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Research Dissertation

Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa: Feminist Critiques of Post-Colonial Africa

By

1649844

Yolanda Mdluli

Department of Politics

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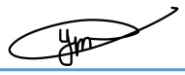
Declaration

I do solemnly declare that this dissertation is my original work. It has never been submitted by one for the award of another degree. Moreover, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no other material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of the dissertation.

Full Legal Name: Yolanda Mdluli

Signature 

Abstract

Beyond problematizing the marginal position of African women, African women have been authoring texts that contribute to socio-political debates about the ways in which African states were crafted to do little to nothing to placate the effects of colonialism after independence. Namely, Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa are among the plethora of authors that have been doing this said project in their prose which is the main purpose behind why I chose to read and analyse a text by each of them for critiques of how Ghana and Nigeria transitioned from the colonial administration, respectively.

I will look at how they not only contributed to these debates but also unpacked the dangers of being enticed by the imperial and masculinist form that many newly-independent nations were taking. Their narratives will work to look at the usage of African literature in politics and not just as critically-acclaimed works of fiction.

Keywords

African Literature. Post-Colonial. Feminisms.

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Table of Contents

‘We invent different fictions to help us out of particular problems we encounter in living’

- Achebe, *The Truth of Fiction* (1989)

Chapter 1

Introduction

African feminist literature has long been relegated to the margins of intellectual scholarship in relation to the politics of post-colonial Africa. This research will use texts of fiction by Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa to demonstrate how these thinkers use a feminist lens to unpack their preoccupations with critiquing the conditions in post-colonial states in which they were born into and which informs their experiences. The study broadens the scope of political and socio-economic perspectives of the post-colonial era, by centering the voices of African women. The purpose of this research is to explore how the texts by these three literary thinkers can be useful in understanding their political positions and ensure the inclusion of Black women authors in the intersecting study of African literature and politics.

The male counterparts of the thinkers I have selected for my dissertation undergo a significantly less or sometimes even nonexistent amount of scrutiny in research because the perception is that feminist, African literature is inherently ill-fitting for scholarly research. To avoid pandering to this patriarchal notion, I will not spend a significant part of my dissertation arguing for why these writers should not have been relegated to the margins they are in to begin with. Choosing Flora Nwapa, who is hailed as the “mother of African literature” (Olukoya 2020), and two other authors that have been greatly inspired by her work, I argue that this should indicate that the typical scholarly work on male writers in the continent would be in good company. In the introduction of this research I will explain the history of the African literary canon. I will then explore the idea of development

and democratization in order to look at the historical context of the countries I am focused on. This will then justify the literature I chose to preface my dissertation and explain why I chose these three authors despite their linguistic background.

African literary history is interesting insofar as its historical periodization, that is, its origination over five thousand years ago in Ancient Egypt and the accompanying oral forms which precede that period. However the canon is seen to be placed squarely on the shoulders of publishers like the *African Writers Series (AWS)* and *Heinemann* (Barnett 2006; 2). This illuminated how African writers' literary negotiation of the global cultural economy proceeds with an awareness of colonial historical and cultural dependency and the limitations it foists on them (Ede 2015; 113). This has meant that there is a fine line between pandering to a market for sales and the allure of getting published by a well-established brand and then understanding what that pandering will mean for the erasure and reduction of literary production in Africa. This fine line also speaks to what many authors grapple with in their fiction where progress is always marred by some kind of compromise of culture and or history. There have been arguments that the AWS is as 'invasive as that of missionary presses and the colonial publishing institutions' (Griffiths 2017). "While an alternative perspective is that commercial-based publishing in the post-independence period is the basis 'for the creating of new forms of spatially and temporally extended public communication" (Barnett 2006; 6). These two – however conflicting perspectives both manage to acknowledge the prestige of being published as well as illuminate how many other writers have had to scramble for book prizes and other forms of recognition (Kaddu 2016, 71).

Acknowledging oral history as part of the African literary canon also means acknowledging the vital role women played in its conception despite the collusion of patriarchy and imperialism to erase this fact (Nnaemeka 1994). This pervasive erasure prompted author, Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi (2005) to write on a collection of African women authors, some of whom received a lot of critical acclaim like Buchi Emecheta and Ama Ata Aidoo, similar to my own research. This is important to take note of because the assumption that research on African women writers needs to be relegated solely to women in 'obscurity' in order to be validly feminist is a misleading assumption. It must be debunked because it is that same kind of trope of masculinist thinking that has allowed this exclusion of their work to exist in scholarly research, despite the popularity and accessibility of the three authors I chose to study. The canon is an exclusive and largely problematic space that has been functioning and legitimating the idea of epistemic superiority to the exclusion of African women since its conception. It is therefore important to acknowledge this problem before my analysis so as to not distract from the purpose of reading the texts by authors that had the access to a privileged space (the aforementioned, *African Writers Series*) in order to publish works that I will probe and analyze in a manner that was solely reserved for writers who are men.

The literary work by each of these authors will enable me to employ an interdisciplinary mode of analysis for literary studies where I can closely read their work beyond just the feminist prose and as texts that provide criticisms of the functioning of the state from a non-masculinist perspective. Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa skillfully comment on ordinary issues in women's lives to illuminate the challenges they face; ranging from the economic to the political. Their narratives will work to look at the usage

of African literature beyond that of critically-acclaimed works of fiction, but as social and political commentaries on Nigerian and Ghanaian societies.

Some literature on development from the Western academy is often based on generalized tropes regarding the African state that are usually informed by conservative, colonial-inspired racist biases about Africans and their political behavior (McFadden 2008; 137). Analyzing Nigeria and Ghana's transition into dependence is much like looking at South Africa's transition into democracy after Apartheid. "Colonialism and apartheid are similar in that both represent forms of political and economic domination that are based on racial hierarchies which favor white minorities over black majority populations" (Decker 2010; 792). After the 1970s, both countries experienced a succession of military coups, interrupted by failed democracies. While this diverted into various legislations that would ensure indigenization and the expansion of the economy to include Western banks and aid into the country (Decker 2010). Understanding the history of the path to democratization is key in understanding the reasons why critiques of it existed and why it is important to analyze these critiques by African women. The feminism that has emerged in post-colonial African states differs from the Western model that is "an advocacy of sexual rights, female control over reproduction, choices within human sexuality and essentialism" (Aniekwu 2006; 143). In addition to these elements, post-colonial African feminism also concerns itself with socio-political assessment of the impact of democratization on African women in countries such as Nigeria and Ghana. Along with the emergence of post-colonial societies at large in these respective countries.

The historical context of my research will focus particularly on the period of 1950-1970. This period is significant because it provides the working definition for the term 'post-

colonial' in my dissertation. Ghana gained independence from British colonial rule in March 1957 where Kwame Nkrumah became the head of government. Being the first country to gain independence, Ghana was seen as a state that had the moral and spiritual qualities to set the pace and tone of independence for all of Africa (Konadu-Agyemang 2000). The token that Ghana received for being the first country to be freed from colonial rule was quickly tainted by the country's socioeconomic conditions and spatial inequalities that resulted in coups, violence and instability. The Nigerian post-colonial period was also marred with issues. The country gained independence from British colonial rule in October 1960. The 1960s in Nigeria were characterized by the quasi-separation between religion, politics and traditional leaders that were incorporated by the British through indirect-rule (Adigwe and Grau 2007).

Reading Ama Ata Aidoo as a critique of systematic imperialism that informed governance and the education system is the first task I will look at in this dissertation. Using the idea of the killjoy as a praxis of dismembering patriarchal and imperial norms. In Buchi Emecheta's work, I will focus on motherhood and marriage as a way of demonstrating her anti-capitalist position. *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) delivers a range of capitalist and economic arrangements that would not only impact mothers (as the central theme of her work) but also highlights the exploitation, oppression and precariousness of wealth for the whole society in her writing. Flora Nwapa's work provides insight on the same concerns of the other two other authors. In her own work, Nwapa writes the cassava as representative of women, which creates parallels between the socio-political standing of Nigerian women whilst unpacking questions of nationalism and identity.

These chapters will reveal how African, feminist authors' critiqued gender and development and how these helped shape feminist post-colonial rhetoric through the lived experiences they describe from a West African perspective. It is not within the scope of this dissertation to look at all the socio-political issues that come with studying the postcolonial era, the compilation of these three authors gives us a nudge in the direction of figuring out how to locate a feminist voice in African literature that encapsulates the plethora of socio-economic issues that faced the nations that emerged after the independence from the colonial powers after the 1950s.

The preface of my dissertation is inspired by a paper by MSC Okolo on African Literature as Political Philosophy (2007). Okolo introduces Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o as the political philosophers in his book. The analysis of Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) is equal parts the methodology and evidence behind proving that Achebe holds a reformist position. Similarly, he uses *Petals of Blood* (1977) by wa Thiong'o as the premise of the argument for his Marxist aesthetics. This book is relevant to my own work because it gives the directive for the aesthetics of analyzing literature in support of particular political positions. I do not wish to negate this existing work done by scholars that have used African literature as a tool to look at political issues on the continent, on the contrary because it was Ngugi wa Thiong'o who said 'African writers are writers in politics' (1981). My research is an exercise of revamping this very same trope through the perspective of African authors who are all women and ascribe to feminisms in their works. This exercise is due to the fact that Okolo (2007) also casually leaves out issues pertaining particularly to Black women, and assumes that 'literature' from Africa is implicitly about the all people that stay there. I believe that while the book champions very

good authors and arguments about their political philosophies, there is a large gap that needs to be filled as far as gender and development is concerned.

Nfah Abbenyi (1997) rightfully argues that African literature has been categorized into different linguistic camps and therefore represents inherently different literatures – which is an idea she opposes. In addition to agreeing with Abbenyi's opposition to the idea that Anglophone and Francophone writers are writing for different literary canons, I also agree with the idea that books are an accumulation of memories and imaginations that contain the cultural capacity of society, of its accomplishments, agonies and aspirations (Bgoya and Jay 2013).

Noting this, I must acknowledge that my choice to focus on three Anglophone women writers was not a deliberate one. My intentions in this regard was to choose literature from the African literary canon – that has a history of silencing African women (Gould 1998; 165). The availability and extensive publishing of the work by the three women I have based my research upon did not close the gap in the literature that I want my dissertation to fill. The acknowledgement of the 'size' of this apparent gap does not negate the fact that work must still be done to reduce it. Where the men considered to be the fathers of African literature occupy positions of political intellectuals that have written fiction work that can speak to politics that can be transposed to various African contexts – regardless of their colonial and linguistic background. This favor is one I want to extend to Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa.

Research Questions

The questions that this dissertation wishes to answer stem from the fact gender inequality if often used in a list of the failings of statecraft in Africa after independence from colonial rule. Furthermore, the African literature burdened with providing the insight on these failings in scholarly work often falls squarely on male writers. In texts that derive political debates and critiques from African literature, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and Ngugi wa Thiong'o are held as the fathers of literature on the continent and are also the main point of reference. This is a great misstep not only because the question of gender and the roles women play in society is largely overlooked in their otherwise brilliant prose, African women writers have often 'written back' to many of these books in order to ensure their inclusion and yet they are still overlooked. My research focuses on works by Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa to prove that they are equally as resourceful in the conversation around using literature to source opinions and narratives around politics. This void and the many problems that have arisen around it have prompted the following questions:

How do Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa use fiction and ordinary experiences to criticize the socioeconomic regimes that characterized their respective countries after freedom from the colonial rule? Using the feminist lens, how do these three authors argue their positions as women? What is the point of difference that each author presents (i) as three women that have greatly contributed to the African literary canon and (ii) in comparison to the studies of using African literature as political rhetoric?

This introduction has done the work of providing the various justifications that make up the foundation for what this dissertation will go on to unpack. It has provided the background for the reason why using African literature is not just notable, but why it is

important in political discourses. The importance of having the introduction read in this way, is to make sure that the subsequent chapter is solely used to study the three authors without constantly interrupting the intention that comes from reading these texts.

The methodology and literature review sections preface what will go into answering the questions. The method largely defines and then describes the methods that will go into the second chapter. While discussing Okolo (2007) has given context as to why the sections on each author are structured the way they are, the method section explains what practice was best suited to read the texts and answer the questions that required us to not just understand the authors but become cognizant of the different perspective they had about post-colonial Africa, no matter how implicit.

Because the bulk of the dissertation is based on literature, the literature review section could easily be obsolete. The literature review is used to provide working definitions for and locating different texts that will be further discussed in the following chapter. The usefulness of the literature review is that it still provides perspectives and scholars that have done research that edifies the arguments I am making in my own dissertation.

With the first two questions being looked at sufficiently in the sections of the second chapter, the third chapter which looks at the texts comparatively is aimed at answering the third question about similarities and differences of the texts and as well as the relevance of the literary canon from which the primary texts themselves fall from. The approach to this is by looking at extracting the major themes that are discussed all three of the primary texts and showing the ways in which they can or cannot be used to support each other. This comparative section is used to add nuance as well ground the purpose of having 3 authors. Seeing that I am looking at three authors that are all critiquing

systemic and sociopolitical ills that come from the post-colonial era, it is important to show why each author was imperative for the dissertation.

Methodology

Reading texts for criticisms is fairly simple, on the surface it is simply finding instances of dissatisfaction in the characters or narrators that help disapprove an assertion of something being satisfactory. In this instance I will be reading for criticisms that are broad and that also align with the feminist intentions of my dissertation as well as the tropes of feminism found in the writings of each author in order to answer the questions posed in this dissertation. In order to do this effectively, I will use two different qualitative methods of research. Namely, intellectual history and close reading. In my comparative analysis of all three authors, I will use the findings from employing the aforementioned methods in order to find the degree to which their preoccupations are similar and also the ways in which they might differ which will help answer the validity of using Aidoo, Emecheta and Nwapa's texts rather than just one author.

According to Skinner (2005) 'Intellectual history' refers less to the form of enquiry into the production, diffusion and enjoyment of printed and scribally published material (29). It is a study in which some intellectual historians have argued involves the social and political sciences apart from just being interested in the histories of a book – this demarcating intellectual history from the way historians read and analyze literature. Skinner also posits that in order to understand concepts such as liberty, or the state, or natural rights or political representation, one has to find out "when, and how, and why vocabulary in which they are expressed originally arose, what purposes this vocabulary was designed to serve and what role it played in the argument" (2005; 34).

Adopting Quentin Skinner's foundations of intellectual history, every part of the texts by each author I have chosen will first be understood as evidence for historical

understanding (Minogue 1981). This preface is important because it will strengthen the close reading (Schur 1998) I will do which as a means to relate their ideas to their theological preoccupations and the political tensions that are being represented at the times when their texts are written. This method allows me to read the texts for cues and answers as though I were speaking to Aidoo about imperialism, capitalism with Emecheta and the overall deplorable treatment of women in societies they helped build with Nwapa.

Close reading as defined by David Schur (1998) "refers either to a method or to an account resulting from the practice of that method. After engaging in the activity of reading closely, you can write down (or simply communicate) a reading, an account of your findings. Closeness here describes a practice of reading that is strict, searching, and minute; it remains close or near to the text. The reader typically moves through a selection gradually, using highly specific textual evidence to make broader connections and claims" (2). This is the working definition I will be using as a method and throughout this paper, as my descriptions of the various critiques and metanarratives presented by the selected authors will often be divulged through close readings that I will undertake of specific chapters.

By undertaking a close reading of three texts, from the same region that are all from the same era I get to have a very centered approach to my research which helps avoid having a study that is broad or not answering the question adequately. One of the tools I will be looking at is the analysis of the narrator's voice in the books and ideas narrative voice and the characterization of women. Another tool I will be using is the characters, especially the Black woman. This will allow me to do an in-depth analysis of how Black women negotiated the economic and political space in their societies. My tools will help

me take specific parts of the novel that I feel are relevant to my study of emboldening the positions of these three women and the critiques that they have as arguments for why they are anti-capitalist, imperialist and feminist to begin with.

Intellectual history is not a methodology that is as reductive or as simple as presenting political or historical ideas (Minogue 1981). Using this method will mean that I will be providing information, supplying the background to the narratives and lives of the characters that provide answers to the questions I look to answer and explain why these texts best fit that exercise, pointing out analogies and giving an outline account of much of what was written by each woman (Minogue 1981). The rhetoric that will be provided through this section of the method will help me analyze each of the texts as 'theorized fictions' (Nfah-Abbenyi 2005). This will mean that my research will ascertain the different layers in each single text. This is because each of these authors has written their critiques in ways that carry several stories, prescriptions, prohibitions or contingencies in one (Dahlgren 2009, 170). This is important to note for my own research because I will be looking for those same layers in narrative as I analyze the texts in details which highlight the best possible arguments.

The purpose of using multiple methods in my dissertation is part acknowledging that all methods have strengths and weaknesses that can compensate for the other once combined (Hunter and Brewer 2015). This is true with the two methods I chose because where close reading fails to fulfil the ability to adequately support the position of each author, intellectual history allows for the text to be burdened with a wider range of sub-texts, histories and narratives that make it possible for the criticisms of the authors more than superfluous.

Literature Review

Feminisms

Sara Ahmed (2009), very eloquently presents the paradox placed on Black feminists by virtue of being black and feminist (a movement which is believed to have happened to Black and African women), she lets us realize how Black woman are made to feel that they should be grateful, as we live in 'their democracy' (Ahmed 2009, 50). Positioning anger as a key part of the feminism employed in this dissertation acknowledges that Black women are allowed to be angry and dissatisfied as it is this anger that gives 'the energy' to react against the deep investments that exist in forms of racism as well as sexism (Ahmed 2009; 52). As I examine and read the three authors I will do so in a way that reinforces their anger whilst looking at the ways they criticize the patriarchal and unstable ways their countries developed after being freed from colonialism.

In order to answer the research questions I have posed, it is important to have a working definition for feminism that encompasses all three authors as well as the kind of substantive content I will be lifting from their literary work. In my dissertation, feminism is a shorthand for Black feminism that is a critical theory and anti-hegemonic social movement in favour of women and men of African descent who have developed their life experiences in a context of social injustice sustained by intersectional oppression (Junco and Guillard 2020).

My dissertation is very explicitly feminist. The gap in literature of Black feminisms is due to the masculinist lens that operates to view the male African writers as the main intellectual thinkers in the category. It is important to first acknowledge that feminism is

viewed as an import from the West (Blay 2008; 58) which is one the main reasons why it is such a contentious label for scholarly work that is African. Typically, critiques of post-colonial societies believe that traditional African societies are the archetype for how people should organize themselves. This would mean that feminism would be at odds with thinkers who frame African tradition as the answer to all of the ills that came with the colonial enterprise. In response to this Ama Ata Aidoo argues that "even in these glorified traditional contexts; women were still judged and marginalized" (Blay 2008; 67). This quote shows that despite what the critics of Black feminism in Africa might think, we cannot blame the West for all of our socio-political ills and we also cannot ignore the importance of having gendered conversations about the paths we have chosen to use in developing our nations.

While the themes and examples I will be using in my dissertation are feminist, the authors I chose to study have argued that they themselves are not feminist. Like Kofi Owusu (1990), I too, am weary of "crediting the writers as feminists when they have not welcomed the identity for themselves" (Owusu 1990, 343). In respect of their decision to not be labeled, is another feminist trope that their texts explore. Due to the suppression of women as part of the colonial enterprise (Tamale 2006), it is important to acknowledge agency of the authors and the characters they write about as this research is squarely in the post-colonial era.

'African women stand at the very heart of the turmoil of their continent' (Conde 1972; 133). This quote helps frame why doing research on African women who write is so important. Choosing Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa as subjects in my research is due to the fact they helped set up universes in the literature they create

where women are the main characters of a world that is usually preoccupied by men and their imagination of women. While a lot of scholars try and place the three authors as a writers who write about the colonial/de-colonial moment, reading literary content by women is important when passing judgements or comments on African realities because they have a particular perspective that comes from their intersecting oppressions and roles in the pre-colonial and independence era.

The feminist principle in this dissertation also extends to the realm of remedying the ways in which women are erased out of politics, resistance movements and the role they played in making those movements a success. Once completed, I hope this dissertation will counter the egregious erasure of African women as intellectual scholars that have used their literary skills to not only write but also riot against what defines and governs over people to maintain inequality and oppression. This means that I get to rescue the category of 'African Literature' from the hyper-masculine canon in which it is often engaged in. The work of doing in research based on writers like Aidoo, Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta is important in this rescue because it means that they are no longer just niche writers about motherhood and consequently womanhood, but they become markers of what it means to be an African writer. The engagement with their work in the following chapters will involve engaging with various scholars that propagate feminist thought in ways that show why I engage with their critiques from a feminist perspective as opposed to any other.

Post-Colonial Africa

Post-colonialism can be simply described as a period and movement that came after independence from Western colonialism that consisted of reclaim and rethinking the

organization of colonies. The colonial state forcibly restructured pre-existing economies and subsequently regulated peasant production through monopolistic trading companies and marketing boards (Bangura 1991; 15). The subsequent criticisms that I will be looking at in the primary texts will explore what this kind of statecraft meant for women and various roles that they had to play in society.

As previously stated, this dissertation focuses on the era of post-colonialism in Nigeria and Ghana. This means that there needs to be a theoretical discourse on post-colonialism and what it entails for each country. "Decolonization in much of Africa occurred within the context of guided transition from the colonial administration" (Bangura 1991, 13). This saw various groups that were undermined by the colonial administration begin to find ways to escape their previously disadvantaged positions. "The emerging élites, on the other hand, saw democracy as a strategy to end their subordinate positions in the colonial economy. Educated professionals wanted greater access to state resources and an improved standard of living that would reflect their training and perceived social status. Those in the commercial sector were anxious to break the monopolistic power of the colonial banks and trading companies" (Bangura 1991; 14)

In addition to the various agendas that arose among the educated and other minorities, "the militaries sought to reengineer the political domain, cultivate a new political culture, reduce the influence of money in the political process and evolve a new political class. However, this intent was undermined by the cancellation, personalization of political power, and the re-emergence of ethnic irredentist group and ethnic politics" (Akinterinwa, 1997). These shifts in political power meant that elites and whoever managed to access capital had a greater chance at lording more political power than anyone else. The class

of petite bourgeoisie managed to swap out the colonial administration for a new one that borrowed from the same principles except Black, educated and almost deified men were at the helm of power.

Thinking about the development of African states, scholars have analyzed the positions of Wole Soyinka along with Achebe and wa Thiong'o. The Reformist agenda by Achebe and Ngugi's Marxist position supports Soyinka's concern with the repressive nation state (Beckman and Adeoti 2006). This is supported by M.S.C Okolo (2007) who analyses Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) is equal parts the methodology and evidence behind proving that Achebe holds a reformist position. Upon unpacking the plot of the book and using the themes around development, the book then goes on to provide arguments for how Achebe's work shows how African societies need an agenda that will really transform the regime (86). It then goes on to show how the questions and subversions about radicalism and military as a separate class propagate Achebe's position. For wa Thiong'o, the book chosen as evidence to premise the argument for his Marxist aesthetics was *Petals of Blood* (1977). The book first explains the basic tenants of Marx and Engels' manifesto; it then explains how because writers reflect the economic arrangement of society, then there is a burden of responsibility on them to do this in a way that carries the ethos of revolution (99). Ngugi is one writer who believes that this burden is one that each writer should embrace and he does in this novel where he represents the class struggles as they were presented in Marx's texts.

Drawing parallels between the ways in which the men in the literary space critiqued African political spheres is an exercise that supports my argument that African women have long since engaged with politics in ways that these men are praised for. An example

can be seen through the reading of Armah and Soyinka in the article on “Excremental post colonialism” (Esty 1999). It focuses on the ordinary, familiar human functions as criticisms of Post-independent Africa. Looking at excremental features of fiction as political satire shows how the body and the everyday functions of it contribute to political debate and satire.

In the works that are analysed in this article, scatology is used to communicate how the novels express disillusionment after the waves of celebrations of independence” (Esty 1999, 24). Scatology is just one kind of visceral translation of how bodies and waste can form critique of a national status quo.

In my reading of Flora Nwapa’s *Cassava Song*, I will be looking at the different metaphors of farming and feeding in support of her perspective on disillusionment and the ruins it has caused for the most marginal groups of society, especially black women. Esty’s (1999) reading, while focused on a specific kind of language and critique of African states, does help provide the tools to analyse metaphors that are especially used to critique institutions and structures of power.

Looking at the texts that form part of this category is important because it provides insight on the kinds of texts that have the language for what the dissertation seeks to do. This is to prove the fact that my argument is to provide new voices to the kind of scholarly writing that is usually reserved for a small, male minority in the literary canon.

Primary Texts

Ama Ata Aidoo states that the purpose of literature for Africans is ‘to expose, embarrass and fight corruption and authoritarianism…” (2013). The particular literary texts I will be

looking at are: Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977), Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1994) and Flora Nwapa's poem, *Cassava Song* (1986). My close reading of these texts will provide the information I will use to substantiate how I define their work as political and serving the same purpose that Ama Ata Aidoo suggested is the very crux of that work.

My rereading of these texts will show the ideas around access and education in *Our Sister Killjoy* (1997); how wealth, healthcare and mortality are some of the key issues in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1994) and how *Cassava Song* (1986) reads like an ode to the emotional and psychological turmoil that comes with being disregarded by society after toiling for its progress. These concerns raised by these texts helped me realize that they are not simply fictional, but are political. All three authors are testament to the idea that Black women are key figures in writing political theory because they have the expertise of living through broken political systems and socioeconomic woes that are not only particular to them but also encompass the instability that came with independence from Britain in their respective countries.

Focusing mainly on the era of development and democratization, Aidoo (1977) brings us into Sissie's world as she reconciles the imperial residue found in the practical ways the country develops. Published 20 years after Ghana's independence, this story reads as a insiders' perspective of the shift from the Nkrumah-led administration demanding independence from Britain to what subsequently became a very militarized and dictatorial state authority that borrowed much of its structure and principles from the colonial administration. The use of education and government serve as microscope into all of the things that Ghanaians were supposed to be grateful for but could not be. Using the idea

of the killjoy (Ahmed 2017), this chapter will unpack what it means to be anti-imperialist by looking at the ways in which Aidoo brings out the killjoy in her characters in the book. This section will focus largely on the narration of attaining an education outside of the country as a black, Ghanaian woman. Sissie is essentially the voice of the 'killjoy' but also characterizes one as she breaks the mould of the 'African making it out of Africa' success story.

Nationalism, a key aspect of decolonization movements and consequently post-colonialism is a contested idea. The idea of a 'home' and nation comes into question in Aidoo's story of Sissie in order to prove her sentiments that "…nationalism is inadequate because women were excluded from its definition, its scope" (Needham and Aidoo 1995; 126). In the reading of the story, I hope to find a way to explain why these contestations exist and why this is a particular materialization of patriarchy that impacts how we can read Ghana in her text. While the Ghanaian path to independence has been an archetype, we cannot ignore that "once Black women's experience is accounted for, assumptions about identity, community and theory have to be reconsidered" (Coly 2010; 8). To further iterate another problem with nationalism as an enterprise, Aidoo (1977) also mentions how "from all around the third world, you hear the same story: rulers asleep to all things at all times and only conscious of riches" (1977, 34). These accounts of nationalism will substantiate the ways in which she problematizes the ways in which imperialism has stained the statecraft in terms of gender and the economy.

Motherhood is a central theme in Emecheta's work. It is one that is so central, you could not try to prove that she does not use it to make her arguments around her anti-capitalist position. In this chapter I will look at all of the ways that Emecheta (1994) appeals to our

humanity while simultaneously debunking our socialised ideas of 'nature versus nurture' in women. Emecheta allows us to start thinking critically about the fact that if capitalism ceased to exist, our societies would be stratified and women would not be objectified as tools for child birth and rearing. Emecheta's chapter will also look into the idea of traditional and modern societies as conflicting spaces for feminist rhetoric to exist due to the fact that either one held some kind of oppression for women that was rooted in patriarchy and maintained by the socio-political makeup of their society. This will be done by exploring ideas that tie the other two authors to a voice that uses ordinary experiences of women to convey messages of resistance and rebellion.

Reading *The Joys of Motherhood* (1994), shows us how Emecheta "adopts plurality of protest making her dangerous to patriarchy and colonialism" (Willey 2000; 155). In her divulging the problems in Nnu Ego's life, we can see how she begins to give us as readers an understanding of how marriage as an institution has adopted oppressive tools that perpetuate patriarchy and colonialism. While addressing them covertly, the "novel looks at the problems with both [Colonialism and patriarchy] institutions" (Willey 2000; 157). This use of the motherhood and marriage become part of how Emecheta uses every day, ordinary sociological information to show threads that illuminate political philosophies that impact people's way of life even though they live in 'developed' societies.

Both Nwapa and Emecheta are using womanhood and its perils to unpack the patriarchal and politically unstable Nigeria that came after 1960 with various factions that pulled people apart and rendered the margins of society that women already resided in inescapable. The incendiary assumption that women's lives and experiences revolve around domesticity and the home is one that has stood the test of time. If one chooses to

be pedantic, we could say that indeed because of rearing children and pregnancy – women accumulate more time at home. While this might be true, it is still very difficult for women to write about things that are perceived as domestic without being jested for pandering to the stereotype. In Nwapa's poetry (1986) we see her using popular crops to unpack the peripheral position of women in society. Using food as a metaphor for gender relations and the results they have is the theme behind this chapter. I will first unpack how Nwapa uses cassava (1986) in a way that appropriates the idea that women only know about domesticity. I will do this by focusing on the figures of speech she uses to convey the ideas that are very clearly linked to socio-political society even though she is writing about crops. I will then have the idea of disillusionment and disappointment as the political messaging she brings across in her poem. These two themes will be the main political critique I explore in my dissertation.

The pessimistic tones in *Cassava Song* (1986) read like a critique of the fact women have endured being marginalized in a society where they contribute so much. The cassava is Nigeria's biggest crop and contributes the most to their economy. When reading Nwapa and the reception of her work, we see how she is placed as a writer who studies motherhood and women in ways that prove that they prove their worth in the socio-economic sphere and thus question why they still live in societies ruled by patriarchal norms that have been maintained by African leaders in the post-independence era. Using the metaphor of crops as representative of genders helps us realize how "it is crucial to recognize the fact that social arrangements of gender are fallible i.e. the socialization of a woman from girlhood to womanhood, the ideologies of domesticity, of romantic love are all at the root of her biology" (Katrak 1987; 159). The significance of the cassava is that

apart from being a staple, it is inferior to yam which is understood as the crop that is worthy of being consumed by men while cassava is the lessor of the two (Yana 2019; 19). This ode to the crop then comments on how unfair it is for the crop to be disregarded but also it acts as commentary on how women themselves are treated in society by and in relation to men. This shows how when Nfah-Abbenyi (1997) argues that African women writers seek to reclaim women's marginal positions and show them as spaces of strength (150), is true in the way that Nwapa writes this poem.

The analysis of these texts in my dissertation will speak to the specific critiques that each author presents. Aidoo's depiction of Sissie's advancement speaks to how her questions around development and education in Ghana, which was supposed to be the leader in African political development but ended up lagging far behind because of the many issues that remained from the colonial administration. Emecheta and Nwapa present various ideas around why the livelihood of black women in Nigeria is riddled with hardship from the roles they play in the domestic space as mothers and wives to how they get overlooked and disregarded in the public and political spheres (Nwapa 1986).

Chapter 2

2.1 The Perils and Joys of Motherhood

"…the paradoxical location of (m)other as both central and marginal and is framed by the idea of "mother"—motherland, mothertongue, motherwit, motherhood, and mothering."

Obioma Nnaemeka, The Politics of (M)othering, *Indiana University, Indianapolis*

Buchi Emecheta

Florence Onyebuchi Emecheta was born on July 21, 1944 in Yaba near Lagos, Nigeria, to Jeremy Nwabundinke and Alice Okuekwuhe Emecheta. Like the community in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), Emecheta was kept at home while her younger brother went to school. She in turn got to experience the culture of her people from her grandmother's story telling. At the age of 16 after years of schooling on and off according to the means her family had available, she had to marry Sylvester Onwordi after being engaged from the age of 11. They had four children. In 1962, her children moved with her to London and she and her husband had a fifth child. After enduring years violence and unhappiness, Emecheta left that marriage and attended the University of London where she graduated with her BA honors and then started writing her autobiography. In 2010

she suffered a stroke and she passed away in her London home in January 2017. (Baraza 2017).

Typically African authors that live and receive their education outside of Africa tend to try and address both race and gender oppression. This a dilemma that Louise O'Brien (2001) says is difficult to solve especially for writers in the diaspora because "the fusion of an anti-colonial with an indigenous feminist discourse is therefore a more courageous path'' in an African context, ''because it has to borrow some concepts – and a vocabulary – from a culture from which at the same time it is trying to disassociate itself and at the same time it has to modify its admiration for some aspects of a culture it is claiming validity for" (O'Brien 2001, 95). It has been argued that in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), Emecheta ignores the dilemma and in its stead describes the misery of a being a black woman in a society which discriminates against Africans and women. Sited in the intersection between the discourses of race and gender, identity for the black woman is constructed between and within overlapping discourses (O'Brien 2001; 96)

In her novel, she portrays Nnu Ego as a protagonist that complicates the idea of motherhood because she does not simply portray nurturing and birth as a process that fulfills women. Emecheta hopes that women can achieve a life of satisfaction and self-fulfillment outside of being vehicles that exist in service of children and their husbands (Emecheta 1979). The autobiographical nature of her novel is part of the way we can see how Emecheta, despite not identifying as a feminist, made contributions to the women's movement. The use of one's experiences is an important means and product of the women's movement (Haraway 1990, 240).

Plot

In The Joys of Motherhood, womanhood is defined exclusively as motherhood. The chapter headings interestingly trace the ups and downs of the protagonist Nnu Ego's fate, all revolving around her success and failure as a mother: "The Mother; The Mother's Mother; The Mother's Early Life; First Shocks of Motherhood; A Failed Woman"; and so on to the last chapter, "The Canonised Mother";. Emecheta vividly charts Nnu Ego's history as mother starting from Nnu Ego's mother, developing into Nnu Ego's present life consumed by demands of constant child-bearing, culminating in her death at forty. By the conclusion of the novel one recognizes the irony of the title - the joys of motherhood are experienced by Nnu Ego as the sorrows of motherhood. Emecheta seems to find no escape for women from the bonds of biology: "If you don't have children, the longing for them will kill you, and if you do, the worrying over them will kill you" (Emecheta 1974, 212). Given Nnu Ego's socializaton she longs to be a mother and when she fails to get pregnant by her first husband, she returns to her father's s compound, a failed woman. Nothing except proof of her fertility is of tangible value. A woman must always be filled, first, either with virginity, or later, with a child. "She had been brought up to believe that children made a woman"; she reflects towards the end of the novel. As she begins to have one child after another with her second husband, Nnaife, she becomes enslaved to them. Within the newly developed urban economy of Lagos, men like Nnaife and others could be employed by the British and accrue the mixed benefits of a Capitalist wage-earning system. For women like Nnu Ego the options of earning any money are severely limited. Despite her several children, Nnu Ego dies in complete isolation.

One of the institutions that Emecheta uses to thread between traditional life and the burgeoning urbanized Lagos is marriage. From Ona, Agbadi's mistress and the protagonist Nnu Ego's mother, in the beginning of the novel it does not seem to be very clear why women should destined to be married. Ona is the happiest and most adored women in the novel by her lover. The powerful and brute that becomes Nnu Ego's father loves Ona so much that even when he cannot marry her because she is her father's only daughter, his love does not relent. In the backdrop of this love story, Agunwa, Agbadi's senior wife dies after hearing her husband spend the night with Ona (Emecheta 1979; 21). Throughout the novel women are inherited as wives or betrothed but none are desired the way Ona was and it was even that desire that inspired Agbadi to love Nnu Ego as he did her mother even though the other men blatantly state that the girl child is not considered very highly because she goes on to become a man's wife.

Another trope of marriage that we see in the novel is polygamy. Through polygamy, Emecheta exposes the double-standard for provision that exists between husbands and mothers. From the onset, Nnu Ego had to learn to economize due to how little her second and final husband made (Emecheta 1994; 48). Nnu Ego's Chi is even blamed for giving her children when she cannot afford them (Emecheta 1994, 96). This shows that women and their Chi's carry the burden of birthing children, feeding and sustaining them and when this burden becomes too hefty, they also receive blame instead of help. All the while, a man such as Nnaife, who in the eyes of Nnu Ego works jobs that rob him of his manhood and enslave him (Emecheta 1994, 50), is still able to inherit his late-bother's wives without ever being seen as less of a man by anyone besides Nnu Ego. Money becomes so precarious that Adaku leaves to look after herself and her daughter. Nnu

Ego's loss of her son due to hunger was a tragedy that she almost never recovered from while Nnaife's inability to keep a second wife was remedied by a replacement, that would also suffer and starve as Nnu Ego and her children often did.

The portrayal of marriage in the novel does the work of exploring of Igbo culture before and after colonial impact (Willey 2000, 155). In Nnu Ego's eyes men like her father and the farmers in her home were 'real men', men that one could get excited about being married to and providing for, while men like Nnaife, pale, smelling of soap, plump and dressed to clean after white people are near repulsive. However through the reiteration of how 'men can never be ugly' and men being able to 'complete' women (Emecheta 1994, 75), we can begin to see the ways in which Black women were subjected to multiple forms of oppression. O'brien discusses how Black men act toward Black women as white men act to Black men (2001, 99). The men from Ibuza, that Nnu Ego idolizes because of their alluring physical qualities and hardworking nature, like her father, bludgeoned a women to death for being too rowdy (Emecheta 1994, 25). Inversely she despised modern Lagos men, many of whom were like her husband, Nnaife who was unable to take care of his family, often drunk and had an inferiority complex that would often result in psychological and physical abuse against her. Either way, the category of traditional and modern did not help Black women from the subjugation and violence they experienced in marriage.

Despite the failings of married life that we read about in the novel, Emecheta finds a way problematize both colonialism and patriarchy (Willey 2000, 157) in a way that still manages to preserve Nnu Ego's preference for her life in Ibuza as authentic and not naiveté but does not shy away from exploring the fact that either life is not without

violence. This because Ibuza comes to represent a place that is untouched by colonialism yet rampant with patriarchal qualities and Lagos is Christian, urban and cornerstone for the colonial enterprise in Nigeria. Nnu Ego's fondness for Ibuza is compatible with Hudson-Weems' definition of what it means to be 'a true Africana womanist' because out of the 18 personality traits that make up that framework, Nnu Ego is family-centered, has strength, is compatible with men, respected (in her death especially), whole, spiritual, mothering and nurturing (Blay 2008, 66). We can therefore conclude that Nnu Ego carries a kind of feminist consciousness that allows her gaze on motherhood and married life to be one that informs why we can read her character as the vector for Emecheta's criticism of marriage, traditional and colonial life. The paradoxes in these relationships also help inform how Emecheta's gripe with capitalism as in the novel (1979) is also woven into the joys and perils and joys that comes from being a mother that grew up in Ibuza and married into a life of poverty and imperial influence in Lagos.

"Nnu Ego had been brought up to believe that children made a woman. She had had children, nine in all, and luckily seven were alive, much more than many women of that period could boast of" (Emecheta 1994, 236). The joys that she experiences in being a mother however are few and far between. One of the members in her home community even points out that Oshia's being in America should bring her great joy (Emecheta 1979; 241). This brings into question the idea around the sustainability of post-colonial Nigeria. Oshia, her eldest son, sees that he would be formidable with more education than what is being offered in the city of Lagos which is what ultimately pushes him to leave for the United States.

As a result of Oshia learning in America, Nnu Ego was also cast as a strong Black woman. “Everybody referred to Nnu Ego, as she proudly carried her back-breaking firewood up from the waterside, as the mother of very clever children” (Emecheta 1979; 212). We see here that her being strong is implicit because of how people overlooked her ache and the hard labor she had to do simply because her boy children were in school while her daughters were growing until they could be married off quietly in the background. Nnu Ego’s pain is a non-issue for many people cementing the fact that women are still viewed as primary caregivers, whose role in the institution of marriage and motherhood further invests men's powerful positions (Bakare-Yusuf 2003, 12). We begin to see how the home and domestic spaces were hemmed with the same patriarchal and heterosexual blueprint that the state was founded on.

Another joy of being a mother is the ability to recognize bondage and abuse. Adaku and Nnu Ego do not hide their bitterness and resentment to their children and Nnaife when the need arises. Adaku, Nnu Ego’s first sister wife that comes from Nnaife’s late brother’s family is the wife that Nnaife decides to physically abuse. The diction to describe the scene shows the readers that Emecheta has not turned a blind eye to the usage of money as a weapon of power that is wielded by men against women. Before long, Adaku’s reckless abandon was returned with a lashing that Emecheta describes by saying, “he could even now afford to beat her up, if she went beyond the limits he could stand” (1994, 125). Even though it was not immediate, Adaku was able to leave Nnaife’s home because she realized that being a mother to daughters was adding value to him and that was her freedom, with her daughter and her business she was able to become independent from them. Nnu Ego’s joy on the other hand was slightly different because it occurred to Nnu

Ego that she was a prisoner, imprisoned by her love for her children (Emecheta 1994, 146). Living out a fate different to Adaku's, Nnu Ego was never able to leave this prison but her inability to do so does not lessen the gravity of her recognizing that she is stuck.

Frugality is another prize of that comes with being a mother. In various instances, Nnu Ego realized that part of the pride of motherhood was to look a little unfashionable and be able to drawl with joy about it: "I can't afford another outfit, because I am nursing him, so you see I can't go anywhere to sell anything." One usually received the answer. "Never mind, he will grow soon and clothe you and farm for you, so that your old age will be sweet" (Emecheta 1994, 85). This particular joy seems to be drawing on the "shining promises and deep disappointments" (Beckman and Adeoti 2006; 3) that are evident in the post-colonial history of Nigeria, that is also mirrored in motherhood. Nnu Ego, a mother of three sons, was supposed to be happy in her poverty, in her nail-biting agony, in her churning stomach, in her rags, in her cramped room (Emecheta 1994, 178). This happiness was supposed to be because of and in spite of the fact that she had given birth to sons. She was supposed to happily accept poverty in the same way that the community she lived in was supposed to accept a broken, capitalist regime because at least it was no longer terrible because of the British and at least Nnu Ego was rich in boy children instead of girls who were merely ornamental. Using a kind of reverse psychology, the characters try to show Nnu Ego that building wealth is pointless without children (Emecheta 1994, 177). Except this is not entirely true when it is the task of feeding so many children that robs them of realizing any kind of wealth that they can enjoy. Equally, the absence of the British in Nigeria does not mean that success and transformation is guaranteed when the system was only made for people to hobble along to begin with.

Being a mother and being poor also unearthed the joy of ignorance. Reading Nnu Ego and her friends that were also married and mothers, one would never think that they were blind to realities in their homes or unable to grasp the reality of their oppression. After all, they realize that Nnaife is a slave and has an effeminate job without him realizing it for himself (Emecheta 1994, 50). However there are more practical ways that being poor meant they did not have access to the goings on around them like most people did. The colonial presence that the British had over Nigeria was likened to the power God has over Christian nations. It was even said that “just like God they are free to take any of us when they wish." (Emecheta 1994, 157). This was something that was discussed but in the bustle of being a mother and trying not to starve to death, the fact that Nigerians had no voice was something that was discussed but “no paper would report what had taken place; even if it were reported, how many of those affected could read, and how many could afford to buy a newspaper?” (Emecheta 1994, 158). Like most of the ‘joys’ in the novel, this one is one that complicates what joy is and problematizes what simple things capitalism takes away from people even though some of those things may not stop people from functioning, like in the instance of their ignorance because they did not have access to the news. But it still helps beg the question as to what forms of emancipation could have been imagined if more people could afford to know exactly how they were subjugated.

The last joy that the novel reveals is honor. Like the others, this joy is inextricably linked to a tragedy in the novel that in part explains part of why it can be read as a critique. Out of all Nnu Ego’s children she is reminded that her honor is in being a mother ‘not of daughters who will marry and go, but of good looking healthy sons, and they are the first

sons of your husband and you are his first and senior wife' (Emecheta 1994, 127). This reminder is meant to make up for the actual poverty that she suffers from when she cannot feed her many kids in her household because of the very mouths she struggles to feed. The use of gender complicates the idea of worth because while the honor is given to the mother of sons, it is women who are only complete once they have sons and until then they are mere commodities. Even the little honor that is awarded to girls is only because 'when they grow up they will be great helpers to you in looking after the boys. Their bride prices will be used in paying their school fees as well' (Emecheta 1994, 135). Emecheta almost uses this as to caricature the pride that men get when they are told they are honorable because it is all useless if, like for Nnu Ego, it leaves you with less than you require to survive.

One of the perils of motherhood is very evident in the preordained purposes that the different genders have to fulfil. While the story only shows us what becomes of Oshia once he is grown up, Nnaife's character becomes a reflection of what becomes of men who live in Lagos. The men are supposed to provide for their families and yet the options that they have for work if they are not lucky enough to become educated illuminate greater societal problems.

> First you washed a woman's clothes, now you want to join people who kill, rape and disgrace women and children, all in the name of the white man's money. No, Nnaife, I don't want that kind of money. Why don't you start looking for proper work? (Emecheta 1994, 93)

This extract shows that men who are servants to white men are considered effeminate and weak and that soldiers are destructive. This shows that the idea that men are the great providers that should be prized over women is a falsehood that makes up part of the tragedy in Nnu Ego's life and the post-colonial society as a whole.

Another clear peril of being mother that we get to see in the novel that also translates to how Emecheta is also making me a critical of how capitalism works is the use of body. Nnu Ego's character is the ideal example for this because she has to balance birthing sons, not failing ill from the hunger and strain from being overworked and also producing food. When she visits her father, he laments that 'if [she] can't produce sons, at least you can harvest yams' (Emecheta 1994, 33). This shows how the worth of her body and entire being is attached to some kind of production. Because without sons she cannot bring honor to Nnaife's home and continue his lineage but that does not stop her from being a useful farm hand. This capitalist notion that someone's purpose is only in what they produce and not what value they have as a human being is one that is seen throughout the novel and even internalized by Nnu Ego who earnestly believes that one day all the sons she has had will afford her the opportunity to rest. The expectation of Nnu Ego to harvest yams as a means of generating value she can enjoy is contradictory to the instances where she and her children were ailing because of a lack of food (Emecheta 1994, 112). Like most workers, her harvesting of crops did not mean that she would be guaranteed food when she needed it even though the crop was rightfully supposed to be accessible to her. We can see here how the Marxist notions of means of production and

the people who do not own anything having to suffer because they are disposable to a system that does not care about them or their stomachs (Engels and Marx 1977).

One of Nnu Ego's realities that we can view as a peril of motherhood was being perceived as barren for not falling pregnant with her first husband. Susan Arndt (1996) looks into how the Ifo treat barren, they are either charged with being malicious or told that they have a malign chi (31). In Nnu Ego's case we can see that her being perceived as barren was only somewhat charged to her chi while a lot of personal responsibility for being unable to have children was placed on her. The novel shows how in their society, a woman's womb (especially when it was deemed defective or did not go according to a man's wishes) was the woman's problem and hers alone. The idea of the chi and other gods becomes evident even when Nnu Ego tries to feed her children but is reminded that "money and children don't go together: if you spent all your time making money and getting rich, the gods wouldn't give you any children; if you wanted children, you had to forget money, and be content to be poor" (Emecheta 1994, 84).

Another devastating peril of motherhood that occurs in the novel is seen through the tradition of provision by mothers. Regardless of how this materializes, mothers are supposed to provide for their children. We see this in the many ways Nnu Ego tries to make sure her children stay fed and taken care of. Unfortunately for her, her efforts do not suffice because she is questioned by her first born on why she would continue to have children if she can't afford them (Emecheta 1979; 111). This shows how her having children can be viewed as a sacrifice on her part because she does not have the wealth to look after them and she fails to successfully assume the role of the mother because she cannot provide.

From the argument provided above we understand one thing clearly, that Nnu Ego's desire for children went beyond her ability to provide for them. This can be viewed as a sacrifice of wealth for motherhood but we must also understand why this desire was as deep as it was for her. Julia Makuchi Afan-abbenyi (1997) aptly describes Nnu Ego as a woman who wants to have self-actualization through motherhood (Afan-Abbenyi 1997, 35). This means that Nnu Ego's identity and personhood rested solely on her bearing children and being able to take care of them. This shows how regardless of her financial situation, Nnu Ego would have still prized the position of being a mother because that was what she felt would allow her to be a complete person meaning that we cannot entirely blame her for wanting this because then that would mean attacking each character's desire and journey to personhood and then still blaming them for wanting it while we know it is intrinsically human to want to be perceived as a person with dignity and rationality.

Nnu Ego's background and socialization also provided much of the tragedy that we see unfold in her life. Firstly Nnu Ego had to behave like she is the child of a wealthy chief (Emecheta 1994, 126). Secondly we know that if she tried to make any decisions of her own she would be seen as mad. We can use her suicide attempt as an example of this. After her son dies and she tries to commit suicide she is regarded as 'mad' by onlookers (Emecheta 1994, 61). Because her breasts leak milk she already is seen as complete; motherhood is what makes a woman so to them they questioned her sanity as to why someone who fulfilled her duty wants to take her own life. This shows that her agency was taken away from her because she was someone's mother and a rich man's daughter. This means that Nnu Ego was at a loss regardless of what the circumstances presented

her with, she would not have been able to escape them the way her co-wife did due to the fact that they were raised and socialized differently.

The life that Nnu and Nnaife provide for their family, a life that is punctuated with moments of poverty and malnourishment, might not have been entirely Nnu Ego's fault or up to her but there is a level of accountability that needs to be attributed to her. Her eldest son rightfully asks why she had him if she could not afford him (Emecheta 1994, 108). This question is not just significant because it is her son that is asking her but it is also significant because it gives the idea that women bear the responsibility of carefully budgeting for the cost of a child before giving birth. This then allows us to shift some blame onto Nnu Ego who proceeds to have a handful of kids without having the money for them and then the kids have to suffer through being starved and growing into underdeveloped teenagers due to bouts of health-related sicknesses.

This reading of Emecheta (1994) has shown the various complexities that she presented in the novel. Not only do we come to understand Nnu Ego's bitterness and sadness at being a so-called 'whole woman' who died alone. We are able to remove the rose colored glasses from how marriage is prized as vital for women whereas it brings them to their demise and does not serve any other purpose besides tasking women with the almost unilateral responsibility of taking care of a home and children. The hunger and lack of sustainable wealth that befalls Nnu Ego and Nnaife's home becomes indicative of a broken system that became a norm in the capitalist and urban cities in Nigeria. Emecheta pointedly shows how this did not improve once wars for independence were fought and won, that what was unequal remained unequal, and that women remained unhappy and their children remained hungry. This critique of the lack of well-developed economy as

seen in the ill-health of Oshia and his siblings and Nnu Ego in her death all shows how Emecheta wanted to explore the idea of capitalism ravaging families in the most literal and mundane way possible. It is through this use of tragedy and ordinary experiences that we can also read Flora Nwapa's use of crops as metaphors for women and disillusionment and inferiority in Nigeria.

2.2. The Killjoy Praxis

"To become a feminist is to stay a student. This is why: the figures of the feminist killjoy and willful subject are studious."

- **Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life***

Ama Ata Aidoo

Born Christina Ama Aidoo into royal Fanti family in Ghana in the year 1942. Her father was an advocate of Western education, and sent her to the Wesley Girls' High School in Cape Coast from 1961 to 1964. When she was in form three, the headmistress asked her what she planned to do with her future. Aidoo replied that she wanted to be a poet. In 1964, Aidoo enrolled in the University of Ghana in Legon, where she found her "writer self." Knowing that she wouldn't be able to write stories "sounding like an English girl," she set out to make her stories "as authentically African as possible." Her stories at this time became about Ghanaians returning from sojourn in the United States and African slave trade. Because of the struggles of relying on her writing career for money which she explores in *The Girl Who Can, and Other Stories*. The following quote shows this explicitly as she chooses to open the aforementioned book like this: "Once upon a time, there was

a writer who couldn't write because she thought she had too many problems. The main one being financial. So one day, she decided she would go and do other things from which she could make money more quickly." (Aidoo 2002, 3). "She then spent most of her career in academia. Her first position, immediately after graduation from college, was as a junior research fellow at the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana. She has also served as a visiting professor and distinguished visiting professor to the English, African, and American Studies departments of several universities and colleges in the United States, including, most recently, Brown University. In 1982 she was appointed minister of education in Ghana, making her the first woman to hold that position" (Kamata 2016).

Plot

In her novel *Our Sister Killjoy*, Aidoo (1977) writes about the negative effects of colonialism and exposes the psychological effects of colonialism and "what Europe is and does to those Africans whom it "sponsors" and educates" (Gagiano 2019, 1). Aidoo criticizes those Africans who left Africa to go to Europe to receive what is perceived by the majority to be a better education. She reveals how most of those educated people are molded into being like the Europeans by internalizing the ideologies of the colonizer. "The book specifically deconstructs various indigenous issues which are destabilizing Ghanaian society and politics, while on the other hand it challenges the discursive construction of Ghana, its people, history and culture as primitive and uncivilized through colonial discourse" (Tagaddeen and Al-Matari 2019). The novel's structure does not read in the traditional sense, In fact, it is hard to call this compilation of poetic anger, political commentary, journal entries, oral voicings and letter writings a "novel". This adds to the

plot itself as it emphasizes the various critiques and emotional burdens in Sissie's journey. The book's structure appears to be a formulation of an African prose poem which reverberates with sounds of the orature in the written language and personal dialogue- illustrating Aidoo's comment that "we don't always have to write for readers, we can write for listeners" (Slobin 2000, 24). This is important to take note of because the intended audience shifts according to how the text is written and places a larger significance on every minute detail of the social and environmental experiences that Sissie witnesses (Wilentz 1991, 162).

Aidoo (1977) takes away the comfortability that we place on things like monetary gain and formal education and unpacks how these 'pseudo-intellectual' pursuits have qualified our biases and worked to form part of the persistent institutional oppression in African countries. Reading *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977) for a dissertation in an upper echelon University is rather ironic because I, by virtue of being a university student, am a recipient of 'imperial leftovers' (Aidoo 1977, 86). The idea that as a Black woman I could be within and without made me hyperaware of my stakes as a reader of her work and a scholar that would use the same work to give weight to my research pursuits. Sara Ahmed (2017) mentions the importance of the 'killjoy' in her feminist discourse. The ability to cause discomfort and create an environment where privilege and disprivilege are equally obvious is what I understand by Ahmed's use of the phrase. Ama Ata Aidoo is the writer that decided to use her education and influence to dismantle and disrupt ideas about post-colonial success for Africans, that we have adopted from the small bits of progress and democratic freedoms that many of our societies have since adopted. Aidoo invites me to

look at the 'Killjoy' idea as a praxis of dismembering patriarchal and imperial norms, no matter how much I personally stand to benefit from their existence.

The first and most significant thread throughout the novel is that the term 'postcolonial' is a placeholder for the reality that is an oxymoron due to the ways in which the neo-colonial state functions (Sterling 2010). This idea can first be read in the character that Aidoo describes as the 'moderate nigger' who is so busy defending beliefs that are not even his own, he can regurgitate only what he has learnt from his bosses for you (1977, 6). This shows that the moderation is not only frustrating because the 'nigger' doesn't believe in anything but rather that there is a sense of complying with the narrative of whatever the master at the time has claimed to be true. In this way, Aidoo shows that the idea of a postcolonial state is untrue but very few people actually have the power to recognize that because of how intrinsically the imperial hierarchies still inform the state and the people living in it.

In an article about 'Afropolitanism', Professor Grace Musila (2016) tells an anecdotal story about "a scholar who became so renowned that he transitioned from being addressed as an African scholar to being dubbed a global scholar" (Musila 2016, 109). That story alone carries a lot of the same assumptions and complications with the 'African' identity that Aidoo is also preoccupied with in Sissie's own character. The idea that there is some level of status or education that one can reach before they are no longer considered African to run away from compromising their work with their Africanness. While recognizing the absurdity of this idea, Aidoo does not ignore the other, more complicated reality of being from Africa. Taiye Selasi explains how there is a pain in "being from" a blighted place, of having surnames linked to countries which are linked to lack, corruption' (2005). *Our*

Sister Killjoy (1977) explores the reality of wanting to hold onto one's identity despite being handed every opportunity to do otherwise while still also dealing with the imperialist agenda of making Africa out to be a place that one must always transition from because it is inherently imperfect unless completely taken over by cultures other than its own.

The first way we see Sissie being unable to dissociate from her African identity is when she introduces herself and the audience remembers that Ghana is a 'mad country' in Sissie's 'madder continent' (Aidoo 1977; 4). Here we can see how the German characters that come across Sissie already had preset ideas about Africa that seemed to stem from the tropes of Africa being *The Heart of Darkness* (Conrad 1996). One might easily assume then that in defense of this, there would be a move to disprove that idea whereas, the novel still continues to delve into the various problems that come with being in Africa. We can clearly see here that no matter how successfully we distance ourselves from the Africa of corruption, wars and poverty, the world will always have a qualified welcome for us (Musila 2016; 112).

Despite this being true, it is still possible to read as an oppositional "voyage, as a young, African female journeys to Europe to encounter the savage, white Other" (Sterling 2010; 134). From the onset this is made possible because Sissie sees how going to Europe was made to seem like a dress rehearsal for a journey to paradise (Aidoo 1977; 9). The words 'dress rehearsal' suggest that the idea of Europe being close to anything like paradise was as a masquerade put on by those that profited most from that narrative and this is why she did not buy into the idea completely. Through Sissie's eyes, every small detail of her experience is significant to how the outside of Africa is different and un-magical. An example can be seen when she sees the giant trees stood for centuries and

little plants [that] bloomed and died, all unmentioned in Geography notes (Aidoo 1977; 38). This is a play on the idea that Africa's only redemption is the nature whereas, Germany, even though not exposed to the same hot climate also has rich plant life which they hide.

The second part of the novel's title, '*or Reflections of a Black Eyed Squint*, is an important part of Sissie's engagement with the gaze. The gaze is a very specific term that theorizes the idea of looking and how it involves power dynamics that come with being looked at and either being seen in a particular way or not being seen at all. The gaze is a term that originated from the feminist discourse about how women were perceived and how this came with very specific, gendered power dynamics. The term 'male gaze' references how women were constantly framed as sexual objects for the viewing pleasure of men. Laura Mulvey (1989) wrote an essay on visual pleasure in film and spoke about how male film frames women as erotic objects.

Mulvey's essay importantly explores ideas of how this gaze shows the unequal power relation between men and women and how men are allowed to consume women's bodies even through film (1989). From this understanding of 'the gaze' came the use of the phenomenon on racial terms. The gaze can allow us to understand how white people view blackness and how they have essential qualities that they associate with blackness. One of the most famous examples of this occurs in Frantz Fanon's (1970) description of his experience on a train where a white boy felt frightened by him being a "man-eating nigga," we see the start of authors using 'the gaze' to describe this specific kind of derogatory external perception. This instance showed us how 'negros' – especially men – were viewed as animals, as less than human and extremely violent and who therefore

should be feared and ostracized. This view of blackness translated to popular culture and has persisted in film, books and many other forms of producing specific images. Between Mulvey (1989) and Fanon (1970), the idea of the 'black-eyed squint' in the title of Aidoo's book automatically brings our attention to the common threads in what it means to look and how the different narratives and histories in these texts allow the reader to be placed in Sissie's narratives about power and what it means to be perceived and perceive in relation to it.

Korang draws our attention to the two main feats of the book: the important casting of 'voyages' and imperialism and secondly, to the feminine voice that Aidoo amplifies in the reclamation of the African (1992, 53). I can credit this reading for prefacing how we see imperialism in our everyday lives by re-visiting the origin and unpacking the work done by the European 'Geniuses' like Christopher Columbus who travelled and 'discovered' the new world. Sissie experiences her own moment where she is gazed upon and she is referred to as a 'black girl' in German and in that moment we witness how she is not only racialized but is also infantilized – a racist trope which is often meted against Black women through the gaze. Just as she is othered by this encounter, she begins a process of othering the whites in her surroundings. Her gaze fixates on their pigmentation and she views them through a racialized lens, "a black-eyed squint" that ousts them from the mobility of individuated identity to become a mass representation of hyper-visible bodies that are "the colour of pickled pig parts" (Sterling 2010; 136). This use of the gaze creates a sense of recuperation from the persistent perceptions of Africans that Aidoo engages with in a way to show the importance of Sissie as a killjoy because of the racist and sexist

connotations of the gaze among the other forms of discrimination that spilt from the colonial enterprise.

One of the ways that the killjoy praxis is the disruption of patriarchal norms.

> Sissie had thought, while they walked in the park, of what a delicious love affair she and Marija would have had if one of them had been a man. Especially if she, Sissie had been a man (Aidoo 1977, 61)

While some read Sissie's pause with regards to Marija's advances as a withdrawal into an African essentialist self that conceives of Marija's advances as the unnaturalness of Euro-dominated cultural forms (Sterling 2010, 141). I read the exploration of their desire for one another as a part of Sissie's experience of the country as a whole. The plums Marija brings Sissie that are bigger and fresher than Sissie expected to be possible in Europe, can be a read as a metaphor for their relationship. While it initially seems as though Sissie is buying into the idea that desire is only something that can be heterosexual, what Aidoo has done by allowing the two women to remain friends is make sure that Europe is not read as a place of discovery while Africa is backward and heteronormative because it is not and relationships are not always about discovery as many perceive but also about convenience and comfort which are two things that Sissie and Marija did not have in her short time in that part of Europe.

Aidoo (1979) presents a relentless attack on the notions of exile as relief from the societal constraints of national development and freedom to live in a cultural environment suitable for creativity. Aidoo questions certain prescribed theories of exile including the reasons for exile particularly among African men (Wilentz 1991, 159). An example of this is seen

when the ‘Diplomats, Visiting Professors and Local experts in sensitive areas are referred to as ‘some such hustlers’ (Aidoo 1977; 35). Even though they have been educated and have jobs and vocations that are important enough to warrant their travel, they are still perceived as mere hustlers. The connotation of this word is linked to the various kinds of criminality that are associated with Black people.

Aidoo critiques the imperial agenda of those that maintain that Black people are criminal and no good by pointing out the irony of the consumer culture in European nations. White teeth - used to be one of the unfortunate characteristics of Apes and Negroes. All that is changed now. White teeth are in, my brother, Because Someone is Making Money out of White teeth (1977, 28). The example of ‘whiter teeth’ being a hot commodity shows how the right price tag makes the very things that they criticized what they profit off of. With that being pointed out, Aidoo allows the exercise of a killjoy causing displeasure to prevail. Instead of praising the fact that Black people will no longer be ostracized for their white teeth, she rather points out the fact that the institutions that determine what is beautiful and what ‘sells’ are built on the premise of racist notions that will continue to prevail should we allow them to sell those notions back to us.

The aforementioned exercise is part a part of being a killjoy that Sara Ahmed (2017) mentions as a tool in living a feminist life. Examples of killjoys causing unhappiness: We are willing to cause “institutional unhappiness if the institution is unhappy because we speak about sexual harassment. We are willing to cause feminist unhappiness if feminists are unhappy because we speak about racism” (Ahmed 2017, 28). An example of how Aidoo uses this in practice in the novel is how the novel criticizes education as an institution. This is first done by providing insight on what exactly Africans decide is the

correct trajectory for scholars even though they end up reproducing work done by their white predecessors and become 'academic-pseudo-intellectuals' (Aidoo 1977, 6). This is followed by various other remarks that Sissie's character makes that show off how ill-fitting most of our educational programs and systems are because of the curriculum, affordability and more importantly, the lack of accessibility. The remarks on education spill into how Aidoo defends anti-imperialism due to the impacts that it has on power and development in countries that were already made vulnerable by the colonial enterprise to begin with.

'Our Sister, Killjoy' is also a fitting title to this story because Sissie herself is a killjoy in the sense that she is not willing to let histories go if the problem is still present. When colonialism is referred to in the book upon which citizenship tests are based in the United Kingdom, it is described as the system that introduced democracy, law, bringing benefits to others. Instead of a violent history of conquest and theft reimagined as the gift of modernity. When it is not over, it is not the time to get over it. A killjoy is willing to bring this history up (Ahmed 2017). This is done through the prescription that we must sing and dance because some Africans made it, despite the fact that education has become too expensive, and that the country cannot afford it for everybody (Aidoo 1977, 57). This shows how, even though the idea of people advancing to their doctorates is a good thing because of the colonial history, it is difficult for countries to have a stable economy and education system where neo-colonialism has wrapped its tentacles around how everything is meant to develop.

Another preoccupation that Sissie has as a killjoy is showing how gender plays a role in understanding pain and privilege. She sarcastically points out how special meals are for

men. They are the only sex to whom the Maker gave a mouth with which to enjoy eating. And woman – the eternal cook is never so pleased as seeing a man enjoying what she has cooked (1977, 77). This shows how men enjoy the spoils of what everyone else has made simply by virtue of being men even though it is senseless. This critique supports the idea that most hierarchies are pointless because they are not supported by any kind of logic other than the patriarchal and colonial roots they stem from. Even the ideas around desire are ridiculed when the idea of what Black women should look like in order to be suitable partners is just as ridiculous as the gendered relationship with food is. Because "If you want to believe the brothers telling you how fat they like their women, think of the shapes of the ones they marry; how thin how stringy thin (Aidoo 1977, 47).

The intent in *Our Sister, Killjoy* is to disrupt, question and transform consciousness. Through the critiques of the government and how exactly the "Nkrumahn hallucination" (1977, 10) occurred. Without fully explaining how this hallucination unearthed itself in Ghana, Sissie mentions how Nigeria not only has all the characteristics which nearly every African country has; but also presents these characteristics in bolder outlines. Nigeria has representations of national pride and grief in all the ways it has failed. She also lists the various emotions that can be associated with the Nigeria: 'heat, naiveté, humanity, beastliness, ugliness, wealth, beauty and how it is all together problematic, tragic and glorious (Aidoo 1977, 52). This description helps us see how the nation's problems are inextricably linked to things that make up the nation's pride even though they are both overwhelmingly blatant.

In the same way the transition to independence had failed, Sissie does not forget to criticize how white people still had power in countries they had colonized because of the internalized doctrine that they were better at leading than Black people themselves.

> How can a Nigger rule well unless his Balls and purse are clutched in Expert White Hands? And the Presidents and their First Ladies Govern from the North Provence, Geneva, Milan . . . Coming south to Africa Once a year for holidays. (Aidoo 1977, 56).

This extract shows how the more foreign the leaders and their families were the less implicit bias they experienced. Aidoo pointed out here that the 'white hand' never really left Africa. And one of the ways that it remained was through the education system; a recurring theme in her criticism of the lasting impact of imperialism on the continent.

'Post-graduate awards. Graduate awards. What dainty name to describe this most merciless most formalized open, thorough, spy system of all time : for a few pennies now and a doctoral degree later, tell us about your people your history your mind' (Aidoo 1977, 86). This description of postgraduate studies is apt in that it criticizes the amount of work and toil it takes for African students to get to do their doctorates only for them to be given grants and scholarships that are not proportionate the amount of work and time it takes to do the work required to become a doctor. "So that although I don't care to be called Dr. Anything, you still have to admit they only begin to treat you like a human being when you have a Ph.D. ' (1977, 12). This quote shows how that even though the process to earning a PhD is relentless, it is still one of the only foolproof ways to be guaranteed personhood.

In an interview, Aidoo mentions the debilitating nature of our African so-called Third World leadership. That is, when somebody gets into power either because we put them there or

they make a coup and put themselves there, they think "Ha! I'm going to solve everything" and they end up simply pocketing our national wealth, putting it away in their bank (Dingwaney 130). This is another critique she makes overwhelmingly clear through Sissie's perspective of rulers asleep to all things at all times conscious only of riches, which they gather in a coma… Intravenously (1977, 34). Which makes the brain drain justified but also adds meaning to why some people cannot stay in their countries because there is nothing left for them to profit from when everything belongs to the corrupt leaders. This complicates the reality of how Kunle died. Killed by the car for which he had waited so long (Aidoo 1977, 103). That car can be read as a metaphor for independence – long awaited and consequentially resulting in more suffering.

In the novel, Aidoo tackles a series of issues through a voyage that is littered with interactions with people and cultures that make her assess her own and what that means for her position in the world. Though it would seem that looking through squint eyes can prevent clarity or objectiveness, Sissie and her reflections prove to be not only clear but incredibly intuitive because they see the obvious imperial ripples in her country and in how black people are perceived but still accept the complications of national pride and disdain that inevitably result in a fatigue and bitterness that is coupled with the tiring postgraduate trajectory and its endless, thankless work. This becomes the conundrum that helps us read Sissie as a killjoy in the way that Sara Ahmed (2017) intended them to be in her prose on feminism. There is a lot of discomfort that is unearthed in the novel as everything that is seen as 'good' and worthy of the same praise that the white man gets, is subjected to the criticism of the way the institutions of education, wealth and other privileges are not indisputably beneficial to colonized peoplea. Focusing mainly on the

era of development and democratization, Aidoo (1977) brings us into Sissie's world as she reconciles the imperial residue on the practical ways the country develops. The use of education and government serve as a microscopic look into all of the things that Ghanaians were supposed to be grateful for but could not be. Using the idea of the killjoy, this chapter unpacked what it means to be anti-imperialist by looking at the ways in which Aidoo brings the practice of being a killjoy out in her characters in the book by focusing largely on the narration of attaining an education outside of the country as a Black, Ghanaian woman. Sissie is essentially the voice of the 'killjoy' but also characterizes one as she breaks the mould of the 'African making it out of Africa' success story.

2.3. Cassava Song

'African women stand at the very heart of the turmoil of their continent' (133).

- **Maryse Conde, *Présence Africaine Editions***

Flora Nwapa

Flora Nwapa - remembered today as Africa's "literary foremother" - was born on January 13, 1931 in Oguta, located in eastern Nigeria. She was the eldest of six children born to parents, Christopher Ljeoma, an agent for the United Africa Company and Martha Nwapa, a drama teacher. Growing up, Nwapa attended missionary schools in Oguta, Port Harcourt, and Lagos. In her early education, Nwapa read and fell in love with the works of Jane Austen, William Thackeray, and Charles Dickens. Nwapa attended the University of Ibadan, in 1953, the 22-year-old was living in a country that had been in a long battle for economic stability and independence from Britain. This however, did not stop her from pursuing her own education and initial plans of becoming an educator herself. While teaching in Enugu the 30-year-old Nwapa wrote her first and most well acclaimed novel, *Efuru*. The book was officially published in 1966 while she was working as the Assistant Registrar at the University of Lagos. The book was sent to Nwapa's colleague, Chinua Achebe, the most famous African writer of the modern era, (author of *Things Fall Apart*), who loved the story so much that he sent it to Heinemann Publishing. *Efuru* made Nwapa the first published female Nigerian author, and was the first book published in English by a female African writer. In 1976, at age 45, Nwapa decided to write full time and founded Tana Press Ltd, later Flora Nwapa Books Ltd. Her first self-published adult novels were

'*This is Lagos and Other Stories'* (1971), *'Never Again'* (1975), *'Wives at War and Other Stories'* (1980), and '*One is Enough'* (1981). Nwapa also self-published two lengthy poems called: '*Cassava Song and Rice Song'* (1986), and a number of children's books. Her books dealt with a variety of issues such as the dangers of Nigerian city life, the Civil War and the practice of polygamy. On October 16, 1993, Flora Nwapa passed away from pneumonia at the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital in Enugu. Her three children, two daughters and one son, went on to be attorneys and to this day, speak fondly and respectfully of their mother, Africa's "literary foremother." (Coolidge 2017; 1-6).

Plot

In "*Cassava Song"*, Nwapa's thematic concern is woman and the celebration of womanhood (Yana 2017, 19). In her poetry, Nwapa's major concern is with gender and, most importantly, with women's subjectivity in a male-controlled milieu. *Cassava Song and Rice Song* (1986) is Nwapa's only collection of poems: throughout the collection, she redeploys language, shifting the boundaries of recognizable, local metaphors and similes to emphasize gender as a positive factor in Igbo culture. (Oha 1997, 107)

You, Mother Cassava

You deserve recognition

You are no cash crop

But you deserve recognition.

(Nwapa 1986, 43)

In *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), the idea of womanhood being inextricably tied to feeding through being mothers also branches out into the idea of women being reduced to seedlings, becomes interesting when motherhood is not possible then 'at least you can help harvest yams' (33). This idea is one that Nwapa chooses to locate in her exploration of gender inequality. Adversely, Nwapa chooses to use the metaphor of women being a staple crop to not reduce their position in society but to magnify the injustice that comes from the inequality they experience in the building of Nigeria's state and independence. In the aforementioned novel, the women who are not mothers should produce yams – the crop that is culturally considered superior and consequently only worthy of men – but this poem focuses on how all women are still worthy of recognition and acknowledgement.

Who will wash the pot?

Who will wash the mortar?

Not me.

Not me.

'Never mind'

Mother says quietly

'I'll wash the pot

Mother and Cassava are one.'

Yes they are one

One loves her children

The other

Also loves her children.

Both you and Mother

You are long suffering

You love your children

You are wonderful.

(Nwapa 1986, 11)

In Nwapa's *Cassava Song and Rice Song*, (1986) which, in a subtle and seemingly innocuous manner the old conflicts in the center of the crisis of Western contact re-emerge. This emergence is immediately in stride with the Igbo world. The old Igbo values of family and motherhood, along with the resilience of the Igbo woman, become adroitly woven into the role of the rather new cassava staple in Igbo (Nwanko 1995, 50). This can be seen in the poem where the idea of the cassava's 'long suffering' (11) is seen in how the mother *cassava* does the work that no one else wants to do. In this stanza of the poem, we see how no one wants to the domestic task of washing and then the mother quietly steps in to do it. This starts off the idea of the mother becoming the 'other' in a society where they do the thankless work from the periphery. In the *Politics of M(othering*), Obioma Nnaemeka (2005) tackles the idea of how feminist notions in African literature do not just tackle the position of African women as inferior but also focuses on how the

women act from that place. Feminist notions of agency draw the line between feminist interpretations of the situation of women in African novels and African women's perceptions of their own situations (Nnaemeka 2005, 4). This speaks to how Nwapa allows the 'Mother Cassava' to be both the object that is othered and the hero that needs to be celebrated for its service all at the same time.

Before the poem which is the major text in this section, Nwapa wrote novels that also tackle the issues around the position of women in society and what they make of their predetermined roles. With the characterizations of her female protagonists in her adult fiction, she complicated female identity as delineated in the literature of Chinua Achebe and his brothers by critiquing both their gender conventions and the power relations between men and women in the homestead (Umeh and Nwapa 1995, 23). In this poem, she does the same work because even though she uses cassava as a metaphor, it is still not only a form of nourishment but it also does not have the same characterizations as other African literary works. The woman is either a doting and enduring wife or a wayward prostitute that gets 'infected' by the freedom of the city. This does not leave a lot of room for women to do anything unless it somehow relates to men. This shows how Nwapa becomes the 'anti-Achebe' even in her characterization of women in this poem because she finds a way to remove men from the center of women's lives and acknowledges them regardless. We can read this as a way that writes back to the literature that puts women in narrow margins of society whereas they hold a plethora of roles that they deserve to be appreciated for, especially in the transitions into independence.

Obododimma Oha (1997) better articulates the idea of the 'anti-Achebe' in her reading of Nwapa's selection of rural Igbo settings and modes of meaning is not necessarily an indication of Achebe's influence on her writing, however. The application of such normative models manifests a phallocentric critical perspective, in which the male writer is taken as the standard, from which the female can only be deviant. (Oha 1997, 107). This means that while Nwapa herself speaks highly of Chinua Achebe as a friend and inspiration, she recognizes that it is still not progress to place him at the center of literary creation the way we place men at the center of everything else. Nwapa uses this poem to write in a way that remedies this and criticizes the masculinist nature of politics and the state as a whole. This is significant again when we read the section of the poem where the 'mother cassava' plays a vital role in going above and beyond for everyone else even though it is not yet appreciated accordingly.

As children, you fed as

You were like a mother

You fed us fat

But we easily forget

You must pardon us

Great Mother Cassava

Great Mother Cassava

You must pardon us

(Nwapa 1986: 2)

We thank the almighty God,

For giving us cassava.

We hail thee,

Cassava The great cassava.

(Nwapa 1986: l)

The 'frame' of cassava as woman and M/other is not part of an original poetic restructuring of language, for it has been available as a given association in a culture dominated by masculine cognition. By translating the frame, or form, into her subject-matter, however, Nwapa responds to masculine presuppositions, attempting to transform prejudice into glorification, hate into love, dishonour into honour, and disadvantaged weakness into privileged strength. Women's image is constructed indirectly in *Cassava Song and Rice Song* (1986) by feminizing cassava and investing it with positive significance. Inheriting the negative association of cassava and women, Nwapa reevaluates cassava in order to rewrite and re-evaluate women (Oha 1997, 110). This framing creates parallels between the socio-political position of women and questions of identity. Male power and control in lgboland find expression in a range of cultural practices, including crop-production where cassava, labelled a staple and 'common' foodstuff, is associated with women, who are, tradition holds, its rightful cultivators. The woman-cassava association devalues woman

by attaching the negative attributes of cassava to her: she becomes common, low in value and odoriferous like her crop. The cultivator and the crop are conflated as 'same': and the derogation of one becomes the derogation of the other in the male-dominated economic system (Oha 1997, 108). Understanding how value is assigned using the crops as a comparative framework helps show how the post-colonial era is riddled with problems characterized by the way power is allocated to men even through the use of food.

In an interview Nwapa stated that she "attempt[s] to correct our menfolks [because] when they started writing, when they wrote little or less about women, where their female characters are prostitutes and ne'er-do-wells. I started writing to tell them that this is not so. When I do write about women in Nigeria, in Africa, I try to paint a positive picture about women because there are many women who are very, very positive in their thinking, who are very, very independent, and very, very Industrious" (Umeh and Nwapa 1995; 27). In addressing and praising cassava, she re-evaluates its producers. Cassava is personified, likened to a mother and finally referred to directly as 'Mother'. This process deliberately dislocates what is culturally accepted as normal or natural (Oha 1997, 110). This figure of speech helps show how *Cassava and Rice Song* (1986) subvert patriarchal Igbo traditions that have made the link between cassava and women derogatory. The poem only focuses on motherhood and its admirable qualities which become the thread that the semantics and connotations of cassava are weaved into.

We pound you

We pound you

We continue to pound

We pound and pound

You endure the pounding

For our sake

For the sake of your children

You endure.

(Nwapa 1986, 6-9)

Another obvious theme that the poem does not ignore is the fact that women do not endure an extra amount of work or chores but they also endure abuses that exist with the lack of equality and fairness. Nwapa writes that in the time of peace and war, woman, like the cassava, always makes sure that her family never lacks. Other issues that Nwapa tackles in the poem are sexual exploitation and early marriage experienced by women. Nwapa employs high use metaphor to show how women are married off very early and the sexual exploitation that usually follows (Yana 2017, 20). An example can be found in this stanza where the phrase ‘pound’ is used repetitively to emphasize the kinds of abuses that women endure. 'We pound you' could also mean 'we beat you' or 'we torture you', suggesting the hardship and brutality some women suffer in the compound (Oha 1997, 113). This is another way to also demystify the idea that the homestead provided some kind of safety for women where the city and the outside world are the most unsafe. This

stanza shows how neither environment is safe because crops are also pounded in masses for industrious reasons so whether for the sake of marriage and tradition or the economy, the cassava will be pounded.

Nwapa uses food imagery to artistically deploy figurative expressions that portray the condition of African women in general and Igbo woman in particular. This means that her critique of the state is reflected in how women are treated. The sections of the poem that are deemed to be about giving thanks and acknowledging women also have to do with the fact that their role in the Biafran Wars (1967 – 1970) was downplayed and this then spilt into the national identity of women in all spheres of life. Using cassava as a metaphorical figure, Nwapa paints the picture of how the woman is treated in the Igbo society in general and by her husband in particular (Yana 2017, 19). *Cassava Song and Rice Song* (1986) is a mediating text, indirectly addressing female interests by praising the feminine foodstuff. Nwapa's concern with gender in *Cassava Song and Rice Song* has drawn attention to a neglected aspect of cultural life in Igboland; by focusing on food culture, she has highlighted the silence of women, making their derogated daily activities visible and socially valuable (Oha 1997, 114). While the mention of children in the stanza about enduring pounding literally means children, it also signifies the larger metaphor of the state. The 'Mommy-Daddy-Me' template of statecraft where women are seen as ornamental to the male, national hero means that the 'Mama Africa' stereotype that befalls women makes them mothers of nations and there they also endure a lot of scrutiny, belittling and bullying but for the sake of national peace and nationalism, women are forced to 'keep it together'. Using food culture to make this analogy, Nwapa threads

together a narrative that supports women and shows the many ways that they are unattended and victimized by the state.

The young ones eat

The old ones eat

The father eats

The mother eats ...

Then everybody

Is happy

As happy as can be

Thank you, Mother Cassava.

(p. 13)

“President Obasanjo of Nigeria from 1999 – 2003 had his regime critically perceived for national insecurity, rising inflation, collapse of local businesses, growing human poverty, homelessness and despondency, epileptic, unreliable and insufficient social facilities, over bloated bureaucracy, halfhearted struggle against corruption”Ahmed (Agaba and Emaojo 2010, 29). The criticisms awarded to his presidency were not unique as the militarized leadership that took over the economy and political spaces left a lot to be desired. In the stanza about how the cassava ‘fed us fat’ (Nwapa 1986, 2), this is not just an image that pertains to food but also to portraying sustainable womanhood for African

women and Igbo women in particular. Through food and farming images, Nwapa seeks to signify a socially productive Igbo womanhood; not simply 'feeding into' the Mother Earth or 'good housewife' stereotypes that pervade West African cultures, Nwapa portrays women undertaking culturally specific 'female' tasks (Oha 1997, 108). This shows how when Nwapa pointedly mentions that the cassava is capable of making everyone happy and fed, it is unlike the regimes that created further inequality and ruin.

The incendiary assumption that women's lives and experiences revolve around domesticity and the home is one that has stood the test of time. If one chooses to be pedantic, we could say that indeed because of rearing children and pregnancy – women accumulate more time at home. While this might be it is still very difficult for women to write about things that are perceived as domestic without being jested for pandering to the stereotype. In Nwapa's poetry (1986) we see her using popular crops to unpack the peripheral position of women in society. Using food as a metaphor for gender relations and the results they have is the theme behind this chapter. This third section of the chapter shows how Nwapa uses cassava (1986) in a way that appropriates the idea that women only know about domesticity. By focusing on the figures of speech, the framing of language and meaning, she uses imagery to convey ideas that are very clearly linked to socio-political society while essentially writing about crops. This then helps illuminate the criticisms that she makes of disillusionment and how it leads to disappointment as the political messaging she brings across in her poem.

All three of the authors in this chapter use some aspects of the post-colonial era in grounding the narratives of the women they discuss in their novels and poetry, respectively. The countries in West Africa, Nigeria and Ghana both experienced two

transitions, post-colonial era (1950s) that was characterized by high volumes of nationalism and the military era (1960s 1990s) which was a politically and socio-economically unstable time (Obadare 2017). Each author has various arguments that show the importance of looking at them as individuals with opinions and philosophies that can be explored in the political arena as well. Different women experiencing democratization and the post-colonial era differently, all present vital contributions to the need for a feminist perspective of the post-colonial period to be politicised but from a Black women's point of view. There might not be a solution to all of the woes that remained from the colonial administration but I believe that this chapter on the literature by these three women who made gallant attempts at expressing the reality of these woes is a step in the right direction.

Chapter 3

Comparative Analysis

Introduction

Each of the authors in the second chapter presented positions on the economy, developmental structures and societal roles that the primary texts they authored defended. This chapter however will analyze them alongside one another in order to justify the usefulness of a study with all three literary authors, as well as, work through the limitations of the study, should there be any. While doing this dissertation to adequately answer the question of whether or not Ama Ata Aidoo, Dr Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa can be consider literary scholars that contribute to the voices that challenge our political imagining, it is also important to keep sight of the fact that African women writers are still ignored by a greater margin than they deserve and that is something that needs to be remedied which is still one of the main intentions behind this entire research.

This comparative analysis will compare various aspects of the themes discussed in the previous chapter. The first part of the analysis will involve an in-depth definition of the theoretical framework behind comparative politics that looks at comparing institutions mentioned by each of the authors and forms of power. This will then show how this framework will work to answer the final set of questions about the point of difference between Nwapa, Aidoo and Emecheta. This will be done by exploring the different criticisms they made and the narratives they chose to make those criticisms. The use of crops, education and motherhood in their respective criticisms will also make up part of

this comparative study as the importance of each when thinking about the failings of post-colonialism is undeniable.

Background: Comparative Analysis and Gender

The purpose of using comparison in this research is to critically analyze the purpose of looking at three authors' critiques of democratization. Some advantages of using the comparative method are "finding correlations as well as instances of complex causality that can enrich the understanding of similarities and differences between different cases" (Lim 2006, 26). In this instance, the ideas around each authors experience of women's narratives in-and-around the transition into a post-colonial era. In parallel, each author demonstrated the dual oppression that arose from lingering imperialism and patriarchal norms. Sissie's voyage and educational trajectory which leads her out of Ghana correlates with Nnu Ego's desire to self-actualize through motherhood and the 'Mother Cassava's job to feed and nurture without ever being appreciated for it. These correlations highlight the inequality in the treatment and advancement of women in society while also creating a segue into the broader critiques of the state.

The correlation and complexity of the causal relationships between the three authors does not mean that the study should be void of asking the critical questions that come with using comparative studies. For one, the question of contexts and countries is one that is highly important to discuss. Ghana and Nigeria, coming into independence at different times and also having separate ideologies that presided over their transition, make it clear why the article *The Problem of Equivalence in Comparative Politics: Apples and Oranges, Again* (1998) by Locke and Thelen is important. In the mentioned article, the authors posit that "comparative research needs to attend more closely to the question

of whether ‘matched comparisons’ that track the same phenomenon or process in different contexts are in fact comparing apples with apples” (Locke and Thelen 1998, 9). It is safe to say that each context and narrative presented by the author is one that focuses on the marginal position of women but the context of women in each author's work is, in essence, different.

Dr. Emecheta and Nwapa both write from a Nigerian perspective. We can question whether this similarity is in fact comparing ‘apples and apples’. Lagos, Nigeria alone has various wards that are populated at different densities and even different local government systems. The city alone being home to a multiplicity of identities, religious groups and problems (Olukoju 2006, 153). So while the problem of equivalence can occur when comparing countries because countries differ not only in their historical legacies and current institutional arrangements but also in their place within the international division of labour (Locke and Thelen 1998, 12), it also has a place within the same countries and locations. Considering this, it is important to state then that the incongruence of the authors makes up a large part of the reason why they were all important to the research. The precarity of wealth and stability in the ‘modern’ city of Lagos that creates the irony in *The Joys of Motherhood* (Emecheta 1979), is not the same as what embitters Flora Nwapa in her ode to the cassava (1986). Considering the differences between the authors, we can conclude that we are indeed comparing apples and oranges but I will argue that the evident differences do not take away from how African women writers create literature that is an important inclusion in the comparative studies of gender and politics.

The focus of this paper is on feminist critiques of post-colonial Africa, there is an implicit comment about the prevalence of 'un-feminist' critiques or rather a narrative that ignores gender all together. I argue that these studies are erroneous to the extent that a lot of transitions from the colonial state, are already gendered. "The Sub-Saharan region of Africa is riddled with examples of this because the fact that the military, in a coup, replaces a civilian government means first that the transition is not democratic and second that it is a distinctively masculinized— and hence gendered—transition" (Beckwith 2010, 164). During these coups women are either left behind in the formalized movements or are made to take care of children and homes that end up as causalities in these violent ruptures. Women experience being erased from militarized action by virtue of being women and that grows the margin that they are relegated to because they then become spectators and ornaments in their own countries while being mostly unable to enjoy the independence that they are told is theirs.

In narratives around post-colonial statecraft that prioritize a male figure as the protagonist of the transition to independence, there is very little mention of gender or more specifically women, despite evidence of the significant role women and women's movements have played (Waylen 1994, 327). "Gender as a concept in political research is conventionally understood as sets of socially constructed meanings of masculinities and femininities, derived from context-specific identifications of sex, that is, male and female, men and women" (Beckwith 2010, 160). After understanding what the concept of gender means, it is important to then discuss the forms of erasure in political literature around how gender is written. In opposition to this literature, the primary texts in this dissertation focuses on the roles of women in the ordinary day-to-day aspects of society that are not formal

'movements' but are still significant in the workings of everyone around them. This distinction creates an important point of entry into the comparative analysis because comparative politics has the language and structure that I will be using in praxis in this chapter to answer the set of questions posed in this research about the critiques of post-colonial Africa in a way that helps me look at why the ordinary narratives are just as important. The use of feminist ideas helps to also then improve the way we read gender because it creates a framework for analyzing the interplay between gender relations and the transition from the colonial state (Waylen 1994, 327).

While a comparative politics of gender would also mean continuing to analyze, as many scholars currently do, "the location of presumably sex-specific persons, men and women, in national legislatures, cabinets, executive positions (both actual and symbolic), political movements, electorates, and political communities" (Beckwith 2010, 165), I think it is also important to consider that politics is not exclusively movements, government and anything that occurs at a national level. The private and public dichotomy that was popularized by feminism shifts the value that the aforementioned spaces has and shows how the home, family and personal are all political spaces as well. This means that this dissertation will undertake a feminist comparative political study that moves away from looking at formal politics as the only place that is significant to studies of a political nature. In the comparisons of Aidoo (1977), Dr Emecheta (1994) and Nwapa's (1986) work, there is little to no mention of the characters themselves engaging with politics in these ways but rather how their survival and existence can be read as metaphors for (Yana 2019, 17) and reflection of their engagement with politics, power and their independence (Aidoo 1977).

The importance of also focusing on the personal and private as political means that when we look at the gendered organization of political rights and liberties (including political participation, individual mobility, access to education and health care, among other political protections); and the nearly universal dominance of male actors in governments worldwide—socially and politically constructed and defended as a "male/female" cleavage—we see strong evidence of the highly gendered nature of power and politics from a comparative perspective (Beckwith 2010, 159). This cleavage makes the personal struggles of the different women read as criticisms of these very differences in the types of access and privileged men and women have. While a comparative politics of gender means moving single-nation analyses of women and politics, and of gender and politics, to "a comparative framework, a singular emphasis in political research on women and gender would benefit by being informed by a comparative context" (Beckwith 2010, 164).

As this chapter continues, it will look at the differences and similarities in each author's work in more detail in order to highlight the ways in which they fill the gap of the narrow masculinist view of African literature as political rhetoric. This will mean that the comparative section strengthens the aim of this dissertation to prove how African women were able to write about their dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the nature of the political systems in their country from various gendered perspectives. Timothy C. Lim (2006) argues that different types of comparisons allow a researcher to treat a range of similarities or differences as if they are control variables. In so doing, the researcher can safely eliminate a whole range of potentially significant factors and, instead, concentrate on those variables he deems most important (Lim 2006, 17). Lim's argument manifests itself in how I use this chapter to show how the correlations, differences and gendered

aspects of comparative politics are all important parts of answering the question of why these three authors that contributed greatly to the African literary canon also contribute to the debate around how critiques of the post-colonial era by Black women are particularly important.

Political legacies of colonialism include political instability, violence, and ethnic exclusion. “The frequent partitioning of preexisting ethnic groups by colonial regimes, especially in Africa, created lasting effects for ethnic politics. Such partitioning can be linked to civil war and other forms of unrest and rupture” (Pierskalla and De Juan 2017, 162). “Despite this and the critiques presented, post-colonialism as a movement is supposed to offer prospects for better citizen participation in the formulation of public policies that can effectively enhance social development” (Razavi 2001). It is important to note that this movement did not translate into practice and one way this is obvious is because of women’s persistent exclusion from formal politics. Which raises a number of specific questions about how to reform democratic institutions, since these institutions are not automatically gender-equitable any more than they are automatically plural in ethnically segmented societies (Razavi 2001). These questions about how the reforms failed in formal politics became the grounds for how women in their societies and home were experiencing the same kinds of inequality and subjugation.

Identifying that the post-colonial state is flawed is a complicated task due to the fact the transition away from colonial rule purportedly offered greater hopes for political freedom and change. This was not just an illusion, as many thinkers still identify colonial rule as a driver of dramatic change and development levels across the African continent and the difficulty in establishing effective rule for colonized people, in large was informed by the

challenge of trying to dominate colonial territories that were completely indoctrinated. That difficulty led to states that were barely able to extend their reach beyond capital or coastal cities (Pierskalla and De Juan 2017, 161). The end of colonial rule across Africa ushered in its own sets of new struggles in light of the betrayal of the nationalist ideals in post-independence Africa (Musila 2011, 3). Musila's insight on these struggles is important because it shows how aside from the economy, "the very foundation of the transition was shaky and this validates the various critiques we have seen that extend into the various institutions that women had to grapple with" (2011, 11).

In a case study titled '*Being a Black Woman in the Post-Colonial Africa - A Case Study of African Women Fiction Writers'* (Sindala 2017), the authors investigate the various ways in which women wrote about their experiences of democratization and personal lives in ways that were invaluable to the canon. Women have written almost every imaginable type of literature from travel books, religious commentaries, histories to economic and scientific works. Part of the goal of exploring these works is to promote awareness of the intergenerational conflict and tensions between tradition and modernity confronting entrenched social inequality and inadequate access to resources. "Women across Africa are working with determination and imagination to improve their material conditions and to blaze a clear path for their daughters and granddaughters. Women too are artists and are endowed with a special sensitivity, insight, compassion and political objectivity, necessary for creativity through prose, poetry, drama, fiction and many other forms. African women speak their thoughts and share their perceptions about their lives and their societies through their writings" (Sindala 2017, 1765).

The Economy

The preoccupations of all three authors are similar in that they have to do with the economy or money in various ways. The biggest commonality among all three is the judgement of development under democratization being crooked in that many people were still left with scraps and could not enjoy the spoils of independence, if there were any. While this is a matter that many African countries grapple with, this research is exploring the issue from a feminist perspective. *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977), for example, reads as rather elusive when it comes to what kind of material wealth Sissie gains from her travels and education. This works to help emphasize the fact that their education and exploits are mostly sponsored by 'imperial leftovers' in the form of scholarships and postgraduate awards. We do not get to experience Sissie with anything sustainable and that speaks to how the post-colonial economy works, people experience traveling and tertiary education as a guise of success whereas very little economic transformation takes place.

Aidoo (1977) uses the idea of education as a theme to show off the lasting impact of colonization on the mind and development of the colonized and their country. She does this through showing how little the reward is when the West funds our education systems only for us to exhaust ourselves to 'earn' those rewards. So in addition to being a killjoy in her representation of formal education and academic awards, Aidoo also uses the idea of travel and migration to critique the systems that allow for this institution of education to prevail. First, we come to realize that "migrants leave one country for another as a result of strong attractions associated with differentials in living conditions, opportunities for professional advancement, and the existence of an environment that is conducive to peace and security" (Sako 2002, 25). In the "Human Development Report" (1993), more

than 21,000 Nigerian doctors are practicing in the United States; at the same time Nigeria's healthcare system suffers a severe depletion of qualified medical practitioners. Of Ghanaian doctors, 60 percent of those who trained locally in the 1980s had left the country by the end of 2000 (Sako 2002, 26). These statistics not only reveal how true the previous statement is but also that the phenomenon, 'Brain Drain', has incredibly intense ramifications. "For Africa, the phenomenon represents a major development constraint. The brain drain challenges capacity building, retention of skilled workers, and sustained growth on the continent" (Sako 2002, 25).

Sissie's traveling and witnessing the melting pot of professionals in other parts of the world is not portrayed as a happy moment of home-away-from-home, it is in fact indicative of the problems that the brain drain reveals which makes up part of why Aidoo is critiquing the government's inability to make use of non-imperial forms of ruling in order to sustain the 'brains' of people at home so they do not have to seek better lives elsewhere. At the heart of this argument is the fact that economies that were not strong enough already, take an even harder hit when this kind of migration happens. "The continuous loss of skilled and experienced professionals is attributed to poor economic and political governance, sociopolitical instability, inappropriate economic policies and declining economic growth rate, poor infrastructure, and weak institutions" (Sako 2002, 25). We never experience enthusiasm from Sissie when meeting other Black people, because they are all unfamiliar and are a form of estrangement from her reality. This is not just a result of the dissociation one feels when travelling far away from home or dealing with their own feelings of alienation, but rather a symptom of understanding that they are all contributing to the worsening of their own economy while trying to break through the cycle

of it. “Several economic factors dramatically affect the choice migrants make about whether to leave their countries: Domestic mismanagement and inappropriate economic policies, Poor and deteriorating socioeconomic infrastructure, high rate of unemployment, steeply rising cost of living, and substantial decline in real incomes and wages due to hyperinflation and currency devaluation or depreciation, drought, famine, and collapse of the rural economy and Inadequate complementary capacity” (Sako 2002, 26). These factors still are a part of the reason why Sissie is not in fact a beacon of hope and change because all of these problems at home follow you wherever you go and this is why Aidoo’s critique of the imperial administration and economic system is adequate.

In Emecheta’s novel (1994), we can see how there is a shift from the rural setting to the more urbanized, city environment that comes with a different set of expectations for marriage and mothering. The picture that the book painted of Nnu Ego’s home where her father stayed was that surviving was a lot easier and that sustenance was a result of hard work, however that sustenance was not enjoyed at the same level because men like her father, Agbadi, were wealthy local chiefs and women edified men in those kinds of positions but hardly experienced anything close to that same level of success. In the city, the system worked extremely differently and it became the archetype of a capitalist society that was still unraveling from colonial rule and a history of slavery. The tension between the community of Black women in Lagos adjusting to the city life when it is drastically different from their rural homes and dealing with forms of labor that revolve around profit rather than sustenance becomes a point of departure for Emecheta to criticize capitalism. She uses the fact that there is little proof that it actually helps people’s

financial situation, to show that the way the economy transitioned after colonization continued to cripple the already broken channels of access to wealth that the majority of Nigerians had.

Before analyzing the complex issues in Nnu Ego's life as a mother and wife, we also need to analyze the idea that women's purpose rests within their ability to be mothers and in the societies mentioned in each author's narrative, motherhood was widely the only purpose for women. Women's activities should be confined to the care of children, the nurturing of a husband, and the maintenance of the household (Hill Collins 1987, 3). These activities mean that there is a cleavage between what women's labor produced versus what men were able to do when they went on to join the army or became service-men in other areas. This compromised the economic worth of women because many undervalue that kind of labor because they believe it does not immediately contribute to the economy in meaningful way. We can see from this that the economy being linked to GDP, and other arbitrary systems in the capitalist network, made it impossible for childcare to receive the support it required as a job and suffering through it was fast becoming a way of life. This was supported by the assumption that motherhood and economic dependency on men are linked and that to be a good mother, one must stay at home, making motherhood a full-time 'occupation' (Hill Collins 1987, 3). While Patricia Hill Collins (1987) is making a fair assessment, it is a lot more complicated when we start to realize that the domestic space was not only a form of labor extraction for women, it was also where they felt a sense of purpose, and safety so this helps emphasize that Emecheta's critique of capitalism comes from the fact that it did not help support women take care of their children, but rather exacerbated the difficulties that come with childcare

and gave reward to people that did work that was not as significant as motherhood was to that society.

This part of the critique goes back to the fact that the lives of the Igbo women in *The Joys of Motherhood* are determined by the “tensions of a "culture collision" between the institutions of traditional Ibo society and the institutions of Western Europe” (Derrickson 2002, 1). This collision manifested itself significantly in the way that the women were made to ‘economise’ and make adjustments for their children and husbands where they previously did not have to. We see this happening in how Nnu Ego had to start working to pay for clothing and her son’s schooling whereas, in her homestead, provisions were always there. This showed then how “[the women] subjected to new forms of exploitation as they are asked to assume traditional duties and responsibilities under a newly imported economic system that-unlike their native system-fails to validate or reward them for such work” (Derrickson 2002, 2). “Nnu Ego's anguish rests not in her position as a mother per se, but in her position as a woman who is asked to assume the same obligations of her "agrarian background" within a new cultural setting that confers "none of the booty" normally associated with such labor. Nnu Ego is able to interpret the inequity of this exchange as something that "enslaves" and "imprisons" her” (Derricksons 2002, 3). Nnu Ego is a victim of this newly imported capitalist society, a society in which African women are required to continue performing traditional duties and responsibilities in an economic setting where that labor is no longer of any market value. In other words, “Nigeria's transition from a tribal culture and a tribal moral value system to a Western capitalist system with all its benefits and pitfalls has occurred at the expense of women like Nnu Ego, who have exchanged one form of patriarchy with another, while being stripped of

former privileges and denied the right to new ones" (Derrickson 2002, 3). The edifice of imported Western capitalism arranges for this dependency by insisting on a separate domain for women, "one that removes them from spaces of public production and exchange and secures them in the role of the housewife, making them financially reliant on their husbands" (Derrickson 2002, 7).

The parallel between food and the economy is one of the most obvious and while Nwapa's poetry (1986) can distinctly read as representative of women, it is still able to invoke ideas about the socioeconomic situation that women face. One of the ways that this is evident is in the metaphor of the cassava 'feeding them fat' showing how the cassava – being women in this instance – is doing the work that a developing post-colonial economy should be doing. In African societies, being fat is signifier of good health and being taken care of. The poem insinuates that this is only possible through the 'Mother Cassava' from which we can imply that 'fatness' was not attainable without it. This then explains the disillusion that we can read in Nwapa's work because not only do the women who play the role of the cassava not get any recognition, appreciation or status for their good deeds, there is also the realization that the post-colonial economy does not actually work as it was supposed to but is not subject to much scrutiny because there is a small population of Black men that profit from it.

In keeping with the parallel of food and the economy, we can also think of the properties of cassava. The crop has the capacity to produce even under hostile environmental conditions where other crops fail (Ezui 2017, 2). This is consistent with the idea that the 'mother cassava' or women are able to perform where others fall short. The idea of other crops failing in 'hostile environments' can also be an apt description for how we can think

of the way governments inherited countries with strong colonial administrations when transitioning into independence but were not able to overcome those conditions in order to create a holistic and equal society where each demographic was not riddled with conflict and insufficiency. In addition to what the properties of cassava expose in relation to the economic thread in the three authors, cassava is also an important source of calories for millions of smallholder households in sub-Sahara Africa (Ezui 2017, 1). This fact, again, speaks to the idea of being 'fed fat' and how exactly this one crop is able to do that for multiple people where systems of power in newly independent nations are unable to do so.

The Role of Women in Society

Another similarity in all three critiques is that all three authors are concerned with using the various societal roles that women have to play to show how even the most mundane exchanges and social practices can speak to the purpose of having specifically feminist voices critiquing the post-colonial era for its failings. Each author however looks at different roles and in varying ways, with the one common role being motherhood. The section entitled '*The Joys and Perils of Motherhood'* contained themes that were present in each of their arguments. The bittersweet relationship that manifests around women and motherhood is the result of many disadvantages that women are faced with, from their health and well-being to being the role of a provider. This becomes a big part of their critique of how the state was shifting in ways that did not fully cater for the very generation that would come to live in the state that they fashioned after independence.

In *Our Sister Killjoy, or Reflections from a Black-Eyed Squint* (1977), the title begins to materialize when we look at the roles that Sissie plays in her travels in Germany. She is

equally a token and the ‘black friend’ to Marija who was the ‘well-meaning’ white woman who befriended her. Sissie can be read as a token because Aidoo (1977) does not fail to mention that the other doctors and academics who were Black that travelled were mostly men. This is consistent with the title because you would literally have to squint to make out Sissie in a room where she is the token Black woman and everyone else is European or a Black man. This exposed how she is prone to experience unique and acute forms of being othered in ways that only she can recognize. This othering then informs her relationship with Marija that is already complicated by the racial and covert romantic tension between them.

Consistent with the brain drain and the types of roles we see unfold in the novel, there are several factors that lead women to also become reliant in ways that show how being privileged enough to travel and become educated are an extension of systemic imperial tools. Some examples can be seen in looking at Sissie’s social interactions with the non-Africana and Africans that she comes across help us read for how Aidoo is making assessments of how the brain drain affects the economy but when we look at the other reasons why people leave their countries, we can also understand how Aidoo (1977) is making a critique of imperialism by painting an image of the African woman who is always ready to receive their next handout even if it is at the cost of dislocating from home. The first set of factors come from the fact that the socio-political environment also influences the decision of migrants, an example of a factor is; repression of human rights, including academic freedom and lack of political atmosphere conducive to free and open debate (Sako 2002, 27). Without negating that these influences are in fact a reality, Aidoo also

uses the fact even in all of her feats, Sissie does not ever experience fulfilment to show exactly how being a recipient does not always mean getting enough.

Non-economic factors instigating outward migration and brain drain from Africa include "political instability (which lead to wars and other forms of unrest), socio-cultural as well as religious factors. In some African countries, it is socially acceptable to travel abroad" (Ikenwilo 2007, 5). All of these problems and complications are like the love-child of the colonial enterprise in Africa and while many other authors choose to manifest them in their prose differently, Aidoo (1977) uses Sissie and the interiority of some of her intimate thoughts and rhetorical questions to help us recognize that these problems did not create themselves and that they are a living legacy that works to aid the superiority of the West without them lifting a finger. Again, the issue of brain drain is a potentially politically sensitive one both for the source country (because it opens up issues about the inadequacy of jobs and the enabling environment to keep their nationals) and for the destination country which is more often accused of 'poaching' or 'stealing' workers from countries who have invested huge sums of money and time in training and developing them (Ikenwilo 2007, 7). This sensitivity helps us see how Aidoo is very intent on having each space that Sissie enters fully exposed for its problems and this is not only a good critique of the imperial nature of how Ghana unraveled but also, a way to make sure that her own novel did not fall into the trap of awarding one country a better standing than the other.

Motherhood and The Family

In addition to these women experiencing discomfort and othering, they are also sacrificial and keeping to the criticisms that Dr Emecheta is making about capitalism, the roles of

the women in her novel highlight how women were basically fungible. The first character that this example is seen in is the slave women that gets buried with Agbadi's senior wife. Not only is that character notable because it is her death that manifests Nnu Ego's suffering but it also goes to show that there was no relief for women because of the pervasiveness of their suffering and enslavement to the patriarchal norms of their cultures. This informs how we can read the role of the wife in the text as well. The transition into democratization is most evident in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1994). This is due to the fact that the story moves with Nnu Ego from her homestead to Lagos and the different worlds that she in turn engages with as a result of that. To add to this comparative section, I will investigate the role of wife first because it is in marriage that some of the tragedies in the novel begin and this then means that the institution of marriage becomes one of the points of departure for Emecheta's criticism of democratization in this novel. This first is seen in the home where there is polygamy. Polygamy begins a point of contention in this novel even before Nnu Ego is born because the presence of her mother, Ona in her father's homestead leads to one of the issues that arise when new wives and partners begin to take attention from those that are already present. Agbadi's senior wife becomes a manifestation of the idea that [being deprived of sex by your husband] causes the same dehumanizing conditions to afflict women and can even be likened to the effect that infertility has (Njoku and Njoku 2019, 4). In most marriages it is perceived that the basis of marriage among Africans implies the transfer of a woman's fertility to the husband's family group." Motherhood is so critical in most traditional societies in Africa that there is no worse misfortune for a woman than being childless. A barren woman is seen as incomplete, she is what [John S.] Mbiti (1970) calls the "dead end of human life,

not only for genealogical level but also for herself" (Akujobi 2011, 3). From this we can see how being a wife esteemed because it meant that you could be closer to fulfilling personhood by being a woman that would be able to give birth to a child.

This role then informed the importance of motherhood as well. Nigeria is incredibly diverse and yet there are consistencies within the Ibo and Yoruba cultures when it comes to motherhood and the importance of that role for a woman to play. In most of Yoruba culture, a wife is referred to as *"eru"* (slave) and yet it is still the ambition of almost every girl to be married, because through marriage she can become a proud mother. (Makinde 2004, 166). The '*eru'* title links to the slave woman who later reincarnates into Nnu Ego because while that woman is just a slave girl who is sacrificed, her presence in that society reads as a symbol for what women are perceived as. However this is still consistent with the Yoruba custom because it is said that some women are not bothered about reference to them as 'eru,' and they even pray that they will be 'eru' for a long time, i.e. that they will not be rejected as wives. To them, it means staying married till the end of life. The alternative, of course is to get out of the marriage to remarry or remain single. The former is more popular because of the social stigma attached to being a single woman. The implication of this attitude is that they are prepared to remain married at all costs, 'after pain comes pleasure'. (Makinde 2004, 167). This pleasure is part of the fact that the way women are perceived depends on the position she occupies, and the different perceptions are reflected through songs, works of art, music, language, and religion. The highest value is given to woman as a mother because… people revere motherhood. (Makinde 2004, 164)The pleasure that comes with being complicit with being an '*eru'* is the same pleasure that makes women like Nnu Ego vulnerable to misery and unhappiness because

they are living to have children like many other women are and this then becomes a tragedy when the economy and the patriarchal hegemon in society does not sustain you physically or mentally and you waste away as your children starve watching you battle to look after them as Nnu Ego did.

While motherhood is an important role for women, Nnu Ego as Agbadi's daughter brings us to another important role – which is being a child. To Agbadi, he feels closeness to Ona, his mistress and Nnu Ego's mother, through Nnu Ego (Emecheta 1994, 27). With Ona's character, we see Agbadi become the kind of man that prizes motherhood in a way that few men do in this novel. He seems to carry high esteem and care for Nnu Ego because afterall Ona carried me in her womb for nine months. She nursed me for three years. If being a mother was a pleasant thing, Ona being a mother to his daughter was a precious gold. That cannot be purchased with money. (Makinde 2004, 165). This was also an interesting contrast because in the typical representations of women in literature, a man like Agbadi would be seen as the archetype of praising motherhood because it meant that his women could fall in line. This idea can be seen when we analyze the idea that in life as in literature, motherhood is the only thing in which a woman's worth is measured. A woman without a child is viewed as a waste to herself, to her husband and to her society. So in cultural/traditional sense, one finds out that patriarchies can easily deploy notions of motherhood to foster traditions no matter how obsolete these may be, and in especially these traditions motherhood also becomes a means of female control. (Akujobi 2011, 4). All of these contrasts and tensions between Agbadi's masculine prowess and his unfailing affection for Ona, became the reason why we can read the role of a daughter as one that brings an interesting contention into how we read literary

representations of masculinity and fatherhood. While this was complicated by the fact that Agbadi still often remained true to his chauvinism and enjoyed the spoils of his privilege, he still changed the scope of how we read in men in either texts through his affection for a women as difficult and unorthodox as Ona.

Nnu Ego as a daughter did experience a heightened amount of love from her father but that did not mean that she was exempt from constrains of her gender and future roles as a wife and mother. Nnu Ego even means 'twenty bags of cowries' (Emecheta 1994, 26). This shows how even though she was her father's prize, she was still a girl that would grow up to have the full experience of belonging to another man because that is what she will be worth. This aligns with the idea that a woman is a necessity for procreation, i.e., a woman is a source of life. (Makinde 2004, 170). This is not something that she could escape even if she tried. And we see that even when she fulfills her dream and actually becomes a mother, she, much like her father expects that her children will enrich her life. This is because children are very important in that, apart from continuing the linage, they run errands when young and help out in the work. When the parents become old and weak it is the duty of the children, especially the heirs or sons, to look after the parents and the affairs of the family. When the parents die, the children give them befitting burial, survive and remember them (Akujobi 2011, 6). So similarly to the maternal ideals that are entrenched and valorized in all cultures, patriarchal societies present a woman's central purpose to be her reproductive function and so motherhood and mothering become intertwined with issues of a woman's identity (Akujobi 2011, 3), being a reward to your parents is an ideal that is embedded in children. This is to help support the fact that women change when they become mothers, above just physically, they become 'new

ceations' in order to await the time when they can enjoy their children's hardwork. This is why motherhood is also seen as a "moral transformation whereby a woman comes to terms with being different in that she ceases to be an autonomous individual because she is one way or the other attached to another - her baby" (Akujobi 2011, 2). When this fails to happen in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1994) and *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977), we can see how this role helps reveal how democratization creates societies that make the role of children and the entire ideal of the family structure redundant.

For Nwapa, while discussing 'cassava' we can almost begin to see the same kinds of themes threaded into the roles that she figuratively awards the crop in her poem (1986). The role of provider, mother and essentially become the source of life, sustenance and even safety – where again we can read this a kind of sacrifice. This poem portrays these roles through the metaphors around feeding and in the same way, if we can look at how cassava is cultivated, we can see how Nwapa (1986) is making a judgement that is similar to the other authors in that women are bearing the brunt of selflessly living for everyone else while the systems and leadership that is supposed to take of them and their people.

Two very obvious ways that we can use the cassava as an example for how women are providers and also nurturers is using the fact that "millions of the world's population habitually consume cassava as a staple" (Coursey 1973, 32). Generally staple foods are more inexpensive and accessible to people and that is why it is consumed so widely and constantly. A staple is also generally viewed as the main source of nutrients as that is what most people eat when they are consuming their food and this is consistent with the contents of Nwapa's (1986) ode to the crop. Nwapa's assessment of the cassava holding people's livelihoods together is part of the reason why the question this paper asked was

how the political landscape is seen by women because they hold people together and literally provide the sustenance to keep them alive. The notion then, of reading the cassava as representational of women, makes us deepen the interrogation into why women being ostracized from benefitting from the development of the political independence is a grave injustice, to say the least.

Political Imagery

Another similarity in all three authors' narratives are the various nods to certain political nuances. For *Cassava Song* (1986), the 'Mother Cassava' image is a shift from the 'mother Africa' idea that places emphasis on the usefulness of women rather than exacerbating them as ornamental, fictitious and magical. The 'Nkrumah hallucination' (1994) that Aidoo mentions very clearly plays into Sissie's view of Ghana and her home which is what we get to experience through her journey in Germany. In Nnu Ego's case, we see how while she is completely consumed by her goal to be a mother, her body and well-being tells us the story of what development and gender inequality fails to remedy in their society.

In Nwapa's case however, reading this poem can also translate to the politics of the cassava as a very complicated plant. Studies have shown that "sweet" cultivars are generally of lower toxicity than the 'bitter" ones, the correlation is not exact (Coursey 1973, 27). This seemingly mundane fact about the plant actually ties in with the critique that Nwapa has been making in her poem about how women get overlooked and relegated to the margins of society by their own people. This toxicity can be read as the result of endless in-fighting and political unrest that ends up affecting everyone, because whether you are directly involved or happen to have to do thankless work like the 'mother cassava'

does (1986), then you are bound to be impacted by the toxicity that no one can evade. This is important to take note of because it shows how we can read the tone of the poem as embittered and dissatisfied because those are emotions that are justifiable when we think about the fact that being unhappy, or cultivated in a land that is toxic doesn't just change your outlook but also who you are. This is consistent with the distance that Nwapa (1986) sets between the 'Mother Africa' image that is all-giving and nurturing and the 'Mother Cassava' that serves but can also respond to its environment, which in this instance is the unfolding Nigerian state as it moves into the post-colonial era.

In addition to looking at what kinds of political messaging is in each author's work, the lack of 'formal political movements' helps us understand that it is difficult for women to be recognized in politics without them even though we have analyzed how their lives reflect various kinds of protest to the systemic oppression. "There is the notion that for a woman to be empowered, women need to attain political power. For this, they need to gain access to a good education and good professions, among other things" (Makinde 2004, 173). *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977) is particularly interesting because while Sissie is read as a woman who has 'made it out', we still see how the glass ceiling is too high, even for her to reach. Also, Sissie's journey (1977) itself does not fully encapsulate the politics around what causes a brain drain, we still get to ask ourselves why this occurrence is so popular when we encounter all of the Africans Sissie meets while away from home. The cause also helps us read into her critique of the imperial forms that are used that continue to make education too expensive and inaccessible. If education is too expensive, it works to further aggravate the problems of disease, poverty and underdevelopment in Africa, while at the same time broadening the gap in development, science and technology

between Africa and the West (Ikenwilo 2007, 12). The connection between the commentaries that Aidoo gives about the economy is very closely linked to the political nuances that are presented when we look at why the brain drain occurs at the rate it is. The importance of thinking about this issue in comparison to what the other two authors discuss is that this narrative shows a different side to critiquing a country that you cannot even live in anymore. This highlights the duality of being privileged enough to 'leave your problems behind' and the conditions being so dire that one can face the consequences of dislocation in order to evade them. What the brain drain reveals about either of these two realities is that neither one is beneficial but both are caused by the same political problems that permeate people's professional and personal lives.

"Motherhood as an experience and as an institution has and is still receiving different definitions" (Akujobi 2011, 2). This is one of the greatest commonalities between all three authors because each text deals with it in a unique and complex manner. As a consequence there is an interplay between motherhood as a role, institution and experience depending on the moment that a particular author wants to use as a form of critique. Firstly, the joys and honor that Nnu Ego's character experiences help open a dialogue for us to question the state of maternal care in Nigeria because Nnu Ego's joys were not unaccompanied by tragedy. Access to a health institution is a major problem for pregnant women in Nigeria, chiefly because of the long distances to reach care, poor transportation networks, delay in seeking medical intervention, lack of money, and because parturition is regarded as something that can be managed at home (Njoku and Njoku 2019, 3). In the book *Retrieving Women's History* (Kleinberg 1988), we read about the ways in which focusing on issues like motherhood and pre and post-natal care form

part of the effort to rectify women's erasure in history entails not only an analysis of their work and their role in the family, but also an analysis of "both formal and informal political movements and their impact upon women, women's participation in them and the ways in which they shape male-female interactions and men's and women's roles in society" (Derrickson 2002, 1).

What this section of this comparison reveals is how motherhood informs us about various political systems. One of which is the socialization of girls into women that have their purpose and livelihood imbedded in their ability to have children. Every institution from family to school and community informs this desire in girls from the moment they are born. The language for this has been explored in the analysis of the role of mothers where even being a wife is the lesser prize for women. What *The Joys of Motherhood* (1994), helps us to realize then is that it is a work of 'sociohistorical import, as a novel that fills noticeable gaps in the historical record of African women's experiences. (Derrickson 2002, 1). This means that it helps us make sense of how different respond to those forms of socialization and what kinds of impact it leaves. Very often, we do not look at the politics that inform how we are socialized and what kinds of consequences they create. The fact that motherhood is indoctrinated as something that is natural to all woman and something that should make up a large part of their lives' purpose helps draw attention to all of the ways that these institutions fail to give adequate support to women to not only take care of their young but also take of themselves.

Differences in Form

One of the points of difference that one can find when looking at the three primary texts in chapter 2 is the form. While this does not take away from the critiques themselves,

because they are still valid in their own right, it does impact how we can read them and better understand the techniques the authors chose to use. Sissie's 'voyage out' of Ghana and travels through Europe are not unique to African literary fiction. The use of travel and exile is an overstated theme in many kinds of books from the bildungsroman to other stories about resistance. Stories from exile are usually prized for the outside-in perspective that they present about experiencing alternative world views of Africanness that are only presented in popular culture and threaded into stereotypes of modernity. On the other hand, *The Joys of Motherhood* (1994) uses a completely opposite approach in form. Nnu Ego's body, through her mental health, physical wellbeing and childbearing reads as an important way of understanding the criticism Emecheta is bringing to the fore. Nnu Ego's body becomes text in the novel unlike Aidoo's use of travel and being an outsider. Flora Nwapa's figurative use of the 'cassava' as the mother uses the same literary tradition in oral history where animals and nature were used to tell stories about societal roles, folktales and other kinds of parables.

Reading Nnu Ego's body as a text is what assists the joys and perils of motherhood, literally, come to life. Her aching body from working too hard, her inability to breastfeed her child from exhaustion and malnutrition and her giving birth to all the children that she does end up giving birth to are all part of her bodily functions and reactions giving us cues of the ways in which the system of capitalism and patriarchy double to induce gender-specific pains that are especially emphasized through her body. In *Cassava Song* (1986), there are techniques of various oral traditions that Nwapa adopts. The first being the use of praise names for the cassava which is popularly used in praise poetry. That in addition to how she is overstating the ways that the cassava has helped people through its deeds

show that Nwapa used these characteristics of praise poetry to serve the purpose of having the readers understand the cassava's job as well as emphasize the various gaps and sociopolitical issues that it remedies. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said (1993), states that exile is predicated on the existence of, love for, and a real bond with one's native place; the universal truth of exile is not that one has lost that love or home, but that inherent in each is an unexpected, unwelcome loss (Ayyash 2010, 107).

The aforementioned statement by Said is important because it begins to help us question how we view Sissie's character. Thinking about issues around the brain drain, privilege and travel, it is very important to still remember that exile is not a one-size-fits-all experience of people who are leaving because of contempt. In this same way, Aidoo paints an honest picture of Ghana and Germany without creating a superiority complex for the latter because that would alienate Sissie from being able to have insight on both, without any biases. In another article, "Said (2000) argues that exile can produce rancor and regret, as well as a sharpened vision. What has been left behind may either be mourned, or it can be used to provide a different set of lenses. Since almost by definition exile and memory go together, it is what one remembers of the past and how one remembers it that determine how one sees the future" (Ayyash 2010, 111). The outsider-within narrative is one that would explicate the criticisms that Aidoo is making about the remains of an imperial way of thinking about space and who can occupy it. The narrative also helps explicate the ways in which the borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience (Ayyash 2010, 116). We can see how each text uses a different kind of method and form

to help the author emphasize their criticisms of democratization. This point of difference is one of the reasons why it was important for this dissertation to use all three authors because not only are they criticizing different aspects of how their respective states were crafted but they use different narrative forms to do so which strengthens the multiplicity of the research.

The Canon

In an article by Mildred Mortimer (2007), we can read an analysis of domesticity and the representations of the state of women's 'affairs' in Francophone literature. This article contrasts my own dissertation by looking at the work of three Francophone writers, Mariama Bâ, Calixthe Beyala and Aminata Sow Fall. While having defended the importance of thinking of the African literary canon without relying on the linguistic divisions, it is important to still compare the literary contributions of other authors, who like the three I have chosen, are also African women who wrote about the similar preoccupations as mentioned in my previous chapters.

Woman can uphold patriarchy as well. This is an important and complex phenomenon to remember when understanding that just because African women have commonalities, it does not mean they all protect each other and that some are exempt from experiencing some male privilege that they can access by upholding certain norms. With that being said we must be able to appreciate the emergence of francophone African women's writing that broke the weighty silence imposed by African patriarchy, encouraged by French colonialism. As patriarchy kept women confined to domestic space, colonialism favoured the education of African boys rather than girls in colonial schools. (Mortimer 2007, 68). Not to say that the literary production in Anglophone tradition by African women

did not have serve the same kinds of challenges, but it was not at the same level as with the Francophone tradition.

This is part of the reason why space and freedom is important because in the same sense that these women did not have the ability to widely share their prose, they needed to establish that where exactly women could be safe to exist, nurturer and support their criticisms of the societies around them. This is why the three aforementioned authors focused heavily on showcasing how a woman's subjectivity is inextricably linked to domestic space and domesticity is valued as both a refuge and a site of rebellion (Mortimer 2007, 67). An example of this can be seen in [*So Long a Letter* (1979) by Mariama Bâ] significant novel on at least two counts: first, it is by a woman writer, of whom there have been very few so far in Francophone Africa, secondly, it deals with the theme of women's emancipation in Africa, specifically, though not exclusively, in the context of polygamy (Mortimer 2007, 69). Carole Boyce Davies (1994), in her exploration of African and Afro-Caribbean women's fiction, links subjectivity to spatiality, noting that spatial structures that commonly define domestic space – houses, rooms, gardens – function in African and Afro-Caribbean women's writing as metaphors of self and loci of self-identification (Mortimer 2007, 71). Locating one outside patriarchal structures, you accept the consequences of displacement which is similar to the instance when Adaku leaves Nnaife and Nnu Ego with her child (Emecheta 1994). This is part of the narrative that is created when we look at how women negotiate freedom and success for themselves outside of the domestic space and the home (Mortimer 2007, 72). The young woman's – even with Nnu Ego – physical poverty and psychological dislocation mirror the alienation of inhabitants of postcolonial African slums. (Mortimer 2007, 73)

In reading *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977) and then going on to compare that to what we can find in the narratives of the three Francophone writers I have chosen to look at, we can see that there are similarities in how we understand objectivity and movement. Readers of francophone fiction of Africa and the diaspora find that women's subjectivity is often defined in terms of domestic space that may be positive or negative, nurturing or destructive. (Mortimer 2007, 76). In the case of Sissie, there are ways that we can read her journey and dislocation from the domestic space as a form of killjoy practice that exists to question the notion that the domestic space can be either or and not both negative and positive depending on what it is a woman needs and requires for her own personal advancement. In the instance of the writings in the Francophone tradition, it becomes important to highlight that there are complexity surrounding the concept of home, specifically, the blending of traditions: African and European, old and new. Indeed, we are reminded as African readers – without the inclusion of the European readers – that although the domestic realm has been defined as woman's domain in Europe and North America for the past two centuries, this model, when transferred to African societies, is filled with contradictions. (Mortimer 2007, 79). These contradictions do not just exist in Aidoo's novel (1977) but across the different texts in different ways. The use of space in the different narratives can only speak to what the author wants to critique or expose at that moment and so I agree with the sentiment that:

"…domesticity in the sense that the text defines the domestic realm as both an enclosed private space and a political economy. It clearly links private space to the public realm (Mortimer 2007, 79).

In Simon Gikandi's (2012) text on romance, realism and the African literary history, he helps us understand what burdens and tasks were placed on 'postcolonial' literature from its inception and how we can compare these to what has been produced by the three authors and the extent to which they used similar methods. In relation with the premise of this research, "most readers are able to assume that the task of a postcolonial literature and its modes of criticism was to provide a radical critique of the theories of mimeticism that had dominated the study of what used to be known as commonwealth literature" (Gikandi 2012, 309). This means that what would be seen as 'publishable' before the postcolonial literature emerged as a genre was simply work that amplified the gaze that was already on the continent so as to stand the chance of getting funding for publishing and prizes. The recognition of this as an extension of the imperial enterprise, it was vital for more African writers to untangle themselves from the need to respond to this gaze and start the task of defining and creating a national identity that would position them to speak out where necessary. This is also very easily tied to the politics of cultural nationalism, the literary project of decolonization was driven by what one may call a "double mimesis: the imperative to question existing colonialist theories of representation and the desire to inscribe the lived experiences of the colonized" (Gikandi 2012, 310). This is seen in the literature mentioned above and in the primary texts because almost every space and role was written in a way that privileged the people that lived there.

I chose to look at the authors I did because their sense of postcolonial writing was thus inaugurated by the desire to counter this seemingly perverted idea of the colonial space as fetishized representation (Gikandi 2012, 316). This shows how when we look at the kinds of setting and form in each text, there was an impetus to move away from the

colonial definitions of what those spaces had to look like. In the killjoy praxis we read about how movement and the privilege to move was not void of the emptiness that is experienced when Africans realize that the mystique that Europe has is but a myth. Similarly, Nnu Ego's body as one of the main texts in the critiques that Emecheta (1994) is making means that we have to learn to sit with her emotions, fatigue, hunger and desperation whereas the emotional mechanics of an African woman are usually not even noteworthy, let alone able to be read as text. This made the work that Nwapa (1986) did with her poem become a cry for how there needed to be an new aesthetic that affirmed the lived experience of the colonized while also questioning the language of a literary canon closely associated with the culture of colonialism and with colonialist notions about progress, time, and subjectivity.(Gikandi 2012, 311).

From a comparative perspective we can see the difference in form and setting helped inform what Gikandi discusses in his text where prose would be used to describe the realities of the nation and thus create the conditions in which the case for reform could be posited, while poetry would be the idiom through which a lovable nation could be imagined (Gikandi 2012, 319). It is similar here, except all of these different are all key components in the criticisms that each author put into their texts in order to show how their own work would then carry an imagination for a postcolonial Africa that was devoid of these problems but also literary work that was essentially theirs and not burdened with being accepted or read by external audiences because the texts were not for them. This seeking to escape the objectified world of colonial society, nationalist writers could be attracted to ideas like romance and images of realism in their texts because it delivered them from the violence of colonial history and the anxieties of an encroaching modernity that they

had begun critiquing because it did not include them or their ways of life. “But the romanticizing strategy could not help them escape the reality that was part of its condition of possibility” (Gikandi 2012, 326). This conundrum then becomes the bedrock of why these texts need to be closely read and analyzed at various levels because there are failings in postcolonial literature that can only be overlooked if the texts are read critically.

The analysis of critiques of the post-colonial political space using literature is a task that requires not only an analysis of the literature itself but also a comparison of what it means to analyze this literature as it emerges in the post-colonial era. This is important to take note of because post-colonial is not a genre or theme but also a reality that meant that shifts in the literary production itself were taking place. This means that we need to take into consideration that while the semantic basis of the term ‘post-colonial’ might seem to suggest a concern only with the national culture after the departure of the imperial power (Ashcroft et al 1989, 2), there was also an emphasis on what kinds of definitions and conversations African writers wanted to their work to carry without centering the colonial presence. My deliberate choice of authors for the undertaking this research was also to speak to the fact that the African canon might already acknowledge all three women but it was not the canon that they wrote for and they did not have to. This is due to the fact, with English literature as a universal norm, there was this cultural hegemony that has been maintained through canonical assumptions about literary activity, and through attitudes to post-colonial literatures which identify them as isolated national off-shoots of English literature, and which therefore relegate them to marginal and subordinate positions (Ashcroft et al. 1989, 7). This means that no matter how many readers of African literature knew about Dr Emecheta, Flora Nwapa or Ama Ata Aidoo, the empire that was

created around literature from the linguistic and hegemonic perspective was always going to have these women in the background of niche texts about 'African womanhood' or mothers and nothing else. Not only does this align with the very patriarchal and Western tropes that this dissertation aims to off-shoot but it also means that there is an under-representation of the technical devices used by writers like these three authors, who come from an oral society (one with no tradition of writing), for instance, can be mistaken for 'power words', 'power syntax', and 'power rhythms' which reproduce the culture by some process of embodiment. Such language use seems to be keeping faith with the local culture and transporting it into the new medium which they all successfully do compared to what Western audiences assume their work should remain in (Ashcroft et al. 1989, 51).

The previous chapter gave a biography of each author before going into the reading of their text and this was done to not only reiterate their achievements and great careers for anyone who might read this and be amiss but also to highlight one very important aspect of their careers which links to why they wrote the work in the first place. The idea of Black women overcoming adversity and oppression is an age old trope that assists the masses that are always quick to strip Black women of their personhood and ability to feel. However overcoming in the literary space and in this field seems to hold a different kind of significance as compared to the ordinary trope. The 'boom-or-bust' effect in the literary field is being published and having no one read your work and your words fade with you into obscurity or a large audience and a lot of scrutiny and notoriety.

"Recently however the latter has occurred a lot less because even though women authors are [not] as yet fully recognized by literary critics and scholars, but rather that an ever-increasing number of texts of tremendous literary and sociological interest are becoming

available" (Volet 1993, 309). This shift is obviously without complications and it is almost that the very ills that Aidoo, Dr Emecheta and Nwapa were addressing are also impacting the literary production of African women who want to write. This makes sense then why a lot of African women, even outside of the three I have chosen to immediately study in the primary readings never shy away from highlighting the issues that they have to face in their everyday lives. Calixthe Beyala is one such example. In her literature, we read how misery and economic difficulties are always in the background of Beyala's literary universe (Volet 1993, 312). Beyala is not the only African woman to have adopted a strong stand against all forms of oppression in general and the oppression of women in particular. In contrast to the far more conciliatory tone of their predecessors (Volet 1993, 314). In thinking about this movement in contrast with the existing literary production, it shows how there is a special burden placed upon women to write according to our experiences where our triumph becomes our ability to address the problems in our society and political systems without ignoring the very special kind of oppressive reality we have to survive in. This can be seen from girlhood where girls suffer most in this environment, as unbearable social and political pressures combined with diehard patriarchal values add to their self-doubt and push them into womanhood before their time, usually through a chain of traumatic experiences (Volet 1993, 309). What this analysis of literary production does is take away from the idea that writing about democratization means that women are writing from a place where they ignore their hardships but I think that these comparisons with other women and the authors I chose have proven that women can write about the political moment without ignoring their own stakes and positionality.

Another aspect that comes with analyzing the canon and the authors that I deemed 'best fit' to answer the questions in this dissertation is considering the extent to which the authors themselves have to put up with being rendered insignifacnt and having their work overlooked as a result of that. One way that this was revealed was through actually researching for this topic and coming across very little engagement with the feminist and political aspects of the three authors work. One or two articles just does not suffice. But it also confirmed that these authors and my research itself is operating in the space of the 'other'. While a few feminists, African literary scholars and myself might find the criticisms brought forward by these authors incredibly vital to the connection between African literature and political science. "The word "Other [as defined by Edward Said 1978]," i.e., those who are not from the West, and who are, by extension, deficient in manners, values, culture, education, and development, oral traditions, which mostly characterized these societies, were also relegated to historical non-significance" (Adbi 2007, 43), is the same way that I use it in this instance. This definition is sufficient because it also extends into thr form of literature used in Nwapa's poem (1986). The use of methods like praise and ode in *Cassava Song* (1986) borrow from the African oral literatures which were not accepted as genuine and valid forms of social, cultural, political, legal, and economic expression (Adbi 2007, 43).In Nwapa's section, the analysis of the poetry offered a very different perspective from the other sections due to the use of figurative language and a thread of metaphors that makes up part of the kind of literature that is 'othered' and the inclusion of it inthis dissertation helps highlight how oralities as mediums of communication and/or expression are so close to the reality of the situation implicated, so original with respect to the speaker's thought processes, so reflective of the

communicator's overall consciousness and expectations, and so contextually realizable in the subject's ecology and attendant life systems, they are concretely more real, and above all else, more open-ended in time and space. (Abdi 2007, 48). This then means that even in the poetry, there is no kind of African lierary form that should be prized over any other because of its contribution to political debate or critique because literary forms can carry the burden of championing traditional forms and political rhetoric.

The preface of this dissertation emphasized the existing texts that explored the literary work by African authors contributing to political movement and judgements. This is important because it not only proves the validity of the questions that were answered in the second chapter, but also proves that the African literary canon requires in-depth exploration because when being compared to the 'Global canon', there are gaps that we need to close by analyzing literature that is on the periphery of the margins that African writers are already placed in. This can be seen when we look at how African writing is minor in global canonical terms even if it might appear more visible due to the prominence of African writers like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o or Ben Okri. (Ede 2013, 4). The visibility of these authors, while being a great feat, is still a painfully narrow representation of African literature. Heinemann and the African Writers Series is largely responsible for the internationalisation and initial token canonisation of African writing (Ede 2013, 96), and this again has helped remedy the problem in terms of publishing more works that can be accessible across various audiences. Unfortunately this does not take away from the fact that the kinds of texts that people choose for representational or academic purposes will still largely focus on the prominent men who

have been presiding over the literary space for decades. The perpetual patriarchal and misogyny has protected the view of the works by these men contains the kind of literary prowess that should be prized for political thought. The comparisons of Aidoo, Nwapa and Dr Emecheta and women authors from Francophone regions have disproved the idea that the only space where African literature can occupy significant political ground is if it masculinized and as distant from domesticity as possible. In addition to the gendered ideas around the canon, we cannot ignore the fact the history of the colonial encounter, its significance for the emergence of African literature, the postcolonial socio-economic conditions affecting African literary production and the metropolitan ideologies of value surrounding its (de)canonization (Ede 2013, 12). While this might be true, it is in the answers that I hope my research has provided that we can begin to see that there is a space to see the shifting of prominence and importance of a singular kind of African writer to the likes of the women I have amplified in my research of their critiques.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to analyze the similarities between each of my primary texts which included how each narrative presented the problems with the economies of their respective countries, the societal roles of women and how because of these roles, it is erroneous to marginalize women and lastly the common threads between the comments on how post-colonialism in Nigerian and Ghanaian left a lot to be desired. The differences which included understanding the form of text added nuance to how post-colonial states can be criticized from different positions. All of these comparisons creates parallels that reveal the different causes and consequences in each authors' narrative that then substantiates the importance of having each of their voices included

in my dissertation as well as how it can work to improve readings of other African women writers in the canon with similar preoccupations.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

The first undertaking that this dissertation set out to solve for was figuring out the political positions of three authors and ensure inclusion of African women writers in a conversation between African literature and post-colonial politics. This part was one of the most simple as it just required to be re-stated as the authors did the work of weaving these political opinions in their eloquent works of fiction. Aidoo (1977) made sure that every part of Sissie's journey revealed a way that we needed to see the problems in Ghanaian systems of development like education while everyone else hailed it up as Kwame Nkrumah's flawless 'creation'. Nnu Ego's (Emecheta 1994) inability to feed her family and herself became the most unfortunate image for a Nigerian women who struggled with the mechanics of capitalism while balancing the deep desire to become the woman she was socialized into believing she had to be. The cassava (Nwapa 1986) metaphor very clearly showed how Nwapa felt about the Nigerian state taking advantage of women who managed various roles that it was supposed to handle while simultaneously never appreciating all that the 'mother cassava' does. All of these preoccupations became the crux of the feminist criticisms that I went on to explain and compare in the second and third chapters respectively.

Another important part of this research that was unpacked was understanding the African literary canon. The canon that was able to make enough room to appreciate Aidoo, Dr Emecheta and Nwapa as prolific writers. While this was a feat on its part, these authors and many other African women were forgotten and this exposed the misogynistic, patriarchal side of the literary canon on the continent. While these women have

experienced acclaim and successes, their work was still in the margins compared to other works by their male counterparts. An example of this that showed up during my research into scholarly articles on their work, where despite having authored multiple works, each of them had a single, widely read title that most, if not all of the academics focused on. This is unlike Chinua Achebe, who has an extensive catalogue of interviews, journals and books written about his entire life's work while, with Flora Nwapa for example, her recognition begins and ends after *Efuru* (1966). This became a limitation that impacted the method and review of the literature on these women because people had already created work around which text they felt was most prolific and if it was inconsistent with the ones I chose for my dissertation I would simply have to fill in those gaps with my own interpretation and comparison of academic material that was written on texts that were not included in my own research.

The interdisciplinary nature that I prized from the very first chapter as being the reason why this kind of research was so important became the saving grace of the limitations I experienced in my lack of material or finding a way to ground their work in previous studies. This dissertation could shift between analyzing literature and all of its stylistic features and move into understanding political thought in ways that did not distract from each other but rather speak to the very question behind why it was important to read and understand the different nuances in these authors' works and how their critiques were doing important feminist work while also framing them as intellectuals in political thought and not just as writers of good fiction.

My introduction to this dissertation gave some space to remembering Achebe and wa Thiong'o as the pioneers of African literature and what then happens to how people think

of your work as a consequence of that recognition. However, they were not a largely emphasized part of my dissertation or part of my analysis of each author. This allowed me to re-member them as equals in the African canon and not necessarily the archetype of what it means to be a writer. This helped make my dissertation itself have a strong feminist underpinning which would then let the feminist notions that shone through in the different texts be emphasized by the way I structured my paper to begin with. In part, focusing on the women and their preoccupations helped give a clearer understanding to the concept of what a post-colonial era means and looks like. These complexities in outlining post-colonialism as a concept and the minimal attention given to the male authors made the criticisms that I analyzed in chapter 2 consistent with the feminist praxis I had adopted when starting this dissertation because my main focus was to give attention and highlight everything that I felt was necessary and nothing else.

Despite not giving too much attention to the male writers, I did however respect the African literary tradition of 'writing back' to some extent. This writing back, took place in the beginning of every section of the second chapter where each author's work was given an elaborate plot breakdown and a biography of their lives. This was (literally) a page out of Okolo's (2007) book on Achebe and wa Thiong'o. This was done because I did not want to make it seem as though their personal achievements and narratives were not important. This was a deliberate choice I made to make sure that there is understanding that there is room at the metaphoric table for respect and recognition to be awarded to African women writers in the exact same ways that men get it.

The 'perils and joys of motherhood' section saw Dr Emecheta using motherhood and marriage as the two key institutions to expose the problems with capitalism and patriarchy

in both. Every mundane and ordinary experience that we see Nnu Ego and her family go through is meant to aid the preoccupation Dr Emecheta has with the way that capitalism has failed to land in Lagos and any other subsequent community in Nigeria that she writes about. Her text writes back in various ways as well so there is a consistency in how African writers communicate with each other's work because the perils and joys that she writes about are visible in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* but also address Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and this shows how not only are Emecheta's concerns addressed but her work is far reaching enough to also not leave behind the work that strengthens and informs a lot of her own

In 'the killjoy praxis' Aidoo definitely shakes the table and lets notions of success and the might of education topple over. The themes of travel and experiencing Europe and the 'outside' of home are not depicted as the usual 'coming-into-herself-bildungsroman' format seen in most narratives similar to this one but rather everything that Sissie witnesses and experiences speaks back to how Aidoo wants it to be known that a paradise does not exist where imperialism and colonial ideals are still informing our norms, goals and successes.

Inside a beautifully illustrated ode to women as mothers, fighters, nurturers and leaders, Nwapa's *Cassava Song* (1986) finds the space and room to still adequately address the fact that women are not in these roles because it is part of a women's objective to be useful and die out without being taken care of and appreciated by the very people they sustain. All of this was embedded in her use of the cassava as a metaphor for all that women do that gets overlooked and placed in the inferior and fetishized box of 'femininity' and never given a second glance. This all to say that this hyper-masculine exercise is

part of a greater sense that is carried in the transition to a post-colonial Nigeria where even the most basic of forms of appreciation and protection of women and their servitude is not awarded to them because that transition in itself was underwhelming and did not actually come into fruition to actually award anyone.

There are several comparisons in the third and final chapter of this dissertation. The first between the three authors to find commonalities and differences in their narratives. This comparison helped reveal how they all similarly wrote that since the economy failed to sustain them, it had failed to develop. This is prolific because development is usually determined by more abstract, 'stock-exchange' like ideals whereas all three of the authors simply showed that an economy that could not better people's lives, is not a good one. They also all consistently painted pictures of the roles that women play in society and how this relates to the politics of the time in order to strengthen their different critiques. The one point of difference between them which contributed to the usefulness of using all three of them as key figures was the difference in form. An exile narrative, using the body as text and a poem that heavily relies on oral tradition differ from each other in how we can infer meaning from each, however this difference did not take anything away from each of their criticisms, in fact it strengthened them to a degree.

The second set of comparisons looked at the relationship between these three Anglophone African women writers and other Francophone writers. In an article about Mariama Bâ, Calixthe Beyala and Aminata Sow Fall, we could see how the difference in the linguistic camps that these authors belonged to, did not make any difference with how they could be analyzed politically. However, this then impacts how we address the tension in deciding what of the African canon is worth analyzing in these kinds of studies and

what the canon means at all. Finding work on these three was almost as difficult as finding diverse interactions with the authors I had chosen and this showed how the colonial legacy of language and misogyny towards certain kinds of literary production continues to push these women further in the margin than the rest of their writer contemporaries. The African canon itself, against a more 'global canon' is a relationship that requires dissecting because it mirrors the realities that the three authors I chose, address in their work and this is why this part of the comparison does of the work of addressing a large part of what this research aimed to do in the first place.

The first question that this dissertation aimed to answer was posed to figure out how the three authors I chose criticize the socioeconomic regimes in the post-colonial era in Nigeria and Ghana and in the second and third chapters, this was adequately proven through the close reading that was done for each of the primary texts and also supplemented by the comparisons which showed how they even used similar themes to link their narratives together. Then there is the use of feminist praxis by prizing their voices, women's experiences and the dualities that exist in these different experiences as a way to emphasize these criticisms was also answered in depth in the second chapter. Even with limited access to academic materials that dealt with their bodies of work in great detail and the different themes that I found relevant to my dissertation in particular, there is a sense that they can not only compare to their male counterparts but also that other African women on the continent can now experience being analyzed in the same way. This study showed how the voices of women, no matter how mundane or simple their subject matter may seem, can certainly contribute to and change the political rhetoric of a specific nation.

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