

Language, Literature & Criticism

Essays
in honour of
Professor Aduke Adebayo

Edited by
Emmanuel N. Kwofie
Babatunde Ayeleru

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Feminist Discourse as Paradigm of Gendered Worldview: An Analysis of the Social Comment of Calixthe Beyala and Ama Ata Aidoo

O.F. Siwoku-Awi

INTRODUCTION

The remarkable steady growth of female writing since the 1970s is proof that African women are working progressively to make the black woman relevant to the budding socio-political system and to create a place for her in a fast growing world. We should really acknowledge that a lot of changes have taken place since women writers woke up to the issue of their subordination. The burgeoning writing proves the fact that women have found a stable voice and are able to judge, quite objectively, within the changing economic and socio-cultural context, women's continuous subjugation, create awareness and satirise socio-political systems. This critical analysis of female writing is intended to promote women's work and also state that women too have a voice and they have a meaningful contribution to make to the world.

The title of this paper suggests some fundamental constructs that are herewith defined: Feminist discourse and gendered worldview. The word 'feminist' is the adjective of the word 'feminism', which theoretically underscores a concerted effort by sympathizers of the struggles for the emancipation of women in emergent modern societies. 'Feminist discourse' would therefore refer to writings by women, who desire to project the female cause. 'Gendered worldview' is the consciousness that we are living in a world of gender, where male interest might not necessarily be the correlate of female interest and where their perceptions differ. Feminist critics admit that female writing is undoubtedly different

from male discourse. Sara Mills discusses the notion of “gendered sentence” in her book *Feminist Stylistics* and asserts that writings produced by women may be linguistically different from male writings. She questions people’s belief in a “feminine sentence” and what makes it different from the existing linguistic patterns. The peculiarities of female experience in a patriarchal world may have facilitated a distinctive literary style and of course feminine qualities in writing; nevertheless, the same linguistic structures as used by men are adopted by feminists to communicate the vision of the kind of society that they want, though with individual variation that may reflect the author’s state of mind.

French feminists believe that feminine language is repressed because of female subjectivity; therefore women’s writing would be essentially psychological. “L’écriture féminine” should then enable women to divulge the repressive order that silenced them. Maggie Humm in *Contemporary Feminist Literary Criticism* states that Helen Cixous “suggests that all forceful women writers give birth to words, flowing in accord with the contractual rhythms of labour. The tempo of women’s writing, in other words, will be in cadence with lacunary moments and ‘jets of letter’” (94). According to Humm, French feminists, Julia Kristeva, Helen Cixous and Luce Irigaray oppose phallogentric language by which men have appropriated the world. Monique Wittique, a novelist and critic endeavours to take language away from patriarchy by experimenting with nouns and pronouns and by rejecting the name ‘woman’ since it means ‘one who belongs to another’.

Though not all female writers may set out to subvert existing linguistic and stylistic codes, it is generally accepted that writers get an inspiration to put down their thoughts in what is a calculated move to communicate, lay bare a throbbing heart, unveil with words and images the evils, fraud and crimes that the society has got used to and could not stand back to judge impartially. In this article, the women writers that we have chosen, we believe, are sensitive to their world and with greater acuity of perception, see

beyond the surface of the ordinary daily socio-economic and cultural patterns that have become our existence. They imagine the society as developing a gangrenous wound and their writing is like removing the scab that covers the putrefying sore that stinks. The scab must be removed for the healing potion to penetrate and cure. African literature since the pre-colonial era has metamorphosed thematically from a struggle for independence to protest and struggle for human rights and egalitarian society. While many of recent African writings have been particularly critical of the excesses of corrupt governments and leaders, women have laid emphasis on discrimination against women; sexual abuse, like female genital mutilation; commercial sex as well as child abuse.

The upsurge of interest in women's issues has been largely due to the social activities of some women writers, who have wielded very positive influence in their society; Ama Ata Aidoo was at a time Minister of Education in Ghana. There may be women leaders who perpetuate the male hegemony, as it is the norm in most African cultures. As writers like Calixthe Beyala, for example, observe, African matriarchs are often the ones who initiate female circumcision and are perpetrators of sexual discrimination, oppression and exploitation of women, by running brothels. It is their perception of the world as communicated in writing that constitutes the focus of this paper. The authors chosen for the study have written about their societies, which are a subset of the world at large. Sometimes the content of their works and the discourse patterns are remarkable deviations from conventions. Particular references are made to Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* and Calixthe Beyala's *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée* and *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*. Their militancy is reflected in their break with conservative prose forms. They open up a new perspective of socio-political realities for feminist writing, a move which should propel African feminist criticism beyond the domestic and the cultural. We shall consider the thematic concerns of each writer as well as peculiarities of the styles of writing.

Female Discourse: Sweet Revenge or Protest

Maryse Condé in determining the reasons for female writing conjectures that female writers have different preoccupations from their male counterparts. According to her, they may be set at correcting the obnoxious notion that missionaries had about African life and gender tradition. Ignorant of African social structure and sex roles, they labelled the women "beasts of burden". In addition, African female writers may just be kicking against everything that relates to the status and condition of women, like polygamy or circumcision.

Condé questions the possible motive for writing thus:

female writers? An echo of these misconceptions, or a protest and a rebellion against them? A cold contempt for those Western judgments and a cool description of woman's experience? Or a disconcerting mixture of conceptions, true descriptions and modernistic attitude? (133)

Establishing the motive of female writer is not an easy task. Interviews have often been useful in determining the background of such writers the reason they vehemently oppose the status quo. The relevance of their writing to prevalent issues also goes to prove to what extent their perspectives are contemporary. In a male dominated literary scene, the woman writer really has also a place. This is summed up in the words of Ama Ata Aidoo:

It is definite that anything that had to do with African women was, of all vital pieces of information, the most unknown (or rather unsought), the most ignored of all concerns, the most unseen of all the visible, and we might as well face it, of everything to do with humanity, the most despised. This had nothing to do with anything that African women did or failed to do. It had to do with politics of sex and

the politics of the wealthy of this earth who grabbed it and who held it (Nfah-Abbenyi, 3).

It is clear that black women writer, much like their male counterparts in any part of the world, have reacted to prevailing political and socio-cultural impositions that may forestall their growth and progress. South African Miriam Tlali, echoes the claim of Aidoo. She says of herself:

I identify myself as a black woman writer. In South Africa, we live under a pyramid of power, so I regard myself as the voice of African woman who is oppressed politically, socially and culturally. There is not enough emphasis given to the plight of the South African woman. I insist on this in my collection of short sores called Soweto stories... In that book, I show the terrible predicament of the South African woman. She is oppressed by her man, by the white woman and of course by the system... African women have no voice, no platform and nobody cares (Nfah-Abbenyi, 8).

African women have had to face patriarchal culture with all its drawbacks, its socio-economic discrimination and prejudices. In reality, the African woman's problems are multifaceted. To compound the devastating effect of patrocetric culture, ravaging poverty has made the African woman's health much more vulnerable than that of the man. In short, African feminist concerns, as deduced from writings, are meant to raise female consciousness, subvert patrocetric culture, which lauds male hegemony and to reconstruct female gender by making the woman valuable and indispensable to an emergent economy in budding African societies. Feminist writers, for the most part, have created a new image for the African woman. In the works of African men, women are sometimes portrayed as prostitutes and appendages to

men while they also act as pimps or are courtesans. Katherine Frank cited Eldred Durosimi Jones as follows:

Until recently, most African novels have been written by men and they tend to focus on social, historical and political rather than personal or domestic themes. By and large women characters are defined in these novels by their relations to men; they are someone's daughter or wife or mother, shadowy figures who hover on the fringes of the plot, suckling infants, cooking, plaiting their hair. Or, as Kenneth Little has shown in detail, women in male authored African novels tend to fall into a specific category of female stereotypes: girlfriend or good time girls, workers such as secretaries or clerks, wives and other male appendages, and prostitutes or courtesans (14).

We shall successively examine our two writers henceforth.

Calixthe Beyala

Beyala in an unmitigated and bilious satire strips the African man of his honour and presents him as worthless and impotent, with only his phallus to boast of. We can affirm that Beyala is haunted by an uncontrollable hatred for the male and every occasion for revenge is relished. Consider for example her outburst in *Lettre d'une Africaine à ses sœurs occidentales*:

Depuis que je vis, les hommes africains me ruinent les nerfs. J'ai une haine particulière, moi contre cette dictature de couilles (13).

All my life, African men get on my nerves. I harbour a particular hatred for this dictatorship of the testicles.

The female writer's proposals have created fictions based on the reality of the world we live in. For instance Beyala's bitterness

against male hegemony is inscribed in the social milieu that she paints. We are confronted with destitution, prostitution, misery, racism and hell -the devastating effect of the world ruled by men. We witness moral degradation and open rebellion against social ethics and the moral code, while the people live knee-deep in mediocrity. Abundant sexuality is expressed by the multiple sexual partners that her women characters have. Beyala opines that they only reflect the direct onslaught of men who do not have any *raison d'être* than to satisfy their animalistic instinct. She paints not only men who could batter and distress women insensitively, but women who lack the initiative to get themselves out of the mediocrity into which they have been pushed by an embryonic society. A case in point is the three generations of Tanga's maternal grandparents who have all gone through the painful experiences of rape, and ending with Tanga who herself has also been sexually abused by her father. Beyala expresses her exasperation in *Lettre* as follows:

Je considérais qu'un compliment d'homme
n'existait pas. Ce qu'ils complimentaient c'était
encore leurs propres grosses bites. Des hypocrites!
De dangereux énergumènes (26)

I considered that compliments from men do not
exist. What they complimented was yet their own
big phalluses. Hypocrites! Dangerous rakes!

To drum in the fact of a disorientated society, Beyala mostly constructs her stories around young people who are confused and are in a dilemma. Seriously handicapped by a dichotomised existence of hypocrisy and illusion, Ateba in *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée* ends up a demented girl, her life completely ruined:

Ateba parle, elle peint, elle répète la parole
de mille manières, on l'écoute ou on ne
l'écoute pas, elle raconte, elle devient un
torrent de mots, d'idées de théories...

Quand elle a fini d'épuiser le mot, elle tourne les talons et se met à courir (147).

Ateba talks, she paints, she repeats her words in different ways, they listen to her or not, she tells her story, she becomes a torrent of words, of ideas, of theories... When she has finished her speech she turns on her heels and starts running.

Ateba starts with the wild goose chase of a nameless absentee father. Her mother, a product of a male dominated economy has taken to prostitution, never to return. Ateba is a symbol of escapism, impotence and bastardisation of a budding society. She exhibits great difficulty in coming to grips with the complexities of her life. Imagining herself as possessing a superhuman ability, she says that all women are stars; they have fallen because of men's craftiness. Women will therefore take over the world and rule it someday. The fact is that proper education and a purposeful existence could be made a legacy for the upcoming generation who do not have to live an idealist life by pursuing illusions.

Derrière la jeune fille de dix-neuf ans qui errait silencieusement à travers les ruelles boueuses QG, trottaient l'ombre de la femme qui chaque jour, à l'heure du soir, regardait fixement le ruisseau qui traversait le quartier et se demandait ce qu'elle allait se pouvoir faire (Nkashama 58).

Behind the nineteen year old girl, who walked silently and aimlessly across the muddy lanes of QG, trotted the shadow of the woman who everyday, at evening time, stared at the stream that crossed the quarter while she wondered what she could do.

However, a new world opens up to her, as she witnesses the death of her friend, Irène, for whom she has nursed lesbian desires. Overwhelmed by the demise of her friend she says:

Ma mémoire s'est brisée, la fenêtre s'est fermée sur mon cœur, il faut réapprendre à penser (142).

My memory was broken, the window was shut on my heart, I must learn to think again.

She will no longer fulfil her vow to build her life on "bases plus saines" (on healthier bases). She takes to prostitution like her deceased friend, Irène, under the pretext of knowing men by following the path of her friend. Overcome by a desire for revenge, in a cemented rage, she kills the man who abuses her sexually. And in a hallucinatory daze she mutters the name of Irène, while caressing the dead man, thinking that it is the dead Irène. The society is faulted for destroying its youth, because there is no future to look to; its young girls are forced into prostitution while those who manage to get away escape to France where they hope for a better existence.

In this first novel of Beyala, the critic perceives a provocative description of squalor quite incongruous with the theme of obsessions about sex, which could be held responsible for the emotional strain that culminates in the final revenge by Ateba. Beyala's quest for 'redress' appears indomitable in the second novel, *Te rappelleras Tanga*, where again she pictures in a fiery denigration the hatred of man for woman and the all-consuming desire to dominate and humiliate her: Tanga, by the age of twelve, has been raped many times over by her father, who eventually impregnates her. Tanga, still a child of seventeen years, is put in the same prison cell with an older white woman, Anna-Claude, of French-Jewish origin. Beyala here again questions the importance of men, whose unique focus appears to be their phalluses. The prison guard suggests cutting Anna-Claude's clitoris in order to silence her while another feels that the best way to humiliate her is by defecating in

the cell. The open animosity against the women shows to a large extent frail male ego, which is often responsible for the uncivilised attitude that some exhibit and for the unwholesome desire to control women and hurt them. Beyala in her works reveals that African matriarchs are directly implicated in the sexual oppression of the younger ones. Tanga's mother expresses extreme joy that her daughter has become a woman by the act of circumcision with little consideration for the pain and numbness the girl feels. She rejoices in the fact that the girl will be able to hold down men with her sex organs. Tanga eventually finds herself in prison with the Jewish-French, Anna-Claude, who in her psychotic state cannot explain the reason for her incarceration; Tanga's rebellion and bitterness towards society make her a criminal: she joins a gang of false moneymakers and dies from the beating received from the prison guards. The prison itself is a symbol of political despotism and a reflection of domestic and cultural dominance as expressed by the prison guards. Shut up in the putrefying dirt and filth, Tanga is tortured by the premonition of her impending death and she bares her heart to the Jewish-French woman. She breaks the silence of many years and tells her the story of her life, which she has never told anyone: the degradation of her life, how her mother has used her for economic gain:

*La vieille, ma mère m'attend, assise sur une natte,
des billets de banque fichés entre ses doigts qui
s'amassent et se tordent depuis plusieurs mois (59).*

The old woman, my mother is waiting for me, seated on a mat, with her hand filled with a lot of bank notes which have been accumulated and have been crumpled for months.

Latent in these stories is the social comment about a stunted political system that cannot cater for its citizens or make provision for their socio-economic growth and independence.

Ama Ata Aidoo

Ama Ata Aidoo presents a pointed criticism of African patriarchy in her work: they are the root cause of social and political problems. She ironically describes in *Our Sister Killjoy* this sadistic masculine trait in Sissie's reaction to squirming Marija, both women. "It hits like a stone, the knowledge that there is pleasure in hurting, a strong three-dimensional pleasure, an exclusive masculine delight that is exhilarating beyond all measure" (76). The irony is that Sissie feels the same desire to hurt, an indication that, the will to hurt others is universal:

In an interview, Aidoo states her motive for writing:

I write about people, about what strikes me. It seems the most natural thing in the world is for women to write with women as central character; making women the centre of my universe was spontaneous (Bulawayo news).

Aidoo's short stories are clear satirical treatises against African governments and their foreign collaborators. Aidoo has concerned herself with an open reproach and denunciation of political institutions that stultify woman's self-realisation and economic independence. Her novels are replete with practical details of abject poverty, the tales of the wretched of the earth. A social activist, poet, dramatist and novelist, she has luxuriantly demonstrated competence in all the literary forms. She has not confined her creativity to the western conceptualisation of feminism. Coussy (1998:37) records our author's liberty of self-expression, self-actualisation and worldview thus:

Je ne vois pas la différence qu'il y a à être une féministe, une nationaliste africaine et une socialiste. Je ne vois même pas comment on peut se déclarer traditionaliste africain et ne pas être féministe, qu'on soit un homme ou une femme (Coussy, 37).

I do not see the difference it makes in being a feminist, a woman nationalist and a socialist. I do not even see how one can call oneself an African traditionalist and not be feminist, whether one is a man or a woman.

In essence, her literary activism does not exclude male participation in women's empowerment. This stance is unlike the outright opposition of western women to male dominance as inherent in the process of their self-realisation. The complexity of African history and of the socio-economic problem calls for a concerted effort. Aidoo while rejecting the incursion of western feminism expresses her pride in being African:

Je suis contente
D'être moi
D'être une Africaine
Une femme
Un écrivain (as presented in Coussy, 37)
I am content
To be me
To be an African
A woman
A writer.

Aidoo criticises bitterly the excesses of African leaders. She sees Africa as conquered and raped and feels the shame of our continent being betrayed and traded. Her novel, *Our Sister Killjoy*, quite different from her other works, tells the story of a young student, nominated to go to Germany. The student, Sissie, very unsympathetically makes bitter comments about her observations. In a plain prose-poetry discourse pattern, Sissie relates her trip to Germany. From the discomfort she feels at dinner with the Ambassador to an attempt at lesbian relationship with the Bavarian. Marija. What is striking in this work is that Aidoo continuously breaks off from a line of thought and digresses into lengthy explanations of another point: a device which

indicates the speed with which she intends to get out her remonstrance against the prevalent political order. When Mania observes the similarity in Sissie's way of speaking and in Indian's, Aidoo moans the obstacles that stand in the way of friendship with other nationals:

We are the victims of our history and our present. They place too many obstacles in the way of love. And we cannot enjoy even our differences in peace (29).

Aidoo's stand is about Africa being a prison of the past and her condemnation of post-colonial African governments. If African countries had at a time been under foreign rule, there could be a meaningful change now.

We have heard too,
Have we not? Of countries in
Africa where
Wives of
Presidents hail from
Europe.
Bringing their brothers or... who knows/
To run the
Economy.
Excellent idea
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
Province, Geneva, Milan...
Coming south to Africa

Once a year
 For holidays,
 Meanwhile,
 Look!
 [.....]
 Champagne sipping
 Minister and commissioners
 Sign away
 Mineral and timber
 Concessions, in exchange for
 Yellow wheat which
 The people can't eat.
 And at noon,
 The wives drive Mercedes-Benzes to
 Hairdressers' making ready for
 The evening's occasion
 While on the market place,
 The good yams rot for
 Lack of transportation and
 The few that move on,
 Are shipped for
 Paltry cents-
 To foreign place as
 Pretty decorations
 On luxury tables
 We must sing and dance
 Because some Africans made it (56-57)

We would not conclude that Aidoo had been bitter and therefore spat out venom on the political system. She obviously has related a real experience; she had been a member of the Government Cabinet in Ghana as Minister for Education from 1982 to 1983 before she resigned. She probably was incapable of coping with the top-level corruption and policies that she was under pressure to comply with. Sissie, in *Our Sister Killjoy* furiously lapidates a

system that seems to oppress the masses as she observes and interprets events in the society.

There may not be African women who exhibit a troubled conscience about the status quo or who have described in disconcerting terms the obvious misery; nevertheless there is a common thematic strain of protest against discrimination, sexual exploitation and injustice done to women. The prevalent underdevelopment is attributed to retrogressive policies and decisions made by African leaders. It is against this background that Beyala paints the lot of downtrodden Africans who actually express very little initiative in solving their economic problems. Women take to prostitution; men take to abundant sexuality and cultural dominance to cover up their impotence.

Sissie, in *Our Sister Killjoy*, has the following to say about Nigeria and Ghana:

Nigeria
Nigeria our love
Nigeria our grief.
Of Africa's offspring
Her likeness
O Nigeria
More of everything we all are,
More of our heat
Our naiveté
Our humanity
Our beastliness
Our ugliness
Our wealth
Our beauty
A big mirror to
Our problems
Our tragedies
Our glories.
Mon ami,

Household quarrels of
 Africa become a
 WAR in
 Nigeria:
 'And Ghana?'
 'Ghana?'
 Ghana?
 Just a
 Tiny piece of beautiful territory in
 Africa – had
 Greatness thrust upon her
 Once.
 But she had eyes that saw not
 That was a long time ago...
 Now she picks tiny bits of
 Undigested food from the
 Offal of the industrial world...
 O Ghana (52-53).

These serious recriminations could be justified today. After several decades of independence, African nations are still toddling and have not been able to appropriately manage economic and political affairs so as to be able to record sustainable, tangible and quantifiable progress.

Beyond the Stereotype Traditional Style

While Aidoo has painted post-independence Africa and its impropriety, Beyala has given much thought to the African male and female, victims of abject economic conditions. Beyala's characters go to France as a solution to their material handicap, the perennial problem of poverty. Both authors present the striking dichotomy that exists between the quarters of the rich and the poor. While the rich live in opulence, the poor live in abject poverty and in insalubrious conditions. Aidoo describes the horror

of the betrayal by leaders who go abroad for honorary degree decorations, but who return and insensitively leave their compatriots in destitute conditions:

That when they come back here
Having mortgaged the country for a
Thousand and a year
To maintain themselves on our backs
With capitalist ships and fascist planes,
They
Tell
Us
How the water from their
Shit -bowls
Is better than what the villagers
Drink...
Ow, glory
While
Able-bodied fishermen
Disappear in
Cholera, the rest, from under
Leaking roofs and unlit alleys

Shall drum,
And sing
dance
with
joy
This year of the pig-iron anniversary
Because
There is ecstasy
In dying from the hands of a
Brother
Who
Made
It (53).

These sad details are, in actual fact, remonstrate remonstrances against unsympathetic and cruel manipulations of power that have characterized African governments. We are concerned here with a feminism that surpasses the sentimental condemnation of the male hegemony or the cultural implications of genital mutilation, clitoridectomy, excision or sexual oppression. The depressing fact is that the criminal acts that seem to go with patrimony are attitudes that spell the operations in government circles. The assassination of female political activists and achievers only proves that some male chauvinists believe till date that success and power should be the preserve of men. Government policies and decisions as deemed by Aidoo are quite often a continuum of the domestic front that places little value on female opinions or the empowerment of women.

The stipulation of a code of ethics or interpersonal relationship for man and woman is secondary if put within the purview of economic and political progress; in the long run, what must change are values that have failed to honour the sanctity of life, promote human dignity and work for self-actualizations regardless of colour, race, sex, or creed. It is worthy of note that Aidoo does not leave Europe out of her remonstrances. According to her, the former colonial masters have been the direct cause of the woes of Africa. The relevant question is if: we can attribute our present woes to colonialism, must we willfully put ourselves in the situation that has hitherto destroyed us?

Even though one might be able to establish a parallel in the thematic concerns of both authors, their discourse patterns differ. No page in Beyala's work spares the society forceful and pointed criticism. Her second rate pidgin expressions reflect the kind of people whose image she seeks to project: 'les fesses coutumières'- 'local buttocks' could be found in all her texts to mean 'indolent neighbourhood women'. The following quotation is an example of Beyala's down-to-earth sarcasm and denigration of her society. She

describes the superficial and shallow experience of mourners at the death of Ekassi, the prostitute in *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée*.

La petite chipeuse d'hommes, haie des fesses coutumières, deviendra célèbre et adulée entre deux bougies anémiques. On en parlera pendant sept jours et sept nuits. Puis, on l'oubliera. J'oubliais de préciser: le QG oublie tout. Même de nettoyer sa merde (42).

The small huddle of men, the row of local buttocks will be praised and adulated between two anaemic candles. We will talk about it seven days and seven nights. Then we will forget it. I almost forgot to specify: the QG forgets everything. Even to clean its shit.

Beyala does a pornographic description of the human body without a sense of shame. She does not seem bothered by the opinion she might be creating or the erotic insinuations that fill the pages of her texts:

Partout où elle passait, les mots s'élevaient désordonnés, indisciplinés, tenus dans la fièvre du délire. Et elle passait, majestueuse, fauchait les hommes, enroulait, les fesses coutumières dans leurs bandelettes de préjugés, fardait les gosses de leurs plus vifs désirs (52).

Everywhere she passed, disordered, undisciplined words erupted, couched in their delirious fever. And she passed, majestically, brought men down, rolled local buttocks in their wrappings of prejudices, and pulled down boys with their intense desires.

It seems that her only concern is to make the most sordid description of the living conditions of her compatriots as she deems fit, thinking perhaps that that could lead to change. At least if her

works would not be reduced to cheap sex thrillers, it is important to evaluate the relevance of her observations to economic and behavioural change. She might also have adopted the French feminist criticism stipulation of what should constitute feminist writing: ellipses, lapses, silences and repetitions; these are often indicated in her works.

Aujourd'hui, j'en ai marre! Ras le bol! J'ai envie de parler... j'ai terriblement envie de parler de cette aube triste, de ces heures qui ont couru avant l'arrivée de l'homme... je puis dire sans attenter à la vérité que c'est sa faute... tout est sa faute... Et elle... il a fallu qu'elle séduise les étoiles pour survivre (7).

Today, I am bored... Enough of it! I have a desire to talk... I have a terrible desire to talk of this sad dawn, of these hours that ran before the arrival of man... I can say without going against the truth that it is his fault... all is his fault... And she... it was necessary for her to seduce the stars in order to survive.

Beyala interposes her narration with a strange and mysterious voice in *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée*. This anonymous voice calls itself "moi" "me" and it possesses all human attributes. It could not be tagged an alter ego because the heroine is unaware of its existence. It is called Ateba's soul. While the function of the "moi" is indeterminate, it adds a third dimension to the narrative, attributing to it a more meaningful depth than the linear narration of a psychotic youth. The "moi" expresses sadness and sympathy, but also its inability to change the situation; helpless it can only look on. It is remarkable that the "moi" dissociates itself from Ateba. No one else can make her life for her; she has to take her destiny in her hands. The critic, Amy-Claire Jaccard, in "Le temps au féminin" declares that:

Le roman féminin montre néanmoins que le dénouement d'une perturbation temporelle dépend

surtout des réactions de la femme confrontée à la problématique du temps (Notre Librairie No 117, 79).

Nevertheless, the feminist novel shows that the ending of a temporal disturbance depends on the reactions of the woman confronted with the problem of the time.

Heroines are responsible for their actions in time and history. Jaccard concludes:

Cette conception est proche de l'existentialisme. Les héroïnes ont, en grande partie, le temps qu'elles méritent par leurs actions ou par leur faculté d'imaginer un avenir plus humain. Hormis un seul récit extrêmement pessimiste, le roman féminin présente donc une vision relativement optimiste en ce que les héroïnes sont insérées dans un temps historique et capables d'agir sur le déroulement de leur existence (79).

This conception is close to existentialism. The heroines have to a great extent the time they deserve by their actions or by their ability, to imagine a more humane future. Except only one story that is extremely pessimistic, the feminist novel presents a vision that is relatively optimistic, in that the heroines are placed within a historical time and are capable of acting on the course of their existence.

Aidoo's tirades are pungent and her ideas are expressed in rapid succession. Her language use has a touch of class and sophistication, which obviously is tantamount to the middle class characters she paints in her work, *Our Sister Killjoy*. There are no expressions to suggest feminist undertones. Nevertheless, there

could be noticed a prose-poetry structure which is sometimes interwoven with pidgin to emphasize the indigenous subject matter:

Sissie was thinking too, as she sat facing her German-born American Professor in the Humanities, that we are a joke. Us over here. And she was fully aware too that that is already too sick a cliché to laugh at. Because it is really true that we are all a joke, both the pigs that run our countries and us the chickens who criticise them. For she was trying to figure out what could happen when that Professor in the Humanities and genius in both Forgetfulness and Invention presented an economic corollary of his brand of history to an influential African.

Who no sabe book
Sabe notin 'for e contrey
No fit hear notin' self.

Oga, 'this big Africa man go sit down te-e-ey, look at this Onyibo man wey e talk, wey e mout go ya, ya, ya,' then your African would obsequiously get up, and with due apology offer the other gentleman something like the world's most expensive liquor, then gingerly sit down again in his own armchair imported from either Sweden or Italy, and sweating and stammering, offer something else to the other gentleman, but this time mother for sale at a take-away price, which he is still prepared to reconsider, and with himself, his brothers and sisters, wife and children all thrown in as bonus...

Beautiful
No? (*Our Sister Killjoy*, 94-95).

There is no doubt that a parallel exists in the concerns of the two writers, who cry out for change in societies where the weak, who are not aware of their precarious situation, are devoured. Ama Ata Aidoo satirises the wrong emphases of African leaders and the sale of their motherland for a pittance.

Conclusion: Towards a Maturing African Criticism

Both Aidoo and Beyala postulate a utopian society, where women are sexually liberated and gender stereotypes are forever destroyed. By the imagination of Ateba, the imaginary world will make women "stars", they would no longer be routinely trampled upon by sadomasochists. In fact, the symbol of masochism "Tina", "man" is forever destroyed. While we may feel uneasy that the heroine is an immature youth, there is yet a lot of truth in the issues of poverty, sexual exploitation, prostitution and economic malaise. The question social activists could frankly ask is: To what extent can an indigent woman survive and resist compromise, pushed by economic circumstances and traditional impositions into the sexual trade and human trafficking? Both authors agree that the moral and social pollution and disequilibrium are caused by colonial and neo-colonial influences, corruption and the subsisting traditional beliefs and values that are incompatible with social reality. According to Adams:

Il est impérative pour les sociétés africaines et les peuples africains à l'époque contemporaine de se purger de la conduite et des attitudes destructives héritées de la société traditionnelle ou dues à l'expérience coloniale (Ellington, 106).

It is imperative that African societies and peoples of contemporary time purge themselves of the behaviour and destructive attitudes inherited from traditional society or due to the colonial experience.

A maturing and maturing criticism should not stop at the incessant liberation of the sexual politics, dismemberment and objectivation of women's bodies and the devouring mothers, who perpetuate patriarchy, but should incorporate the underlying economic dependence (of men and women) which constitutes the social context that makes these feminist writings relevant and invaluable to social realism.

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