she who reproduces everybody’s story or fortune” (*Africa* 28). Moreover, to turn *Odu* into *Ifa's* worthless other, the male seer “babalawo” uncovers her secrets to those who ask and, hence, leaves her aside powerless. This “is sexism at the basics” (*Africa* 28), and explains women’s displacement from the political and social agendas in the large community of her nation. The evidence left from this myth in the African literary world is that male authors executed the first written literature, mimicking the seer who reveals stories in the *Odu's* myth above. It is necessary to note that *Osun's* story becomes a major part in *Odu's*, and consequently *Odu* is “the mother-text par excellence” (*Africa* 28). Ogunyemi grounds her theory through placing this myth in the women realm, and retrieves the authority of storytelling and writing from the men’s exclusive hands.

Ogunyemi also brings in a significant analogy between cloth and the African women writers’ texts in order to develop her theory on the repetitive sequences. She deduces that the repetition of patterns in both African typical cloths and literature can inform of a particular tradition. She borrows this idea from Anne Adams’ talk at the University of Bayreuth in 1986, in which she compared some African women’s texts and the *lappa*. According to Buchi Emecheta’s glossary included in her novel *Kehinde*, the *lappa* is a “traditional woman’s costume, a length of cloth wrapped around the waist” (144). Ogunyemi provides further details:

The simple two or three yards of fabric is versatile: it can be used as a dress, a blanket, a pillow, a curtain or screen, a mattress or mat, a sheet, a bed cover, a tablecloth, an umbrella, headgear, a baby carrier, a sling, a wall decoration, or an *aju* to cushion and protect the head from the load it carries. Its commonplaceness ensures its position as a symbol of African womanhood. (*Africa* 4)

Ogunyemi adds that the *lappa* is not only used by women as a wild card, but also by men to cover themselves at any time. Ogunyemi stresses the use of the *lappa* as the soother for the heavy weight held by women on their heads, or the babies on their

backs or on their way to and from markets or farms. Definitely, this Nigerian critic likens the *lappa* to African women's writing: "Women's novels, like the *lappa*, are intended primarily for women who mostly bear burdens, yet they are indispensable for communal use" (*Africa* 4).

Ogunyemi also draws inspiration from Houston Baker's idea regarding the flaws of the creation of theories through invented tropes. For him, these intend to approach texts in an ordered manner but end up being an experience of selective reading and working from some invented literary theory. This can exhibit order within the interpretation of a text but many aspects or even entire texts are left untouched. Baker calls these troubling remnants "remainders." Ogunyemi agrees and pins down the works of the Nigerian women writers as the important "remainders" that have been ignored by "many African discourses, especially the theory of decolonization" (*Africa* 8).

Ogunyemi chooses to launch her vernacular theory based on the frame of reference of motherhood, though not from a feminist point of view in this case. Motherhood alludes to the condition of a woman as being a creator or engenderer:

Motherhood or mothering will serve as the central trope for a literary theory of the novel under consideration. Motherhood/mothering engenders numerous connecting threads, resulting in an intricately woven *lappa* with patterns replicated with slight variations, as with the Yoruba *aso ebi*. (*Africa* 9)

For her, this concept rather belongs to the Yoruba people in Nigeria, meaning "cloth for kin," and referring to the practice of wearing identical cloths "at crowded affairs like weddings, funerals, chieftaincy, inaugurations, or political gatherings" (*Africa* 10). Friends and families wear the same to satisfy their "Yoruba psychosocial consciousness" (*Africa* 10). Ogunyemi continues on highlighting that:

It engenders group identity, solidarity, a sense of being special. In spite of the general impression of sameness in the *aso ebi*, there are always distinctions in the total effect of each person's outfit, creating individuality in uniformity through choice accessories and poise of carriage. (*Africa* 10)

The parallelism this critic finds between the *aso ebi* in Nigerian life and the Nigerian women's fiction urges her to use the *aso ebi* as a metaphor for the reassessment of African women's writing. She affirms that womanism⁶ is the repetitive

⁶ Womanism is the theory that embraces both "Alice Walker's theory of black woman's identity" and "an affirmation of motherhood" as the central issue (Newell, *West* 152). This theory focuses on the African women's oppression, although seeking communal solidarity through conciliation with men since both

pattern that pervades their narrative. Therefore, womanism is highly inserted in the many diverse texts by African women writers (*Africa* 10). I lean on this statement of her theoretical discourse and the expanded idea of womanism with the four Cs to include the social and political commitment and participation in many African women writers, especially Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta in the two decades I analyze.

Okechukwu Nwafor has enriched this discussion explaining that *aso ebi* is a combined word where “*aso* means cloth while *ebi* means family” (1). In addition to what Ogunyemi calls the practice of wearing, Nwafor asserts, based on his research on the Nigerian middle and lower classes in Lagos, that recently the “*aso ebi* practice is predominantly an urban phenomenon” (2). His historical account traces this practice back to the times of colonial modernity, although also looks into contemporary African society as observed in his quotation from *Sun News*:

In recent times it has become a city phenomenon and has diffused into other groups in Nigeria. *Also peoples from other West African sub-regions* engage in *aso ebi* activities and the practice has risen above family affiliation such that a stranger and an uninvited guest may seek recognition through *aso ebi* (emphasis added). (3)

These stressed words reaffirm that the essence or concept of the *aso ebi* is not limited to Nigerian community. In this sense, I will approach both Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta as participating in the *aso ebi* celebration of writing, in which their repetitive patterns are not only limited to a gender role but also open out to other social and political aspects, which I will discuss later.

1.4. THE ADINKRA SYMBOLS AND WRITING

The Akan people from Ghana and Ivory Coast have developed a communication system during centuries based on the Adinkra symbols. These have allowed them to arrange both the physical and spiritual universe, facilitating to classify, encode, and transmit their experience in their religious, social, moral, and political daily life. The Adinkra symbols are initially stamped on traditional cloths used during a funeral ceremony.

W. Bruce Willis asserts that the translation for the term Adinkra is: “a message one gives to another when departing” (1). The burial ceremony is celebrated as a final rite of passage from this world to the most important world, the abode of the dead

genders become supplementary. Recall that for Ogunyemi, African womanism is also based on the four c’s “conciliation, collaboration, consensus and complementarity between women and men” (*Africa* 126), as I mentioned above.

ancestors, who intercede for the living in all their affairs. For Willis, the “Adinkra symbols are firmly rooted in the proverbial literature and the oral tradition of the Akan people. They are clearly a cultural link between the living and the dead, the past and present, and the events that occur today and in the future” (43). To this, G.F. Koj Arthur adds:

Communication can be accomplished through the use of discrete graphical representation of commonly held ideas and views. In this way, ostensibly, ‘non-literate’ societies may produce, through the use of their symbols and signs, a literature which pervades their environment by being emblazoned on their clothes, tools, and other common material artifacts. (10)

For him, the Adinkra symbols are icons and metaphors that stand for a whole system of thought, religious belief, social behaviour, and political organization based on a common experience that hold together the Akan people (cf. 12). His analysis reveals the richness of the kaleidoscopic interpretations that his re-reading of the Adinkra cloth has conveyed. He concludes that if we take into account variables such as the colours of the cloth background and the infinite combinations of the symbols, then we can read each Adinkra cloth as an illustrated book, in which knowledge is stored through its own narrative (cf. 123).

The Adinkra symbols do not conform to a static system of illustrations and thoughts. Every experience has yielded a new form for artistic expression. Nowadays, the symbols can be found everywhere as decorative designs not only on the funeral cloths and others, but also carved into furniture such as the sacred stool, moulded into facades of government buildings, welded to jewellery, and other adornments for daily use. It is significant to remark that this is not a dead system. It continuously renews itself, maintaining its abiding quality of communicating knowledge, and adapting to fit the needs of the Akan community’s changes with the requirements of the present everyday life.

Kofi Anyidoho intertwines both artistic works and Adinkra symbols with the Ogunyemi’s theory regarding the repetitive patterns of the *aso ebi*:

The cultural landscape of Ghana as seen in her literary and performing arts is dominated by an amazing range of defining metaphors and symbols,⁷ of which a certain core group constitute various *patterns of recurrence*. While some of these metaphors emphasize achievement and

⁷ Kofi Anyidoho particularly refers to the *Adinkra* symbols here.

celebration, others underscore the need for critical evaluation of self (emphasis added). (3)

The evolution of the Adinkra symbols is due to the capacity for adaptation of the African community. It is no wonder that, in addition to the traditional old symbols, the Akan Christians have incorporated new colours and symbols that represent Good Friday or Easter. Although the Akan people constitute a large community from diverse regions in Africa, Kojo Arthur tends to unify their cultural and religious idiosyncrasy and unique and unified institutions (cf. 21). However, this author acknowledges that the commercial contacts with the Islamic African community has caused a cultural exchange where both groups have lent and borrowed from each other words and symbols (cf. 23).

Arthur has launched a question, “Signs and Symbols from Ghana: A Writing System?” as the title for one of his chapters. His research compares the diverse theories regarding the origin and history of the ideograms or ideographs, and wonders if these symbols can be understood as a writing system. Then he delves into the essence of his analysis: the Akan cloth. His intention is to focus on the function of the Akan cloth as a communication mechanism. Kojo Arthur quotes Susan Domowitz’s *Wearing Proverb: Anyi Names for Printed Factory Cloth*: “proverb cloths offer an accessible public voice to those who are constrained to silence” (Arthur 19). In talking so, she particularly refers to the Adinkra cloth. Arthur also quotes Kwesi Yankah’s *The Proverb in the Context of Akan Rhetoric: A Theory of Proverb Praxis*, related to the “textile rhetoric”:

Yankah on the other hand, notes that the cloth design, along with the mode of wearing it may be used “not just to praise political heroes, to commemorate historical events, and to assert social identities, but also as a form of rhetoric—a channel for the silent projection of argument (emphasis added).” (Arthur 19)

In selecting both quotations, Arthur insists on the aspect of the communicative power of the Adinkra cloth, in which symbols speak out the silence of the people dressed in that way. I have stressed the last sentence in the quotation above, since it is crucially related to Ogunyemi’s literary trope: her analogy between cloth and women’s texts and the reception of those texts.

Kojo Arthur also adds that the Adinkra cloth is not only used for the funeral and other sacred ceremonies, but also for the swearing ceremony of the king and the queenmother. Hence it is a cloth worn by both male and female members of the Akan

society (cf. Arthur 20), and also offered as a “parting cloth” when someone is sent to exile (cf. Arthur 25). He highlights the significance of the colours used for the printing of the Adinkra symbols and the background of the cloth:

The colors and the constituent symbols of the adinkra cloth evoke complex concepts that relate to social and political organization, beliefs and attitudes, moral and ethical issues about the self and one’s responsibility, and knowledge and education. The adinkra cloth symbols are but one example of textile tradition that demonstrates how the Akan express complex cultural, spiritual and philosophical concepts through their art. (20)

Furthermore, Kojo Arthur defends that the Adinkra symbols become a “multi-layered ideogrammatic language,” in which the culturally specific becomes at once universal in dealing with concepts common to everyman (cf. Arthur 20). In any case, Kojo Arthur’s most relevant affirmation for my argument is that “the adinkra cloth is pregnant with text” (20), and that “the symbols and the patterns of stamping them in the cloth constitute text that needs to be examined for what it encodes” (26). This feature of communication, which transforms the Adinkra cloth from a mere piece of material into a cloth embellished with woven voices emerging from the printed symbols, will turn into an essential issue in my approach to both Aidoo and Emecheta.

1.4.1. THE ADINKRA *ASO EBI* CLOTH

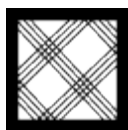
I embrace the analogy between some African women writers’ texts and the practice of the *aso ebi* cloth—as this latter is practiced among African women—as Ogunyemi suggests in her theory. Even though there are particularities that diverge, Ogunyemi’s analogy is based on the similarities that converge. She equates the repetitive designs in the *aso ebi* cloth of all the African women, who belong to a group in an event, to the recurrent patterns of thought or themes that create similarities in African women writers’ texts. This recurrence unveils a fascinating tradition in African women writers.

By bringing together various theoretical approaches such as Ogunyemi’s position, Ojo-Ade’s warning against African women’s discrimination, Newell’s consideration on harassment, Kojo Arthur’s affirmation that the adinkra cloth could become a text, and Bruce Willis’s affirmation that the Adinkra symbols are clearly linked to proverbs and the oral tradition of the Akan people, I conceive the corpus of my research as an *aso ebi* activity, in which I have chosen Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta out from the growing group of West African women writers. Both are

wearing the same cloth printed with Adinkra symbols that speak out their stories and their worries. These re-presentations are loaded with narratives about political, social and spiritual predicaments. Their divergences in the *aso ebi* cloth constitute the characteristics of the individuality in each writer. Meanwhile, the similarities lie on the recurrent patterns that form the *aso ebi*, which highlight the existence of a tradition that Ogunyemi analyzes when theorizing on the West African women writers's narrative. These recurrent motifs contain the encoded traditional, social, and political messages related to the Adinkra symbols I analyze in this research.

My approach focuses on analyzing the Adinkra symbols as a pre-text for each part of this research, in which I study the contents related to the tenets of these symbols. Therefore, each part fits to the message that each symbol conveys and its relationship with Aidoo's and Emecheta's narratives. Now let me probe into the divisions of the imaginary Adinkra *aso ebi* cloth and extract the symbols that create similarities and individualities. Each symbol with its proverb and meaning will become the mouthpiece of the narrative that decodes the messages of the voices emerging from previously silenced people.

Each symbol guides the readers of this research to take heed of the main worries, ideas, and themes, which some African women writers re-present. Sometimes they converge into common grounds and on other occasions diverge into their own particularities. Each symbol is framed in the ideas I presented above, regarding the issue of re-presentation in diverse texts from other disciplines in addition to the literary narrative. At the same time, I consider some social, political, and scientific theories, which have built up a girdle of racism around many texts from previous decades that are now subjected to observation here.



1.4.1.1. NKYIMU

I have selected this Adinkra symbol for Part I of this research, since it represents the idea of proficiency and intelligence required to divide the cloth before printing the symbols on it with the natural dyes. I assimilate the sectioning of an Adinkra cloth with

both the methodology I develop in this Part I and the general organization of the sections in this research, my own work mimicking the Ghanaian craftsmen.

The starting point for this Part I is the concept of re-presentation, which is essential in the title of this PhD dissertation. In this sense, the methodology I have followed relies on the cross-sectional sources developed above, especially Stuart Hall's elucidation on the evolution of the concept of representation, Kadiatu Kanneh's race factor departing from Foucault's idea of representation, Edward Said's assertions regarding the importance of the colonial narratives about the strange peoples and the places in the world, and Franz Fanon's analysis on the psychological effects of colonialism. All these cross-sectional approaches will serve to reveal the doubly-marginalized condition of African women as both women and writers. Therefore, the meaning encoded in my hyphenated term "re-presentation" conveys a new chance to discuss and freshly present again, having also in mind the issue of race.

Additionally, I inquire into Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi's concept of motherhood, which creates or engenders common threads that weave metaphorically a cloth called *lappa* in Nigeria. And I also embrace Ogunyemi's analogy between the text and the *aso ebi*, accomplishing the function of creating a kin group through the use of repetitive patterns. All this has helped to turn my corpus into an Adinkra *aso ebi* so as to study both the thoughts and lessons embedded in the new re-presentation of Africa and Africans, and the forms of art used to achieve this goal.



1.4.1.2. AKOBEN

This symbol stands for a horn that is blown to call the people to come together and do something or help the rest of the community. In Part II of this PhD dissertation I introduce the external elements that, in addition to the inherent desire of becoming writers, have prodded West African writers to balance stories about Africa and Africans, as if they were blowing the *Akoben* horn for the community of writers.

Chinua Achebe's insistence on putting right the image of his people has made him call for a new self-representation by Africans themselves. Indeed, this aspiration

encouraged both Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta. Aidoo wanted to become a writer ever since she was a girl at school; exactly as Buchi Emecheta who had also fancied to become a writer. Both have written to improve and go further the African male-self-representation by adding the African women's voice in their new representation.

In order to organize the effect of those external factors that moved African intellectuals to re-present themselves, I have relied on Alastair Niven's view on how the image of Africa and Africans was downtrodden in the writings of David Livingstone, Mary Kingsley, and Joseph Conrad, calling attention to the power of literary discourse when it comes to distorting people and their land. I have also depended on Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow's reading of more than five hundred works of fiction and nonfiction by British authors about the sub-Saharan Africa from 16th through 20th century. Guarav Desai's expanded definition of the concept "colonial library" has served me to show the epistemological colonization of the "native African minds," and has derived in what I call a body of discourse and counter-discourse about Africa and Africans generated by the colonisers, colonialists, and colonised.

Likewise, both Frantz Fanon and Edward Said have yielded enough argumentation to justify the idea of the *Akobon* (war horn) calling African writers to the action of self-representation, which is extended to women writers in this research.

Finally, Chinua Achebe's critical essays centered my attention on the issue of race. Most of the "colonial library" books demean Africans and this, as if it were an *Akobon*, motivated Achebe to start writing about his people and country. Furthermore, his writing turned into the *Akobon* that called other writers to recover Africa's lost dignity. Definitely, this stimulated Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta to write from their own point of view their self re-presentation as African women.



1.4.1.3. NEA ONNIM NO SUA A, OHU

Part III in this research deals with this significant symbol that conveys a very popular message for West African peoples. It translates into "If you no know you go know" as any Ghanaian would repeat in diverse social situations. It suggests that only through the

acquisition of knowledge can one live and grow. It urges people to keep on learning in order to keep flowing with life.

Achebe defends the writer's function as a teacher who regenerates society. Franz Fanon's overcoming of the racial inferiority complex in *Africans* or Nadine Gordimer's insistence that only a committed writer can take the responsibility of writing for the sake of education and change, are among the clear examples I have followed to demonstrate the necessity for improvement in African society in the two decades I analyze. Along with it, special emphasis is also given to how African women writers were committed in three ways: "as a writer, as a woman and as a Third World person" (Ogundipe-Leslie, *Women* 10). Within this late consideration, I deal with the issue of labelling these African women's writings as feminist literature. Both Ama Ata Aidoo's and Buchi Emecheta's rejection of this label is delineated through Emecheta's process of teaching the Igbo cultural particulars and their traditions, and Aidoo's moral, social and political lessons. I exemplify this with their texts in detail, how these authors represent the problems with the only aim of teaching for change. Or, as the symbol *Nea Onnim No Sua A, Ohu* suggests, one can live and grow only through the acquisition of knowledge.



1.4.1.4. SANKOFA

This is one of the most deeply rooted Adinkra symbols, since it calls for looking back to ancestral art forms and culture so as to recover African identity. Precisely, this was banished during the colonisation period and further. For Bruce Willis, *Sankofa* is the icon that stands for African cultural awakening, inviting to bring from the past what is precious to construct a new prosperous future. Moreover, Kofi Anyidoho puts forward what he calls "The *Sankofa* principle" to explain the recurrent attitude of contemporary Ghanaian writers and art performers of intertwining both the present and past to endow their artworks with proposals for the future.

After the independence of Ghana, UNESCO encouraged African intellectuals and politicians to establish an agenda for the revival of African culture. Kwame Nkrumah, the first Ghanaian president, was one of the pioneers in this endeavour.

Moreover, intellectuals, writers, poets, and playwrights have participated in this re-emergence of the African identity. For example, Kayper-Mensah wrote his poems on some Adinkra symbols as a way of ensuring the regeneration of old traditions, so as to keep on transmitting the ancient vernacular knowledge of Africans.

Part IV represented by this symbol brings into discussion intellectuals such as Chinua Achebe—inviting artists to bring back through memories and imagination the history and stories of their people; Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o—dealing with the idea of setting Africa as the central point of departure to learn other cultures and his desire to de-colonise the educational system in his country re-evaluating oral tradition; Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike’s recommendation to render into English all the African resources from the traditional proverbs, jokes, legends, metaphors and other stylistic features, in such a way that they conserve the African flavour; and Abiola Irele’s legitimacy of embracing the oral realm into the written texts.

Consequently, I analyze how both Aidoo and Emecheta accomplish the *Sankofa* maxim of looking back to get the gems, and divide their behaviour into three main modes: correspondence, duplication, and substitution. Just like any *aso ebi*, this Adinkra *aso ebi* will reveal to have similarities and particularities in its re-presentation.



1.4.1.5. ODENKYEM

This symbol looking more like a turtle represents, in fact, a crocodile, which is considered an animal able to live in and out of water. It conveys a message of the importance of flexibility and prudent adaptability, since in these lies the wisdom of overcoming difficulties for the sake of survival.

Under this Adinkra symbol, Part V in this research focuses on the issue of language. Chinua Achebe debunks Roscoe’s idea that the African literature written in European languages can only be considered as an appendage, irritating many African writers and intellectuals (cf. Arndt, *African* 63). Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o’s critical essays and conferences have always proposed the idea of writing in African languages and then, if necessary, translating the works into European languages. Abiola Irele

acknowledges that the emerging African literature is challenging the Western classical canon and trying to become different. On the other hand, Chinua Achebe defends the idea of embracing the English language, although with the condition of adapting it to represent the African particularities in the literary works, promising to “do unheard of things with it” (“Colonialist” 9).

This debate on the issue of language conveys an analysis on Buchi Emecheta’s strategies to accomplish her re-presentations, intertwining English and pidgin, Igbo and Yoruba languages. I rely heavily on Susan Arndt’s nomenclature and specific terms so as to organise my explanation of this phenomenon in the Emecheta’s use of language to re-present the cultural particularities of her people. In the case of Aidoo’s strategies, especially seen in her combination of both Mfantse and English, I have relied on Kobina Sekyi, John Wiredu and Irene M. Danysh, and Esi Sutherland-Addy.

In looking for the origins of the African narratives included in my corpus, both Aidoo and Emecheta draw from diverse sources to produce their African works in the first two decades after independence. Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o serves as the launching pad for this discussion, since during the 1980s his intention was to ground the African novel roots in the African oral literature. Moreover, Ali Mazrui was aware about the issue of genre related to the African literary written productions ever since they appeared in the 1930s. Chinua Achebe’s process of re-storying, which was necessary to overcome the trauma of dispossession that Africans experienced, implies the use of the traditional cultural resources for the new written narratives.

Encouraged by Odamtten’s work I have embraced a term linked to science to provide African writing a new rightful label: “African polyphyletic literary category,” which best fits to this new written literature that sprouts from so many origins. This produces a kind of eclecticism, which is mainly based on the diverse sources both Aidoo and Emecheta include in their narrative. In this sense, they participate of the Adinkra symbol, *Odenkyem*, in which the importance of flexibility and prudent adaptability are necessary to overcome difficulties and for the sake of survival. In the case of these two writers, their narrative, interviews, and miscellaneous pieces have demonstrated the successful combination of vernacular elements and a new literary representation.



1.4.1.6. *ASASE YE DURU*

This symbol selected for Part VI in this research suggests that the Earth, which is heavier than the sea, sustains life. It is like a mother that gives life, sustains her children, and cuddles them when they die to bury them in her womb again. In the Adinkra *aso ebi* that stands for texts in both Aidoo and Emecheta, this symbol acquires a holistic dimension. The messages emanating from the previous discourses on African Mother Earth have created a distorted image that has blown the *Akoben*—war horn—for the Africans to set right this undesirable situation. Among these repairers are both Aidoo and Emecheta with their re-presentations. Through the combination of both Kadiatu Kanneh's considerations on some writers' political and economic commitments to suit their engagements with the powers in command, and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's idea about the spiritual connection between land and people, we come close to understand both Ama Ata Aidoo's and Buchi Emecheta's Adinkra *aso ebi*.

I embrace diverse approaches such as Kanneh's categories: the experiential, the visual and the historical, to analyze the evolution of the meaning of Africa. Mudimbe's argumentation is based on the deformity and discontinuity of the discourse on African history, which is based on the ideological and sociological discourse about Africa. Taking into account Sister Joseph Thérèse Agbasiere's analysis on the history and identity of the *Ibi* people, and Cheik Anta Diop's defense of the historical connectedness in order to create a historical consciousness of a people, Emecheta's works present a new historical narrative that I consider to be a re-presentation of her people's history. In the case of Aidoo's texts, Cheik Anta Diop's thought is promising for Aidoo's pan-Africanist vision on the discourse of the African peoples' historical connections.

The discourse on Africa as a locus of illnesses and rare tropical diseases, based on a research carried out by Hammond and Jablow on the one hand, and on the other, Megan Vaughan serve to explore how Emecheta reverses this historical discourse on illnesses for her re-presentation of Africa. Regarding Aidoo, I analyze how she uses the issue of science and medicine as a backlash against racism.

The last two categories—experiential and visual—proposed by Kanneh are seen in how both Aidoo and Emecheta perceive and re-present the geographical notions about Africa. For example, in examining how African economy greatly depends on women’s efforts, especially those from the rural world, the markets appear as a space for economic, social, and political interaction. If Emmanuel Obiechina considers the literature associated to popular Onitsha market as the cradle of the African novel, both Aidoo and Emecheta confirm that some African markets and the peoples involved in them present the African society’s complexities, including the differences between rural and urban spaces, which are re-presented in these writers’ fiction. Finally, African Mother Earth has been continually sustaining life at the historical, experiential, and visual levels as the symbol *Asase Ye Duru* suggests, as well as protecting all its sons and daughters.



1.4.1.7. EPA

The Adinkra symbol *Epa* represents two cuffs, and they refer to enslavement. Although this ideogram is related to the concepts of law, order, justice, and control, I analyze it as a representation of the slave trade and other kinds of enslavement and subjugation.

J.D. Fage and William Tordoff’s *A History of Africa*, and Basil Davidson’s *Africa in History* have been enlightening to discern how both Emecheta and Aidoo re-present all kinds of enslavement. In Part VII of this research, and regarding Aidoo’s treatment of slavery, I have followed Kofi Anyidoho’s analysis on the slave forts spread throughout the slave coast of Ghana, which demonstrates how these have become a significant metaphor in Ghanaian culture (cf. 13). Moreover, Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang’s approach on the stone buildings as the source of an infinite number of thoughts and thousands of images runs parallel to his affirmation that “Slavery is the living wound under the patchwork of scars” (23).

The two cuffs in the Adinkra symbol *Epa* fit the postcolonial enslavement that Aidoo re-presents in her work, such as silence, skin colour, religion, language, inferiority complex, easy money, and the yoke of neo-colonialism. In the case of Buchi Emecheta’s fiction, I analyze her narratives of enslavement, in which the enslaved

characters do not complain about the “cuffs,” but she does. I examine profitability and survival as justifications her characters offer to explain the slave trade that takes place in the markets. At that point, Emecheta is re-presenting the new kinds of bondage through which the enslaved people only change masters.



1.4.1.8. AKOKO NAN

This Adinkra symbol graphically stands for the hen’s feet as Bruce Willis and Kojo Arthur affirm. It represents protective parenting and parental admonition. Its aim is to correct the behaviour of younger people for their own benefit. Commitment and responsibility are crucial to accomplish this hard task in writing. Aidoo’s self-infliction is one of the causes her writing has been neglected by the African male critics, although there already was the tradition of self-assessment practice in the Ghanaian theatrical performances (cf. Aidoo, “Commitment” 14). She has washed her people’s dirty linens in public. Furthermore, Kofi Anyidoho defends that the idea of self-appraisal already existed in the traditional Ghanaian drama and oral narrative.

To examine oneself and one’s people demands to travel or be away from one’s hometown, as Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi has articulated in her theory around the term “Been-toism.” This is related to the common terms “been-to” or “bintu,” used mostly in English-speaking West African countries to identify those who have been to other places away from their original birthplace. The important issue here is the displacement that endows the displaced person with a double vision that causes change in the perception of reality as Homi Bhabha also affirms in *The Location of Culture*.

The tradition of self-examination serves to approach the works of both Emecheta and Aidoo and analyze the two possibilities for reprimanding: what do you do that causes hurt to others? And what do you do to yourself? Aidoo exposes the African maladies in the 1960s and 1970s and the heritage of the colonial and post-colonial eras. Meanwhile, Emecheta warns about the influence of the obsolete traditions coming from a remote past, which were still imposed in the first half of the 20th century and still

present in some African countries. This attitude has served to awake Africans and revise “where the rain is beating them.”⁸

Definitely both Aidoo’s and Emecheta’s intentions correlate to the *Akoko Nan* symbol, suggesting commitment and responsibility through protection and parental admonition, as demonstrated in Part VIII of this research.

⁸ Achebe uses this expression (a Nigerian saying) on numerous occasions, referring to the search for the reasons behind any problem.



PART II: *AKOBEN*

AFRICAN WRITERS AFTER THE COLONIAL LIBRARY

2. THE MEANING OF THE ADINKRA SYMBOL *AKOBEN*

The literal translation of *Akoben* that Willis provides in his Adinkra dictionary is: “War horn.” Kayper-Mensah and Kojo Arthur share the meaning of this icon and the idea behind it. It symbolizes a call to action, readiness, patriotism, and voluntarism. According to Kojo Arthur, the war horn and the *Asafo* drum were used to call every “abled-body person to action” (147). Willis explains that the people worked in fields and villages and when it came to defend the town, it had to be “a collective and voluntary act” of all the members in the town. Nowadays, this symbol is connected with the idea of being ready to accomplish a collective task when required for the community’s sake (cf. Willis 67).

2.1. WOMEN HEAR THE HORN TOO

This Part II brings forward the reasons and evidence that partly blow the Adinkra *Akoben* (war horn), and consequently encourages the intellectual community to expedite the inception of the new English-speaking African literature. Not only do African male writers react to the sound of the horn but, significantly, also women writers. It is a necessary step to present the African women’s experience. Moreover, only the African women writers can accomplish their reivindicative task through their self-representation. For example, it is noticeable the cases of Flora Nwapa, Mabel Dove, Adaora Lily Ulasi, and Adelaide Smith Casely who published during the 20th century, although their recognition came later since they received deficient critical attention.

2.2. FIRST STEP: LITERACY AND EDUCATION

Achebe used literature as a launching pad to restore the African dignity. Not only did he devote himself to writing stories about Africa, its peoples and culture, but also criticising those novels about Africa written by non-Africans, which he considered as demeaning literary works degrading Africans.

Emmanuel Obiechina has proved that neither reading nor writing would have been possible without or even before literacy. A giant leap back in time, before the creation of the West African literature written in English, shows that the oral tradition in African languages presented in a myriad of performances was the dominating art for the transmission of stories, folktales, poems, myths, proverbs, all traditions, and knowledge. It was not until the European missionaries arrived in Africa to spread their Christian faith that Africans started to learn, read, and write. According to Obiechina’s work

entitled *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*, literacy was crucial for the emergence of the African novel. It was also decisive for the Africans who have widened their consciousness and deepened their knowledge about the world, through the practice of individual reading (cf. 3).

Obiechina affirms that the Fourah Bay College “played an important role in the development of education both in Sierra Leone and all over West Africa” (9), since its foundation by missionaries in 1826. However, V.Y.Mudimbe sees the dark side of the missionaries’ discourse in his work *The Invention of Africa*. His exhaustive analysis has yielded conclusions that substantiate how the missionaries’ intentions were dark in those periods. For example, in the 15th century they obeyed the Pope’s sacred instructions of ousting pagans and enslaving them after dispossessing them of their personal properties (cf. 45). Moreover, he believes that the imposition of colonisation was accomplished by “Three major figures, from the fifteenth century to the end of the nineteenth, determined modalities and the pace of mastering, colonising, and transforming the ‘Dark Continent’: the explorer, the soldier, and the missionary” (46). Hence, behind literacy there was a twofold intention: the blade of literacy could instruct people into Christianity, but it could also bring down the native culture and society through the colonisation process. However, literacy proved to be, on the long run, one of the tools for resistance and contestation against colonisation, and one of the most influential instruments to achieve freedom and independence.

By mid-19th century, Freetown was taking in thousands of men and women, mostly Yoruba, who were liberated by British authority from the slave ships, attempting to go unpunished with the slave trade. There were also the newly-returned freed African-American slaves, descendants of the first generation of African slaves, who lost trace of their precise origins. Most of the members of the first group also forgot most of their traditions, so they needed to reorganise their society heeding to new cohesive aspects that either belonged to or opposed the Western tradition. Missionaries were working hard in the West African lands and found those groups of liberated slaves, who were in a chaotic disorganised state, and therefore easy to gain as followers of the Christian faith. Besides, the second group of newcomers had already experienced the evangelisation that took place on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, and were aware of the power that lies behind knowledge. Therefore, these knew that in order to overcome their modern problems, they had to take advantage of the Christian educational system. Moreover, and on a different level, the Creole inhabitants were

emerging in the area with the ambition to participate in the economic system, and to compete in the commercial world along the coast controlled by the British.

All these activities and diverse varied goals propitiated benefits to the West African peoples on the long term, not only from Sierra Leone but also from the Gold Coast and, obviously, South Yoruba land, which are known nowadays as Ghana and Nigeria respectively. In the 1850s most of the students that excelled above the rest in the missionary schools started travelling to Great Britain and France to achieve higher grades in education, and became the Europeanised African *élite* that forged a trail towards Europe and America in search of knowledge and technology.⁹

Some of these first generations of students betrayed their people turning into the puppets that served both the British and French political and economic colonial interests. Nevertheless, the next generations of African intellectuals changed the African peoples' destiny. Young affirms that they mostly drew their “inspiration from the active and vocal struggle of African-Americans against discrimination and oppression in the United States” (221).

Definitely, education nurtured African peoples with essential values not only as regards to independence and sovereignty, and modernizing social reforms, but also raising self-esteem and competence.

2.3. PSEUDO-SCIENTIFIC APPROACHES TO BOTH RACE AND SKIN COLOUR

Although the total colonisation of Gold Coast was effected in 1907, and Nigeria's in 1914, it is not until after the World War II when some West African countries gained independence like Ghana in 1957, Guinea in 1958, Nigeria, Cameroon, and Senegal in 1960 and Sierra Leone in 1961. Nevertheless, Europeans and Americans were constructing an “Other” even before the 19th century, in order to classify those who belonged to another race or had darker skin. Some historical data in the 1850s and 1860s provide the potential reasons for the future changes, regarding the attitude of the British political authorities and intellectuals towards West African peoples.

In 1859, Darwin presented to the English society his theory of evolution by natural selection in his book *The Origin of Species*. The main scientific statements

⁹ I reiterate that although this research is mostly focused on the English-speaking West African literary art and cultural criticism, we cannot ignore the importance of the contribution of the French-speaking political and intellectual figures in this part of Africa.

emanating from this book—natural selection and the survival of the fittest—have been transposed to other fields in the social sphere, justifying domination, exploitation, and subordination of other peoples. The most powerful and the richest nations had the “scientific grounds” to classify themselves as the fittest and consequently dominate the other cultures and races. In 1855, almost a century after the Swiss Alexandre Césaire de Quatrefages’s coinage of the sciences “Anthropologie” and “Ethnologie,” Jean Louis Armand de Quatrefages presented a new description for the flourishing science of anthropology in Western Europe, as the natural history of man under zoological norms. In addition to this, we have to take into account that the scientific and political misinterpretations of Blumenbach’s craniological classification of humankind into five races proved to be the milestone to justify colonialism, and introduced a racist discourse into both the political and social contexts.¹⁰ Moreover, Darwin’s further research applied to mankind appeared in his work *Descent of Man*. The reading of these scientific works led to a hierarchical classification of the human beings, based on the range of skin colour and physical features, placing African peoples on the lowest level.

In 1863, the British explorer and pioneering anthropologist Richard Burton affirmed that he had no faith in the progress of the “Negro,” after his mission in Dahomey. Africans were not only different from, but absolutely inferior to white Europeans, who had to master the “savage” and dominate their geography (cf. Fage and Tordoff, *History* 353). Moreover, contemporary scholars Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow cast light on the inherent racism in British writing about Africa from the 16th through the 20th century:

The evolutionary schemes propounded by the writers of empire were grounded in racism. Differences in culture, history, language, and behaviour were confounded with biological differences, and even when they were able to distinguish among them, the writers attributed all differences to the crucial factor of race; thus evolutionary development, too, was seen as a function of racial difference. (97-98)

Hence, this is a brief exemplification of how many issues regarding injustice and colonialism were backed by this kind of pseudo-scientific approaches to both race and skin colour.

¹⁰ In “The Beautiful Skull and Blumenbach’s Errors: The Birth of the Scientific Concept of Race,” Raj Bhopal revises the role of Blumenbach as the most significant contributor to the scientific concept of race.

2.4. WRITTEN TEXT, DISCOURSE, AND POSTCOLONIALISM

Having in mind Foucault's concept of discourse elaborated in his book *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), the above-mentioned texts are samples of the totality of the racist discourse reproduced in fiction in that particular historical moment. I embrace this idea in the same way Edward Said applies it to the well-known thorough study presented in *Orientalism* (1978). I expound their approach with the help of Robert J.C. Young, who defends that Foucault describes his affirmation about discourse as a "coherent domain of description" (398) rather than a theory in itself.

Discourse is not limited to the text itself. It is the formation of knowledge through the interaction among the written text or spoken language, historical moment, material reality, and the unique physical circumstances that encompass a social or political event. Hence, in Young's words:

Knowledge operates in the interstices of the contact zone between concepts and materiality. The difficulty—but also the value—of his [Foucault's] analysis is bound up with the desire to characterize discourse as a material, historical entity. (399)

Moreover, the resistance and challenging texts produced against the racist discourse demonstrate how discourse is a material entity that is intertwined through words with peoples, their history, and stories. In this sense, I concur with Kadiatu Kanneh's idea about the inclusion of literary texts in the corpuses of analysis on the biased representation and racism. Cary's and Conrad's fictions constitute a significant part of the discourse on Africa and Africans. For instance, Achebe has affirmed that he discovered the truth by himself throughout the years:

What his [Cary's] book *Mr Johnson* did for me though was to call into question my childhood assumption of the innocence of stories. It began to dawn on me that although fiction was undoubtedly fictitious it could also be true or false, not with the truth or falsehood of a news item but as to its disinterestedness, its intention, its integrity. ("My Home" 33-34)

It is no wonder Achebe was one of the first African critics to bring Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* as well as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* forward to the field of discussion, mostly under the postcolonial magnifying glasses.

Potcolonial critic Edward Said also highlights the impact of the written text. He relies on Homi Bhabha's ideas in *Nation and Narration*:

As one critic has suggested, nations themselves *are* [Said's italics] narrations. The power to narrate, or to block their narratives from

forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them. Most important, the great narratives of emancipation and enlightenment mobilized people in the colonial world to rise up and throw off imperial subjection; in the process, many Europeans and Americans were also stirred by these stories and their protagonists and they too fought for new narratives of equality and human community. (Said, *Culture* xiii)

On the other hand, Frantz Fanon quotes Sékou Touré's speech to the second Congress of Black Writers and Artists, held in Rome in 1959:

To take part in the African revolution it is not enough to write a revolutionary song; you must fashion the revolution with the people. And if you fashion it with the people, the songs will come by themselves, and of themselves. (*Wretched* 166)

Fanon chose these words to start his chapter, "On National Culture," included in his work *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). He reminds readers that what resembled passivity and silence in Africans at the beginning of colonialism was only because those who were fighting back colonialism were not enough. In the 1960s, things started to change due to the growth in the number of dissidents. He affirms that there was this need to look for a national culture going back to the time before the colonial era, and this urge "finds its legitimate reason in the anxiety shared by native intellectuals to shrink away from the Western culture in which they all risk being swamped" (*Wretched* 168). Fanon insists that intellectuals had the need to recover their own history, which was very different from what the colonisers described and far from their recent history of colonialism. For this author, Africans discovered their glory and retrieved dignity. Their demand for national culture does not only restore their nations, but also provokes a change in the "psycho-affective equilibrium" of the natives. Fanon explains the colonial maneuvers:

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and restorts, disfigures and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today. (*Wretched* 169)

Fanon affirms that colonialists intentionally carry out their scheme to devalue African culture and "to convince the natives that colonialism came to lighten their darkness" (*Wretched* 169). African intellectuals have the need and right to redress the grievances of their people:

The native intellectual who takes up arms to defend his nation's legitimacy and who wants to bring proofs to bear out that legitimacy, who is willing to strip himself naked to study the history of his body, is obliged to dissect the heart of his people. (170)

Edward Said has observed that many writers from diverse colonies have experienced these same feelings:

Many of the most interesting post-colonial writers bear their past within them—as scars of humiliating wounds, as instigation for different practices, as potentially revised visions of the past tending toward a new future, as urgently reinterpretable and redeployable experience, in which the formerly silent native speaks and acts on territory taken back from the empire. One sees these aspects in Rushdie, Derek Walcott, Aimé Césaire, Chinua Achebe, Pablo Neruda, and Brian Friel. And now these writers can truly read the great colonial masterpieces, which not only misrepresented them but assumed they were unable to read and respond directly to what had been written about them, just as European ethnography presumed the natives' incapacity to intervene in scientific discourse about them. (“Two Visions” 31)

In addition to those writers mentioned by Said above, there are more African writers that became mindful of the undermining narratives, such as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, V.Y. Mudimbe, and Abiola Irele among others. It becomes clear that postcolonial critics have reversed the discourse of the colonial written texts, provoking the re-affirmation of the obliterated African culture.

One of the best exemplifications for postcolonial and Africanist reading is Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which echoes the prejudices against Africa and Africans at the end of the 19th century. It becomes like the sour yeast for the production of more African writing. When Marlow—Conrad's narrator in this work—starts narrating the story about his trip to Africa, his audience within the novel, as well as Conrad's readers, perceive the dangers that loom ahead. Conrad paints Marlow's trip along the Congo River with cold and dark colours. The African heat described in the novel produces the opposite effect in the reader, who cannot help but shiver in view of the great expectation created around Kurtz, his madness and activities. The mystery emanating from Congo and its inhabitants is tainted with racism. The adjectives Conrad repeatedly uses, such as “unspeakable,” “inscrutable,” “black,” “nude,” “silent” or “savage,” should have disturbed the peacefulness of any Victorian reader. Today, they might possibly produce a mysterious atmosphere of incomprehension, or simply lead to

undesirable conclusions about the narrator's or author's racism. The reader is always in expectation to learn about Mr. Kurtz's bad deeds.

One of the most astounding excerpts of this novel, which Achebe does not surprisingly quote in "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," is when Marlow informs readers that "*All Europe* contributed to the making of Mr. Kurtz, and by and by I learned that most appropriately the *International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs* had entrusted him with the making of a report for its future guidance (emphasis added)" (49). The mere idea behind the name of this society suggests the common fierce belief in the inferiority of other races.

Marlow describes his narration as "a beautiful piece of writing" (50). In fact, I consider Kurtz's pamphlet as a text within a mother text, as a metaphor in the novel that represents the 19th-century English writing about Africa and Africans. This long quotation contains the most impressive words illustrating his racist concerns:

He began with the argument that we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, "must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings—we approach them with the might as of a deity," and so on, and so on. "By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded," etc. etc. From that point he soared and took me with him. The peroration was magnificent, though difficult to remember, you know. It gave me the notion of an exotic Immensity ruled by an august Benevolence. It made me tingle with enthusiasm. *This was the unbounded power of eloquence—of words—of burning noble words.* There were no practical hints to interrupt the magic current of phrases, unless a kind of note at the foot of the last page, scrawled evidently much later in an unsteady hand, may be regarded as the exposition of a method. It was very simple and at the end of that moving appeal to every altruistic sentiment it blazed at you luminous and terrifying like a flash of lightening in a serene sky: "Exterminate all the brutes!" (emphasis added). (50)

As can be observed from this long excerpt, not only written texts draw powerful images of the "Other." All types of extraordinary artistic manifestations lend their compelling aesthetic value, consciously or unconsciously, to the benefit of their creators' ideology.

2.5. ENGLISH NARRATIVES AND THE COLONIAL LIBRARY

Before the 1950s, the unconstrained power of the English narratives about Africa, which had colonised the stories and characters of that continent, was the yeast for the reaction of some African writers. It was time for African peoples to recover their own narrative. In turn, the first written works in English by African male authors also

became the *Akoben* for women writers negatively affected by the colonising English narratives.

Alastair Niven's general approach to the interrelation between the British intellectual and the African literary mind (cf. 225) confirms that by the end of the Victorian period almost every British household was familiar with some African place names (cf. 207). He assures that "David Livingstone and Mary Kingsley had caught the public's imagination so strongly that they had entered the iconography of popular art. Unfortunately so had their prejudices" (208). He adds that, apart from Livingstone and Kingsley's writing about Africa, there were no complex or inventive representations of Africa in the English-speaking literary works until the publication of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*: "Indeed, the most 'serious' examination of Africa in English fiction of the period, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, is full of images of anonymous Africans in states of physical and almost monumental dullness" (208). He exemplifies this with descriptions of the black figures that Marlow—Conrad's narrator—offers the readers. Characteristically enough, Niven also chooses a quotation from this narrative about the African woman: "... the barbarous and superb woman did not so much as flinch, and stretched tragically her bare arms after us over the sombre and glittering river" (208). Niven cannot but admit that "European aggrandisement is well understood by Conrad in his famous novella, but very much *at the expense of depersonalizing Africans, who are depicted as nameless, threatening and at times satanic* (emphasis added)" (208). Conrad was not the only writer who wrote about Africa in these terms. Many other English writers, especially Joyce Cary, also followed this colonialist view. It becomes clear that Africa needed authentic African writers to voice its genuine and complex personality.

Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow published *The Africa That Never Was* in 1970. They analysed more than five hundred works of fiction and nonfiction written by British authors about the sub-Saharan Africa from the 16th through the 20th century. Hammond and Jablow uncovered a corpus of fantasy and myth about Africa, with gruesome representations that became referential for further writing. Their corpus for this research could be what V.Y.Mudimbe has called the "colonial library."

Gaurav Desai quotes V.Y.Mudimbe's definition of the "colonial library": "the set of representations and texts that have collectively 'invented' Africa as a locus of difference and alterity" (4). He endorses "Mudimbe's claims that along with physical colonization of geographical spaces and human lives in Africa, there existed an

epistemological ‘colonization’ that was responsible for reorganizing ‘native’ African minds” (4). However, he also suggests that we should try to reimagine the “colonial library” as a space of contestation, and take into account that its delimitations are subject to the disciplines and theoretical frameworks that use it as a corpus depending on what is due to be analysed. Moreover, Desai also puts forward that “The question to ask of a discourse is not so much what it *says* but what it *does* (emphasis added)” (5). Furthermore, the notion of subjectivity has to be reconsidered because even if the subject is set far from its centre it still preserves a sense of human agency and practice (cf. Desai 6). He also insists on including the discourse of the colonised along with the colonisers so as “to understand the colonial library as itself an important terrain of colonial tension and struggle” (7). Finally, Desai highlights that one of the most significant shortcomings that the limited male-centred colonial library needs to resolve “is the marginalization of African women in the colonial library both by European as well as by African writers” (7).

Both Emecheta and Aidoo, who were most probably stirred because of their absence in the important task of building up their nation and continent through narrative, also wanted their voices to be heard. So they stood up for themselves and started writing, sometimes as a reaction to the male colonial library, and other times for the sole need to explore and expand their re-presentation of Africa and Africans away from any topical worldview.

2.6. CHINUA ACHEBE AGAINST RACIST COLONIAL REPRESENTATION: JOYCE CARY’S *MR JOHNSON*

Probably, Chinua Achebe is the critic who has most denounced racism in English narratives. He has expressed his concerns related to the colonial library in many essays and interviews. He has particularly focused on the literature then called African, although it was mostly written by British authors serving their empire. His punching bag was both Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and Joyce Cary’s *Mister Johnson* (1939). His writing-back and responses to these texts have also become part of the colonial library following Desai’s suggestion mentioned above.

When Achebe attended high school in Nigeria, which was modelled on British public schools, he read English books such as *Treasure Island* and *Oliver Twist* among other dozens, in addition to Ryder Haggard’s and John Buchan’s “African” books. He

confesses that he positioned himself on the side of the “white men against the savages” who “were sinister and stupid, or at most, cunning. I hated their guts” (“Song” 32). As time passed by, Achebe realised that he was not one of those whites “steaming up the Congo” on Marlow’s boat in *Heart of Darkness*, but rather he was one of those jumping on the banks of the African river. He acknowledged “stories are not innocent; but they can be used to put you in the wrong crowd, in the party of the man who has come to dispossess you” (“Song” 32).

Alastair Niven suggests that it is absurd to repudiate Cary’s work on the basis that it is an “expression of a condescending colonial mentality” (213), since Cary was the first “European writer to make an African character not only central to his narrative and sympathetic, but psychologically complex” (213). However, scholars within the theoretical frame of the postcolonial perspective cannot but illustrate an intense and explicit racism in his novel. Here is an excerpt from *Mister Johnson* that demonstrates the white character’s racism towards the African character Ajali:

Naow, and some of the real hugly ones like yourself, the real wogs, isn’t the worst, neither. That yellow Ajali, for instance—I wouldn’t trust the bawstard farther than I could kick him. ’E’s afraid of me, the cur. Can’t look a man in the face. A chap may be a nigger—that’s the way Gawd made em’—same as ’e made wart-hogs and blue baboons—’e can’t ’elp being a nigger—but ’e can help being a man. Wot I like about you, Wog, is you aren’t afraid of me. (138)

Achebe apprehended that it is the author who writes as a racist. In fact, the white characters are explicitly racist. For example, in this illustrative excerpt Sergeant Gollup, a white old soldier of the British Army and owner of a store in Fada, Nigeria, is talking to his Nigerian employee, Johnson. The *Collins English Dictionary* provides two meanings to the word “cur”: 1) “any vicious dog, especially a mongrel,” and 2) “a despicable or cowardly person.” If we look up “Mongrel” we also find two meanings: 1) “a plant or animal, especially a dog, of a mixed or unknown breeding; a crossbreed or hybrid,” and 2) “a person of mixed race.” It becomes obvious that the writer meant to debase this African character and his race. We also read that he describes him disparagingly as a “yellow” coward. Furthermore, “cur” is an old-fashioned word used as an insult, and the *Collins Cobuild Dictionary* refers to the term “wog” as “an extremely offensive word for anyone whose skin is not white”; this dictionary also adds in capital letters and between brackets the following additional note: “(BRIT VERY OFFENSIVE).”

“Wog” was the sarcastic affectionate name given to Cary’s Mr Johnson by Celia, the British administrator’s wife:

Celia doesn’t notice this [referring to her husband’s bachelor-attitude] while she is enjoying Africa with the delightful Johnson, with whom, as she says, she is quite in love. She calls him privately ‘Mr. Wog’. Rudbeck hears her laughing at six in the morning and asks, ‘What’s the joke, darling?’
 ‘Only Mr Wog.’
 ‘He’s comic, isn’t he?’
 ‘A perfect quaint.’
 ‘Where are you going today?’
 ‘I don’t really know. Mr Wog said something about weaving?’
 ‘You’ve seen that, haven’t you?’
 ‘Oh, yes, but we must do weaving again for Wog’s sake.’ (102)

Celia enjoys going out with Johnson to see African spots, pot making, weaving, and other activities. But her opinion about Africa and Africans is quite explicit. This couple might like Mr Johnson but they often laugh at him. They use nicknames for him, which remind readers what most British people thought about the black race then. Their attitude in the novel perpetuates the impression that the African race is at the lowest evolutionary level and close to uncivilized state. Illustratively, Celia reaffirms this view when she asks her husband Rudbeck if he is jealous, since she has observed that he had made his workers build a wall to avoid peeping while they were swimming in the pool:

“You’re not jealous, are you?”
 “Good God, no—of a lotta apes like that.”
 “But if they were really monkeys?”
 “Damn it all, Celia, why not let it go at that? Or must you analyse everything I do?” (sic) (169).

Chinua Achebe narrates how while a young student in Nigeria, he started his encounter with the non-African literary resources in English. Following the official regulation, he was forced to read the books of his high-school library. He underlines the titles of the English books that he enjoyed then: *Treasure Island*, *Mutiny on the Bounty*, *Gulliver’s Travels*, *Ivanhoe*, and *School for Scandal* (cf. “Song” 20). He also affirms that his European professors at the University College in Ibadan made obligatory to read the same writers as in any UK university syllabus: William Shakespeare, John Milton, Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, William Wordsworth, Samuel T. Coleridge, John Keats, Alfred Tennyson, A.E. Housman, T.S. Eliot, Robert Frost, James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, and Joseph Conrad. Joyce Cary was appended to this list when the

magazine *Time* praised this Irishman writer with his *Mister Johnson* as “the best novel ever written about Africa” (Achebe, “Song” 22).

The setting for *Mister Johnson* is Nigeria and its main character is Nigerian. Achebe had the chance to read it as classwork and then have a say on this book. He recalls that one of his Nigerian classmates expressed in class that he was happy to read that the British master shoots Johnson to death by the end of the novel. Achebe could not help but read between the lines. He asserts that:

My problem with Joyce Cary’s book was not simply his infuriating principal character, Johnson. More importantly, there is a certain undertow of uncharitableness just below surface on which his narrative moves and from where, at the slightest chance, a contagion of distaste, hatred and mockery breaks through to poison his tale. (“My Home” 23-24)

Achebe calls his readers’ attention to the fact that some of the descriptions of Africans cannot be distinguished whether they belong to Cary’s or Conrad’s texts: “Haven’t I encountered this crowd before? Perhaps, in *Heart of Darkness*, in the Congo. But Cary is writing about my home, Nigeria, isn’t he?” (“My Home” 24). Achebe refers to some of Cary’s sentences like this: “[...] the demoniac appearance of the naked dancers, grinning, shrieking, scowling, or with faces which seemed entirely dislocated, senseless and unhuman [sic], like twisted bags of lard, or burst bladders, [...]” (Cary 153).

The white characters in this Cary’s work repeatedly express overt racism. For instance, a few days after Sergeant Gollup, who was supposedly fond of Johnson, had punched the latter on his nose and needed, maybe, to “praise” him: “I say, you’re too good for a nig, Johnson—ah, it’s a pity—you ought to bin born one of the ’igher races, wot got the hintelligence too. You got the nature, but you ain’t got the hintelligence” (151).

Mister Johnson was first published in 1939, and according to William Boyd’s introduction to the 1985 edition, the novel represents Joyce Cary’s Nigeria after World War I. Cary himself worked for the Nigerian Political Service in the colonial era, after being wounded while fighting in the Nigerian Regiment during World War I. Later he had to retire and leave Africa for health reasons and eventually started to write about Africa and became a famous fiction writer. William Boyd had lived in Africa and his first reading confirmed that he saw no resemblance between the Africa he knew and what the author was describing. Later, he changed his mind and affirmed that the book

perfectly depicted the colonial Africa and African mind. This might have angered Achebe, but there is no written evidence about it yet.

Joyce Cary's novel is full of paragraphs describing the nature and activities of the Nigerians in Fada and its surroundings. Many adjectives activate the readers' imagination all over the story, framing the encounters between English and Africans in a dramatic clash somewhere among the "civilised" British authorities, the literate African civil servants—considered either "tricksters" or "thieves" working for the British administration—and the "savage" and "primitive" Africans, who were "dirty," "lazy fools," and "frenzied drummers and dancers." The meanings of these words turn many of Cary's paragraphs into what Achebe has described as racist pieces of fiction, in which vocabulary is not innocent.

2.6.1. ACHEBE'S *AKOBEN* URGES CONDEMNATION OF RACISM IN JOSEPH CONRAD'S *HEART OF DARKNESS*

According to Nicholas Wroe, in his eighties Achebe continued on cogitating about his condemnation of the racism that he found in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*:

I felt it was my duty as an African writer to reflect on the work of Conrad. But I won't return there although I am pleased it sparked so much discussion. It is good to show in stark outline what the real situation is, what the person at the other end of the whip is feeling. But I also understood that I must get on with my work and not dwell on one subject or book. (4)

Notwithstanding, the important issue here is that Achebe's writing has reactivated the domino effect again as the sound of an *Akoben* for the rest of African writers be they male or female. He has proved to the young African students and future writers that an African can write too. Ama Ata Aidoo admits in her interview with Adeola James that Achebe's first novel was very significant for her because he was the first African author that she encountered while a student, and found him very "viable, solid and so on." At that time she already knew that she wanted to become a writer but it was Achebe's work that breathed great confidence into her to carry on with her ideas (Aidoo, "Interview with Adeola James" 19).

Once encouraged to write, each by different reasons, both Aidoo and Emecheta must have also had the need to redress the mistakes propitiated by non-African writers' representations. They also tried to give life and voice to the African women who have been ignored by almost all the male African authors. Indeed, I believe that, even though

they have not written any critical paper on Conrad's and Cary's mentioned works, both Aidoo and Emecheta must have had the chance to read them. They were most probably also affected in the same way as Achebe or any other African. My conviction is based on my reading of some sections of Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy or Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint*, and Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, in which these authors' backlash against racism, as well as their favouring an Africans' own history are displayed. When we come across some passages in *The Heart of Darkness*, racism is frequently evinced. This is the case of Marlow's description of the "natives [...] in the bush" of the Congo River, the "simple people" (53), or "[...] the crowd, of whose presence behind the curtain of trees I had been acutely conscious all the time, flowed out of the woods again, filled the clearing, covered the slope with a mass of naked, breathing, quivering, bronze bodies" (66), or Conrad's most quoted excerpt by Achebe himself:

But suddenly as we struggled round a bend there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling under the droop of heavy motionless foliage. [...] The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us—who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surrounding; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. (35)

We cannot but interpret them through Achebe's critical framework as Conrad's racism inflected on Africans, in which Africa is represented as the dark side of the world. Achebe's article "An Image of Africa" presents more examples from Conrad's novel that many scholars, including myself, have to quote in order to epitomize our ideas:

The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there—there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly and the men were [...]. No they were not inhuman. Well, you know that was the worst of it—this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped and spun and made horrid faces, but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. (36)

More striking quotations are those in which Africans are compared to animals such as Marlow's words about his fireman who is an African:

And between whiles I had to look after the savage who was fireman. He was an improved specimen; he could fire up a vertical boiler. He was there below me and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat walking on his hind legs. (Conrad 36)

All this kind of expressions and terms such as “prehistoric man,” “madhouse,” “monster,” “a thing monstrous,” “horrid faces,” and “ugly,” in addition to questioning their being inhuman and comparing the fireman to a dog, can only blow the *akoben* to raise, as said above, not only the male African writers, but also women writers to write back too, including both Emecheta and Aidoo.

2.6.2. F. ABIOLA IRELE IN SUPPORT OF CHINUA ACHEBE

Chinua Achebe was not the only African intellectual to grouch about his schoolday readings. His compatriot Abiola Irele also became aware of racist literary and artistic works as he grew up. He was Professor of African, French and Comparative Literatures at Ohio University and the editor of the Journal *Research in African Literatures*. Irele shares that experience with his readers in the preface to his book, *The African Imagination*. He confesses that he also awakened to the reality of the fake representation of Africans by European artists some years later, when playing the role of Monostatos, “the lascivious Moor,” in Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*. Approaching the 1960s, while he was a student at the University College of Ibadan in Nigeria, any Western musical performance was one of the most important events every year. He enjoyed playing the role during the three nights that this spectacle lasted, although he realized that “[He] came to be fully aware of the stereotyped and demeaning image of the black man that the role represented” (vii). He adds that it is important to be aware of the power of those remarkable works of art, which can conceal “with their very brilliance the moral zones they impinge upon” (viii). He reiterates that Achebe found Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* so intentionally destructive for Africans that no matter how significant this novel was aesthetically speaking. Moreover, Irele proclaims that:

He [Achebe] was stirred to literary creation himself by the realization that his own humanity as an individual was called into question by the negative representation of Africa that he encountered in Conrad’s novella and in the work of other European writers who have located their imaginings in his continent of origin. (ix)

Irele believes that the Africans' way out, far from the colonial oppression was expressed through "imaginative literature," which not only displayed the "epochal significance of the encounter with Europe and its objective implications for African societies and cultures," but also "the complex relation of African experience to the norms and precepts commonly associated with the modern West" (ix). In addition, he highlights that the most important achievement is "their determination of the directions of African thought and expression" (ix). Furthermore, Irele's study of Achebe's earlier literary phase brings to this conclusion:

Achebe's imaginative and ideological challenge of Western representations of Africa in his own work clarifies admirably the mental process that has attended the emergence of African literature in modern times. (ix)

What is also worth mentioning is that Achebe wrote his piece of criticism on Conrad's novel, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," in 1975, and later revised it twice in 1977 and 1988. He tried to become politically correct, even though never changed his mind about Conrad's racism. Furthermore in 1973, and before this critical article on Conrad's work, Achebe already positioned with regard to Cary's work in "Named for Victoria, Queen of England":

At the university I read some appalling novels about Africa (including Joyce Cary's much praised *Mister Johnson*) and decided that the story we had to tell could not be told for us by anyone else, no matter how gifted or well-intentioned. (102)

Many critics do not agree with Achebe's assessment, and differentiate fiction from reality. They insist on the idea of distinguishing the author from characters and narrators. This same argument was used to defend Salman Rushdie, who was sentenced to "Fatwa" by the Iranian authorities when he published *The Satanic Verses*. However, I understand his position and stand by his affirmation:

In the end I began to understand. There is such a thing as absolute power over narrative. Those who secure this privilege for themselves can arrange stories about others pretty much where, and as, they like. Just as in corrupt, totalitarian regimes, those who exercise power over others can do anything. They can bring out crowds of demonstrators whenever they need them. In Nigeria it is called renting a crowd. Has Joyce Cary rented Joseph Conrad's crowd? Never mind. What matters is that Cary has a very strong aversion to the people he is presenting to us. And to the towns and villages where these people live, where the action of his novel takes place. ("My Home" 24-25)

Furthermore, Achebe's rebellion over Cary's novel in class created a gossip among his fellow students, which turned into his need to react against this book and made him decide to write. For Irele, it was Conrad who blew the *Akoben* to push Achebe to write; whereas for Achebe's classmates it was Cary. Nevertheless, he obviates these affirmations and firmly states that he had three reasons to become a writer. First, he had "an overpowering urge to tell a story." Second, he had "intimations of a unique story waiting to come out." And finally, he considered "the whole project worth the considerable trouble [...] you will have to endure to bring it to fruition" ("Empire" 39). Notwithstanding, Achebe's explanations, works, and words speak for other reasons too. He could not hold back his need to redress the wrongs inflicted on his people and on all Africans in general, as can be deduced from his critical texts.

2.7. AIDOO'S BACKLASH AGAINST RACISM: AN EXEMPLIFICATION

I share C.L. Innes' comparison between Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, deducing that Aidoo's novel "rewrites and reverses Conrad's novel, as the archetypal European novel 'about' Africa" ("Mothers" 140). Aidoo's masterpiece is centred on an African young girl, Sissie, who receives a scholarship to travel to Germany, the cradle of Arian culture. When she arrives at Frankfurt airport, a commissioned officer takes charge of her and two other young Nigerian boys—who also participate in the same programme—to the railway station to travel to a small German town. Sissie discovers that she is outstanding in some sense in that noisy space, because although she knows very little German she *does* understand that there is a woman affirming to her daughter that Sissie is black: "Ja, das Schwartzte Mädchen" (12). Aidoo's main character shares with Frantz Fanon the same experience this describes so clearly in his work *Black Skin, White Masks*. He had gone through a very similar incident when a boy told his mother: "Look, a Negro!" or "Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!" (112). Fanon's first reaction to the boy's words was to smile or even laugh at the idea of being pointed out in a public space, but the boy being frightened of him implied that these people—as the rest of the Western people—had received the wrong myths and stories about Africans:

I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristic; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetichism, racial defects, slave-ships. (112)

But later, things got worse. He got angry as he became aware of what the mother had said to amend the situation: “Take no notice sir, he does not know that you are as civilised as we [...]” (113). Then he shifted from anger to sadness: “My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly” (113). Whereas in the case of Sissie, she was surprised and started to look for a black girl around her:

And it hit her.
That all that crowd of people going and coming in all sorts of directions
had the colour of the pickled pig parts that used to come from foreign
places to the markets at home.
Trotters, pig-tails, pig-ears
She looked and looked to so many of such skins together.
And she wanted to vomit. (12)

As this point, Aidoo displays a genuine reaction. Racism is fought back by racism. Black and white exposed to each other’s appalling reactions. Notwithstanding, Aidoo goes further than Fanon and graces her with an instantaneous awareness and enough remorse to last all her life for being a racist herself. She lost the chance to become different from Marlow at the moment of her first encounter with Europeans in Europe:

Then she was ashamed for her reaction.
Something pulled inside of her.
For the rest of her life, she was to regret this moment
When she was made to notice differences in human colouring.
(12-13)

Moreover, Sissie is endowed with a sense of self-esteem, which Fanon had proved to be lacking in the Africans’ personality due to colonialism. The narrators’ words disclose the process of healing in her subconscious, which is necessary to overcome racism from both sides: “No matter where she went, what anyone said, what they did. She knew it never mattered” (13). It is significant to highlight that these words are not simple statements of ignorance, or only forgiveness: “But what she also came to know was that someone somewhere would always see in any kind of difference, an excuse to be mean” (13). Aidoo, or her narrator, reverses Fanon’s painful experience quoted above, by redirecting the adjective “mean” to those whose intention is to perpetuate the hurt inflicted on the Africans.

2.8. EMECHETA'S BACKLASH TO PROVIDE HER PEOPLE WITH A HISTORY OF THEIR OWN

In the case of Buchi Emecheta, although the narrators seem to have complete knowledge of what is occurring in her three African novels, the native characters are not completely aware yet of how colonialism and its implications are changing their lives. Notwithstanding, the author's aim is not to anchor her works in a backlash against colonialism and the British Empire, but rather to provide her people with a history of their own and highlight the other kind of oppression exerted by her male companions in African society. She responds to Cary's racism in *Mister Johnson*, and uses it to her benefits. One of the important and racist characters in Cary's novel is Sergeant Gollup. The first day Johnson, the Nigerian main character, goes to work to Gollup's store, he "is surprised to see the gentlemanly Ajali receive a tremendous kick in the backside for failing to understand" (136), because Gollup asks Ajali to get him something but gives him the wrong instructions and, of course, Ajali cannot find what Gollup wants. The kick is described by the narrator as "one with an unexpected power and dexterity which moves Ajali visibly into the air and causes him to utter a loud squeal" (136). But then Gollup, knowing that he has erred in hitting Ajali violently, threatens Johnson since he is the only witness of what happened:

'You didn't see anything, did you?'

'What, sah?'

'You didn't see anything 'appen just then—to Ajali's trousers? Because if you did, you better not. See. Unless you want something to 'appen to your trousers, only more so.'

'Oh, yes, sah. I see, sah.'

'No, you silly baboon—you didn't see. See?'

'No, I didn't see, Mister Gollup.'

'That's it. You don't see and you take bleeding good care not to see, neither. I know the law as well as you do, Mr Monkey-brand.'

'Oh, yes, sah—I see, sah.'

Gollup turns upon him sharply and bawls, 'Oh, you do, do you? All right.' He swings up his fist.

'Oh, no, sah. I don't see.'

'Oh, you do see now—see—you see that you don't see. So that's all right.' (136-137)

Moreover, just a few lines below, Gollup ends up punching Johnson on his nose, and threatens him not to say the truth otherwise he would hurt him again. After calling him "baboon" and "Mr Monkey-brand," and hitting both Ajali and Johnson

violently, Gollup gives Johnson half a bottle of bad gin and an old shirt to gain his loyalty.

In Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, we see how "baboon" is used to address African servants. It is important to mention that this author's African novels do not include significant white characters. Nevertheless, the passage I am revising here must have been intentionally inserted to show that worse than racism, slavery or colonialism is suffering from the oppression by your own male companions. For example, Nnu-Ego, the main female character gets married a second time to a man, Nnaife, in the city of Lagos. He works as a washerman for the white master and mistress, Mr and Mrs Meers. Dr. Meers works in Yaba at the Forensic Science Laboratory. Emecheta presents Nnaife to the reader the day his brother brings Nnu-Ego from Ibuza as a wife for him. Nnaife, happy with the arrival of his wife, asks permission to leave the boy-quarters, in which the servants lived. Mrs Meers accepts "in the cultured, distant voice which she invariably used when addressing the native servants" (41); so she bid him goodnight. The white couple were aware of some kind of expectation going on but they did not inquire. So Nnaife wished them:

'Good night, madam. Good night, sah,' Nnaife said to the master, who was pretending to be too engrossed in the paper he held in front of him to be aware of what was going on about him.

Dr. Meers peered over the paper, smiled mischievously and answered, 'Good night, baboon.'

Mrs Meers straight away went into a torrent of words, too fast and too emotionally charged for Nnaife, who stood there like a statue, to understand. He gaped from husband to wife and back again, wondering why she should be so angry. The woman went on for a while, then suddenly realised that Nnaife was still standing by the door. She motioned with her arm for him to go away. He heard Dr Meers laugh and repeat the word "baboon." (41-42)

Nnaife came from western Iboland and hardly knew any English then. So he did not understand what was going on. He noticed that Mrs Meer was very angry at her husband's words. The narrator explains that Nnaife was of the opinion that all women were the same, but he was "determined to ask someone in the near future what the word 'baboon' meant" (42). The narrator clarifies that Nnaife would have never done anything if he had known the meaning of the term "baboon." In fact, "He would simply shrug his shoulders and say, 'We work for them and they pay us. His calling me a baboon does not make me one'" (42). Emecheta's irony is underscored in the next paragraph where the narrator makes intelligible Nnaife's thoughts when he expresses

doubts about the intelligence of the white men unable to keep their wives quiet. Nnaife could not understand why the white man preferred to laugh behind the newspaper instead of silencing his wife. Racism strikes the white doctor back as a boomerang, though to women's cost. In the following statement the narrator contrasts Nnaife's innocence with the brutal facts:

Nnaife did not realize that Dr Meer's laughter was inspired by that type of wickedness that reduces any man, white or black, intelligent or not to a new low; lower than the basest of animals, for animals at least respected each other's feelings, each other's dignity. (42)

These words show that racism is brutal when attacking the dignity of human beings. However, the fact that Nnaife does not mind racism as long as he has a job, in addition to the idea that he would not have allowed any woman to keep on talking angrily, implies that it is easier to overcome racism than to change the African male's mentality. Hence, Emecheta responds to racism and takes advantage of it to highlight other African social maladies, such as the male's everlasting intention of silencing women. In this sense, Emecheta also speaks up for silenced African women.

Regarding the first men's representations of African women in African literature, editor and critic Ada Uzoamaka Azodo explains that the paradigm of the African woman as "subservient, weak, dependent, and subordinate" ("*Dilemma*" 223), is a fallacy. She elucidates that:

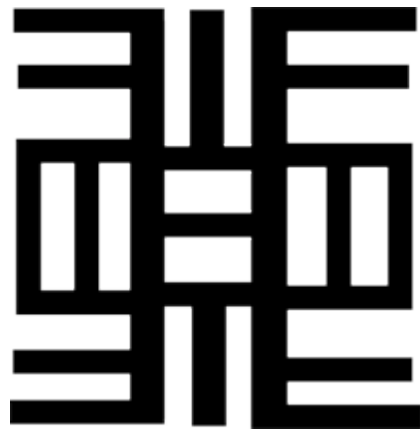
In colonial times, such an erroneous myth started as a result of the wives of the colonial administrators who, having not much with which to occupy themselves, spent their days lounging around as housewives. Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* also helped to perpetuate this image, which now was imposed on the African woman as dependent and unproductive. ("*Dilemma*" 223)

Moreover, Azodo affirms, "In reality, the truth is far from that myth, which needs to be exploded once and for all" ("*Dilemma*" 223). This must have been taking place, since by the time that Achebe assessed the texts mentioned above, there were already African women writers complaining about the absence of the woman's voice in Achebe's own novels. Hence, the absence of women active main characters in Achebe's works was also a motive for the reaction of some of the West African women writers. Thus, Achebe's voiceless women or flat female characters become the powerful wind to blow the *Akobon* urging again women writers to react, as in the case of Emecheta.

As late as 1986, Buchi Emecheta was asked if there was “any difference between the ways in which the African male and women writers handle theme, character and situation?” (Emecheta, “Interview with Adeola James” 42). Her answer was that the Nigerian author has portrayed the good woman as an obedient subjected entity with no voice. Emecheta insisted that she has written about the importance of the African women in bringing things together. James assured her that:

People are beginning to say that the real reason for the tragic disruption of society depicted in *Things Fall Apart* [Achebe’s first novel, 1958] is because the female principle is neglected while the male principle, with its strong-headedness and inflexibility, is promoted above all else. (42)

Since literature is both a model to follow and an image representing society, the African women writers have followed Emecheta’s emphasis on the role of women: to listen to the call of the *Akobon* voluntarily and put their wit to re-present Africa and all its inhabitants in an integrative way.



PART III: *NEA ONNIM NO SUA A, OHU*

**DIDACTIC LITERATURE TO ENLIGHTEN THE LIVES OF
AFRICANS**

3. THE MEANING OF THE ADINKRA SYMBOL *NEA ONNIM NO SUA A, OHU*

This symbol is not included in the Willis's dictionary, whereas Kojo Arthur defines it as the symbol that represents "Knowledge, life-long education and continued quest for Knowledge" (183). The complete proverb related to this symbol is literally translated from the Akan (Twi) as: "He who does not know can know from learning; he who thinks he knows and ceases to continue to learn will stagnate." Kojo Arthur adds: "To grow is to live, to stagnate is to die. Only as one continues to search for wisdom will one grow wiser. Education is a lifelong process" (183). I recollected from my personal experience in Ghana that this symbol was accompanied with the saying "if you no know you go know, O!" and served as a warning, since experience in life will end up teaching everyone; or as a direct challenge to teach others. In the case of both Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta it is as if they would say: you did not know this and that, well sit down and I will tell you everything about them so that you will know too.

3.1. "IF YOU NO KNOW YOU GO KNOW"

This Part III demonstrates how both Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta started writing African short stories and novels in the 1960s and 1970s with the firm intention to change the lives of their African countrymen and women through their work. Aidoo was encouraged by her male colleagues, while Emecheta had the need to put her "head above water" through her writing about Africa after her success with the London novels. They both wanted to uncover some obsolete traditions, degrading activities, and devastating habits that have been acquired during the colonial period. Their wish was to put an end to the abasement of the African women and blighted African condition. We see how their writings are supplementary re-presentations to the African men's writings so as to make room for new readings on slavery before and after colonialism, traditions, and the effect of being invaded by other cultures and religions. Their works respond to those who have not seen nor heard of these problems yet, or simply obliterated them.

3.2. THE AFRICAN WRITERS' NECESSARY COMMITMENT

Many African writers have felt the responsibility for writing and at the same time they have been aware of the accountability that awaited them after publishing their writing. Their works have changed the African society, since they have learned through reading

how powerful the colonial library was in designing the inferiority of their race, gender, and culture. In 1965 Chinua Achebe wrote an article entitled “The Novelist as Teacher,” in which he developed his ideas regarding what African society demanded from its writers. He stresses that “the writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done. In fact he should march right in front” (*Morning* 59). He affirms that he wrote having in mind that his readers were his Nigerian compatriots. The sales of Achebe’s books, *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *No Longer at Ease* (1960), were much stronger in Nigeria than in Britain and other places all over the world. He asserts that his readers are mostly African (56).

Achebe also quotes a letter sent to him by a young Nigerian reader, who had never written to any author before but thought he had to thank him for writing novels that served to advice the young people in Nigeria. This reader urges him to keep on writing this kind of work (*Morning* 56). Achebe insists on the author’s freedom to decide and choose, even if this leads him to rebel against society. However, he dismisses some readers’ opinions, especially those asking him to change the endings, expecting him to write a last section with questions and answers in order to pass final exams. This last petition, mentioned here along with other instances in other articles by Achebe and other African authors, demonstrates that Achebe’s books are widely read in many high schools and education centres, not only in Nigeria but also in other African countries and the rest of the world.

Books by African authors read at school have provoked changes in African society. At the beginning, only Achebe had this privilege, and women authors were not easily included in the high school syllabi. Moreover, Ogunyemi asserts that “The exclusion of woman’s text from school curriculums on the pretext that it is trivial carries the struggle to another level” (*Africa* 120). She emphatically expresses her mistrust when she says:

I suspect that in Nigeria members of the military realize that the novel has a potential for effecting change, hence the inaccessibility of books through prohibitive pricing resulting from high duties imposed even on educational materials by military government. (225)

At that time, what most worried Achebe was the unforgivable sin of the Africans’ acceptance of the racial inferiority status. He includes an acknowledgment of his guilt: “What we need to do is to look back and try to find out where we went wrong, where the rain began to beat us” (*Morning* 58). In his work *Black Skin, White Mask*,

Frantz Fanon defines the inferiority complex after a thorough analysis on the effect of colonialism in the psychological state and social behaviour of the colonised black individuals from the Antilles. He insists that there are “differences that separate the Negro of the Antilles from the Negro of Africa” (16). Notwithstanding, his theories are extended to describe the psychological state of the colonised Negro in Africa and all over the world. The objective fact was that the young students attending Achebe’s wife’s classes on English language still suffered the inferiority complex, even in 1965, that is after independence, bolstering up Fanon’s thesis. Therefore, to prove that Fanon’s diagnosis on the inferiority complex is real, Achebe exemplifies this with a true tale about the boy who wrote an essay describing the winter season instead of focusing on the “harmattan,” since he was afraid to be called bushman (cf. *Morning* 58). The African student was ashamed of his African origin and the particularities regarding the African weather.

This kind of experience reaffirms Achebe’s idea that his job as a writer is to teach young boys not to be ashamed of anything African (*Morning* 58). He states that he decidedly champions a counter racism mission with his writing. His commitment is to fight against this inferiority complex and assist his society: “regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement” (*Morning* 59). He believes that the writers’ assignment is, in addition to redress the dignity of the African peoples, to re-educate through writing and consequently re-generate the members of the African society, re-establishing their self-esteem, respect, and worth.

The proof that Achebe’s intentional work has become effective can be found in Ama Ata Aidoo’s words referring to the absence of African literature at schools in Africa, “Because of the colonial experience we still, unfortunately, are very much lacking in confidence in ourselves and what belongs to us” (Aidoo, “Interview with Maxine McGregor” 26). But when she is asked if the general idea is that anything African is not good enough for learning, she underscores the importance of Achebe’s boldness with his act of writing: “this is the reason why I love Achebe: that, you know, he gave so much—to me anyway he gave so much in confidence—no matter what you think about his writing” (Aidoo, “Interview with Maxine McGregor” 26).

In 1982 Achebe expanded on his idea of this commitment when he expressed his extended responsibility due to his “capacity for diverse identities” (Achebe, “Interview” 209). He puts his identities in the following order: Ibo, Nigerian, African, black, and writer. He avers: “Each of these tags has a meaning, and a penalty and a responsibility.

And all these tags, unfortunately for the black man, are tags of disability” (Achebe, “Interview” 209).

In 1984, the South African and Nobel Prize winner, Nadine Gordimer, meditated on her responsibility as a writer in her article “The Essential Gesture.” She seems to enjoy the idea of writing as creating but she knew that “Responsibility is what awaits outside the Eden of creativity” (285). She is also aware of the power of the Foucauldian discourse: “The creative act is not pure. History evidences it. Ideology demands it. Society exacts it. The writer loses Eden, writes to be read, and comes to realize that he is answerable. The writer is *held responsible*” (286). In her case, she was a white South African writer committed against apartheid in her country. But her ideas regarding commitment and responsibility are the key ideas of many writers in the African world at all times, especially when these countries became ambushed by conflicts before the 1960s, such as colonialism in West Africa, after independence post-colonialism, neo-colonialism, corruption of the political rulers, and other social and political maladies.

More than a decade before Gordimer’s reflections, Ama Ata Aidoo had already published a workpaper entitled “Commitment” in 1971, which she delivered in the *Burning Issues in African Literature* Symposium, at the English Department of the University of Cape Coast in Ghana. By this time, her plays *The Dilemma of a Ghost* and *Anowa* had already appeared in 1965 and 1970, as well as her book of short stories *No Sweetness Here* in 1970. In her paper, she insists on presenting her own opinion about the idea behind the term “commitment.” Moreover, she clearly defines this term understanding it as “that process by which a writer puts his entire talent or genius, as the case may be, to the service of an idea. So that his writings reflect, explore and promote this idea” (10). Aidoo situates her belief in the power of the artist’s commitment away from the Romantic idea that “the pen is mightier than the sword,” though closer to her compatriot’s, Ayi Kwei Armah’s, example in his work *Fragments*. Here, the indirect influence of a weak little boy who sits under a coconut tree and beats a tin drum can encourage the strong fishermen to accomplish their work thanks to his song (“Commitment” 10). In addition, she also highlights that the artist’s engagement in a pre-independence era was completely different. She asserts: “Commitment is not static. It moves. And so violently sometimes that what constituted radical commitment at one time can become dangerously reactionary at another time” (13).

The Nigerian feminist literary critic, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, expresses her concerns about the African women writers’ commitment in her article “The Female

Writer and Her Commitment,” which was published for the first time in *The Guardian of Lagos*, in Nigeria in 1983. This critic stands by the feminist idea that women writers should write about their experience of being women and about reality from their own point of view (5). She underlines the importance of identifying the stereotypes about women that appear in African authors’ writings be they men or women, and urges to contest them in order to bring about a change. Ogundipe-Leslie also hastens to encourage African women writers to leave behind the myth of the simple rural woman’s ideal life.

Ogundipe-Leslie underlines as a Nigerian critic that the African woman writer “should be committed in three ways: as a writer, as a woman and as a Third World person; and her biological womanhood is implicated in all three” (10). She explains that the woman writer should be faithful to her keen desire to deploy her voice through art without betraying her own vision. Moreover, she avers that the African woman author should become conscious that she belongs to the Third World. This awareness could help her write from a political courageous stand to present her readers the possible points of view regarding colonialism, imperialism, and neo-colonialism.

3.3. AFRICAN WOMEN WRITERS DEFENDING AFRICAN CULTURE

Ogundipe-Leslie praises Ama Ata Aidoo for being a “politically conscious” writer, and Buchi Emecheta for educating readers about the woman’s realm of experience. This Nigerian critic also explains that even though these women writers describe the women’s experience from their own perspective, they deny their belonging to the feminist ideology because “Male ridicule, aggression and backlash have resulted in making women apologetic and have given the term ‘feminist’ a bad name” (“Female” 11).

Stephanie Newell in her chapter, “Feminism and the Complex Space of Women’s Writing,” also highlights the difficulties that West African women writers undergo when they tackle the issues of gender and power. She assures that feminism “is probably the most contested and problematic” -ism that circulates in that region (148). Apparently, many people participated in the 1980s debates on these issues in Nigeria “The public discussion of feminism is inextricable from people’s moral commentaries on postcolonial politics and personal morality” (148). What is worse is that the liberated women who did not want to depend on men were blamed for every ailment in Nigerian society. Furthermore, they did not want to get married or bear children. They were also

accused of the economic failure and political uncertainty. According to Newell, even the literary and cultural critics such as Charles E. Nnolim, accused Flora Nwapa from Nigeria, Mariama Bâ from Senegal, and Nawal El Saadawi from Egypt of being “in league to push the tenets of feminism to scandalous, even criminal and murderous levels” (150). Newell also mentions the contribution of the nationalist critic, Chinweizu, who hurled “a ‘masculinist’ attack on ‘feminist’ African women” (150) in his *Anatomy of Female Power* (1990).

The African women writers had their first encounter with feminism in the conferences held far from Africa. The Western feminists were at war with men in the fight of liberating themselves from the restrained social, political, and religious norms. Hence, this dividing ideology and theory did not fit the African writers’ worldview. The Western feminists were labelled with simplistic tags as lesbians and man-haters. The rejection of motherhood emerged from the idea of a family-wrecking ideology, and this was not what African society could rely on for progress. I stand by Susheila Nasta, the founder-editor of the literary review *Wasafiri*, when she rhetorically wonders if being a feminist could have been interpreted in the post-colonial countries as “an implicit adherence to another form of cultural imperialism” (xv).

Newell reminds her readers that the reaction against feminism lasted in some significant African women writers until the end of the 1980s:

Other women whose writing has been associated with “feminist rebellion” also question this label, including Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta. While their literary texts produce meanings and gender identities that openly contest the authority of men, their ideological self-positioning involves a forceful repudiation of the one “-ism” that would seem the most appropriate to describe their work. (150)

Newell’s source for Emecheta’s rejection of the term “feminism” is the latter’s interview with Kirsten Holst Petersen in 1989, in which this African writer expressed that she disliked to be labelled a feminist since this was a European term and she should rather be classified as an African womanist. However, Emecheta insists in her famous article “Feminism with a Small ‘f!’” that she is not a ‘feminist’ in the western sense of the word.

Moreover, even though Emecheta’s works have been translated into many languages, she knows that her books are hardly read in Nigeria. Nevertheless, she believes that her writing is committed to the new generations of Africans who were and are born in the Western world. Notwithstanding, in the three novels included in this

research she re-presents Africa and the African issues within the realm of women by giving voice to the experience of her main Igbo women characters. On the one hand, she has proved through them to be committed to challenging women's place within the Igbo traditional society in Nigeria, and by extension in Africa. And, on the other hand, the outcome of the people, whose lives are oscillating between their own traditions and the "westernised modern" way of life. According to Susheila Nasta, the post-colonial women writers know that it is not enough to speak up loud and clear; or to use different new forms and language to substantiate their diverse experience; or to demolish the frames of the male-centred ideology and discourse. Their most difficult task is "to subvert and demythologise indigenous male writings and traditions which seek to label" ("Introduction" xv) the African women writers.

This position correlates with both Aidoo's or Emecheta's definitive commitment to African culture. Each of these writers' stories is a slice of life that can take place in any African country and at many levels. Both authors accomplish the essence of the symbol *Nea Onnim no Sua A, Ohu*, which is related to the concepts of teaching and learning ingrained in the idea of knowledge and their significance in the progress of African people. On the one hand, the agents that carry out the task of teaching are the narrators and tradition bearers. And, on the other hand, the teachings inserted in their narrative, which are embedded in the discourse of gossiping, justification of slavery, and the cross-references from one text to another. However, the personal implication of these two writers in the production of their work cannot be obviated. They are writing their work being conscious of these issues and present behind every voice, unveiling their commitment to African people. A close reading of their personal interviews helps bring forward their thoughts, intentions, and ideology. These authors are not "dead" in Barthesian terms. Their view, language, and literary work evince their individual responsibility and aims that support this research.

For example, in the case of Emecheta, she uses Adah—the main woman character in her *Second-Class Citizen*—and Bill—as Adah, member of the library staff—to channel her feelings and opinion about writing a book. Adah expresses her satisfaction at finishing the book and compares it to giving birth to a baby. Moreover, Bill who seemed to be a bookworm adds:

But that is how writers feel. Their work is their brainchild. This is your brainchild; you are the only one in this whole world who could have produced that particular work, no one else could. If they tried it would

just be an imitation. Books tell a great deal about the writers. It is like your own particular child. (176)

However, reversing this statement, these writers' own words in interviews tell more about their works and the influence of their real everyday life on their literary work. Chinua Achebe affirms that any writer is inevitably "the sensitive point of his community" (*Morning* 59), and completes this idea quoting the Ghanaian professor of Philosophy, William Abraham:

Just as African scientists undertake to solve some of the scientific problems of Africa, African historians go into history of Africa, African political scientist concern themselves with the politics of Africa; why should African literary creators be exempted from the service that they themselves recognize as genuine? (*Morning* 59)

Hence, for some African intellectuals, writers run parallel to social workers, since they become responsible for the education of the people in their community. Moreover, literature becomes an essential instrument that can enlighten people so as to overcome the difficulties in their society.

3.4. AMA ATA AIDOO'S WRITINGS: TO AMELIORATE THE FUTURE OF HER COMPATRIOTS

There is a crucial reason that urged me to differentiate between Aidoo's and Emecheta's writings. Even though their literary works analysed here were written in the 1960s and 1970s, Emecheta's main themes are based on the concerns during the colonial era in the first half of the 20th century. Emecheta sketches her characters' lives through the eyes of a "been-to" modern woman, who is living now and at the time of writing in the centre of the Empire. While Aidoo's themes stem from the morbid fascination of her African compatriots for everything Western, especially the easy money and preponderance for frivolous things. Aidoo's concerns are more holistic and embracing diverse aspects. She takes into account the social, physical, and psychological aspects of the post-independence Africans in Ghana and all over the world. Emecheta's works would be travelling directly from the past and the core of the Igbo traditions, with her vantage point set in the present away from her community, to signal both the positive and negative aspects. Emecheta highlights the positive aspects that need to be preserved, and the obsolete traditions that constrain the lives of the Igbo women and have to be abolished. She wants to improve the African woman's future by an

awakening process through reading literature. In contrast, Aidoo's works' departure point is both the present and the new problems inherited from the coloniser's culture. She writes from inside in the present, and her target is to ameliorate the future of her countrymen and women. She brings forward many of the flaws of the African peoples with the only intention to arouse in them the need to amend mistakes and improve their lives. Emecheta's university degree in sociology has driven her to focus on sociological issues, as she herself had described in her interview with Adeola James: "My first discipline is sociology. In sociology we learn about a lot of concepts. My books are based on various concepts. For example, [...] *Joy of Motherhood* deals with population control and *The Slave Girl*, the tradition of slavery" (43). However, Aidoo's narratives speak out not only about her social commitment, but also about her political engagement as an African nationalist and pan-Africanist.

Whereas Emecheta's novels are set between the beginning and mid-twentieth century, Ama Ata Aidoo's works I have chosen for this research are set in a postcolonial era. However, Aidoo rejects the idea of post-colonialism as the tag for an era in which historical processes have supposedly been reversed to suit the social, economical, and psychological needs of Africans. She cannot understand the term, even if it were hyphenated, as a concept that alludes to the period of time after colonialism, because she believes that colonialism is not over. Politically speaking, she sees the era of emancipation as an era of a new colonisation by means of the old regimes of power, although this time the rulers are her own African compatriots. For her, this is even worse. In fact, wherever she looked she could not find "the wind of change" that the British Prime Minister said "was blowing right through Africa" on his tour around Africa in Ghana in January 1950. Neither could she find what Kwame Nkrumah referred to when he rectified later that "no ordinary wind, but a raging hurricane," was the drive force of the coming changes in Ghana and the rest of Africa.¹¹

According to Ada U. Azodo and Gay Wilentz, when Aidoo was asked about "postcolonialism" she had vehemently answered: "Post What? We're not post anything!" ("Introduction" xvii). Moreover, in another instance during a conference

¹¹ Kwame Nkrumah was one of the most significant hustlers to oppose colonialism until Ghana gained political independence in 1957. He became the first elected president of the Republic of Ghana in 1960. He entitled the chapter 26 of his book *I Speak of Freedom* as "The Wind of Change," quoting Mr Macmillan's famous coined phrase in his speech when this visited the Gold Coast, now Ghana, in 1950 (cf. 203).

entitled “Critical Fictions,” which was organized in New York in 1991, Aidoo’s comment on the concept “postcolonial” is clarified in these terms:

Perhaps the concept was relevant to the United States after its war of independence, and to a certain extent to the erstwhile imperial dominions of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Applied to Africa, India, and some other parts of the world, ‘postcolonial’ is not only a fiction, but also most pernicious fiction, a cover-up of a dangerous period in our people’s lives. (qtd. Mongia, “Introduction” 1)

Inspired by Nadine Gordimer’s article “Living in the Interregnum,” I follow the idea behind Gramsci’s quotation that she had already used as epigraph for her novel *July’s People*: “The old is dying, and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms” (263). Even though Aidoo did not want to believe in a no-win situation for the Africans after independence, she knew that they were living in a kind of interregnum in Gramsci’s sense where the old was dying and what was arising as new was already in a decaying status quo, in which endless social and political maladies were sprouting.

Of course, Aidoo writes about Ghanaian women, mainly immersed in their daily lives and representative of the different regions of the country be it rural or urban. However, she goes further and also decries the crippling afflictions that still either obstruct or hinder the improvement of the Ghanaian communities even after independence. Aidoo’s teaching is not that of the Emecheta’s narrators and other tradition bearers re-presented to the readers. Aidoo is concerned with what her people were learning during the pre-independence and post-independence years. Her interests range from the education or knowledge they might receive at school to the baggage of experience they can recollect from the imposed neo-colonial culture regarding their way of life and physical aspect, which become the most obvious reflection of their self-esteem. Furthermore, for Aidoo what is at stake is the effect of all these intruding elements in her compatriots’ lives. She hates to sit and see both her African sisters and brothers paddling on the surface of pseudo-knowledge without diving into the deep sea in search of the sources for the progress of each and every African.

In *Our Sister Killjoy* we have one or more experimented wise and older narrators than the protagonist Sissie. These narrators have enough knowledge to teach something to the readers. Moreover, the author also rebukes her own people with the only intention of correcting their mistakes. Sometimes Aidoo uses wise voices as an eye-opener to remind her people of certain facts about the present in which the story

takes place. The narrators expose the truth, once and whenever they have the chance in this novel, about those who abuse their own people and country:

There are
 Richer, much
 Richer countries on this continent
 Where
 Graver national problems
 Stay
 Unseen while
 Big men live their
 Big lives
 Within... (55)

These kinds of problems are awaiting writers as Aidoo to uncover the pernicious attitudes, which have influenced on her people in the neo-colonial era. She knows that only through education can a nation rise. In this novel Aidoo's words shine like a neon light in the dark: "EDUCATION HAS BECOME TOO EXPENSIVE. THE COUNTRY CANNOT AFFORD IT FOR EVERYBODY" (57), with the only intention of exposing her African rulers and announcing their lies to every fellow countryman and countrywoman. If they did not know, now they know and forever that something has to be done with respect to education. This is the exact message that the Adinkra symbol conveys in this Part III.

Aidoo has another method for teaching her readers. She re-presents continents, characters, colours, attitudes, and other aspects in binary oppositions so that the readers can deduce and learn. For Chioma Opara, Aidoo exploits Sissie's portrait "to explore binary oppositions of race and gender" (141) in *Our Sister Killjoy*. However, Aidoo also re-presents contrasts to highlight the enormous gaps created between the native traditions, imposed culture, and religion through colonialism. In this same novel when the German character, Marija, asks the African Sissie her name, the first woman was surprised to hear that her name was also Mary. Marija affirms that this was a German name. Aidoo's poet-narrator writes in verse to explain that every nationality has asserted that this name was theirs, and that the missionaries had done the job to validate this name in every Christian mission. In this example, Aidoo goes further than the gender and race issues Opara suggests, and discloses here the naming process in Ghana when the poet contrasts it with the information about the missionaries' naming of the children through baptism in the African colonies:

And what shall it profit a native that

He should have
 Systems to give
 A boy
 A girl
 Two
 Three names or
 More?
 Yaw Mensah Adu Preko Oboroampa Okotoboe

Ow, my brother...
 Indeed there was a time when
 Voices sang
 Horns blew
 Drums rolled to
 Hail
 Yaw
 —for getting born on Thursday
 Preko.
 —just to extol Yaw
 Mensah
 —who comes third in a series of males
 Adu
 —A name from father
 After venerable ancestor,
 Okotoboe
 —for hailing the might of Adu. (*Our Sister* 25-26)

Therefore, the reader learns how Aidoo's work teaches that the naming process in Ghana takes into account the day the child is born, number in family, ancestors, ethnic group, being one of twins and whatever title one might inherit. The German lady's astonishment at hearing Sissie's real name brings about the narrator's poetic reaction that emphasizes the binary opposition between the simple act of naming the new-born children with African names and the imposition of using Christian names to become successful in life.

3.4.1. AIDOO'S DIDACTIC LITERATURE: TO ILLUSTRATE COLONISING MECHANISMS

In Aidoo's short story "Everything Counts," the narrator adopts the perfect attitude of the representative entity of the Adinkra symbol in this section that corresponds to an eyewitness informant. This narrator suggests that if you do not know you will learn through his words, that is, through Aidoo's didactic text. In addition to the use of wigs,

the protagonist notices a difference in Ghanaian women's physical appearance, or I better say, a change in their skin colour:

Even that was not the whole story. Suddenly, it seemed as if all girls and women she [Sissie] knew and remembered as having smooth black skins had turned light-skinned. Not uniformly. Lord, people looked as though a terrible plague was sweeping through the land. A plague that made funny patchworks of faces and necks. (*No Sweetness* 3-4)

Aidoo knows that the propagation of the wigs' use is the result of the imposition of the Western values of beauty through propaganda in newspapers and magazines.¹² Aidoo reproduces her knowledge about her people through Sissie: "she would also try to remember some other truths she knew about Africa. Second-rate experts giving first-class dangerous advice. Or expressing uselessly fifth-rate opinions" (*No Sweetness* 1).

The main character in "Everything Counts" is astonished at her arrival to her country of how things have changed. Aidoo, by virtue of Sissie's stupefaction, succeeds in her re-presentation of the Africans' bondage to the new ways of colonising her culture, especially realizing this was specific to the women's realm:

Really, she had found it difficult to believe her eyes. How could she? From the air-stewardess to the grade-three typists in the offices, every girl simply wore a wig. Not cut discreetly short and disguised to look like her own hair as she had tried to do with hers. But blatantly, aggressively, crudely. Most of them actually had masses of flowing curls falling on their shoulders. Or huge affairs piled on top of their heads. (*No Sweetness* 3)

Here, we realize how Aidoo identifies another problem in order to teach her people. She has re-presented the nuisance of blindly imitating the Western fashion and aesthetics without taking into account its implications. Her character, who seems to disapprove the use of wigs and whitening ointments for the skin, has also used wigs, though discreetly. Aidoo does not only identify the problem but also wants to describe, analyse, and work out methods to erode it. It is not enough for her to have women using wigs discreetly. She wants to eradicate the need for wigs. She sees them as new tools of colonising, in this case, African women.

For Aidoo, another critical issue against African nations's development is the high rate of brain drain they have suffered. Many Africans have had the chance to attend American and European universities and stay there forever. In *Our Sister Killjoy*,

¹² I have analysed this aspect in my article "Heirs of Wigs." Aidoo's narrator draws the readers' attention to the fact that the problem would not probably exist so vastly without the implication of those who write the advertisements and some African mediators.

Aidoo's main character, Sissie, admits she knows the motivation behind the brain drain.

It is an issue related to the eternal search for personal and collective worth:

But they [the white people in the west] have always known how much we [the Africans] are worth. They have always known that, My Brother, and a whole lot more. They may not consider it necessary to openly admit it [...] that's another matter. They probably know it is strategically unwise to. (129-130)

Moreover, the African economic reality does not encourage experts—educators, surgeons, doctors, lawyers, and technicians—to return home to face the poverty inherited from “kleptocracy” that reigns there. However, Sissie would like to convince her boyfriend in a letter she will never send:

So please come home, My Brother. Come to our people. They are the only ones who need to know how much we are worth. The rewards would not be much. Hardly anything. For every successful surgery, they will hail you a miracle worker. Because their faith will not be in the knives you wield but in your hands; in your human touch. . . Once a year; some man of means will come to give you thanks, with a sheep. Or a goat. Sometimes they may even make a subtle hint that you marry their beautiful daughter. (130)

She continues tempting her boyfriend—every African—with the presents that he might receive, from a verbal “thank you” to blessings, from a cockerel to fresh eggs; though she is aware that she cannot lie to him and promise money. Notwithstanding the differences between being a doctor in Africa and out of Africa, Aidoo still wants her people to come back to Africa because this is the only way they can change the fate of their continent. Her didacticism encourages Africans to overcome their inferiority complex and quit this need for the non-Africans' recognition. Their worth should not depend on the non-Africans' opinions, nor should it be measured by what they earn.

3.4.2. AIDOO'S CHARACTERS AND THE ISSUES OF PROSTITUTION AND MIGRATION

Africans know that money is tight. However, money also serves to illustrate Aidoo's thoughts and the distressing consequences derived from it, among these the problem of prostitution practiced for getting easy money. The high number of young girls selling their body to old rich men for the sake of financial easy gain was and is still alarming. In her short story “For Whom Things Did Not Change,” the Ghanaian couple from the north, in charge of a Government Rest House, comment that the new African visitor

named Kobina has not brought any woman with him. At the beginning we can perceive both Zirigu and his wife Setu as faultfinders, since she criticises those women who accompany the old men to the rest houses. Zirigu is surprised at his wife's criticism. He assures Setu that Kobina is different. She is not so sure at the beginning of the story, though by the end Kobina proves to be different. In this context, Zirigu reveals more information about most of the post-independence young girls' idiosyncrasy: "But the men are big men. They have the money. They have all the nice things, like big cars and the false hair that come from the white man's land. And the little girls sleep with them because they like these things" (*No Sweetness* 10). When Setu asks about the girls' families, Zirigu explains:

Some of them do not even know that their children are like this. They live in the villages and when their daughters take good things home, they think it is because they are ladies and have got them all with the pay from their work. Some clans learn from the wayside how their daughters are living in the cities. (*No Sweetness* 10)

This is the exact core in Aidoo's short story entitled "In the Cutting of a Drink." Its storyteller is the main character who tells the audience and readers how some women turn into prostitutes. He goes to Accra to look for his sister Mensa who has left her family back in her hometown. Surprisingly, he finds her the first night he arrives there. It is Saturday night and his friend Duayaw wants to show him how are Saturday nights in the city. The storyteller, whom Aidoo does not provide a name—we can only infer that he is Mensa's brother—deduces through observation in the nightclub "that something made [him] realise that they were all bad women of the city" (*No Sweetness* 36). He thought that his sister was married to a big man and was well. To his surprise, one of these "bad women" turned out to be Mensa. When he discovers this he asks if that is her work, and she boldly responds she doesn't even know who he is: "And who are you to ask me such questions? I say, who are you? Let me tell you that any kind of work is work. You villager, you villager, who are you?" (*No Sweetness* 36). When she recognizes him she laughs.

In another short story "Certain Winds from the South," Aidoo re-presents the recurrent issue of prostitution again. M'ma Asana tells her daughter Hawa—who had given birth to Fuseni ten days before—that her husband Issa has just left to the South in search of a job. M'ma Asana tells her daughter old stories about so many men who had to leave the North and immigrate to the southern cities including Hawa's father. Most of

these men became soldiers and when they came back, mothers wanted their daughters to get married properly to them. Here, Aidoo's storyteller gives rise to the other reason that turns some women members of that community into "bad women." For example, Memunat is a young woman in love with a soldier who has to leave. In M'ma Asana's words to her daughter Hawa: "Who was this Memunat? No, she is not your friend's mother. No, this Memunat in the end ran away South herself. We hear she became a bad woman in the city and made a lot of money" (*No Sweetness* 53).

Finally, Aidoo re-takes prostitution for her short story "Two Sisters," in which the young girl Mercy earns her living working as a typist, going to work by bus, and living with her married sister Connie. However, Mercy is already buying expensive things when she claims she runs short of money. She finally tells Connie that she is dating with Mensar-Arthur, a member of the Parliament. Connie becomes startled because even though her sister has mentioned that she wants to marry and bear children, she has also said that she hasn't found the right man yet. Connie warns her that people have gossiped that Mensar-Arthur has many wives and girlfriends. In this story the elder sister cannot stop her younger sister from becoming involved in a wrong behavior:

Their parents were good Presbyterians. They feared God. Mama had not managed to give them all the rules of life before she died. But Connie knows that running around with an old and depraved public man would have been considered an abomination by her parents. (*No Sweetness* 93)

In addition to this, when Connie becomes pregnant and her husband James also comes home late, Connie starts to think that he is also involved in some affairs with younger girls. When Connie tells James about Mercy's affair he expresses his approval and justifies Mercy's decision: "Since every girl she knows has ruined herself prosperously, why shouldn't she? Just forget for once that you are a teacher. Or at least, remember she is not your pupil" (*No Sweetness* 98). Connie becomes startled at her husband's words and cannot understand why her sister wishes to do what other young girls are doing wrong.

Furthermore, Connie dislikes the statements her husband casts out from his mouth: "What would you like me to say? Every morning her friends who don't earn any more than she does wear new dresses, shoes, wigs and what-have-you to work. What would you have her do?" (*No Sweetness* 98). Aidoo's narrator heedfully describes Mercy's relationship with her lover and the economic bribes he would provide to avoid possible problems with Connie. Then, Mercy leaves her sister's home to live in one of

the government state houses. However, the 1966 *coup d'état* overthrows the government and Connie believes that this event will also bring back her sister to live a normal life in her house again. In fact, Aidoo's irony is underscored with Connie's wide open mouth looking surprised in the last line of this story. She has thought that with the new order of things regarding the political state in Ghana things would improve for her own state of mind. Nevertheless, to her surprise Mercy takes her new lover, a powerful man in the new government, to meet Connie and her family.

Here, Aidoo's teaching deals with the basic problems of prostitution and migration. She re-presents some people's life immersed in poverty and their easy way out. She wants to teach readers, mainly her people, that fast and superficial solutions hinder the progress of the young inhabitants in African society. The public exposure of these maladies might oblige her people to commit themselves to definitely solve the roots of these problems.

3.5. BUCHI EMECHETA'S *THE BRIDE PRICE*: THE IGBO CULTURE AND TRADITIONS

Emecheta's early writings—the so-called London novels—reveal the difficulties she had to go through while living in London, for she was an African woman bringing up her five children on her own. Whereas her African novels seem to be written to accomplish, among others, one of her aims: teaching those Africans living away from their home about their continent and the conditions of its inhabitants. For example, she presents her children as Africans who were born and live in England in her autobiography, *Head Above Water*. Their lack of a precise knowledge about Africa or any African issue which was mostly acquired through their British teachers at school, is corrected on many occasions by their mother. Her children's scarce African experience in their early age, as well as of other African children's living in foreign lands, can only be compensated by teaching them through writing books about Africa and the diverse African ethnic cultures.

The first manuscript of *The Bride Price*, dedicated to her mother, Alice Ogbanje Ojebeta, was not published until 1976. She explains in her autobiography that she started to re-write it in 1974. She thought then: "Seeing who my new publishers were, I thought I would tackle *The Bride Price* again. I would rewrite the book my husband had burned years ago when I was still living with him" (*Head* 153). Emecheta's husband was Nigerian and his act of burning the manuscript was the first response to her writing.

He did not want anyone else to read that book. She explains that the first manuscript ended with the young husband and wife reacting against the traditions of her people, and living happily ever after. She thinks that since she had read on sociology at the university, the new version would have more depth and it would have a different ending for those characters opposing traditions. In spite of its completion, her publishers did not get the book published as soon as she had it ready. Furthermore, she explains that she had to re-write it again for a third time at the request of her publisher: “I rewrote *The Bride Price* for non-Nigerian readers (as Heinemann of Nigeria did not bother to reply to Elizabeth’s approach)” (*Head* 172).¹³ This implies that the non-African reader was taken into account, and since Emecheta writes about the Nigerian traditions in this novel she has to introduce, or simply add explanations to make the reading easy and friendly. In this sense, Emecheta becomes an instructor about the traditions of her people.

Emecheta’s third manuscript became the definitive version, which was first published in the United States of America by George Braziller, and five months later Allison and Busby launched the English edition. I have used the 1995 Heinemann first edition for this research, instead of the 1976 version published by Allison and Busby in 1976. All this will prove to be relevant for this study because later I shall explain more about the changes that the novel underwent. It is worth highlighting that the publishers wanted Emecheta to re-present the Igbo society in detail for the sake of clarity, and this turns her from writer into teacher. The following paragraphs will disclose an analysis of her lessons regarding the particularities of her people.

In *The Bride Price*, Emecheta’s omniscient narrator is also a “been-to,”¹⁴ able to distinguish between African and non-African culture. This storyteller becomes aware of the aspects that a non-African audience would ignore. Therefore, he explains the details that can either pin down the story in an African geography; or, can remind the world that there was a previous culture before Europeans invaded their continent, and changed the norms they considered to be savage or uncivilised. Since people brought up in the West could be the real readers of this kind of books about the pre-colonial Nigeria, she explains every attitude, the expected behaviour, adequate manners, and correct ways of

¹³ According to Emecheta’s account in her autobiography, Elizabeth Stevens had sent the second manuscript of *The Bride Price* to Heinemann publishers, suggesting it would be published in Nigeria since it was based there, but they never answered then (cf. *Head* 172).

¹⁴ A “been-to” is a term used in Africa to refer to a travelled person who has been out of Africa and has experienced other cultures.

approaching the diverse problems in the Nigerian community. Emecheta's voice, or her expert narrator's, is heard everywhere teaching her readers social aspects associated with the customs and social behaviour of the people who inhabit her novel. This know-it-all-narrator in *The Bride Price* highlights that the stories were not only told for fun but also to teach the community the different traditions and moral lessons. Hence, oral stories were a valuable source for knowledge and the best means to transmit customs and beliefs to the African peoples: "The stories were so intensely charged with philosophical lessons about one thing or another that Aku-nna and her friends were able to learn from them" (19), and so will the readers of this novel too. Once and again, the author repeats how traditions and customs were transferred through practice and oral transmission into the past: "Since the announcement of her father's death, she had never stopped marvelling at the unwritten ways of her people" (35). However, it is important to highlight that Emecheta's intention is not only limited to the idea of continuing with the handing down of these traditions. Another of her aims is to denounce what—to her open mindedness—is evaluated as the factors that hinder the progress of Nigerian peoples and Africans in general.

Emecheta uses different agents to assure her purposes. On some occasions in this novel, it is easy to perceive that the tone of the tradition-bearer, be it the narrator or any other character, is that of a teacher who at times instructs only the readers and, on other occasions, both characters and readers. An example of this is when Aku-nna would have scolded her father but couldn't because "in Nigeria you are not allowed to speak in that way to an adult, especially your father. That is against the dictates of culture" (6); or, illustratively when Emecheta's storyteller explains Aku-nna's attitude when she wanted to know why her aunt had been crying: "Aku-nna was prevented from asking, because in her culture it would have been bad manners, and if so many questions had come from a young girl like herself it would have been considered even worse than bad manners" (23).

Secondary characters are also useful for Emecheta's purposes in *The Bride Price*. This is the case of Aku-nna's cousin who has always lived in the village and therefore knows her people's tradition better than Aku-nna, who has lived in the city of Lagos until now. So Ogugua will inform her cousin Aku-nna about the traditions that a widow should follow once her husband is dead: "You're almost fourteen years old now and you still don't know the customs of our Ibuza people? Your mother is inherited by my father, you see, just as he will inherit everything your father worked for" (63).

Moreover, we can observe here how Emecheta underlines that Ogugua chides Aku-nna for not knowing the customs. This would imply that there is an amalgamation of ethnic groups in Lagos and it is impossible to experience a sole ethnic culture. Hence, specific traditions can disappear if no one perpetuates them. Ogugua's words explicitly teach Aku-nna, and as a consequence the readers implicitly learn too. Ogugua's aim is to preserve the ancient rules. Nevertheless, Emecheta, who on the surface level seems to be teaching her people to stick to traditions, also uses Ogugua to unveil the obsolete practices that have to be changed. Emecheta has to show her readers what has to be modified.

Another example is when Aku-nna's father has gone to hospital to finally die there. She knows some aspects related to the Igbo social mores present in her own village of Ibuza: "Their neighbours would look after them, she knew, for in that part of the world everyone is responsible for the next person" (9). Furthermore, when Aku-nna feels betrayed because she knows less than her uncles about her father's bad state of health, the narrator underscores the notion of community:

What she still had to learn was the fact that her people, the people of Ibuza, have what psychologists would call the group mind. They all help each other when in trouble or in need, and the extended family system still applied even in a town like Lagos, hundreds of miles from Ibuza. They are a people who think alike, whose ways are alike, so much so that it would not occur to any one of them to behave and act differently. (11-12)

In some instances her narrator acquires a teacher's tone and uses the impersonal "you," in which anyone can be involved in learning, but it is specifically directed to a non-identified, non-personal "you," some reader or every reader: "Among the Ibo people, an elderly male relative, who looks after you like a father, is referred to as your 'big father' if he is older than your natal father" (13). This is not a mere description of a custom but rather the narrator's/Emecheta's pure intention to preserve this tradition by involving "you," the reader or anyone, to continue practicing or transmitting it. Contrasting the previous statement with the narrator's bracketed words: "(for according to their custom no father should finish all the food on his plate: he must leave a piece of meat or fish for his children to share)" (13), we can say that the narrator limits his remark to the category of descriptive information on a day that Aku-nna's father, before getting so ill, was so angry with his nephew Uche that he almost forgot one of the most important family customs of sharing his food with his children.

Moreover, the narrator in Emecheta's novel, *The Joys of Motherhood*, underscores the strong sense of community in such a dramatic instant when the main character, Nnu-Ego, in distress tries to commit suicide:

However a thing like that is not permitted in Nigeria; you are simply not allowed to commit suicide in peace, because everyone is responsible for the other person. Foreigners may call us a nation of busybodies, but to us, an individual's life belongs to the community and not just to him or her. So a person has no right to take it while another member of the community looks on. He must interfere, he must stop it happening. (60)

African communities are not mere conglomerations of peoples. The diverse ethnic groups agglutinate people belonging to the same families that practice the same traditions, speak the same languages, and share the same ancestors. They are committed to one another and, therefore, they all share responsibilities and take care of each other. In the same way, they also have their watchdogs who are committed to maintain these traditions and commitments.

3.5.1. BUCHI EMECHETA'S WOMEN CHARACTERS AND THE AFRICAN SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Emecheta's essay, "Feminism with a Small 'f'" reflects on the African women's community and points out one of the motives to write *The Joys of Motherhood*: to represent the diverse kinds of women, among which we find Nnu-Ego. This article unearths the reasons why Nnu-Ego is alone and lonely, by adding new information to those not familiar with the internal structure of the Igbo women's realm. Emecheta focuses on the importance of sisterhood, or women friends you can lean on when things get bad. She highlights that after a certain age a woman can find joy by counting on her sisters, friends or the rest of the members of her group if she has taken care of cultivating friendship and sisterhood (554-555). The different experience regarding social organization in Western and Nigerian cultures are evident and crucial for the development of the Igbo characters in this and the rest of her novels. Here, Nnu-ego's son Adim sheds light on one of the Igbo society's pillars. In the last chapter Adim asks his mother to stop worrying about her children: "What's more, you need a little rest, Mother. You have worked too hard all your life. You have to join your age-group at home, dress up on Eke days and go and dance in the markets" (222). But Nnu-Ego has dedicated all her life to her children, so she has never participated in her age-group activities, and finally dies in miserable conditions. Emecheta's narrators usually explain

some essential aspects in an age-group. For example in *The Slave Girl*: “(age-groups, made up of those born within the same three-year period, were like mutual benefit societies, whose members, from adolescence, would organize meetings and dances for important occasions such as this)” (17). Hence, Emecheta tries to enforce the positive aspects regarding the Igbo social organization, which supports not only the social development of women members but also their personal growth. So the author also teaches what is right and wrong.

Likewise, in *The Bride Price* Emecheta’s narrator also explains details regarding clothing and connecting them to the traditional women age-group dances:

The girls talked and dreamed about their outing dance. They worked and saved hard to buy their *jigida*, the red and black beads which they would wear above their bikini-like pants. Apart from these their tops would be bare, displaying the blue-coloured tattoos that went round their backs, then under their young breasts, and met at the heart. Their feet would also be bare, but small bells were to be tied round their ankles, so that when in the dance they jumped, or curtsied, or crawled in modesty, the bells would jingle in sympathy. (105)

It is noteworthy to highlight that at the beginning of the novel the narrator has already explained the importance of using the traditional cloth adequately to demonstrate the good manners of a girl:

You are taught from childhood that when you sit you must make the cloth of your *lappa*, called *iro* in Yoruba, into a kite-like shape, so that a point of it goes between your legs, to cover your sex. The crossing of the legs was added as a double security, just in case the kite effect had not achieved the desired result; when a girl sat with her legs crossed, it served to ward off the curious and prying gazes of young males. (14-15)

Nevertheless, Emecheta also re-presents the other side of this coin when her narrator explains how the young boys and girls play night games:

Their custom allowed this. Boys would come into your mother’s hut and play at squeezing a girl’s breasts until they hurt; the girl was supposed to try as much as possible to ward them off and not be bad-tempered about it. So long as it was done inside the hut where an adult was near, and so long as the girl did not let the boy go too far, it was not frowned on. (99)

Sometimes, the different locations of the story bring about new information. In chapter eight the scene on the river cannot be described without the people who are working or having fun. Okolie, an old man bathing and telling stories is an essential character, though not for the plot. He is one of those tradition bearers who functions as a

medium for the Igbo traditions and customs. In this context and in addition to the clothing, the writer deals with the issue of nakedness and the body. We have seen above that the sex organs have to be hidden from the curious eyes of the opposite sex, and the *lappa* has to be wrapped in a way that when sitting on the floor nothing can be seen.

This is a necessary condition in Lagos. However, things are different in Ibuza. Aku is presented as a girl who is not used to showing her body. When she and her friends go to the river, she can hardly strip herself of her cloths. She hides her breasts, “Obiajulu and the other girls discarded their knee-length *lappas* on top of the pile of firewood, covered their private parts with the beads they wore round their waists, and returned to wash away the mud from the farm in the stream. Aku-nna waited on the bank” (116).

Moreover, the comparison between the old days and the time in this story takes place, as well as the contrast between the people brought up in Lagos and Ibuza, is only possible thanks to the presence of Okolie who compares Aku’s attitude, regarding her own body and nakedness, to that of the rest of her friends from the same age-group:

I don’t know what the world is coming to. When I was young, girls of your age never thought of clothes. It was only after marriage that women tied loin cloths, not before. Look at your friends with heavy *jigida* beads around their waists just to cover their nakedness. (116).

Whatever the old man compares, it renders the narrator’s account of Emecheta’s awareness of how colonialism has affected the African peoples’ perception of nakedness.

Furthermore, *The Bride Price* is based on Aku-nna’s idea of going against tradition. Igbo tradition does not allow an inter-marriage between a freeborn and a descendant of slaves. However, she decides she will not marry anyone other than her teacher Chike, who is a slave descendant. This decision also changes her mother’s life, Ma Blackie, who after Aku-nna’s father’s death is inherited by her brother-in-law and becomes his second wife, taking sides with her daughter. So her new husband, Okonkwo, is offended and decides to divorce her. According to the narrator:

In Ibuza, if a man divorced or no longer wanted his wife, he would expose his backside to her in public; and Okonkwo did just that, one evening when the fever was burning in him so fiercely that he scarcely knew what he was doing. He walked like a man without eyes straight into Ma Blackie’s hut and shouted, calling all his ancestors to be his witness. He removed his loin cloth and pointed his bare posterior towards Ma Blackie’s face. (163)

The narrator clarifies that even though this is how things are done, it is not usual: “His relatives and friends who stood by covered their faces in shame, for this was not a step commonly taken by Ibuza men” (163). Hence, clothing is important because it conveys messages that only the local people can decode and understand.

The whole story of *The Joys of Motherhood* spins from the early 1900s to the mid 1950s before the independence of Nigeria. Emecheta writes the book in 1979 just after the Biafra War; and hardly re-presents confrontations between the two ethnic groups—Igbos and Yorubas—who were enemies for a long time in any of her books in the decade of the 1970s. Once again, women play a significant role to illustrate the African sense of community. Emecheta brings together Nnu-ego’s Igbo family and a Yoruba family to become relatives after the marriage of their children Kehinde and Aremu, in spite of the opposition of Kehinde’s father, Nnaife. As any Igbo should know, Nnaife knows that the Yoruba family would not pay the bride price for Kehinde. So after Kehinde’s escape to the Yoruba’s house, Nnaife flies drunk to the Yoruba’s house and tries to kill them with his cutlass, and after injuring the young man he is taken to prison. Notwithstanding, the marriage takes place after Nnaife has disappeared from their lives. Kehinde gets married and appears in the rest of the novel as a very happy Igbo woman married to a Yoruba man with the blessings of her mother and her Yoruba in-laws.

Indeed, Emecheta still re-presents the segregation that takes place in the wedding; and she does so through the Yoruba family’s clothing during the wedding: “The Yoruba in-laws made the whole thing more colourful than many people anticipated. They all attended the church in identical *aso ebi* cloths, and brought their own food and their friends” (221). As we saw above, Ogunyemi’s work *Africa Wo/Man Palava* sheds light on the idea behind the use of the *aso ebi* in this wedding described by Emecheta. The novelist, being Nigerian, emphasizes that this group of people bring with them everything that they need to celebrate the wedding on their own. Ogunyemi underscores the significance of the use of this cloth as a uniform to identify the people of the community and separate those who do not belong to the same ethnic group:

Aso-ebi, the “uniform” worn by friends and/ or kin to identify those who belong from the outsiders, particularly at crowded affairs like weddings [...] is important in Yoruba psychosocial consciousness. It engenders group identity, solidarity, a sense of being special. (*Africa* 10)

Thus, Emecheta's lesson is divulged through decoding the *aso ebi* practice. On the one hand, clothing again reveals information; and on the other hand, she explicitly points out that the Igbo and the Yoruba people do not like each other, without mentioning the Biafra war.

Emecheta practises another teaching technique by using women to provide information between parentheses for the non-Nigerian readers in order to understand, for example in *The Slave Girl*, this kind of greeting: “‘Your father’s wealth is the greatest,’ she said to her husband by way of greeting. (Everybody, every family in Ibuza had special praise name and greeting; *even slaves and those of slave ancestry* took the greeting of their masters after a while) (emphasis added)” (9). Umeadi’s praise name is “She who is on a mountain of money” (9). After reading her first three African novels I have observed that the praise names are used as both greetings and funeral salutations of the deceased. However, the narrator in *The Bride Price* seems to contradict what the other narrator mentioned above: “Every Ibuza person, *with the exception of slaves and the children of slaves* [my stress], was addressed with particular names of praise in a special greeting. [...] *Odozi ani*, which meant literally ‘beautifier of the land’ but also had the sense of ‘bringer of peace’” (34). In this sense, I believe we have to take into account Emecheta’s own testimony from her autobiography *Head Above Water*, in which she firmly asserts: “The concept behind this book [*The Bride Price*] is tradition” (154). Even though she must have revised her knowledge about the traditions of her people before writing her first African novel, she, thereafter, rectifies her errors (maybe without noticing) in *The Slave Girl*, which was written later in 1977. In any case, women are re-presented in Emecheta’s work with the primary goal to illustrate and defend the African sense of communal values.

3.5.2. EMECHETA’S LITERARY TEXTS TO AVOID SUPERSTITIOUS TRADITION

Regarding the credulity of the Igbos, most of the characters in *The Bride Price* are re-presented as people influenced by their reliance on supernatural causation. This reveals the importance of superstitions and how people’s life is regulated by these beliefs. The narrator highlights the power of these delusions to Emecheta’s advantage in order to bring the reader to finally accept the ending of Aku-nna and Chike’s story. Once again the women protagonists play a decisive role in their community. For example, Aku-nna’s alteration of superstitious traditions conveys abomination and death. Aku-nna is

not happy to experiment the menstrual cycle, for this means that she has become suitable for marriage. Since her family is thinking about her bride price they try to find her a husband very soon. Of course, they reject Chike, the slave descendant, in accordance to the tradition mentioned above. From this Akunna's new experience, the non-Nigerian reader has the chance to learn what the Igbo people believe about a young girl who has just had the menstruation:

And when a woman was unclean, she must not go to the stream, she must not enter a household where the man of the family had either the 'Eze' Or 'Alo' title—her uncle Okonkwo had the latter; if she went into such a house, the head of the family would die and the oracle would discover who the culprit was. She might not be killed in broad daylight, but Ibuza people had ways, psychological measures, to eliminate those who committed the abominable *alu*. (95)

Furthermore, in the last chapter of this same novel, entitled "Tempting Providence," we can see how Emecheta aims at enforcing the idea of how taboos and traditions can cause illness, pain or even death in their most extreme form. Away from the Okoboshi compound and after Aku-nna's elopement with Chike, who has kidnapped her to marry her by force, they get married. Aku-nna asks her husband Chike to pay her bride price to her uncle so as to live together happily ever after: "Just give them their bride price in peace, because you know what they say: if the bride price is not paid, the bride will die at childbirth" (161). The fact that her uncle does not accept the bride price means that the money is never paid to her family. By virtue of the information delivered by the different tradition bearers, the reader understands that their union is not blessed. Consequently, this precipitates the story to the sad, though expected ending. This kind of issue is re-asserted in Emecheta's autobiography *Head Above Water*, in which she explains Aku's death: "Guilt for going against her mother and her uncle killed her when she was about to give birth to her first baby" (155); and adding that "She died because she had gone against our tradition" (155). Aku-nna's death as a young bride, after prematurely giving birth to her daughter Joy, is expected as the consequence of committing an abomination.

Emecheta could not leave behind another African practice, which is now known all over the world. In *The Bride Price* the narrator highlights what is common knowledge for the African local reader:

It was known in Ibuza that if you wished to get rid of someone who lived far away, you made a small doll in the exact image of the person and pierced the heart of the doll with a needle, or alternatively set it alight

and allowed it to burn gradually. It was evident that it worked, though nobody was sure how because those who knew the art would not submit it to scientific investigation; the victim usually died, very slowly and very painfully. (163-164)

“Juju”¹⁵ exerts an unearthly power on the people who believe in it, inasmuch as it produces illness or even death in some cases. Okonkwo, Aku-nna’s uncle and step father, uses this practice to hurt her: “So it came as no surprise to Ma Blackie to see the image of her daughter one morning in front of Okonkwo’s *chi*, his personal god, when she just happened to be passing by” (164). She also tries to threaten Okonkwo with another “juju”: “She would either bribe Okonkwo into removing the image from the *chi*, or threaten him directly by showing him an image of himself with needles in it” (164). As the first doll that Okonkwo sent to be made to hurt Aku disappeared, he sent another “juju,” which caused her to hear voices calling her through the wind. However, Chike’s father represents the first generation of the educated elite and insinuates that the effect of the “juju” is mostly produced by the victims’ conviction of the harm caused rather than the unearthly powers attributed to this practice itself. Therefore, the knowledge itself of this practice becomes responsible for the evil effects in the victims: “Most of these things do little harm if the intended victim is not aware of them” (165). Nevertheless, even though the readers understand that Aku-nna was never told about the “juju” being practised on her, paradoxically she gets ill and finally dies.

In *The Slave Girl* Emecheta introduces another superstitious element present in Nigerian society. The narrator describes the Onitsha market as a space where the tangible and the intangible coexist:

And there were many superstitions attached to the market place. For example, if a person was insane then so long as the madness was not shown in the market there was hope of a cure. The big markets were places where the visible living met and among them moved the dead and the invisible. (37)

Emecheta’s narrator provides a great amount of information about the particularities of the people who inhabit this novel, aimed at avoiding cumbersome understanding of the story. Umeadi, the main character’s mother, has finally given birth

¹⁵ Following the Oxford English Dictionary “*Ju-ju, juju*: [W. African; generally thought to be a.F. *joujou* toy, playing.] An object of any kind superstitiously venerated by West African native tribes, and used as a charm, amulet, or means of protection; a fetish. Also supernatural or magical power attributed to such objects, or the system of observances connected therewith; also a ban or interdiction effected by means of such an object (corresponding to the Polynesian *taboo*).”

to a baby girl who survives the calamities of birth. She already had two boys but both she and her husband desired to have a girl, “her mind went to all the sacrifices she had made to her *chi*, the personal god to whom every Ibuza individual appealed in time of trouble” (10). Moreover, she decides to visit her local doctor, so “She handed the baby to Ukabegwu’s wife, and ran as fast as her health would allow to the house of her dibia, the native doctor” (10). But this doctor is more trained in superstitious practices than scientific medicine as his words indicate: “Your child will stay this time if you tie her with safety charms. These must consist of cowries, tops of tins brought here by the Potokis, and real bells made from metal” (10).

In another chapter when Okolie takes his sister Ojebeta to sell her to Ma Palagada at the Onitsha market, the narrator has the chance to describe the importance of the tribal marks for some ethnic groups and the connections with superstition:

He knew why they were laughing. It was not just because of Ojebeta’s safety charms, the bells and cowrie shells that jingled and clanged when she made the slightest movement. It was because his sister also had a very interesting face. All over her features were traced intricate tattoos, the pattern of spinach leaves, with delicate branches running down the bridge of her nose, spreading out on her forehead and ending up at the top of her ears. On each cheek was drawn the outline of a large spinach leaf looking ready to be picked. It was not that many Igbos did not have facial tribal marks of different kinds, rather that few would have put so many on the face of one little girl. (39)

The narrator continues on explaining that Ojebeta’s mother was sure that her daughter will not die soon after birth and did not care to pay a lot of money to the face-marker, since this means that she would be protected: “For, with such a riot of tribal spinach marks on her only daughter’s face, no kidnapper would dream of selling her into slavery” (39). This narrator’s last comment underscores the irony in this novel, since it is her own brother who sells her into slavery. Moreover, Emecheta’s obsessive intention is to teach her people that their belief in superstitions cannot safeguard anyone.

3.6. AMA ATA AIDOO’S AND BUCHI EMECHETA’S CONCLUSIVE TEACHING

Both Aidoo and Emecheta need to reinforce the idea that many Africans do not have complete knowledge about colonialism. And even though they have to turn the page and proceed to the future, they need to re-present the colonial story in different ways. For

example, in *Our Sister Killjoy* Aidoo brings forward a senior wise political narrator, who thrusts his words in order to clarify many political and social facts for Sissie and her generation, addressing her as “Child.” Readers, especially those who have not been colonised, also learn. Hence, in this case he describes what the colonial exercises mean and implicate for Africa and Africans:

A way to get land, land, more land.
 Valleys where green corn would sway in the wind.
 A grazing ground for highland cattle.
 A stream to guggle the bonnie bairns to sleep.
 Gold and silver mines,
 Oil
 Uranium
 Plutonium
 Any number of ums—
 Clothes to cover skins,
 Jewels to adorn,
 Houses for shelter, to lie down and sleep.
 A harsher edge to a voice.
 A sharper ring to commands.
 Power, Child, Power.
 For this is all anything is about.
 Power to decide
 Who is to live,
 Who is to die,

Where, [single line on page]
 When, [single line on page]
 How. [single line on page] (13-16)

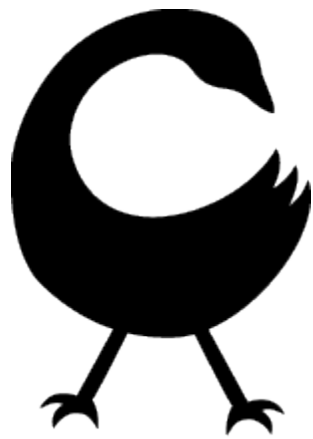
As can be observed, Aidoo speaks of past issues affecting the present. Meanwhile, Emecheta’s different novels are set in those years when, for example in *The Slave Girl*, the Portuguese were handing on Nigeria to the British. Her omniscient narrator does not transfer any information about traditions here but rather informs about colonisation:

In fact the people of Ibuza—at a time when it was glorious to be an Englishman, when the reign of the great Queen Victoria’s son was coming to its close, when the red of the British Empire covered almost half the map of the world, when colonization was at its height, and Nigeria was being taken over by Great Britain—did not know that they were not still being ruled by the Portuguese. The people in Ibuza did not realize that their country, to the last village, was being amalgamated and partitioned by the British. They knew nothing of what was happening; they did not know that there were other ways of robbing people of their birthright than by war. (7)

Emecheta's past is set in the present of the novel and relates to the first half of the 20th century, though those aspects are expanded in time. Hence, they were still impinging on the 1970s when she wrote the novel, and still do now too.

It is important to underline that both Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta write to inform readers about the African reality. These authors turn the deleterious "effects" of the colonial and post-colonial machinery, especially those inherited by the African ruling elite, into the motives for the social and political predicaments in Africa. These authors deploy their writing into the national and international arena to diagnose the everlasting everyday-life quandary of African women and men in many communities. Most of all, they are aware that they have the chance to re-present what was once represented by the non-Africans. So they write because they also know that what is written is exposed and cannot remain ignored.

Finally, both writers are aware that the teaching process can only happen if the real problems are properly described and brought forward boldly. This goal is achieved through their re-presentations. They make readers think about the problems they expose. Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta have taken the responsibility to improve their society by teaching through their narratives. They accomplish the maximum of the Adinkra symbol *Nea onnim no sua a, ohu*, in which learning is valued as the only instrument to overcome stagnation and keep on progressing.



PART IV: *SANKOFA*

**DRAWING SOURCES FROM AFRICAN LITERARY
HERITAGE**

4. THE MEANING OF THE ADINKRA SYMBOL *SANKOFA*

Kayper-Mensah explains the meaning of the Adinkra symbol in his poem entitled “Sankofa”:

That bird is wise,
Look. Its beak, back turned, picks
For the present, what is best from the ancient eyes,
Then steps forward, on ahead
To meet the future, undeterred. (*Sankofa* 4)

Kojo Arthur elucidates that the term *Sankofa* is the combination of *San* meaning “return,” *Ko* purporting “go” and *Fa*, which could be translated into English as “look, seek and take.” It is an icon that represents the Akan people’s quest for knowledge, though this search is associated with critical examination and patient investigation (cf. Arthur 181). The past serves as a guide to plan the future: “The mythical bird that flies forward with its head turned backward” symbolizes wisdom, knowledge, and the people’s heritage. The aphorism that accompanies this symbol is translated literally as ‘There is nothing wrong with learning from hindsight’” (cf. Arthur 181). According to Kojo Arthur’s sketches, this symbol has sixteen different graphic representations, but I have chosen this design because the idea it represents is wonderfully illustrated.

Bruce Willis’ dictionary adds information related to the new use that the Akan and the rest of the African people provide to this symbol. He explains that:

Sankofa is symbolic of the mindset and the cultural awakening African people are experiencing in the decades after independence on the African continent. Though the concept might seem new, it is an old tradition that links a people to the discovery of their past, which is a fundamental building block for the future. (189)

Willis highlights that this symbol is an invitation to individuals or communities to go back to the source whenever there is a need to make decisions. He also clarifies that “Sankofa is a realization of self and spirit. It represents the concept of self-identity, redefinition, and vision. It symbolizes an understanding of one’s destiny and the collective identity of the larger cultural group” (189). Moreover, it is important to be aware that *Sankofa* is a symbol coterminous to the symbol *Nea Onnim no Sua A, Ohu*, which I presented in Part III. They both share the borders of everything coming from the past, though in *Sankofa* the authors just willingly retrieve the treasures to learn and enforce positive aspects to walk towards the future. *Nea Onnim no Sua A, Ohu* conveys, in addition to the invitation to learning, the double reading in which challenge and

warning are included. In any case, they both bring everything (positive and negative) from the past to the present, and can teach in order to perpetuate the positive aspects or abolish negative ones. If one does not willingly learn, then life will teach him or her by force.

4.1. WISDOM CONSISTS IN LEARNING FROM THE PAST TO CONSTRUCT THE FUTURE

The intellectuals who participated in the first line of African rebellion against colonialism were aware that one of the most effective ways to heal the African ails and recover African personality and pride was through the retrieving of the cultural heritage and the ancestors' wisdom. Once at the brink of independence, politicians also encouraged all artists and intellectuals to bring from the past whatever was necessary to recover the dignity of Africans. UNESCO as well as other social and political organizations held conferences and meetings to state on paper the appropriate recommendations for the use of tradition in cultural manifestations, so as to seek redress for the infringements of colonialism.

After Ghana independence, many Afro-Americans went back to West Africa in search of their roots. In her autobiographical book, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*, the Afro-American poet Maya Angelou recounts the story about her trip to Ghana in the 1960s and chronicles her friendship with Efua Sutherland, one of the most significant figures in the revival of Ghanaian culture. Sutherland was a poet, playwright, teacher, and head of Ghana's National Theatre. She told Angelou that she personally met Kwame Nkrumah,¹⁶ and that "Kwame has said that Ghana must use its own legends to heal itself. I have written the old tales in new ways to teach the children that their history is rich and noble" (Angelou 13). Angelou's remarks on this issue have encouraged me to search for Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta's literary footprints with the only intention of tracing their incursions into the African past and cultural treasures. I have chosen this symbol to emphasize these authors' need to bring forward the African heritage to satisfy their desire of writing down a renewed African culture.

¹⁶ Kwame Nkrumah was the first Ghanaian president to govern in independent Ghana. He proposed what he called the "Philosophical Consciencism," which he defined as the best ideology for the emergence of the new postcolonial culture rooted in the ancient knowledge, though not anchored stagnating there. Progress through future is the key to recover a national culture just as the *Sankofa* bird symbol does.

4.2. THE TENETS OF *SANKOFA*: TO RETRIEVE, RE-POSSESS, AND RE-PRESENT

An Africanist scholar can liken Bruce Willis's last quotation above to the definition of African literature that was initially launched from West Africa. The main concepts from that quotation, such as self-identity, redefinition, vision, along with the understanding of the individual destiny and collective identity, can stand for the cornerstones of that young written literature. In *FonTomFrom: Contemporary Ghanaian Literature, Theater and Film* (2000), Kofi Anyidoho proposes what he calls "The *Sankofa* principle" ("National" 4). His close analysis of the work by contemporary Ghanaian writers, poets, and creators of other traditional arts has revealed an attitude towards life, in which both present and past intertwine in the creative process propelling art and its proposals into the future. He propounds that the idea behind this symbol has been chosen as the appropriate pointer for the advancement of the Ghanaian nation. Moreover, regarding arts, Anyidoho believes that "One of the most significant ways in which this principle has guided development in the arts is the constant search for retrievable ancient models of excellence and relevance so typical of the works of the various generations of Ghanaian creative artists" ("National" 5).

In the same year, Chinua Achebe assured in his essay, "Today, the Balance of Stories," that he witnessed and participated in the endeavour of writing about his own people and their stories. Moreover, he was aware that he and most of the artists had to go back to retrieve their own African cultural assets. He describes this process as:

a tremendously potent and complex human reinvention of self—calling, as it must do, on every faculty of mind and soul and spirit; drawing as it must, from every resource of memory and imagination and from a familiarity with our history, our arts and culture; but also from an unflinching consciousness of the flaws that blemished our inheritance—such an enterprise could not be expected to be easy. And it has not been. (79-80)

Achebe inherently always knew that the best treasures are those we bring from our ancestral knowledge and wisdom. He and many other African writers definitely revived the *Sankofa* symbol motto.

In the 1980s Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o delivered his path-breaking lectures on the issue of language in African literature, which he collected in his book *Decolonising the Mind*. Here, he describes the whole process of rebellion against the established order of things at the English departments in Kenyan educational centres, regarding the syllabi

of English literature and language taught at schools and universities. He raised the question to the level of a national debate, which he called the “Nairobi Literature Debate.” By the end of the 1960s, Ngũgĩ along with other African colleagues were already struggling hard to convince the government educational boards to participate in decolonising the educational discourse, to which the Kenyan students were exposed during the school and college years. His intention was to install the centrality of Africa and ground the Kenyan children’s education on the knowledge about themselves and their culture. Then, from this consideration of Africa as the centre of their world, they can discover the rest of humanity around themselves. He insists that “With Africa at the centre of things, not existing as an appendix or a satellite of other countries and literatures, things must be seen from the African perspective” (94). Moreover, Ngũgĩ quotes his own words from his work *Homecoming* (1969), and accounts them as the most dauntless appeal for the setting of oral literature at the centre of the syllabi:

The oral tradition is rich and many sided [...] the art did not end yesterday; it is a living tradition [...] familiarity with oral literature could suggest new structures and techniques; and could foster attitudes of mind characterized by the willingness to experiment with new forms. [...] The study of the Oral Tradition would therefore supplement (not replace) courses in Modern African Literature. By discovering and proclaiming loyalty to indigenous values, the new literature would on the one hand be set in the stream of history to which it belongs and so be better appreciated; and on the other be better able to embrace and assimilate other thoughts without losing its roots. (*Decolonising* 95-96)

Ngũgĩ’s words loop around the *Sankofa* main tenet: “go back and get it.” Indeed, the syllabi in any African literature department become the seedling beds for the new generation to let emerge its own new literature. Establishing the traditional oral African heritage as the mother for every narrative written text has certainly allowed the African literature blossom, and enriched African critics with tools to assess written art forms in their own context.

Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian Nobel prize recipient, was aware of the direct relationship between cultural identity and artistic production. In his article “Neo-Tarzanism: The Poetics of Pseudo-Tradition,” originally published in 1975, Soyinka writes as if it were a confession:

I cannot claim a transparency of communication even from the sculpture, music and poetry of my own people the Yoruba, but the aesthetic matrix is the fount of my own creative inspiration; it influences my critical response to the creation of other cultures and validates selective

eclecticism as the right of every productive being, scientist or artist.
(329)

This is exactly what Ngũgĩ means: your departure point is your own culture and this will also serve as your tool to understand and evaluate other cultures. In fact, Soyinka, as many other African writers, draw from African sources, as if following the *Sankofa*'s bird trajectory of going back to the roots to bring forward the gems. He admits in his way that there is an origin for African aesthetics from within African culture, and this can encourage the rest of African artists to do the same.

It took Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike ten years to get their work *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* ready for publication in 1980. The troika, as Wole Soyinka calls them, urge the African writers to decolonise African writings, be they prose or poetry. In their intention to prescribe, they end up describing the African grounded works already published by the 1980s. Many African writers were working in many ways to retrieve the African self-confidence, history, and traditions, in order to restore the African identity. In their section centred on the tasks necessary for the decolonization of African literature, they remind poets and writers that they are the heirs of the oral African tradition and they suggest:

If the stylistic features of African oral narrative are to be captured in the African novel in English, it is necessary that the full range of linguistic resources of African prose traditions be rendered in English. Proverbs, legends, fables, puns, jokes, similes, metaphors, allusions, hyperboles, declamatory speech, rhetorical devices of conversation and public oratory—these are just some of the resources that need to be marshalled and so rendered that their flavor comes out in English. (262-263)

After these words the Bolekaja group, as they call themselves, quote Achebe's words praising the Igbo oratory art, since it is the realm in which every African artist can find the best source for the raw material such as legends, folklore, and proverbs.

In 1981, Abiola Irele expressed his belief that the modern African literature presented itself as a new literature by that time, in opposition to the dominant trend of the Western imperialistic frame, and "a mode of a creative process of self-differentiation" (*African Experience* 2). In his chapter "Tradition and the Yoruba Writer" Irele departs from T.S. Eliot's definition of tradition:

"tradition"—as not so much an abiding , permanent, immutable stock of beliefs and symbols, but as the constant refinement and extension of these in a way which relates them to an experience that is felt as being at once continuous and significantly new. (*African Experience* 174)

I stand by Irele's elucidation that the African writer is mindful of the mesmerizing reality and significance of the basic structure of traditional life patterns in his experience and artistic expression. Therefore, the African writer seeks "either a thematic or formal integration of his work to the specific mode of literary expression which has been associated with these traditional patterns of life" (*African Experience* 175). However, I do not agree when he affirms that only from the Yoruba writers' works can he illustrate the transition from the traditional to the modern. Both Buchi Emecheta and Ama Ata Aidoo—neither of them is Yoruba—have accomplished the essence behind the philosophy of the *Sankofa* symbol, "Return and get it," which alludes to the importance of bringing forward from the past all knowledge. In any case, in 2001 Irele enriches his argument and insists on the legitimate embracing of the oral realm by the written text:

The fact of a direct progression from the oral literature is important here, since it is a question not merely of drawing upon material from the oral tradition but essentially of re-presenting such material through the medium of print in order to give wider currency as well as new expression to forms that are already structured within the languages themselves. [...] However, the predominance of orality as a shaping medium is a determining factor of the process by means of which such material is recreated and endowed with a new mode of existence. (*African Imagination* 11-12)

Irele is referring here to the literature written in some African language. He specifies that, when he approaches the literature with African content written in European languages, he calls it "transposition": "by which [he] designate[s] the recuperation of African material and forms in the standard form of European language" (*African Imagination* 17-18). Irele's words above clearly explain what Aidoo and Emecheta have performed with their African education in traditions and its influence on their written texts. Having in mind that Aidoo's and Emecheta's works analysed in this research are written in English, I would rather apply the concept of re-presentation than that of transposition, as shall be seen in Part V.

According to Emecheta's narrator in *The Bride Price*, "Her cousin did not know about stories in books, but she did know a great number of folk stories that were told by moonlight and handed down from generation to generation" (65). Both Emecheta and Aidoo also heard many stories from their mothers and other sources, as well as were exposed to different oral art performances. They have retrieved and re-possessed

traditional oral forms to re-present in new African expressions a contemporary African consciousness, as I will demonstrate in the next sections below.

4.3. AMA ATA AIDOO'S AFRICAN CULTURAL HERITAGE

Never before has Ama Ata Aidoo referred to her family as she was pushed to do in her interview with Micere Githae Mugo. The recognition of her valuable commitment to her society and Africa as a whole and the celebration of her works demand a closer approach to Aidoo as a private person, as a human being and not just as the active writer, educator, and transformer of African society. For the first time, Aidoo responds to the personal questions her friend Mugo dares to ask her. The questions about the potential practice of *Sankofa* tenets in Aidoo's procedures at the moment of creation are answered in her accounts of her personal life.

Since her father was a chief and her mother's father too, Aidoo grew up surrounded by the practice of everyday African knowledge and wisdom. She describes her father as "a real chief and a good one" (Mugo 30). Moreover, even though she does boast about being the chief's daughter, she owes her father the recognition of his people "But I also know that as African chiefs go, my father was one of the best" (Mugo 31). Having said that, it is important to highlight that her father achieved his goal of building a bridge to connect the village in times of heavy rain and floods with Cape Coast and further. Coincidentally, Aidoo has also constructed a bridge in her writings, which connects both traditional and contemporary knowledge. She belongs to a matrilineal society in which women are preferred. No matter how many boys are born to a woman, it is the lack of girls that can make a woman childless. Aidoo confesses that she has easily drawn from Nkrumah's Pan-Africanism, since she grew up in his age. Moreover, she believes that her upbringing prepared her to become a nationalist. She has absorbed Nkrumah's message against colonialism, which is easy and clear to see (cf. Mugo 33).

Mugo reminds Aidoo that it was not a usual practice for the 1960s undergraduates to have a clear opinion about slavery, and much less, knowledge and courage to write about the slave trade in Africa. Aidoo insists on the idea of her home education. She owes her critical vein to the environment she lived at home, in which her father became very critical with the established system. Moreover, she adds that "[her] mother was very articulate as well, but again, she herself a Chief's daughter, had this kind of interrogative attitude towards the system she grew up in" (Mugo 33). Aidoo recalls that when she was young a "native law" banned calling other people slaves or

descendants of slaves, and this had bonded with her until today. Furthermore, she cannot help wondering who can go and come on the Cape Coast roads and not see old slavery spots like the Cape Coast Castle or Elmina Castle. Aidoo clarifies that she learned at school the nature of these forts and became traumatised (cf. Mugo 34). This is why she brings forward in her writing this standing icon on the Cape Coast—previously called Slave Coast—as a metaphor to remind readers the African people’s past.

Additionally, Aidoo’s daughter Kinna is the addressee of many of her poems and some of her short stories. Taking into account all this personal information, at this point it can be deduced that Aidoo, like the *Sankofa* bird from the Adinkra symbols, looks back at her parents and descendants, although her vision and dreams are also set in the future her daughter represents. Aidoo graduated in 1964 and the success of her first play, *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, earned her appointment as junior research fellow at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon (cf. Mugo 35). She also worked for two years with Efua Sutherland “transcribing stories and teaching English to the students who were doing Dance” (Mugo 35).

In the “Introduction” to *The Legacy of Efua Sutherland: Pan-Africanism Cultural Activism*, the editors Anne V. Adams and Esi Sutherland-Addy highlight that the pillar of Efua Sutherland’s legacy was based on the retrieving and repossessing the Ghanaian cultural heritage in order to disseminate and perpetuate this cultural capital:

Adapting that cultural inheritance to the job of self-defining development is the work of cultural activism. It was precisely such work that characterised and consumed Efua Theodora Sutherland, inspired by a notion of re-constructing Africa as a liberating concept and a nourishing reality. (8)

In this context, Vincent O. Odamtten also highlights in his notes that “Her [Sutherland’s] influence on Aidoo’s work may be more correctly acknowledged in terms of the ‘psychological space’ created by Sutherland’s advocacy of the creative use of the rich Ghanaian orature in the contemporary context” (177). Indeed, Aidoo has demonstrated to share Efua Sutherland’s conceptions about the traditional Ghanaian forms of drama in her plays, *Anowa* and *The Dilemma of a Ghost*. Odamtten relies on Lloyd Brown’s words, who affirmed that “In *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, much of the plot is based on original materials cast in the conventions of the dilemma tale” (Brown 89-90). Moreover, Brown also learned from some of Aidoo’s interviews that “In *Anowa*,

the narrative as a whole is based on a legend the playwright heard from her mother and which was based on historical events in nineteenth-century West Africa” (Brown 91).

In another interview Aidoo affirms: “I believe with her [Sutherland] that in order for African drama to be valid, it has to derive lots of its impetus, its strength, from traditional African dramatic forms, however one conceives these forms, because they exist” (Aidoo, “Interview with Maxine McGregor” 22). Hence, Aidoo is a loyal practitioner of the *Sankofa* maxim of bringing from the past what can re-introduce and strengthen an African culture.

However, what is important for this research is that not only Aidoo’s drama turns her into a tradition bearer but also her fiction, as demonstrated in the development of the last episode in *Our Sister Killjoy*. Here, the main character Sissie writes a long letter in the plane, although she finally decides not to send it to her love in London. She has returned to Africa whilst he remains in that city with many other young Africans, who prefer to stay away from Africa to make their living, and to fulfil other psychological needs of reaffirmation. The whole letter is a swan song addressed to her love and his colleagues. As the narrator clarifies by the end of the book, the letter helps her ease the pain in her heart and understand her own decisions and ideas about Africa, its history, and its people (cf. 133). But even though the letter was never sent, there is still a message for readers. She imagines her boyfriend suggesting that she should not encapsulate time with tragic visions:

I agree with you about letting time move. But, my Darling, we have got to give it something to carry. Time by itself means nothing, no matter how fast it moves. Unless we give it something to carry for us; something we value. Because it is such a precious vehicle, is time. (113)

Only the treasures of wisdom that belong to her people can survive through time. Sissie cannot easily forget her people’s suffering in the past due to slavery, colonialism, dispossession and racism. To walk into the future they need to save themselves from the other people who wish them ill. Therefore, she reminds her boyfriend that “[they] are not responsible for anybody else but [themselves]” (114). Sissie’s words in Aidoo’s novel echo the *Sankofa* adage, three decades before Kofi Anyidoho’s elaboration of the metaphor of this Adinkra symbol:

Maybe, it’s all nostalgia and sentimental nonsense. Again, why not? Why should I be afraid of being sentimental? In any case, the question is not just the past or the present, but which factors out of both the past and

the present represent for us the most dynamic forces for the future. (115-116)

Sissie wants to bring together the African youth to overcome the plight of the rest of Africans. Sissie's words prompt the metaphor that stands for slavery and colonialism: "An enemy has thrown a huge boulder across our path. We have been scattered. We wander too far. We are in danger of getting completely lost. We must not allow this to happen" (Aidoo, *Our* 118). Moreover, to prevail over these old obstacles Sissie believes that it is necessary to anchor collective forces in traditional knowledge and wisdom, because as she says "Of course, we are different" although she also avoids racism herself, since she completes her statement with "No, we are not better than anybody else" (Aidoo, *Our* 116).

Atukwei Okai has rightly described Aidoo's adherence to *Sankofa*'s tenets in the fifth section of her poem:

She is sprinkling cowries collected
From the armpits of the
Centuries
Over the flames of ancient wisdom
Interrogating the sentinels
Of our future (xii)

Thus, as if keeping a promise and after her dramas, Aidoo has continued on insisting about the treasures of her culture in the rest of her works: short stories, poetry, novels, as well as children's books, and other political and critical writing published in journals, magazines, and newspapers.

4.3.1. AIDOO'S STORYTELLING AS AFRICAN "ORATURE"

Micere Githae Mugo has asked Aidoo about her insistence on using "orature"¹⁷ as a site of knowledge for her creative writing. Aidoo clarifies that it pours out of her writing unconsciously because it is her source. She was engaged in storytelling ever since she was at school and the teacher asked students to tell stories to avoid drowsiness.

¹⁷ Simon Gikandi understands "orature" as "something passed on through the spoken word, and because it is based on the spoken language it comes to life only in a living community" (416). He adds that it "is a development of a complex literary genre that demands the establishment of its own aesthetics for its interpretation and evaluation" (416). And it is executed by "performance, which combines sound, action, and meaning" (416). This produces the reaction of the audience who interact with the "text, medium, [and] performer" (416), rendering in this way an interpretation and evaluation within the context of the performance.

Moreover, Aidoo also mentions some few outstanding facts about her experience as a daughter. She describes how her mother went to sleep very early only to wake up early and tell her stories while she was still sleeping. Aidoo found “that whole thing so incredible—so warm” (45). She also reveals:

And then I grew up in my father’s house, where the most incredible, wondrous, ridiculous—just name it, happened there. I would come from school and find a wandering prophet. My father would be behaving like he had no other responsibilities in this whole world than to listen to the wandering prophet. That was going on and they would bring cases to handle and proverbs. I just had a really rich upbringing. (45)

As a result, when she starts to write all this feedback just comes so easily and almost effortlessly. She affirms: “To a certain extent I feel that this kind of knowledge, information, art, should have been and should still be formalised into the education system” (45). Furthermore, she describes herself as “some kind of sponge,” who has “some healthy stuff to absorb” (41). Hence, Aidoo had the chance to retrieve, repossess and re-present what life offered in her personal life and during her formation years of formation.

She had previously expressed in 1967 that she loved to invite people to listen to tales, folktales or even modern stories. She adds that if she gets hold of some short story, she asks the author to come and read it or just tell it to the audience. Her modesty does not hold her back from trying “We cannot tell our stories maybe with the same expertise as our forefathers. But to me, all the art of the speaking voice could be brought back so easily. We are not that far away from our traditions” (Aidoo, “Interview with Maxine McGregor” 24). By then, she was awarded in the Third All Africa Short Story Competition in 1962 by the Mbari Club at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria for “No Sweetness Here” (cf. Likimani). Hence, she was aware of the worth and impact of telling or writing short stories for the audience/reader in the after independence modern African. Moreover, not only does she use the oral tradition but also defends it. She assures McGregor that:

One doesn’t have to be so patronizing about oral literature. There is a present validity to oral literary communication. I totally disagree with people who feel that oral literature is one stage in the development of man’s artistic genius. To me it’s an end in itself. [...] We don’t always have to write for readers, we can write for listeners. (23-24)

Over the years, Aidoo has lived up to her promise of writing oral tales for readers since she published her first collection of short stories in one book entitled *No Sweetness Here* in 1970.

Aidoo's words in McGregor's interview are the clues to discover how she writes short stories for listeners rather than readers. Vincent O. Odamtten approaches Aidoo's works in a holistic way. He suggests that this author writes all her works to form an African *fefewo*. He explains: "*Fefewo* is an Ewe word that signifies the totality of a story-telling event-performance and reception" (185). Moreover, Odamtten distinguishes two types of *fefewo* in Aidoo's works. He gives a detailed explanation of the *fefewo* that *No Sweetness Here* represents. For him, "the whole collection may be experienced as a dramatic narrative performance or *fefewo* in five acts, or phases" (81). However, he refers to each short story as a chapter in that collection. Later in his text, Odamtten expands on his definition in a note explaining that her "narratives are serious and demand critical contemplation by the reader-audience" (186). Moreover, he specifies that in Ewe *No Sweetness Here* is considered as a "*fefewo kple eme nyakpakpawo*, a collection of dramatic prose narratives for the audience-reader's contemplation" (186). Whereas, "*Our Sister Killjoy* may be described as *fefewo aloo nutinyawo kple eme nyakpakpawo*, a collection of prose-poetry narrative performances and a meditation for the audience-reader's contemplation" (186).

In her interview with Adeola James, Aidoo admits that she would not call *Our Sister Killjoy* a novel. She confesses: "I have said it is fiction in four episodes. As to its verse-prose style, it was almost an unconscious decision" (15). In this case, her unconsciousness implies an inherent knowledge of the tradition of *fefewo* and an automatic adherence to this practice. Hence, I stand by Odamtten's research regarding this novel, and say that Aidoo has leaned on Ghana's Ewe's tradition of performance to produce a new genre I will discuss in Part V.

4.3.2. AIDOO'S CRITICAL VIEW ON AFRICAN SOCIETY: THE DILEMMA TALE

Aidoo's short stories focus on the African problems she likes to uproot so as to make her readers react and change. She unearths the decadence that both colonialism and neo-colonialism have directly or indirectly provoked in African communities. She continuously gets her characters or narrators to remind readers about her society's

maladies. Particularly, her fiction concentrates on non-fictitious African predicaments. She relies on the tradition of the dilemma tale that Odamtten describes so well, “Essentially, the dilemma tale is a narrative whose primary function is to stimulate serious, deep-probing discussion of social, political, and moral issues that confront human beings in their everyday life” (18). Odamtten highlights that the traditional teller of a dilemma tale is not “only a creative artist or performer, but also one whose performance has been *licensed*. [...] the nature of the performance [...] legitimized the criticism or challenging of the status quo or perceived social and political injustices” (20). Nevertheless, Odamtten is disappointed since the scientific investigation carried by many Western anthropologists has disdained the literary worth of the dilemma tale, and not rendered “insightful conclusions” (19). For him, a dilemma tale is a narrative that embraces many genres, and in addition to its social and political worth it also has literary worth.

Kofi Anyidoho enhances the importance of the *Ananse* figure (a spider) in the Ghanaian folktale, and the traditional use of this character to convey a critical self-portrait (cf. 10-11). Aidoo writes her short stories to challenge her society. In this sense, her writing is closer to the dilemma tale rather than to the *Ananse* tradition. Her characters criticise and put into doubt many practices present in their everyday life after colonialism and which got worse in the post-independence years. Moreover, Aidoo is aware of the effect of the dilemma tale on her audience and its compulsory mental exercise that this implies, since she had already intentionally used that term for the title of her play, *The Dilemma of a Ghost*.

Most of Aidoo’s writings deal with dilemmas produced within her society as the negative result of either the political and psychological effects of colonialism or the loss of morality and corruption after independence. In “Everything Counts” the main character’s and later the reader-audience’s dilemma is: what are the factors that can produce a real change in a country and make its people progress?

In “For Whom Things Did Not Change” the dilemma is produced when Aidoo brings the young medical doctor face to face with the lowest working-class servant. They both suffer from disillusionment. In basic terms, the everyday life of the major part of Ghanaians has not changed. In this short story the workers, husband and wife, openly criticise how the old high-class political and military members of the new government are inducing the village young girls to prostitution. Their parents either think that these girls have descent jobs in the city or they are cajoled into accepting old

men through bribery. Other short stories that deal with a similar critical attitude to young village girl's destiny after independence are "In the Cutting of a Drink" and "Two Sisters."

Other dilemmas closely related to women's lives are treated in other short stories. In "Certain Winds from the South," both a mother and her daughter suffer the same experience of having their husbands emigrate to get jobs in the southern areas of Ghana before and after independence. They both represent two different generations and demonstrate how things have hardly changed for the common people in the northern areas. They still have to migrate and the dilemma is produced.

In the short story "No Sweetness Here," divorce leaves Maami Ama without her son, though what finally takes away her son from both families is the bite of a snake. In "A Gift from Somewhere," in order to save her son's life, Mami Fanti has to practice a taboo imposed by a Mallam on her. She can't eat either fish from the sea or meat on Fridays and Sundays. She believed that her sacrifice had saved her son's life. She would do anything for saving her boy's life, whereas her husband doesn't care at all. When the son goes to the river to get prawns for his mother, his father gets angry and hit him with a cane. In her intention to save her boy from the blows she gets beaten. The resulting wound leaves a scar on her arm that makes the husband ashamed of his action. Again in "Something to Talk About on the Way to the Funeral," the dilemma that Aidoo represents is how women are left pregnant by men and have to manage to bring up their children. Sometimes they bear the shame in their community until they are respected and accepted again. In all these cases, Aidoo's tales criticise women's repression and how things have not changed.

In "The Message" the dilemma is based on the difficulty and clashes caused at the first encounter with the new aspects of the other culture. In "The Late Bud" the dilemma is related to the old generation's impatience and incomprehension with respect to the youngsters, who need their own time to accomplish their tasks. Aidoo's "Other Versions" brings about the issue of slavery and turns into a dilemma tale criticising that latent problem. Pan-Africanism is also challenged when it comes to the idea of including or excluding Afro-Americans. A related aspect with this latter topic is about the similarities and differences between the main character's African mother and the Afro-American women he sees in the United States. Ultimately, all these concerns demonstrate how Aidoo is interested in writing about varied social issues, and how her people's progress is delayed in African society.

Vincent O. Odamtten adds a note for his chapter “Back to the Present; or *No Sweetness Here*,” in which he affirms that all the editions of this collection of short stories have ignored the original intentional divisions between each story that he called “acts” or “phases of the *Fefewo*.” He explains: “The earlier editions of the collection signified these divisions by a blank unnumbered page, much like a pause or lacuna in the action. Obviously the economic consideration of the publishers superseded the aesthetic demands of the work itself” (185). Hence, if there was any intentionality on Aidoo’s side, this was not respected by her publishers. However, these short stories are more like written oral dilemma tales instead of printed narrations to suit the new way of life and please the new generations of African and non-African readers.

H.O Chukwuma compares the African oral tale and short story. She concentrates on the description of the audience and performance. Moreover, she enumerates and defines the different kinds of oral tales and the structure and language used. Aidoo’s tales included in this research do not strictly adhere to H.O.Chukwuma’s classification of the African oral tales: none of them is an animal tale, includes human and supernatural characters or refers to humans and animals’ interaction (cf. 14-16). Nevertheless, Aidoo’s short stories are written for an audience instead of text readers. She desires them to be told. In her interview with Adeola James, she insists that she would just love to sit and relate stories, “We can write for *listeners*” (23). She brings from the past the idea of telling oral tales. They become written stories for listeners who are also sometimes part of the written tale, occupying different levels of audience. Moreover, Chukwuma validates both oral and written versions of tales. Her final statement is conclusive in this regard: “The oral tale has not been submerged by the written tradition but rather complemented by it” (17).

Adeola James has referred to Ama Ata Aidoo as “a shaper of human opinion” (Aidoo, “Interview with Adeola James” 18), “part of the makers of history,” as well “one of ‘the voices of vision in our time’ shaping the future for our [the African] children” (Aidoo, “Interview with Adeola James” 24-25). Aidoo has relied on the knowledge she received from her parents and family in Ghana, and honours her parents and ancestors by using some traditional devices to re-present her African written stories in the way Chukwuma somewhat suggests. Hence, as if Aidoo were a *Sankofa* bird herself, she surfaces the oral tale particularities from the deep past oceans of memory and tradition to supplement them with her writing abilities.

4.3.3. FORMULAIC SENTENCES IN AIDOO'S ORAL-ORIENTED TALES

Aidoo's eleven stories, included in *No Sweetness Here* were written during the 1960s decade. Their compilation in one book does not necessarily mean they follow the same structure or style. Aidoo is familiar with listening to stories since she was a child. Sutherland-Addy illustratively confirms that Aidoo had the privilege of connecting with some post-independence playwrights and writers in her university years. Additionally, Aidoo also attended the workshop in Ibadan organised by the Mbari Club (Sutherland-Addy, "Mfantse" 332), in which she won the All Africa Short Story Competition for her short story "No Sweetness Here," in 1962. Thus, this enriching experience has turned Aidoo into a participant of the awakening of the cultural nationalism and experimentalism, which was enhanced by Efua Sutherland's effort to recover the Ghanaian culture and identity.

This formative background has served Aidoo to write some tales, which can be considered as storytelling printed on paper for readers, who magically become listeners in the act of reading. Among these stories I highlight in *No Sweetness Here*: "The Message," "In the Cutting of a Drink," "Certain Winds from the South," and "Something to Talk About on the Way to the Funeral" published in 1970, along with "Satisfaction?" published in 1971. Here, she uses either typical or traditional formulaic sentences that any tale-teller would use in a storytelling session. The typical phrases and sentences found in the short story, "In the Cutting of a Drink," anchor the written work in a fictitious oral atmosphere, in which addressees are mostly mentioned through collective naming. Some examples are: "I say, my uncles [...]" (30), or "But my elders, I do not want to waste your time" (30), or "There is something somewhere, my uncles. Not desiring to deafen you with too long a story" (30), or "Yes, my uncle," (31). However, the storyteller also addresses mothers in general when speaking to his own mother: "My mother, do not interrupt me, everyone present here knows you tried to do what you could by your daughter" (31). In "The Message" Aidoo also opens her short story with a key sentence "Look here my sister, it should not be said but they say they opened her up" (38), which carries the reader into a fictitious space typical of some oral storytelling session. In "Certain Winds from the South" the structure corresponds to a storytelling session between a mother and her daughter inside another written storytelling session, in which a narrator interferes. M'ma the main character tells her daughter Hawa about the latter's husband migration to the south and compares other women's life in the past with Hawa's. She starts this section with a sentence that

prepares the reader: “Twenty years ago. Twenty years, perhaps more than twenty years [...] perhaps more than twenty years and Allah please, give me strength to tell Hawa” (51), or “Listen to me and I will tell you of another man who left his newborn child and went away” (52). While M’ma is telling the story there are no interruptions, and this part is similar to the pure storytelling in “In the Cutting of a Drink,” in which readers deduce the other characters’ reaction thanks to the storyteller’s responses. In this regard, Vincent Odamtten affirms that “The use of this narrative strategy emphasizes our role as eavesdroppers” (99).

In the case of the short story “Something to Talk About on the Way to the Funeral,” Aidoo re-presents a private conversation between two women, in which the reader becomes a busybody. This latter has become a stereotype in African society, here meddling in these two women’s gossips and personal opinions. These women are on their way to the woman’s funeral they are talking about. In this story one of the characters knows more information than the other, but needs the reaffirmation of the other character: “Like you know, my sister. After all, was it not a lawyer-or-a-doctor-or-something-like-that who was at the bottom of all Auntie Araba’s troubles?” (115). Or, when she asks her not to tell anyone else: “Yes, my sister. One speaks of it only in whispers. Let me turn my head and look behind me. [...] And don’t go standing in the river telling people. Or if you do, you better not say that you heard it from me” (115). These are the typical sentences one would use in this kind of gossiping communication. Here again, the reader becomes an eavesdropper as Odamtten suggests, and must feel like an intruder too when the character says: “I don’t want anyone to overhear us” (123).

Moreover, in these same short stories we find some of Aidoo’s traditional or formulaic sentences. The storyteller in the short story “In the Cutting of a Drink,” who is recounting the story in detail about his adventures in the city searching for his sister, seems to be assaulted by his listeners’ impatience wanting to know if he ever found his sister. For the sake of not spoiling the whole storytelling session by anticipating the end, he will naturally use the oral tradition formula to keep his own pace of the story. Aidoo herself must have heard the use of some of these devices used as a strategy to hold the listeners’ breath. The details related to the central theme of finding Mansa makes her brother say “I would not like to stop somewhere and tell you the end [...] I would rather like to put a rod under the story, as it were, clear off every little creeper in the bush” (35). The storyteller does not want to leave out any detail. However, it seems that

listeners are so eager to know if he had found his sister that he has to use again another formulaic sentence to remind them that they want to know the whole story in detail and he does not fail: “I am cooking the whole meal for you, why do you want to lick the ladle now?” (35).

In “Something to Talk About on the Way to the Funeral,” when one character interrupts another who is telling the whole story about the deceased Araba, she is responded with an oral tradition formulaic expression: “That is the story I am telling you. I am taking you to bird-town so I can’t understand why you insist on searching for eggs from the suburb!” (118). Then further in this short story, when the two women arrive at the town where the funeral would take place, the woman who was gossiping says: “I had wanted to put a stick under the story and clear it all for you. But we are already in town” (122). This last sequence of speech is very similar to the one found on page 35 in “In the Cutting of a Drink,” which Mansa’s brother uses as quoted above.

4.3.4. PROVERBS AND SAYINGS IN AIDOO

Aidoo does not use proverbs as frequently as Chinua Achebe did in his *Things Fall Apart*. As we observed above, proverbs anchor literary works in a particular culture, and help explain in a few words entire and complex ideas that could not be explained otherwise. Moreover, the existence of proverbs reassures listeners that the person who invented that proverb or saying experimented similar situations in the past. Aidoo’s short story “Satisfaction?” was first published in 1971, one year after she had published the first collection of her short stories *No Sweetness Here*. She had to wait until the publication of her second collection, *The Girl Who Can and Other Stories* in 1997, to include the revised version of “Satisfaction?” under the new title of “Payments.” Her revision has rendered a new short story regarding form and style. In the 1971 edition she uses poetry or verse to express more emphatically the emotional distress that the main character—a fish seller—feels towards a new-rich African woman—once a nurse—whom she considers responsible of maltreating her at the hospital when her baby girl was ill. In “Payments” (1997) Aidoo turns all the poetry sections into prose, except for the two pieces in which the main character addresses her friends to continue telling her story. In both versions the storytelling session takes place in the fish market, and Ekuwa Esuon—the main character—is telling her story to her friends trying to explain why she has refused to sell her fish to that woman who approached her ready to

buy it at any price. In “Satisfaction?” the main character’s friends seem to have misguided the meaning of Ekuwa Esuon’s story, so she addresses one of them:

Esi Bo, you are looking at me sleepy-eyed? Which means you do not understand what I am saying? So then, how is it you come talking to me, Ekuwa Esuon, in proverbs? I know a few too, my sister. And what I am telling you is that *to him who never feels hurt by that which is painful, painful things never stop happening* (emphasis added). (3)

This same proverb is included in the later version, “Payments.” However and surprisingly, Aidoo changes the gender from the common generalised masculine “to him” into “to her,” and refines the expression: “to her who never is hurt by that which is painful, painful things never stop happening” (106-107). Moreover, when the storyteller wonders why her receptor advises her to “delight in that which is beautiful or sweet” (109), she answers that she can delight in anything though not in what “someone else is enjoying,” and she assures her receptor that she was not “the kind *to sniff at the aroma from someone’s fine soup, smack my lips and just continue sitting, while my bowels scream with hunger* (emphasis added)” (109). Whereas in “Satisfaction?” the main character in the same situation responds her receptor that “what [she] cannot do is delight in beauty and sweetness that someone else is enjoying. But [she thinks] *only a fool smacks his lips with pleasure at the aroma of someone’s fragrant soup* (emphasis added)” (6). Hence, Aidoo has modified the saying, though this still transmits the same idea. As we can appreciate in the first short story, Aidoo uses the masculine gender “his lips,” whereas in the second version she uses the first person singular to denote her personal involvement. What is more, she dramatizes the saying by personifying the concept of hunger in order to intensify the effect of the saying on the market listeners and readers-listeners.

Moreover, in “Satisfaction?” the main character complains about the insults that the morning nurses heaped on her, while it was the night nurses’ fault that her baby was crying since she was not allowed to feed her baby the night before. Ekuwa Esuon explains that there was no reason for the nurses first to forbid her feed her child, nor abuse her, so in order to make her listeners understand the reason and give herself some relief she resorts to this proverb: “That God creates every person/And his enemy at the same time” (10), which Aidoo inserts in verse form. Nevertheless, in “Payments” Aidoo uses two proverbs for this situation. The first one is to answer listeners who asked the main character about her reaction while she was insulted: “You don’t hit anyone on the

head if your fingers are in her mouth, do you?" (113). The second one, "God creates every person and his enemy in the same minute" (113), is a refined expression and a slight variation of the one we saw in "Satisfaction?" Additionally, Aidoo ends both short stories with different sayings. When the listeners warn the fish seller that she might be arrested for spitting at the once black nurse and now new-rich lady her response in "Satisfaction?" is "Let them! When everything in life turns upside down, who is the fool that wants to remain upright?" (12). In "Payments" she responds differently: "Let them. *It's all part of the wear and tear that is life.* If I don't fight my battles now, who would fight them for me, and when? (emphasis added)" (116). The stressed sentence is a catchy saying that seems to belong to the English language rather than any African expression. However, it is the use of these kinds of expressions that is inherent to the traditional style of African oral storytelling.

In "Something to Talk About on the Way to the Funeral" Aidoo uses two very common sayings in the telling of stories or gossiping. I have included "And don't go standing in the river telling people" (115) as part of a formulaic expression in the section above, but this is also the typical traditional saying that would circulate in a gossiping conversation too. In another instance, the speaker—who was telling her friend that Araba's son never came back to marry the pregnant young Mansa—explains: "Everyone said that the road always has stories to tell" (123).

Aidoo starts "The Late Bud" with an announcement of what the story might be about and identifies it as a saying. In this case, she also puts it within quotation marks as is emphasized in what follows, "*The good child who willingly goes on errands eats the food of peace.*" This was a favourite saying in the house (emphasis added)" (103).

In "No Sweetness Here" a mother, Maami Ama, loses her only son to her husband through divorce. The women members of the ex-husband's family disregard her with bad names and the women members of the two families quarrel. Since Maami Ama herself was an only child they express their belief through these sentences: "Oh, that she is. Anyway, only witches have no brothers or sisters. They eat them in the mother's womb long before they are born" (68). Moreover, her ex-husband's cousins continue on mistreating Ama and her family with affirmations such as these: "You are always calling other people witches. Only a witch can know a witch" (69). To make things worse, the boy dies as a result of a snakebite that day. The narrator, who is a teacher in this case, quotes the women's typical saying and refers to this event as a social pronouncement: "And he was his mother's only child. She has no one now. We

do not understand it. *Life is not sweet! Thus ran the verdict* (emphasis added)” (71). The loss of the boy makes the women in his father’s family comment that there was no solution for death “What can we do indeed? *When flour is scattered in the sand, who can sift it?* (emphasis added)” (73-74); or “*What does one do, when one’s only water pot breaks?*” (74). These sayings, I stress above, are generally used by people in situations with no possible solution.

In “Certain Winds from the South” Aidoo uses a single saying: “*Show me a fresh corpse my sister, so I can weep you old tears* (emphasis added)” (47), which highlights the predicament of northern Ghanaian women used to losing their husbands and sons who either died at war or were searching for jobs far away. It is a saying that specifically describes women’s condition and their sharing of this kind of suffering.

In *Our Sister Killjoy*, when Sissie, the main character starts whistling in the section “The Plums” the poet-narrator inserts his words:

“She is a bitch
Or a witch
Who whistles” *the old ones had said* (emphasis added). (63)

These words underline Aidoo’s gesture of respect towards ancestors and elders, when referring to the origin of the proverb. It is the heritage that she picks, like a *Sankofa* bird, to bring forward through her narrator’s verse. Another example of Aidoo’s use of sayings appears in the last section of this novel, in which the protagonist addresses her boyfriend and thanks him for not leaving her as soon as he found out that she did not share with him the same ideas about Africa, “All of life is a game. Learn to play your part, that’s all. *Says the voice of forever-wisdom* (emphasis added)” (127). The stressed sequence is an obvious manifestation of her adherence to the precious lessons from traditional knowledge and wisdom. She looks back to bring forward valuable elements to help her reader-listener cope with the difficulties of life as her old wise people did.

Furthermore, in *Our Sister Killjoy*, Aidoo strategically uses a proverb to reinforce the idea of the lies that self-exiled Africans tell their people once back home. Sissie informs her German friend Marija that she has to visit an African friend whose mother has implored her to tell her the truth about her daughter in Hamburg. Marija was surprised to learn that sometimes Africans deceive their people with lies about their situation and life in Europe. Sissie affirms her idea: “Yes, Marija. *So our people have a proverb* which says that *he is a liar who tells you that his witness is in Europe*

(emphasis added)” (74). Since Marija does not understand the word “witness” she loses the meaning of the proverb. But Sissie explains it to her and repeats again: “That any man who insists that his witness is in Europe is a liar” (74). It should be highlighted that this proverb does not belong to the set of ancient traditional proverbs. It should have been used for the first time ever since the colonial experience. But it demonstrates that the Ghanaians, who look back to their traditional proverbial corpus, keep on creating new proverbs for their future.

In Ghana there is the tradition to write sayings and proverbs on lorries or trotros, which transport people and carry their goods too. Sometimes instead of traditional expressions the drivers or owners of the lorries also allow the writing of slogans. Most of the times those texts are painted in bright colours on a wooden board, black paint on coloured plank or directly on vehicles. Some of them are written in English or pidgin, and others in the diverse local languages. Sometimes, proverbs and sayings are not complete because of space; mostly, because the content of these texts are part of the common knowledge and traditional culture of the local people. Hence, this reveals a participatory activity, since when people read the visible part they know how the proverb or saying ends. Those who do not read can also complete the texts that they hear. Moreover, sometimes there are drawings and icons that complete the intended messages.

Aidoo also uses part of a proverb as a metonym that stands for the lorry itself. According to Sutherland-Addy, there is a proverb used on lorries that says: “The Tailless Animal—It is God Who Acts as Its Fly Swatter” (“Mfantse” 341). This appears on the lorry that the main character refers to in “Other Versions.” He has gone to visit his parents and after saying goodbye to the people: “Mother took [him] up to the mouth of the road. Being a Sunday, [they] thought it would be useless to wait for *The Tailless Animal* to wander in. Because it simply wouldn’t. It did that only on week days” (130). A first reading could only render that it must be the metaphoric name for a long train, but the treasure becomes unveiled when Sutherland-Addy discloses the whole proverb text. Hence, the foreign reader/listener with no knowledge of the African traditional proverbs can miss the message. However, and at the cost of misunderstanding the whole message of a proverb, Aidoo still prefers to use them. Therefore, her written representations of these treasures confirm her adherence to the *Sankofa* maxim.

4.3.5. SONGS AND DIRGES FEEDING AIDOO'S PRETENSION OF ORALITY

Aidoo has only written one song in “Two Sisters,” in which her narrator explains:

The new pair of black shoes are more realistic than their owner, though.
As she walks down the corridor, they sing:

Count, Mercy, count your blessings
Count, Mercy, count your blessings
Count, count, count your blessings. (No Sweetness 88)

This section in this dilemma tale follows the traditional oral tale conventions, in which we have human characters and those “supernatural” pair of shoes that are more realistic than Mercy herself, according to the narrator. The aim of this song is to teach Mercy a moral lesson. It could be classified under the type “b” of the oral tale classification H.O. Chukwuma included as “The Tale with Human and Supernatural Characters” (15). However, Sutherland-Addy informed me in her tutorial at the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana-Legon that a song is an important feature in the traditional oral tale, which is used sometimes to embellish the plot and other times to make a moral comment. Moreover, Sutherland-Addy added that this was a song interlude called “mboguo” in Akan. In fact, she highlights the importance of the “mboguo” in the traditional oral tale form, since “the audience/reader is transported into the world of story telling where intimate objects can become personified” (“Narrative” 62). She underscores that the song is used “in this case to make a moral comment and to draw attention to the implication of the behaviour of the character in question” (“Narrative” 62-63).

It is worth remarking that all critics allude to this song in the short story mentioned above as the only example for her use of songs. Aidoo uses a very similar song in another short story “Lice” that I will not comment since it is not included in the corpus of this study. However, it is not necessary to re-present the song itself, since the narrators—as in the case of “The Late Bud”—describe the scene where the little girls were playing “soso-mba.” Sutherland-Addy explained in her tutorials the rules of the game that could be translated into “Catch me.” The girls form a semi-circle and they *sing*. The one in the centre falls on the rest and is pushed up by the other girls, and so on and on. The local readers know this game and they have the song interiorised. Their memory plays the song for them. Here again, Aidoo inserts a traditional song that not all the readers-listeners can hum but the local ones know that the girls are singing when the narrator recounts that: “There were only three left of the eight girls who were

playing *soso-mba*” (106). Therefore, this song accompanies the reader’s mind and puts him near the African heritage.

The power of words lies on evoking images and sounds. In “Something to Talk About on the Way to the Funeral,” two women see each other and start gossiping about Auntie Araba on their way to her funeral. The deceased elaborated bread and sweets:

‘Did you hear the Bosoë dance group practising the bread song?’
 ‘Yes, I hear they are going to make it the chief song at the funeral this afternoon. *It is most fitting that they should do that. After all, when the group was formed, untie Araba’s bread song was the first one they turned into Bosoë song and danced to*’
 ‘Yes, it was a familiar song in those days. *Indeed it had been heard around for over twenty years. First in Auntie Araba’s voice with its delicate thin sweetness that clung like asawa berry on the tongue [...]*’
 (emphasis added). (*No Sweetness* 114)

Aidoo brings forward a song that has been adapted to her people’s use and traditions twenty years ago. This is a double use of the *Sankofa* maxim, since her characters bring a traditional model of song and dance to their present. They embrace a new song to the traditional form until it turns into a new tradition twenty years later when Aidoo re-presents it to her people in this written short story. The non-local readers-audience can only know all this information on display thanks to these two women’s gossip. However, the local readers-audience can almost hear the song and see the dancers move to the rhythm they already know. Moreover, even though Aidoo does not describe the funeral practice, she re-presents the essence of what is practiced in the funeral. We learn that there are songs and dances in that ceremony. Therefore, the simple name of a game or a dance evokes a tradition that Aidoo rescues from oblivion, as if she were a *Sankofa* bird. Her intention is to eternalize the games, dances, and songs for African children and elders.

Sutherland-Addy reminds that Aidoo was familiarised with the tradition of royal funerals (“Mfantse” 338) due to the fact that she grew up in a family where both her father and grandfather were important chiefs. Another issue that is specific to her ethnic group—the Mphantse—is its matrilineal line, in which women compose and perform the “keening and dirge-singing which constitute a powerful art form” (Sutherland-Addy, “Mfantse” 338). Dirges appear frequently in Aidoo’s poetry, which I do not analyze here. Though it should be underscored that in her work *Our Sister Killjoy: or Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint*, some of her verses do cry for Africa and her peoples.

For instance, in the section “The Plums” of this novel, Aidoo presents a German character asking Sissie about the African countries. To Marija’s surprise, Sissie recommends her to visit Nigeria if she ever has the chance to visit a single African country, since this contains within it the whole essence of Africa. However, the narrator intrudes as if to sing out a lament to the reader-audience in a tone that brings forward the essence of a dirge:

Nigeria.
 Nigeria our love
 Nigeria our grief.
 Of Africa’s offspring
 Her likeness—

O Nigeria.
 More of everything we all are,
 More of our heat
 Our naiveté
 Our humanity
 Our beastliness
 Our ugliness
 Our wealth
 Our beauty

A big mirror to
 Our problems
 Our tragedies.
 Our glories.

Mon ami,
 Household quarrels of
 Africa become
 WAR in
 Nigeria: (52-53)

Marija thinks that Sissie is unpatriotic and asks her about Ghana:

Ghana?
 Just a
 Tiny piece of beautiful territory in
 Africa—had
 Greatness thrust upon her
 Once.
 But she had eyes that saw not—
 That was a long time ago . . .
 Now she picks tiny bits of
 Undigested food from the
 Offal of industrial world . . .
 O Ghana. (53)

Aidoo's narrator sings a dirge for the brain-drain, and those who have "messed" sexually with the "wrong" sex or race. The mere thought of the possibility of having "a delicious love affair" (61) with Marija passed by Sissie's mind, if one of them were a man,:

I wail for
 Lost Black minds
 —Any lost Black minds—
 Because
 A tailor for the poor
 Can ill afford to throw away his
 Scraps:

Beautiful Black Bodies
 Changed into elephant-grey corpses,
 Littered all over the western world,
 Thrown across railway tracks for
 midnight expresses to mangle
 just a little bit more—
 Offered to cold flowing water
 Buried in thickets and snow
 Their penises cut. (62)

Furthermore, in this same section, "The Plums," the narrator intrudes to challenge the idea of how many negative intentions are behind the International Aid arriving in Africa. For him, this continent is the testing tube for many First World countries, which hide their greed and scientific ambitions behind fake benevolent activities. Here, Aidoo also laments how these developed countries use women from "remote corners of Banana Republics and other so-called-developing countries" to test "The pill and other/ Drugs" (70):

Oh.
 Let me wail for
 The Man we betrayed
 The Man we killed

For, Which other man lives
 Here
 Who dare tell
 These guardians of my peace, and
 Those
 Exploiting do-gooders
 To forget
 My problems

Ignorance
 Disease
 Poverty

 To stop
 Their mediocre human loans

 To stuff
 Their pills where
 They want them?

 Ah-h-h
 Lord,
 Only a black woman
 Can
 'Thank
 A suicidal mankind'
 With her
 Death. (70)

These two excerpts start with the verb “wail,” indicating along with the contents of these verse fragments that they are laments not simply thrown to the wind but also printed, turning these dirges into everlasting oral pieces for many readers-audience to know and learn too.

Moreover, sometimes most of the narrator’s intrusions in Aidoo’s verse become critical historical accounts. On other occasions, they are rebukes or laments that invite readers-audience to think and feel about Africa and Africans. Aidoo uses dirges for most of her laments, thus following her ancestors’ oral traditional customs, and turning this somber song into a strategy to accomplish her political and social commitments through her writing.

4.4. BUCHI EMECHETA’S CORRESPONDENCES, DUPLICATION, AND REPRESENTATION

Oladipo Joseph Ogundele has asked Buchi Emecheta about her compatriot Flora Nwapa and if this has some influence on her writing. The motive for this question was based on the fact that Emecheta grasped the title *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) from the last lines in Flora Nwapa’s first novel *Efuru* (1966), as an Olympic torchbearer would do, to continue the endeavour of writing:

Efuru slept soundly that night. She dreamt of the woman of the lake, her beauty, her long hair and her riches. She had lived for ages at the bottom

of the lake. She was as old as the lake itself. She was happy, she was wealthy. She was beautiful. She gave women beauty and wealth but she had no child. *She had never experienced the joy of motherhood.* Why then did the women worship her? (emphasis added). (Nwapa 221)

This is what Ogunyemi also highlights as the similarity that allows her to rely on the analogy between texts and the *aso ebi*, the “kin cloth,” which brings women writers together into a group, as mentioned in Part I. Moreover, this critic underscores the importance of having predecessors: “Following the steps of one’s mother, one’s ancestor, one’s foremother, is praiseworthy” (Ogunyemi, *Africa* 43). However, Emecheta eulogizes Nwapa’s career as a writer but reproaches her move from writing to politics. For her, Nwapa never attained her initial excellence as a writer again. Emecheta highlights that people see Nwapa as her big sister. This means that Emecheta is aware that people perceive Nwapa as the model and guide that Emecheta has followed. Notwithstanding, and beyond any correspondence between them, Emecheta affirms—as if she were avoiding the idea of the influence of the trailblazer on her writing—that although she had heard Nwapa’s name since her schooldays, she met Nwapa when *The Joys of Motherhood* was already published (Ogundele 450).

Nevertheless, Ogunyemi, as if emphasising the ethos of the *Sankofa* symbol, highlights that “The writer is part of a long chain in reincarnating texts. She inherits the past, learns from it, then leaves her own distinctive stamp on the corpus, thus helping to establish a tradition” (*Africa* 43). Emecheta as Nwapa’s “small”¹⁸ sister is the heiress of their home treasures of writing. She also re-writes the stories that re-present variations of the myths of *Osun* and her son *Osetura/Esu*, in which the goddess’ relations with male figures and her children in her community are displayed and exploited for the benefit of a fresh re-presentations. To achieve her goals, Emecheta takes advantage of those inherited literary elements to re-present varied issues present in Africa: womanhood, fertility, motherhood, aesthetics, private and public participation in the community, gender conundrums, enslavement versus independence or participation in domestic and national problems. To these I should also add other essential themes specifically related to women, such as their economics, the interdependent relationship between men and women, and the need for men’s reconsideration of women’s place in the community to achieve reconciliation. Consequently, all this has contributed to the

¹⁸ In English-speaking West Africa the adjectives “big” and “small” before sister or brother refer to age rather than size.

progress of the people and advancement of the community for the common good in Nigeria and, by extension, Africa.

It is noticeable that Buchi Emecheta was settled in London when she wrote her novels under analysis in this research. However, these are set in Africa and all her characters are Africans, although she mainly concentrates on women's lives. She has said in an interview with Adeola James: "my first discipline is sociology. [...] *Joys of Motherhood* deals with population control and *The Slave Girl*, the tradition of slavery" (Emecheta, "Interview with Adeola James" 43). She has also explained in her autobiography, *Head Above Water*, that the concept behind *The Bride Price* was tradition (154). These three aspects illustrate her intentions in those novels. In each we can see how she goes back to the colonial era. She picks the problems, from that period—mostly those revolving around women's life—which were prevailing then and still in the 1960s and 1970s, and even in the 21st century Nigeria. To set these three novels between the 1920s till the end of the 1950s, Emecheta has—just as her authorial narrator in *The Bride Price*—to rely on "History—the oral records, handed down by word of mouth from one generation to the next" (73). In doing this, she was following the *Sankofa* principle.

4.4.1. AFRICAN SOURCES FOR EMECHETA'S STORYTELLING

When Adeola James asks Emecheta which is the motive to become a writer, she responds that she only visited her village once she finished her education, but became instantly fascinated with the women she met there:

Some will be telling stories, and *not to young children*. I saw it and I used to sit with them. *I liked the power these women commanded as story-tellers*. Since then, *I thought I would like to be a story-teller myself*. But unfortunately, I can't write stories in my own language. I can write Yoruba but not Igbo, so I have to write in English (emphases added). (37)

The emphases above show that Emecheta underscores the fact that stories are not only told to children but also to elders, and the storytellers have a power that no other women possess. She definitely wanted to become a storyteller. Emecheta, following the *Sankofa* core idea, always goes back to her sources to retrieve what she values significant in her culture. Furthermore, her conversation with Adeola James does not purport that this was the first time she mentioned her literary sources. She had already alluded to the wellspring for her novels and other writings. For example, in

“Feminism with a Small ‘f’” Emecheta describes her accomplishment of the *Sankofa* maxim. It is worth quoting at length since it is the most significant evidence for my discussion now:

My Big Mother was my aunt. A child belonged to many mothers. Not just one’s biological one. We would sit for hours at her feet mesmerized by her trance voice. Through such stories she could tell the heroic deeds of her ancestors, all our mores and all our customs. She used to tell them in such a way, in such a sing-song way that until I was about fourteen I used to think that these women were inspired by some spirits. It was a result of those visits to Ibuza, coupled with the enjoyment and information those stories used to give us, that I determined when I grew older that I was going to be a story teller, like my Big Mother. (552)

Moreover, as Marie Umeh reveals Emecheta has substantiated her gratitude “to the griottes who exposed her to the tradition of storytelling [...] by naming her publishing company ‘Ogwugwu Afor,’ i.e., ‘ancestral staff’ in honor of her family’s ancestral goddess” (“Introduction” xxix). Emecheta’s works are full of the particularities she mentions in this quotation regarding the Igbo society. In her case, since she is the one writing, I infer that her authorial narrator is her Big Mother’s avatar in the world of the written fiction of her novels.

In Emecheta’s autobiography *Head Above Water*, the third chapter entitled “What They Told Me” starts with a paragraph in which she explains her inclination to narrate all kinds of stories:

Most of the events that happened before I was born had to be told to me by my mothers. The history of the British Empire and her greatness I learned from my English teachers at school in Lagos. But when it came to events that happened nearer home, concerning my ancestors and me in particular, I had to rely on the different versions told to me by my mothers. They never ceased to fascinate me, especially as each member of my family had a slightly different version. It was from this oral source that I learned from many angles the story of my birth (emphases added).
(6)

The first emphasized sentence shows that in African culture it is normal to call “mother” to all the elder women in the family compound. I have also stressed the phrase “oral sources” since she affirms that the origin of her stories is the storytelling that takes place among her people in her Nigerian community. Moreover, it is important to underscore that there is more than one version for every story depending on the storyteller’s view. So her aunts turn also into her mothers and become the wellspring of her creativity. Their texts become the mothers of Emecheta’s texts. Furthermore,

Emecheta affirms that she resembles her grandmother, and whenever she looks at herself in the mirror she saw her grandmother:

This soft, very fat woman who seemed to have all the patience in the world; this mysterious woman who had the art of punctuating her stories with long silences and deep breathing—it was she who had the patience to tell it all to me in one go. (*Head* 6)

Oladipo Joseph Ogundele also asks Emecheta how she observes her growth as a successful writer and she simply responds that her evolution as a writer is natural. She writes one book after another. Nevertheless, she expresses her indebtedness to her country: “But what I think helps me mostly is the fact that I go to Nigeria at least twice a year. Nigeria is a land full of stories. Every time I am there I always come in contact with something new” (448). Emecheta always insists in her interviews that she needs to go back to Nigeria to recollect ideas and stories.

After the brouhaha that Chinua Achebe’s first novel *Things Fall Apart* caused in Africa, and the rest of the literary world in early 1960s, both Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta were encouraged to write, notwithstanding the fact that this male Nigerian author did not give voice nor choice to women in his book. However, in Achebe’s novel we learn about the storytelling tradition in Nigeria. I quote Achebe’s words in extension because these reveal the “mystic” source of stories in which Emecheta has become immersed since she was a child, and is still exposed whenever going back home to Nigeria.

In *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Achebe’s main character, Okonkwo, wants his son Nwoye hold the reins of his wife and children in the future, “And so he was always happy when he heard him grumbling about women. That showed that in time he would be able to control his women-folk” (37). So the father rallied his sons to come to his quarters, telling them “stories of the land—masculine stories of violence and bloodshed” (37). Moreover, “Nwoye knew that it was right to be masculine and to be violent, but somehow he still preferred the stories that his mother used to tell, and which she no doubt still told to her younger children” (38). From this perspective, it is easy to observe how the spheres of men and women are separated. Consequently, their scope of teaching depends on the children’s gender and age. The little children receive their daily education through their mothers’ stories. Those stories are fables with important characters such as the famous bird “eneke-nti-oba,” tortoise, vulture, sky and earth, and

many others, all with lessons to teach the Igbo children. Achebe's narrator emphasizes that:

That was the kind of story that Nwoye loved. *But he knew that they were for foolish women and children*, and he knew that his father wanted him to be a man. And so he feigned that he no longer cared for women's stories. And when he did this he saw that his father was pleased, and no longer rebuked him or beat him. So Nwoye and Ikemefuna would listen to Okonkwo's stories about tribal wars or how, years ago, he had stalked his victim, overpowered him and obtained his first human head (emphasis added). (38)

Achebe presents here the common idea about the storytelling sessions and content of these stories. It is women's job to teach children the important values in the Igbo society, and it is men's to perpetuate the myths and stories about tribes and wars, which cultivate the dominating attitude towards women and oblige to hate the enemies of their community.

Emecheta, as Achebe did, also includes in her novel *The Bride Price* (1976) a whole long paragraph about storytelling. This excerpt is a self-referential text or a meta-storytelling narrative:

Aku-nna liked listening to Auntie Uzo's stories, for she was a born storyteller. Aku-nna, like most of her friends, had been born in Lagos, but her parents and relatives were fond of telling nostalgic stories about their town Ibuza. Most of the stories were like fairytales *but with the difference that nearly all used the typical African call-and-response songs: the storyteller would call, and all the listeners would respond*. Auntie Uzo was particularly gifted in the art of these songs. Sometimes her voice would rise, clean and clear, ringing like the sound of a thousand tiny bells. And when the story was a sad one, her call would be low, still clear but sounding like an angry stream rushing down a fall. This type of song was often so moving that tears would well up in the eyes of her audience. Invariably Uzo would ask the listeners to make rhythmic heavy groans, in imitation of the sounds produced by the master drummers in the remote villages around Ibuza. In between the pulsating groans and the mournful song would be *repeated refrains*, at first in high and then in descending pitches. And the listeners would be awe-struck to silence, their terrified minds imagining many things. The stories were so intensely charged with philosophical lessons about one thing or another that Aku-nna and her friends were able to learn from them (emphases added). (19)

These emphases reveal the most important features in a storytelling session. The term "storytelling" already introduces the sound device in the session. The audience is composed of hearers or listeners, who also become participants in the performance of

the session itself. The repeated refrains are used to keep them informed and help to remember what has been already said. Reading of novels and short stories in silence and solitude can only be enlivened by descriptions of this kind. These awaken the readers' imagination and take them back to the setting of the old traditional storytelling sessions Emecheta mentions. In contrast to Achebe's text, her main characters are women. Moreover, Emecheta's main contribution is to highlight the significance of the act of storytelling rather than the content, as demonstrated in this above excerpt. She ignores the divisions made according to gender and insists that the stories are used to teach everybody.

4.4.2. WOMEN'S IGBO FOLKTALE IN EMECHETA: *IFO*

In order to analyze the African influence on Emecheta's writing I have relied on Susan Arndt's *African Women's Literature: Orature and Intertextuality*. This research enriches the field of African studies in the Western world with her particular approach to the Igbo folktale, which is mostly told by Igbo women and called *Ifo*. Arndt extrapolates Saidu Babura Ahmad's theory on African folktales—mainly derived from the Hausa folktales called “Tatsuniyoyi” to the *Ifo* oral tradition. Moreover, Arndt establishes the *Ifo* as the blueprint in many Igbo women writers' work. She observes that each *Ifo*—similar to the “Tatsuniyoyi” or “Tatsuniya”—was based on an oral template in which the storyteller had to render the same old tale with its fixed elements and only shape some variables by choice. The first constant element consists of:

[the] fixed inventory of verbal narrative devices, non-verbal narrative means like gesture, facial expressions, the variation of the voice and the interaction with the public, as well as the structural elements of *Ifo* repertory like plots, themes, motifs, conflict constellations, characters and character constellations. (182)

Arndt reminds that this first constant element is not always applicable to the Igbo women writers' work, since these bring together both the Western narrative tradition and *Ifo* into a new form (184). A more detailed analysis on this issue will be discussed in the Part V of this research.

The second constant element focuses on how most characters are standardized and always manifest the same characteristics and behaviour until they become well-known stereotypes. There is no need to describe or characterize them since they are not allowed to be altered by the storyteller, if she has followed the *Ifo* unwritten

conventions. But this again, is not what happens in the Igbo women writers' written narratives. Arndt highlights—what I have also found in my exploration of Emecheta's three African novels I analyze—that “They also use motifs, themes, characters and conflicts which are not included in the repertory of basic *Ifo*,” and adds: “The characters in Igbo women's literature lack the standardization and predictability from the *Ifo*” (185).

Regarding the third constant, Arndt points out:

The third constant is that *Ifo* must not only be socially relevant, but must also correspond with the officially recognized norms and values of Igbo society. This means above all: *Ifo* are under the compulsion to make statements which conform to the unwritten laws of Igbo society. Consequently, it is characteristic of *Ifo* figures that they either live up to the official norms and values, or are condemned and punished. (182-183)

Nevertheless, and following Arndt's previous article, “Buchi Emecheta and the Tradition of *Ifo*,” Emecheta revises women's image that the traditional *Ifo* criticises as guilty of violating the Igbo rules and the source of all evil. Hence, “She rewrites rather than adopts, questions rather than continues, revises rather than reproduces the connotations that are associated with and underlie the female images in oral tales” (46). However, I have observed that Emecheta brings together the oppositions Arndt suggests in her quotation above. Namely, Emecheta embraces from the past even though she also re-writes in her African novels. She continues but also challenges. Finally, she reproduces the connotations associated with and underlying women's image in oral tales, although she also courageously revises them to bring forward her new representation, for she has envisioned her people's betterment.

Remarkably, she writes the story about the mysterious Idu in *The Slave Girl*, which if it were an oral storytelling session, it would have a male performer narrating it instead of herself. The main character's father must go to Idu to get his little daughter some amulets to help her survive all natural and supernatural maladies. It was a place he had heard about in “Ibuza folklore” (12). Emecheta must also have heard about it in the Ibuza folklore, and it would most probably have been a male storyteller who would have presented this travel story. She brings this story, history or myth about Idu from the past, and fully describes the place and its people. I just quote an excerpt from this story:

Idu was the native mythological name for the old Benin empire. This empire was portrayed as being at the end of the world in most of the

traditional stories told in Ibuza to the young and old alike on the golden moonlit nights that were one of the bounties nature bestowed upon the people of this area. To get to Idu, it was believed you would have to pass seven lands and swim or row your canoe through seven seas. It was a long way to go to Idu. Idu was said to be situated at that point where the blue sky touched the earth, sealing it up in a neat compact. The people of Idu were the last humans you would see before you came to the end of the world. (12)

Then, Emecheta introduces history, another field of knowledge reserved for men in the traditional storytelling session:

He was a great king, this king of Idu, known to the Ibuza people as the Oba Idu. History, when it was written much, much later, identified these rulers of Benin as the Akenzuwas. But at the time when Ogbanje Ojebeta was born, there was little division between myth and reality. The trekking distance was vast, and the road dangerous: if you were caught along these bush treks you were either killed as a human sacrifice to one of the king's innumerable gods or, if you were lucky, you would be sold to the pale-skinned "Potokis." (12-13)

Emecheta continues writing about this empire and describes the way the king's "four hundred or so young wives" lived as well as his "warriors and their families" (13). She also delineates these women: "One could recognize these royal women by their hair styles and their heavy anklets" which she describes in detail (13). Finally, she outlines the relation between the king and the other African people who traded with them. Therefore, it is significant that Emecheta also writes about travels and tribal wars, which, as Achebe's narrator suggests above, were realms reserved for men's stories and addressed to men.

The constant elements found in the *Ifos* forge a space for repetition. Notwithstanding the fact that Emecheta retrieves, re-possesses, and re-presents her *Ifo*-like stories by adding new argumentation and criticism to some unwritten rules in her society, and adapting other elements to suit her goals, she also duplicates the core of essential stories in her African novels so as to create the repetition needed in an endless African storytelling session.

Kwame Anthony Appiah defends the African texts that include explanations and definitions of the African particularities, and rejects the idea that these elements alienate non-African readers. He explains that the extensive details about the social, political, and cultural background, along with wide-ranging information about traditions, are a practice that brings audience to a full comprehension of the tales. In his attempt to

counterbalance some critics' assumption that the details about the African culture, for example in Achebe's writing, are there to make the reader conscious of being a foreigner, outsider or Other, Appiah writes:

The fact is that the accumulation of detail is a device not of alienation but of incorporation. The provision, in traditional narration, of information already known to the hearer does not reflect a view of the hearer as alien. *Otherwise oral narrations would not consist of twice-told tales. The function of a rehearsal of the familiar in narration often depends precisely on our pleasure in recognizing in a tale what we already know* (emphasis added). (248).

The emphasised sentences in this quotation above underline the idea of re-telling something over and over again. Repetition is common in the same storytelling session so as to help the listener not to lose the line of argumentation. Appiah also speaks of the "twice-told tales," that alludes to the repetition that occurs from one storytelling session to another. He refers to what I will call duplication of the roots, even though the final flowers can be slightly different in colour or even shape.

Likewise, this is a common feature in Emecheta's African novels. Moreover, to read Emecheta's books is like a continuous session of storytelling under the illuminating full moon or in the afternoon shade of a big tree. The sense of *déjà vu* that invades the common reader of her African books produces either confusion or a feeling of repetition. The encounter with the same anecdotes told over and over again from a different perspective is characteristic to the African oral tradition. This is what Appiah calls the twice-told tales. From the information we gather in Emecheta's autobiography about her aunt, her favourite model as a storyteller, whom she calls Big Mother, we can affirm that Emecheta makes mostly an extensive use of the African oral tradition in general, although she especially relies on the *Ifo* principles for the telling of her stories. New versions about the same experience in the people's lives of the compound are told by Big Mother or other storytellers every now and then from different perspectives. The repetition of these stories guarantees the survival of the Igbo traditions in spite of the potential colonial erasure of African cultural tradition. Emecheta wishes to perpetuate the Igbo traditions by writing about them repeatedly, although her ultimate aim is to underwrite progress for Africans.

The most obvious examples to illustrate Emecheta's repetitions can be found in those stories of slaves buried with their mistress. This kind of twice-told story is exemplified in *The Slave Girl*, which frightened the slave girls working for Ma

Palagada. This same story is later taken at a starting point for her other novel, *The Joys of Motherhood*, as a tale that will affect the main character's, Nnu Ego's, life for ever, since the buried slave princess will turn into the Nnu Ego's *Chi*. It is outstanding that most of the heroes and heroines in the Big Mother's stories are real people, such as herself or the rest of the members of her (Big Mother's) family. These can be her ancestors or descendants, who lived in real compounds in different parts of Ibuza, Onitcha, Lagos or any other African or British locality, inserted in real historical times associated with the colonial era. In this same way, mimicking Big Mother's artistry, most of Emecheta's novels are populated with real or fictitiously real people from her past and present who inhabited or still live in both African and non-African environment. Emecheta retrieves and re-presents these stories with people who have previously appeared in her Big Mother's storytelling sessions, and lived in that area of Nigeria.

Moreover, another repetition that readers discover is the myth or legend of the Ibuza town founding. Emecheta writes a prologue in *The Slave Girl*, as if she were presenting a map for her story that is about to be narrated. She writes about this founding as if she were the guardian of this area's history in Nigeria. She tells the story of why an Igbo group that accompanied the prince Umejei had to leave their home Isu; and how he chose the spot where he and his followers settled and later founded the famous town of Ibuza. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, she goes back to this story when she wants to trace back the origin of Nnu Ego's father. She tells the story of how the inhabitants of the area allowed the settlers to stay, even though she does not mention the prince's name, and the way he and his people founded Ibuza:

Agbadi was from Ogboli, a village of people who, legend said, had lived in that part of what is now Ibuza before the Eastern Ibo people from Isu came and settled there with them. The Ogboli people allowed the *founder of Ibuza to stay*, and bestowed titles on him and his descendants. They also inherited most of the widows of the newcomers. This was the arrangement for a long time, until the people of Ibuza grew in number and strength, and those of Ogboli somehow diminished. [...] The Ibuza people, who came from the eastern part of Nigeria, fought and won many civil battles against their hosts (emphasis added). (10-11)

So Emecheta creates within her African written novels a realm of storytelling sessions, in which she mimicks the *Ifo* norms of having constant and variable elements. In addition to this, she uses cross-references to remind readers that they are with the same storyteller. She also presents Igbo women and young girls as the main characters.

But she does not only write about women. Susan Arndt affirms that men may narrate *Ifo*, but this was not the common trend:

men on the other hand are said to be neatly associated with creation myths, migration legends, heroic legends, war legends, epics, stories about travels and adventures, allegorical and fabulous tales, and tales about certain causes of famine, the existence of different soils, the cause of animal and human diseases, and helpful medicine. (“Buchi” 32)

Furthermore, Arndt insists that: “To find access to these narratives both as performers and audience proves to be difficult for women” (“Buchi” 32). Characteristically enough, Emecheta dares to write about all these themes reserved for men. She writes about myths, legends, and wars, as well as on travels and adventures—according to Achebe’s narrator mentioned above—just reserved to male storytellers and listeners. Not only does she venture to write about those topics but also takes the risk of repeating them from different points of view, so as to give a knowing wink to her readers.

4.4.3. EMECHETA’S MIXING OF BOTH IGBO AND YORUBA TRADITION AND PROVERBS

As Appiah recommended to leave behind the “anthropologizing” reading of Achebe’s work (248), the same should be applied in Emecheta’s work. This should not be read under an anthropological magnifying glass but rather to understand her continuous incursions into traditions as a mechanism to bring the Igbo traditions from the past, and in some cases highlighting that some became obsolete in the 1970s.

Emecheta endows her narrators and some characters with the authority to articulate the Igbo knowledge and sometimes the Yoruba tradition and culture. I call this kind of characters and narrators as the tradition bearers or culture actors and informants, since some do not even change the plot of the story. For example, they appear in *The Bride Price*, to inform readers about the social traditions, appropriate behaviour, and the Nigerian people’s way of life. Most of these are Igbos and Yorubas, for Emecheta was educated under the influence of these two ethnic groups, in addition to her British education at school and later at the university in London. Moreover, *The Bride Price*’s narrator highlights that the stories are not only told for fun but also to teach the community the diverse traditions and moral lessons. Hence, the oral stories become a valuable source of knowledge and the best means to transmit customs and

beliefs to African people: “The stories were so intensely charged with philosophical lessons about one thing or another that Aku-nna and her friends were able to learn from them” (19). These words epitomise the *Sankofa* principle. Emecheta gives a conspicuous demonstration of how to use traditional elements and the Igbo culture particularities.

Far from considering these three African novels just related to anthropological or ethnographic disciplines, Emecheta’s outstanding treasures picked from the past are displayed to re-present the colonial Africa by an insider to Africans and non-Africans, who lack the grounding knowledge about the Nigerian traditions, mostly the Igbo’s and the Yoruba’s. She follows Achebe’s premise of establishing an African worldview in her work through the use of proverbs, sayings, and the description of customs, traditions, and social practices. Charles H. Rowell asks Achebe about his frequent use of tales and proverbs in his novels as well as interviews to exemplify his ideas. Achebe reminds the interviewer that proverbs are those statements handed down from generation to generation by his people “across the millennia” (267). He defines them as:

Proverbs are miniature tales; they are the building blocks, if you like, of tales. They are tales refined to their simplest form, because a good proverb is a short story. It is short indeed. What it demonstrates, [. . .] is the clarity with which those who made these proverbs had observed their reality. A proverb is a very careful observation of reality and the world, and then a distillation into the wisdom of an elegant statement so that it sticks in the mind. (267)

Achebe believes that the use of proverbs is similar to the use of quotations to reinforce or reject what is being discussed. Moreover, proverbs act as a bridge that brings together the past and present. In Achebe’s words: “it gives one a certain stability, it gives one a certain connectedness, it banishes, it helps banish the sense of loneliness, the cry of desolation” (Rowell 268). It is worth analysing the role of proverbs in Emecheta’s work since, as Achebe observes, they serve to connect both African tradition and literature: “They are, just for their elegance as literary forms, interesting and satisfying; then they ground us in our ‘great tradition’; they tell us something about the importance of observing our reality carefully, very carefully” (Rowell 268).

For example, one of Ma Palagada’s girl slaves in Emecheta’s *The Slave Girl*, Amanna, cannot abandon her mistress’ house because she cannot return home. Her parents had thrown her away because she was one of twins and could not afford feeding

her. The main character Ojebetahad hears this saying regarding slavery: “Go to your people, and eat the mushroom of freedom if they cannot afford to buy you meat” (150).

Whereas in *The Bride Price*, the proverb that the narrator uses is “The people of Ibuza have a proverb which says that the quarrels between relatives are only skin deep; they never penetrate to the bones” (14). The narrator complements this proverb with the following words: “They have another saying, that on the day of blood relatives, friends go” (14). Furthermore, this Igbo narrator characteristically uses the Yoruba culture sayings to explain or, in this case, justify the dispenser’s, Arinze, use and benefits of the medicines he prescribes and get for the poor patients unable to pay a doctor. Arinze is accepted as everybody’s doctor and respected in Ibuza. Moreover, Emecheta is Igbo, and also acculturated in Yoruba. So she can indifferently use both Yoruba and Igbo sayings and proverbs to pin down her novel in an African cultural map with characters that she calls the children of the Niger River: “According to Yoruba saying, if you work by the altar you must eat from the altar; you are a wicked man if you refuse to give it up when your time is up. So Arinze was not acting without the common accord. He was simply conforming to another of the unwritten laws of the children of the Niger” (24). Here, the narrator’s comment highlights the significance of proverbs as guiding lines or norms to follow or approach Africans. Further in the same story, Aku-nna falls in love with the teacher Chike, who is slave descendant, and cannot get married to the Ibuza people. The narrator explains Chike’s attraction towards Aku-nna through the use of this saying: “It is said that stolen water is sweet” (87). Therefore, proverbs describe both social and emotional reality that people experience through time.

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, the narrator describes the relationship between two African couples working for the white Meers. The main character Nnu Ego is married to Nnaife the washerman¹⁹ in Lagos, and her neighbours are Cordelia and husband Ubani, who is the cook at the Meers’. Each African couple lives in a room called the “boys quarters,” although sharing the same veranda. The men get along very well, but when women quarrell they use to take sides, until “they decided that it was not worth excommunicating each other. There was far more to be gained by communication: ‘If the tongue and the mouth quarrel, they invariably make it up because they have to stay

¹⁹ Emecheta uses the term “washerman” to refer to the “washer-man,” who is boy/man working for the white residents in the English-speaking West African countries, such as Nigeria and Ghana. From my experience of living in Ghana for ten years, the word used in Pidgin to refer to the man who washes the clothes is “wash-man.”

in the same head” (63). I underscore that this Nigerian proverb is very similar, and conveys the same message as the Adinkra symbol *Ese Ne Tekrema*, translated literally into “The teeth and the tongue.” For W. Bruce Willis, it is a “symbol of improvement, advancement, growth, the need for friendliness and interdependence” (102), which Kayper-Mensah’s Ghanaian Adinkra poem clearly expresses:

Paired for life, shut up
 In an Island of each mouth
 Are teeth and tongue
 Happy fellows in one bed.
 Happier still at work together,
 Yet sometimes, tongue bleeds from bites. (13)

Emecheta concentrates more on the other aspects of her cultural background through her knowledge of both Igbo and Yoruba traditions, as seen above. Her use of this proverb from the Igbo ethnic group shows that there are common grounds that many African communities share. In this case, the Adinkra symbols from the Akan culture. Moreover, this again evinces that it is possible to bring together both Nigerian Emecheta and Ghanaian Aidoo, and analyze their work under the light that the meaning of the Adinkra symbols cast.

4.4.4. THE IGBO TRADITIONAL COSMOLOGY IN EMECHETA: *CHI*

Emecheta also brings forward notions that are not mere words. They are spiritual concepts that do not stand for rituals but rather a whole system of beliefs that belong to the Igbo cosmology; such as Achebe’s classification of the concept of *chi*. She inserts many Igbo words with no equivalents in English. She calls the readers’ attention by bringing treasures such as the *Chi* that guides each Igbo’s individual life wherever they are from her Igbo traditional culture, as if she were a *Sankofa* bird. In *The Joys of Motherhood* we can read in the first chapter that the main character Nnu Ego has in mind one single intention in her attempt to commit suicide:

Then she would be able to seek out and meet her *chi*, her personal god, and she would ask her why she had punished her so. She knew her *chi* was a woman, not just because to her way of thinking only a woman would be so thorough in punishing another. Apart from that, had she not been told many times at home in Ibuza that her *chi* was a slave woman who had been forced to die with her mistress when the latter was being buried? So the slave woman was making sure that Nnu Ego’s own life was nothing but a catalogue of disasters. (9)

This quotation explains the concept of *chi*. According to the narrator's words, *chi* is a personal and female god in this case. Moreover, here is the repetition of the story of the slave buried with her mistress mentioned above. So this *chi* was once a human being and now belongs to the realm of minor deities. But then readers recollect in the second chapter of the same novel that Nnu Ego, Agbadi's and Ona's daughter, is the reincarnation of the slave once buried alive with her mistress:

This child is the slave woman who died with your senior wife Agunwa. She promised to come back as a daughter. Now here she is. That is why this child has the fair skin of the water people, and the painful lump on her head is from the beating your men gave her before she fell into the grave. (27)

The non-Igbo reader gets confused with the two ideas: on the one hand, that the slave became Nnu Ego's *chi*—a minor personal god—and, on the other, that Nnu Ego is the reincarnation of this same slave. So the slave became both the physical entity of Nnu Ego and her spiritual personal guide: *chi*.

In 1976, Chinua Achebe published "Chi in Igbo Cosmology." He introduced the concept of *chi* for the first time to non-Igbo scholars and readers, since he believes that it is necessary to approach the concept of *chi* and try to comprehend it to make sense of the Igbo-world-view in literature (cf. 132). Achebe insists on the notion of duality that the Igbo society relies on: "Whenever Something stands, Something Else will stand beside it" (133). He further insists that "no matter what" that something is (139). This will lead him to say:

The world in which we live has its double and counterpart in the realm of spirits. A man lives here and his *chi* there. Indeed the human being is only one half (and the weaker half at that) of a person. There is a complementary spirit being, *chi*. (133)

Moreover, Achebe writes a simple definition of the concept *chi* based on the converging common ground all Igbo people coincide:

Every person has an individual *chi* who created him; its natural home is somewhere in the region of the sun, but it may be induced to visit an earthly shrine; a person's fortune in life are controlled more or less completely by his *chi*. (137-138)

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, the reader is aware of the importance of the concept *chi* in each character's life. The relationship between Nnu Ego and her *chi* is hard, for that slave turned into her *Chi* as an act of vengeance. However, this buried-alive-slave-

turned-*chi* is capricious regarding Nnu Ego's fertility. When she dearly wants a child at her first marriage to Amatokwu she cannot have any, even though Nnu Ego's family has provided her guardian figure when she moves to her husband's compound: "A new and more beautiful effigy of the slave woman who was her *chi* was made and placed on top of all Nnu Ego's possessions, to guard her against any evil eye" (30).

Nnu Ego has to go back to her father's compound since Amatokwu does not get her pregnant. Nevertheless, when she gets married to her second husband Nnaife, she has a first baby but he dies. Nnu Ego in a trace of madness was anxious to die to meet her *chi*, since she accused that deity of taking away her child (62). So this personal god is responsible for giving children and for taking them away. In chapter eight of this same novel, Nnaife directly censures *chi*, since he is jobless and has learnt that Nnu Ego is having another baby: "What type of *Chi* have you got, eh? When you were desperate for children she would not give you any; now that we cannot afford them, she gives them to you" (91). And in chapter eleven, it is Nnaife's *chi* who will help him end his women's rebellion when his little son inadvertently tore up the money bills causing women to become penniless: "After all, you told me you knew what you were doing when you decided not to cook for me. My *chi* has taught you a lesson, not to tamper with a man's stomach. I did not tear up the money, your son did" (137).

Moreover, a *chi* is also responsible for the success of an individual as in the case of Oshia, Nnu Ego's son who wins a scholarship to study in the United States of America: "Oshia, when are you going to buy your father a bottle of white man's whisky to toast your *chi* for making you pass your exams?" (200). Nnu Ego also clearly expresses the Igbo way of thinking in her words "After that I'm afraid, son, your life is in your own hands and those of your *chi*" (214). Finally, at court, both Nnaife and Nnu Ego are reminded: "Remember, Mr Owulum, that you have sworn by your *chi*, and your god would not like you to tell lies" (215); and "You remember, Mrs Owulum, that you have sworn by the Bible, which is, like your *chi*, very binding" (216). In these two last examples, Emecheta reinforces the importance of *chi* in the Igbo protagonists' life by introducing it, in this case, in the official spheres such as the courts.

In *The Bride Price* we can also see how Igbos ask their *chi* to cause harm to others. Knowing that Okonkwo—Aku-nna's stepfather and uncle—wants to kill her because she has committed the abomination of eloping to marry a slave descendant "it came as no surprise to Ma Blackie to see the image of her daughter one morning in front of Okonkwo's *chi*, his personal god, when she just happened to be passing by" (164).

In *The Slave Girl* we also learn that an individual has to appease or gratify beforehand his or her *chi* in order to get what he or she wants: “[...] as it became apparent that the child might indeed live, her mind went to all the sacrifices she had made to her *Chi*, the personal god to whom every Ibo individual appealed in time of trouble” (10). Ultimately, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi’s elaboration of her vernacular theory for the Nigerian literature includes the concept of *chi*:

It is essence, innateness, instinct, genetics, luck, endowment, destiny, empowerment; it is the caretaker and caregiver installed within. It is everywhere in the body. [...] recognized as a powerhouse lodged within the individual, a recourse accessible, in danger or crisis, to the owner willing to use it. (*Africa* 35-36).

Buchi Emecheta cannot but re-present this anciently founded belief—a spiritual knowledge—rooted in the past of her Igbo people as the *Sankofa* symbol dictates.

4.4.5. THE IGBO TRADITIONAL COSMOLOGY IN EMECHETA: OGBANJE

Buchi Emecheta also brings forward into her narrative the Igbo spiritual concept *Ogbanje*. For Ogunyemi, Nigerian women needed to come to grips with the increasing infant mortality due to unknown diseases, which could not be explained by the medicine men in that area:

To cope with these mysterious deaths, Nigerians take solace in the *Ogbanje/ Abiku* myth. The conviction that a dead child is reincarnated, then returns from a contiguous world to be born again by its mother, deeply consoles the grieving woman. The catch is that the wayward child may once more choose to die, thereby establishing a cyclic time, which leaves the bereaved profoundly baffled at an apparently ineluctable fate. (*Africa* 62)

Ogunyemi explains that the term *Ogbanje* is associated with the Igbos, whereas *Abiku* is the Yoruba term for the same concept. She elaborates the idea of the existence of metaphors embedded in these notions in her vernacular theory, explaining the slight differences between the two terms and their perceptions in each ethnic group.

Emecheta does not attach metaphors to the concept of *ogbanje*. She uses it to describe her main character, Aku-nna in *The Bride Price*. The 13-year-old girl is described as insignificant for she is small, thin and “bound to catch” all types of diseases (3). Moreover, as Emecheta’s narrator puts it “her mother many a time begged her to decide once and for all whether she was going to live or die. One thing Ma Blackie could not stand, she said over and over again, was a ‘living dead’, an *ogbanje*”

(3-4). As seen from the early pages of the novel, the reader becomes alerted that death is on the watch. Aku-nna's life is in danger. Later in the story, when Aku-nna has to leave Lagos and go back to Ibuza, her family members see her different because she is pale and weak. One of her cousins speaks everybody's mind when he asks: "Mother, do you think that girl might be an *ogbanje*?" (79). At this point Emecheta re-presents the myth of the *ogbanje* with an extensive explanation of the concept and the way people feel and react according to their beliefs through the mother's answer:

"Yes, I am sure she is one," she pronounced emphatically. "She is different. Have you ever come across someone who seldom talks? I must speak to her mother about it tomorrow. I fear these girls who are *ogbanje*. They all seem to behave too well, but they are only in this world on contract, and when their time is up they have to go. *They all die young, usually at the birth of their first baby*. They must die young because their friends in the other world call them back. I am happy none of my three girls was an *ogbanje*, and that they only give me the type of trouble I can cope with, the trouble I can see. A mother is really in the soup when a daughter gives her these unearthly troubles" (emphasis added). (79-80)

Moreover, the narrator adds that Aku-nna's 20-year-old cousin has already seen many teenage girls die at childbirth. What is stressed in this quotation is Aku-nna's potential death sentence, which is accomplished after having her first baby Joy by the end of the story. Aku-nna's family perceives her as an outwardly creature. Among other things, because she was primarily educated in Lagos, went to school in Ibuza, and eventually falls in love with her teacher Chike, who is a slave descendant. However, Aku-nna's cousin asks if they can save her from the eminent death that is awaiting her and the answer is:

'I suppose it is possible these days', said Ngbeke, 'if one can get a powerful witch doctor to take her to the site where the agreement with the spirits was made. It costs a great deal of money. That is what the mother should be worrying about, instead of teaching her to wiggle her bottom in short skirts and letting her talk to the son of Ofulue'. (80)

Astonishingly, Emecheta no longer recurs to the *ogbanje* myth to explain Aku-nna's death at the end of the story. Instead, she resorts to an old belief: if the bride price is not paid the married girl will not survive the first childbirth. However, it is worth mentioning that it is after all the knowledge collected in the novel that non-Nigerian readers become surprised to find out that *ogbanje* can also be used as a proper name. In

fact, *The Bride Price* is dedicated to the author's mother: Alice Ogbanje Ojebeta Emecheta.

Nevertheless, Emecheta has repeatedly pointed out that *The Slave Girl* is her mother's story. Once we read the novel we understand why her mother was named so. Emecheta's grandmother had lost all her daughters at childbirth. When Emecheta's mother was born she did not die: "So she has at last decided to stay with us, this regular visitor who has been visiting for a long time. Ogbanje Ojebeta: that will be her name, even though it is not very decorative. Only let her live [...]" (12). Additionally, Ogbanje Ojebeta's father has to go to the mythical town of Idu to get some safety charms that will help her fight against all evil spirits. But as the story goes on, her brother Okolie wants to sell her at the Onitsha large market and has to get rid of these charms:

Usually it was thought safe to remove such charms from a child when that child could talk coherently enough for any living adult to understand, so that if her persecutors from the other world should ask her to come with them, she could shout, 'go away, I don't want you. I am happy here.' Then the adult could take a broom or whatever and start to beat all the corners of the room saying '*Asha, Asha,*' until the child stopped calling for help. (39)

Emecheta brings from her tradition the concept of *ogbanje* and uses it to represent a straightforward concept, sometimes to inform, at other times to alert readers. Hence, this Nigerian author's three African novels retrieve genuine Igbo traditions, which were rooted in the Igbo culture but re-presented in the 1970s, obeying in this way the *Sankofa* tenets.

4.4.6. THE IGBO AGE-GROUP IN EMECHETA

Emecheta also brings to the arena of her fiction the concept of age-group, which is intrinsic to how Igbos keep records of events. Don C. Ohadike explains the age-group as an association of men or women born at an interval of three to five years. They form a social group called *Ogbo* or *Otu* and are named after an historical or significant event that took place at the time of its members' birth. Ohadike provides some examples of age-group names: for the Biafran War (*ogbo aya Biafra*), World War II (*ogbo aya Hitler*) or influenza (*ogbo ifelunza*). Each age-group would have its assignment or task to perform. Those below sixteen years old will be in charge of the physical errands. The middle-aged from sixteen to forty years old would be responsible for the defence of the compounds in case of war, or otherwise felling trees for wood and clearing off the

bushy land (cf. xxv). The senior groups are responsible for the political and judicial matters, as well as for the announcement of annual festivals and the opening or closing of the agricultural cycles (cf. xxvi). The members of the age-groups practice dances and celebrations together and become friends for ever.

Emecheta affirms that in England she belonged to the war-babies age-group, although “They called us ‘the saltless babies’, [t]hat means we were born in Nigeria when they didn’t have salt because of the war. So in our village we were called ‘the Saltless Women’” (“Feminism” 554). Emecheta apprehends the concept of age-group as an essential element in how people relate to each other in the Igbo community. To her understanding, people who belong to the diverse age groups always have a friend to share all the problems or happiness that life offers. Without a group, individuals perish. Emecheta explains that Nnu Ego’s loneliness and failure by the end of *The Joys of Motherhood* is a consequence of not forging her friendship bonds properly. Moreover, Nnu Ego’s departure to Lagos means her separation from her Ibuza age group; and what is worse, she did not dedicate time to form part of a new group of friends in Lagos. Nnu Ego “was so busy being a good mother and wife that she didn’t cultivate her women friends” (555).

In *The Bride Price*, Emecheta’s narrator explains how the Igbo society was organised:

There were various different societies in the town, most of them existing for social purposes; but in the main it was one’s age group that determined membership. Age groups were created at three-year intervals, each one characterised by an important incident. (Children born during the civil war would become known as the children of Biafra, and when babies born at that time grow into adolescence they will hold meetings, organise dances, in the big Eke market; they might have special dances which will take years of practice for the Christmases of their youth or the Ifejoike yam festivals.). (102-103)

The narrator at this point tells the story of the Aku-nna age group. Many girls between fourteen and eighteen on their way to the market to buy some cloths for their marriage celebrations drowned crossing the River Niger due to a terrible storm. In order to overcome their pain the Ibuza people apprehend their deaths as a necessary sacrifice for the river beautiful goddess. Some time after the mourning period many women got pregnant and when their babies were born the mothers were grateful, believing it was the river goddess who had replaced the dead girls; so “That age group became associated with the year the River Niger ate the children of Ibuza” (103). Therefore,

when Aku-nna comes back to Ibuza her age group is there and enjoys the friendship of its members and has fun with them. But it is on the day Aku-nna is performing with her age group the *aja* dance when she is kidnapped and forced to marry Okoboshi. This leads her to the most painful experience in her life.

In *The Slave Girl*, Emecheta's narrator also acts as a tradition bearer and defines this concept again, as a reminder or simply repeating the familiar information for non-Nigerian readers within parenthesis as "(age groups, made up of those born within the same three-year period, were like mutual benefit societies, whose members, from adolescence, would organize meetings and dances for important occasions such as this)" (17). Moreover, it is the coming of age dance with his age group that urged Okolie, Ojebeta's brother, in this novel to make easy money through selling her into slavery:

He needed the money his sister would fetch, [. . .] to buy a new horn pipe, and some women's head-scarves which he would have to tie round his waist for the dance. He would also need strings of cowries and little bells for his feet. Essential too were large, colourful ostrich feathers to complete his Uloko outfit. (35)

The selling of Ojebeta after her parents' death caused by the influenza changes her life forever. She does not belong to an age group, and therefore cannot practise any kind of traditional celebrations. In contrast, she is taken to church and learns Christian religion. The other slave girls with whom she works for Ma Palagada become her friends. However, the concept of age group is an important social organization that Emecheta retrieves and repossess from her culture and traditions to sketch her plots. She re-presents the social networks that dominate the Igbo people's life in her African novels analyzed here.

Conclusively, this part of my research underlines the elements that both Ama Ata Aidoo and Bucho Emecheta have rescued from oblivion or revealed and revived from their traditions and ancestral treasures to re-present what was mostly ignored due to colonialism.



PART V: *ODENKYEM*

**EMBRACING WESTERN PATTERNS
IN AFRICAN LITERATURE: THE EXAMPLE OF BUCHI
EMECHETA AND AMA ATA AIDOO**

5. THE MEANING OF THE ADINKRA SYMBOL: *ODENKYEM*

Odenkyem literally means crocodile. Following Bruce Willis, it is the symbol of propriety and prudence. The proverb that accompanies this symbol is translated as: “The crocodile lives in water yet it breathes air not water” (166). The crocodile is an adaptable creature able to survive in both water and land. This symbol teaches people to prudently come to terms with whatever new situation in their life in order to overcome new difficulties. Willis suggests, “Prudence is practical wisdom. It involves choosing the right means to achieve correct goals” (167). Kojo Arthur adds that this is a symbol of greatness, power, adaptability, scepticism, scrupulousness, and advancement (cf. 144). Kayper-Mensah also includes this symbol in his book, though the drawing is presented on the page upside-down. The crocodile’s tail is drawn upwards and the head is downwards, as if plunging into the water. This poet gives the symbol a similar name, *Denkyem*:

You slide into water for your supper
 Certain you will get it, fat;
 From the fish that fed for you.

Now out up here breathing air
 You amble slowly, saying only
 “No. No hurry. No. No hurry.”
 That naughty chick that ate your fish
 It and the fish will cook as your dish. (22)

This poem indicates that the crocodile’s potentials have increased, as it was able to survive outside the water. The possibility of adapting to diverse physical environments or circumstances might present greater advantages than remaining motionless.

5.1. EMBRACING WESTERN PATTERNS TO SURVIVE

The debate on the issue about the existence of an independent African literature—not appended to Western literature—which was initiated in the 1960s, offers the possibility of taking into account the analysis of this literature from the point of view of language, form, and style. I have chosen this symbol to underscore Aidoo’s and Emecheta’s potential embracement of some Western literary genres to meet their Africanist goals. They have also used new varieties of the English language to re-present the African idiosyncrasy. We will see how Aidoo intends to ground her works on the newly discussed patterns of African literature, whereas Emecheta’s interest is to bring her so-

called African novels closer to Western canonical formulas. Indeed, the latter has proudly talked about how the British bookshops do not shelve her novels tagged as African literature. In an attempt to pin down the sources for this new African literary achievement, I have to delve into the diverse strategies these writers have followed in their writing.

5.2. THE USE OF PARTICULAR LANGUAGES AND AFRICAN LITERATURE

Susan Arndt quotes the controversial critic Adrian Roscoe:

the novel, as it is known to the West, precisely because it is a written form, has no history whatever in Africa. The continent has had its own fictive fiction tradition; but it has been the tradition of the story, narrated orally. [...] The novel [...] is a literary import [...] from Europe; its appearance provides evidence for those Africans who argue that their new writing is but a minor appendage to the mainstream of European literature. (Arndt, *African* 63)

The Bolekaja group has disliked Roscoe's insistence on the idea that African literature is an appendage of European literature because the novel is an imported literary genre.²⁰ This wiped away any possibility of giving an independent identity to the emerging literature written by Africans, from Africa, and about Africa. In fact, Chinua Achebe refuted Roscoe's assumptions in his essay "Thoughts on the African Novel," in which he wrote:

I dare not close without a word of recognition for that small and proprietary school of critics, which assures us that the African novel does not exist. Reason: the novel was invented in England. For the same kind of reason, I shouldn't know how to drive a car because I am no descendant of Henry Ford. (72)

Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o defends the idea of getting rid of anything non-African in his theoretical and critical works. However and at first sight, any scholar could be bewildered by his classification of African literature, since he seems to stand by Roscoe's idea of considering it an appendage to the mainstream European literature. Ngũgĩ divided this literature into three blocks. He follows a systematic organization based on timeline and the language used in the works with no regard to nationality or writers' origin. The first group embraces the African oral tradition. The literature

²⁰ I am following Mikhail Bakhtin's consideration of the novel as a literary genre, which he developed in his essay "Epic and Novel" collected in his *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*.

written by African authors in European languages is included in a second group. And finally, he mentions a third tradition that consists of the African literature written in African languages (cf. *Moving* 18-21). Therefore, the language used becomes crucial for Ngũgĩ's classification along with other aspects.

In 1981, Abiola Irele observed that the African writers' works—written in European languages to express their African experience—were inevitably compared with some European literary works. He was aware that in the case of the established literatures there exists a kind of convention that determines a consensus upon the value of an author. This implies that the critic has a kind of a blueprint for the assessment of authors and works. In Irele's words "the convention itself is buttressed by a constituted body of past works which provides a constant reference against which new creations can be judged" (*African Experience* 4). Moreover, Western critics enjoy the advantage of both the established literary and critical traditions, which are also part of the Western literary realm. Irele highlights that African critics have the same tools: "the indigenous oral tradition and the Western tradition both combine to provide him a background area of responses as a basis for judgement, the fact remains that modern African literature offers the special challenge of *newness*" (*African Experience* 4). Irele has conceived African literature as a new literature, which is "being constituted as an exploration of a new area of experience and expression" (*African Experience* 4). Moreover, he affirms that "modern African literature presents itself both as a challenge to the pervasive spirit of imperialism of the West and as a mode of a creative process of self-differentiation" (*African Experience* 2). In short, the language chosen for writing literary works will always determine the post-writing phases, which those works and their authors will undergo.

Ngũgĩ was asked about the issue of language in the upcoming literary works by African writers. He insisted on the distinction between the literature written in European and African languages, not including the former within the scope of African literature even if it were written by African authors (Ngũgĩ, "Interview with Martini et al." 118). During the 1980s, Ngũgĩ delivered diverse papers later compiled under the title of "The Language of African Literature," in which he manifests his idea about the African literature written in European languages: "What we have created is another hybrid tradition, a tradition in transition, a minority tradition that can only be termed as Afro-European literature; that is, the literature written by Africans in European languages" (27). Ngũgĩ defends African languages and seems to write, with his teeth clenched,

statements such as: “In some instances these European languages were seen as having a capacity to unite African peoples against divisive tendencies inherent in the multiplicity of African languages within the same geographic state” (7). He looks back in anger when he realises the fact that in 1962, while still a student, conferences with titles such as “African Writers of English Expression” centred on the issue of what was African literature, African authors writing in African languages did not qualify for the event. Notwithstanding his exasperation, the idea of using European languages to write African literature could mostly be justified once “the borrowed tongues carry the weight of [their] African experience by, for instance, making them ‘prey’ on African proverbs and other peculiarities of African speech and folklore” (7).

However from the 1950s onwards, Achebe’s first novel encouraged educated Africans to write all over the continent, and he chose to use the English language. In 1964, he ended his essay “African Writer, English Language,” with a crucial paragraph, in which he affirms that he embraces the English language and adapts it to meet the requirements of his literary needs: “I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, *still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surrounding* (emphasis added)” (84). The emphasised string of words shows Achebe’s wisdom through his awareness of the importance of being prudent to achieve his desired goal of transforming the English language as if he were colonising it for his own exploitation and benefit. However, ten years later Achebe wrote in his article “Colonialist Critic”:

Most African writers write out of an African experience and of commitment to an African destiny. For them that destiny does not include a future European identity for which the present is but an apprenticeship. And let no one be fooled by the fact that we may write in English, for we intend to do unheard of things with it. Already some people are getting worried. (9)

Admittedly, another ten years later, Ngũgĩ follows this line of thought in the interview mentioned above, as if he were supporting the 1970s Achebe’s statement: “I have a sense of Igboness in Achebe’s novels through his use of English” (Ngũgĩ, “Interview with Martini et al” 120).

Furthermore, in *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*, the Bolekaja group urge African writers to experiment with European languages in order to adapt them to the African needs. Indeed, each African language should use the European languages in a way to suit their particular and specific cultural inheritance: “If a flavour

of African life is therefore to be captured in novels written in English, the English language has to be flexed and bent to allow these idiomatic and rhetorical usages to be presented” (Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike 262).

We cannot forget that even though I use the concept Africa as an umbrella for all the African peoples and languages, I am aware of the importance of observing the differences underscoring the diverse use of European languages as these critics propose. For example, Abiola Irele refers to the situation of “diglossia” provoked by a kind of “dual competence” when African writers write in European languages (*African Imagination* 12). He highlights that not all writers recreate the oral tradition in their writings:

The interaction of orality and literacy in the case of those writers who have established a visible traffic between the African languages with their distinctive forms of expression and the European linguistic medium is especially instructive. These writers provide clear evidence of the tense area of signification that lies between the native traditions of imaginative expression and the European literary tradition, a terrain through which every African writer has to find an expressive means to navigate for his or her own creative purposes. (*African Imagination* 13)

Further than just the flavour of the locale in these African works, the use of language draws our attention to what African writers want to re-present. Irele is aware that the tension produced in these cases is similar to any encounter with liminal areas in all aspects. Below we can see where and why the situations of poliglossia rather than just diglossia are produced.

5.2.1. AMA ATA AIDOO’S LANGUAGE: EMBRACING ENGLISH AND GHANAIAN EXPERIENCE

When Adeola James interviews Aidoo in 1986, she informs Aidoo that critics have eulogised her good command of English and qualified it as genuine and sensitive that provides insight (cf. Aidoo, “Interview with Adeola James” 23). Aidoo herself has previously boasted about her effectiveness at using English and reiterates in this interview that she likes how she masters this language, although she has never intended to speak the Queen’s English. She assures James that she has “tried to always let the flavour of [her] African background come through in terms of idioms and so on” (23).

It is suggestive to observe how Aidoo’s narrator, a teacher, in her short story “No Sweetness Here” provokes a double perspective related to her intention of using English against the African background. In this case her narrator generates a

metalinguistic utterance, as if to call the readers' attention or just contextualizes her walk among the Fante people in the village where she taught: "As I passed the old people, they shouted their greetings. It was always the Fanticised form of the English" (*No Sweetness* 58). The teacher is the literate and educated character-narrator in this story. She is aware of the use of the diverse languages and linguistic registers or simple nuances that occur in every act of communication after the colonial experience. Hence, Aidoo intentionally announces her own choice of using these registers in this short story, through the teacher's words. Any scholar would consider this evidence as Aidoo's intention to Africanize what to the eyes of the Western canon belonged to the West—the written short story.

James Gibbs explains that "No Sweetness Here" was previously published in *Black Orpheus* in 1963: "This was the story that won a prize offered by Mbari in 1962. Like other early 'scattered stories', it was collected into a single volume in 1970" (435). The dates of writing and publication of this short story do not convey any complication for this research, since it was written and finally presented to a wider range of audience in the following decade under analysis in this dissertation. Since Gibbs reveals that "No Sweetness Here" is Aidoo's first short story, her narrator's words become the spearhead of her way of writing. Aidoo follows the trailblazers who have exerted a significant influence on her literary career. These are two Ghanaian intellectuals: Kobina Sekyi and Efua Sutherland. Both used the Mfantse²¹ language combined with English: Sekyi in his satirical play *The Blinkards*, and Sutherland, in addition to the language issue, also brings the traditional Ghanaian sources to the field of the artistic creation and performance.

In the 1960s Aidoo anticipated Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike's recommendation of writing African fiction in English:

In addition to capturing in the African novel the narrative devices of African languages, there is the task of appropriately employing the various types of English that are spoken by Africans, e. g., pidgin, creole, the English of secondary school leavers, the English of university graduates, officialese, etc. The task of capturing the flavour of African life in the African novel would be sadly incomplete if these were left out and if the King's or Queen's English were insisted upon in all contexts. (263)

²¹ The term "Mfantse" is a variation of "Fanti" and "Fante." These allude to an ethnic group and their language in Ghana.

Ama Ata Aidoo has written all her works in English, but sometimes her language is refurbished with African vernacular languages. The resulting text is close to Africanised English, which is not pidgin in itself, because some parts are literal translations of African linguistic constructions. The syntax and grammar used in these cases are far from what the normative English would consider acceptable. But still, those texts are understandable to Africans and non-African readers once they get used to these constructions. This reading experience holds back non-African readers and occasionally hinders comprehension or obstructs the flow of these stories. However, this is not the case for local readers. This is what makes non-local readers remember that the story and the storyteller come from Africa and not from any other part of the world.

John Wiredu and Irene M. Danysh's article, "The Ghanaian Voice, A Ghanaian's Statement: Language in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes*," analyses Aidoo's linguistic competence when it comes to the bending of English language to suit her aims. She locates her novel in a Ghanaian context, in which characters and social and cultural traditions can be easily both identified by the Ghanaian readership and considered as African by non-Ghanaian readers. I have not included this novel in my research because it was written after the decades I analyse. However, I highlight the expression "Ghanaian voice," which endows Aidoo's work with this quality that *Odenkyem*—the focal Adinkra symbol in this Part V—endorses as the ability of adapting by choosing the right means to achieve some goals.

To accomplish her success, Aidoo embraces English and adapts it to the African reality she writes about in "No Sweetness Here," as her narrator announces. In fact, she uses a "Fanticised English" language.²² For Wiredu and Danysh, the "Ghanaianess" of her language can be pinpointed under these categories: "instances of Ghanaian customs, traditions, and beliefs," "exclamatory expletives," "vocabulary items," "direct translations" (90), and "images" (91), among others.

In 2012 Esi Sutherland-Addy particularly focused on Aidoo's language in her seminal essay, "Mfantse Meets English: Interpretations of Ama Ata Aidoo's Multilingual Idiom." She reminds readers that as a Mfantse native speaker she will unveil the different strata of the discourse behind Aidoo's mixture of English, Mfantse

²² Ama Ata Aidoo belongs to the Fanti ethnic group and I extrapolate Arndt's expression "Igboized English" to refer to the language Aidoo uses in her short stories.

and pidgin (329). She reaffirms that Aidoo reproduces the linguistic reality of her community in her re-presentation:

Ama Ata Aidoo often turns the assimilation of English to a variety of uses. Firstly, the lyrical appropriation of the English language by rural people, far from being made to sound clumsy, is rendered as a dignified and natural use of the given assimilated word fitting it into the texture of their own discourse. The words often represent new institutions, professions, and systems. (337)

Aidoo also includes many inherited words non-related to the Ghanaian language in her work, especially those used in remote villages. Some illustrative examples are found in her short story “No Sweetness Here” included in the book with this same title: “Chicha” (56) stands for “Teacher,” “Kudiimin-o” for “Good evening” (58) or “Tanchiw” (59) for “Thank you,” This is repeated in her short story, “In the Cutting of a Drink”: “Lamlale” (34) for “lemonade” or “Klas Tri” (31) for “Class three.” In “The Message” we read “Sodja” (40) that stands for “Soldier,” “Draba” (40) for “Driver” or “Tengram”(42) for “Telegram.”

All this kind of vocabulary is inherited from the colonial experience. It refers to elements introduced in the Ghanaian society by English colonists. Aidoo’s characters who live in remote villages and have no chance to go to school pronounce some English terms in this way. For Western readers the use of these language-devices reinforces the idea that even though Aidoo writes short stories and novels in English, her assimilation of vernacular expressions places her works in the African context, and provides her characters with their African idiosyncrasy.

Aidoo goes further and uses the character Zirigu’s simple pidgin to produce the most stinging political satire in “For Whom Things Did Not Change.” She performs this through spelling and Ghanaian pronunciation of some words, especially in conversations about the everyday trifles related to food or the previous visitors and guests who stayed in the rest house during the colonial era. These new spellings evoke the double sense of meaning and thus elevate her irony to simple, perceptible though very high level:

Massa, I beg. Don’t make so. I no wan’ vex you. This here chop, ’e be white man’s chop. ’E be the chop I cook for all massas, for fifteen years. The Ministars, the party people who stay for here, the big men from the

Ministries, the Unifartisy people, the big offisars from the army and police. [...] 'E be same chop, they chop, this white man chop.²³ (16)

Here, sarcasm is only intensified by the possible alternative meanings, which spring from the inherited words in a pidgin context. As Sutherland-Addy has highlighted: “it is clear that Aidoo is also inclined to use code switching in satire” (“Mfantse” 337). The corruption of ministers and the unscrupulousness of the political class are underscored by the idea behind the use of “ministars,” referring to the kleptocrats who take advantage of their higher position to steal their nation’s riches and live like stars. “Unifartisy people” could be understood as the people who are worth nothing. They could be the “pseudo-intellectuals” Aidoo mentions in *Our Sister Killjoy*. They are the educated people who become contemptible. They waste their time in trivial things, even though they might have the knowledge to change things. Moreover, they stink if their name contains the term “fart.” Finally, “Offisars” refers to those who are away from or do not fulfil their job as they should. In fact, they are off rather than on duty. A more farfetched meaning of “SAR” is the abbreviation of “Search and Rescue.” Hence, for Aidoo the army and police also participate in the decline of her country and, by extension, Africa. Many members in these security forces do nothing to change things, and when they do they only achieve the shifting of the profits from the previous government to the newly-established military government.

It is significant to mention that Aidoo uses at her will what Sutherland-Addy has called the corruption of words. Furthermore, Aidoo is able to make a same character use diverse terms in English, pidgin or African languages to suit her aims and to evince both the versatility of some African people and their concealed source of energy for subsistence. We can find many examples for these aspects in her collection of short stories, *No Sweetness Here*. For instance, the term “Massa” stands for “master,” and this is how Zirigu calls the dweller of the government rest house in “For Whom Things Did Not Change.” The fact that the guests are no longer white men, and that after independence the educated Ghanaians have replaced the British civil servants and held governmental posts, underscores the enslavement of the poor Ghanaian servants, who are half slaves and still oppressed. Zirigu as a black Ghanaian servant still sees his high-

²³ My translation: “Master I beg you. Don’t do that. I don’t want to vex you. This food here is White man’s food. It is the food I have cooked for all the masters for fifteen years. The Ministers, the party people who stay here, the big men from the Ministries, the University people, the big officers from the army and the police. [...] it is the same food they eat. This is White man’s food.”

positioned compatriot as a master, although Kobina—the guest—asks him fervently not to call him master and not to “wait on [him] hand and foot” (*No Sweetness* 14).

In this same short story the reader observes that Zirigu is skilful in varied languages, depending on the roles he adopts. He turns into an illustrative example of how Aidoo uses language aiming at highlighting the power that language conceals and the social reality it mirrors. When Zirigu speaks to his wife, Aidoo uses Standard English, and when speaking to Kobina he uses pidgin: “But why? For Massa, you fit sleep late. Weyting you go do for office? Like me, I wake early, yes. But you, no!” (*No Sweetness* 14).²⁴ However, Kobina speaks in Standard English reflecting that he is an educated man. Nevertheless, when Kobina insists on sharing his drinking with Zirigu and asks him to tell his story, the latter no longer addresses him as “Massa” but rather as “My young Master” (*No Sweetness* 23), and uses also standard English to indicate that they are communicating with each other at the same social level, as two compatriots do. When Zirigu serves the white man, he is under the yoke of colonialism. Things have not changed but Kobina has given him the chance to bring forward all the knowledge he acquired in his previous colonial experience. This kind of behaviour shows how Aidoo moulds her characters’ language to intentionally produce dramatic effects. Through the use of “Massa” she emphasizes that some social aspects and other affairs have not changed after ten years of independence, though some people have been testing a new attitude. This is verified by the servant’s vocabulary and underscored by Kobina’s standard English, correct grammar, and syntactical structure: “If you ask them, why ten years after independence, some of us still have to be slaves, they say you are nuts to ask questions like that” (*No Sweetness* 15).

Aidoo’s short story, “The Message,” re-presents the case of a grandmother in a village who wishes to go to Cape Coast to bring her granddaughter’s body back home for a traditional burial. Aidoo re-presents this story session with two groups of participants. The first group includes the old woman, her friends, and the driver from the village, whereas the second group consists of nurses, nursing sisters and doctor. The old woman thinks that her granddaughter died after the doctors “opened her up” (*No Sweetness* 38). The drama is created through the use of Fanti expressions of surprise and sorrow among the village people, thinking that the young granddaughter died when giving birth to her twins. The old woman cannot find her at the hospital since her

²⁴ My translation: “But why? Since you are the master, you can sleep late. What are you going to do at the office? For the ones like me (that is, in my position), I wake early, yes. But not you.”

granddaughter was not registered under her African name. In a last attempt to identify her the old grandmother says: “She came here to have a child ... ‘... and they say, they opened her stomach and removed the baby’” (*No Sweetness* 45). After a long wait, a nurse realizes who they are talking about and says: “Oh... oh, I see” [...] “I see. It is the Caesarean case” (*No Sweetness* 45). The use of the medical term “Caesarean” and the nurse’s questions to the driver create a gap between the two groups:

‘Did she bring all her clan?’
 ‘No. She came alone.’
 ‘Strange thing for a villager to do.’
 I hope they have not cut her up already.
 ‘Did she bring a whole bag full of cassava and plantain and kenkey?’
 ‘No. She has only her little bundle.’
 ‘Follow me. But you must not make any noise. This is not the hour for coming here’. (*No Sweetness* 45)

In addition to the nurse’s intentionality to highlight the social class and generation differences between these two groups of people, she worsens the situation with her mocking tone. Aidoo’s narrator uses her hyphenated phrase to re-present the nurse as “Scrappy nurse-under-training, Jessy Treeson, second-generation-Cape-Coaster-her-grandmother-still-remembered-at Egyaa No.7 said, ‘As for these villagers,’ and giggled” (*No Sweetness* 46). Of course, this hurt the driver who “looked hard at her, all of her: her starched uniform, apron and cap [...] and then dismissed them all” (*No Sweetness* 46). The nurse’s complete knowledge of the traditions and customs of the old generation of her own people—and her scoffing at the villagers and giggling—immediately erect a wall that separates the non-educated villagers from the pseudo-educated or professional Africans.

It becomes clear that Aidoo’s use of language is intentional and conveys the representation of the Ghanaian embracement of English but also a definite critical attitude to colonisation and corruption in the whole African continent.

5.2.2. AIDOO’S MFANTSE RELEXIFICATION

I have followed Susan Arndt’s concept of relexification even though she defines it in the context of her research on Igbo women writers’ texts. In her study, Arndt defines relexification as “what is rendered into the English language” that are “not lexical units of Igbo, but its idiom, formulas and oral texts” (69-70). In this case, I will apply relexification to the Mfantse idioms and oral formula translated into English.

Aidoo's "Fanticised" language included the relexification of the Mfantse or Fanti idioms.²⁵ In her use of Ghanaian traditional forms of art and its adaptation to the Western short story, she entitled one of her short stories with the relexification of Mfantse idiom, "In the Cutting of a Drink." Here, she also uses the expression "Cut me a drink" (*No Sweetness* 33), which is a pure example of relexification replacing the request for a drink in a bar: "Serve me a drink." This story draws upon the typical formulaic sentences used in oral storytelling sessions that I assign to Arndt's idea of relexification, since there is an adaptation of English to Fante language: "I am cooking the whole meal for you, why do you want to lick the ladle now?" (*No Sweetness* 35). This idiomatic expression implies that listeners are in a hurry to know how the story ends, and also anticipates questions, whereas the storyteller wants to tell the whole story in detail and calls his listeners' attention. A closer reading also informs that the storyteller was chronicling his adventure in the city in his Fante language, since he comments about the people laughing at him while dancing at a nightclub: "He said something in the white man's language and they started laughing again" (*No Sweetness* 34), and in recounting his experience the storyteller uses Fante. Later, someone invites him to dance: "Then I heard her ask me in Fante whether I wanted to dance with her" (*No Sweetness* 35). In this case, language separates the villager from the city dwellers. The storyteller cannot cope with the city people speaking in English. However, he feels at ease when he is addressed in his own language, Fante.

Another example of relexification can be found in Aidoo's "Other Versions": "[...] and Mother took me up to the mouth of the road" (*No Sweetness* 130) or in "Something to Talk About on the Way to the Funeral," when one of the characters asks: "Yes, look at that crowd. Is Auntie Araba's family house near the mouth of this road?" (*No Sweetness* 123). These examples might become weird to non-African readers. Moreover, some of Aidoo's relexifications are related to gossiping such as "Hmm, let me shut my trouble-seeking mouth up" (*No Sweetness* 115), "And don't go standing in the river telling people" (*No Sweetness* 115), "there are plenty of things in the world's old box to pick up and talk about, my sister" (116) or "Everyone said that the road always has stories to tell" (*No Sweetness* 123). Another formulaic utterance is used when the person who is telling the story is interrupted: "That is the story I am telling

²⁵ Esi Sutherland-Addy clarifies that "The Mfantse-speaking people are also known more generally as Fantes" ("Mfantse" 330). However, Vincent Odamtten refers to these people as Fanti or Fantse. Hence, Fante, Fanti, Fantse and Mfantse may refer to the same ethnic group and language.

you. I am taking you to bird-town so I can't understand why you insist on searching for eggs from the suburb!" (*No Sweetness* 118). Finally, in "The Late Bud" Aidoo starts her short story with a saying that is another case of relexification "The good child who willingly goes on errands eats the food of peace" (*No Sweetness* 103).

5.2.3. AIDOO'S FANTICISED ENGLISH

Illustratively, Sutherland-Addy affirms that "Aidoo is one of Africa's writers who has been building 'African literary English'" ("Mfantse" 336). In the process of constructing this post-colonial language, her task passes from the stage of the relexification of English to the use of a purely "Fanticised" English until she arrives at the point where she no longer translates or describes, but rather writes in Mfantse (cf. Sutherland-Addy, "Mfantse" 338). She is loyal to the Mfantse women community and hands on to the new Ghanaian generations their real voices through her new African written narratives. I call it Fanti-lexification mimicking Arndt's coined expression of Igbo-lexification. This is exemplified in "Something to Talk About on the Way to the Funeral," in which Aidoo italicizes the denominations one of the gossipers enumerates in a single paragraph, and which are related to the products Auntie Araba can make and bake out of flour: "Lord, there is no type of dough of flour they say she has not mixed and fried or baked. *Epitsi? Tataré? Atwemo? Bofrot? Boodo? Boodoo-ngo? Sweetbad?*" (*No Sweetness* 117). Aidoo uses footnotes to write down the meaning, definition or explanation of each product in English so as to allow readers get the picture of each product. I rely on Sutherland-Addy's help for another example of Fanti-lexification from "In the Cutting of a Drink," which focuses on the Ghanaian peoples' idiosyncrasy and their agricultural problems. It is a term related to an insect called Akatse: "I told him [...] how last year the *akatse* spoiled all our cocoa" (*No Sweetness* 32).

Conversely, this author does not always use the context—as Emecheta does—to clarify the meanings of some Fanti words. This is evinced in "The Message," in which the main character is an old woman from a remote village who is informed that her granddaughter has a baby through a caesarean delivery. The poor old grandmother cannot even imagine how this surgical procedure can be done without killing her granddaughter. This short story has many examples of Fanti-lexification, and following Sutherland-Addy's approach these expressions "form part of a lexicon associated with women" ("Mfantse" 340). In the beginning of this short story—when women talk about

how they “opened up” the granddaughter—an astonished woman listener says: “*Meewuo!*” (*No Sweetness* 38), which is an expression with multiple options used when someone is astonished. For Sutherland-Addy, it literally means “I am dead” or in Fante “*Yoo*” (39), which means “alright” or “I hear,” but it is also related to “*Eno due, due, due,*” (40) which—as Sutherland-Addy explained to me in her 2004 tutorials—is an expression of condolence, or “sorry” for some tragic or difficult situation. “*Poo*” (*No Sweetness* 38, 39, 41) stands for “poor” and appears more than once in this short story and usually comes before the term “pity” to emphasise the English word “pity” (*No Sweetness* 340); and “*Tchiaa!*” (*No Sweetness* 41), which for Sutherland-Addy means “ridiculous” and it is used to express a negative perception when somebody lies or simply someone cannot believe in him. In “Something to Talk About on the Way to the Funeral,” we can observe the term “*Whopei!*” (*No Sweetness* 124), which Aidoo uses six times on the same page and stands for “oh no!” This is an expression of dismay and disgust. Additionally, Aidoo inserts many greetings in vernacular language, such as “*Ayekoo*” that means “well done,” “thank you” or “congratulations,” depending on the context (*No Sweetness* 59) used very often by everybody in Ghana, with its answer “*Yaa*” (*No Sweetness* 59). It is easy to find in many of Aidoo’s short stories included in *No Sweetness Here* the interjection “*Eheh?*” (123). The author uses it in italics denoting that it is part of the Fanti language, and used with the interrogation tone of “yes?” Currently, the answer that usually follows is “*Nyo*” (123), which means “Yes.”

An increasing Fanti-lexification appears when Aidoo’s characters speak about specific local things, such as when Adwoa says: “I just rushed into my room to pick up my *akatado* when I heard the news” (*No Sweetness* 114). As Sutherland-Addy personally explained to me, an “*akatado*” is a second cloth Fanti women dress as a sign of adulthood, and usually employed to carry the babies. Moreover, on that same page some characters talk about the Bosoë dance group, and Sutherland-Addy elucidates that the Bosoë was a popular performance. Indeed, the chain of words coming after the Fanti word alludes to dancing and singing. The context helps to assume that the term “*Akwanbo*” refers to “the festival and the libation ceremony” (*No Sweetness* 114), which the family of the dead person most probably celebrate a few days after the first funeral. Another example is “*Bosohwe*” (cf. *No Sweetness* 115), which is a Fanti expression that means “Come and taste it”—as Sutherland-Addy defended in her tutorial. People use this expression for the name of the place where Araba bakes her bread and African cakes. Aidoo also use a Ghanaian idiophone like “*Yetse-yetse*” (cf.

No Sweetness 121) to refer to Ghanaian snobbish persons. Sutherland-Addy affirmed to me that this expression is used in all the Ghanaian languages.

Aidoo's use of Fanti-lexification expands to the different kinds of Ghanaian dishes. For example, in "For Whom Things Did Not Change" it serves to indicate the origin of the speaker. Although Ghanaians share their food independently of the ethnic group that brews it, they have specific denominations for it depending on their origin:

'I say, Zirigu, can the Mother count my stomach in for the evening's meal?'

'Massa. I no wan' play?'

'I'm not playing.'

Heh? God. You mean you go eat *tuo*?

'Why not? At home I eat *banku*. Isn't it the same? One of rice, the other of corn? Aren't they all farina? Semolina? Whatever?' (*No Sweetness* 18)

Sutherland-Addy suggested to me that "Tuo" is a kind of a stiff porridge made of rice flour, whereas "Banku" is the name in Ga language for stiff porridge made of mashed corn. In this same short story *Kobina*, the medical doctor who is a guest at the rest house, drinks Pito, the Northern Ghana millet beer, with the servant Zirigu. However, it is interesting to know that both Zirigu and his wife belong to the Hausa ethnic group since she prepares and sells "Kaffa" and "Agidi" as staple food made of corn. Hence, it is thanks to Sutherland-Addy's suggestions that non-African readers learn from the context. For example, Zirigu's wife Setu was a Moslem, although they might miss the fact that she comes from the Hausa ethnic group.

It is also worth highlighting that Aidoo's characters' names are almost all Fante names following the tradition of naming according to the weekday of birth. *Kobina* from "For Whom Things Did Not Change" must have been born on Tuesday. Esi Amfoa, both grandmother and granddaughter from "The Message," must have been born on Sunday. Kwesi, the little boy in "No Sweetness Here," must have been born on Sunday too, and his mother Maami Ama on Saturday. In "A Gift from Somewhere," the little boy, who was about to die, was called Kweku because he was born on Wednesday, and as his mother explains: "Somehow, he did not die. To his day name Kweku, I have added Nyamekye. Kweku Nyamekye. For, was he not a gift from God through the Mallam of the Bound Mouth" (*No Sweetness* 81). Kofi, from "Other Versions" was born on Friday. Hence, from the names of most of her characters we know that they belong to the Mfantse social group.

Conclusively, Aidoo's relexification serves to bring the Ghanaian language and culture into visibility. In combining both the mode of the Western short story and Ghanaian reality, she has succeeded in demonstrating her loyalty to her African community and helped to hear the real voice of the new Ghanaian generations.

5.2.4. BUCHI EMECHETA'S LANGUAGES

Marie Umeh elucidates that Emecheta has acknowledged that "her British education has exerted considerable influence on her writing in that both her attitude and her language are very English" ("Introduction" xxx). In her autobiography, *Head Above Water* (1986), Emecheta explains how her teacher, Miss Humble, did not accept Emecheta's dreams of becoming a writer in her school days:

I came to the conclusion that Miss Humble probably felt that her language was too good for the likes of me to want to use as a means of expression. But that was the only language I was being taught to write. If I spoke my Igbo language or any other Nigerian one in the school compound, I would be given a bad mark or asked to pay a fine. (22)

In the same year of the publication of her autobiography, Emecheta also confesses in an interview with Adeola James that she unfortunately cannot write stories in her own language. And in spite of being able to write in Yoruba, she cannot write in Igbo. Therefore, she has to write in English (cf. Emecheta, "Interview with Adeola James" 37). However, Emecheta has repeatedly justified her use of the English language, such as in her famous article "Feminism with a Small 'f'":

I learned to my dismay at school in Lagos that if I wanted to tell stories to people from many places I would have to use a language that was not my first—neither was it my second, or third, but my fourth language. This made my stories lose a great deal of their colour, but I learned to get by. (552)

Even believing that her stories would lose the local Igbo colour, she has demonstrated to manage the English language conveying the new woman writer's ability for adaption, as the philosophy behind the *Odenkyem* symbol demands. Emecheta also shuffles the English semantics to reproduce literal African expressions in her re-presentation of Africa and Africans in her three novels I analyse here.

As Susan Arndt points out,²⁶ Emecheta, as one of the Igbo women writers, has used the English language, but she "displays traits of [her] native language" (*African*

²⁶ Susan Arndt's work is the result of an exhaustive research based on the close reading of many Igbo novels and Igbo women writers' short stories. She also analyses critics and theorists on African, and

69). Emecheta inserts a large amount of African lexis, mostly Igbo, and occasionally Yoruba and Hausa, with the intention of Africanising both the scenery and language of her villagers. These are especially located between the 1900s and 1950s, a period in which illiteracy was the common state of many, if not all, inhabitants in the remote villages in Africa.

Susan Arndt relies on the term “relexification,” which the American linguist William Alexander Stewart coined in 1962, while working on sociolinguistics and more particularly on Creole language. For Stewart, relexification occurs in the cases when “The vocabulary derived from one source language has been largely replaced [...] by a more recent vocabulary derived from another language while the original grammatical structure is preserved” (Stewart). I embrace Arndt’s terms of Igbo-lexification that she defines as a process whereby the “Igbo women writers introduce Igbo words (above all nouns), word groups, sentences and passages into their anglophone novels and short stories” (*African* 69). As mentioned above, I also follow her approach to relexification defined in the context of the Igbo writers’ texts as: “what is rendered into the English language is not lexical units of Igbo, but its idiom, formulas and oral texts such as *Ilu* [proverbs] and *Afa-Ozo* [praise names]” (*African* 69-70).

Emecheta’s first three African novels do not include any glossary to help non-African readers with the foreign words. In contrast for instance, she adds a two-page glossary to explain Igbo, Yoruba, and pidgin words at the end of *Kehinde* (1994). Emecheta is not a trendsetter in the use of these mechanisms to Africanise or rather “Igboize”²⁷ these novels, but she might be one of the best Igbo women writers to amalgamate both English and Igbo in the 1970s. To measure her ability at writing, the reader-friendly concept helps bridge the language gap. The intrusion of Igbo language does not interrupt or delay the access to her accomplishment, and enjoyment of her story. Furthermore, Arndt’s comparisons of Emecheta’s work with other women writers leads her to conclude: “The translations in Emecheta’s novel possess an aesthetic maturity which is unequalled [sic] by other Igbo woman authors” (*African* 82).

specifically, Igbo oral traditions. She presents her data statistically and her main goal is to develop a comparative study searching for the intertextuality between those writings and the traditional Igbo oral narratives. For the first time, the corpus is limited to the Igbo women narratives, since other critics mainly focused on African male writing.

²⁷ This term was coined by Susan Arndt in her article “Buchi Emecheta and the Tradition of *Ifo*”: “I use the term *igboizing* of contemporary literature by analogy with Chinweizu, Madubuike and Jemie, who said that African literature has to be Africanized to be decolonized” (51).

5.2.5. EMECHETA'S USE OF IGBO NAMES AND PRAISE NAMES

Emecheta has insisted in her autobiography that her African novel *The Bride Price* is a story about traditions (*Head* 154). Her main characters have to move from the city of Lagos to their village Ibuza, in which both education and knowledge are circumscribed by the Igbo community traditions and moral values. Emecheta assigns her narrator to translate the meaning of the characters' names to ultimately reveal that the author intentionally chose their names to intensify the dramatization effect. For example "Aku-nna" the name of the main character in *The Bride Price* means "father's wealth" (4), and her brother "Nna-nndo": "Father is the shelter" (25). Paradoxically, these names do not guarantee the accomplishment of their meanings. Firstly, because their father dies at the beginning of the novel and the family no longer holds for the Igbo tradition. Secondly, because Aku-nna will not bring to her new family any wealth—the bride price—but rather loss and tragedy through her marriage to the wrong husband, again opposing the Igbo tradition.

Moreover, Aku-nna's mother thought that she was an *ogbanje*, a "living dead" (cf. 4), since she was always ill and about to die. The term *ogbanje* is also used as a name in *The Slave Girl*. The main character's name is Ogbanje Ojebeta, because *Ogbanje* also refers to the Igbo belief of "the dead child reincarnated," since her mother had had already many girls and they all died after birth. By the end of this novel the main character acquires a new name, Alice, in addition to her Igbo name, as a sign of her Christianisation and modernisation process (cf. 158). Her brother's name Okolie means that he was born on the Olie market day (cf. 6), and it is precisely in the market where he will sell his sister.

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, "Nnu-Ego," the main female character's name, means "twenty bags of cowries," which is a large amount of wealth and correlates with her father Agbadi's perception of her as a very precious and awaited child: "This child is priceless, more than twenty bags of cowries" (26). This name intensifies the irony that the author intends since Nnu-Ego leads a hard life for the sake of her children, and mainly their education. At her father's death, Nnu-Ego goes to Ibuza to bid him farewell and has her seventh child after the burial ceremony. The family decides to call him "Nnamdio" meaning "This is my father," for the Igbo family believes that this was the dead father reincarnated again as his daughter's boy (cf. 155). Finally, the narrator presents the names of the last female twins that Nu-Ego has: Obiageli, meaning "She

who has come to enjoy wealth,” and Malachi, meaning “You do not know what tomorrow will bring” (cf. 187).

The naming procedure, an aspect also analyzed by Susan Arndt, is very significant in the Igbo culture. It conveys many details about the place of birth, day, precedent family factors and status, as well as information about the tradition of the community. Emecheta, in her ambition of bringing closer the European novel to her African reality, fulfils her loyalty to this aspect regarding the Igbo naming, and aims at using the right names to suit her stories’ plot or her characters’ outcome.

Moreover, she also introduces the praise names that refer to the names that Igbo communities confer on the living and non-living elements as an act of praising or honouring them. They can be human beings, animals, objects, and villages. Arndt identifies them in Igbo language as *Afa-Ozo*, and asserts they “are metaphorical, often elliptical word groups, which call attention to outstanding features, modes of behaviour, accomplishments or deeds of a person or his or her family” (*African* 145). Praise names are precious examples of “relexification.” In *the Bride Price* Emecheta explains through her narrator:

Every Ibuza person, with exception of slaves and the children of slaves, was addressed with particular names of praise in a special greeting. Uncle Richard’s greeting was the same as her father’s, since their great-grandfathers were of the same parents [their grandfathers were cousins]: *Odozi ani*, which meant literally “beautifier of the land” but also had the sense of “bringer of peace.” (34)

Hence, this relexification is to render the praise name of “Odozi Ani” into “beautifier of the land” or “bringer of peace,” becoming diverse in the English translation of this Igbo praise name. In this novel we also learn the praise name that Ma Blackie, Aku-nna’s mother, was addressed with “Amu-apa,” which translates into the relexification as “she who rocks her baby” (43). However, on other occasions the process is closely adhered to word-by-word correspondence. This is the case of the medicine man who is addressed by Ma Blackie as “Igwe,” which means “the heavens” because as the narrator explains this medicine man was also “a red-cap chief, and these chiefs were owners of the heavens” (43).

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta re-presents Obi Idayi, a friend of the main character’s father, directly through the relexification of his praise name: “He who roars like a lion” (29), without the need to put down the words in Igbo as she did in her previous African novels. In contrast, it is significant to highlight that Joyce Cary did not

not use either African names or praise names in his *Mr Johnson*—tagged as African literature by the western canon—since he had no competence in these African traditions and matters.

5.2.6. IGBO TERMS FOR IGBO PARTICULARITIES IN EMECHETA

Emecheta's three African novels, far from being ethnographical or anthropological works, they become rich in native expressions and words. These bring forward the traditions of the Igbo community so as to set the novels in an “authentic” African setting that guarantees the continuity of the African identity of this community during and after colonisation. In order to achieve this, on many occasions Emecheta uses Arndt's Igbo-lexification mentioned above. Through her narrators we learn how her people have words for maladies common in Africa such as *iba*. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, the narrator reveals the meaning of the word “Iba” through its contextualisation: “Agbadi's early fear had been that it might be *iba*, the malaria which killed anyone in a short time” (24). The definition of this word is produced through the use of the comma after the word as we can see in this example.

Nevertheless, her people also experience new maladies, which were unknown to them at the time Emecheta wrote her novels. This is the case of *The Slave Girl*, when the epidemic influenza was killing the Africans who had either gone to Europe to diverse wars or with the arrival of soldiers in Africa. Here, the gongman warns the people in the markets about the deadly disease, “There is a kind of death coming from across the salty waters. It has killed many people in Isele Azagba, it is creeping to Ogwashi, it is now coming to us. They call it Felenza. It is white man's death” (19). These people become confused and think that it is the smallpox epidemics they suffered in the past and had named it after their hard experience, as the narrator tells us: “They had experienced disease like smallpox, which was so feared that they gave it the name of ‘Nna ayin’—‘Our Father’ or at that time smallpox meant death” (19). Hence, they give the smallpox an Igbo name whereas they just embraced or corrupted the term “influenza” and transformed it into “Felenza.”

There are also other Igbo terms referring to entities or diverse affairs and aspects, which are part of the Igbos' everyday life, but have no correspondence in the English language. For example, the term *chi*, which is the name of a personal god as the narrator points out in *The Joys of Motherhood*: “Then she would be able to seek out and

meet her *chi*, her personal god, and she would ask her why she had punished her so. She knew her *chi* was a woman” (9). Or, when Nnu-Ego’s son Oshia passed his exams she insisted: “Oshia, when are you going to buy your father a bottle of white man’s whisky to toast your *chi* for making you pass your exams?” (199-200). In fact, *chi* is a spiritual entity that mediates between each Igbo person and the rest of the Igbo gods. The village’s traditional people fear their personal god. However, Nnaife’s second wife Adaku, whom he has inherited from his belated brother, is ambitious and wishes to abandon Nnaife’s household:

‘I’m leaving this stuffy room tomorrow, senior wife.’
 ‘To go and worship your *chi*?’
 ‘My *chi* be damned! I am going to be a prostitute. Damn my *chi*! She added again fiercely.
 Nnu-Ego could not believe her ears. ‘Do you know what you are saying Adaku? The *chi*, your personal god, that gave you life—’. (168)

Hence, *chi* is also a giver of life, mediator, and mostly responsible for all the outcomes in Emecheta’s Igbo characters.

Both men and women have their personal *chi*. In *The Bride Price* the narrator explains that Aku-nna’s stepfather was determined to hurt the young girl who wanted to marry the wrong man asking his *chi* to hurt her: “So it came as no surprise to Ma Blackie to see the image of her daughter one morning in front of Okonkwo’s *chi*, his personal god, when she just happened to be passing by” (164).

Emecheta divulges in her autobiography, *Head Above Water*, that *The Slave Girl* is her mother’s story. In this novel she re-presents the astonishing episode about the birth of who turns later into the slave girl. Her narrator is the authorial omniscient entity introducing concepts such as “*ogbanje*,” referring to “this visitor” child who is born to Umeadi, and “looks as if she is staying this time” (10). Emecheta re-presents some aspects associated with the Igbos’ spiritual practices. For example, Umeadi’s efforts to conceive this baby girl and save her from death as it had happened in the past: “her mind went to all the sacrifices she had made to her *chi*, the personal god to whom every Ibuza individual appealed in time of trouble” (10). Moreover, in addition to her *chi*’s help, Emecheta describes how Umeadi needs “her *dibia*, the native doctor,” to consult what to do to help her daughter live (cf. 10). It is interesting to highlight that Emecheta’s Igbo-lexifications explained through the context of African experience are all italicized in the novel except for the term “*dibia*,” which is an Igbo name for the medicine man. Nevertheless, in *The Bride Price* Emecheta italicizes “*dibia*”: “Don’t

worry now; if there had been anything wrong that medicine-man, that *dibia* would have told you” (44). Another example can be found in *The Slave Girl*, in which the narrator explains the Igbo term “*nso*” through the context of Ogbanje Ojebeta’s birth: “Luckily she was able to call for assistance from Ukabewu’s wife, who had stayed home because it was her time of month when she was under *nso*”(9).

There are more Igbo-lexifications related to Igbo social customs, values, and traits with no equivalence in the English language. These terms fix characters to the Igbo society within a time and place marked context. Their fundamental function is to re-present the authentic African reality and identity. This is exemplified in *The Bride Price*, when the narrator explains why a forced marriage occurs: “Even as they were doing all this, they knew it was useless. Aku-nna had gone. All the man responsible had to do was cut a curl of her hair—‘*isi nmo*’—and she would belong to him for life” (138). Another social aspect that Emecheta re-presents in this novel is the rejection of intermarriage between Igbo people and slave descendants, “For a girl from a good family to marry the descendant of a slave would be an abomination, *ife alu*” (113). Related to this Igbo social rule and in a previous chapter of this novel, the narrator had already introduced another term, *Oshu*, to describe the teacher, Chike: “He was handsome and though women knew that he came from an ‘*oshu*’ slave family, they pretended not to see it” (84); or, in another instance: “but those same people would insist that he was an *oshu*, the son of a common slave” (93).

Emecheta also deploys her knowledge about the African vegetation to comply with the African particularities with no correspondence in English. In *The Bride Price*, the narrator describes the village school building and refers to some leaves by their African names rather than any scientific Latin term or English name. Most probably, they belong to the African vegetation, “The building was long, whitened with clay, but the window shutters were darkened with black *uli* leaves. The windows were circular and the doors were very small, and the roof was artistically covered with *akanya* leaves” (81).

Further in this same novel, Emecheta also brings forward African artistic traditions, as those when the narrator re-presents the age-group activities that Aku-nna has to practice: “they all spent the evenings learning their special *aja* dance” (104). Moreover, when the narrator describes the dance teacher who was preparing the age-group celebration also praises his abilities: “He was very good at composing and singing the *aja* songs” (105). In fact, non-Igbo readers will never know how the *aja*

song and dance are performed until they see them sometime, although the use of common nouns after the word *aja* clarifies that these are specific African dances and songs. In addition to this, the narrator explains that to perform this dance the girls have to put on some special accessories: “The girls talked and dreamed about their outing dance. They worked and saved hard to buy their *jigida*, the red and black beads which they would wear above their bikini-like pants” (105). We can see that instead of writing “jigida beads” the narrator uses the context and inserts the whole explanation between commas.

This Nigerian author also introduces names of African food followed by explanations in *The Bride Price*: “*Akpu*, as the cassava pulp was called locally was a heavy foodstuff made from the roots of the cassava plant” (62); or accompanied by the generic name such as “Ma Blackie, sitting there on the veranda plaiting her long, black, shinny hair, telling her that they were having her favourite Agbona soup” (15), so that we know that they are talking about some kind of African soup. On other occasions, food names are described with more details in many instances, such as in this case: “agbona is a vegetable that draws like okra, and it made the swallowing of pounded yam very easy and tasted delicious” (15).

The narrator in *The Bride Price* uses the context again to explain the meaning of the term “*owele*” in the same novel: “Just as she was coming out of the *owele*, the women’s lavatory, she saw Okonkwo’s youngest wife Ezebona rushing in” (46). Emecheta also serves of her narrator to indicate the diverse kinds of cloths almost every African has in an Igbo or Yoruba village: “You are taught from childhood that when you sit you must make the cloth of your lappa, called *iro* in Yoruba, into a kite like shape, so that a point of it goes between your legs, to cover your sex” (14). Here the narrator only italicizes the Yoruba term “*iro*,” in contrast to the Igbo term “lappa,” as if the whole sentence were written in Igbo. In doing this, Emecheta underscores that she is an Igbo herself, and the foreign language here is the Yoruba language and not English. She repeats this further in the novel, considering that there is no need to keep on explaining what a lappa is: “Obiajulu and the other girls discarded their knee-length lappas on top of the pile of firewood” (116). In this last sequence there is no mention of the term “cloth” and “*lappa*” is not italicized, and additionally it is in plural imitating the English plural forms. This same aspect reappears later in the novel when Aku-nna is kidnapped to marry the young Okoboshi “The young woman showed Aku-nna a pile of new lappas which they had bought for her to wear” (140). In this same episode

Okoboshi's family take Aku-nna into "a room where the mud couch had been colourfully painted, and on the other side was a wooden bed, spread with a white *otuogwo* cloth that was edged with red checked patterns" (14). Here we know that *Otuogwo* is a cloth, but in Emecheta's glossary in *Kehinde*, *otu-ogwu* is a "cloth wound about the body under the armpit," whereas a *lappa* is "wrapped around the waist" (*Kehinde* 144).

It is significant to highlight that "lappas" are not only used by women but also by men. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, by the end of the novel, the police come to detain Nnaife. He "had thrown around him loosely" his "night cloth" when Nnu Ego had asked the police to allow her "to hide [his] nakedness," for he was her husband and the father of her children: "'Please, policeman, let me tie his lappa round him more securely.' Nnaife stood there unmoved, as Nnu Ego tied the lappa tightly, making an extra knot so that, however much he was pushed and tousled, it would not come off" (211).

Emecheta also presents English terms in her first three African novels. They had become part of the Igbos' language, even of some who lived in remote villages. Emecheta, in her self-re-presentation as a member of the Igbo ethnic group, re-presents through a new spelling the Igbo pronunciation of these English words. It is simply a process of adaptation to the new experience of the characters' colonisation in her novels.

For instance, in *The Slave Girl* the narrator introduces Okwuekwu, the main character's father, reminding his occupation: "he was a 'Kortu-ma'—a court messenger" (6). Emecheta presents both the Igbo spelling and pronunciation of this non-African profession followed by the corresponding explanation in English. Moreover, she describes Okwuekwu as an Igbo man who cannot speak or understand either English or Portuguese, nor differentiate any of them. However, he knew when the European District officer wanted peace and silence to listen to judicial cases:

He would put his hands behind his back, take a few menacing steps as if to bear down on the offender, and then shout. 'Oda!' The newly installed DO had many times tried to teach him to repeat the whole sentence—'Order in the court', or 'Silence in this court'—but Okwuekwu could not be bothered with all that, and continued to use his own version. (8)

Emecheta reproduces other words in this same novel such as "Amoku" for "hammock" (7), "Tapilita" for "interpreter" (8), "Potokis" for "Portuguese" (56), "Germanis" for "Germans" (21), "Kinsheni" for "Kitchen," and as we saw above

“Felenza” for “Influenza” (19). In *The Bride Price* she mentions “dokitas” for “doctors” (46). Moreover, in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta re-presents her illiterate main character, coming from the village of Ogboli in Ibuza, as a survivor during her life in Lagos. She is proud to be able to bring up and educate all her boys: “Oh, I haven’t just got daughters, I have a son in ‘Emelika’, a boy in grammar school, and another who is going to be a farmer” (223). The term “Emelika” stands for “America.”

5.3. THE AFRICAN POLYPHYLETIC LITERARY CATEGORY

In his attempt to liberate the African novel from the genealogical tree of the European novel, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o writes in his work *Decolonizing the Mind*:

In any case the novel itself was an outgrowth from the earlier traditions of oral tales and of epic poetic narratives like those of Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey or those of Liyongo in Swahili literature. These were certainly the artforms of the peasantry. The African novel as an extended narrative in written form had antecedents in African oral literature. The most essential element in the oral tale as in that of the novel is still the story, the element of what happens next. The artistry lies in the various devices for maintaining the story. (69)

Another Kenyan specialist, Ali Mazrui, is conscious about the issue of literary genre related to the African literary production in the 1930s. He and other scholars affirm that Africa has always had poets, storytellers, and singers. Therefore it is not hard to incorporate the Western poetic tradition to an already existing art form. The indigenous art forms can be easily adapted to the short story, essays, and autobiography. Nevertheless, he and other scholars believe that “the novel was the most alien” (Mazrui, Andrade, Abdalaoui, Kunene, and Vansina 553). They remind us that the novel was also a relatively new literary genre in Europe, since it appears as “a product of the nineteenth century and the industrial revolution” (Mazrui, Andrade, Abdalaoui, Kunene, and Vansina 553). These scholars also understand that storytelling is common to all cultures, and therefore, “the transition to short stories was not so difficult” (Mazrui, Andrade, Abdalaoui, Kunene, and Vansina 553). They insist that, for at least a period of a thousand years, the West African griots have been accustomed to telling complex stories and even epics. In any case they point out that:

The novel as an art-form which fuses a single story with characterization, plot and narrative went beyond the conventions of the *griot*. Of all the literary forms which burst their way into Africa during European colonial rule, the novel was in many ways the most purely European. (553)

On the edge of the 21st century, Chinua Achebe reflects on the African literary production in his article “Today, the Balance of Stories.” In his defense of the African story he affirms that:

The twentieth century for all its many faults did witness a significant beginning, in Africa and elsewhere in the so-called Third World, of the process of “re-storying” peoples who had been knocked silent by the trauma of all kinds of dispossession. (79)

Moreover, his recognition of the validity of the traditional cultural resources for writing African literature comes along with the new hope that “in the final reckoning the people who will advance the universal conversation will be not copycats but those able to bring hitherto untold stories, along with new ways of telling” (Achebe, “Today” 83).

Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta might have appropriated the European bourgeois genre known as the novel. For these women writers both the novel and short story are the tools they have embraced to produce new African creations. Therefore, I borrow the adjective “polyphyletic”²⁸ from science, and I bring it forward to the field of African criticism. I propose the expression “African polyphyletic literary category” to provide a distinctive mark to the diverse African literary categories, which are difficult to classify under the strict Western literary canon. Especially, because they have derived from the combination of more than one traditional or ancestral group: the Western novel and short story, the African traditional oral art manifestations such as drama, storytelling, songs, dirges, and other forms not familiar to non-African scholars such as the Ghanaian *fefewo* or the Igbo *Ifo*.

In an attempt to root African writing in its own particular culture, the Bolekaja group—composed by Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike—recommend the use of the oral techniques in storytelling so as to include an African dramatic dimension to the narrative written prose:

It should also be possible to utilize in these narrative forms, and in novels and stories as well, the traditional style of oral rendition where the

²⁸ The Merriam-Webster dictionary associates this term with the international scientific vocabulary and defines it as “relating to or being a taxonomic group that includes members (as genera or species) from different ancestral lineages” <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/polyphyletic>>. I embrace it in this dissertation to apply to the field of literature with the same sense it has in the scientific world. Therefore, I propose the new expression of “African polyphyletic literary category” used in relation to African literary works involved in the group of fiction, which definitely derive from “different ancestral lineages.”

audience is assumed to be, not a reader or readers, but a group of participant-listener. Such a rendition would mean that the written story would have as a narrator a master story-teller, a spell-binding raconteur whose delivery will conform to the styles of traditional story telling, utilizing its familiar techniques and rhetorical devices with the audience chiming in with questions, comments and laughter, interrupting the narrative form time to time, and taking part in those segments of the narrative which call for group singing or dramatization. (260-261).

The Bolekaja group's intention is to employ African traditional devices so as to produce a work of art that displays those qualities showing the new features of contemporary African literary trends. It is worth noting that these three critics prescribed what is quoted above in 1980, much later than Aidoo, who was already using the traditional style they defend in the 1960s and 1970s.

5.3.1. AMA ATA AIDOO AND THE AFRICAN ORAL STORYTELLING TRADITION

Aidoo's first collection of short stories published in 1970, *No Sweetness Here*, evinces what the Bolekaja group recommended much later. This group's quotation above fits at least three of Aidoo's short stories included in *No Sweetness Here*: "The Message," "In the Cutting of a Drink," and "Something to Talk About on the Way to the Funeral." They all are built up in the way these critics set forth the steps to create a new African literary art form. Moreover, her short story "Satisfaction?" (1971), later published as "Payments" (1997), contains more elements of the African tradition oral forms than what the critics had suggested earlier, as I demonstrate on the next pages.

Aidoo, a young author then, told Maxine McGregor during an interview in 1967 that:

If I don't have a play around, I will invite people to come to listen to poetry, either in English or in Fanti, or to come to listen to tales, folktales, or modern stories—entertain them—I mean this is my concept of entertainment. In fact I pride myself on the fact that my stories are written to be heard, primarily. (Aidoo, "Interview with Maxine McGregor" 24)

In this fusion between Western written narratives and the African way of telling stories, Aidoo's cornerstone is the use of the Ghanaian oral tradition techniques of storytelling to render a piece of art. This implies the existence of an expectant audience at the fringe of the story itself, though they form part of the whole process in this new

literary piece. Aidoo resolves their expectations by having the storyteller commenting on their reactions and answering their questions, which the readers never read in a direct speech style. Even though Esi Sutherland-Addy refers to the participants in this kind of storytelling session as the “participatory auditor” (“Narrative” 61), and the Bolekaja group calls them “participant-listener” (Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike 260), I refer to them as the “audience-within,” since their existence is within the limits of the written realm and their involvement is curbed by Aidoo’s final intention. They become part of the innermost level of the fictional act in this kind of storytelling, in which only the same storyteller echoes what they could have said. This is exemplified in a close reading of “In the Cutting of a Drink” included in *No Sweetness Here* because the narrator keeps saying “yes, my uncle” (31), or “My mother, do not interrupt me,” (31), or “Oh, my mother and my aunt, oh, little sister, are you all weeping?” (37), and the most interesting instance is when Aidoo inserts an interjection supposedly uttered by someone in the audience with the storyteller’s response effects: “Do not say ‘Ei’, uncle, it seems as if people do this thing in the city” (33). This act of re-presenting what the “audience-within” says—through indirect speech—turns the storyteller into an actor that brings together the first level of the “audience-within” and the second level of receivers, who are the readers of Aidoo’s short story. Moreover, it is worth quoting at length the following paragraphs to observe how Aidoo submits the different vernacular oral techniques to the written arena, exemplified through interjections, supposed connectedness of the audience-within and the storyteller-within, and the use of idioms, folk sayings or proverbs:

Yes, I danced too, my uncles. I did not know anyone, that is true. *My uncle, do not say that instead of concerning myself with the business for which I had gone to the city, I went dancing.* Oh, if you only knew what happened at this place, you would not be saying this. I would not like to stop somewhere and tell you the end [...] I would rather like to put a rod under the story, as it were, clear off every little creeper in the bush (emphasis added). (35)

[...]

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

These quotations become a kind of a monologue that echoes emotions, questions, exclamations, and other expressions. Aidoo's mastery in fusing both modes of telling stories—oral and written—is deployed when this reproduces in this narrative the effect of anxiety in the audience-within, who are eager to know if the villager ever found his sister in the city. I have emphasized the indirect speech in the quotation above, in which the storyteller addresses the audience-within. Moreover, the raconteur has a power that can calm down the audience and teach them to be patient: "I would not like to stop somewhere and tell you the end [...] I would rather like to put a rod under the story, as it were, clear off every little creeper in the bush" (35).

Aidoo also re-presents popular sayings from the oral tradition of the storytelling in this written narrative, which is related to the idea of not leaving behind any detail. Finally, it is important to point out that Aidoo's images and figures of speech ground most of her short stories, re-presenting the tradition of African realistic oral storytelling. The simile from "In the Cutting of a Drink," in which the Fante villager character addresses his audience-within, "I hope I am making myself clear, my uncles, but I was trembling like water in a brass bowl" (35), underscores the significance of the storyteller's knowledge about the common experience he and his people share in order to explain emotions and mental state.

In this short story, as well as in some other cases mentioned above, Aidoo uses the storyteller as an embedded identity—the main character—within the act of the storytelling, who as a raconteur provokes reactions and responses from the audience-within. I have called this entity the "storyteller-within," because even though the final product is a written short story, the real storyteller is Ama Ata Aidoo herself. Hence, she writes, readers approach her text, and at the end her storytelling product represents the new African polyphyletic literary category. This combines both the Western short story and novel and the oral storytelling based on elements from the Ghanaian tradition such as the dilemma tale, songs, and dirges.

5.3.2. GOSSIPER'S STORIES EAVESDROPPED IN AIDOO

In another short story entitled "Something to Talk about on the Way to the Funeral" also included in *No Sweetness Here*, Aidoo uses a common communication feature among people everywhere, be they rural or not. I am alluding to the practice of gossiping, which Nigerian writer Flora Nwapa had used before Aidoo to explore and present stories about women. Carol Boyce Davies affirms that she has found similarities

in her analytic comparison between the works of African and other women writers. However, she mentions that the differences are more than suggestive and are epitomised in Paulin Nalova Lyonga's dissertation, in which this "demonstrates a thematic and formal continuity between African women's oral and written literature" (Davies, "Introduction" 16). The use of gossiping turns Aidoo's work into a bridge that brings together orality and written text, since gossiping is mainly an oral practice or act of speech, labelled as "small talk" and considered as a flaw "in women writers who have not 'mastered form'" (Davies, "Introduction" 16). It should also be emphasized that "Something to Talk about on the Way to the Funeral" was initially written as a radio play, but later turned into a short story built upon a dialogue between two women who are on their way to Araba's funeral.

Aidoo re-presents a brave woman's difficulties of becoming a mother of a baby boy, with no husband and alone through the gossiper's words in this story. Eventually, her son repeats his father's mistake and impregnates a young girl, Mansa, and does not marry her either. Araba shelters Mansa and teaches her how to bake bread and cakes to earn a living as Araba did in the past. The reader becomes a second eavesdropper, after Aidoo-writer-storyteller, who is the first eavesdropper in this short story. By writing this story Aidoo thwarts her main female character's intention who insists on the idea of secrecy while telling her story: "Yes, my sister. One speaks of it only in whispers. Let me turn my head and look behind me. [...] And don't go standing in the river telling people. Or if you do, you better not say that you heard it from me" (115). The speaker does not want other people to know that she has told the whole story. Moreover, by the end of this short story, when the two women were arriving at the funeral, the main gossiper again insists on the secrecy of all the events that she was telling her: "Let us stand in this alley here—that is the funeral parlour over there. I don't want anyone to overhear us" (123). However, the other woman—the direct listener or just "audience-within" engaged in this gossiping activity—does not know that there is a secret in Araba's life, and starts to get the details: "*Ei*, there are plenty of things in the world's old box to pick up and talk about, my sister" (116). Later in this dialogue, she remembers seeing Araba in dismay and admits: "I had enough troubles of my own and had no eyes to go prying into other people's affairs. [...] So that was that" (124). She clarifies that she is not the kind of person inquiring about other people's life like a busybody, who is common in many African communities.

Notwithstanding the dialogue form that this short story presents, it is a one-sided opinion-built up-story about other women with no authorial voice to confirm the facts within the short story, since Araba is dead. Aidoo also uses the oral formula as she has done in other short monologue narratives: “Tell me, my sister. I had wanted to put a stick under the story and clear it all for you. But we are already in town” (122). These examples demonstrate the intended secrecy of this dialogue. However, Aidoo re-presents an act of gossiping in a written short story. In this sense, she combines both the realm of women’s gossiping and Western short story, which finally become representative of the new African polyphyletic literary category.

Moreover, Odamtten has classified Aidoo’s collection of short stories, *No Sweetness Here*, as the African art form called “fefewo kple eme nyakpakpawo,” which refers to a collection of dramatic prose narratives for the audience-reader’s contemplation. For him, her novel *Our Sister Killjoy*, is a “fefewo aloo nutinyawo kple eme nyakpakpawo,” which is a collection of prose-poetry narrative performances and a meditation for audience-reader’s contemplation. I should highlight that Aidoo’s tales or short stories are also dilemma tales, as analyzed in the Part IV of this research, since she re-presents a dilemma within some short stories and does not provide any final solution. Instead, she invites readers-listeners to participate with their thinking and own conclusions.

5.3.3. OUR SISTER KILLJOY: AIDOO’S EPITOME OF THE AFRICAN POLYPHYLETIC LITERARY CATEGORY

Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Our Sister Killjoy* is usually considered a novel. For me, it is also an illustrative example of the African polyphyletic literary category, which emerges from many African oral practices moulded to suit the Western novel. Adeola James quotes Aidoo when this affirms that oral literature is “an end in itself” and would love to be able to “just sit down and relate a story.” James asks her: “Do you still hold on to the utilisation of oral literature as the best thing that can happen to our literature?” (Aidoo, “Interview with Adeola James” 23). James conducted this interview in 1986 and Aidoo answers: “I think it is a pity that people have seen the development of literature as a one-dimensional thing. It is not,” and she adds that it was time for the rest of the world to accept “oral narration as an artistic mode” (Aidoo, “Interview with Adeola James” 23). Moreover, she recognizes her contribution has been ineffective to change this fact. Nevertheless, it is evident she has innovated the African novel, and particularly

succeeded in what I have termed as the African polyphyletic literary category.

Aidoo also informs James in this same interview that she likes to write poetry and that it “insists sometimes on getting written” (22), although she knows that “poetry is cryptic” (22) and worries about its accessibility. Paradoxically, she confesses she does not like much to write fiction “simply because it is too many words” (22). She would favour writing drama over any other literary genre. However, she surprisingly brings poetry and prose together into her novel *Our Sister Killjoy*. James suggests that Aidoo was “experimenting with a new style, a fusion of poetry and prose in a novel” (15), and ponders over the issue “whether one can appropriately call this work a novel” (15). Aidoo’s answer is:

I wonder too. I never describe it as a novel myself. When I have been forced to describe *Killjoy*, I have said it is fiction in four episodes. *As to its verse-prose style*, it was almost an unconscious decision. *There was no way I could have written that book in any other style. It seems that there were different tempos in terms of the prose, the narrative and what constituted the reflections of the major character.* It seems to me to be the most appropriate way to have written that book. As I said earlier on, I leave the critic to say whether it is a novel or not (emphasis added). (15)

The complete title of Aidoo’s masterpiece is *Our Sister Killjoy: or, Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint*. With this title she prepares the readers for a text full of distrust and rebuke. The killjoy in this story is sobered up by historical facts induced through diverse discourse levels, which allow serious reflections thanks to the “knowledge gained since” (27).

This is a work of fiction in four sections. It is presented within the convention of the written text in a lineal form. However, any reader will easily observe how verse and prose are interspersed. Emphatically, the poetry portions are charged with emotional political nationalism related to her strong commitment with the African experience of colonialism, post-colonialism, and neo-colonialism. Characteristically enough, Mazrui, Andrade, Abdalaoui, Kunene, and Vansina defend poetry and rhetoric as the first creative literary genres in Africa emerging in the 1930s, followed by drama and then novel. Moreover, they believe that “poetry was the most indigenous form of literature on the continent” (553). Aidoo uses poetry to express what her heart must say regarding Africa: colonialism, neo-colonialism, nationalism, pan-Africanism, and racism.

Aidoo’s literary art can be experienced as if it were one of Henry Mancini’s original soundtracks for films composed in the late 1960s, combining uniform rhythm

and sudden changes of tone. However, the impetus of Aidoo's poetry has the power to make the reader-audience think and reflect upon African problematic reality. Indeed, it becomes similar to the dramas in which something is happening on the middle of the stage with overlapping voices as if interrupting the other actors' performance. These voices can derive from the main character's thoughts, her further reflections on what happened to her or merely historical information. All these combined lead the reader-audience to some kind of holistic, emotional, historical, and physical knowledge about the African character's total experience. The diverse discourse levels in this novel can rather be classified as an African polyphyletic literary category, in which Aidoo blends together the European novel with other creative materials present in the African literary tradition. She writes the story of an African single woman in a context that embraces many private stories and the history of the African continent. She interpolates prose and poetry focusing on the African's emotional background, reminding readers-audience that the power of poetry has often been used for political ends, such as some French-speaking African poets and politicians demonstrated. To mention the most illustrative case: Léopold Sédar Senghor, who followed the European surrealist school and wrote powerful poems with the aim of changing the political panorama in Africa.

The four sections in *Our Sister Killjoy* are written in various styles. Aidoo uses prose to place characters and their actions and reactions. She interposes poetry pieces among prose narrative so as to present her wise avatar's reflections, omniscient narrators, and both her father and mother's wisdom and engagement in the everyday political affairs. As gathered from Aidoo's conversation with Micere Githae Mugo, Aidoo's father was a wise and good chief who frequently challenged the Ghanaian political system. He listened to his people no matter where they came from. He knew very well the history of his people and his continent. Moreover, Aidoo's mother cast doubt on her society's flaws, and was also the daughter of a well-instructed chief. This interview reveals that her parents' wisdom has turned into avatar narrators in her writings about Africa and Africans. Her familial, educational, and social environment has enriched her with many lessons that, in turn, she transmitted to her readers.

In the last section of this novel Aidoo presents a confessionary and reflexive discourse under the guise of a letter, which the main character will never send to her boyfriend. This letter voices both Sissie's mind and Aidoo's thoughts. It heals the character's heart and soothes her psyche. Furthermore, it reaches all readers-audience and the private becomes public. However, the most important detail for my discussion

on style here is the fact that in this last section where Sissie speaks in first person singular, she uses the device of a saying that justifies with her own words: “All of life is a game. Learn to play your part, that’s all. Says the voice of forever-wisdom” (127). She is referring to the traditional treasure of proverbs and sayings of her people and how they have survived thanks to the people that use them, and how significant is the experience that has enriched these people. Hence, Aidoo’s narrator is not only a product of her parents’ wisdom but also is enriched precisely by this abstract entity, “forever-wisdom,” which knows everything about space, time, and people, be they men or women. Therefore, *Our Sister Killjoy* interweaves prose, poetry, and popular sayings and proverbs to render a multi-layered discourse.

In this novel we find a key phrase: “From knowledge gained since” (27), which alerts readers-audience ever since it appears for the first time in the second section entitled “The Plums.” It is repeated before the wise narrator tells in poetry the gloomy story of the Bavarian widows who lost their men at the time of the “Third Reich” (36). Then again, it is inserted in the middle of a poem that follows Marija’s words about how happy she is bearing a baby boy and not a girl. The narrator re-uses this locution in a poem about lesbian sexual relationships between two schoolgirls in an African school, and the reaction of the white headmistress. In this poem this expression appears twice, by the middle of the fragment in verse and as the final line. Finally, the narrator starts writing a poem as a response to the German district officials who deliver their speech to the African students about the “country’s contributions to the international foreign aid to the developing nations. And peace [...]. From knowledge gained since” (69).

All these repetitions insist on the idea that all these things were happening to Sissie or around her, although she was not yet aware of many facts about her country, her people and their history, and still less about her own feelings and thoughts regarding all these serious issues. This implies that this novel does not start with the Sissie’s trip on the first pages that Aidoo writes. The whole story is told in a linear way though some flashbacks help to observe what had happened before she gained all this knowledge. The omniscient forever-wise narrators describe what she knows and feels during her trip, and what new knowledge she has assimilated bringing changes in her life at the time of narrating this story and after the experience was already over.

This idea is reinforced by the narrator’s comment when Sissie describes Ghana to her German friend. When she focuses on the Upper Volta, Marija asks her if it is beautiful and Sissie says yes, “But in a poorer, drier, sadder way” (54); and the narrator

affirms that “She did not know she thought so then. / She was to know” (54). Another instance is when the narrator’s comments enhance the idea that these comments are on a separate level of this storytelling. The narrator is omniscient and capable of displacing his comments forward and backwards either anticipating or reflecting on Sissie’s movements, thoughts, and reactions. The narrator intrudes to have a say about Sissie’s reaction at seeing the poor Africans in London wearing rags, shabby cloths, and cheap plastic shoes to keep warm. Sissie thinks that other skin colours would look worse in those rags. Moreover, this thought seems to comfort her, and the narrator explains: “But perhaps, this cold comfort was the gift of knowledge acquired later. For she knew from one quick composite vision, that in a cold land, poverty shows as nowhere else” (89).

However, the sight of the poor Africans turns her so sad that she first cries but “Then she became very angry” (89). She cannot understand why they have left their warm Africa to come to “such chilly places” (89) and live miserable lives. At this point, the narrator describes Sissie as “Our poor sister. So fresh. So touchingly naive then” (89). Furthermore, the narrator clarifies that “She was to come to understand that such migrations are part of the general illusion of how well an unfree population think they can do for themselves. Running very fast just to remain where they are” (89). The use of the word “then” once and again, in addition to the explanation that follows this last quotation sets the narrator’s comments on a later time when the story was taking place. The written story describes the events happening in a past that stands out in the present of the reader-audience’s moment of reading. They are transformed now thanks to the comments of the narrator regarding the knowledge that the main character has gained after that experience in the past.

Finally, it is important to mention that all Aidoo’s works re-present African stories through different devices and styles. They become African literary polyphyletic re-presentations with diverse kinds of narrators, who suit diverse literary forms. To mention a few examples, in “No Sweetness Here” her narrator is the teacher—“chichi”—who tells the story in first person interpolating dialogue and description. It is significant to highlight that Aidoo does not fill up her white pages with descriptive texts. In her short stories with village settings, she never describes the village. Moreover, as we have seen above, her storytellers are narrators who talk about their experience in first person singular such as “In the Cutting of a Drink,” in which we do not even know the name of the storyteller as an individual, but rather as Mansa’s brother; or as in “The Message.” In “Something to Talk About on the Way to the

Funeral” the storyteller is a gossip who narrates Araba’s story sieved through her opinion and view about life. In “Everything Counts,” as in most of this author’s works, the narrator is the critical authorial voice coming from Aidoo’s parents’ avatars and the “forever wisdom” abstract entity. Though most probably, in this case it is her mother’s because she knows some particular details about women’s realm. Similarly, in “Certain Winds from the South,” husbands travel to southern Ghana in search of their livelihood and their wives stay behind. The varied authorial voices in Aidoo’s narratives render a myriad of re-presentations.

Aidoo’s choices and decisions regarding style and literary category are mostly shaped by her close collaboration with Efua Sutherland in the retrieving and revival of the Ghanaian oral forms and presentations. Moreover, Lloyd W. Brown highlights the consistency of applying the techniques of oral performance to most of her works, implying that she has a significant ability to integrate the traditional oral techniques with the western literary forms (101). Furthermore, he clarifies his statement by detailing the use of each element:

There is a significant diversity of technique in her stories. Colloquial rhythms reflect rural Fanti life styles; colloquial forms and standard English are juxtaposed to dramatize cultural conflicts or cultural integration; and a uniformly Western style reflects Western attitude or, Western insights into the nature of female roles, in both traditional African and contemporary Western societies. (101)

Hence, as demonstrated above, language, style, and form are held together for a single purpose: Aidoo’s need to re-present the idiosyncrasy of Africa and Africans in new written literary ways. Indeed, Aidoo’s writings exemplify what I have coined as the African polyphyletic literary category. Aidoo has Fanticised her English to suit her styles of re-presentation in her short stories. By following the *fefewo* scheme Aidoo reaches her people and makes them reflect and think about their land, people, and future.

5.3.4. BUCHI EMECHETA’S POLYPHYLETIC NARRATIVE

Buchi Emecheta became familiar with books and Western literature at school in Lagos. She has admitted in her autobiography “[her] greatest escape was in literature” (*Head* 19). She explains that she loved to stay behind when all schoolmates went from their dormitory to the classes: “so that [she] could read a line of Wordsworth, or a verse of Byron or Tennyson” (16), and confesses that “[She] could deliberate, chew over and

repeat the works of Rupert Brooke, Keats and Shakespeare” (*Head* 16). She remembers that the fairy tale *Hansel and Gretel* stimulated her imagination to take back her mother’s love. Her second influential story was *Snow White* that in her own words: “I used to cry my eyes out for those seven dwarves” (*Head* 20). However, she was addicted to stories, because when she remembers her holidays at home in Ibusa she explains that “There, [She] virtually drank in all [her] big mother’s stories” (*Head* 20). Emecheta’s autobiography also serves to inform about her intention to become a writer ever since she was at school. The mere fact of speaking loud her desire to write triggered her teacher’s negative reaction, who discouraged and asked her to go to the chapel to ask God his forgiveness for such a daring idea. Emecheta reveals it was her “chi” who turned the situation from asking for forgiveness to asking for a wish to come true:

‘But, dear God, I so wish to be a writer, a story-teller, like our mother Ogbueyin and her friends at home in Ibusa.’ Unlike them I would not have to sit by the moonlight, because I was born in the age of electricity, and would not have to tell my stories with my back leaning against the Ukwa tree, *because now I have learned to use new tools for the same art.* Now I know a new language [...] So where is the sin in that? (emphasis added). (22)

Emecheta apprehended Western literary genres and English very early in her life as tools that she was able to use in the future to narrate stories drawn from her homeland sources to the rest of world.

Within this context of Western varied influences, the Bible is substantial in Emecheta’s work. Umeh quotes this Nigerian writer’s words regarding her style: “The Bible has influenced all my work. I like its simplicity. If I feel that I am losing touch with my style, I always go back to the Bible, the King James edition” (“Introduction” xxx). This is exemplified through her use of the parable in *The Bride Price*, in which this writer makes the teacher reflect about what he and Akunna are going to do against the Igbo tradition. They both are looking at a line of working ants that “followed the same route one after another, as if at the command of a power invisible” (92)²⁹ but he interrupts their path “absentmindedly” by putting a dried leaf in their way. The possibility that these ants lose their way worries Aku-nna, so Chike removes the leaf

²⁹ Many parables in the Bible refer to simple everyday life stories and they are told in a very simple, clear and didactic style and language for people to learn moral lessons easily.

and “The ants quickly reformed and carried on with their business as if nothing had happened” (92). Aku-nna’s questions help Chike learn and teach a lesson here, inviting readers to reflect on such important matters in life just by observing God’s creatures, as the holy book does with its simple stories that help people reflect and think about their decisions:

‘Why do they follow one another like that?’
 ‘Because each ant would be lost if it did not follow the footsteps of those in front, those who have gone on that very path before,’ He stopped short. Was that what his father was trying to tell him the night before? That he should forget this girl and let custom and tradition take their course? (92)

On the other hand, Emecheta uses a long metaphor in this same novel to make Chike’s father explain what his son has to do about his impatience regarding those traditions that interfere with their desire of getting married. Chike tells his father that he usually bought the plantain Akunna took for selling and dumped it into the river, so as to spend all the time with her. Chike’s father wants to help his son and asks him to notify him when Aku-nna becomes an adult. Then, he can ask her parents to accept Chike as a husband. The issue is that Chike’s father perfectly knows that they descend from slaves and the Igbo tradition does not accept any intermarriage between slaves and pure Igbos. Chike anxiously asks his father what they can do in the case Akunna’s parents refuse their proposal:

You are dancing yourself tired before the music has even begun. Wait until it starts. If the tune changes, we too will change with the tune. But we cannot do anything until the music starts. Keep your ear to the ground and be watchful, so that you will not be the second to ask for her when she becomes a woman. Be very careful. (109-110)

Later in 1994, when Emecheta responds to Oladipo Joseph Ogundele about who are the persons, writers, and books most influential on her creativity and literary imagination, she reminds her interviewer that she has had the old colonial English upbringing, adding that as a child “[her] reading was Catholic,” but she also read “everything [she] could lay [her] hands on”(447).

In this same interview with Ogundele, Emecheta recognizes that in spite of the Catholic influence on her writing: “I know that my style is more like storytelling. My style is ballad like. The way I recount things that happen comes from the way we speak in our part of Nigeria” (447). Moreover, her real inspiration comes from her own

homeland “what I think helps me mostly is the fact that I go to Nigeria at least twice a year” (Ogundele 448). For her, “Nigeria is a land full of stories” (448). Her trips to Nigeria enrich her with her own experience or with the other people’s she hears of. So when she wants to write about something she “[goes] back home [...] to revitalize the Africanness or Nigerianness in [her]” (Ogundele 450).

Emecheta’s words definitely imply that whenever she goes to Nigeria, she gets in touch with new versions of old Ifo, in which she might have observed that women characters still correspond to old stereotypes such as the unfaithful wife, wicked second wife, proud or disobedient daughter, childless woman, and dependent woman. In addition to Ifo, she also has the chance to hear stories about herself and her family. Therefore, Nigeria provides Emecheta fertile sources for her imagination that replenishes her writings over and over again.

5.3.5. REVERSING THE IGBO IFO IN EMECHETA

Susan Arndt has heavily relied on Saidu Babura Ahmad’s thesis, especially recollecting from his work the idea that African narrators choose from varied elements those that suit their purposes. Therefore, they narrate old stories adding their own view and adapt them to some new situation (*African* 183). Hence, Arndt affirms that Igbo women narrators select the appropriate Ifo or some of its structural elements to face a situation in which they think community needs of their intervention.

Furthermore, Arndt informs us “An *Ifo* can also end once with a moral and another time with an aetiological explanation” (*African* 183). The summaries of all the Ifos that she has compiled have enlightened this research.³⁰ For example, the synopsis of the variation of Ifos on the theme of the disobedient daughter, who marries a man she chooses, discloses stories quite similar to the *Aku-nna*’s story in *The Bride Price*. In all the variations on this theme the daughter is always punished because she goes against her parents’ and Igbo society’s unwritten laws.

Buchi Emecheta’s husband burnt her first manuscript of *The Bride Price*. The lack of knowledge about the Igbo traditions has propitiated some enigmatic approaches on this matter, which many feminists resolved with the idea that her husband did not

³⁰ Among Arndt’s sources are: Helen Chukwuma’s dissertation, *The Oral Tradition of the Igbos*; Romanus Egudu’s *The Calabash of Wisdom and Other Igbo Stories*; Cyprian Ekwensi’s *Ikolo the Wrestler and Other Ibo Tales*; Nkem Okoh’s dissertation *Traditional and Individual Creativity in Enuani Igbo Tales*; Rems Na Umeasiegbu’s *Words are Sweet: Igbo Stories and Storytelling*; and *Omlinze: A Book of Igbo Folktales*, edited by E. Nolue Emenanjo, along with other works (cf. Arndt, *African*).

accept the mere thought of having a successful, free, and independent writer as a wife. Moreover, the Nigerian critic Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi has consciously or unconsciously disapproved this writer, suggesting that if Emecheta were judged by the elders of her Igbo community they would have condemned her for writing about her personal failure in her marriage, and knowing that Emecheta's real story is that she was a disobedient daughter herself ("Buchi" 68). Emecheta repeats this scheme and rewrites this novel after narrating her personal experience in a previous London novel. In *The Bride Price* she uses the fixed stereotyped girl who wants to get married and that Arndt generally calls "the handsome stranger." However, after reading Emecheta's own words in her autobiography, and with the knowledge gained after Arndt's analysis, the action of Emecheta's husband burning the first manuscript of her novel can be accurately explained:

In *The Bride Price* Akunna did not recover. She died because she had gone against our traditions. The original story ended with the husband and wife going home and living happily ever after, disregarding their people. But I had grown wiser since that first manuscript. I had realized that what makes all of us human is belonging to a group. And if one belongs to a group, one should try and abide by its law. If one could not abide by the group's law, then one was an outsider, a radical, someone different who had found a way of living and being happy outside the group. Akunna was too young to do all that. She had to die. (155)

Most probably, Emecheta's husband was familiar with the main theme of the Ifo about the "handsome stranger," which appears under any of the titles Arndt enumerates in her notes, such as "The Girl Named Lightning," "The Beautiful Daughters" or "A Proud Girl's Punishment" to mention just three of a very long list focused on different concerns to teach children to be obedient and perpetuate the Igbo traditions. Hence, being an Igbo himself, he preferred to burn her first manuscript, since the original story was like an Ifo but did not respect the most significant commitment of the storyteller: perpetuating the Igbo teachings.

Emecheta's husband's reaction towards her manuscript, along with Ogunyemi's disapproval of this Nigerian woman writer's rejection of the Igbo traditions in this novel—coincidentally, Ogunyemi is also Nigerian—becomes the best proof to affirm that Buchi Emecheta uses ancestral oral sources to create what I define as an African polyphyletic literary category. In this case, the Western novel goes hand in hand with the oral storytelling, songs, proverbs, praise names, repetition, and other formal elements, all together transformed into written voices for the readers-audience's delight.

I stand by Arndt's belief about most of the Igbo women writers, who instead of reinforcing the norms and Igbo social conventions, they "fail to respect the official norms of tradition and contemporary Igbo society regarding the gender relationships in their literature. They even attack them—and thereby the conventions of the *Ifo* as well" (*African* 185). Arndt exemplifies this view with some of Emecheta's writing, and affirms that although she uses some structural elements of the *Ifo* such as women characters, she still challenges issues about womanhood and the realm of women "by enlivening them with other points of view" (*African* 185).

Emecheta was interested in hauling African women out from the pit of the desperate conditions many lived in. She has said that whenever she goes to Nigeria she speaks on the radio and the women watching behind stage jump out of joy for her firm words about the the necessity of the African women's liberation. This matches her selection of characters for her writings. Her women characters are varied in essence, but they are no longer the eternal evil existing on the African land. Her re-presentation of African women by means of the Western novel in an Igboized English, sieved through the traditional Igbo oral storytelling, either girdled by or against the Igbo *Ifo* canon, make Emecheta's writing belong to the African polyphyletic literary category. She has Igboized English in her African novels, even though she boasts about her books being tagged as English literature on the shelves in British bookshops and libraries.

Basically, her intention to destroy the negative stereotypes of Igbo women focuses on restoring the female voice and repairing the damage done to the image of the demonised, evil, unfaithful, and disobedient Igbo daughters, sisters, wives and co-wives, mothers and widows. She either writes in opposition to the previous traditional storytelling sessions of the vernacular *Ifo*, or she mimics some of them with new viewpoints and giving voice to the women to speak themselves.



PART VI: *ASASE YE DURU*

**CHALLENGING THE TRADITIONAL VIEW ON AFRICA
AND AFRICAN HISTORY**

6. THE MEANING OF THE ADINKRA SYMBOL *ASASE YE DURU*

For Willis, this is the symbol of providence and the divinity of Mother Earth. The proverb attached to it is: “Asase ye duru se po,” which translates into: “The earth is heavier than the sea” (80). In the Akan cosmology God (*Nyame*) is the creator of the universe, but it is Earth that sustains life. Earth is personified as the fertile, great-breasted goddess (80-81). The Ashanti call her Asase Yaa; being Yaa the name given to a child born on Thursday. Hence, on the Earth’s sacred day no Ashanti can go to work on a farm. Whereas, the Fanti call the Goddess Earth Asase Efua; being Efua the name given to a child born on Friday. Accordingly the farmers cannot go to farm on a Friday since it is their holy day. Moreover, Kojo Arthur affirms that Asase meaning land, “is not only the sustainer of life, it is also considered as the source of power” (49). Furthermore, “Mother Earth receives the newly born, sustains the living, and receives the dead back into her womb on interment” (Arthur 49).

The Ghanaian poet Kayper-Mensah also has a poem for this symbol, although his drawing, compared to the one we see here, is set in a horizontal way:

So heavy this our earth,
My friend
It’s yonder sea that’s heavy!
But heavier earth carries it.
O yes; so heavy is this earth.
 Like brain?
Yes. Weight of knowledge wearies, ages;
But a good brain bears it, keeps it;
Turns it, feels it light; great light;
 Is the brain then heavier too?
Find out yourself, how true. (16)

As we read Kayper-Mensah’s poem we perceive an idea in depth, in which the poet separates the physical earth that a simple eye might be able to see, from the concept of earth, which is much larger and only the eye of the mind can perceive.

6.1. NARRATIVE RESPONSES TO THE AFRICAN MOTHER SOIL

There was a time in history, as will be seen in this part, when those who had never been to Africa before had to rely heavily on travelogues, commercial accounts, religious reports and literary works produced, at times, by real travellers and, at other times, by readers of these “authoritative” representations, who had never set their feet on African land.

This part focuses on how both Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta re-present Africa and Africans in their works during the 1960s and 1970s. Nevertheless, in addition to literary studies, this analysis is informed by other disciplines, such as, history, geography, biomedicine, and social studies. As seen in Part II of this dissertation, African writers have an urge to write to restore their identity and culture. In this Part VI, the works of these African women writers included in this research are scrutinized in order to find out if they answer the previous representations of their continent and peoples. Through this approach the codes of these two authors’ “Adinkra aso ebi” will be deciphered.

Kadiatu Kanneh’s work, *African Identities*, has informed this section of my research. Her first chapter, “The Meaning of Africa: Texts and Histories,” brings together different disciplines by taking into account the factors that constitute the cornerstones for the construction of an authorised image of Africa by outsiders. She believes in the process of connecting time and comparing the narratives produced in the 19th century with those of the early 20th century. In addition to this, she examines the places where those texts were produced. Finally, scrutinizing the disciplines that framed the writings in ideologies of the time with the corresponding political engagement of the authors, she has been able to unveil how the meaning of Africa has been defined through the establishment of a corpus of narratives produced as a concept and a body of knowledge for diverse purposes.

Moreover, as seen in Part I, Kanneh cannot but approach the literary texts as an important corpus that bridges the divergent opinions and links the dissimilar sections of an African complex society. Hence, I observe and analyze the idea and meaning of Africa comparing the narratives of Buchi Emecheta and Ama Ata Aidoo with the other perspectives developed in previous decades. Moreover, Kayper-Mensah’s poem above relates the weight of the earth with that of the brain, and I take the words “earth” and “brain” as metonyms that stand first for Africa, and then for all the corpus of knowledge and images about Africa that the brain can hold. The never-ending discourse on Africa

makes the brain that holds them heavier than Africa itself. In simple words: this translates to the manifold meanings of Africa.

Conrad's crew in the *Heart of Darkness*, including the twenty cannibals who ate hippo-meat instead of each other (cf. 34) before Marlow's face: "were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet" (35). This quotation and more of such statements pronounced by Marlow have provoked a myriad of reactions within the realm of literary criticism as we have seen in some previous parts of this research. The bitterest redressing came from Chinua Achebe who wrote and re-wrote over and over again his piece of criticism, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," trying to efface his anger towards Conrad's work, though he could not, as will be revealed below. The possibility of ousting Africa from our planet Earth, and plant it on an unknown planet, or on the planet of the unknown, is what encouraged the idea of dedicating a section to the conception of Africa. Reading Kanneh's work supported this possibility. Moreover, this last statement and other descriptions of Africa and Africans, found in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*—as well as Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*—and the reactions of African intellectuals mainly represented by Chinua Achebe, have led to take into account this section under the *Asase Ye Duru*, in which the focus is on the re-presentation of Africa as a physical and geographical entity, as a mental or metaphysical scope, and as a social and political space. These aspects in the texts included in this analysis will be approached having always in mind that they were written in the 1960s and 1970s.

In Dennis Duerden's interview with the Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, the latter explains that, in spite of the geographical and the social remoteness of the English writer's works, D.H. Lawrence has made him feel that he "was entering into the soul of the people, and not only of the people, but even of the land, of the countryside, of things like plants, of the atmosphere" (3). Ngugi clarifies that land is not his principle preoccupation but he is aware of the effect of the land on the people in Kenya. He explains that "It is more than the material; it is not just because of its economic possibilities, it is something almost akin to spiritual" (4). In the cases of Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta, this is precisely what their writings transmit. It is not that they concentrate on Africa as if it were simply a geographical entity, but rather on all the other social, emotional and spiritual implications that their continent imposes on the inhabitants of their novels and stories. They also add the political and economic consequences that reverberate from the historical happenings that occurred and still do

on the lands of Africa. For these writers, Africa is an enfolding presence that maps the destiny of all the Africans.

6.2. THE COLONIAL LIBRARY AND ITS SCATHING APPROACH

A response to the writings about Africa that have been circulating ever since the British trader Captain John Lok wrote on his trips to Africa in 1554 and 1561 can be included in what V.Y. Mudimbe has called the “colonial library,”³¹ along with other texts in diverse languages. We can find in Hammond and Jablow’s *The Africa That Never Was* many examples of texts that have been written over a period of four hundred years—from the 16th century till 1968—in which British authors represented Africans and their continent in concordance with the social and political context of the time. They were mostly based on the idea of the supremacy of their white race to serve their politics of expansion and domination, as well as to justify their practice of slave-trading. Hammond and Jablow’s book “is a case study of a Western view of an alien people and land” (8). Moreover, according to the authors: “The Africa that emerges from the British tradition is a myth and, as such, has a place and function in the society that created it” (8). The intention of this analysis was also “to establish unequivocally the stereotypes of the myth itself” (9). Hammond and Jablow explain that even though the British accounts of their trips to Africa were brief descriptions of the climate, people, flora, and fauna in addition to topographical notes, they heavily relied on some classical writings to invent their own fantasies. Furthermore, these fantasies have created an aversion towards the Africans in the British readers, and the myth still circulates with new aspects that favour racism nowadays. Hammond and Jablow quote Lok’s text where he admits his dependence on other previous narratives:

Negroes, a people of beastly living, without a God, lawe, religion, or common wealth. [...] the region called Troglodytica, whose inhabitants dwel in caves and dennes; for these are their houses, and the flesh of serpents their meat, as writeth Plinie, and Diodorus Siculus. They have no speach, but rather a grinning and chattering. There are also people without heads... having their eyes and mouths in their breasts. (20)

³¹ Guarave Desai defines the “colonial library” as “the set of representations and texts that have collectively ‘invented’ Africa as a locus of difference and alterity” after V.Y. Mudimbe, as seen in the Part II of this research under the symbol of *Akobon*, section 2.5.

The Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie also speaks of Lok's representation of Africa and Africans in her lecture, "The Danger of a Single Story." This can be heard and seen on the TED website. Here, she expresses her ideas about the danger of believing in only one version of any story. She exemplifies this with other texts and stories that have created, mostly in a pejorative tone, either a false or an incomplete image of Africa and Africans. Regardless of how one looks at those texts, they always seem to degrade the other people from other continents.

The search for the diverse sources of these narratives has revealed that the influence was coming from medieval texts, as Alixe Bovey's *Monsters and Grotesques in Medieval Manuscripts* has demonstrated. He explains that there were "Reports of monstrous creatures and humanoid races that inhabited distant regions" (7), and "Deformed creatures, many with human features, were said to inhabit faraway lands such as Ethiopia and India" (7). He names important writers that participated in the creation of those texts: "Ancient Greek writers, including Aristotle, Homer, and Herodotus, described monstrous creatures and men living in Africa and the Indian subcontinent" (7). Bovey divulges that what Ctesias, Pliny and Solinus had written before about the monstrous races was "reshaped late in the tenth century in an Anglo-Saxon text known today as the *Wonders of the East*" (8). That is where the British could find "men with heads in their chests called blemmyae" and "polyglot man-eaters called donestre" (8). Adichie's intention is to unveil this truth about these representations to non-scholars and all common readers who ignore the existence of these classical texts behind many later texts about Africa and Africans.

These texts, as we have seen, come from diverse origins. Hence, this is the reason why Hammond and Jablow clarify that, even though they are aware of the existence of other texts in other languages, they only approach British texts, in the first place, to avoid problems of translation; and in the second place, because the British Empire was the dominant "European colonial power in Africa" (12). Indeed, the British influence has become a fixed factor for the sake of rigour. Furthermore, they observe that 18th-century travel narratives and other writing veered away from the mere practice of apprising without appraising, to the intentional tone of degradable assessment of Africa and Africans:

Eighteenth-century comments placed inordinate emphasis upon the sanguinary aspects of West African cultures. African behaviour, institutions, and character were not merely disparaged but presented as the negation of all human decencies. African religions were vile

superstition; governments but cruel despotism; polygyny was not marriage, but the expression of innate lusts. (23)

What deteriorated the image of Africa was those texts justifying slave trade. Hammond and Jablow affirm that the mere idea of abolishing slave trade favoured writing “a literature of devaluation,” (23) hence the defenders of slave trade produced “the most derogatory writing about Africans” (23).

Strikingly, the colonial library kept on growing, as Achebe has demonstrated. For him, this disparaging writing was still being produced in the 20th century. In his work, “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*,” Achebe explains that he is aware that Conrad was not the mastermind behind the image of Africa that emanates from his work, but “It was and is the dominant image of Africa in the Western imagination and Conrad merely brought the peculiar gifts of his own mind to bear on it” (19). Moreover, Achebe affirms that the West, still in 1975 when he wrote his article, needs to gain reassurance through comparisons of the European civilization progress with the “primordial barbarity of Africa” (19). He goes further and equates the relation of Africa and Europe to that of Dorian Gray and his picture:

Africa is to Europe as the picture is to Dorian Gray—a carrier on to whom the master unloads his physical and moral deformities so that he may go forward, erect and immaculate. Consequently, Africa is something to be avoided just as the picture has to be hidden away to safeguard the man’s jeopardous integrity. (“An Image” 19)

Achebe rejects the idea of the classification of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* as one of the first six best short novels in English literature. He dislikes the idea of prescribing this book as compulsory reading for the students of literary courses in American universities in the 20th century and he cogitates on this:

I am talking about a book which parades in the most vulgar fashion prejudices and insults from which a section of mankind has suffered untold agonies and atrocities in the past and continues to do so in many ways and many places today. I am talking about a story in which the very humanity of black people is called in question. (“An Image” 16)

A Conrad student approached Achebe in Scotland to explain that “Africa is merely a setting for the disintegration of the mind of Mr Kurtz” (“An Image” 13). But this was not a good reason to reduce Achebe’s redressing argument, because he could not accept the idea of perceiving “Africa as a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril” (“An

Image” 13). Moreover, this Nigerian writer wonders why a book that denigrated the African continent and peoples should be so highly valued and celebrated as a masterpiece, since “The real question is the dehumanization of Africa and Africans which this age-long attitude has fostered and continues to foster in the world” (“An Image” 13).

Maybe my reading is biased by Achebe’s perception, though the positive Conrad also highlights through his narrator Marlow the objective description of what the crew was seeing in this and few other cases: “Trees, trees, millions of trees, massive, immense, running up high” (Conrad 35). There is nothing in Conrad’s text that can help restore the dignity of the people he and his narrator are talking about. This kind of narrative explains the need of Africans to address themselves with their own knowledge. Moreover, the African authorities know that they have to work hard to ameliorate the effects of the debasing procedures prolonged for a long time through history.

Both UNESCO and the Organization of African Unity organised *The Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies in Africa: Problems and Prospects*, celebrated in Accra in 1975, to establish a strategy to recover the dignity of the African peoples and restore their diverse cultural identities. In 1978, another meeting took place in Brazzaville organised by both UNESCO and the Congolese government. The work of these experts on African political and cultural issues were published in UNESCO’s *La afirmación de la identidad cultural y la formación de la conciencia nacional en el África contemporánea*, in which many subjects were addressed and concluded by inviting Africans to participate through serious and thorough research on political studies, history and geography, science, sociology, philosophy, traditional oral literature and theatre, African languages, music and dance. They were also invited to review the theoretical concept of “Negritude.” Additionally, they were summoned to revise and rethink concepts such as Pan-Africanism, democracy, nation, justice, and other notions in order to achieve the lifting of the African personality proposed by Kwame Nkrumah—the leader of the independence of Ghana, who also fostered the unity of the African peoples through the diversity of their cultural identities. His aim, along with other political and cultural groups, was to restore self-confidence through the reinforcement of the positive evaluation of Africa.

6.3. CHALLENGING AFRICAN HISTORY³²

George Bond, the director of the Institute of African Studies at Columbia University, editor of the series *The Heritage Library of African Peoples*, describes Africa in his introduction to the volume entitled *Igbo*: “Africa is a rich continent that has for centuries provided the world with art, culture, labor, wealth, and natural resources. It has vast mineral deposits, fossil fuels, and commercial crops” (6). He continues with a very clear explanation about Africans worth quoting at length:

But perhaps most important is the fact that fossil evidence indicates that human beings originated in Africa. The earliest traces of human beings and their tools are almost two million years old. Their descendants have migrated through the world. *To be human is to be of African descent*. The experiences of the peoples who stayed in Africa are as rich and as diverse as of those who established themselves elsewhere (emphasis added). (6)

In Achebe’s article, “Today, the Balance of Stories,” delivered as a lecture in 1998, he livens up his public with the use of a proverb that he cannot pinpoint its source of origin to a researcher who had asked him. He clarifies that the Africans do not care about the origin of this proverb as much as they care about its positive quality. However, Achebe explains that the lion in this African proverb, “Until the lions produce their own historian, the story of the hunt will glorify the hunter,” did not satisfy his sense of justice since the author believed that lions projected a very strong aura and the power should only be in the story itself and not in the storyteller (73-74). I stand by Achebe in that it is not lions that are telling the stories, but rather the lions’ historians or storytellers. I also agree with Achebe in his idea of liberating the stories and their creators from their powerful masters. It was time for Africans to recover their right to write and tell Africa and the rest of the world about themselves. George Bond, as quoted above, has reproduced the ultimate approach about the origin of human beings, and this was only possible by the end of the 20th century and almost never before.

In his introduction to the eighth volume of the UNESCO collection of the *General History of Africa*, the editor Ali A. Mazrui quotes a few lines from “The

³² I must clarify that, and I apologise, beforehand, for I allowed myself to choose the word “Africa” to stand, almost continuously, as “the whole” that supersedes each and every bit of the continent, every time I refer to the different countries that belong to the whole African continent, since the characters and, sometimes, the writers themselves, those included in this research and most of the critics, do the same.

Meaning of Africa,” authored by the Sierra Leone poet and diplomat, Davidson Abioseh Nicol:

You are not a country, Africa,
 You are a concept,
 Fashioned in our minds, each to each
 To hide our separate fears,
 To dream our separate dreams. (9-10)

Later, Mazrui, Andrade, Abdalaoui, Kunene, and Vansina respond in “The Development of Modern Literature since 1935,” with a couple of lines: “You are not a concept, Africa, / You are a glimpse of the infinite” (581). Mazrui and these scholars are aware of the infinite meanings that have been suggested, projected or perpetuated regarding the African continent and her peoples. Moreover, in another chapter, “Trends in Philosophy and Science in Africa,” from the same history volume mentioned above, Mazrui, Ajayi, Boahen, and Tshibangu use the same poem that becomes a mirror that reflects ideas, about the continent, in progression and adds a few verses that could represent the perception of Africa by the essentialist Negritudists:

Hooray for those who pursued no science
 Hooray for those who refused to philosophize!
 You are not a concept Africa,
 You are a mere country! (677)

At the end of this chapter Mazrui and the other contributors use this proverb to clearly exemplify how all discourses about Africa end up affecting Africa and Africans: “When two elephants fight, it is the grass which suffers... And when two elephants make love, it is still the grass which suffers” (677).

History and time are significant aspects for most African writers. Especially if we have in mind how a text such as Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* pushes Africa backwards to a time that does not correspond to the European’s in descriptions like this: “Going up that river was like travelling to the earliest beginning of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings” (33); or as already quoted above, “We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet” (35). Africans are equated to “a prehistoric man” in Conrad’s text, so we cannot but understand Achebe’s indignation through his pieces of criticism such as in “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*.”

Moreover, Paul B. Armstrong, the editor of the Norton Critical Edition of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, includes a 19th-century short essay—Hegel’s “The

African Character”—in his compilation to contextualize this novel. Hegel perceived Africa as follows:

At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit. [...] What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's History. (212)

Mudimbe has proposed some responses to this colonialist view in his book *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. He tries to explain that the reason for the deformity and disjunction in the history of knowledge about Africa is the fact that the texts themselves are rooted in the period of the Greek and Roman empires. The discourse produced then was either related to geography or what was later known as anthropological works (cf. 175). However, according to Mudimbe, ethnohistory has transformed this situation, since new types of expressions are taken into account, such as the oral tradition including poetry, and other fixed cultural formulas, though texts are limited to one side of the discourse and in their main languages leaving behind the discourse of the “Other.”

Mudimbe draws a linear sketch of the evolution of the Africanist discourse on history, and he asserts that in the 1950s the interest was focused on its ideological activity. Furthermore, an outstanding event then was the emergence of sociology that centred its attention on the real African people's history, though when bringing it from the villages to the nation failed in its idealism for ignoring the facts of colonialism (cf. *Invention* 176). Later, in 1956 Marxism brought about a new approach that included the economic outcomes, endeavour for the political liberation, social classes, role of capitalism and imperialism, and other aspects of the African society. However, Mudimbe clarifies, through his J. Copans' reading, that “insofar as from a Marxist viewpoint Africa was “a virgin theoretical field” (176).

Following Mudimbe's *The Invention of Africa*, in the 1960s neo-colonialism pushed forward the study of the modes of economic exploitation that could enhance, through the adoption of Marxist perspectives, the political and revolutionary solutions (cf. 176-177). Moreover, writing the African history requires “a dialectics of analogical relations between the historical constructions of the same and the new compliances with and about the Other” (177). This can only be done after the challenging of the European history's validity and its redefinition that was already taking place. This leads Mudimbe

to Levi-Strauss' celebration of the "savage mind," which Mudimbe adapts for his concept of history defining it as "a disconnected whole, formed of areas each of which is defined by a frequency of its own" (177). It is important to underscore the idea behind Lévi-Strauss and his followers' reasoning, such as Luc De Heusch, highlighted by Mudimbe: "who favour the structures of myths as pertinent loci of identity and difference" (*Invention* 177).

Moreover, Mudimbe's *The Invention of Africa* reconsiders the 1970s Structuralism, which challenged and reflected on cultures and non-Western societies, and enhanced its methodology proposing "synchronic precepts for tabulating the forms of myths and cultures within a universal frame of relations of similarities and differences" (178). Mudimbe explains that this approach challenges ethnohistory itself, since it does not take into account Heusch's affirmation: "history is ensnared by myth which imposes its own sovereignty on kings" (178). The idea behind Heusch's statement particularly anchored the inclusion of Emecheta's intrusions into the history of her people, the Igbos, as developed in this Part VI following Kanneh's category of history.

It is impossible to bound Africa to simple concepts. Is it a concept, an idea, a paradigm, a glimpse of infinity or simply a mere country as Mazrui's verse suggests above? The response could be kaleidoscopic. It is even easier to point out what both Africa and her people are not, as many important African intellectuals have been doing for some time now. But I still have to try to pin down how the authors under analysis in this research conceive and re-present Africa, including all these possible definitions challenged above. Hence to organize this extended analysis I have followed Kadiatu Kanneh's conception of tackling the representation of Africa in literature in her *African Identities*. For a better rendering of this dissertation, I take after her the pattern she proposes for the analysis of Cary's *Mister Johnson*: "'Africa' as an idea is approached in the novel in a range of contesting ways which can be summarised in three categories: experiential, visual and historical" (Kanneh 24).

I have to remind the readers of this research to take into account the nature of my primary sources, which are novels and short stories. Hence, it is difficult to separate Kanneh's three categories into isolated blocks since Aidoo's and Emecheta's narratives can contain all these three categories at the same time.

6.3.1. AIDOO'S APPROACH TO HISTORY

In the case of Ama Ata Aidoo, her short stories included in this research are set in the era of the independence of Ghana. In her works Aidoo tries to explore her people's disillusion and failure about the political class in the 1960s, when time has passed by and things have unexpectedly worked themselves backwards to bring down the Ghanaian people. In *Our Sister Killjoy* Aidoo uses different mechanisms to write history. In her fourth section, entitled "A Love Letter," she practices again expressive formal elements through the use of the typographical media, as it is frequent in this novel. For example, the title in this case is set at the end of the third superior edge of a white page. It is followed by another white page. And finally a third page where her text starts on the second third of the white page almost on the same line as the title in the previous page. What is worth highlighting is the inclusion—what one might call digression—of an isolated dialogue in the mode of an epigraph that speaks of history:

Said an anxious Afro-American student to a visiting African professor,
 'Sir, please, tell me: is Egypt in Africa?
 'Certainly,' replied the professor.
 'I mean Sir, I don't mean to kind of harass you or anything,' pressed the student, 'but did the Egyptians who built the pyramids, you know, the Pharaohs and all, were they African?'
 'My dear young man,' said the visiting professor, '*to give you the decent answer your anxiety demands, I would have to tell you a detailed history of the African continent. And to do that, I shall have to speak every day, twenty-four hours a day, for at least three thousand years. And I don't mean to be rude to you or anything, but who has that kind of time?*' (emphasis added). (*Our* 111)

What I have emphasised here is Aidoo's writing back to Hegel's ideas about the "Unhistorical and Undeveloped Spirit of Africa" (212). Regarding the formal aspect of this section of the novel, the quoted paragraph is followed by a typographical gap of more than a third of the page. On the following page she starts what she calls "a love letter." The white spaces created through her typographical gaps are intentionally set here to inspire readers to fill them in with the unwritten history of the African continent. Aidoo's paragraph above also echoes the Senegalese pan-Africanist philosopher and physicist Cheikh Anta Diop. According to this, by the time Europe had undergone the industrial revolution Africa was pushed back in the scientific and the technological fields. This new state of things required an effort to put new heart into the African personality that suffered from Europe's arrogance. Some African historians such as Mazrui, Ajayi, Boahen and Tshibangu have elucidated that this has deviated the priorities of African philosophy. They call those who worked to revive the Africans'

personality as the “romantic gloriana” who “chose to emphasize that Africa before the arrival of the Europeans had its own complex civilizations of the kind that Europeans regarded as valid and important” (“Trends” 670). However, those African historians also highlight this: “In its more restrained form, romantic gloriana is a branch of idealized African historiography. It tends to accept European values while rejecting European ‘facts’ about Africa” (“Trends” 671). Hence, those romantic gloriana are focused on the everlasting admiration that Europe had for the ancient empires and their kings. They pinned down the African valuable knowledge and thought with a historical richness. Consequently, Africans have to take advantage of these aspects and use them in order to be accepted as a viable civilization:

This particular school of African thought looked to ancient Egypt as an African civilization, and stressed Egypt’s contributions to the later miracle of ancient Greece. Cheik Anta Diop’s scholarly commitment to demonstrate that the civilization of ancient Egypt was not only African but *black* has produced an influential school of thought not only within Africa but also within the African *diaspora* in the Americas. (Ajayi, Boahen and Tshibangu, “Trends” 670).

Cheikh Anta Diop had already written his work *The African Origin of civilization: Myth and Reality* in 1974, before he became the president of the newly formed World Black Researchers Association in 1976. As he clarified in his inaugural speech, his aim was to bring together all the black researchers of the world. He wanted to pan-africanize the social and scientific researches so as to assure and strengthen a common cultural future for all the black peoples of the planet (cf. Ajayi, Boahen and Tshibangu, “Trends” 646).

Micere Githae Mugo has insisted that Aidoo’s pan-Africanist vision had been “a very major contribution not just to African or Black writing, but to world conceptualisation of the *historical connections of people of African origin* (emphasis added)” (Mugo 32). Hence, Aidoo also re-presents that history of Africa that stretches a bridge over the ocean and brings together those Africans sold into slavery. She was “growing up in Nkrumah’s time” and she perfectly understands his vision of pan-Africanism because it is “very clear and very clearly articulated” (Mugo 33). She also confesses that living far in a village and having to pass by the “castles” of Cape Coast and Elmina every time she went home, the sight of these castles and her slight knowledge then about the history of the forts traumatised her.

Moreover, when Aidoo learns more about them she can perceive the historical connections between the “children of Africa” all over the world as part of her pan-Africanist vision (cf. Mugo 34). She also experiences and understands the coming back of the grandchildren of slavery—the Afro-Americans nowadays—in search of their origin. This explains Aidoo’s incursions into the history of the castles, slavery, and Afro-Americans in some of her most important works. The only short story about the encounter of Africans and Afro-Americans in this research is “Other Versions” (1970), and the main theme is not related to history itself. Moreover, later in *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977), in spite of being her only novel set outside Africa until today, we can observe this author’s insistence on expressing how these castles and the people’s lives involved in have deeply rooted on her the notion of a history that connects the black peoples all over the world. Moreover, in Part VII of this research and under the Adinkra symbol *Epa* on slavery, I will analyze the history of these castles in Aidoo.

6.3.2. EMECHETA: IGBO “HISTORY” OUTLINED

Buchi Emecheta was anxious about the publication of her second African novel after the success of *The Bride Price*. She had written *The Slave Girl* not as a sequel to her first African novel, though she preferred her readers to read it after *The Bride Price*. In her autobiography, *Head Above Water*, she expresses her thought that “A new reader of [her] work would find it too African” (220). George Braziller, the publisher of *The Bride Price* in the American market, rejected the idea of publishing her second book because he disliked the language she used in this case, and was not sure American readers liked it. Likewise Emecheta’s other publishers in London, Clive Allison and Margaret Busby, were controversial on this novel. The first did not want to be committed to signing a contract, while the second assured Emecheta that they would publish it. After some time, Margaret Busby changed the title of the first chapter, “Introduction,” for the American 1977 edition. Later in 1995, Heinemann entitled this introduction as “Prologue.” What did this introduction contain that the publishers could not conceive as the first chapter of the novel?

This introduction or prologue to the novel hardly occupies four pages, in which Emecheta presents a setting for her characters and story. She re-presents the Igbo people and settlement on their fertile land; as well as their subsistence economy, political organization, social traditions and values. However, the question raised once and again is about the publishers’ decision of separating this prologue from the rest of the first

chapter. Emecheta writes in the prologue for the *The Slave Girl* what she must have heard before as the *history* of the foundation of Ibuza—“the town of nine slices” (3).

It is important to point out that the social anthropologist Sister Joseph Thérèse Agbasiere highlights in her work, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought*, that when her field of research focused on the history and identity of the Ibi people, her elder informants who belonged to that society showed no interest and answered vaguely (cf. 33). She affirms: “The origin of the Ibi people—as that of the Igbo tribe with which Ibi is identified—remains a matter of historical conjecture” (33). This anthropologist insists that, on the one hand, there are no records about the Ibi and on the other hand, outside their local area their history is not known either. She adds that “Some myths of origin are found within the community itself, but these are not elaborate and they can be viewed as propaganda or prestige myths” (33).

In the case of Emecheta’s narration about the origin of Ibuza in *The Slave Girl*, we can consider that her text becomes the written history of this town. Her narrator’s authorial voice turns this oral story into the official history of this place. This story is about a prince from Isu—an Igbo town—who kills his contender by accident in a friendly wrestling match. The Igbo society lays down a rule to take a life for another life and, as the narrator’s words explain, establishes the moral values of the Igbo people: “it did not matter whether one of the lives was that of a pedlar and the other that of a beloved prince like the gallant Umejei” (1). So to refrain from killing the prince, his father who was the Obi³³ decides he should be banished from Isu. However, before the departure of the prince, his father blesses him and gives him a gourd of medicine to protect him. The Obi tells his son:

Where this gourd drops to the ground, there shall be your home, and there you shall increase and multiply, and your people, your sons and daughters, shall fill the new town, and that town will grow and will always be yours. I forgive you for what happened; it was a misfortune. But in your clan all souls are equal, none is greater than the other. The law of our land will not permit you to stay in Isu and live, so you must go, and go in peace. (1)

From this excerpt, similar to a text from the Bible, we already observe a dignifying description of the people of this community. These people suffering from a dramatic accident cannot betray their sense of justice and execute the corresponding

³³ According to Emecheta’s African novels, Obi is an Igbo title given to a chief. However, in *The Slave Girl*, the Obi of Isu was the king and his son was the prince.

punishment to every member of their society with no distinctions. These Africans have no resemblance to those who appear on the banks of Conrad's Congo River in *Heart of Darkness*. This text focuses on the history of the origin of Ibuza. Emecheta's narrator informs us that the prince does not leave alone, since both his mother and sisters have decided to accompany him. They walk "through the thick tropical jungle of what was then Western Nigeria" (*Slave 1*). After they cross the big, wide, and dangerous river Niger, they reach an area known nowadays as Omeze in which "Umejei had a fall and the town of Ibuza was founded" (*Slave 2*). According to the narrator's judgement: "He could not have chosen a better place to found a new town" (*Slave 2*). After this statement the narrator describes the land as an exuberant land full of African tropical plants and deep clear rivers full of fish. The narrator uses the flash-forward method, inserting brackets to describe what the area was like when Emecheta wrote the novel in the mid-1970s "(Now before you reach Ibuza [...]. On the way you have to pass walls of thick forest, and many farms, before you come to the Atakpo stream, in a valley, and it is then that its beauty will strike you)" (*Slave 2*). This last sentence is an evidence of how Kanneh's visual category supplements her historical category, which will finally imply the appearance of her experiential category. One has to see Africa in order to experience its beauty in both the past and present.

Further in the following paragraph the narrator explains that in front of the valley there was a hill that stood like a barrier against possible intruders: "However it was inside this dense natural protection that the prince Umejei and those early pioneers established their settlement" and again the narrator flashes forward to affirm "(Now there is a road there)" (*Slave 2*). Nowadays what was the nucleus of the settlement has become a part of a bigger extension of the big town of Ibuza. The narrator cannot but attest to the Igbo's preference of fighting rather than eating. Their winning of battles was the reason—along with the abundance of water and fertile land—why Ibuza has grown rich and become the town of ten slices after the village of Ogboli had united to the group of the nine other villages.

However, to overcome any possible thought that she has failed her people, Emecheta gets her narrator to add: "Apart from being surrounded by rich vegetation and water in plenty, Ibuza was surrounded by neighbours—some friendly, some not so friendly, *although after hundreds of years of living close together they were all to learn to respect each other* (emphasis added)" (2). This stressed sentence challenges Nigeria's history and its role on the Biafra War (1967-1970) between Igbos and the rest of

Nigerians. Emecheta proves not to be ready to write about the secession war then—when Igbos were vanquished—until her publication of *Destination Biafra* in the 1980s.

Moreover, the author turns her narrator into an etymologist when he elucidates “The name of Ibuza, which meant ‘Igbos living in the middle of the road’, was no doubt given to the town by her neighbours who were already there before Umejei came” (*Slave* 2). The idea that the Igbos took hundreds of years to live in peace, draws the Ibuza’s history back to the period when Hegel, as we have seen earlier, denied the existence of any history engaging African peoples and their social organizations. Emecheta puts the myth down on written record in her novel. Maybe it is inspired by an oral record of a real event, or maybe it is just, as Agbasiere describes, a “myth of origin [...] found within the community itself” (33), which Emecheta picks up and turns her novel into a token for her people’s history.

For Cheikh Anta Diop, the formation of a cultural identity needs the confluence of three different factors: the historical, the linguistic and the psychological (cf. 59). I focus on the historical factor, based on a connecting thread that brings together people with their furthest ancestral past. This produces a sense of continuity and creates a historical consciousness, which is transformed into a cultural security as a weapon against exterior cultural aggression (cf. 60). Hence, teaching African history after independence becomes a national activity (cf. 61). To do this, Africans have to research scientifically and objectively away from any kind of ideology (cf. 61). This is an issue he continuously addresses in many lectures during the 1970s. Moreover, he adds that UNESCO knows that Africans have demonstrated to be capable of being serious researchers (cf. 61).

However, Emecheta has validated her idea about African history when she also includes it in *The Bride Price*. Here, the narrator explains how African history has always been orally reachable until Africans started to write it down: “History—the oral records, handed down by word of mouth from one generation to the next” (*Bride* 73), and survived in spite of the dominating western discourse on history that obviated the African point of view. Moreover, in her 1979 book, *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta creates Agbadi, a character who comes from Ogboli. When the narrator describes the origin of this character, he goes back to this segment of the history that Emecheta has put on paper in the prologue for *The Slave Girl*, referring to the Igbo village mentioned above that turns Ibuza into a town of ten slices instead of nine. Nevertheless, in *The Joys of Motherhood* the history of these people is narrated from another point of view:

Agbadi was from Ogboli, a village of people who, *legend* said, had lived in that part of what is now Ibuza before the Eastern Ibo people from Isu came and settled there with them. The Ogboli people allowed the founder of Ibuza to stay, and bestowed titles on him and his descendants. They also inherited most of the widows of the newcomers. This was the arrangement for a long time, until the people of Ibuza grew in number and strength, and those of Ogboli somehow diminished [...]. The Ibuza people, who came from the eastern part of Nigeria, fought and won many civil battles against their hosts (emphasis added). (10-11)

In this case, the author insists on the power of the Igbo people who founded the town of Ibuza. Moreover, to reinforce the idea that has been already expressed earlier, about classifying Emecheta's text on the origin of Ibuza as "history" following Agbasiere's recollection from her research, I add that the repetition of this piece of story from another point of view promotes the re-presentation of Africa under Kanneh's category of history. Emecheta's choice of the word "legend" to allude to the origin of this story situates this piece of narrative in a liminal history-cultural space between history, myth and legend. In fact, it reflects the debate that was taking place in the 1970s as pointed out by Mudimbe and his quotation from the anthropologist Luc De Heusch mentioned above. We know that the vanquisher, and in this case the coloniser, writes what he calls the official history, but legends can neither be buried nor erased from the realm of the people's knowledge. Hence, be it legend, myth or whatever, it undoubtedly refers to Africa with a story that provides her people with a historical account previous to any non-African historical record.

It is the history of the people that Emecheta re-presents in her African novels set between late 19th century and the 1950s. She confers on her people a scope for a history of their own before colonialism, as if redressing Achebe's grievances expressed in his article "An Image of Africa," mentioned above, at his discovery that even an "erudite British historian and Regius Professor at Oxford, Hugh Trevor-Roper" declared that "African history did not exist" (Achebe, "Image" 2). Achebe exemplified this above, mentioning the anecdote of an old student who became surprised at learning that Achebe was a teacher and not an old student like him, and that Achebe taught African literature. Moreover, the student found it very funny to have met him since "he knew a fellow who taught the same thing, or perhaps it was African *history*" ("Image" 1). For Achebe:

If there is something in these utterances more than youthful inexperience, more than a lack of factual knowledge, what is it? Quite simply it is the desire—one might indeed say the need—in Western psychology *to set*

Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest (emphasis added). ("Image" 2)

Then, Emecheta has planned to re-present Africa and Africans with their own history to erase the ignorance of readers, mainly non-African readers. African villages and towns have long existed before any outside intrusion. The myths or legends about these places and their stories become the elements of continuity that guarantee temporal histories, which can restore identities immersed in their culture and traditions with flaws included, as will be seen in Part VIII under the Adinkra symbol *Akoko Nan*. *The Slave Girl's* prologue stands on the idea that Africa has a history of its own before the colonial era. The fact that Ibuza existed a long time ago contrasts with Joyce Cary's description of Jirige—a new village founded in the colonial Nigeria—in his novel *Mister Johnson*. It is worth quoting at length this excerpt where Joyce Cary's narrator describes the ferry town to where the Nigerian main character, Mr Johnson, is heading in order to accomplish his marriage agreement with the bride-to be and her family. This also helps to understand Achebe's aversion to Cary's descriptions of Africa:

Jirige is a new town, planted three years before to serve the ferry, but it has already created for itself a little desert surrounding it on all sides. Every tree has been cut or burnt down. The soil has been cropped and then left to blow about in dust. Close to the mat walls of three compounds, large rubbish heaps throw a powerful stench of fish refuse down wind. These rubbish heaps are also village latrines. The paths to the village wander through and over them. No one has planted a shade tree, much less a fruit tree, but the sticks supporting the mat walls of the compound have insisted upon taking root, so that in the village itself, thanks only to Nature, there are patches of green leaf and blue shade. (Cary 29)

Here, there is no sign of any social implication of the African inhabitants of this newly created village. The Africans are not active elements in the foundation of this spot. Kanneh's category of history in this text is associated to what Mudimbe has called the colonial library discourse. People in this quoted paragraph are missing. Maybe it was better to keep them away from Kanneh's visual and experiential categories, since while reading the text readers must have wanted to put a peg holding their noses back from the book. Those who just keep on reading find out that Africans are represented in such a way that Achebe would qualify as denigrating:

At eight o'clock in the morning this village is just waking up. Women are beating corn and fetching water; a dirty child *with a large sore* on its

chin is sitting on the largest rubbish heap and holding a goat. Two men are dawdling towards the shore, holding themselves with crooked languor as *if just out of hospital. Infinite boredom and disgusted resignation are expressed in their languid, crippled progress* (emphasis added). (Cary 29)

Cary wrote in his introduction to this book: “None of my characters is from life” (7). Hence, this challenges the qualities he endowed his characters with, as well as the rest of the representations of the places where the characters move. The adjectives used cannot but bring down the image of the people living in that village in Nigeria. Cary’s text contrasts with the re-presentations of Africa and Africans found in both Emecheta and Aidoo’s works published in the 1960s and 1970s, even when including the representations that they brought forward of the flaws of Africa and Africans. Indeed, Cary’s Africa is a filthy place where the sickly and lazy people are born, live and die.

If we go back to *The Slave Girl*, even though Emecheta re-presents in her prologue the history of the old village of Ibuza, in the following chapters she wants, through her narrator, to extend the temporal line of this history and links it to the history of the area when it becomes colonised. The narrator flashes backward and forward just as a historian would do to explain the events that occupied the Igbos’ lives then. The Africans who live in some villages and towns in the deepest heart of Nigeria cannot even imagine what happens to their land and culture. We can think as readers of this novel that they are very innocent, or, to the worst, ignorant. However, I can infer that the main idea is to highlight the purity of the ordinary people during the colonisation period; and, mostly, their unawareness of the existence of a master colonial history parallel to their own daily history. Moreover, in times of hardship their ultimate worry is their subsistence. Any human being needs to survive first:

In fact the people of Ibuza—at a time when it was glorious to be an Englishman, when the reign of the great Queen Victoria’s son was coming to its close, when the red of the British Empire covered almost half the map of the world, when colonization was at its height, and Nigeria was being taken over by Great Britain—did not know that they were not still being ruled by the Portuguese. The people of Ibuza did not realize that their country, to the last village, was being amalgamated and partitioned by the British. They knew nothing of what was happening; they did not know that there were other ways of robbing people of their birthright than by war. The African of those days was very trusting. (7)

So the Ibuza people, who are trustful of the white man, do not know that the British were the colonisers of Nigeria, and that the Portuguese were no longer the masters of

the black people in that region. However, I would like to highlight that Emecheta does not write an anti-colonialist narrative. Instead, she uses the colonial reality of that time to design some characters' destiny and the outcomes of their lives; and mostly to grant them their own private history aside from the colonial one. She gives them active roles and they do not appear as the filthy Nigerians that Cary sketched in his novel. Consequently, Emecheta's approach to African history clearly contrasts with the master colonial history.

6.4. AFRICA: THE LOCUS OF MALADIES

Aidoo clarifies that in her youth she did not have to deal with the colonisers because she grew up in a village far from the city. She explains that:

Unlike East Africa and Southern Africa, these so-called British West African places—thanks to the mosquitos and other factors, such as the climate—were rather hostile environments for the colonisers. They could not penetrate the country and the countryside. They were forced to live their lives virtually along the sea. (Mugo 33)

Hammond and Jablow analyse not only the Europeans' geographical representation of Africa, but also Africa's effects on both their physical and psychological health. They refer to the tropical rain forest and swamps as “the Dark Labyrinth” or as “the White Man's Grave,” with images that:

were invested by the earliest writers, and ever after, with a sinister and terrible quality. The hot, moist lowlands were unwholesome and uncongenial, causing more distress to the English than any other environment. The misery, discomfort, and disease they suffered are projected upon the continent: Africa is evil. (137)

Buchi Emecheta also picks up this idea that becomes part of the common knowledge about Africans, as can be also seen in Aidoo's comment above, to reverse the notion of Africa as the cradle of deadly maladies. Megan Vaughan has approached this discourse produced by the Western biomedical authorities about illness in Africa. She has perceived these narratives—found in court records, medical journals, fundraising posters, and “jungle doctor” cartoons from the mid-19th to mid-20th century—as a means through which “the African” was culturally constructed. In her last chapter Vaughan explains how a missionary who was in the process of writing a book about health education to encourage the African young students to become medical trainees

and doctors, was advised by James Aggrey³⁴ to include stories “drawn from many lands,” since the Africans did “not like their country to be looked upon as the only hotbed of disease” (200). Vaughan argues that she had insisted on demonstrating that although the biomedical discourse was not well-grounded nor monolithic—new theories were continuously appearing—it was not concerned in developing an adequate “healing system” (cf. 201) for Africa:

So [...] in the nineteenth century the physical features and illnesses of the peoples of Africa were often studied not for their own sake but for what they supposedly helped to demonstrate on the question of difference between the sexes in Europe. (201)

This means that the elaboration of theories of differences took the field of biomedicine on the side of justifying colonisation. For Vaughan, in the beginning of the 19th century various biomedical discourses—participating in that discourse on difference—were developed to divide the Africans in the East and the central parts of the continent into diverse groups, each marked by its culture (cf. 201). She sums up that:

In this discourse Africans were conceived of as members of collectivities, the features of which could be defined and delineated, and which in large part accounted for the differential incidence of diseases on the continent. (201)

Moreover, Vaughan asserts that culture was used as another variable in the biomedical analysis. On the one hand, the missionaries considered the concept of “primitiveness” as a cultural feature in African society, and this made Africans susceptible to certain diseases. Hence “Africans got sick, in this model, because their societies were fundamentally sick” (201). This must have been the idea that Conrad’s scholar tried to explain to Achebe when he affirmed that Africa was *the* setting for the deranged Kurtz. On the other hand, and regarding insanity, leprosy and sexual diseases, the biomedical researchers and administrators believed that those diseases were produced because of the “rapid but uneven industrialization and urbanization” (Vaughan 202). The main factor they used in order to explain these diseases was the disintegration of African society, and the process of “deculturation” they had gone

³⁴ James Emman Kwegyir Aggrey was an important Ghanaian intellectual, missionary, and teacher whose words and ideas have always been taken into consideration in Ghana and the rest of Africa. His most important message was that people can only progress through the education of boys and girls, as well as hardworking.

through: “In this version of the role of culture in producing disease, Africans got sick essentially because they had forgotten who they were, they had ventured across boundaries of difference and chaos had ensued” (Vaughan 202).

6.4.1. AIDOO BLASTS THE COLONIAL BIOMEDICAL DISCOURSE

Aidoo’s position regarding the colonial biomedical discourse is revealed in various passages of her literary works. For example, and particularly in the case of madness, Aidoo’s main character Abena Gyaawa—also called Mami Fanti—in the short story “A Gift from Somewhere” is re-presented as a mother under the effects of her anguish and distress since she is about to lose her third-newborn child. The Mallam or healer—who happens to pass by and does not know how to help her when she asks him if her baby is dead—has his own mode of observing things:

And she started running up and down, jumping wringing her hands and undoing the threads in her hair. Was she immediately mad? Perhaps. The only way to tell that a possessed woman of this kind is not completely out of her senses is that she does not uncloth herself to nakedness. (“Gift” 77-78)

The woman is under a state of shock and despair, but she is not really mad since nudity is the ultimate sign of insanity in these regions. It is her extreme agony and state of affliction that produces these effects on her. Furthermore, the reader never gets to know what is wrong with the little boy who resembles a dead baby.

Aidoo does not specifically focus on epidemics as Emecheta does, but rather on the “advances” in the field of medicine and science. She blasts the colonial biomedical discourse that Vaughan has unveiled in her research. In *Our Sister Killjoy* Aidoo exemplifies her position through other characters again, about the Western scientific and medical discourses that are brewing the alleged differences among the human races:

Sickle cell anaemia. High blood pressure. Faster heartbeats in infancy. One truth maybe. A whole lot of wishful thinking. No amount of pseudo-scientific junk is going to make us a weaker race than we are. And may they come to no good who wish us ill. ... A curse on those who for money would ruin the Earth and trade in human miseries. (114-115)

Indeed, this quotation literally illustrates the controversy over the use of Western medical diagnoses in Africa. Moreover, in Aidoo’s tales included in this research there is no mention of any common malady. In another short story, “No Sweetness Here,” Kwesi, the main character’s son, dies from snakebite. And in “The Message,” the main

character, Esi Amfoa, learns about the modern techniques for solving difficulties at giving birth. Her granddaughter has had identical twins through a Caesarean surgical operation at the Cape Coast hospital. Here, Aidoo presents the health care progress in Ghana through how a grandmother understands childbirth, and the surgical experience her granddaughter goes through to overcome the difficulties of a complicated delivery that ended in Caesarean operation.

Aidoo's most outstanding exhibition of her commitment with Africans is thrust through her novel *Our Sister Killjoy*, in which she deals with the issue of science, medicine, and surgery advancements. This is her backlash against the political injustice and double morality that white South Africans were perpetrating against black South Africans.

In this novel, Sissie goes to London. The narrator describes her surprise at discovering that the Africans who travel abroad speak lies to their people when they go back home. Most of them do not want to return to Africa. Even though Aidoo also deals with the issue of brain drain, it is important to highlight her intention in this section of the novel. Sissie has a meeting with her friend who was coming to London too. He is already at the hotel with his friend Kunle. The narrator highlights that these African young men are not worried about the war in Nigeria—the Biafra secession war (1967-1970)—but rather proud of the heart transplant Dr. Bernard carried out in South Africa. Aidoo, instead of concentrating on pushing forward the idea of Africa as a land of science and progress, gets her wise narrator to expose the bare facts about the apartheid system of segregation imposed on South Africans. If we try to set the exact time of this encounter between Sissie and her two Nigerian friends, it must have occurred after the second heart transplant after January 2 1968, when the white Jewish South African dentist, Philip Blaiberg,³⁵ went through a successful heart transplant and the polemic issue was that the donor was the coloured Clive Haupt.

This story circulated all over the world. For example, two days after this successful second heart transplant, magazines such as *Raleigh Observer* published “Man’s Heart Transcends Apartheid” dated January 4, 1968. Aidoo too echoes this story in *Our Sister Killjoy* as it appeared in many international news media and papers:

The Heart Transplant. The evening papers had screeched the news in with the evening trains of the Underground. Of how the Dying White

³⁵ It is relevant to mention Philip Blaiberg's white and Jewish origin in contrast to the donor's—black and South African—in order to perceive the intensity of Aidoo's criticism.

Man had received the heart of a coloured man who had collapsed on the beach and how the coloured man had allegedly failed to respond to any efforts at resuscitation and therefore his heart had been removed from his chest, the Dying White Man's own old heart having been cleaned out of his chest and how in the meantime the Dying White Man was doing well, blah, blah, blah. (95)

Aidoo never mentions directly this doctor's name but calls him the Christian Doctor, instead of Christiaan Neethling Barnard. Moreover, Aidoo's intention is to present diverse perspectives to this historical event. Sissie does not understand Kunle's exaltation: "We are in the region of SCIENCE" (96). Africa has become the first space for the most astounding scientific, medical and surgical accomplishment. The narrator expresses Sissie's frank thoughts before all this: "But really, Sissie could have spared herself the guilt of anti-science self-accusations" (96). However, a reading between lines through these pages unveils the disturbing queries that Aidoo and her created character—as well as the wise narrator—carve with invisible ink: If they accept that Africa can also be a cradle for scientific progress the question is: but which Africa? And this happened in that part of the continent where black Africans were rejected and segregated. Why do they need science if they still suffer from the yoke of racism? However, Aidoo brings forward, through Kunle's words, the other aspect that the Africans clinched with hope—the solution to the colour issues:

that he was sure it is the
type of development that can
solve the question of apartheid
and rid us, 'African negroes
and all other negroes' of the
Colour Problem. The whole of the
Colour Problem. (96)

Regarding this, Marais Malan's book *Heart Transplant: The Story of Barnard and the "Ultimate in Cardiac Surgery"* published in 1968, contains the opinion of many politicians. The political and social reactions to this surgical achievement flustered the grounds of the apartheid system in South Africa that was reigning ever since 1948. The issue of segregation, racism, and civil rights bring together the black people all over the world. According to Maran's compilation of different politicians' opinions it was rather a matter of saving lives:

*The relief of suffering knows no colour bar...*The heart is merely a blood-pumping machine and whether it comes from a white, black or coloured man-or a baboon or giraffe, for that matter-has no relevance to the issue

of race relations in the political or ideological context. The question of colour is not at issue here (emphasis added). (115)

However, Aidoo illuminates the idea of the double morality used then, emphasized in the quotation above. It is a fact that Philip Blaiberg died nineteen months after his heart transplant and was buried in the cemetery reserved for white people (cf. History Engine). Hence, Clive Haupt's coloured heart was buried in a white sacred place. Notwithstanding, Aidoo does not suggest this paradoxical situation, since she deviates all her attention to the idea of the origin of the donors for the experimentation that took place before this surgery. Kunle affirms that the doctor "must have experimented on the hearts of dogs and cats" (97). But Aidoo calls into question the comparison between man and animal:

I have been to a cold strange land where dogs and cats eat better than many children;

Where men would sit at table and eat with animals, and yet would rather die than shake the hands of other men.

Where women who say they have no time to bear children and spoil their lives would sit for many hours and feed baby dogs delicate food with spoons, and make coats to cover the hairy animals from the same cloth they wear, as sisters and brothers and friends in our village would do on festive occasions.

My brother, I have been to a land where they treat animals like human beings and some human beings like animals because they are not Dumb enough. (99)

Aidoo's bitter irony is spread in the last poem of this section after we learn that Kunle died from an avoidable car accident when he finally decided to go back home to Nigeria. The narrator describes how he is burnt to ashes by the flames. This image that Aidoo sketches in 1977 brings to combustion any hope for overcoming racism, segregation or apartheid, not only in South Africa, but also all over the world. Paradoxically, Kunle, who believed in the innocence of the doctor's experimentations and the possibility of transcending racism and apartheid through science, dies unavailingly:

Yes,
Kunle's heart stayed in
His chest, too strong to be
Affected by anything else,
Still pumping under the
Sizzling chest,
Stopping only when
The flames had

Swallowed it up.
 Poor Kunle
 Poor Christian Doctor.
 What waste
 What utter waste.
 For it certainly would have gladdened Kunle's heart to find itself
 in the hands of the Christian Doctor.
 A thoroughly civilised
 Meeting.
 But it is long way from
 Lagos-and-Ibadan, to
 A White Southern hospital.
 And anyway—
 Wherever they are and from whatever causes,
 My God,
 Black people still
 Die
 So
 Uselessly! (107-108)

The last five lines are like a dirge for all the Africans' lives gone to waste through the colonial, post-colonial, independence, and post-independence periods. Conclusively, Aidoo reveals through these sections the controversy over the biomedical discourse in Africa. For her, science is no voucher for the end of racism.

6.4.2. EMECHETA'S REVERSAL OF THE COLONIAL BIOMEDICAL DISCOURSE

Emecheta has included the so-called "colonial biomedical information" in *The Slave Girl* like many other Africans had done before her, as Vaughan has asserted: "Indeed, participation was often a necessary step towards resistance, and the forging of new identities through resistance" (203). Emecheta uses this kind of discourse to amend the Africans' history and allow the development of African identity. The diseases she writes about in this novel—and in some of her other books—also help create a discourse on the private histories of the African families living far from the coast deep into the villages. She re-presents the inhabitants of these villages and towns within their own African history, which was hardly started to be written in the 1970s. In *The Slave Girl* Emecheta introduces Okwuekwo, the head of the main family of this novel. She describes his private history as a way of explaining how he, who does not speak English, gets his job as a court man for the British authorities in the town of Ibuza. The narrator displays information about the Igbo people from Ibuza and their reaction to the

white man and colonisation in the beginning of the 20th century. The white officers were sent to Ibuza to solve the problems of the “troublesome” Igbo people. In those years mosquitoes and other insects were able to expel the whites from Africa. However, Africa was and is still a locus for malaria and other dangerous or even fatal diseases:

He had been lucky to get this job. An English District Officer had been sent to the troublesome town of Ibuza, where in year 1900 the elders resisted the white administrators. Other officers were dispatched there in 1909, and they were sent packing not only by the elders but also by their notorious malaria mosquitoes, and many other such tropical insect soldiers. (6)

She accepts the reality of the mosquitoes and other insects as the only army that can fight the colonialists. This fact was also highlighted above in Aidoo’s words.

Emecheta reverses the discourse in *The Slave Girl* when she speaks of the maladies that Europeans have brought to Africa. While the main character is in the market with her mother, they observe a burial ceremony. This serves to introduce the reader to the Igbo traditions regarding funerals through the narrator’s information, but what lies behind this is how this burial worries the rest of the people in the market so much. One of the stalls was empty and the town runner comes back from there to inform “that there was a kind of a sudden death spreading in that area” (17). The narrator’s main focus is how the people of Ibuza do not know the origin of so many deaths. But further in the narrative the narrator explains how intercommunication works in those remote Igbo villages. The town’s runner brings the news to what they call the *diokpa*, the oldest men in the village; and after pertinent consultations the final decision is to warn the villagers. This is done by the gongman who walks around the whole village yelling out the bad news:

Pom! Pom! Pom! The rumours that have been going around are true. *Pom!* There is a kind of death coming across the salty waters. It has killed many people in Isele Azagba, it is creeping to Ogwashi, it is now coming to us. *They call it Felenza. It is white man’s death* [this emphasis added]. They shoot it into the air, and we breathe it in and die. *Pom! Pom.* (19)

Further reference to the history of experiencing previous epidemics introduced in Africa by the colonisers is leaked out through Emecheta’s narrator’s account, in which the diseases are not caused by mosquitoes or other tropical insects, as the biomedical discourse Vaughan mentions in her book:

Everybody felt a kind of chill; not that an epidemic was anything new to the people of Ibuza, but at least previously they had always known what measures to take to avert mass disaster. They had experienced disease like smallpox, which was so feared that they gave it the name of ‘Nna ayin’-‘*Our Father*’ for that time smallpox meant death: they knew that to stop it spreading throughout the villages any victim had to be isolated, so when somebody was attacked he would be taken into the bush and left there to die. All his worldly possessions would be burned, and no one would be allowed to mourn for him. So much feared was smallpox. (Emecheta, *Slave* 19)

So we see that the elders’ decisions are severe when related to saving the lives of the non-infected members of the African community.

Emecheta uses the influenza epidemics as a boomerang that hits back the non-questioned good health of the British and, by extension, Europeans in general. This piece of narrative can be considered a resistance discourse through fiction, when all those biomedical discourses were constructing the African identity as Vaughan reveals in her work.

Emecheta avails herself of the repetitive use of the colonial historical context of both World Wars. Her intention is to highlight how they affected the health of many Africans, as seen in the case of her characters in *The Slave Girl*:

It was then that Ibuza began to hear explanation of what had caused the disease. Before that time most people living in the interior of Nigeria did not know that the whole country now belonged to the people called the British who were ruling them indirectly through the local chiefs and elders. Now, in the year of 1916, the rumours said that the new colonial masters were at war with their neighbours ‘the Germanis’; and the latter fought the British by blowing poisonous gas into the air. When you breathed it in, you died. Many inside Ibuza were asking themselves what they had to do with the Germanis, and the Germanis with them. (21)

In this novel World War I affected the lives of these people. Influenza was assumed as a man-made attack. The inhabitants of Ibuza are re-presented as Africans who use a teleological reasoning to understand what was happening to them at that time, when the “felenza” was killing them. They could not understand the relation between them and Germans. Because as the narrator had said above, the people did not know that the Portuguese were no longer their colonisers. In addition to this, they believed that diseases were punishments inflicted on them because they have done something wrong or because, as Vaughan has put it, “Africans, it seems, in this socio-medical

discourse, never get sick innocently” (205). So the Ibuza people in *The Slave Girl* are looking for the reason that can justify those deaths by influenza:

But this felenza was a new thing that the “Potokis” had shot into the air, though everyone wondered why?
 ‘We have done them no wrong,’ people said. ‘They came to places like Benin and Bonny, bought healthy slaves from our people and paid us well. And this is how they thank us.’ (19)

Here, their knowledge of this white man’s disease is null, and mixed up with the information heard about the German’s use of a poisonous gas in 1915—for the first time in the history of the world—as a weapon to attack their enemies. It is an historical fact that Germans used this gas in the second battle of Ypres in Belgium for the first time. But there does not seem to be any relation between the epidemics of the influenza in Africa and the use of the poisonous gas in Europe.

Nevertheless, the infested British officers who moved mostly to West Africa must have carried with them the germs that caused the inexplicable deaths—the African reasoning at that time—of many Africans. This is confirmed in the *General History of Africa VII*, which explains the African entanglement in the European war. It was either that some colonies were attacked—hence war also took place on African land—or that Africans were recruited under the colonialist flags. Whatever the degree, the Africans were involved in World War I and the result was no good news for them:

While the war directly took an enormous toll in dead and wounded in Africa, it further accounted for innumerable indirect deaths in the Africa-wide influenza epidemic of 1918-1919, whose spread was facilitated by the movement of troops and carriers returning home. (Boahen 135)

Most probably, Emecheta knew about these cases either through her academic studies in England or maybe because she heard this story also as a way of rumour from her aunt and registered it. This happened to the ordinary real people of Ibuza. These are the African characters that Emecheta wanted to re-present in the 1970s. Their private and personal stories finally compose and complete the huge tapestry of the history of their continent. These stories were not told in the history books at school until UNESCO’s effort restored the right of the African people to write their own history. Emecheta becomes the scribe of a history of the times gone and not narrated yet, when history was just news and only the gongman was the main source of information within the community.

In Emecheta's African novels chosen for this research, the effects on the African families' destiny are due to the experience that the male characters go through when they participate in the European wars. For example, in *The Bride Price*, Aku-nna's father's death drastically changes the lives of his family members. In the beginning of the novel he dies, just a few years after his return from Burma where he participated in World War II. Aku-nna's uncle explains to her how the West African soldiers were subjected to terrible conditions that the "white British could not bear" (5) such as walking in the jungles of Burma or wading waters in India. Her father dies from a swollen incurable injured leg that no one ever knows if it was caused by the bite of a snake or any other tropical insect.

Another example is the case of Ojebeta's parents in *The Slave Girl*, who die from the influenza epidemics befallen on the Ibuza people because of some villagers' participation in World War I. Finally, in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnaife, the main character's husband was abducted with other African men and forced to join the British army in India in World War II. Moreover, in spite of the money that the British administration paid to Nnaife's family, his wife Nnu-Ego suffered some hardships to raise her children and pay the boys' school fees. Moreover, the questions a neighbour asks when they hear about Nnaife's abduction brings forward the idea of the impossibility of common Africans to oppose the coloniser's desires: "Why can't they fight their own wars? Why drag us innocent Africans into it?" (148). Nnaife, as many soldiers who come back to their African home after going to war, has an unhealthy yellowish colour and swollen feet provoked by the swamp in Burma, just like Aku-nna's father in *The Bride Price*. Nnaife is ill and "nervier than before" (*Joys* 182). He cannot but fight for the honour of his daughter Kehinde, who has voluntarily eloped to her Yoruba neighbour's house to avoid an imposed marriage on her. Nnaife, drunk that night, had injured the Yoruba butcher with his cutlass when he broke violently into their house to bring back his daughter Kehinde. The police caught Nnaife and he had to go to the court for the scheduled trial. His lawyer defended him by presenting reports about Nnaife:

The lawyer read a long report about how Nnaife had been in the army, how he had been taught to kill without thinking if an enemy invaded his territory. Nnaife, he said, had been half asleep at the time of the incident and had acted instinctively because he thought the local butcher and his son were stealing his daughter. (214)

Emecheta, without entering into details about the court cases—in which madness is present—brings forward, though as if tiptoeing, the subject of mental disorder during the colonial era in some African regions.³⁶ Her character's flaws are mostly due to Nnaife's heavy drinking, which in this case led him to almost kill his Yoruba neighbour. However, he is justified because he has been to war under the British flag. This is a fact that has affected his mental state and made him a post-war weak-minded African.

6.5. AFRICA: A GEOGRAPHY FOR NEW PERCEPTIONS

The other category Kanneh mentions is the visual perception and the common knowledge about Africa, which is also present in Buchi Emecheta's work. In her autobiography, *Head Above Water*, she takes her children to the London Zoo where they see all kinds of animals and have lunch under a beautiful big tree imagining they are in Africa. In her description of this trip to the zoo, the author highlights that she has “never seen such huge snakes, monkeys, tigers, lions or giraffes” (79). Her children do not believe her:

‘But you came from Lagos and from Ibuza, Mum, and you must have seen loads of tigers and elephants in your streets.’

‘Who told you that? I have seen smaller snakes, dead ones in Lagos but not like these huge ones, and as for elephants and things, this is my first time of seeing them.’ (79)

Her response does not convince her children who have not seen Africa. But what the author highlights by reproducing her children's words is how their educators in London have distorted their ideas about Africa:

‘But Mum, Miss said you came from the jungle.’

‘Your grandparents came from places with smaller houses and huge forests, but not huge or thick enough to call jungle. I have been there several times and loved every minute of my stay, but I have never seen tigers and elephants except here in London Zoo. (79)

Emecheta's novels including descriptions of the African landscape can be read as a response to those readers of African origin living out of Africa, who apprehend Africa through the eyes of misinformed educators. I regard these descriptions as belonging to Kanneh's visual category and cannot be easily separated from the

³⁶ See Megan Vaughan 100-128.

experiential category. Moreover, it is also illuminating for the non-African readers who have never been to any African cities or villages.

Likewise, in Emecheta's novel *The Slave Girl*, in which Okolie has initiated with his little sister Ojebeta a trip to sell her into slavery, the author displays a description that produces uncertainty in the readers' mind and anxiety in their hearts, for they get empathetically involved in the little girl's fate. The two children have to leave at dawn, and it is still dark: "The silence was profound. The night animals had gone into hiding and the day ones were still reluctant to come out into the open to start their early morning business" (24). It is surprising to think of an African night or dawn in this case, as noiseless. Nevertheless, it is an effective strategy since this silence will produce expectations in the readers' heart.

The text goes on with portraying the unawareness of these two very young characters of the possible dangers lying behind this trip. The author describes the foot track that they follow as "a thin red snake hemmed in by the two sides of this green presence" (24). So the only snake that we read about is a metonym that stands for the winding road. But Emecheta converts this "short journey" into something similar to Conrad's description of Marlow's trip on his boat through the Congo River, though in Emecheta's case the two children walk:

As they padded through the bush tracks, they seemed to be entering the very belly of the earth. It was as if they were being gradually but nonetheless determinedly swallowed by a dark, mysterious, all-green world, the walls of which were enveloping them, fencing them in, closing them up. Overhead hung the tangled branches of huge tropical trees, on both sides of them were large leaves, creeping plants and enormous tree-trunks, all entwined together to form this impenetrable dark green grove. (24)

Emecheta continues with the description of the clarity of the Atakpo stream where the two children wash themselves. The water is sparkling and the sands in the bathing areas are silvery white: "It looked so pure and so clean, cleaner than she could ever have imagined possible at the usually very busy Atakpo stream. She was so taken aback by the purity of it all that she hated to disturb it by wading in to have a wash" (25).

In another novel, *The Bride Price*, Emecheta's narrator also describes this part of Africa, as can be seen below:

The landscape changed slightly after Benin. The soil was redder, the leaves were that type of deep green which suggests a tinge of black. The

forests became really dense like mysterious groves. Here you saw a narrow footpath like a red ribbon winding itself into the mysterious depths. There you saw a human figure emerge as it were from a secret green retreat, carrying on her head a bunch of ripe, blood coloured palm fruit. Or a girl with her little sister, scrambling into the deep forest at the sound of the approaching lorry. (59)

Again, the reader visualises the red winding soil, though this time it is not compared to a snake but to a ribbon. Here, she also introduces human figures in this African landscape, even though they are not characters in this novel.

On the other hand, Ama Ata Aidoo does not re-present such images of Ghana on the terrain, but rather from an eagle's eye above in the sky. Those instances could be classified under a visual category. Anne Adams defends that Aidoo's way of addressing nationalism is by a process of a centripetal fusion among the historical, experiential, and visual aspects—Kanneh's three proposed categories—of all the African nations, which ends up in a centrifugal process, propelling her Pan-Africanism out. Adams quotes the Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, to show that this young novelist takes Aidoo's concept of Africa up after thirty years: "A nation is not about the geography of land but the geography of the mind. It is a collection of ideas" (Adams, "Introduction" 2). Africa and Africans are always present in Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*, notwithstanding the fact that the novel is not set on the African continent.

When Sissie is flying from Ghana to Germany, she first has to go to Nigeria. It is during the high tide of the South African apartheid, and as the narrator explains, "many airlines were not allowed to stop at Accra because Johannesburg and other Afrikaaner cities formed a backbone to their African business" (10). Once Sissie is on the plane she sits on her assigned seat beside two white people she thinks are Europeans. But when the plane is in the air, the flight attendant invites Sissie to join her friends at the back of the plane. Sissie does not know who are those friends, but she immediately realizes that they are Nigerians and black like her, whereas the people at the front of the plane are white South Africans. The plane becomes a land or rather territory of apartheid. In this scene, Aidoo re-presents the racial problems that were at their worst point at the end of the 1960s and 1970s. South Africa was still divided by Du Bois's concept of the "colour line." Here, Aidoo's Africa belongs to Kanneh's experiential category. The plane experience cannot but bring forward the idea of pan-Africanism, because it becomes the "other" with respect to the apartheid system. They seem to stand side by side in a binary opposition. The apartheid system considers all black Africans as one—the black mass—

no matter where they come from as long as they are black. The apartheid system reinforced the idea of Pan-Africanism, which is always in Aidoo's mind weaving ideas to make her reader face this issue.

The presence of Africa is paradoxically highlighted through its physical absence, "The hours of the flight had been organised in such a way that they passed over the bit of Africa left in their way in the dead hours of the night. [...] Good night Africa. Good morning Europe" (10-11). Aidoo manifests the eternal binary opposition; though this time the first element is the dark-night-black-Africa against the light-morning-white-Europe. Aidoo rings a bell to the readers who have read Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* with her narrator's comment on Sissie's emotional state when she observes the valleys in the Alps from the sky: "Wondering if this was not the beginning of the world and amoeba yet to be" (11). This complements Aidoo's re-presentation of Africa through its absent presence and contrasting it with Europe. In the last section of the novel, Sissie explains why she can only laugh back at home and not in London:

Maybe it was the sun and the ordinary pleasure of standing on our own soil Our beautiful land. Did I say our land? One wonders whether it is still ours. And how much longer it will continue to be...
A curse on all those who steal continents! (120)

When Aidoo uses the expression "our land," she is referring to both Ghana and Africa. However, by the end of her letter Sissie expresses her hopelessness after trying to convince a young, brilliant, and famous African doctor to go back home to Africa: "When the atmosphere is as inert as Africa today, the worst thing you can do to anybody is to sell him your dreams" (129).

On Sissie's final flight back home to Africa, it is the heat invading the aircraft that wakes her up and not the voice announcing that they are approaching Africa. The pilot has suggested that "If they looked down, they would see the continent of Africa" (133). The narrator contrasts the warmth of Africa with the "chilly interiors" of the plane: "sure enough, there was Africa, huge and from this coastline, certainly warm and green" (133). After being accused by her boyfriend in London of being a very serious girl who never laughs, the reader experiences her loud laughter as she sees Africa as "the land unfolding before her," from her seat on the plane: "Dry land, trees, a swamp, more dry land, green, green, lots of green" (133). Moreover, after sitting on the plane for hours writing that "love letter" to her boyfriend, she decides it is not worth sending it to him, because what matters is that she is going back home to Africa:

Besides, she was back in Africa. And that felt like fresh honey on the tongue: a mixture of complete sweetness and smoky roughage. Below was home with its unavoidable warmth and even after these thousands of years, its uncertainties. “Oh, Africa. Crazy old continent.” (133).

This warmth Aidoo uses as sign of approaching Africa is also described in Buchi Emecheta’s *The Bride Price*:

But on this hot day, when the sun was pouring its merciless fire on to the unprotected heads of children coming home from school, when the heat was so intense that the ground looked as though it had been cooked and then baked, when the heat ate its way through the shoeless of Africans padding their various ways to their various destinations, when the air was so still, so waterless, so juiceless, that the perspiration had to pour from the bodies of humans to neutralise the temperature—Aku-nna forgot all thoughts about her bride price. (4)

In this case it is the intense heat that identifies the ruthless African climate, mostly during the summer months. The image produced in this paragraph is both visual and experiential since the terms that the narrator uses tend to drive the readers into an African space of extreme heat and dryness.

6.5.1. AIDOO’S MARKETPLACES: AN EXEMPLIFICATION

Regarding Ama Ata Aidoo’s work, her approach to the market is slightly different. In the last section of *Our Sister Killjoy*, the narrator describes the interior cabin of the plane, in which Sissie is flying back home. This cabin is a place where the flight attendants are selling duty-free goods to the passengers who are busy exchanging information and performing transactions among each other, conceiving it as “Altogether, the atmosphere was that of another human market-place” (132).

In the short story “Satisfaction?” Aidoo uses the marketplace as the famous speakers’ corner in London. Her main character, Ekuwa Esoun, refuses to sell her fish to another African woman who had been a nurse. The latter had been mean enough to inflict pain on the market seller’s heart when she did not allow Ekuwa Esoun to see and feed her crying sick baby in the hospital ward. Aidoo does not describe the marketplace, but she includes other women traders and market visitors as the listeners of this tale. Moreover, the only time she refers to the place she calls it the central market, with a small “c.” Hence, the idea of central is relative and depending on where the characters are. Aidoo’s aim is to focus her readers’ attention on the idea of the practice of the abuse of power coming from educated Africans and directed towards the common

people. The marketplace becomes a free popular space to achieve the backlash against abuses.

Even though Aidoo does not describe the marketplaces as such, she sketches in another short story “No Sweetness Here” through her teacher’s words the market products of the Ghanaian farm:

Oh, that picture is still vivid in my mind. She was sitting on a low stool with her load before her. Like all the loads the other women would bring from the farms into their homes, it was colourful with miscellaneous articles. At the very bottom of the wide wooden tray were the cassava and yam tubers rich muddy brown, the colour of the earth. Next were the plantain, of the green colour of the woods from which they came. Then were the gay vegetables, the scarlet pepper, garden eggs, golden pawpaw and crimson tomatoes. (*No Sweetness* 58-59)

All the products delineated here re-present the native African farm products. The still-life picture the teacher exhibits to the readers stands out as a living tapestry of Africa. Pawpaw is the term used in West Africa instead of papaya, and garden eggs stand for aubergines. Hence, the teacher’s use of the specific African terms for these products turns the whole tray into an exclusively African tray and not any tray from some other tropical countries that also have this kind of vegetables and fruit.

6.5.2. MARKETS AND WOMEN IN AFRICAN ECONOMY: EMECHETA’S EXEMPLIFICATION

Africa and her people go hand in hand in both Aidoo’s and Emecheta’s novels. Even though Buchi Emecheta aims at a new re-presentation of the African woman, she still describes her with a load on her head, which reproduces the everlasting image of the African woman in the African rural areas. This image of a woman carrying goods on her head is an icon that stands for the African woman worker, who can feed her family working hard, and sometimes become economically independent. In *The Bride Price*, the main character Aku-nna has to leave the urban Lagos after her father’s death, and meets some of the women from her mother’s village:

The children stared in the direction their mother was pointing and saw about fifteen women trotting in to the fast filling square that was to be the market place. They were carrying a heavy pile of damp cassava pulp, all tied with banana skins on to baskets; many of the baskets were not very big, but with the heaps of dripping cassava pulp piled high on them they ended up looking like sky-scrapers. *Akpu*, as the cassava pulp was called locally, was a very heavy foodstuff made from the roots of the cassava plant-so heavy was it that the necks of the poor women carriers

(who were sweating profusely although the heat of the early sun was still moderate) were compressed to half their normal sizes. (62)

It is worth quoting here this excerpt at length because it fully reproduces an entire image that visually re-presents an old picture of the rural Igbo women, preparing readers for the contrasts that will follow in the novel. Ogun-dipe-Leslie criticises the African writers, both male and female, who have perpetuated the image of the African rural woman. However, she applauds those who use the old icon of the African woman, carrying the loads of her life, in order to dissolve “this kind of mythification of the rural woman” (“Female” 7). She adds: “The truth is that the rural woman wants change and innovation. She wants power, wealth and status like men” (7). These aspects are almost accomplished in Emecheta’s novel mentioned here.

In *The Bride Price*, Aku-nna does not repeat what her mother Ma Blackie did for a living and the schooling of both her children. But Ma’s life is also on the turn before her daughter’s. She is one of these women who also started to change her activity from simply carrying the goods on her head to delegating the transportation of heavy products to a lorry in order to sell them:

The little capital Ma had managed to save from her husband’s gratuity she invested in palm kernels, for she did not wish to have to carry baskets of akpu to market on her head. Her type of trading was different and less strenuous: she would go to town of Ogwashi to buy the kernels, have them bagged and sent to Ibuza via the one and only lorry which made that trip. On Nkwo market days the bags were transported to Asaba, and Ma would follow on foot; she sold the kernels to eastern Ibo traders, who would have them processed and exported to England to be used in the manufacture of famous brand-name soaps. The cakes of soap would then be re-imported to Nigeria, and women like Ma Blackie would buy them. The kernels, thus, made a completely circular journey. (73-74)

This whole excerpt exemplifies how Ma Blackie—who wants to change things to improve her life—has managed to do so. Moreover, this quotation is a significant example of how some African products are exported to England and then imported back as luxury products for the African market. Hence, some of Emecheta’s characters are sketched and involved in evolutionary progress, which in this case will fail to achieve the totality of the desired change, since tradition holds the Igbo people back to the past. It has to be taken into account that even though Ma Blackie’s family women members have carried goods on their heads, she manages to change this aspect in her life. In so

doing, she participates in the “circular journey” of the African products and African economy in her society. This must have satisfied Ogundipe-Leslie’s anxiety regarding the image of the African rural woman, since Emecheta’s novel was written almost a decade before this scholar’s piece of critical writing, and she must have accepted this as an icon or a myth in motion towards a better future.

In the quotation above we learn from the first sentence that these women are on their way to the market place. In *The Slave Girl*, the first line is “The Eke market was the centre of all that mattered in Ibuza” (1). It stands like a neon light sign to drive the readers’ attention to the importance of markets for Africans. It is the heart of any African community that bumps out life and stories. Emecheta’s narrator explains that the Eke market is one of the most significant markets in the mid-western region, and many merchants go there to trade in goods. The story of the seven-year-old slave girl, Ogbanje Ojebeta, could not have occurred but in a market background. Her brother Okolie takes her there to sell her to an important cloth trader, Ma Palagada, who has other slave girls sewing and selling cloths for her. The title of the chapter is “Onitsha Market,” and the first paragraph introduces the location and explains the meaning of the place for the African people:

The Onitsha market called Otu, one of West Africa’s big meeting places, was situated on the bank of the River Niger and served not only the people of Onitsha but those from the surrounding Igbo towns and villages as well. They regarded this place as the centre of their world. A market day was an occasion to dress up and meet with friends, as well as to buy and sell. (37)

Emecheta highlights the significance of the market in the social, economic, and political field. It is not only a place to sell and buy, but also to eat, dance, sing, perform rites, and participate in traditional events. Likewise, people can observe here the latest fashions and the most beautiful hair styling, hear the latest news and recent gossip, but mostly meet new people from other ethnic groups and learn new lessons from each other:

The market was where people who wanted to display their dances went, be it an age-group or a family showing the end of their mourning for a departed relative. And there were many superstitions attached to the market place. For example, if a person was insane then so long as the madness was not shown in the market there was hope of a cure. The big markets were places where the visible living met and among them moved the dead and the invisible. (37)

Emmanuel Obiechina also highlights the idea of the importance of the location of the Onitsha market and its consequence in the increase of popular activities there. He explains that after World War II the number of literate Nigerians increased, and this encouraged the circulation of the popular pamphleteer literature. Obiechina sees the so-called Onitsha market literature as the cradle of the African novel: “There is a direct connection between this popular writing and the novel, going beyond their being written by the same person, a coincidence that recalls the connection between Defoe and Grub Street pamphleteering and the rise of the English novel” (13).

Emecheta has explained in her interview with Adeola James that she has never been to there and all her inspiration and descriptions come from the stories that her mother had told her about herself and her childhood in the Onitsha market:

‘When I was in Onitsha’, and she would go on and on, and you heard that 20 million times! You know how our mothers used to go on recalling their own lives when we went out of step? I suppose this is our oral tradition. It was from all that information that I was able to reconstruct her life. (44)

Indeed, *The Slave Girl* is Emecheta’s re-presentation of her mother’s story. And even though Emecheta has never seen the area, her descriptions of the Onitsha crowded marketplace, where people elbow and bump into each other, are vivid. They are like a live visual image in motion in any African market, constituting a catalogue of everything African. As claimed by the narrator, who only knows the Eke market, the Onitsha market resembles a whole city to the eyes of the little Ojebeta:

It was a complete market landscape that seemed to stretch for miles. People swarmed and buzzed like insects. Most were dressed up fashionably but some, like the canoe men and the people selling fresh fish, wore only very meagre cloths wrapped kite-like round their loins. Apart from the Igbo traders, there were Yoruba stalls where you could buy different kinds of root medicine and the black dyed cloth called *Iyaji* (in fact it was more a navy blue but to the Igbos, who loved things colourful, bright and flowery, anything darkish and plain was black). Even the Northerners—the Hausa, and the tall, graceful Fulani shepherds with their leather knapsacks, leather slippers, long whitish robes and dark brown turbans—had stalls. Some of their families had settled permanently in the houses along Otu market and sold delicious Hausa dishes, such as corn and bean dumplings laced with roasted meat in honey, and the beef known as *efi Awusa*. Their women had large holes in their ears through which they wedged bright coral beads bought with the money they made buying and selling in Igbo towns. (38)

It is worth quoting the whole excerpt for the sake of observing the complete picture emanating from Emecheta's words, which re-present an image of West Africa through one of its most important markets. However, in the rest of the chapter the narrator completes the whole drawing of this market to fit her descriptions to the beginning of the 20th century. In this market, where Okolie was to sell his sister, there were many little and young slave girls working for diverse rich stall-owners. The narrator also describes some particularities of the facial tribal marks, and how each ethnic group recognises others through their apparent physical features, language, cloth designs or colours, and other aspects. It is important to highlight that Emecheta wrote this novel in 1977 after the Biafra war was over. Nevertheless, she re-presents the peaceful confluence of many different African ethnic groups into this market, even though the historical setting of the story is previous to the secession war.

Emecheta, at setting *The Slave Girl* in the Onitsha market in the 1920s, cannot but mention the Aba riots when the market women stood up and faced the white colonisers who wanted to impose taxes on the market's women. Ma Palagada is not willing to fight against the white men who have helped her make her fortune in the past. She suggests to her market women peers that they should try to sit and talk with them but the rest of the women do not agree and get very angry with her. Ma Palagada, at the thought of having terrible disagreements with the rest of the women, finally decides to agree since she does not want to pay the taxes either. However, by the time the historic riot was about to take place, Ma Palagada does not participate: "On the day of the Aba riot, when the market women rebelled against being taxed, Ma Palagada was in her room, very ill; this time there was very little hope of her coming out of it alive" (138). In fact, Emecheta mentions this women's war, but is not interested in displaying a discourse about these Igbo women who, according to Misty L. Bastian, called themselves "useful women," "the trees that bear fruit" or even "vultures of the marketplace" (269). This story/history was told and known to every African then. Emecheta does not reveal anything new since her character's story is not affected by this riot.

Moreover, not even as a digression in this novel does she want to re-present these active Igbo women who employ all their traditional resources such as singing, dancing, and other Igbo activities reserved for women in their Igbo society in order to face up to the colonial impositions on women in the African markets. Notwithstanding the fact that her characters profit from the marketplace, Ojebeta, who is a slave, cannot

belong to this important group of powerful and determined Igbo women. Ogunyemi's work *Africa Wo/Man Palava*, informs that these market women, irritated by the Benin and Ibadan governmental new laws of imposing taxes before the registration of their children for school in the 1970s, threaten to go naked in the streets, which is a taboo and abomination in their traditions since their children would be cursed forever. These women win the case even before coming out on the streets since the government has no other way than submitting to the women's wishes (cf. 54). Ogunyemi asserts that the market place is "a home away from home" (55), and "nowhere else is there such a concentration of women as buyers or sellers reinforcing each other by their sheer numbers" (55).

6.5.3. AIDOO'S AND EMECHETA'S AFRICA: COUNTRYSIDE VERSUS CITY

There is always a time when some rural villages either grow and become urban cities imbued in new styles of life, or resist change keeping the traditional way of life. But it is the people in these places who have to face the new experience. Sometimes the adventure for change is propelled through migration in search of a better job or education.

Regarding this, I firmly abide by Chinua Achebe's inclusion of Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* in the "colonial library" as a racist book. Nevertheless, I agree with William Boyd's "Introduction" to this novel in 1985, where he affirms that "Rudbeck's motor road represents the dawn of the new Africa and the imposition of standards of Western 'civilization' upon the old" (4). Boyd's words give the gist of Rudbeck's thoughts after he had finished directing and supervising the construction of the Fada road as the District Officer of the area then:

The road itself seems to speak to him. 'I'm smashing up the old Fada—I shall change everything and everybody in it. I am abolishing the old ways, the old ideas, the old law; I am bringing wealth and opportunity for good as well as vice, new powers to men and therefore new conflicts. I am the revolution. I am giving you plenty of trouble already, you governors, and I am going to give you plenty more. I destroy and I make new. What are you going to do about it? I am your idea. You made me, so I suppose you know.' (186)

This brief excerpt clearly reflects the issues I analyse in some of Aidoo's and Emecheta's works. The effects Cary mentions about the urbanisation of small villages

and all the positive and negative aspects, affect the order of things and the inhabitants' life in these places.

Aidoo's short story, "In the Cutting of a Drink," is focused on a young countryside man who goes to the capital of Ghana in search of his sister. The storyteller confesses: "I say, my uncles, if you are going to Accra and anyone tells you that the best place for you to drop down is at the Circle, then he has done you good, but... Hm... I even do not know how to describe it" (30). It is not an easy task to sketch this new place with words since the storyteller surely has nothing in his own village to compare it with. However, the obliteration of a description about the big modern Accra as a whole helps the reader focus on the story that leads this man to go to the city rather than the visual description of the place.

This trip is experiential in the sense that his motivation was a family problem. His as well as his family's emotions help Aidoo develop her social message. Nevertheless, the storyteller tries to reproduce his impression of the huge and very famous roundabout with its water fountain: "As we went round *the thing which was like a big bowl on a very huge stump of wood*, I had it in mind to have a good look at it, and later Duayaw told me that it shoots water in the air [...] but the driver was talking to me, so I could not look at it properly (emphasis added)" (30). As we focus on the emphasised segment, we can read that he compares one of the most important fountains in Ghana with the daily elements from his own rural domestic environment. Indeed the main character tries to assimilate this urban experience through his own experience of the countryside.

Aidoo's Africa as a geographical or physical space in itself is not the major issue in these short stories. In *Our Sister Killjoy* when Marija, Sissie's German friend, insists that Sissie should visit Munich before going to England, the narrator reminds the reader that there is no other important cities out of Africa for Sissie. Moreover, "Humans/ Not places/ Make memories" (81), the narrator claims. For both Aidoo and Sissie, there is no other place like Africa to experience a peace of mind:

Marija,
There is nowhere in the
Western world is a
Must—

No city is sacred,
No spot is holy.
Not Rome,

Not Paris,
 Not London—
 Nor Munich, Marija
 And the whys and wherefores
 Should be obvious. (79-80)

At the beginning when Marija meets Sissie, she asks her about the other places in Africa that Sissie has been to. Sissie recommends Nigeria on the basis that it is so big that it contains everything Ghana has, though magnified. The narrator addresses both Nigeria and Ghana in an elegiac tone that brings about an emotional image of Africa, in which Kanneh's three categories—contemporary history, visual as well as experiential dimensions—are present:

Nigeria
 Nigeria our love
 Nigeria our grief.
 O Africa's offspring
 Her likeness—

O Nigeria.
 More of everything we all are,
 More of our heat
 Our naiveté
 Our humanity
 Our beastliness
 Our ugliness
 Our wealth
 Our beauty

A big mirror to
 Our problems
 Our tragedies.
 Our glories.

Mon ami,
 Household quarrels of
 Africa become a
 WAR in
 Nigeria:

'And Ghana?'
 'Ghana?'

Ghana?
 Just a
 Tiny piece of beautiful territory in
 Africa—had
 Greatness thrust upon her
 Once.
 But she had eyes that saw not—
 That was a long time ago. . .

Now she picks tiny bits of
 Undigested food from the
 Offal of the industrial world. . .
 O Ghana. (52-53)

Nevertheless, Aidoo writes about Africa as the space that has engendered all the different African situations in contemporary history and how these have determined the people's life and economic progress.

In her short story "For Whom Things Did Not Change," Aidoo gets her main character to pronounce her own worries regarding the Ghanaian forgotten areas and peoples who have to migrate to survive: "She is a Moslem but I am not a Moslem. You people think all of us from the north are Moslems. *It is because you do not know anything about the north* (emphasis added)" (28). The north is part of Ghana. It is also Africa. As this emphasised sentence shows, Aidoo reinforces the idea of abandonment of the north and African people by re-presenting the flaws of the reforms that take place in the governmental guesthouse after the awaited independence of Ghana. To the eyes of the old houseboy and cook Zirigu—after working so many years for the colonial administration—it is time for a change after independence:

When the white people were here, and they were our masters, it was only understandable that they should have electric lights and water-closets and give us, the boys, latrine pails and kerosene lamps. But now we are independent they are going to make this house new. My own people will give me a closet and an electric light. (27-28)

Many things are transformed in this guesthouse. However, in the so-called "boy's quarters," where the workers live, they hardly paint the walls, repair some steps or make a little veranda. Zirigu who wishes to have a toilet and electric light, "the same things as [their] betters" (28), is disappointed: "But there were no electric lights and in the lavatory, no water-closet. I discovered they had taken away the old pail and given me a new one" (28). His disillusion underscores the drama of the shortcomings of the political reform in this guesthouse. This space along with the characters become Aidoo's metonym to re-present Africa and African society, in which both the countryside and city are under the abuse of political power that casts a dark shadow on the progress of the continent and its peoples. Zirigu is aware that painting the facade is not a profound reform, and that the problem is the fact that the ruling class—although Ghanaians themselves—frustrate the common people's life with their heartless wrong

decisions: “*My own people* who are big men do not think I should use these good things they use (emphasis added)” (28).

In the same way that Aidoo’s storyteller is unable to describe Accra, Emecheta’s main female character in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego, can only describe Lagos after comparing it with Ibuza and its people. Nnu Ego has travelled with her future brother-in-law to Lagos in order to marry her second husband Nnaife. Once she has arrived at Lagos, her brother-in-law starts joking about her getting pregnant soon, and the narrator reveals what she is thinking: “This type of man, thought Nnu Ego as she watched him, did not belong to a soft place like this” (46). Moreover, the way Nnu Ego perceives the city of Lagos drives the reader to the conclusion that she describes what she sees in opposition to her previous experience of what is an authentic African reality. Lagos is the new modern city to where all the young villagers are migrating in search of a better job and life. This was not

Nnu Ego’s case. She goes there for a husband who can help her become a mother, and she thinks of her brother-in-law that:

He belonged to the clear sun, the bright moon, to his farm and his rest hut, where he could sense a nestling cobra, a scuttling scorpion, hear a howling hyena. *Not here. Not in this place, this square room painted completely white like a place of sacrifice, this place where men’s flesh hung loose on their bones, where men had bellies like pregnant women, where men covered their bodies all day long.* Yes, he would go back to where his people had lived for five, six, seven generations without any change at all. How did his younger brother called Nnaife come to find this place in the first instance? *And if she should go mad in a town like this, where would she find a medicine man?* (emphasis added).” (46)

Nnu Ego has described the “queer-looking house” (40) as a place for sacrifice. The white walls have failed to satisfy her taste and customs. However, the only visual experience of Africa here is the whiteness of the walls. The rest is the visual experience of Africans, mostly men. Definitely, the city is not exactly the place that Nnu Ego wants to live in, but it is there where her dreams of becoming a mother come true.

Additionally, Emecheta’s main character Aku-nna in *The Bride Price* has to leave the city of Lagos to go back to her family village. Hence, what the young girl goes through is the opposite experience of those going from a small village to a big city as Lagos. This young main character encounters the whole body of the unwritten traditions of her people and the power it exerts on all her social life, weighing down her personal progress and happiness. Therefore, Emecheta presents the contrastive way of life

between the city and countryside in this novel highlighting the significant differences between the change of the Nigerians' style of life in Lagos, and the perpetuation of traditions in the villages that hinder the progress of those women who long for change.

As we have seen from the beginning of this Part VI, Earth is an important element in the African people's life. This explains why both Aidoo and Emecheta cling unwaveringly to Africa. Most of these writers' works I analyze here are set in the African countryside in addition to some cities as Lagos or Accra. Emecheta's three novels are set in the colonial Nigeria, that is, physical Africa. Whereas, Ama Ata Aidoo's short stories characters move around the different villages of Ghana. Emecheta re-presents a geography of Africa grounded on the physical senses and heart, while Aidoo re-presents a geography of Africa in her mind, in which the absence of the physical Africa is made tangible and present through the intellect.



PART VII: *EPA*

**AMA ATA AIDOO AND BUCHI EMECHETA AGAINST
DIVERSE ENSLAVEMENTS**

7. THE MEANING OF THE ADINKRA SYMBOL *EPA*

The name of this symbol is translated into English as “handcuffs.” Both Bruce Willis and Kojo Arthur assert that this ideogram is a symbol of law, justice, order, and control. Arthur understands the aphorism that the symbol brings forth as: “You are the subject of he whose handcuffs you wear, or when you go to a town and you see the chief of the town is in handcuffs you do not ask whether everything is alright in that town” (151). Willis explains the evolution of this symbol in time. He affirms that in the colonial era the cuffs were instrumental to the arresting of the persons who committed illegal actions or caused disorder. It was a shame to be detained and cuffed for the person, his family, and the rest of his community (cf.100-101).

Although Willis and Arthur concentrate on the meaning of this symbol as a sign of law that is applied equally to everyone who breaks it, and does not contemplate the individual’s status or social rank, I focus on the meaning of the proverb related to handcuffs as an element that impedes the freedom of the “captives.” In this way *Epa* becomes a metonym for the whole process of enslavement, in which a group in power enchains frail people causing the obstruction of their natural progress. Handcuffs become the bracelets of slavery. Whatever kind of handcuffs, be they physical or metaphysical, even the slightest invisible strings of social mores or rooted traditions, can subjugate the “captivated” members of a society at a certain historical moment, and hinder any possible advancement in everyday life. Kayper-Mensah explains this Adinkra symbol in his poem with such clarity that it is easy to perceive the inevitable and permanent state of enslavement of human beings:

Some chains there are
Stronger than new steel
At our birth their links appear
And are transparent when we die
Unbroken, though unseen, as air.
They handcuff now with past and future
And our lives with other lives. (25)

7.1. STILL IN HANDCUFFS

Slavery is not a worn-out topic yet, not even nowadays in the 21st century. Hence, it is not an obsolete subject because it is one of the keynotes in both Aidoo’s and Emecheta’s literary works. On the one hand, Aidoo cannot neglect such an important historical background that has shaped the continent and its peoples forever. On the other hand, Emecheta includes the term and the concept not only in one of her titles, *The*

Slave Girl, but also as one of the most important topics she explicitly deals with in the three African novels I analyse in this part. The tentacles of slavery have reached every nook and cranny of the African peoples' lives in and out of Africa. Moreover, these authors do not limit their work to describe the subject matter, but rather deal with the consequences slavery has entailed upon the African peoples. Particularly, this is visible in the African women's everyday life, who became enslaved in their own countries, social communities, and family circle. Enslavement, in all its possible varieties, is the main issue that has determined the destiny of Africa and Africans in general.

7.2. AFRICAN SLAVERY: SOME HISTORIANS' ACCOUNTS

Slavery uprooted many Africans away from their families and communities. Not only did it shatter the lives of those abducted or simply sold sisters or brothers; but it also conveyed their subjugation: first to the African ruling or merchant classes, and later to whites. The history of African slavery is not as simple as to affirm that the starting point was the commercial exchange for the benefit of Europeans.

Historians such as Basil Davidson, J.D. Fage, and William Tordoff have intended to shed light on such an important aspect of African society in the books they have written on the history of Africa. Davidson's *Africa in History: Themes and Outlines*, was first published in 1966, and revised and expanded five times accordingly to the changes that occurred in the political, economic, as well as social life in the African continent until 1991. His project is to explain the social, political and economic organization of the African peoples from the European Middle Ages till, theoretically speaking, the abolition of slavery and the prohibition of the trade of human beings. Throughout his explanation about slavery, he draws a timeline trail³⁷ on which he sketches in detail the process of change from what started as servitude, "tied" and "wageless labour" (209), followed by the trans-Saharan slave trade, till its final manifestation as pure trans-Atlantic slave trade among Africans themselves and the comers from the overseas countries (cf. 210).

Davidson asserts that the lack of wage-labour led the Africans to bring together men and women, who belonged to the same "age-sets"—people of the same generation—to work without any type of payment as tradition had imposed on them.

³⁷ This trail refers to the centuries through which slavery develops from one stage to another in and out of Africa. Davidson provides many further details on the subject of this kind of slavery in his book (cf. 198-223).

Others arrived to servitude as a form of social justice applied to the criminals or outlaws (cf. 208). Whereas in other cases, many other people became servants in households of people who belonged to a higher social class, or qualified as craftsmen that the powerful families needed. In addition, these families took more people to form slave armies, a military body of defence for their wars, and afterwards for raids to get more slaves for exchange or sale in the future. Davidson insists that the slave soldiers were not “outcasts in the body politics” as were “the African chattel slaves who would labour in the Americas” (209). Nevertheless, it might seem contradictory to our common knowledge what this historian gathers about the slaves in West Africa in the 18th century:

Household slaves lived with their masters, often as members of the family. They could work themselves free of their obligation. They could marry their masters’ daughters. They could become traders, leading men in peace and war, governors and sometimes even kings. “A slave who knew how to serve,” ran the old Asante proverb, “succeeds to his master’s property.” (209)

Basil Davidson’s inference above could have been the fate of the main character, Ogbanje Ojebeta Alice, in Emecheta’s *The Slave Girl*, who is the baby girl born to Umeadi and Okwuekwu. She could have inherited Ma Palagada’s market stall and prosperous business, if she had accepted to marry her son Clifford. But as Clifford had to get in charge of his mother’s business, he left without any special promise to Ojebeta. So when Pa Palagada allows her to leave the house after Ma Palagada’s death, she returns to her hometown. Instead, it is Chiago, the eldest slave girl, who stays and bears Pa Palagada’s four children. She becomes the mistress of the house and in so doing lives up to the old Asante proverb mentioned above.

J.D. Fage and William Tordoff use a similar reasoning to Davidson’s to explain that slave trade was possible because it did not thwart the population growth in West Africa. On the contrary, it even enriched some West African communities. The West African families exploited the great extensions of the cultivable West African land. But more carriers, traders, miners, military organizers, and political workers were required to satisfy the growing market trades of precious goods as copper, gold, ivory and salt (cf. 268), so the ruling class and merchants were anxious to increase their slaves because they needed labourers for their agricultural, economic, and political progress. Furthermore, they were interested, in expanding their ruling sphere.

It is important to highlight that slaves formed part of the family structure, at that time and subsequently their descendants became part of that community. Moreover,

becoming part of the family implied that supposedly they would never aspire to overthrow the master. Hence, according to Fage and Tordoff: “The prime importance of slaves then was not as articles of commerce, but as means by which larger and more effective units of population might be created than resulted simply from kinship ties” (269). However, they clarify that when the economic circumstances were difficult, the masters had to exchange their slaves for the needed supplies that arrived from overseas. The more slaves the kings and masters had, the easier it was to defeat their neighbouring rivals in wars and raids for more slaves, and in extension for more wealth and power (cf. 269).

These historians underscore how a time came when the African masters and rulers conceived the slaves as individuals with an economic value, who could be used for trading: “a slave, tended to become the yardstick by which other sources—horses, guns, parcels of trade goods, quantities of agriculture produce—were measured” (270). But they insist that the goal was not to trade with them, because the success of any African kingdom was directly proportional to the number of slaves (cf. 270).

Fage and Tordoff observe that about less than half of the slaves were eventually sold away by their own families. These were mostly composed of the outcasts, who offended their community, debtors, convicted of crimes, adultery, and witchcraft. Along with these, the mentally or physically diminished were liable to become cannon fodder or human sacrifices in ancestral cults. There were also slaves who had neither family nor friends to interfere with their capture (cf. 267). For example, in the case of Emecheta, her main character Ogbanje Ojebeta Alice, in *The Slave Girl*, was sold even though she had her “other mothers” and family in her community. Her brother Okolie cheated them by saying that she was staying with a rich relative.

Fage and Tordoff explain that when the trans-Atlantic slave trade started, the merchants demanded slaves in specific good conditions (cf. 263-264). They clarify that the European slave traders’ narratives reveal that they advised the trans-Atlantic traders to buy only young, healthy, and productive slaves in order to survive through the long trip to America. As a result of an excess of slave trading it could be inferred that Africa was being drained of its young peasants, labourers and craftsmen. However, Fage and Tordoff believe that this idea behind such statements could be questioned:

the demand for slaves for export led to an increase in warfare and raiding, and hence to an increased destruction of life, and of the property, production and general security needed to sustain life and growth. (264)

They elucidate that what was called in West Africa “slavery” was similar to the feudal social organization in Europe, in which structures of dependency acted as the pivotal basis for economic and political survival (cf. 268). They deduce that even though the Europeans captured slaves before the 18th century, the West Africans rulers themselves were the providers of slaves:

In effect these Africans seem to have been consciously or unconsciously weighing up whether their interest would be better served by concentrating exclusively on building up local labour force, or by exchanging some of it for the commodities which were offered for sale by Europeans. (266)

Fage and Tordoff highlight that, according to archaeological evidence, the country of the Igbo was already immersed in a prosperous and sophisticated network of marketing, trading and exchanging of goods during the 16th century (cf. 271). The Igbos mastered and dominated the river trading affluence and therefore they had access to the interior land, in which the population was higher in number. When the Europeans arrived at that flourishing area, it was easy to buy slaves. In compliance with this historian’s analysis, “by the end of the eighteenth century, one European observer thought that three quarters of the slaves exported from Bonny, one of the principal delta ports, were of Ibo origin” (271).

7.3. AMA ATA AIDOO’S WORDS ON CIVILIZED BONDAGE

In the case of Ama Ata Aidoo, she sometimes versifies her ideas about slavery and enslavement in her long poem “Speaking of Hurricanes” dedicated to African exiles in her work of poetry entitled “*An Angry Letter in January*”:

African women in various forms of
Civilised bondage are
Still and forever wiping
Baby snot and adult shit:
Bourgeois black or imperial white.

Who cares?! (II. 24-29)

The Slave Trade was only
A chapter, watershed perhaps, but
Really no more than an episode in the hands of
A master tale-performer who knows too well, how
To change the story,
Its telling,
Its music,

Its drums

To suit his times. (III. 1-9)

Although these lines published 1992 are not part of the works I analyze in this research, they could stand out as a summary of the main themes in this writer's work. Her certainty that an African woman is a nation-builder and important pillar for the progress in her society pushes Aidoo to write about the political, social and human conditions in her own country. She is cuffed by her own commitment, and not necessarily as a feminist but rather as a fighter for human rights, which include women's rights. She cannot escape her reality or her people's in Ghana when she writes her works. This is underscored in this excerpt that follows below from *Our Sister Killjoy*, in which she warns readers and her people in general against believing in the words of those who deny truth, becoming more obvious than the slave castles spread on the Ghanaian Cape Coast:

Oh no. The academic-pseudo-intellectual version is even more dangerous, who in the face of reality that is more tangible than the massive walls of the slave forts standing along our beaches, still talks of universal truth, universal art, universal literature and the Gross National Product. (6)

The Ghanaian poet and scholar Kofi Anyidoho highlights, before quoting this same excerpt found above, Aidoo's suggestion "that until we take full account of the impact of slavery and colonialism on the very foundations of our societies, we cannot make any meaningful progress in reorganizing ourselves into a viable modern nation" (14). Anyidoho explains that the slave fort is one of the hearts of metaphor in the Ghanaian culture (13). The castles stand as a background on a stage where it is inevitable to either have them as the starting point or the ending of a myriad of stories. Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang also underscores the significance of the stone buildings in his poetic prose as the source for an infinite number of thoughts and images:

CAPE COAST CASTLE, THE EDIFICE AND THE METAPHOR, stands outside the limits of time. Its meaning is deliquescent. Its world is the world before naming, form or kinship. Knotty, full of discrepancies and confused codes, it rules by silence. The power of the Castle is the power of silence; silence as the seduction and betrayal of power. (23)

Opoku-Agyemang concludes with a few significant words: “Slavery is the living wound under the patchwork of scars” (23), and adds: “The voices within Cape Coast Castle are full of the scarring. The wound is real, the judgement of chaos is real” (23). World vacationers as well as Afro-American pilgrims feel overwhelmed by the brutality of the fact of an exit with no return through which the slaves one by one, due to the narrowness of door, left and never found their way back to their African continent. The visitor cannot but drown, after plunging into the humid and heavy darkness, under the weight of human injustice, into a state of silence due to the sadness inflicted by imagining the untold suffering. According to Opoku-Agyemang:

The effect of enslavement have [sic] lasted this long because of the silence that surrounds its history. The Mandingos say: ‘one adds to the power of the fetish by leaving it in the bag.’ The power of the fetish of slavery is enhanced by keeping it hidden. Growing out of the rock upon which it stands, Cape Coast Castle today is a blind permanence, the white-heat centre of a pyre, anguish become [sic] a castle, a castle as a sign both of the triumph of others over us and of our seemingly rootless grief: rootless because we are so silent. But the world does not listen to silence. (27)

In *Our Sister Killjoy* Aidoo plays with blank spaces alternating sentences in an unexpected way. Blankness can be considered to re-present that kind of castles metaphorically covered with white bags of silence. These castles’ walls flaking off remain unrestored. They are full of silent grief awaiting experience and knowledge to spill its guts and tell, and loaded with untold episodes of history and real life stories. Page three with the only line: “Things are working out” (3), typed on the first third of the sheet of paper. Then, page four with another line on the same proportion of the previous one: “towards their dazzling conclusions...”(4) and the lines finish on the upper half of page five:

...so it is neither here nor there,
what ticky-tackies we have
saddled and surrounded ourselves with,
blocked our views,
cluttered our brains. (5)

Page six only has the first two thirds written, then as we move to page seven we have to lower our eyes to read the words found in the last third of the page. These leaps from one empty space to another are obviously intentional, and they produce curiosity

to know and desire to learn. Why did Aidoo leave so many pages unwritten? Many possibilities are open to the unsaid. Aidoo writes all without words, but the world does not listen to the silences as Opoku-Agyemang has expressed above. Finally, and after the solemnity of her silences, Aidoo writes about slavery and enslavement starting by the metaphor of the castle as her vital and necessary launching pad.

The narrator again brings forward one of the most important Ghanaian metaphors: the young African girl, Sissie, leaves Ghana and its castles. She arrives in Germany and is taken to the youth hostel, where she and other youngsters from different parts of the world will spend sometime nursing some pine seedlings, and to her surprise:

There was a castle
 Which the brochure tells you
 Was one of the largest in all
 Germany.
 Germany?
 The land of Castles?
 So who was this
 Prince,
 This Lord and Master
 Who had built one of
 The largest castles of them all,
 Possessed the
 Biggest
 Land, the
 Greatest number of
 Serfs?
 And you wondered
 Looking at the river,
 How many
 Virgins had
 Our Sovereign Lord and Master
 Unvirgined on their nuptial nights
 For their young
 Husbands in
 Red-eyed
 Teeth-gnashing
 Agony, their
 Manhoods
 Hurting...
 But 'all the days are not equal', said the old
 Village wall, and

The castle is now a youth hostel. (19)

So Aidoo cannot escape the metaphor of the castle. Moreover, her commitment will drive her further away from silence to speak up for her people and Africa.

The narrator in Aidoo's novel explains, as if his voice coming from backstage, the mechanism and implications of colonialism in poetic form. The colonisers take the Other's land make home out of it and exploit all its riches. Then, they exert power to oppress the colonised even if their decisions meant the killing of the natives. This brings the narrator to implicitly highlight the ideas of dissimilarity on which the whites forged their justifications for colonisation. The difference between the African and Western world is highlighted. In addition, the idea of the superiority of the white race is the starting point to imply that the black people do not conform to their established standards. The idea of the physical, biological, and psychological differences between the white and black races is the basis to justify colonialism. Hence, colonialism is the solution for the white man. Consequently, exploitation and looting have been emptying Africa and filling up the Empire's booty:

But what she also came to know was that someone somewhere
would always see in any kind of difference, an excuse to be mean.

A way to get land, land, more land.
Valleys where green corn would sway in the wind
A grazing ground for highland cattle.
A stream to guggle the bonnie bairns to sleep.
Gold and silver mines,
Oil
Uranium
Plutonium
Any number of ums—
Clothes to cover skins,
Jewels to adorn,
Houses for shelter, to lie down and sleep.
A harsher edge to a voice.
A sharper ring to commands.
Power, Child, Power.
For this is all anything is about.
Power to decide
Who is to live,
Who is to die, (13)

And after the comma, the narrator-observer of time finishes the poem with a few words that Aidoo writes on page fourteen "where," then on page fifteen "When," and finally "How" on page sixteen, referring to the place, time, and method the colonisers used to execute those who disturbed their aims. Moreover, the typological white gaps are the spaces where Aidoo's irony emerges from the clash between the re-presentation of silence in her second section, which also starts with only the title "The Plums" on

page seventeen along with the absolute blankness on page eighteen, and then followed by the narrator's eloquent poetic intervention.

In a further intervention the narrator adds a line to his thoughts in verse, as if it were an afterward thought: "From Knowledge gained since" (27). He repeats this verse afterwards once and again in different sections of the novel, converting it into a keystone for the fact that Sissie turned her trip and other experiences into important apprehended knowledge. She is aware now of the injustice of slavery and the fact that peoples around the world were not benevolent to each other. They still hurt one another:

And now we know why. It is such an old story. Such a painful one too. Otherwise, how could they have made slaves of us when we owed them nothing? Not a cent, not a pesewa, not a kobo. Oh, it is not easy to understand. To think that we owed nobody the smallest franc. Yet, they wanted our labour for free. And when with the help of the gun and some of our own relatives they succeeded in sitting on us, they then said that indeed, we were made to be slaves because we are stronger, and we can work longer hours in the sun, and such other nonsenses... (114)

Sissie gets to curse those who ruined the lives of the Africans: "And may they come to no good who wish us ill. ... Yes, why not? ... A curse on those who for money would ruin the Earth and trade in human miseries" (114-115). In the last section of the novel, in the letter that later was never sent to Sissie's boyfriend, she curses them again: "A curse on all those who steal continents!" (120). Sissie explains that those of the Africans who were not sold by their relatives into slavery ended up being kidnapped, to belong later to foreign masters. But in any case, Sissie affirms that:

Meanwhile, those who grew up around Mother woke up to forced labour and thinly—veiled slavery on colonial plantations... Later on, her sons were conscripted into imperial armies and went to die in foreign places, all over again or returned to her, with maimed bodies and minds. (123)

7.3.1. AIDOO'S CHARACTERS TRAPPED IN BY SKIN COLOUR AND CHRISTIANISM

Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*, Aidoo also underlines the eternal imprisonment the Africans suffer due to their skin colour. The first shock that Sissie experiences when she arrives at the train station in Germany, the very centre of the Aryan race and the core of whiteness, is her awareness of being the only black person in that space of the whites. The cognizance of the fact that she was different because of her skin colour puzzled her: "Ja, das Schwartzte Mädchen" (12), She was pointed out as a black girl by a German

mother. Hence, she became fully conscious of the prison of her skin. Her skin colour chains her forever to all sorts of myths and fallacies. Her reaction as we observed earlier is of disgust and rejection to the white race, but later she feels remorse. According to the narrator she will regret this moment all her life, this instant when she is forced into the knowledge of the presence of the “colour line,” which Du Bois marked as the problem of the 20th century. However, this incident echoes Frantz Fanon’s “racial epidermal” experience that he recounts as a personal experience in *Black Skin, White Mask*, in which he writes “‘Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!’ Frightened! Frightened! Now they are beginning to be afraid of me” (112). And he adds:

In the train I was given not one but two, three places. I had already stopped being amused. It was not that I was finding febrile coordinates in the world. I existed triply: I occupied space. I moved toward the other [...] and the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared. Nausea. (112)

Accordingly, Aidoo’s aim is to underscore that one’s skin can become a prison if it is in the wide range of the varieties of blackness, because colours hold bags of information tainted by ideologies that can hurt on the one hand, and hinder progress on the other hand.

Additionally, this Ghanaian author seems to look for more issues that enslave the main character who re-presents the been-to-and-come-back-home Africans in this novel. Sissie’s name is Mary the same as her German friend’s name is Marija. The German woman cannot understand why an African girl should have a Christian name, so Sissie explains: “I come from a Christian family. It is the name they gave me when they baptised me. *It is also good for school and work and being a lady* (emphasis added)” (24). Sissie’s family has to comply with the arrival of the new Christian religion in order to survive in the new African society:

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. (25)

Aidoo reaffirms that the only way to strive to become someone in such an African society as the independent Ghana is by converting to Christianity.

7.3.2. AFRICAN TONGUES SHACKLED AND NEO-COLONIALISM IN AIDOO

It is no secret that Ama Ata Aidoo has always been aware of the issue of language and the ongoing debate among African literary critics, writers and intellectuals, regarding the choices they have to make when they write articles, essays, books, scripts and other work. In the 1960s and 1970s this was an issue of commitment and the choices were sometimes interpreted as adhered to ideology. It was almost a must to justify and theorise about the use of a language. In the case of this Ghanaian writer, her use of the English language has already been explained in the section 5.2.1 of this research. Aidoo as well as her main character in *Our Sister Killjoy* are both enslaved by the English language, due to colonialism, as the narrator demonstrates through his poetic expression. The German lady explained that Sissie's use of English reminded her of her Indian friends who worked at the supermarket before they left:

A common heritage. A
Dubious bargain that left us
Plundered of
Our gold
Our tongue
Our life—while our
Dead Fingers clutch
English—a
Doubtful weapon fashioned
Elsewhere to give might to a
Soul that is already
Fled. (29)

Sissie, in the last section of the novel, expresses her awareness of the problem of language in the first person singular, since this part is presented in an epistolary style. The narrator does not interfere here. It is the main character who writes a letter, which we read as a monologue with her own words, potential responses, and her boyfriend's reactions. As if Sissie were answering to a simple comment by her boyfriend she says:

But how can I help being serious? Eh, My Love, what positive is there to be, when I cannot give voice to my soul and still have her heard? Since so far, *I have only been able to use a language that enslaved me, and therefore, the messengers of my mind always come shackled?* (emphasis added). (112)

Sissie's words, stressed intentionally in the very famous quote above, speak out Aidoo's feelings and thoughts about the imposition of a language. Both Sissie and Aidoo believe that it is a civilized tool for a new way of slavery.

Another aspect that Aidoo deals with in this novel is the dilemma of the brain drain. The bondage here is psychological. If they go and never come back it is because they are enslaved by their need to prove to the world that the Africans are also able to get to the highest level in education, medicine, technology, and other aspects related to knowledge and wisdom. It is their vital struggle to prove that they are as worthy as a white man. As Frantz Fanon points out: "There is a fact: White men consider themselves superior to black men. There is another fact: Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect" (*Black* 12). Fanon sadly asserts that: "However painful it may be for me to accept this conclusion, I am obliged to state it: For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white" (12). Aidoo's crowd in London seem to emanate this idea, which kept Sissie brooding over those who would never go back to Africa if they do not overcome their inferiority complex and pursuit of the white approbation.

The other side of the dilemma about the brain drain Aidoo re-presents here is the case of those returning to Africa. Those are also enslaved by the government abuses and poverty or even by their own greed that ends in political corruption. This also tortures people still waiting for the young generations to lift up Africa. Therefore, the narrator's backlash against brain drain rather than being a reprimand it conveys a litany of complains:

So, please,
Don't talk to me of the
Brain—
Drain—
Which of us stays in these days?
But those of us who fear
We cannot survive abroad,
One reason or another?

Gambian ophthalmologist in Glasgow
Philippino lung specialist in Boston

Brazilian cancer expert in
 Brooklyn or
 Basle or
 Nancy.
 While at home,
 Wherever that may be,
 Limbs and senses rot
 Leaving
 Clean hearts to be
 Transplanted into
 White neighbours' breasts...
 And
 Peace Troops and other volunteers
 Who in their home towns, might not
 Get near patients with
 Hayfever in league with
 Local incompetence
 Prepare
 Rare case for
 Burial... (32-33)

Furthermore, after these words, the wise narrator informs that it is Sissie who gets angry later, once she leaves Germany and goes to London to visit her boyfriend. She discovers that most of Africans and West Indians live in a precarious situation "for she knew from one quick composite vision, that in a cold land, poverty shows as nowhere else" (89). Sissie, explains the narrator, came to realize "that such migrations are part of the general illusion of how well an unfree population think they can do for themselves. Running very fast just to remain where they are" (89). Moreover, she was puzzled at the idea that when they returned home they were not honest enough to tell the truth about their dramatic lives. They would not even be honest to themselves:

So when they eventually went back home as 'been-tos', the ghosts of the human that they used to be, spoke of the wonders of being overseas, pretending their tongues craved for tasteless foods which they would have vomited to eat where they were prepared best.

Fish and Chips.

They lied.

They lied.

They lied.

The Been-tos lied.

And another generation got itself ready to rush out. (89-90)

It is not the recipe of the fish and chips that makes the following generations flee out of Africa, but rather the sustenance itself to survive away from the ails of their

African society, in which the future is thwarted by the past political failing activities. The price is very high for both Africa and Africans. Even though they think that their salvation is away from their own home. They must have discovered that “there is nothing at the centre but worse slavery” (88).

So after the slave trade and colonialism, the apparently independent African peoples become enslaved by what Aidoo calls neo-colonialism. The precarious economical situation of so many families in the countryside of Ghana lead the young people to flee to the urban spaces where they heard that it was easier to make money. And the same frustration appears when they return home.

In 1970, Aidoo published her collection of short stories, *No Sweetness Here*, before her first novel, *Our Sister Killjoy*, which appeared in 1977. She included in her short stories tales about the contemporary problems provoked by neo-colonialism. For example, in “For Whom Things Did Not Change” Aidoo re-presents how by the end of the 1960s many workers in official rest houses maintained their jobs, and did not assimilate the difference between serving the white masters and the new black elite. The steward-boy Zirigu wants to serve the African visitor, Kobina, as if this were one of those white Europeans. As a cook, he can only prepare European food, because otherwise, preparing African food means an offence for him. In fact, it was his wife Setu who cooked African food at home. Moreover, Zirigu kept on calling Kobina, “Massah” as he would call the white masters in the colonial period. Zirigu does only want to offer European products such as English or French breakfast, but Kobina only wants real oranges instead, the ones Zirigu gets from the local market. At a first reading, we understand that Aidoo underlines Zirigu’s inadaptability to the new situation of independence in his country by re-presenting his inconsistency at the time of addressing his visitor: “My young Master, forgive me for still addressing you like this. But then, is there anything else I can do? At my age, it is too late for me to start being too familiar with my betters” (23).

Zirigu refers to Kobina as a different kind of African elite, that is, respectful and expecting familiar treatment from his compatriot who happens to be the caretaker of the government rest house. Kobina reflects on the idea of becoming a master himself, in the colonial sense of the word, which implies that Zirigu is a slave:

‘If you ask them, why ten years after independence, some of us still have to be slaves, they say you are nuts to ask questions like that.’

‘You are getting your definitions wrong. By what stretch of imagination does a steward-boy or a housemaid become a slave?’

‘Was it not enough that whole sections of us were bred so that all they could do was to minister to the needs of white men and women? Doing soul-killing jobs? Do they have to do them for us too?’ (sic) (15)

Another aspect is that Zirigu speaks in his native language with his wife and in pidgin with his visitor, as a slave must do with his master. He can also use perfect English whenever he wants. Through Zirigu’s own words, we learn how he has become the steward-boy of the rest house thanks to his first white master during colonialism, who recommended him for the job. He has stayed in this same job for years even after independence. By the end of the short story, we find out that Zirigu’s awkward behaviour is but a reaction to what he considered an unjust situation. Zirigu and Setu were happy with their destiny but they had only one very simple wish:

When the white people were here, and they were our masters, it was only understandable that they should have electric lights and water-closets and give us, the boys, latrine pails and kerosene lamps. But now we are independent they are going to make this house new. My own people will give me a closet and an electric light. (27-28)

To his anger and his wife’s disillusion, the men only painted the walls, repaired some steps leading to the rooms and added a little veranda: “But there were no electric lights and in the lavatory, no water-closet. I discovered they had taken away the old pail and given me a new one” (28). Zirigu affirms, “My own people who are big men do not think I should use these good things they use” (28). He is hurt by the idea that according to these African men’s discrimination he does not deserve the two bulbs even though they are worth very little money. As if out of spite, these men’s action imply that he has to continuously buy kerosene. This is an unnecessary expensive commodity he can save if they install electricity. This incident conveys the idea that a low-class servant is not qualified for the improvements that independence has brought forward. Only the elite can take whole advantage of the social changes and economic benefits. He is angry and his wife scolds him: “She said I was behaving like a child. That it is nothing. We should never forget who we are, that’s all. Now the anger is gone, and I stay here. My young Master, what does ‘Independence’ mean?” (29). Aidoo throws out to her people and all readers this rhetorical question that proves how the African people perpetuate the enslavement of the low classes by enforcing the idea of their inferiority, as if they were not worth living a better life.

7.3.3. AIDOO AND THE SUBMISSION TO EASY-MONEY MAKING

Another fiasco that Aidoo writes about in *No Sweetness Here* is the lack of alternatives to survive in the African rural areas during the first decade after the independence of Ghana. Poverty, lack of education and other hardships were driving most of the young people, especially female members of the Ghanaian families, to the cities and into prostitution. In “For Whom Things Didn’t Change,” Zirigu and Setu talk about Kobina. They wonder how strange he is since he neither drinks nor brings a young woman to his bed. This made the couple talk about the young African village girls who abandon home and flee to urban areas. Setu wonders about the reasons why they sleep with big old African men in the cities. Zirigu explains that they bring back “good things” home cheating their mothers about the source of their money:

But the men are big men. They have the money. They have all the nice things, like big cars and the false hair which come from the white man’s land. And the little girls sleep with them because they like these things.
(10)

Moreover, when Setu complains about the times they are living in and the rulers they have, Zirigu reminds her: “Mm. Was it different in the old days, Setu my wife? Did not the lords take the little girls they liked among the women?” (10). This reality turns into a problem at the moment that Ghana becomes independent and, supposedly, the African rulers should have worked hard to propagate education and create new jobs for the new generations. But this does not happen. The African elite are perpetuating the ignorance of the African people to dominate them.

However, Aidoo had the courage to come up against her own character’s, Setu’s, statement: “Everyone sees them on the land, and no one says anything”(10). As if the author were responding to Setu’s despair she wrote two short stories, “In the Cutting of a Drink,” and “Two Sisters” explicitly dealing with the problem of prostitution. In the first one, Mansah’s brother goes to the city in search of his sister who has refused to go to school any more. She was sent there to a woman to learn how to keep a house and work with a sewing machine. She goes back home for a visit in the first Christmas, but she has never returned again later. Twelve years have passed and the family in the village are anxious about her news. Mansah’s brother meets his friend Duayaw in the city, and that night he takes him to dance. Duayaw laughs at the naivety of his friend who thinks he would find his sister easily in the city. He thinks that the city is as small as a village where people know each other. However, Duayaw explains that it is not

easy to find her, especially if she got married to a rich man who might live in the big houses far from downtown. It is Saturday and Duayaw thinks he would take Mansah's brother to dance, so that he can tell his friends and family in the village about the new places he has been to. He asks a girl to dance with him following Dauyaw's instructions. When he comes back to his table he realizes that the girls at the other table are "all bad women of the city." He begins to feel uncomfortable:

I was unhappy thinking about these women. 'Have they no homes?' I asked myself. 'Do not their mothers like them? God, we are all toiling for our threepence to buy something to eat...but oh! God! this is no work.'... Any kind of work is work... This is what Mansa told me with a mouth that looked like clotted blood. Any kind of work is work... so do not weep. She will come home this Christmas. (36-37)

As can be observed above, Mansah's brother speaks out Aidoo's worries and complaints. He goes to look for a girl and finds a woman who is lost in prostitution.

In "Two Sisters," Mercy is the younger sister who works as a typist and is not satisfied with the little wage. She becomes the sweet heart of a big old man who can buy her cloths, shoes, and whatever she desires. Mercy lives with her elder sister, Connie, who is a teacher and does not approve of her ways of getting these goodies back home. The big man wants to bribe Connie into approval and gets her an electric engine from London for her sewing machine. Connie, who is pregnant, is sure that her husband James is also having an affair with another woman, so she is sad for both her sister and herself. James is delighted with Mercy's decisions:

'Since every other girl she knows has ruined herself prosperously, why shouldn't she? Just forget for once that you are a teacher. Or at least, remember she is not your pupil.' [...] *'What would you like me to say? Every morning her friends who don't earn any more than she does wear new dresses, shoes, wigs and what-have-you to work. What would you have her do? (emphasis added)'*. (98)

Aidoo is aware of the catastrophe that is leading to the dramatic denouement of the fate of many young African girls in Ghana and other parts of West Africa. The words stressed above allude to those who have sold their bodies and their souls in exchange for the Western futile and useless objects of commodities and fashion. However, there are also members of some families that close their eyes and pretend they do not see in order to benefit from this situation. In this short story James envisages that both he and Connie can use Mercy in their own interest with the influence of the big man:

‘In fact, encourage her. He may be able to intercede with the Ministry for you so that after the baby is born they will not transfer you from here for some time.’

‘...’
 ‘And maybe he would even agree to get us a new car from abroad. I shall pay everything’. (98)

Connie becomes ashamed of James’ idea. She feels that her sister Mercy is saved thanks to the coup that put an end to this story because the big man is taken to jail. Notwithstanding, Mercy, who lives in one of those government houses, has to look for somewhere else to live since she does not want her sister Connie interfere with her prosperity. She finds a new big old important man, although on this occasion she boldly brings him to her sister’s house and presents the Captain to her family. This ending implies it is not easy to convince young girls to relinquish the possibility of making easy money.

7.4. BUCHI EMECHETA’S SLAVE NARRATIVE

In accordance with Emecheta’s self-representation in *Head Above Water: An Autobiography*, she starts with the description of her own relationship with her mother. To the reader’s surprise, the second paragraph in the second chapter of this autobiography could be considered as the summary of her novel *The Slave Girl*, in which she emphasises that it is centred on her mother’s life. The main character’s name is taken from her mother’s real name after embracing the Christian religion, which was Alice Ogbanje Ojebeta Emecheta. Buchi Emecheta’s statement that her mother had forgiven her uncle for selling her to a relative in Onitsha—to buy the objects he needed for his coming-of-age dance—could be considered as a necessary afterword to this African novel.

In *The Slave Girl* Ojebeta’s enslavement begins when both her parents die from the felenza (influenza). Her brother, Okolie, sold her when she was only seven years old to his rich relative, Ma Palagada, the market cloth trader. He needed money to buy himself many things “for his coming-of-age dance” (30). He reasons out the justification to sell his sister by insisting on two ideas in one thought:

So I deserve to have the money I need so badly for my coming-of-age dance. What does it matter if I have to trade my sister to get it? She will be well looked after there, better than I can afford to do in Ibuza. Let her go. This is the only way she can survive and grow into adulthood. (31)

The ideas in this quotation are simply “amuse gueules” that Emecheta uses to prepare the reader for more information about slavery within Africa in the first decades of the 20th century.

Although Okolie possesses his parents’ farm, he does not want to work to earn a living. He wants fast and easy money. His father, Okwuekwu, always accused him of being lazy. He never goes to work to the farm because he only wants to go to all the celebrations and burials to blow his horn. Okolie’s idleness and greed will change the course of Ojebeta’s life forever. He is not a responsible person and does not want to bring up his sister. He only worries about what he requires, “a new horn pipe, and some women’s head-scarves which he would have to tie around his waist for the dance. He would also need strings of cowries and little bells for his feet. Essential too were large, colourful ostrich feathers to complete his Uloko outfit” (35).

In spite of the frivolous main reason that anchors Okolie to the decision of selling his sister, Emecheta writes about one of the most serious subjects: she anticipates the important fact that slavery in some cases and at specific historical moments was the only way out of an eminent disastrous life for both the slave trader and the slave in the first decades of 20th century Africa. This author uses her omniscient narrator as if he were one of the historians mentioned above in order to unveil the history of the slaves’ everyday life and their mistresses such as Ma Plagada and Ma Mee, who is another rich cloth trader at the Otu market in Onitsha:

Many of the market women had slaves in great number to help them with the fetching and carrying that went with being a full-time trader—and also in the vain hope that one day the British people at the coast would go and some of these house slaves could be sold abroad, just as their fathers and grandfathers had done, so profitably that the abundance of capital and property they had built could still be seen in many families round Onitsha and Bonny and Port Harcourt. (53)

Okolie and Ojebeta finally meet Ma Palagada after a long walk from Ibuza to Onitsha. Ma Palagada, who was once kept by a Portuguese slave trader, was left behind with two daughters and “a great deal of wealth” (114). Therefore, she is surrounded by luxury and has won herself the right to lead a comfortable life thanks to the slaves working for her in the cloth stall. Ojebeta is cheated by her brother and left behind eating her Ghanaian corn dough, “Agidi Akala,” in the cloth stall with the rest of Ma Palagada’s working slaves, while Okolie bargains the cost of the loss of her freedom.

The little Ojebeta gets tired of waiting for her brother, whom she cannot see anywhere. So she decides to run and look for him so as not to lose her way back home to Ibuza. The Onitsha market women are cooperative and work as a market community group. Ma Mee, the other cloth trader, catches the little runaway, Ojebeta, and tells her that she has been sold: “You are just a domestic slave” (55). She knows that it is better to follow the unwritten traditional law “among the traders on the banks of the Niger” (54) of helping each other against thieves and capturing runaway slaves instead of wasting their time going to the police, court or chief to restore the robbed objects. Ma Mee could need the help of others in similar situations.

Most of the chapter entitled “A Necessary Evil” is exclusively dedicated to the subject of slavery. The reader will learn about slavery in Africa, on the one hand, through the narrator’s gossip about Ma Mee’s evaluation of the Palagadas’ slaves; and on the other hand, through Chiago’s succession of memories. Ma Mee knows that the Palagada family has, in addition to the four young girls, two other men slaves from the Urhobo ethnic group, whom she cannot assure if they were captured or bought by the Potokis,³⁸ who were returning to their country. With the arrival of the little Ojebeta the slaves at the Palagadas’ place sum up to seven people. The men work in the Palagadas’ farms, and the girls work at the cloth stalls at the market and also at home. However, Ma Mee, does not envy the Palagadas for all their wealth, because she is also one of the richest Onitsha market women in 1916. She knows that they can no longer sell the slaves to the foreigners of other continents in order to increase their fortune because of the abolition law.

Emecheta presents another new character, Amanna, the youngest slave that Ma Palagada already had, to tell her own story. Amanna belongs to the ethnic group called the Efiks who do not accept the birth of twins. She was born a twin and secretly fed and later sold into slavery by her own mother to save her life. Hence, Ma Palagada’s trade with people can be considered a good deed. Thus, the fact that Ojebeta was an orphan child simply justifies her loss of freedom as the only salvation she can dream of: “Ma Mee walked back to her stall telling herself that buying and selling people could not be helped. ‘Where would we be without slave labour, and where would some of these unwanted children be without us?’ It might be evil, but it was a necessary evil” (60). Ma

³⁸ The Igbos in the hinterland called all the white people “Potokis” at the beginning of the 20th century before the English took over. This spelling stands for the way the Igbos pronounced the word “Portuguese” (*The Slave Girl* 13).

Mee's justification echoes Emecheta's voice in her re-presentation of the Igbo people regarding the theme of slavery in the pre-colonial and colonial old days. Hence both profitability and survival prepare the ground for enslavement.

Although for many readers it could be astounding when Emecheta insinuates that slavery has in some cases saved Africans from starvation, it is evinced here that she is endorsed by some historians' research. In fact, her chapter "A Necessary Evil" echoes Archibald Dalziel's apologia for slavery in the preface to his work, *The History of Dahomy: An Inland Kingdom of Africa, Compiled From Authentic Memories*: "Whatever evils the slave trade may be attended with [...] it is mercy [...] to poor wretches, who...would otherwise suffer from the butcher's knife" (qtd. Hammond and Jablow 23).

Chiago, Ma Palagada's eldest slave, remembers her enslavement experience. Chiago's memories about her personal experience regarding her own loss of freedom bring forward the problem of the lack of birth control that causes hunger. Ironically, to avoid starvation becomes another reason to justify slavery in Africa. Since parents cannot feed all their children, they are traded as slaves. Emecheta depicts this situation captured from real life rather than from history books. Chiago lived in a village that she cannot remember where it was. She was too little when her father sold her to Pa Palagada. Her parents had too many children and her mother was ill. Moreover, that year, the rains did not allow her father to feed them all properly. She was told that she was hired just to carry flowers for a Christian wedding, although she finally discovered that she was sold away to this rich man. She travelled for many days and there was no wedding and no services to perform. She would have thought of going back home but she knew she would never be able to do so. Thus, she finally accepted her destiny. Her family needed the money and she needed to fill her stomach. After eleven years of slavery she accepts the experience as the only way of salvation for her family:

Her family would certainly have starved had she not been sold to this man, Pa Palagada, who had later handed Chiago to his wife. It was a blessing that at least her stomach had been sold with her, so her parents would no longer have to worry about how to feed her; and perhaps the money her head had fetched had helped her family for a while. (57)

Chiago also witnessed one of the cruellest Igbo traditions. When she was twelve, she travelled to the deep Igbo land with Ma Palagada. There, the first wife of the master of a compound died and the tradition was to bury a living female slave with the

dead woman to accompany her to the land of the dead. The chosen slave was a young beautiful girl full of life. She was said to be an Igbo princess captured during the war. As she did not want to be buried alive, she was brutally beaten to death. Chiago heard the slave promise to come back to life again as member of the master's family. When Ma Palagada narrates the story to another woman trader in the market, she affirms that the youngest of the master's wives had a baby girl with a lump on the back of her head, exactly in the same spot where the slave princess received her deadly blow from the master's son. This cruel burial episode does not affect the development of Ojebeta's story. However, it evokes a terrible scene of a ruthless Igbo tradition that Emecheta repeats over and over again in her three African novels.

7.4.1. CHANGING MASTERS IN EMECHETA'S *THE SLAVE GIRL*

Emecheta takes advantage of a slave narrative to demonstrate how those slaves who are freed need to be chained again to their communities by other kinds of bondage. In *The Slave Girl*, Ma Palagada, the owner of many boys and girls slaves, gets very ill and finally dies. Before her death, she asks Ojebeta to take care of her son Clifford. In other words, Ma Palagada wants Ojebeta to marry Clifford. After Palagada's burial her cruel daughter Victoria wants to take Ojebeta as her own slave, but as Clifford has left to attend his mother's business, Ojebeta decided to go back to her hometown and promises to pay back the enslavement money and buy her own freedom. She is welcome in Ibuza, and in two years she goes to Lagos and marries Jacob in a church ceremony. He pays her bride price to Ojebeta's brother as tradition demands. Their first two children are born healthy but the following babies die one after another; and even though they have had a proper Christian marriage, they still have to comply with their society's laws and pay back Ojebeta's worth to Clifford.

Finally, after the decline of his business and enlistment in the army, Clifford goes to collect the money out of need. Eventually Ogbanje Ojebeta Alice feels that she is liberated. However, the paradox behind the idea of a woman being free from slavery but enslaved by her husband heightens Emecheta's irony: "The contract is completed, after all these years. *I feel free in belonging to a new master from my very own town Ibuza; my mind is now at rest (emphasis added)*" (184). In the last paragraph of the novel Emecheta underscores again this same idea:

So as Britain was emerging from war once more victorious, and claiming to have stopped the slavery which she had helped to spread in all her

black colonies, Ojebeta, now a woman of thirty-five, was changing masters. (184)

This reaffirms the notion of a new re-presentation of the Africans lost to other types of bondage, as that of the social mores of the Igbo praxis.

Emecheta considers Christianity as another kind of servitude in some of her African novels. Her characters are subjugated by Igbo tradition, but they are also dominated by the new Western religion. In her *Head Above Water: An Autobiography*, she writes about her mother's story and it is worth quoting the paragraph at length to show the evolution of her enslavement from one master to another:

My mother, Alice Ogbanje Ojebeta, that laughing, loud voiced, six-foot-tall, black glossy slave girl, who as a child suckled the breasts of her dead mother; my mother who lost her parents when the nerve gas was exploded in Europe, a gas that killed thousands of innocent Africans who knew nothing about the Western First World War; my laughing mother, who forgave a brother that sold her to a relative in Onitsha so that he could use the money to buy *ichafu siliki*-silk head ties for his coming-of-age dance. My mother, who probably loved me in her own way, but never expressed it; my mother, that slave girl who had the courage to free herself and return to her people in Ibusa, and still stooped and allowed the culture of her people to re-enslave her, and then permitted Christianity to tighten the knot of enslavement. (3)

In *The Slave Girl* Ma Palagada takes the habit of sending Ogbanje Ojebeta to Sunday school to learn about Christianity. Hence on Sundays and weddings, the slave girls go and participate in the Christian ceremonies. Getting married in a church becomes the modern way of dealing with marriage. However, when Ogbanje Ojebeta returns to her hometown she discovers that her family has not changed their traditional way of life, and everything she has learned from Ma Palagada's household was influenced by the culture of the white people and their religion. Emecheta highlights the clash between the been-to and the traditional Igbos:

Ojebeta still maintained her enthusiastic involvement in Christianity. Many Ibuza girls went to the CMS church then, attracted by the songs, especially the translated Igbo songs. Ojebeta was so devout that she was encouraged by the white vicar to attend baptism classes. This was one of the issues that caused minor clashes between her and Uteh and Eze. (156)

Moreover, Ojebeta is asked about the reasons why she rejects the Igbo traditional religion and marriage rituals:

What is wrong with the religion of your fathers? What is bad in making sacrifices to your dead mother and father and to your personal god? [...] What is wrong with our own music, and our own way of a girl going to her husband's house? (157)

Her answer loads the environment with such high tension: "It's the work of the devil. The Bible and the Catechism books say so. I must be married in the church" (157). After she finally gets married in the church, it is her family-in-law's turn to interrogate Ogbanje about the reasons for her Christian marriage, and about the deficiencies of the traditional ceremonies, prayers and sacrifices. Her answer is: "Well, it is like a man cutting a lock of a girl's hair—it makes a marriage last for ever until either of them dies. But unlike cutting of the hair, the husband is restricted too. He has to marry only one, just one wife as the Bible says" (177-178). Hers and other characters' weddings in Emecheta's African novels are only blessed if they are engaged in a kind of a double wedding, following both Igbo and Christian rituals. Alice Ogbanje Ojebeta wanted to be her husband's only wife for a lifetime.

Emecheta insinuates a kind of bondage through the Christian religion, but as she explains in her interview with Oladipo Joseph Ogundele:

I have just returned from Nigeria where I did the celebration of my mother's life. I explored the spirituality of Christianity which I found has done a lot of harm to our African religion and culture. My next book will revolve around that topic. I will explore deeply the African spiritual life. (456)

7.4.2. OTHER POWERFUL ENSLAVEMENTS IN EMECHETA

Fage and Tordoff have explained that the slave trade was in decline at a certain time. Hence: "In the twentieth century, the Ibo sought to solve their problems by a great investment in Western education and by emigrating to seek jobs all over Nigeria" (271). We have seen that most of the people who inhabit Buchi Emecheta's African books are Igbos. Supplementing the history lessons on Africa, exposed by the two historians introduced above, Emecheta seems to single out the private tales of those whose ancestors had been enslaved. Her stories are written as if to exemplify the historians' texts mentioned earlier as well as to re-present the consequences of slavery. In *The Bride Price*, this author writes the tale of the main character, Aku-nna, in the mode of a general "bildungsroman," highlighting the specific experiences that precipitate her

biological and mental growth, although instead of enriching her life these lead to her premature death.

Aku-nna, who learns about death when she was only thirteen at her father's death, has to leave Lagos with the rest of her family. The motive lies on the Igbo tradition: the eldest uncle Okwonko, who lives back in their hometown Ibuza, receives them as inheritance. After the mourning period of nine months marked by the Igbo tradition, her mother becomes Okwonko's new wife and he turns into the new family's father. Aku-nna's mother Ma Blackie trades and sends her children to school as their real father did before he died in Lagos. Okwonko's wives are against this idea since their own children were never sent to school. Schooling brings about the love story between Aku-nna and her teacher Chike. The name "Aku-nna" is an Igbo word that means "father's wealth." As we continue on reading, we understand that her uncle's economic interest is in Aku-nna's bride price, since the bridegroom's family would have to pay more for her because she has been educated at school. However, Emecheta's intentional choice of naming the main character Aku-nna intensifies the paradox in this novel. The young girl's desires do not comply with the Igbo tradition of marrying a man chosen by her family. It becomes worse for them since the young girl wants to marry Chike, who was an "oshu," a descendant of slaves. Aku-nna was born in a good Igbo family and it would be an abomination to marry a descendant of slaves, according to the traditions and beliefs in her community.

Her cousin Ogugua warns Aku-nna not to develop a friendship with the teacher Chike. He has offered Aku-nna to ride on his bike the very first day on their way to Ibuza after her father's death. Ogugua advises her: "You must be very careful. That man, that teacher—he's not one of us, you know. No decent girl from a good Ibuza family is allowed to associate with him. My father would rather see his daughter dead than allow such a friendship" (70). From this affirmation, the reader can already perceive the severity of a mystery untold yet. We have to wait until the chapter entitled "The Slaves," in which the narrator unveils the truth about Chike. The most crucial information that produces this turning point in the story is quite far from the early insinuations about possible dangers ahead.

When Chike was a small boy he heard the Reverend repeat to him once and again: "We are all equal in the sight of the Lord" (84). After this statement the narrator tells the story of the origins of the teacher: "his grandmother had been a princess who was captured from Ubulu-ukwu, a town only fifteen miles from Ibuza, in the days when

there were no roads but only footpaths used by warriors” (84). She excelled all women in beauty and her master, Obi Ofulue, decided to keep her and get her a man slave to accompany her. The story continues on:

By the time her master died and she had to be buried alive with him, she had already borne four sons and two daughters. The girls were sold, but the rightful son of Ofulue retained all the boys. Soon it became illegal to sell slaves; Ofulue, not wanting to lose face with these Europeans who suddenly stopped buying slaves and turned into missionaries instead, preaching of a kind of God of whom he had never heard, decided to send the Ofulue men slaves to them. Most of the slaves whom the missionaries took in were to become the first teachers, headmasters, and later their children became first doctors and lawyers in many Igbo towns. (84)

According to Agbasiere, the Igbo marriage system “is also governed by the notion of birth status. Thus, it is forbidden for *nwa* or *diala*, ‘a freeborn’, to marry an *osu*, ‘a cult-slave’, or *ohu* ‘a bought-slave’ and their descendants” (96). This anthropologist collected for her research the affirmation of a respectable Igbo octogenarian: “an *osu* is a slave of an idol, hence an untouchable. A freeborn cannot marry him or her” (96). He assured her that Christianity and education are changing things nowadays, since slave descendants also have rights.

In this novel too, exactly as in the case of *The Slave Girl*, Emecheta re-presents the slaves’ stories under proper names. The collective impersonal history narratives about masses of slaves is atomised into individuals who live, love, and suffer. She brings forward the story of a slave to intertwine the events in this novel in order to enhance other kinds of enslavement motivated by taboos in the Igbo society. Chike’s ancestral stories and his survival in the post-World War II period working as a teacher in an Igbo community becomes instrumental to highlight Aku-nna’s forced enslavement to traditions. Although she does not comply with her community’s mores, and after escaping from her first imposed marriage, she elopes with the teacher and gets pregnant facing up her family’s rejection of her bride price and the consequent bad luck. This at first sight could be seen as a starting point for the changes that should rectify the attitude of the people towards many obsolete aspects of the Igbo tradition. This tortured her as well as her mother. Hence, no matter how educated she was, Aku-nna was psychologically enslaved to her people’s traditions, and this turned out to be so powerful that it motivated her death after giving birth to her daughter named Joy.

Emecheta's narrator explains that the people take revenge on Chike's father and destroy his farm of cocoa beans, palm trees, and coconut palms. Moreover, Ma Blackie discovers that her new husband Okwonko, who was expecting a good bride price from Aku-nna's marriage, "was" also "determined to kill" her daughter (164). It is not enough to show his buttocks as the Igbo sign of divorce when he is so ill out of anger and in fever. Emecheta provides a full explanation about the juju practice among the Igbo people, although this is not specific to this area of Africa: "It was known in Ibuza that if you wished to get rid of someone who lived far away, you made a small doll in the exact image of the person and pierced the heart of the doll with a needle, or alternatively set it alight and allowed it to burn gradually" (163). Ma Blackie is not surprised to see a doll of her daughter's image in front of Okwonko's personal god, his *chi*. She prays to the Christian God to help her daughter through parturition and make her people in Ibuza forget the offence.

Emecheta intensifies the idea of having in mind the potentiality of Aku-nna's psychological enslavement as a member in transition in an Igbo community. First, by adding Chike's promise to Ma Blackie of not telling Aku-nna about Okwonko's use of juju: "Most of these things do little harm if the intended victim is not aware of them" (165). Second, through the narrator's affirmation that juju has obviously caused harm to the victims until they finally die painfully, even though this is not scientifically tested (cf. 164). Aku-nna never heard about that juju done to her, but as already unveiled above, she dies after giving birth. According to the narrator's last words at the end of the book, her death was due to the pressure of the traditional superstition: "If the bride price was not paid, she would never survive the birth of her first child. It was a psychological hold that existed for a very long time" (177).

7.4.3. EMECHETA'S SLAVE TRAIL

We have seen the importance of the fact of repetition in Buchi Emecheta's African novels included in this research. For example, the story of the slave who is buried with her mistress appears in the three novels, though from different points of view, and with different consequences affecting the characters' life in some way or another. This Nigerian author becomes an African hawker ringing her bell to offer her products in different stages till they ripen. Emecheta has created in this way a bridge that connects those novels under the shade of slavery.

Another example is the account about Chike's origin in *The Bride Price* gyrating around a blueprint of a story that will be retold in Emecheta's later work. For example, the scene of the burial of a slave with her mistress is repeated in *The Slave Girl* through Chiago's memories. Moreover, Emecheta extends a bridge between "A Necessary Evil," the fifth chapter in *The Bride Price* and "The Mother's Mother," the second chapter in *The Joys of Motherhood*. In this last novel we apparently see Ma Palagada and Chiago from *The Slave Girl* among the crowd of *The Joys of Motherhood* witnessing the whole process of the young female slave who has to be buried alive with her mistress, the chief wife of Agbadi, father of the main female character, Nnu-Ego. Emecheta has reinforced the story of this slave by pointing out these two witnesses found in the crowd surrounding the people who celebrate the burial ceremony, which had taken place in the past in *The Slave Girl*. Hence, Ma Palagada and Chiago, who belong to the realm of *The Slave Girl*, happen to have crossed a tunnel of time and place in Emecheta's realm of literary fiction to form part of the onlookers in that burial ceremony in *The Joys of Motherhood*. Moreover, the two narrators of these novels coincide giving the same information from different points of view, telling their truth, through fiction.

Thus, we learn from Emecheta's African novels about the Igbo tradition of burying a slave alive at the death of her mistress. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta details the effect of this tradition in the Igbo society. The slave is beaten to death by the mistress's son because she does not lie down by his dead mother as tradition demands. His father Agbadi rebukes him for being so cruel: "'Stop that at once' [...] 'What do you call this, bravery? You make my stomach turn?'" (23). The slave thanks Agbadi and promises to come to his household as a daughter. In time, Agbadi's lover, Ona, gives birth to a baby girl, Nnu-Ego, who is described by the narrator as a beautiful child, fair-skinned, but she has a lump on her head. The "dibia's" words in this part of the novel rings a bell and produces a déjà-vu experience in the reading of Emecheta's narratives:

This child is the slave woman who died with your senior wife Agunwa. She promised to come back as a daughter. Now here she is. That is why this child has the fair skin of the water people, and the painful lump on her head is from the beating your men gave her before she fell into the grave. She will always have trouble with that head. If she has a fortunate life, the head will not play up. But if she is unhappy, it will trouble her both physically and emotionally. My advice is that you go and appease the slave woman. (27)

Nnu-Ego is Agbadi's only daughter. He had many sons, but Ona was very special to Agbadi and so was Nnu-Ego, especially once her mother dies after her second child is born prematurely, who also dies. Ona was an only child and her father does not allow her to marry any man because he wants his descendants to belong to him and not to Agbadi.

Much later Nnu-Ego gets married to Amatokwu, but disappointedly, as the months pass by, she does not get pregnant in spite of all the prayers and sacrifices offered to that slave woman, and to their goddess Olisa. Consequently, since the problem is only hers, she secretly goes to all the "dibias" she can and they all coincide in their diagnosis: "that the slave woman who was her *chi* would not give her a child because she had been dedicated to a river goddess before Agbadi took her away in slavery" (31). This slave has become, in Agbasiere's words above, an "osu," a cult slave, before she was kidnapped by Agbadi. Furthermore, Nnu-Ego is beaten and has to leave Amatokwu's compound when her husband discovers she is mothering and breast-feeding his son from his second wife. So she returns to her father's home:

Her father renewed his expensive sacrifices to her *chi*, begging the slave woman to forgive him for taking her away from her original home. He told her through the rising smoke of the slaughtered animals that *he had stopped dealing in slaves and had offered freedom to the ones in his household. He even joined a group of leaders who encouraged slaves to return to their places of origin, if they could remember from where they came. All those in his own compound who refused to go were adopted as his children;* he had seen to it that proper adoption procedure was carried out, in that they were dipped in the local stream and had the chalk of acceptance sprinkled on them (emphasis added). (35)

Here again, we see how Emecheta brings about historical data related to slavery in Africa by recounting private lives in a specific Igbo community. As the stressed words indicate that Agbadi is an important Igbo man in his community. He redeems himself by rectifying his attitude towards slaves and slavery, in order to please his daughter's "chi." His only aim is to convince this personal god to give Nnu-Ego a child. His beloved daughter has to become a mother. Moreover, Nnu-Ego's bride price was also returned to the Amatokwus.

The Joys of Motherhood is close to this woman's biography, whose anxiety to become a mother drastically alters her life. As mentioned earlier, this novel narrates the story of Nnu-Ego's birth, hard life, and death. When she is ready, emotionally speaking,

after the failure of her first marriage, she is sent to Lagos to marry an unknown man chosen by her father, for he had the idea that “When one grows old, one needs children to look after one. If you have no children, and your parents have gone, who can you call your own?” (38). This statement as well as other instances in the novel work as a contrast to highlight the ironic ending. Because Nnu-Ego, after having her seven children and working so hard, struggling against odds to feed them and give them an education, dies alone.

Emecheta re-presents Nnu-Ego’s enslavement as involved in a conservative tradition still followed by her people even though she lives in a context away from her hometown. Life in Lagos is hard to persevere, away from the social codes of behaviour that the Igbos have in order to overcome hunger and keep body and soul together. Nnu-Ego does not have the adequate elements to help her confront the difficulties in an urban space as Lagos, which is changing everyday to adapt to the new order of things due to colonialism and the World War II in Europe. There is no land to plant and she can only trade with very little money. Even though her neighbours do not belong to her family or ethnic group, they sometimes help her to avoid her children’s starvation.

Nnu-Ego’s new life in Lagos and the time-consuming responsibilities that she acquires there such as being a housewife, mother, and petit-trader, thwart any possibility of belonging to any kind of sisterhood or age group. Moreover, she hardly cultivates any women friends. On the one hand, Emecheta inserts Nnu-Ego’s story in such an environment to highlight the importance of clinging to the positive values which the Igbo women have developed in order to help each other keep their “heads above water.” And, on the other hand, to bring forward the concept of birth control, as she clarifies in her interview with Adeola James. Here, she explains that her resource for the concepts she deals with belongs to Sociology, her first field of study. She adds that Nnu-Ego ironically dies alone even though she has had many children.

The experience of polygamy enforced by Nnu-ego’s hometown traditions is rarely reproduced in Lagos. This also brings forth a kind of awareness in her. By extension, it becomes one of those alarm bells that Emecheta rings to awake the rest of the African women to the issue of polygamy in the new order of things. In fact, in the eleventh chapter, “Sharing a Husband,” Emecheta “makes polygamy work” for Nnu-Ego, her husband and his inherited new wife Adaku, as she has echoed in her famous article “Feminism with a Small ‘f,’” in which she seems to defend polygamy and describe it as a situation that creates a space where women overcoming jealousy and

envy can survive under the protection of a husband, household, family, but saves from her nightly sexual obligation. Hence, polygamy can become a token of freedom for an intelligent African woman (cf. 553). But the Nigerians in Lagos work for the white people and are married under the Christian church oath of having only one wife.

The new wife Adaku is fed up with the news that her husband Naife is spending his money drinking palm wine instead of giving more money to feed the children. She convinces Nnu-Ego to go on strike and not cook for him. After feeding the children secretly, Nnu-Ego offers him the three pounds in bills in a dish instead of food. Naife gets angry because he is tired from work and very hungry. In addition, his wives ask for more money, which he cannot get. Oshia his eldest son, who is still a little boy, tears the money bills into small pieces to make more money. Naife rebukes his senior wife Nnu-Ego for obeying Adaku. Nnu-Ego begs him to give her money to feed her four children and gets nothing, she has to wait until that evening. Adaku has no problem since she only has a little girl to feed. This incident opened Nnu-Ego's eyes to her reality. The whole event underscores Emecheta's aim of pinning down the idea of other kinds of enslavement, evinced by what is stressed below:

On her way back to their room, *it occurred to Nnu-Ego that she was a prisoner, imprisoned by her love for her children, imprisoned in her role as the senior wife*. She was not even expected to demand more money for her family; that was considered below the standard expected of a woman in her position. *It was not fair, she felt, the way men cleverly used a woman's sense of responsibility to actually enslave her*. They knew that a traditional wife like herself would never dream of leaving her children. [...] It seemed that all she had inherited from her agrarian background was the responsibility and none of the booty (emphasis added). (137)



PART VIII: *AKOKO NAN*

**LAMBASTING THE CULTURE THAT PERPETUATES THE
EFFECTS OF COLONISATION**

8. THE MEANING OF THE ADINKRA SYMBOL *AKOKO NAN*

On the authority of Bruce Willis and Kojo Arthur, *Akoko Nan* literally translates into English as “Hen’s feet.” Willis explains that it “is an Akan metaphor for protective parenting, parental discipline tempered with patience, mercy, and fondness, and benevolent kinship” (71). Kojo Arthur translates the proverb that goes along with this symbol into: “When the hen treads on its chicken, she does not mean to kill them. Or, Parental admonition is not intended to harm the child” (163). To reinforce this notion, Kayper-Mensah explains this symbol in these lines:

Who has seen a mother hen
Step upon, and kill its chicks?
It may step on its straying chicks
In danger, but protecting them. (3)

Hence this symbol has the only one meaning of straightening twisted behaviours. The aim of this ideogram is to reprimand one’s own children, family and by extension one’s own people when they do not act correctly or proceed as it is expected.

8.1. AN ACT OF APPRAISAL

I have chosen this symbol to delve into Aidoo’s and Emecheta’s works in order to unveil their aim of re-presenting a revision of the rigmarole about the state of the Africans in general, particularly focusing on the African women and their varied field of action in the 1960s and 1970s. These two writers are among the first African women to dedicate their work to self-representation as part of the African women themselves. Their kind of re-presentation involves the inevitable requirement of self-examination. Moreover, this self-assessment can only be understood as such if it is contrasted with the historical and social backgrounds they embrace in every issue exposed to readers.

8.2. BOLD WRITERS ARTICULATE UNSAVOURY FACTS

In 1971, Ama Ata Aidoo published a working paper entitled “Commitment,” in which she expresses her concerns about the responsible engagement of the African writer with his or her society through writing. She explains that this commitment should not be framed within the same yardstick, for the different parts of Africa require disparate treatment. She reminds her audience that writers have to take into account that the countries’ independence has not changed the lives of the ordinary African peoples, since power is just in the hands of a few. Aidoo underscores the significance of the

commitment of the writers, whose works have been only partly accepted by the African readers because, as she added ironically, these authors have:

exposed us to our enemies (the whites?) by talking of our weakness, (our greed, cruelty to one another, the unhealthy physical conditions in which the majority of our people live, the fact that our own rulers differ from the colonisers only by skin colour) and other unsavoury facts of our present and our past. (13)

Aidoo herself has suffered from the negative reactions and hurting comments about her work *Our Sister Killjoy*. As a committed writer, Aidoo has projected her thoughts and worries through her biting criticism in this novel with the only intention of awakening the dormant and conformist Africans. Moreover, she finds it anachronistic 1) to reproach Europe to free Africa, 2) to glorify the past, and 3) even to chant that black is beautiful or Africa is wonderful (cf. "Commitment" 14). In her opinion, the real and radically committed writers are the ones who pursue "certain ideas towards the positive revolutionising of society," notwithstanding that they are "these treacherous writers, who are washing our dirty linens in public" ("Commitment" 14).

Aidoo's works selected for this research show us to what extent she is committed and how courageous she is. She dares to reveal some of the flaws of her society with the only wish to eliminate them. Through her description of how committed writers should act, she has unconsciously described herself. She sees a quality she also has: "a very special type of courage to do auto-surgery" ("Commitment" 14). The intention that lies behind this author's work is to upgrade the quality of life in Africa.

Emecheta also wants to take a hand in the changing process of significant social matters in Africa through her self-appraisal writing. She confessed, when she was informed that the manuscript of *The Bride Price* was sent to Heinemann and they were surely interested in it since the story was based in Nigeria, that "Another of [her] dreams was coming true. [She] had always dreamt that [her] books would be read in Nigeria" (*Head* 157). However, she was aware that her compatriots hardly read in Nigeria, and less her books. Nevertheless, she prides herself about her ability to communicate verbally with her female compatriots on the television programme, "Woman's Forum," whenever she goes to Nigeria. She assures that in Britain she overcomes her anger through writing books because the British read, whereas in Nigeria she has to speak up criticising the African women who practice self-subjugation (cf.

Petersen, “Dilemma” 17). Moreover, Emecheta explains that most of the time in Nigeria she was the odd one out. Notwithstanding, she affirms that Nigerian women “secretly admire open criticism” (Petersen, “Dilemma” 18), for she had seen them behind the glass in the studio jumping up and down happily cheering. The motive for this is her critical attitude about women issues, although to her disillusion, they never tell her directly.

The corollary to this position is that Africans should be aware of the reality of their lives and the practice of injustice that delays their countries’ development. In the Ghanaian culture, the theatrical representations are used to practise self-surgery. In fact, it is a self-examination that belongs to their cultural heritage. For example, Kobina Sekyi’s³⁹ important comedy entitled *The Blinkards*, which was performed for the first time on stage in 1915 with members of the Cosmopolitan Club in Cape Coast in Ghana, belongs to the Ghanaian cultural heritage of self-examination. It was not published as a book until 1974. It is a light comedy in English and Fante publicizing Sekyi’s critical position on the social and cultural consequences of colonialism in his own community. According to the introduction to this book: “Nevertheless, both man and his message are of great significance not only for contemporary Ghana but for Africa as a whole” (Langley xi). I use the year of the publication of the book as a proof that the 1970s was a period in which this kind of self-revision and self-examination were still very crucial to bring about a change in Africa. The historical independence of many African countries did not bring the expected results. Sekyi’s characters are ridiculed through their characteristic artificial and pretentious imitation of the British society.

To reinforce this, and according to Kofi Anyidoho, the idea of self-appraisal already existed in the traditional Ghanaian drama and oral narrative. He quotes Efua Sutherland, the most important playwright in Ghana who used the mythical figure of the spider Ananse, when she explains that the spider’s character is: “artistically exaggerated and distorted to serve society as a medium of self-examination, [...] a medium for society to criticise itself” (11).

The Bolekaja group—composed by Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike—also reminds African artists that “our protest voices should not be turned exclusively

³⁹ Sekyi was born in Cape Coast-Gold Coast in 1892, and died in 1956. According to J. Avo Langley, his friends nicknamed him “the George Bernard Shaw of West Africa” (5). According to Kofi Owusu: “The timelessness of ‘the present’ is assured by Sekyi’s creative response to the language question and his stance on decolonising the African mind” (487).

outward to Europe, to America, to audiences of white faces, to the supposedly exclusive foreign sources of our hurts, but should turn homewards, to an African audience, against African wrongs. Especially after the 1960s and 1970s there is plenty to protest in African life” (260). Both Aidoo’s and Emecheta’s chosen works for this research were precisely written in those decades. This means that they had already launched their protest before the Nigerian critics’ advice suggested to do so as we can read in the quote above.

Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi has articulated a literary theory, in her work *Africa Wo/Man Palava*, which is related to the common term “been-to” used mostly in English-speaking West African countries to identify those who have been to other places away from their original birthplace. It is worth quoting this excerpt to understand the effects of distance in these been-to writers:

Been-toism registers as sophistication engendered by contact with another world, with the traveler [sic] acquiring an improved lifestyle, to confirm the vast differences between the person who has been to the other place and the stay-at-home. The journey, however, invariably entails a penalty. In the hazardous venture for the material world, the character loses something valuable—the original self, innocence, and contentment—as s/he becomes gradually engrossed in the upheaval of a new existence that spells displacement and unbelonging. (221)

In addition to the influence of the tradition of self-assessment in the Ghanaian theatrical scope, self-criticism is mostly possible because of the writers’ condition of being been-tos and due to their experience of the “unhomely” condition described by Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*. Bhabha explains the idea of “unhomeliness” as “the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations” (9). However, this postcolonial theorist insists that: “To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the ‘unhomely’ be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres” (9). He exemplifies this with Henry James’ similar idea in *The Portrait of a Lady*:

James introduces us to the ‘unhomeliness’ inherent in the rite of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiation. The recesses of the domestic space become sites for history’s most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is divided as it is disorienting. (9)

Bee-toism has provided both Aidoo and Emecheta with the double vision acquired through the displacement from the homely to the unhomely condition, which is “a paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition” (9) for Bhabha.

At this point it is important to bring back William Boyd’s introductory essay to Joyce Cary’s novel, *Mister Johnson*, to clarify again my line of argumentation. Boyd’s experience of what Bhabha calls the extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiation has endowed his sight with the double vision that he apprehends as a result of displacement in time and space. Being a Ghanaian by birth, Boyd was an expatriate who lived in both Ghana and Nigeria, and regarded West Africa as his home (i). Boyd’s first reading of *Mister Johnson* leaves him with an “abiding impression [...] of its strangeness and remoteness” (i). He does neither recognize the Africa nor the Africans that Cary represented in that novel. But as time has passed by and after Boyd abandoned Africa his second reading of the book changes:

The fact is, looking back now some twenty years on from that first reading, that not only had the world of the novel indeed vanished but also I clearly did not know Africa in the way I fancied. It takes some genuine form of displacement—either intellectual or spatial or temporal—before one can scrutinize one’s home (and its accoutrements and inhabitants) with any real curiosity or objectivity. My first reaction to *Mister Johnson* showed that no such displacement had yet occurred.
(i)

Displacement is the result of a spatial, and by extension the psychological schism with an initial identity to tiptoe across to that space in-between where new interactions take place. This migration on the bridge connecting both ends, in this case two different cultures, converts the unified self into an open multifaceted one which is able to reach both ends of the bridge by going and coming, oscillating and losing that property of the initial identity.

This is the case of Boyd and also the case of both Emecheta and Aidoo. Aidoo has been to other countries, and Emecheta is living in England. This has allowed both to see other realities in the rest of the world outside Africa. They know that there are other models for governing a people. Approximately one decade later after achieving independence, when these writers wrote the novels I analyze here, many African countries were not progressing as the African leaders had promised. These writers also knew that women in most Western countries had more opportunities of advancing in their social and personal life. From their estrangement, Aidoo and Emecheta have been

able to compare and distinguish the good from the evil in their own countries. As if he were defending these writers, Bhabha's words adjust to this vision: "the truest eye may now belong to the migrant's double vision" (*Location 5*).

The reception of these women writers' work with a clear message of a self-assessment was remarkably unvoiced in the 1970s, and still nowadays very few male critics highlight the significance of their literary production.

8.3. AMA ATA AIDOO'S REBUKE

Aidoo's fiction mostly presents the afflictions that grow due to the crisscrossing of both the personal interests of the powerful governing elite and the longing for a better life of the ordinary African people. Her main themes are related to political issues that range from the abuses of enslavement to the awaited social changes that never take place. In this Part VIII the focus on Aidoo falls under four perspectives: 1) lack of education, 2) prostitution, 3) the so-called educated Big men, and 4) the imposition of Western codes on African people. She brings forward the problems of the forgotten people of the northern region of Ghana in her short stories "Certain Winds from the South," "A Gift from Somewhere" and "For Whom Things Did Not Change." She throws rhetorical questions at a corrupted ruling class such as in the last short story mentioned above where her last sentence is: "My young Master, what does 'Independence' mean?" (29). Furthermore, she highlights the political failure of the independence plans and airs the fiasco in stories based on daily experience.

She re-presents the Africans under the siege of perpetual poverty, mostly in rural areas, due to the lack of government educational and economic policy. She underscores the reasons for the proliferation of prostitution after independence in "Two Sisters." She also censures the attitudes of the Africans who acted as if abducted by the white aesthetics. She writes openly against wigs and skin bleachers such as in her short stories "Every Thing Counts" and "Satisfaction?"

Moreover, she sketches with prose and poetry how the dearth of knowledge and shortfall in public investments for health care and education, in addition to brain drain, cause the underdevelopment that drives the people to hardship and hence unavoidable suffering. But it should be mentioned that her characters do not stand forward as victims, or at least they are not aware of being involved in continuous unjust situations. They wake up every morning and stand up to face the difficulties of life. They are survivors struggling daily for a dignified way of life.

8.3.1. LACK OF EDUCATION

When Adeola James interviews Aidoo, the former describes her as “part of the makers of history, one of ‘the voices of vision in our time’ shaping the future for our children” (Aidoo, “Interview with Adeola James” 24). In this same interview, Aidoo insists that the main problems of Africa are the basic ones where mothers have to worry about feeding, educating, and guaranteeing basic health for their offspring (cf. 25). In her text “Unwelcome Pals and Decorative Slaves” this Ghanaian author quotes her aunt, who hardly knows how to read. She advises Aidoo: “My child, get as far as you can in this education. Go and go and go. Go until you yourself know you are tired. Because as for marriage, it is something a woman picks up along the way” (12). In this same text Aidoo writes a note where she says: “It was from my father I first heard of the rather famous quotation from Dr. Kwegyir Aggrey: ‘If you educate a woman, you educate a nation’” (23).

For Aidoo, food, education and health are the most important pillars that sustain a society. In her novel *Our Sister Killjoy* she has her narrator express ideas about education. The hindering idea that education has become so expensive for the government to offer her people free education becomes Aidoo’s bone of contention. She believes that this idea thwarts the progress of the next generations of Africans. The narrator’s first words in this poem simulate a litany more than a prayer, so as to reinforce Aidoo’s public declaration that the limiting of education to a few is the cause for misguidance and evil to her people:

Dear Lord,
So what can we do about
Children not going to school,

When
Our representatives and interpreters,
The low-achieving academics
In low profile politics
Have the time of their lives
Grinning at cocktail parties and around
Conference tables? (57)

The omniscient poet adds that people in general do not complain about those who use the country’s money to travel to other universities to get their “Honorary Doctorate degrees.” Nevertheless, readers understand that no matter what degrees they

get, when they come back home their attitude is not that of wanting to serve the country and promote a better future for their people. They mostly become arrogant been-tos:

Nor do we mind
 That when they come back here
 Having mortgaged the country for a
 Thousand and a year
 To maintain themselves on our backs
 With capitalist ships and fascist planes,
 They
 Tell
 Us
 How the water from their
 Shit-bowls
 Is better than what the villagers
 Drink...(58)

According to Ada Uzoamaka Azodo, in 1982 Aidoo was assigned to occupy the post of the Education Minister in Rawlings's government of Ghana. Later, she first became the director of the Ghana Arts Council, then of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, and finally of the Medical and Dental Council. Azodo infers that Aidoo was forced to leave, since her male colleagues did not accept the idea of having a woman in important political posts only reserved for men at that time (cf. "Multifaceted" 400). Following one of Aidoo's Ghanaian idioms, borrowed from her short story "Something to Talk About on the Way to the Funeral": "I had wanted to put a stick under the story and clear it all for you" (122). Aidoo was bound to abandon those governmental posts. She is a woman who does not believe or participate in kleptocracy and pleads for free education in order to produce real social changes in the Ghanaian society.

Notwithstanding, her social denunciation has been brought forward by virtue of her diverse writings almost a decade before she tried to become an active catalyst for a real social revolution. She was aware of the fallacy behind the international aid and the complicity between both the African and foreign rulers. In Aidoo's second episode, as she herself has described the divisions of her novel in the interview with Adeola James, she hurls accusations through her politically informed narrator against the potentates, especially those who only cause damage to her people:

From all around the Third World,
 You hear the same story;
 Rulers
 Asleep to all things at

All times—
 Conscious only of
 Riches, which they gather in a
 Coma—
 Intravenously—

So that
 You wouldn't know they were
 Feeding if it was not for the
 Occasional
 Tell-tale trickle somewhere
 Around the mouth.
 And when they are jolted awake,
 They stare about them with
 Unseeing eyes, just
 Sleepwalkers in a nightmare.

Therefore,
 Nothing gets done in
 Villages or towns,
 If
 There are no volunteers,
 Local and half-hearted.
 There are some other kinds:
 Imported,
 Eager,
 Sweet foreign aid
 Eventually to take a
 Thousand
 For every horse-power put in. (34-35)

It is worth quoting half this poem at length since it is the only way to reproduce what Aidoo projected with this overt attack against those rulers who still rob African people.

8.3.2. PROSTITUTION

Aidoo also puts up a fight against the cultural imperialism, which she believes has invaded African society and individual lives as exhibited in her short stories “For Whom Things Did Not Change,” “Everything Counts,” and “Two Sisters” in addition to her novel *Our Sister Killjoy*.

Setu, the main character's wife in “For Whom Things Did Not Change,” has noticed that the young scholar Kobina has not brought with him any woman from the same instant she and her husband receive him at the Government Rest House. Her husband defends that he is different because he does not drink. Since Setu is a Moslem,

she thinks that maybe Kobina is another believer too. But Zirigu reminds her that no matter if they are believers or not, these big African men always drink alcohol and bring young girls to sleep with them. Even so, Setu expresses her harshest dislike towards that kind of girls: “Maybe. He certainly did not bring one of those nasty pieces with their heads swollen outside and inside like the meat and feathers of overfed turkeys. Ah, Allah!” (9). When Zirigu’s words reveal his astonishment she insists that “there must be something wrong when young girls who have seen their blood not many moons gone, go sleeping with men who are old enough to be their fathers, and sometimes their grandfathers” (9). Later, Setu confesses that she is “thinking of those girls” (9), and wondering, “Do they not have homes? Have they not got fathers and mothers?” (10). These are more than rhetorical questions. They cast a political glance at the social effects of the post-colonial and neo-colonial impositions of the so-called progress and welfare in African society.

Hence, the young female sector is totally and deadly affected in the sense that these young girls leave their school and home in their villages in search of easy money and Western goods. The tragedy lies on the fact that their parents have no idea about the real reasons why their young daughters abandon their villages. Setu also complains about the silence with which these issues are treated, “Everyone sees them on the land, and no one says anything” (10). Her repetition of the question, “But what do the mothers of these little girls say?” (10), intensifies the women’s role in changing this reality. They think that the girls are working as house girls, or at sewing workshops or other jobs. However, Zirigu clarifies: “Some clans learn from the wayside how their daughters are living in the cities. But they are afraid to say anything” (10). This last statement points an accusing finger directly at those powerful big men who are destroying the future of these young girls. It also implies that they are *those* that everybody knows. They occupy highly important political, economic or social posts. Moreover, Zirigu lays bare that “Sometimes they [parents] are not afraid of the daughter herself but the big man. Because he has big power and he can ruin them if they do not give him what he wants—their daughter. And Setu my wife, such things have been known to happen” (10). Furthermore, Aidoo wants to help the readers remember that this was an old problem in Africa, though it was a result of other ancient maladies already apparently gone such as slavery or colonialism. Zirigu reminds Setu: “Mm. Was it different in the old days, Setu my wife? Did not the lords take the little girls they liked

among the women?” (10). Setu’s response to these questions is one of Aidoo’s condemning timeless sentences: “All women are slaves of our lords” (10).

Aidoo takes the problem of prostitution further in “Two Sisters.” She opposes the qualities and lives of the two sisters as a way of re-presenting the problem and the solution in the same family. The elder, Connie, is a teacher married to James and expecting her second baby. She represents the ideal project for an African woman after independence. She has studied enough to become an independent woman through her teaching post. She is married and mother, the dream of almost every African woman; whereas Mercy, her young sister, works as a typist. This does not want to continue her studies and is anxious to get any job. But she does not earn enough money to buy all the frivolous Western goods. Aidoo introduces an Akan *Inboguo* song in this story: “*Count, Mercy, count your blessings* [repeated three times and in italics by the author]” (88).

Dr Sutherland-Addy has personally explained to me that an *Inboguo* is a song interlude used in an oral traditional tale-telling session for diverse purposes, to make a moral comment in this particular case. However, in this story Aidoo’s intention is to highlight that even though some family members do not accept prostitution, they finally become accustomed to this situation. Connie believes that if her parents were alive they would see her sister’s behaviour as an abomination for their clan and community in general. However, James thinks that Connie should take advantage of her sister’s relationship with the parliament member and get her sister to ask him use his influence to assign Connie to a teaching post near home since the second child is about to be born. James also wants to get himself a car and thinks that through Mercy’s powerful lover things could be easier even if he has to pay for it. In fact since Mercy has told her elder sister about their relationship, the old parliament member alarmed by the problem that could arise thinks in the manner to buy them out: “Find out something she wants very much but cannot get in this country because of import restrictions” (95). Mercy informs the old man that her sister eventually wanted an electric motor for her sewing machine. The Ghanaian politician affirms: “I am going to London next week on some delegation, so if you bring me the details on the make of the machine, I shall get her the motor” (95). So the politician in Ghana usually bribes the family members of their lovers bringing them goods as presents from everywhere and, of course, with the government money. When Mercy moves to a government estate house, this situation causes a lot of suffering to the elder sister. She sees Mercy’s ambition as a flaw in her life and a problem for the life of the family members.

Aidoo's sarcasm might be one of the reasons that do not urge her male compatriots on to review her short stories. The weight of her words brings down any possibility of ignoring what is going on. Aidoo articulates the maxim of *Akoko Nan* once and again by following the tradition in drama of the self-appraisal that she transfers to works of prose and poetry. In "Two Sisters" she addresses her people: "People are worms, and even God who created them is immensely bored with their antics. Here is a fifty-year-old 'big man' who thinks he is somebody. And a twenty-three-year-old child who chooses a silly way to conquer unconquerable problems" (96).

After the 1966 military *coup*, Mercy's powerful man loses his political post and power. To her sister's surprise, she does not come back home, but rather she gets a new old lover: a Captain who belongs to the new political body of the country. Ode Ogede underlines Aidoo's intention in this short story. He affirms that Aidoo pays "great attention to the frivolity, self-degradation, and corruption associated with the urban culture" and that "she holds the new set of values bequeathed to Africans by the colonial venture entirely responsible for the continent's postindependence social malaise" (83).

8.3.3. THE SO-CALLED EDUCATED BIG MEN

Aidoo also criticises those African young men who get girls pregnant and leave them behind to carry on with their prosperous life, whereas the girls have to carry with the shame and the responsibility of bringing up their babies on their own. This is the main theme of the short story "Something to Talk About on the Way to the Funeral," in which the author publicly and frankly voices her opinion through the gossiping between two women on the way to Araba's funeral. While they are talking they think that it would be more profitable and better for Araba's life if she were younger in those days when girls went to bed with the old powerful men. However, at this time the educated men abuse young girls and leave them pregnant: "After all, was it not a lawyer-or-a-doctor-or-something-like-that who was at the bottom of all Auntie Araba's trouble?" (115). When Araba is "ready for her puberty" she is sent to stay at her relative's house. There she learns to bake so well, but that is also the place where the man of the house will impregnate her four years later.

We learn from the characters' words that in spite of shame, Araba is taken back home and well treated by her mother. However, Aidoo also wants to highlight that this is not the usual reaction of other parents who scorn, insult, or even sack their pregnant

daughters from their homes. Moreover, the author wants to shift the scornful attitude away from the side of the victim, and direct it against the big scholars and educated young men who abuse the young girls in the village promising marriage and then have to come back home. Most of these return with other abused girls who belong to powerful families, and therefore have to make up for their mistakes and marry them. In this short story Aidoo brings together two generations of abused young girls. The first generation is Araba's, who cannot marry her relative's husband. The second generation is represented by Araba's son, who repeats the tragedy with Mansa, a young girl whom he will never marry for he has also abused another young girl from a powerful family and is recommended to marry the latter since her father can cause them some trouble. Araba takes care of Mansa until the young girl decides to leave her village. It is important to highlight at this point that these girls are not eager for any Western luxuries or goods. Their mistake is to listen to promises that would never be accomplished. Their abusers are those educated men who separate themselves from the village people. They aspire to marry girls from the city and make their benefits out of marrying girls from important rich families. Aidoo criticises the previous generation of educated men through these two talkative women's words. Those men do not bring their efforts forward to ameliorate their villages or their community. She turns her blame from the side of the girls who have gone to prostitution towards those useless men:

Though it is a crying shame that young girls should be doing that. As for our big men! Hmm, let me shut my trouble-seeking mouth up. But our big men are something else too. You know, indeed, these our educated big men have never been up to much good. (115)

The Ghanaian writer is aware of other hazardous problems that are generated by and come along with the educated elite. Hence, she also writes about the menace of learning from false prophets. Those who think they know all just by repeating the Western patterns that do not coincide with the African reality.

Aidoo worries about the issue of knowledge in her novel *Our Sister Killjoy*, and brings her words forward through her wise and experimented narrator. She provides him the license to call one of the *soi-disant* experts "nigger" (6) at the beginning of the novel. This term is not politically correct and denigrates the holder, but to the main character's understanding it was the only way she could think of him. The narrator ridicules him by affirming that he just "regurgitates" what his bosses want him to learn. That is, if anyone asks him anything he will only repeat anything without relating his

answers to the questions. This last fact increases the distrust of his compatriots. Hence, the narrator teaches through his present tangible experience:

Oh no. The academic-pseudo-intellectual version is even more dangerous, who in the face of reality that is more tangible than the massive walls of the slave forts standing along our beaches, still talks of universal truth, universal art, universal literature and the Gross National Product. (6)

Aidoo highlights the effect of her stern rebuke when she compares the experience of exchanging knowledge with a chess game, with the self-proclaimed intellectuals, who empty their heads and finally accuse people of being too young to understand: “Without doubt, the experience is like what a lover of chess or any mind-absorbing sport must feel who goes to a partner’s for a game, *but discovers he has to play against the dog of the house instead of the master himself* (emphasis added)” (6). The words stressed here convey to what extreme she berates the pseudo-intellectuals.

Furthermore, and even though it could appear as a contradiction to what I have pointed out above, Aidoo exerts her most biting criticism against the brain drain in *Our Sister Kill Joy*. She knows that those who are real intellectuals and educated sometimes dangerously suffer from a lack of self-assurance. Her narrator, who throws rhetorical questions at readers and who is wandering in Germany along with Sissie, asks those who never return to their country once they have completed their degree:

“Why did you remain
Here?”
“What do you mean?”
“Why did you not go back
Home?”
“Where?”
“Do they need you as a Doctor
Here,
As desperately?” (30)

However, this narrator also knows the other side of the story of the brain drain, which also has its double-face tragedy:

Me not knowing what to say.
Though having to agree
“Going to work in a
State hospital is
Unnecessary
Slavery...”

Unless you are a smart one

Anxious to use
 State beds,
 State drugs
 State time for civilised
 Private patients,
 Business tycoons,
 Other clever public servants
 Who only know how to
 Lord-it over the public,
 Lodge-brothers and
 Classmates,
 Just any
 Rascal who can pay for
 Himself or his
 Wife. (30-31)

Finally, the informed narrator asks the specialists who prefer to stay in the First World countries to come back, although he knows that they will stay to satisfy their need for recognition and the enjoyment of economic benefit:

So, Please,
 Don't talk to me of the
 Brain-
 Drain-
 Which of us stays in these days?
 But those of us who fear
 We cannot survive abroad,
 One reason or another?

Gambian ophthalmologist in Glasgow
 Philippino lung specialist in Boston
 Brazilian cancer expert in
 Brooklyn or
 Basle or
 Nancy.
 While at home,
 Wherever that may be,
 Limbs and senses rot
 Leaving
 Clean hearts to be
 Transplanted into
 White neighbours' breast... (32)

Aidoo makes Sissie write a letter to her beloved boyfriend, after “knowledge gained,” in which she expresses her thoughts. This “love” letter will never be sent but it constitutes the last episode of the novel and the most biting criticism directly targeting any African male member in Aidoo’s society, who has left Ghana with no return ticket.

“But oh deliciously naïve me. What did I rather do but daily and loudly criticise you and your friends for wanting to stay forever in alien places?” (117). Aidoo is ironic through Sissie’s words: “But please, Dear Heart, I only wished to say that we have been caught at the confluence of history and that has made ignorant victims of some of us, it seems” (118). Neither Aidoo nor Sissie are one of those ignorant victims. However, the author is aware that when she wrote the novel in 1977, many Africans were still expecting changes to occur, or maybe they just accepted being colonised or enslaved by their own African brothers or leaders.

Aidoo singles out the terrible effects of intrusions of the Western world in African society: “Indeed we are certain now, are we not, that so many people have wished us ill. *They wish us ill. They have always done. They still do* (emphasis added)” (114). She justifies her previous words by adding the painful and old story: “Otherwise, how could they have made slaves of us when we owed them nothing. [...] Yet they wanted labour for free” (114). Later, Aidoo sympathises with the common African people when they are blinded by confusion: “Yet, all these are ‘facts’ I am just learning. How far can one really be blamed for being born naïve, eh? Or for not catching the survival lines in a terribly confused social stream?” (118). Moreover, by the end of the novel Aidoo dares to make Sissie almost spit words at those who need to stay in foreign countries to prove their worthiness to the non-Africans: “The superior monkey has got his private white audience for whom he performs his superior tricks. Proving our worth, eh?” (130).

8.3.4. WESTERN CODES IMPOSED: CHRISTIAN NAMING, WIGS, AND SKIN BLEACHING

In *Our Sister Killjoy* Aidoo’s narrator also criticises how the German character Marija challenges the veracity of Sissie’s name being “Mary,” since she was African and not German. For Marija the name is German and not African. Aidoo, an executor of the *Akoko Nan* symbol, calls our attention to things that should be corrected. She brings Sissie, her main character to *justify why* she is called Mary: “I come from a Christian family. It is the name they gave me when they baptised me. *It is also good for school and work and being a lady* (emphasis added)” (24). Moreover, the wise old narrator cannot but react to what is stressed above since he has more information that will allow him to criticise through his poems:

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?

Yaw Mensah Adu Preko Oboroampa Okotoboe. (25-26)

Another Western self-imposed habit is skin bleaching and the wearing of wigs. Some of Aidoo's main characters criticise those who want to make up for their lack of self-confidence and psychological complex of inferiority. For this writer to embrace Western recommendations is a mistake. She particularly refers to useless habits such as the use of wigs, hair straightening treatments, and skin bleachers.

For many years, West Africans were exposed to advertisements recommending the use of wigs and skin whiteners. The texts and pictures assured the magazine and newspaper readers that the use of diverse kinds of Afro-American hair styled wigs or straight hair ones would change the Africans's life. This pressure was accompanied by Westernized face creams, ointments and soaps. In my article "Heirs of Wigs, Chalky Masks and Straight Hairs: The Bequest of Slavery and Colonialism" I have delved into the core of some of these advertisements to bring to light the context in which Aidoo fights against their evident effects in her people's lives. She perceives this situation as a problem that has burgeoned due to the subliminal messages that to her understanding are erasing the African aesthetics and the social and cultural values.

Aidoo started to write against the the African women's use of wigs since the end of the 1960s, and continues to do so till today whenever she has the chance, be it a short

story, book review or essay. Aidoo has always tried to write about her “disapproval of the use of these artifacts” (Jojo, “Heirs” 272); and her rejection of wigs has kept her writing energetically against their use every time she has had the chance (Jojo, “Heirs” 272). Moreover, “She strategically starts each of the books mentioned above [*No Sweetness Here* 1970, and *The Girl Who Can and Other Stories* 1997] with the stories about wigs” (Jojo, “Heirs” 272). She highlights in her review of Edward Brathwaite’s book of a collection of poems entitled *Masks* that the poet’s work “literally makes you want to cry but not only for these past mistakes. For we know that ‘our women’ have not changed. We do the old things but only for new rubbish like wigs and skin-bleaches” (“Akan” 1099).

Aidoo stands by Fanon’s 1952 denunciation of the laboratory products for the “denegrification” of the black skin, responding to economic profit imposed on those who desire to have a lighter skin colour through the process of “lactification” with harmful medications, face ointments, and creams, which obviously, for Aidoo, as it was for Fanon, perpetuate the inferiority complex. It is important to highlight that Aidoo has taken her struggle against wigs as a political resistance confronting the neo-colonial implementations of aesthetic canons that do not belong to the African concept of beauty.

In her short story, “Everything Counts,” Aidoo exerts pressure on her society through her narrator who describes the wigs as products, at times, of atrocious acts so as to convince African readers not to use them. She is aware that the use of wigs is just a sign of weakness, a sign of cultural imperialism. African girls want to look like white girls. The wigs are re-presented here as icons of all types of horror:

The wig. Ah, the wig. They say it is made of artificial fibre. Others swear that if it is not gipsy hair, then it is Chinese. Extremists are sure they are made from the hairs of dead white folk—this one gave her nightmares, for she had read somewhere, a long time ago, about the Germans making lampshades out of Jewish people’s skin. (*No Sweetness* 1)

However, all these horrible stories about the origin of the wigs are not enough to refrain the demand for them. This author needs to go further. Aidoo’s purpose of launching a reminder of self-examination at every African reader is achieved through Sissie’s surprise. This character finds out that many African women have adopted the use of wigs as an everyday essential commodity, from the “air-stewardess to the grade-three typists in offices, every girl simply wore a wig” (*No Sweetness* 3). But what seems

to annoy Aidoo more than anything else is the motive behind the use of wigs. These women only want to reach their successful goals through the lies of commercial advertisements that assure them that their success is only attained if they look like the typical white successful woman. This is the neo-colonialism she mostly writes against. Moreover, the “lactification” problem is more dangerous than the use of wigs, since African women hurt themselves rather than improve their image:

Even that was not the whole story. Suddenly, it seemed as if all the girls and women she knew and remembered as having smooth black skins had turned light-skinned. Not uniformly. Lord, people looked as though a terrible plague was sweeping through the land. A plague that made funny patchworks of faces and necks. (*No Sweetness* 3-4)

Aidoo needs to make her readers reflect on all those notions mentioned above. These were already represented in her short story “Satisfaction?” It seems that the main themes are still outstanding to re-write and re-present this same story under the new title of “Payments,” which was published in her new collection of short stories, *The Girl Who Can and Other Stories*.⁴⁰ Aidoo wanted to fight her battles in the 1970s and, as the new version “Payments” shows, she is still fighting the same battles after more than twenty years. In “Satisfaction?” Aidoo uses Ekuwa Esuon’s voice, a market fish seller, to speak out her thoughts and feelings towards new rich women. These come from the same social class as the market women do, but get married to those men who climb to governmental posts acquiring endless and ruthless power. Ekuwa Esuon has refused to sell her fish to a woman she has recognised from the old days when her little girl was sick in the hospital. This woman was one of the nurses who refused to allow her into the ward to feed her ill daughter. The nurses “began heaping insults on” (“Satisfaction?” 10) Ekuwa Esuon who had to lie down on the floor of that hospital hearing her ill and hungry child crying all night long. They accused her of things she had never done in her life. Ekuwa can do nothing at that time, and as she explains to other market sellers: “you would have thought she was paying me back for some evil I had already done her” (“Satisfaction?” 10). For her, apparently, that nurse only wanted her and her child to suffer because when the rest of the nurses begged her to let the fish seller in she refused. So Ekuwa has kept her thirst for vengeance until this occasion when the woman comes to buy her fish. Ekuwa is sure that this is the same woman “who rejoiced to see my

⁴⁰ Even though I compare both “Satisfaction?” and “Payments” in this dissertation, the latter version was slightly adapted for the 1990s. Hence, I mainly centre on the first version, “Satisfaction?” since this was composed within the period I focus my research.

[her] child suffer” (“Satisfaction?” 12). The fish seller spits at the woman and calls her prostitute. Aidoo’s disillusion is echoed through Ekuwa’s acts and words:

What surprises me about people is how they can go round saying we must not do this and we must not do that, when “this” and “that” are probably the only one or two things left that we can do. What I am saying is that the things we really cannot do anymore are so many that we only destroy ourselves even more by fearing to do some of the one or two things left which we can still do. (“Satisfaction?” 3)

Moreover, Aidoo darts her attack on this kind of women once and again. In this case it is the woman who used to be a petty market seller that becomes a rich woman after her husband who was a teacher has turned into an important man in the government:

And I have certainly seen the like of that little tart before. Same car, black with glass that look like they have been smoked, driven by the same driver when she came here to buy fish. She had the same hairstyle, the same bleached face and hands, the same lazy and insolent voice. (“Satisfaction?” 6)

But after the military coup, the wheel of life turns everything upside down. To harshen the lot of the backlash against this kind of women, the fish seller informs her friends in the market that:

They auctioned her wigs, her trinkets, dresses, shoes, bags and even bodice and draws. It was an unbelievable heap, yet they auctioned them all. Including an elastic belt they say they make specially for ladies to hold their pads in place with when they menstruate. Yes. (“Satisfaction?” 6)

Whereas when it comes to the case of the nurse, Ekuwa describes her as a person who has used all those artificial devices that Aidoo is fighting against in her writing:

She was a nurse at the hospital. She had gawky ways and buck-teeth. Now they have removed the teeth and stuffed artificial ones into her mouth, straight and even. They bleached her skin, put a wig on her head, and expensive clothes around her shoulders. (“Satisfaction?” 7)

What infuriates Aidoo is that these women “come preening” (“Satisfaction?” 7) themselves to the rest of the market women, who struggle everyday to bring something to their families’ mouths to eat. This short story contains many of the African women’s undesirable and unhealthy habits or attitudes towards their own body, life, and, consequently, community and country.

This critical attitude against the people in government positions correlates with Aidoo's denouncement of the government's social and political abandonment in the north of Ghana. In "Certain Winds from the South" Aidoo again tells the stories of two generations as she has done in "Something to Talk About on the Way to the Funeral." M'ma Asana has to tell her daughter Hawa, who has just had a baby boy, that her husband, M'ma's son-in-law, had to leave very early to the south to look for a job. In this sense, Hawa is repeating her mother's solitary story of staying back in the north waiting for her man to come back some day. Furthermore, these who migrate to the south have no guarantee to survive there. The repeated mistakes aggravate the outcome of the family life. Hence, women's suffering continues on generation after generation: "Show me a fresh corpse my sister, so I can weep you old tears" (*No Sweetness* 47). In the case of the men who belong to the previous generation, they went to the south to enrol in the British army and sent to war. Most of them never came back. The family unit of the second generation with newly-born babies Aidoo re-presents in this story also suffer separation due to their poverty. Aidoo, as if under the spell of the *Akoko Nana* symbol, becomes the spokeswoman for the northern Ghana inhabitants, who suffer from the neglect of their government. She reprimands the people responsible for this neglect by telling the story to the rest of the world.

8.4. BUCHI EMECHETA'S ADMONISHMENT

In spite of Emecheta's awareness of the little number of readers in Nigeria, she still writes books about Africa for Africans and non-Africans. In the Adinkra symbol *Nea Onnim No Sua A, Ohu*—analyzed in the Part III of this research and focused on teaching and learning—Emecheta uses various characters to transmit knowledge about the Igbo traditions and behaviour, and sometimes about the Yorubas and other ethnic groups that appear in her chapters where the markets become vital places for the economy and social interaction. However, Emecheta's narrators not only talk about traditions in order to retrieve the essence of her community's mores, but also to denounce those practices that no longer suit women in African society. Especially, having in mind that her stories are set in the past and readers have been reading her books since the 1970s.

Some critics, such as Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi in "Buchi Emecheta: The Shaping of a Self," bring forward Emecheta's contradictions in her writings, ideology,

and views due to her condition of being a Nigerian who migrated to England. In Ogunyemi's terms:

Indeed, the long exile has done her greater harm. This manifests itself in her ambivalent attitude towards her material: her viewpoint shifts between shame and pride in her people, a feeling of inferiority interlaced with a need to be tough to gain approval of those who matter to her—her British audience. (“Buchi” 65)

However, in her seminal work *Africa Wo/Man Palava*, Ogunyemi understands and explains Emecheta's *Akoko Nan* attitude towards her people in the 1970s, affirming that “Emecheta is versed in the intricacies of the palaver” (224). Here, Ogunyemi takes after the definition of palaver by Bakomba Katik Diong: “Every human emotion is expressed during a palaver—anger, indignation, joy, contempt, etc. and every skill is brought into play to sustain the architecture of this contest in eloquence” (Ogunyemi, *Africa* 224). Hence, Emecheta leans on her ability as a palaver woman and achieves through her skilful writing the *Akoko Nan* maxim of the well-intentioned reprimanding to correct her people's mistakes.

Katherine Fishburn asserts that some of Emecheta's novels are not easy to understand for European readers. She explains that the reasons are varied but she highlights the gap that is created through the encounter with the unfamiliar values and traditions that evolve in Emecheta's African works. Fishburn underscores the difference between the theme of romantic love, the outcome of the young characters and tragic endings. The critic is aware that the products of different cultures might not have the same literary conventions. Therefore, they produce uncommon or unexpected results that obstruct easy understanding. The endings in Emecheta's African novels can be read as incomprehensible and very much against the initial telos of feminists' expectations. This becomes a contradiction that feminists have to resolve, just the way Ogunyemi did, since they consider Buchi Emecheta a feminist. The idea of punishment is evoked in Emecheta's endings in each of these three novels. Fishburn challenges the uncertainty created through the act of interpreting the readings of these works. However, it is precisely her way of ending these three novels that produces her achievement of the *Akoko Nan* postulation.

8.4.1. NOT ONLY MEN BUT ALSO WOMEN CAN

In *The Bride Price* the main character Aku-nna learns that her father died. She reminds readers with her thoughts that his name “Nna-nndo” means “Father is the shelter.” Her thoughts are followed by the narrator’s enforcement that once the father dies in an Igbo family, each of the members’ life will suffer drastic changes. No widowed mother is accepted as the new head of the family:

It is so even today in Nigeria: when you have lost your father you have lost your parents. Your mother is only a woman, and women are supposed to be boneless. A fatherless family is a family without a head, a family without shelter, a family without parents, in fact a non-existing family. Such traditions do not change very much. (emphasis added) (25)

Emecheta’s narrator, in addition to informing about a myriad of traditions, also dares to lambast some of the absurd practices that no longer hold in the 1970s. The narrator’s decision to use the first phrase stressed above obliges the reader to bring this fiction set after World War II to the reality of the 1970s or even any reader’s present. What follows can be considered as the only existing reality, due to the narrator’s voice acquired through his informative mission. The reader is taken by surprise and becomes aware of these contradictions since we know that a mother is also a cornerstone in any African family. Otherwise, how can the exigency of motherhood and the tradition of polygamy survive? When a man takes a new wife, he leaves a nucleus and forms a new one. This means that women should sustain and maintain together the nucleus the husband will only sporadically visit. A woman bears her children, works on the farm, sells in the markets, and does the domestic work all by herself if she has no other help. Even today, if she works, as many women in other parts of the world, she is still in charge of the housework and the upbringing of her children. However, Emecheta’s womanism underscores that a father is the most important pillar in any family, though bringing these two ideas side by side highlights Emecheta’s attack against the postulation that an African woman cannot stand to her responsibilities despite the difficulties. Yes, African women can, as Emecheta’s stories demonstrate. Moreover, the death of Aku-nna’s father is seminal to allow the author to focus her writing on the women’s life and hence offer the narrator the best chance to defy all the related problems.

In *The Bride Price* Emecheta precisely brings the reader face to face with the preposterous traditions related to the Igbo women’s life experience. To start with, once

Aku-nna's father dies, her eldest uncle inherits her mother. Hence the mother has to marry her eldest brother-in-law, and this will become Aku-nna's new father. Consequently, Emecheta's narrator has to explain all the process of the widow's mourning once she arrives at her village Ibuza. Firstly, the young men from the village build a separate hut where the widow "Ma Blackie was to stay and mourn for her dead husband for nine full moons" (71). The narrator clarifies why this period exceeds the usual seven months of mourning:

because Ezekiel Odia, to ensure that his wife would always be his, had taken the precaution of cutting a lock of hair from Ma Blackie's head and keeping it as evidence. Once a man had taken this step, his wife could never leave him, for to do so would be to commit an abomination; and such a woman, if the husband died, must mourn for nine moons. (71)

According to the narrator, this was a period of testing the widow, and in the case that she dies she would be responsible for her husband's death. This sounds as the culmination of absurdity in fiction, but we deduce from the author's interview with Kirsten Holst Petersen that such practices are real:

And when it comes to mourning, well, they say put your old clothes on, you should stop going to church, you should stop this and that for those nine months. I will not accept this type of thing! And when you tell them that you are not going to stop, naturally it irritates them, so I find myself sticking out. (Petersen, "Dilemma" 18)

Emecheta's narrator continues telling what was expected of Ma Blackie during her mourning period:

Ma Blackie was to remain alone in this special hut; not until the months of mourning were over could she visit people in their homes. She must never have a bath. No pair of scissors nor comb must touch her hair. She must wear continually the same old smoked rags. (72)

Emecheta takes advantage of the new situation in Ma Blackie's life to bring forward one of the most scathing attacks against women considered as severe custodians of the old ways to insure the implementation of ridiculous traditions for Emecheta. The Nigerian anthropologist, sister Joseph T r se Agbasiere, has assured that "Igbo women in general are expected to perform the role of 'watchdogs' of public morality" (39). And that is exactly what the narrator tells us about the Ibuza women who received the widowed Ma Blackie: "The fact that she had come dressed in black cotton had caused much controversy and *the women in the family* were divided over the

issue. Some said Ma Blackie could keep and wear these cloths as well during her mourning period, some insisted that she should not (emphasis added)” (72). However, it is her brother-in-law, her future husband who settles the matter since he is interested in Ma Blackie and the bride price that her daughter Aku-nna would bring him for the benefit of becoming an *Eze* (chief). His words prove that he wants to please her: “Let her wear the black cotton when she feels like it. Let her have a black headtie, too. She was married in church, so why should we let her become infested with lice?” (72).

Nevertheless, the scissors that were banned to Ma Blackie in *The Bride Price*, become a crucial instrument in *The Joys of Motherhood* when Agbadi, the main character’s father, dies. His daughter Nnu-Ego along with his other daughters, have to “shave the heads of the widows and dress them in mourning outfits” (154). In this novel it seems that they prefer to shave the women’s heads before they get infested with lice as we can read in Emecheta’s quotation above from *The Bride Price*. However, Emecheta is not an anthropologist and she writes fiction. But according to Agbasiere:

In most Igbo societies as soon as burial is over, the widow has her hair thoroughly shaved. Where shaving is not the custom, the hair, if previously plaited, is loosened and left uncombed. In either case, the widow is expected to wear her hair dishevelled for the whole period of her mourning (i.e. one native year). (147)

Hence, Emecheta does not only write about traditions to teach anyone here. She darts at provoking the Nigerian readers who already know about the Igbo practices. Those are the ones—hypothetically speaking—who have the power to change these traditions and not the non-African readers.

The three African novels that Emecheta writes after the London novels are not mere chronicles of the past in the Nigerian village of Ibuza. They are also revisions of the Igbo, and by extension African traditions. In other words, *The Bride Price* is not only a novel about exhibiting traditions as the author herself has described it in her autobiography *Head Above Water*. They deal with condemning the old degradative practices. The novel is her excuse to stomp on the traditions of her people that no longer hold. She executes the *Akoko Nan* proverb, as the mother hen, in her effort to correct her chicks’ behaviour or attitude towards some obsolete customs. Emecheta has to tread on some of her compatriots and their traditions to set right the situation for women. However, just as hens, her intention is not to “kill” them.

The prohibition of the intermarriage between Igbo people and slave descendants complicate women's life in *The Bride Price*. In this case, Aku-nna cannot help falling in love with Chike, in spite of his being a slave descendant. Agbasiere's ethnographic work corroborates the notion behind the birth status and its relation to marriage, as we already saw above: "Thus, it is forbidden for *nwa* or *diala*, 'a freeborn', to marry an *osu*, 'a cult-slave', or *ohu*, 'a bought-slave' and their descendants" (sic) (96). Emecheta's intention is to highlight this devastating traditional marriage precept. The author gets Aku-nna to ask herself a harsh rhetorical question: "Oh, what kind of *savage custom* was it that could be so heartless and make so many people unhappy? (emphasis added)" (126). But things get worse for Aku-nna when Okoboshi's family kidnap her so that he can marry her by force. Aku-nna, who was raised in Lagos, has no idea what this is about. She does not know anything about this terrible custom. Her people are insulted by this act and they become very sad. The women cover their heads with their lappas as a sign of grief and the young boys swear to get their revenge (cf. 137). The first thing the family had to do was to find out who had stolen Aku-nna:

Even as they were doing all this, they knew it was useless. Aku-nna had gone. All the man responsible had to do was cut a curl of her hair—'*isi nmo*'—and she would *belong to him for life*. Or he could *force her into sleeping with him, and if she refused his people would assist him by holding her down until she was disvirgined*. And when that had been done, no other person would want to take her anymore (emphasis added). (138)

Emecheta denounces this practice by bringing it forward to her African and non-African readers to think about and change this situation for the girls who are kidnapped and raped. However, it is interesting to highlight that Agbasiere does not mention anything about the practice of the *isi nmo*. This could be due to the fact that Ibuza is a village that lies uncovered in her research. If we look at a map⁴¹ of Igboland in Nigeria, Agbasiere's work is limited to the right side of the River Niger, whereas Emecheta's novels take place on the left of this same river. Hence, some practices could be limited to some communities that belong to the larger ethnic group of the Igbos.

In *The Slave Girl* Emecheta's main character Ojebeta overhears at night that her relative's husband, Eze, who is against Ojebeta's marriage to Jacob, would use the old tradition of cutting "a curl of Ojebeta's hair" (171). The practice of the *isi-nmo* obliges

⁴¹ I have used the maps in Agbasiere's work, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought* 11-12; and the maps in Marie Umeh's *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta* xi-xii.

her to marry Ezen's cousin, Adim. Her reaction is to creep "to where Eze kept his shaving knife and shaved off every last vestige of hair on her head, then went out to the back of the hut and burned all the pieces" (172). Emecheta describes Ojebeta's hair equating the idea of its growth and her taking care of it to her progress from being a small slave to becoming a free young girl at the death of Mrs Palagada. So here, even though Ojebeta is not a widow, the only way out of this situation is to erase the only signs of her self-governing in order to save her real freedom:

Now she had lost it all [emphasis added]. Like her *ogbanje* charms, her hair seemed to symbolize her freedom. Would she ever be free? Must she be a slave all her life, never being allowed to do what she liked? Was it the fate of all Ibuza women or just her own? Still it would have been better to be a slave to a master of your choice, than to one who did not care or even know who you were. (172)

All these issues bring readers face to face with the Igbo women's destiny in Nigeria. Some prefer to become "enslaved" by someone they "choose" rather than succumb to their destiny.

Emecheta uses images from nature as lessons and metaphors for future outcomes in *The Bride Price*. For instance, when Aku-nna has to leave her classroom, and sits under an orange tree to cry because her life can change now that she has her menstrual flow. For the Ibuza people she has become a woman ready for marriage. Aku-nna notices a couple of birds building a nest happily and she feels so lonely because she was falling in love with her teacher. This example from nature encourages Aku-nna to dream of making her own nest with her teacher Chike. However, these birds are free to love each other and build their nest, but she is not free to love her teacher since he is a slave descendant. They are not allowed to love each other because of the horrible *Igbo* tradition that does not allow the inter-marriage between a free born and a slave descendant.

Emecheta brings forward another immediate example of nature through her narrator to make readers interpret it as a cautionary tale. This is intentionally inserted to illustrate to Aku-nna and Chike the inappropriateness of their love affair. It is not taken from any African folk tale. It is something that is happening just in front of Chike who joins Aku-nna sitting under the orange tree. They both watch how some brown ants march in a perfect line carrying some food to a hole: "No single ant deviated from the main column, all followed the same route one after the other, as if at the command of a power invisible" (92). Chike suddenly blocks their way with a dried orange leaf and

Aku-nna gets troubled at the sight of the ants' confusion, fearing these will lose their way. Chike rectifies and removes the leaf and assures her that the ants will not lose their way: "The ants quickly reformed and carried on with their business as if nothing had happened" (92). Aku-nna enquires why the ants follow each other in this way. Chike's response comes as a surprise to the reader who has the intuition that this couple is not following the rules: "Because each ant would be lost if it did not follow the footsteps of those in front, those who have gone on this very path before" (92). Readers become shocked when Chike cowardly wonders about the path *he* has to take. Chike's observation of the ants leads him to many thoughts Aku-nna cannot even imagine: "He stopped short. Was that what his father was trying to tell him the night before? That he should forget this girl and let custom and tradition take their course? He was finding that impossible to do" (92). However, even if this tale can be considered a cautionary tale within another cautionary novel, Emecheta's intention is to bring these issues to a round table discussion. Will the lovers follow the birds' or ants' lesson?

The imposed self-examination that the Nigerian people have to experience through reading brings Emecheta to isolation in her own country. In Emecheta's autobiography, *Head Above Water*, we can read she re-wrote *The Bride Price* on two new occasions to comply with her people's norms. She points out: "The concept behind this book [*The Bride Price*] is tradition" (*Head* 154). Moreover, according to this author, her husband probably burned the first manuscript of the novel because the ending was happy for the couple Aku-nna and Chike. These go against their community's rules by getting married and living happily ever after. Emecheta's autobiographical confessions regarding the ending of this novel shed light on all the endings of her novels since she experienced the reaction of the closest reader to her at that time: her husband. Emecheta explains that she became wiser and could only write Aku-nna's death because "she had gone against our [Emecheta and her people's] traditions" (*Head* 155). She also affirms that every human being has to belong to his or her group, and those who cannot abide to their community's rules become "an outsider, a radical, someone different who had found a way of living and being happy outside the group. Aku-nna was too young to do all that. She had to die" (*Head* 155). It can be deduced that this couple follow the birds' lesson and Chike not only ignores the ants' example but also his father's advice.

Aku-nna's death is already announced at the beginning of *The Bride Price*, in which she is described as a weak child that belongs to the group of the Ogbanje or

Abiku children of Nigeria. The narrator explains to the non-Nigerian readers that “*Ogbanje*” is a ‘living dead’ and Ngbeke, Ma Blackie’s co-wife, predicts like a sorcerer that Aku-nna will die after giving birth to her first child:

I fear these girls who are *Ogbanje*. They seem to behave too well, but they are only in this world on contract, and when their time is up they have to go. They all die young, usually at the birth of their first baby. They must die young, because their friends in the other world call them back. (79)

When Aku-nna confesses to her mother that she has the menstrual flow her mother, as if predicting Aku-nna’s future tells her: “I am not allowing you out of my sight until you are seventeen, or *you are bound to die of childbirth*. You are so thin and not very developed. All you have are legs and eyes (emphasis added)” (114). Here, Emecheta is denouncing young marriage and early pregnancy. Notwithstanding, Aku-nna prefers to die rather than stay with the man she does not love. On the one hand, the narrator speaks Aku-nna’s mind but, on the other hand, the narrator becomes Emecheta’s voice:

But if she was forced to live with these people for long, she would soon die, for that was the intention behind all the taboos and customs. Anyone who contravened them was better dead. If you tried to hang on to life, you would gradually be helped towards death by psychological pressures. And when you were dead, people would ask: Did we not say so? Nobody goes against the laws of the land and survives. (148)

The last sentence in this quotation brings the idea that even the first manuscript of her novel did not survive because of Emecheta’s intention to go against her own people’s traditions.

Finally, Aku-nna asks Chike to give her uncle her bride price after they elope together: “Just give them their bride price in peace, because you know what they say: if the bride price is not paid, the bride will die at childbirth” (161). Nevertheless, even though her new father desires to get the bride price, her family would not take it as a sign of rejection to this wedding. But the way Emecheta brings Aku-nna’s death about is worth considering. This writer wants to bring superstition to a halt by infuriating the literate Nigerians who no longer want to believe in superstitions, at least not of this kind, and want things to change. She throws at her African and non-African readers the lumps of absurd reasons that kill Aku-nna in her last paragraph of the novel so as to impose an only ending:

So it was that Chike and Aku-nna substantiated the traditional superstition they had unknowingly set out to eradicate. Every girl born in Ibuza after Aku-nna's death was told her story, to reinforce the old taboo of the land. If a girl wished to live long and see her children's children, she must accept the husband chosen for her by her people, and the bride price must be paid. If the bride price was not paid, she would never survive the birth of her first child. It was a psychological hold that existed for very long time. (176-177)

This is also reaffirmed in Emecheta's autobiography *Head Above Water*, in which she compares Aku-nna to herself and brings about the two main issues involved in the young main character's death: "Guilt for going against her mother and her uncle [...] when she was about to give birth to her first baby" (*Head* 155); and "because she had gone against our tradition" (*Head* 155). Notwithstanding, Emecheta confesses that: "Akunna died the death I ought to have died. In real life, due to malnutrition and anaemia, I had a very bad time with my first daughter" (*Head* 155).

This same aspect is repeated in the last two paragraphs of Emecheta's *The Slave Girl*. These are reserved to Emecheta's narrator who is her literary avatar. The rhetorical questions that the narrator throws to the readers are the easy way out of this high pitch criticism that Emecheta re-emphasizes and hurls at the Igbo society and its traditions. Those rhetorical questions can be interpreted as if she were on her people's side and not against those practices.

8.4.2. EMECHETA'S EMPHASIS ON EDUCATION

In *The Bride Price* Emecheta launches her terrible biting narrator to speak out about the two of the most important aspects in the Igbo society: their gossiping habit and their idea about education. In other words, he criticises the Ibuza people's reaction at observing that Aku-nna and her teacher Chike are intensely in love, since they think this is an unacceptable relationship:

In a town like Ibuza, people did not need newspapers and radio as local media; such modern means of spreading information were alien to them and, what was more, were too slow, and you had to be able to read and write in order to follow them. *The elderly, who made the decision about the life of a girl like Aku-nna, could do without such literary knowledge. What was the point of bothering to learn the alphabet, of what use would it be to them?* It would not tell them which was the best season for planting yams; it would not tell them what their fate with a particular woman might be. They had their own methods of knowing these things without the benefit of ABC (emphasis added). (118)

Emecheta wants to highlight the issue of education through her narrator's irony. Many African girls are not able to make decisions. Here, we can also observe the possible disadvantage of community itself. Children are once protected and as adults are obliged to comply with their community values. The narrator informs readers that Akunna "was trapped in the intricate web of Ibuza tradition. She must either obey or bring shame and destruction on her people" (119-120). Moreover, the family that kidnaps Akunna does not pay her uncle Okonkwo a high bride price because for them going to school can be only assessed negatively: "After all, she was just like any other girl. All this modern education did nothing good for any woman; to say the very least, it made her too proud" (138). This is the narrator's voice denouncing the village people's attitude to perpetuate their children's illiterate condition, especially their girls by condemning what they call "modern education."

It is interesting to underscore that Emecheta's only illiterate main character is Nnu-ego from *The Joys of Motherhood*. She is aware of the importance of education. Emecheta highlights the difference it would have made if Nnu-Ego were literate. The uneducated mother, Nnu-Ego, receives a note from the army barracks to go and pick some letters from her soldier husband Nnaife. He was serving in the British Army in Burma. Nnu-Ego can neither read the note nor the letters that arrived a long time ago. It is her literate friend Mama Abby who helps her through this situation. Nnu-Ego realises her illiterateness is the motive for the difficulties to feed her children. Her husband sent the money but since she cannot read she cannot collect it:

With tears of relief in her eyes, she promised herself that all her children, girls and boys, would have a good education. If she herself had had one, she would have been able to call at this office to check about the money. She would at least have been able to contact Nnaife, and he could have done the same. She and her husband were ill prepared for a life like this, *where only pen and not mouth could really talk*. Her children must learn (emphasis added). (179)

Emecheta speaks her mind through Nnu-Ego's reflection on education. The phrase stressed above is a metaphor that proposes the author's intertwined idea of correcting and teaching through her writings. As a writer she knows that oral storytelling is no longer enough to teach her people through self-appraisal. It is also necessary to use the printed word to accomplish the *Akoko Nan* premise.



PART IX

CONCLUSION

This research focuses on the analysis and consequences of some Adinkra symbols and literary re-presentation, which I proposed here to stand for the formal aspects and contents in Ama Ata Aidoo's work—*No Sweetness Here*, "Satisfaction?" and *Our Sister Killjoy: or Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint*—and Buchi Emecheta's novels—*The Bride Price*, *The Slave Girl*, and *The Joys of Motherhood*.

I demonstrate how the Adinkra symbols I analyse are extremely useful to understand the physical and spiritual universe both Aidoo and Emecheta develop in their work. To achieve this, I have recurred to Kojo Arthur theoretical approach to those symbols he understands as a writing system. His research also delves into the essence of the Akan cloth, which reaffirms the function of this symbolic cloth as a communication mechanism. Therefore, each part of this research fits to the message that each symbol conveys and its relationship with Aidoo's and Emecheta's narratives. Each symbol with its proverb and meaning becomes the mouthpiece of their narrative that decodes the messages of the voices emerging from the previously silenced. Indeed, these symbols provide a new chance for discussion, denying the topical conceptualization of Africa and Africans.

As regards re-presentation, I have followed both Stuart Hall's and Kadiatu Kanneh's approaches to the concept of representation. Hall has re-established the basis for this concept with a special emphasis on the meaning in language and the significance of the production of knowledge "to refer to either the 'real' world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events" ("Work" 17). Kadiatu Kanneh agrees with Hall's explanation of the evolution of the concept of representation mentioned above. She explores texts that have installed biased discourses around race, depending on the historical time, the political ideology, and economic aims. My conclusive contribution to this field rests on the use of the term "representation" with a hyphen, "re-presentation," to highlight that there is a second chance, afresh, anew with respect to any previous idea or situation. In this sense, African women writers bring forward women characters and their realms by writing back to their male peers, who mostly present women characters either as silenced or completely absent entities from any social and political scenario in their work.

Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi's vernacular literary theory has helped me read these African women's texts under a new light. Her theory sheds light on African multicultural and multilingual literary tradition, springing from the oral Yoruba and the Igbo ethnic groups' myths, and informing that the repetition of patterns in both African

typical cloths and literature could inform of a particular tradition. The parallelism she finds between the *aso ebi* in Nigerian life and women's fiction has become effective for my analysis, since she urges to use the *aso ebi* as a metaphor for the reassessment of African women's writing. She affirms that womanism is the repetitive pattern that pervades narrative. I lean on this statement of her theoretical discourse but extend the idea of womanism to include the social and political commitment and participation in many African women writers, especially Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta in the two decades I analyse.

The unbounded power of the English narratives on Africa is demonstrated in Part II of this research. I concur with Kadiatu Kanneh's idea about the inclusion of literary texts in the corpuses of study of the biased representation and racism. Joyce Cary's and Joseph Conrad's fictions constitute a significant part of the topical discourse on Africa and Africans. To do this, I incorporate various readings of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Cary's *Mister Johnson*, especially Chinua Achebe's responses to these two British writers, who echoed the prejudices against Africa and Africans.

Alastair Niven's general approach to the interrelation between some British intellectuals and the African literary mind, and Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow's analysis of more than five hundred works of fiction and nonfiction written by British authors from the 16th through the 20th century about the sub-Saharan Africa have become instrumental for this research to grasp what V.Y. Mudimbe has called the "colonial library." In this sense, my engagement with Chinua Achebe and Abiola Irele has served to show the power of works of art to oppose African stereotypes.

My detailed analysis of the early significant and influential writings in English in the mid-1950s, which emerged in some West African countries such as Ghana and Nigeria—with special emphasis on Chinua Achebe—triggers, as if controlled by the domino theory, the possibility and need to redress the mistakes associated to African peoples and restore their dignity. This was at stake because of the texts written by non-African authors, whose ideologies were biased by both racism and colonialist attitude especially present in the so-called colonial library. On the other hand, I focus on the need to tell stories about both the African past and present to give also voice to African women. Even though the pathfinders were male African writers, it did not take long for women African authors to join that pioneering group. In any case, it is evinced that four factors blew the Adinkra *Akobon* horn—used as the motive for this Part II—and activated the African women writing: 1) reading original works of non-African writers

about Africa and Africans, 2) access to the assessment of racism and political implications of colonialism on the African mentality, and consequently new social and political organization, 3) belief in the possibility of writing, being African themselves, thanks to Achebe's first widely spread novel *Things Fall Apart*, although with an urge to give voice to the African woman, and 4) need to write from their point of view as African women about their experience and give voice to their African sisters.

This consciousness that books had the potential for changing society implied that many writers knew that the main motivation was their commitment and responsibility as inherent to authorship in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s. For example, Franz Fanon reminds that what resembled passivity and silence in their parents at the beginning of colonialism was only due to the fact that those who were fighting back colonialism were not enough. In the 1960s things started to change due to the growth in number of dissidents. Fanon insists that intellectuals had the need to recover their own history, which was very different from what the colonisers described and far from their recent history of colonialism. I particularly analyse writers who became teachers trying to improve Africa, since the achievement of independence was not enough. In fact, Chinua Achebe considers the novelists as teachers with the responsibility of regenerating their society, reviving the African identity and culture, as well as building up the African self-confidence. Definitely, Aidoo's position against racism and Emecheta's defense of an African history are exemplary within this context as I demonstrate in the last sections of Part II.

Part III analyses the didactic role both Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta have developed in African culture. My approach shows how they were aware that the teaching process can only happen if the real problems are properly described and brought forward boldly through literary re-presentation. They accomplish the maxim of the Adinkra symbol *Nea onnim no sua a, ohu*, in which learning is valued as the only instrument to overcome stagnation in order to keep on progressing. Following, Chinua Achebe's ideas regarding what African society demanded from its writers, I have conclusively delineated how both Aidoo and Emecheta reaffirm the necessity of education. To reinforce this idea I have brought into consideration what both Achebe and Fanon think about the unforgivable sin of the Africans' inferiority complex. This kind of experience reaffirms Achebe's idea that the job of any African writer is to teach. Part III is also inspired in Nadine Gordimer's meditation on her responsibility as a writer, in which creativity and ideology become attached to the Foucauldian discourse

of the writer who is answered. Consequently, commitment and responsibility are key ideas in many African writers, especially when some countries became ambushed by conflicts, before the 1960s, due to colonialism in West Africa; and later after independence, due to post-colonialism, neo-colonialism, corruption of the political rulers, and other social and political maladies.

I definitely insert Aidoo's didactic literature into this context, which is also deeply analysed in her characters and issues like prostitution and migration. In the case of Emecheta, her didacticism is mainly based on the Igbo culture and tradition, which leads this author to highlight the African sense of community and the need to avoid superstitious traditions in order to improve African society. It is important to underline that both authors write to open the readers' eyes to the African reality. They turn the pernicious "effects" of the machinery of colonialism and post-colonialism on their own people, especially those inherited by the African ruling elite, into "causes" of social and political predicament for Africans. Additionally, these authors deploy their writings into the national and international arena to pinpoint the everlasting everyday-life plight of the African women and men in many communities. Conclusively, they are aware of the chance to re-present what was once represented by the non-African writers. They also write because they know that what is written is kept and cannot remain ignored.

These writers clearly attach to the Adinkra symbol of *Nea onnim no sua a, ohu*, since they develop a critical attitude accompanied by a necessity of commitment to defend African culture. In fact, Stephanie Newell also highlights the difficulties that West African women writers undergo when they tackle the issues of gender and power. Their various methods illustrate their creativity. For example, this research investigates how Aidoo informs readers presenting the worst problems Ghana was suffering ever since its independence. The young girls eager for having the frivolous Western commodities abandon their villages and schools and migrate to the city in search of easy money. They sell out their youthful bodies—as the numerous quotations I have selected demonstrate—to get goods that the white culture sells as modern and necessary for success: wigs, skin-bleaching, and other unhealthy remedies to become white. She also handles the problem of the brain drain, knowing beforehand that this problem can only be solved once corruption is overcome and morality reigns among the ruling class. The problem of poverty is a result of the appropriation of wealth by the ruling elite, leaving the common people alone to face their problem of survival. Hence, in Part III I conclude that Aidoo's method is first to expose the problem, teach or show readers the roots of

the problem, and then proceed to the reprimanding process. I have also chosen many examples from Emecheta's *The Bride Price* to illustrate my point regarding the explicit teaching aim behind Emecheta's novels. I point out that this novel contains more explanations about the Igbo society than the rest of her African novels included in this research. Her special focus on the Igbo traditions is accompanied by the significance of education, sisterhood, and the consequences of slavery and colonialism. Therefore, didactic commitment becomes essential in these two writers.

Part IV of this research deals with the Adinkra *Sankofa* maxim: "go back and fetch the ancestors' gems." I look into Aidoo's and Emecheta's works in search of ancient traditions to find that the literary re-presentations in both authors have been enriched with them. In this case, both writers align themselves with Wole Soyinka's defense of the direct relationship between cultural identity and artistic production. This position is supplemented by Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike's work, *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*, in which they urge African writers to decolonise their writing be they prose or poetry. And, finally, both writers also stand by F. Abiola Irele's elucidation that the African writer is mindful of the mesmerizing reality and significance of the basic structure of traditional life patterns in his experience and artistic expression.

This line of thought has led both Aidoo and Emecheta to retrieve, re-possess and re-present the African social and cultural reality. The African literary heritage becomes substantial in the acquisition of wisdom, which is based on learning from the past to build the future. In the diverse sections of Part IV I investigate how Ama Ata Aidoo was brought up in a family and a social context fond of traditions. Many members in her family had to deal with social and political problems and dilemmas. This explains why her fiction concentrates on non-fictitious African predicaments, and she relies on the tradition of the dilemma tale analysed by Vincent O. Odamtten, which is a narrative that embraces many genres, and in addition to its social and political concerns it also has literary worth. The knowledge and treasures of Aidoo's ancestors have always been the starting point in the years she was exposed to political ideas that influenced her intellectual formation. Her experience of Ghana independence in first person pushes her to engage in the recouping of this nation's identity and culture. My deep analysis of her work infers that she has followed the *Sankofa* maxim looking back to proverbs, sayings, and songs of her people's tradition. As a *Mfantse* she has also used dirges that are reserved for women to perform in her community as instances of lamentations. She has

brought to the literary field many African elements of knowledge and has re-presented them in a new African form. For instance, her predilection for the oral storytelling performance has always inspired her. Therefore, she has drawn heavily from the oral storytelling art and has re-presented the typical traditional formulaic sentences as we have seen in the examples of this Part IV.

I have contextualised this aspect of orality through H.O Chukwuma's comparison of the African oral tale and short story. She concentrates on the description of the audience and performance. Moreover, she enumerates and defines the different kinds of oral tales and the structure and language used. However, Aidoo's tales included in this research do not strictly adhere to Chukwuma's classification of the African oral tales. Rather, she participates of Achebe's concept about the storytelling sessions and content of the stories. It is women's job to teach children the important values in the Igbo society, and it is men's to perpetuate the myths and stories about tribes and wars, which cultivate the dominating attitude towards women and oblige to hate the enemies of their community.

Buchi Emecheta's life and expectations have also led her to disseminate whatever she has learned from her African experience. Her love for the storytelling sessions that she remembers so well when she is away from Africa has added impulse to her act of writing. I have traced back this writer to big sister Flora Nwapa and her writing about African women in Nigeria. Emecheta's act of taking up Nwapa's final words in *Efuru*, and using them as the title for her third African book *The Joys of Motherhood*, can be seen as looking back to Nwapa's works and carrying on with it, just as the Adinkra *Sankofa* symbol does: it looks back, brings what is valuable and flies into the future. She also uses in her works elements that bring her ancestors forward. She picks from the past whatever suits her intentions to clarify the social state that the Nigerian woman has inherited, without forgetting men's influence be they beneficial or pernicious.

Within this field, I also delineate how Emecheta retrieves, repossesses, and re-presents the storytelling art: her use of some traditional concepts that belong to the system of belief of her people or their way of narrating tales to each other, such as the *Ogbanje*, *Chi*, and Age-group. It is observable how she channels the potentials that these African particularities offer so as to create new plots different from the traditional ones with the aim of proposing changes. Her repetitions become cross-references, which reinforce the re-presentation of the ancient African stories that she re-captures over and

over again after hearing them from her aunts, other storytellers, and gossipers. She transforms these stories into reality bites. Moreover, it is important to conclude that Buchi Emecheta's narrators are the bearers of the Adinkra *Sankofa* maxim: perpetuating the African cultural heritage and providing knowledge through their words. Rather than anthropologists interested in the Igbos, her narrators become responsible of Emecheta's African cosmology in which the Igbo joins the Yoruba tradition to play a substantial role. Susan Arndt's *African Women's Literature: Orature and Intertextuality* has served to enrich this field of African studies with her particular approach to the Igbo folktale, which is mostly told by Igbo women and called *Ifo*. Arndt extrapolates Saidu Babura Ahmad's theory on African folktales—mainly derived from the Hausa folktales called “Tatsuniyoyi” to the *Ifo* oral tradition. Moreover, Arndt establishes the *Ifo* as the blueprint in many Igbo women writers' work.

Likewise, Kwame Anthony Appiah's idea behind the fact of re-telling something over and over again conveying repetition as a significant technique, defines a common feature precisely in Emecheta's African novels. As Appiah has recommended readers to leave behind the “anthropologizing” reading of Achebe's work, the same should be applied to Emecheta's work. These should not to be read under an anthropological magnifying glass but rather to understand her continuous incursions into traditions as a mechanism to bring the Igbo traditions from the past, and in some cases highlighting that some became obsolete in the 1970s.

In Part V, the crocodile from the Adinkra symbol *Odenkyem* defends the idea of an appropriate prudent adaptation to every new circumstance. From this perspective, I deepen on the use of particular languages and African literature. My starting point is Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's insistence on the distinction between the literature written in European and African languages, not including the former within the scope of African literature even if this was written by African authors. To this, I have added Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike's demand that African writers should experiment with European languages by adapting them to the African needs. Indeed, each African writer uses European languages in a way to suit her particular and specific cultural inheritance. To combine these two perspectives helps to explain how both Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta have preferred to write in English. Since the choice of language for writing in West Africa in the 1960s and 1970s was still an important issue, I defend that these authors reveal their commitment as if it were a pledge to re-present their Africa and Africans from the insiders' capacity to adapt the imposed English language to their

vernacular communication tools. My extended analysis on their work in Part V responds to the issue of adaptation in form and style. These writers have intentionally inserted foreign language elements into English, and this has affected the formal and visual aspects of the literary works analysed in this research.

Susan Arndt's concept of relexification has been applied to the Mfantse idioms and oral formula translated into English. For example, Ama Ata Aidoo has *Mphantised* or *Fanticised* English to suit her style of re-presentation in her short stories, definitely making use of relexification. Doing this, she has embraced the English and Ghanaian experience. In the case of Buchi Emecheta, she has *Igboized* the English language for her African novels, especially through the use of Igbo and praise names, even though she boasts about her books being tagged as English literature on the shelves in bookshops and libraries. Emecheta inserts a large amount of African lexis, mostly Igbo, and occasionally Yoruba and Hausa, with the intention of Africanising both the scenery and language of her villagers. These are especially set between the 1900s and 1950s, a period in which illiteracy was the common state of many, if not all, inhabitants in the remote villages in Africa.

In addition to Africanising the English language in their narrative, my analysis concludes that both Aidoo and Emecheta have intended to emancipate the African novel from the tyranny of the European literary canon. They have liberated this old literary genre from the strict authority of the established norms by including elements derived from the African oral literary tradition. In fact, the Bolekaja group—composed by Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike—in an attempt to root the African writing in their own particular culture, recommend the use of the oral techniques in storytelling so as to include an African dramatic dimension to the narrative written prose. My research demonstrates that both Aidoo and Emecheta have created what I term the African polyphyletic literary category, in which texts incorporate art performance and African oral literature into the conventional European novel and short story. Both Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta might have appropriated the European bourgeois genre known as the novel. For these women writers, both the novel and short story are the tools they have embraced to produce new African creations. I borrow the adjective “polyphyletic” from science, and I bring it forward to the field of African literary criticism. I propose the expression “African literary polyphyletic category” to provide a distinctive mark to the diverse African literary categories, which are difficult to classify under the strict Western literary canon. Especially, because they have derived from the

combination of more than one traditional or ancestral group: the Western novel and short story, the African traditional oral art manifestations such as drama, storytelling, songs, dirges, and other forms not familiar to non-African scholars such as the Ghanaian “fefewo” or the Igbo “Ifo.”

In this sense, these authors have written not only for readers but also for listeners, since they have included storytelling techniques as I have closely analyzed in Part V. For instance, by following the “fefewo” scheme Aidoo reaches her people and makes them reflect about their land, community, and future. In this sense, I have particularly focused on her gossipers’ stories and her novel *Our Sister Killjoy*, which is Aidoo’s epitome of the African polyphyletic literary category. The use of gossiping also turns Aidoo’s work into a bridge that brings together orality and written text, since gossiping is mainly an oral practice or act of speech, labelled as “small talk.” Whereas, Emecheta, in order to destroy the negative stereotypes of Igbo women, writes back to the Igbo “Ifo” by restoring the women’s voice, and repairing the damage done to the image of the demonised, evil, unfaithful, and disobedient Igbo daughters, sisters, wives, co-wives, mothers, and widows. Additionally, Emecheta recognizes the Catholic influence on her writing, although her real inspiration comes from her own homeland. Her trips to Nigeria enrich her with her own experience or with the other people’s she hears of. Both writers’ works epitomise what I have coined as polyphyletic literary category, which keeps the essence of the storytelling sessions used not only for fun but also to instruct the reader-audience.

I have selected for Part VI the Adinkra symbol *Asase ye duru*, which is associated with the providence and divinity of Mother Earth. This symbol conveys the idea of Earth as a mother that receives her newly-born child, sustains, and then takes back her dead ones to her womb. Following this, I have focused on how both Aidoo and Emecheta have challenged the traditional view on Africa and Africans. First, Kadiatu Kanneh’s work, *African Identities*, has informed this section of my research. Her first chapter, “The Meaning of Africa: Texts and Histories,” brings together different disciplines by taking into account the factors that constitute the cornerstones for the construction of an authorised image of Africa by outsiders. In addition to this, she scrutinizes the diverse disciplines that framed the writings in ideologies of the time with the corresponding political engagement of the authors. She has been able to unveil how the meaning of Africa has been defined through the establishment of a corpus of narratives produced as a concept and a body of knowledge for diverse purposes.

Definitely, Africa appears always involved in three categories: experiential, visual and historical. I have to remind the readers of this research to take into account the nature of my primary sources, which are novels and short stories. Hence, it is difficult to separate Kanneh's three categories into isolated blocks since Aidoo's and Emecheta's narratives can contain all these three categories at a time.

I have heavily relied on the corpus of narratives included in the so-called "colonial library," which being girdled by the ideology of the colonial machinery, has created a myriad of mostly racist meanings for Africa and her peoples, and. I have considered Hammond and Jablow's approach to the British accounts of Africa to observe the fantasies that created an aversion towards the Africans in the British readers. These texts come from diverse origins. Hence, this is the reason why Hammond and Jablow clarify that, even though they are aware of the existence of other texts in other languages, they only approach British texts, in the first place, to avoid problems of translation; and in the second place, because the British Empire was the dominant empire. Indeed, the British influence has become a fixed factor for the lack of rigour, and the intentional tone of degradable assessment of Africa and Africans. I agree with Achebe's idea of liberating the stories and their creators from their powerful masters. It was time for Africans to recover their right to write and tell Africa and the rest of the world about themselves. Furthermore, Mudimbe defends that ethnohistory has transformed this situation, since new types of expressions are taken into account, such as the oral tradition including poetry and other fixed cultural formulas, although texts are limited to one side of the discourse and in their main languages leaving behind the discourse of the "Other." This could only be done after the challenging of the European history's validity and its redefinition that was already taking place in the 1950s.

Of course, this investigation determines that it is impossible to bound Africa to simple concepts. Is it a concept, an idea, a paradigm, a glimpse of infinity or simply a mere country as Ali A. Mazrui's poetry suggests? The response could be kaleidoscopic. It is even easier to point out what both Africa and her people are not, as many important African intellectuals have been doing for some time now. But I still have to try to pin down how the authors (under analysis in this research) conceive and re-present Africa, including all these possible definitions challenged above. Hence to organize this extended analysis I have followed Kadiatu Kanneh's conception of tackling the representation of Africa in literature in her *African Identities*.

To illustrate this, I compare some racist texts by Joseph Conrad and Joyce Cary with Aidoo's and Emecheta's works included in my corpus. Earth is of paramount importance in the African peoples' life. This explains why both Aidoo and Emecheta cling unwaveringly to Africa, and why they have developed their own narrative responses to the African mother soil. Ama Ata Aidoo and her main character in *Our Sister Killjoy* do not want to leave Africa behind. Whereas Buchi Emecheta, although she does not live in Africa, keeps going back to Nigeria in search of inspiration, and recompiles most of her tales from her people. Most of these writers' works analyzed here are set on African land. Ama Ata Aidoo's short story characters move around the Ghanaian villages. Furthermore, in her *Our Sister Killjoy* the main character travels out of Africa to finally go back. Her narrators move from the physical experience to the different mental paradigms that circumscribe Africa in space and time. Aidoo does not provide the reader with exhaustive physical descriptions about her African settings. Her re-presentations are built out of political, social, and experiential elements that create a discourse embracing her picture of Africa bordered by a pan-African frame. Emecheta's three novels are located in colonial Nigeria, re-presenting the physical Africa. She heeds the geographical or physical territory and describes villages, natural resources, and places like markets in which people live and socialise. She re-presents her people in genuine environments. However, she incorporates myths that survive as legends in her "Igboland."

This investigation also demonstrates how Aidoo focuses on the modern history of her country and Africa in the late 1960s and early 1970s. She presents the problems that affect the whole African continent in an inclusive re-presentation, as if pan-Africanism were a reality. In this case, the whole stands for the particular in a centripetal process, in which the centre is a different nation. As seen in Part VI, she particularly deals with Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa. Aidoo's eagle's eye view of Africa in *Our Sister Killjoy* is a metaphor to comprehend her ability to see the whole picture, and combine both positive and negative aspects of her Africa. On the other hand, Emecheta sets her stories in her Igbo people's private history in the first half of the 20th century. She launches them as if in a centrifugal process outwards to embrace the rest of Africa with her specific visual and experiential dimensions. Moreover, the idea of granting the untold history to people assures this writer's sense of continuity to reinforce a national and cultural identity. Hence, the convergence of historical news about Africans and their society within the liminal space of legend, myth, and non-

colonial history reassures a re-presentation of Africa and her people from within, and interestingly enough, written by an African woman writer. Moreover, her re-presentation of the past is full of information about the Igbo people. Emecheta also criticises her own people and social organizations, which have perpetuated what she has defined in her three novels as unacceptable idiosyncrasy.

This PhD dissertation extends also to the role of biomedicine on the side of justifying African colonisation. According to Megan Vaughan, in the beginning of the 19th century various biomedical discourses participated in the discourse on difference among Africans. Moreover, Vaughan asserts that culture was used as another variable in the biomedical analysis. On the one hand, the missionaries considered ‘primitiveness’ as a cultural feature of African society and this made them susceptible to certain diseases. Regarding this idea of Africa as a land of tropical diseases, in which any non-African who goes there dies, this research determines how Aidoo compensates this negative view re-presenting the failure of the Western medical and scientific advances in Africa, and how political maladies have not been eradicated yet. I illustrate her critical attitude through her consideration on the worldwide acknowledgement of the success of the heart transplant in South Africa, which motivated her to write against racism, apartheid, and segregation system. Emecheta also reverses the biomedical western discourse. She re-presents most of her African male characters as sufferers from diseases originating in non-African lands. Instead of reading about the colonialist administrators’ death due to African maladies in many novels written by non-African writers, we now read about African characters’ death provoked by illnesses brought into Africa by outsiders. Emecheta’s allusion to the participation of Africans in European wars, and the deadly effects these produced in the African interior regions reverses topical issues on this subject matter.

To supplement both Aidoo’s and Emecheta’s new perception on African geography, marketplaces acquire a significant role. Rather than mere mercantile establishments, for Aidoo they re-present a political scenario or a speaker’s corner, in which African women can freely speak and express their hatred or outrage towards those who abuse of their new power. Aidoo also provides a commercial dimension to markets, since they re-present fresh farm products from Ghana, which are directly consumed. For Emecheta, markets are colourful spaces, where traditional, economic, social, and political issues thrive. She re-presents the cyclic route of a Nigerian raw product since it leaves the village market: how it travels to the city then to the Empire,

and then comes back as an expensive product of luxury. In any case, both writers exemplify achievements and contradictions in the contrast between the city and countryside.

Conclusively, the Africa as mother soil that Aidoo presents in her work includes both Kanneh's historical and experiential categories, intertwined in such a way that history is also an emotional experience for her. The visual category is also present and accentuated, although Africa is signalled and re-presented by its absence on some occasions. Aidoo re-presents an Africa for a mental perception where the absence of the physical Africa is made tangible and present through the eye of the mind. Emecheta re-presents the African geography as the tangible ground for the senses and hearts of the Africans.

The application of the Adinkra symbol *Epa*—which becomes a metonym for the whole process of enslavement—to both Aidoo's and Emecheta's works results from an extensive reading of other disciplines that has enriched the development of Part VII. In the 1960s and 1970s African writers were still writing about slavery. I have particularly followed historians Basil Davidson, J.D. Fage, and William Tordoff who have intended to shed light on such an important aspect of African society in the books they have written on the history of Africa. Opoku-Agyemang's sensibility has been also useful to analyse the wounds of slavery in Africa. Slavery uprooted many Africans away from their families and communities. Not only did it shatter the lives of those abducted or simply sold sisters or brothers; but it also conveyed their subjugation: first to the African ruling or merchant classes, and later to whites. The history of African slavery is not as simple as to affirm that the starting point was the commercial exchange for the benefit of Europeans.

Reading other scholars' and critics' works regarding the issue of enslavement in both Aidoo's and Emecheta's works has revealed that their approaches mainly focused on gender from the feminist point of view. This research has included other aspects and more elements of analysis. These writers' texts have shed light on the dark side of slavery in their characters' daily life, and show different pictures of subjugation, servitude, and enthrallment that appeared during colonisation and after independence. I have used Davidson's and Fage and William Tordoff's historical accounts to contextualize some issues in Aidoo's position on the civilized bondage in some African countries. For instance, she highlights how Africans become trapped by bleaching their skin, Christianity, easy-money illusion, and especially how African tongues are

disregarded by neo-colonialism. Her discourse on slavery also stands out in her novels just as the slavery castles of Ghana do. The enslavement she writes about in the works analysed in this research evinces the political, social, cultural, and racial situations in both the post-independent Ghana and Western world. The worst of subjugation she presents is the new generations' desire to follow the Western way of life represented by easy-money making, to get frivolous commodity goods, and the uselessness of their life. Her novels hail African readers to resist against Western temptations, and free themselves from their inferiority complex. Ever since the 1960s and the 1970s she has been criticising the new modes of bondage through and due to neo-colonialism.

Buchi Emecheta's slave narrative particularly focuses on her mother's story. It is noticeable how her texts show powerful enslavement in modern Africa. Her novel *The Slave Girl* exemplifies how the new have replaced the old masters. However, she illustratively recounts the other side of the story. As if working side by side with some historians who wrote works on the history of Africa, she discloses other aspects unknown to many readers such as enslavement as the only mode of survival for Africans. She energizes readers narrating personal and private stories of people who were enslaved once by the tradition of slavery, traditions of their communities, new masters, colonisers, and Christianity. When a knot is loosened another knot tightens. Moreover, Emecheta also insists on the issue of self-enslavement through beliefs and superstitions. Lastly, Emecheta's narratives cannot obviate the subjugation that unveils the dark side of marriage, polygamy, and the significance of being a mother in the African community.

This research also brings into focus the question of self-examination that has developed a significant role in the ancient oral tradition of African performance art. The Adinkra symbol for Part VIII is the *Akoko Nan*, which stands for parental admonition accompanied with patience and mercy. This symbol is inherent to African social life, in which self-appraisal is crucial for the community's improvement. Both Aidoo and Emecheta have transmuted the effects of colonial machinery into the causes of the social plight in Africa. To understand their new perspective, I have recurred to Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi's theory, in her work *Africa Wo/Man Palava*, which is related to the common term "been-to" used mostly in English-speaking West African countries to identify those who have been to other places away from their original birthplace. "Been-toism" has provided both Aidoo and Emecheta with the double vision acquired through the displacement from the homely to the unhomely condition, which is

“a paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition” (9) for Bhabha. In this sense, displacement is the result of a spatial, and by extension the psychological schism with an initial identity to tiptoe across to that space in-between where new interactions take place. This migration on the bridge connecting both ends, in this case two different cultures, converts the unified self into an open multifaceted one which is able to reach both ends of the bridge by going and coming, oscillating and losing that property of the initial identity. In addition to the influence of the tradition of self-assessment in the Ghanaian theatrical scope, self-criticism is mostly possible because of the writers’ condition of being “been-tos” and due to their experience of the “unhomely” condition described by Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*. Bhabha explains the idea of “unhomeliness” as “the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations” (9). However, this postcolonial theorist insists that: “To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the ‘unhomely’ be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres” (*Location* 9). From their estrangement, Aidoo and Emecheta have been able to compare and distinguish the good from the evil in their own countries. As if he were defending these writers, Bhabha’s words adjust to this vision: “the truest eye may now belong to the migrant’s double vision” (*Location* 5).

This research demonstrates how Aidoo practices a conspicuous criticism in her narrative. She lambasts the culture of colonial aping that perpetuates the effects of colonisation on the psychological and social aspects of every African. She openly hurls scathing indictment on the politicians, pseudo-intellectuals and on those Africans who manifest signs of inferiority complex. She has used her writing machine and pen as if they were her most effective weapons.

Aidoo’s personal marked style of verse intertwined with prose creates a battlefield, in which she shames the enemies, traitors, and liars of Africa and Africans. Readers cannot but think about how the Africans themselves cause damage and suffering to African people. Furthermore, readers see clearly that something has to be done to reverse the situation that impedes progress in Africa. Aidoo writes to change her society and she can only do this through the practice of self-appraisal. Aidoo also represents her narrators and characters as Africans who are either fed up with the political and social shortcomings or are aware of what ails their society and react by pointing them out vigorously.

Likewise, this research reveals how Aidoo impregnates some of her work with what I shall call covert criticism. Various techniques have served for her purposes. On

the one hand, she sometimes uses songs, especially observable in “Two Sisters,” as the means her people have traditionally used to correct the attitude or behaviour of the members in her society. On the other hand, she uses the habit of repetition in many African oral traditions or artistic representations such as music and dancing. In her short stories “Something to Talk About on the Way to the Funeral” and “Certain Winds from the South,” the repetition of the same experience generation after generation, without resolving the difficulties and mistakes, produces the effect on the reader of wondering why these characters or their societies have never learnt the lesson. This implies that Aidoo is urging the political parties to take heed of the errors that have to be corrected. For instance, Ghanaian politicians have to put an end to the problems derived from the abandonment of the peripheries in the big cities. Aidoo dares to “wash” the Africans’ “dirty linens in public” and African intellectual men did not like this in the 1970s. She believes that she has to re-present the truth about the flaws of independence as if she were treading on her chicken as the hen in the Adinkra *Akoko Nan* symbol. Moreover, what becomes worse is that many Africans have inherited the colonial power and abused it. She admonishes them through her ironic and scornful prose and poetry texts.

I have extensively quoted Aidoo’s complex novel, *Our Sister Killjoy*, to demonstrate her reprimanding tone. Her main characters and narrators frequently expose their rejection to those who embrace erroneous Western customs and recommendations that worsen their life and, consequently, hinder the progress of Africa. In this sense, the lack of education, prostitution, the so-called educated big men, and the imposition of Western codes visible in Christian naming, wigs, and skin bleaching are issues Aidoo presents as exemplary of a society that needs to renew itself. In doing this, this author echoes Franz Fanon’s ideas when she pins down Africans’ need to make up for their lack of confidence and inferiority complex as the main motivation. However, her principle goal with her *Akoko Nan* attitude is to wash away all the agents of misery and bring back dignifying modes of behaviour for her people. Her work highlights that she and her continent can only progress through honesty and well-intentioned edifying actions.

In Emecheta’s case, her admonishment is not only addressed to men but also to women, and is always accompanied by her emphasis on the necessity of education. She has pointed out many of these aspects in her three African novels and in her autobiography *Head Above Water*. The analysis of her works developed in this research shows how they have yielded a myriad of readings, beyond her explanations, provoking

different reactions during the following decades after they were written. She particularly addresses her criticism against all the discriminations that Igbo women and, by extension, African women have suffered from. Her only possible recipe to liberate them from the chains of old habits that obstruct their progress is through breaking the ramparts of tradition. Moreover, Emecheta exploits the narrators' voice of authority to unveil the damage inflicted to women through the implantation of old practices and their impossibility of breaking away. Hence, these narrators are not only the custodians of the old African traditions but they are also at a time the denouncers of the state of affairs in African society. Consequently, the adaptability of her three African novels I focus on in this research to suit many ideologies and tastes through her multi-authorial voice produces the uneasiness that every reader needs to set thoughts on one side or another. However, her endings have obscured and confused the possibilities of a single interpretation for many critics, especially feminists. Following my own analysis, this is her *Akoko Nan* strategy of reprimanding. Her protest rises from the impossibility of classifying her catch-22 message. The ironic words in some of her final paragraphs produce the tragic endings that inevitably function as a warning to those who want a change to happen in their life. Like the hen in *Akoko Nan* she treads on her people, but to what extent can it be confirmed that she does not "kill" any of them? Eventually, Emecheta's despised opinions have deflated her own popularity. Many have pointed a finger at her as a protest writer who intends to exasperate others through honest self-assessment, so as to push them to look for solutions and defy the boundaries of gender and social enslavement.

I have analysed Ama Ata Aidoo's and Buchi Emecheta's works under the heading of the hyphenated term "re-presentation." In order to bring their works together, at the beginning of this PhD dissertation I propose that their texts belong to a metaphorical *aso ebi* practice, where the cloths were decorated with some Adinkra symbols. This metaphorical Adinkra cloth used in this *aso ebi* practice is pregnant with messages revealed through all the parts and the examples presented above. Hence, Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta practise the *aso ebi* cloth tradition through their texts, which convey messages emanating from the Adinkra symbols printed on the *aso ebi* cloths. These writers' texts chosen here have yielded responses to all the maxims of the Adinkra symbols selected for this purpose. This research has demonstrated that these writers have reinforced the African identity by regaining a history for their people, and retrieving the ancient wisdom from their traditional deposit of beliefs, thoughts,

proverbs, oral performance, and stories. Moreover, both Buchi Emecheta and Ama Ata Aidoo are acculturated West African women writers but this has not prevented them from looking at both cultures with critical eye. They are highly-educated West African women writers—and also “been-tos”—so they have the ability and perspective to compare and choose the best for their people. Nevertheless, behind their success lies their ability to prudently and wisely adapt the English language and Western modes and literary genres to their didactic African purposes.

Both Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta have spoken out against all the plights that hinder the progress of Africa and Africans. Their work is best perceived through the Adinkra symbols used in this research. As the Adinkra *aso ebi* cloth, their literary work is pregnant with multiple voices, which these writers have re-presented with new strategies and in an African creative way.

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