

Ama Ata Aidoo's Black-eyed Squint and the 'Voyage in' Experience: Dis(re)orienting Blackness and Subverting the Colonial Tale ¹

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Abstract

This essay endeavors to read Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* with a postcolonially-inflected consciousness. It aims at demonstrating how her work could be read as a sophisticated postcolonial revision of the colonial travel narrative whereby the protagonist's black-eyed squint operates as 'the all-seeing-eye' to subvert the historically unbroken legacy of the Orientalist ideology. It tries to demonstrate how Sissie assumes authority and voice in an act that destabilizes the traditionally established modes of western representation. It is also an investigation into how Aidoo's text adopts processes which "undo the Eurocentrism produced by the institution of the West's trajectory" (Gross 1996: 240) through diverse acts of resistance and 'various strategies of subversion and appropriation'. Her counter discursive strategies of resistance are shaped up in various ways by a feminist consciousness that attempts to articulate a distinct African version of identity and preserve cultural distinctiveness.

Introduction

Ama Ata Aidoo, a Ghanaian, is an internationally recognized literary and intellectual figure. She has consistently and fascinatingly explored her society through many plays, novels, short stories and poems. Her fictional works are explicitly critical of the colonial history of Ghana, and of what she refers to as the "dance of masquerades called independence". *Anowa* (1970), *No Sweetness Here* (1970), *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977) describe and criticize oppression and inequality, target colonialism and implicitly deny the term "postcolonial". Aidoo is also known as an important feminist writer. Her works feature strong female protagonists who are faced with institutionalized and personal sexist attitudes on a

¹ Aido, Ama Ata. 1997. *Our Sister Killjoy*. New York : Longman

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daily basis. In her non-fictional writings, Aidoo also explicitly fights against the axis of oppressive social constructions of gender and their consequences for women. She blames colonialism for importing “a fully developed sexist system, which has been adapted, maintained and exacerbated as it has been integrated into different aspects of African culture” (Marangoly, Scott 1993: 299).

In *Our Sister Killjoy*, Aidoo is concerned mostly with the estrangement of the African educated class. Sissie, the main character, is offered a grant to receive a European education. Her journey into the west chronicles different aspects of her resistance to the overriding ideological hostilities that bring down Africa and African people. The novel is divided into four parts. “Into a Bad Dream” relates Sissie’s travel experience to Germany. She is secure in her racial background, and only progressively over the itineraries of her ‘westbound mobility’ does she become conscious of her colour complexion. In “The Plums,” Sissie discovers Marija, a new German friend. Marija is entangled in boredom and immediately gets caught within the exotic Other ‘the black-eyed squint’ student stands for. In the course of their friendship, Sissie finds out Marija’s perverted behaviors, rejects her lesbianism and leaves her in frustration and total disillusionment. In “From Our Sister Killjoy,” Sissie moves to London, the colonial capital which brings back into her mind the whole tale about the British colonial experience in Ghana. She appears to be extremely disappointed at the tragic social reality and marginalization of black African immigrants. In the epistolary section on a “Love Letter”, Sissie is engaged in a mock-conversation with a lover, using an extremely sarcastic style to assert her identity through the experiences she went through.

The present study is an attempt to make *Our Sister Killjoy* speak postcolonially. I will try to demonstrate how Aidoo’s work could be read as a sophisticated postcolonial revision of the colonial travel narrative whereby Aidoo reverses

the direction of a classic colonial genre, the travel narrative, through which Europe typically represented its soon-to-be or already colonized Other, [also subverts] the gaze that constitutes Europe and its presumed obverse. This time around, it’s the protagonist’s black-eyed squint, not a white, usually male gaze that functions as the all seeing-eye (Needham 2000: 77)

What seems indeed to be of paramount significance is how a body of ‘melancholic’ postcolonial writers articulate and interrogate those ‘originary’ tropes of colonial narratives, shaped in important ways by an Orientalist mindset. Also significantly important is how the conventional western stereotypical discourses are concurrently counter-acted, resisted and subverted by the postcolonial text. According to Salah Mokhlis in his reading of Leila Abouzeid’s

Year of the Elephant, “the concern of postcolonial and emerging voices [...] has centered on subverting the assumptions of colonial discourse and rewriting its history from the vantage point of the subaltern” (Moukhlis 2003: 66). My argument in this regard goes beyond Edward Said’s conception of resistance whereby the Other is offered no opportunity for self assertion, helplessly powerless and his/her voice is ultimately muffled and suppressed. The objective is to explore how Aidoo’s work revolts against the “psychological bondage of colonial ideology” (Marangoly, Scott 1993: 298) and strives to articulate a counter-discourse of resistance through which the oddities of Whiteness are explicitly uncovered. The paper starts with a theoretical background that adopts concepts such as ‘contrapuntality’ and the ‘voyage in’ experience as a reading strategy to flesh out the counter discursive elements at work in Aidoo’s text.

Beyond Orientalism: Recasting Oppositional Voices and Liberating the Post-Colonial Text

By silencing the native’s resistance and effacing oppositional voices, Edward Said has allowed throughout his project on Western representation of the Orient no space for the marginal and the oppressed to express their will for liberation and emancipation. His model of analysis “does not try to articulate the voices of the oppressed so that the colonial discourse appears to be possessed entirely by the colonizer. The Oriental himself is reduced to a state of silence and powerlessness. He is available to European scrutiny and amenable to dominance and control” (Bekkaoui 1998: 29).

Accordingly, the natives in Said’s thesis are offered no opportunity for self-assertion; their voice is utterly repressed and suppressed. Yet, one of the most vital shifts in Saidian model of analysis between *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* is visible in relation to the question of native resistance. After being harshly critiqued for stifling the native’s voice, Edward Said reconsiders the issue of resistance and offers a restorative framework in his *Culture and Imperialism*. From the outset, he seems to be determined to take into account not the horrifically coherent formulations of imperial ideology, but the dissent voices of resistance they have produced. He states that “though imperialism implacably advanced during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, resistance also advanced. Methodologically then I try to show the two forces together” (Said 1994: xxvi). He argues that indigenous resistance can function in what he calls “culture of resistance”; a new disruptive and enabling strategy which would allow postcolonial writers to “appropriate for their fiction such great *topoi* of colonial culture as the quest and the voyage into the unknown, claiming them for their own, post-colonial purposes” (34). This configuration resistance consists of reversal displays, or a

rewriting and a reconstruction of the colonial text. Shakespeare's *Tempest*, for example, has been readapted by Latin American postcolonial writers; and *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad has been appreciatively rearticulated by Tayib Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, where the hero "does (and is) the reverse of what Kurtz does (and is): the Black man journeys north into white territory" (34).

Within this stunningly cultural effort which seeks the inauguration of a culture of resistance that is able to regain and retrieve the native's voice, Said is fully aware that these postcolonial reinterpreted endeavours could wrongly be viewed as "simpleminded, vindictive, assaultive." Non-western artistic and intellectual interventions, however, can't be ignored; they "are not only an integral part of a political movement but, in many ways, the movement's *successfully* guiding imagination, intellectual and figurative energy re-seeing and rethinking the terrain common to whites and non-whites." Hence, postcolonial texts for Said are "potentially revised visions of the past [...], urgently reinterpretable and re-deployable experiences in which the formerly silent native speaks and acts on territory reclaimed as part of a general movement of resistance, from the colonist" (256). Said, accordingly, seems to recognize the ability of postcolonial texts, with their revisionist attitudes, to displace the metropolis's official discourses of mastery which not only misrepresented the natives but also "assumed they were unable to read and respond directly to what had been written about them, just as European ethnography assumed [their] incapacity to intervene in scientific discourse about them" (35).

Said introduces the concept of "contrapuntal reading", a form that reads back from the point of view of formerly colonial subjects; and sheds light on the hidden colonial history which permeates 19th Century literary texts. In the passage below, Said defines contrapuntality as a process whereby incongruent social practices, native culture and imperial outline, past and present, are to be mutually considered. As Said puts it, "we must be able to think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant, each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its own internal formations, its internal coherence and system of external relationships, all of them co-existing and interacting with others" (36). Elsewhere, he assumes that contrapuntal 'mediation' "must take account of both processes, that of imperialism and that of resistance to it, which can be done by extending our reading of the texts to include what was once forcibly excluded." According to Mary Louise Pratt, the chief methodological proposition that shapes *Culture and Imperialism* is what Said refers to as

'contrapuntal reading' [...] a reading that consciously tacks back and forth across the 'activated imperial divide'. Where there is domination, it seeks also the expressions of resistance; it discovers by crossing the divide, both the presence of

the imperial referent in the denying metropolitan text and the historical processes that text has excluded (Pratt 1994: 3).

However, by taking his examples from European canonical writers, Said silences indigenous voices, as pointed out before, and hampers the natives' ability to stand against all forms of invisibility. For Said, the effort of postcolonial writers is to emerge into the Western discourse adopting a 'more playful or a more powerful narrative style' able to grant full recognition to the concealed and 'subalterned' histories. This 'authorising story of the intellectual' is what he codifies as "the voyage in" the Western writing; that is to say, the incorporation and the "movement of Third World writers, intellectuals, and texts into the metropolis and their successful integration there" (Robins 1994: 30). Said's re-appropriation of the 'expedition' motifs and the inversion of narratives suggest the ways in which the Third World migrant intellectuals and travellers 'write back to the centre' across subversively disruptive liminal zones that stretch the lines of demarcation between the West and the rest. The 'Voyage in' experience, therefore, becomes in Saidian analysis an essentially "interesting variety of hybrid cultural work". Its existence is

a sign of adversarial internationalization in an age of continued imperial structures. No longer does the logos dwell exclusively, as it were, in London and Paris. No longer does history run unilaterally, as Hegel believed, from east to west or from south to north, becoming more sophisticated and developed, less primitive and backward as it goes. Instead, the weapons of criticism have become part of the historical legacy of empire, in which the separations and exclusions of 'divide and rule' are erased and surprising new configurations spring up (Said 1994: 295).

As Said argues in the passage above, the movement of the Third-World intellectuals to the metropolis, encapsulated in the concept of the "voyage in" or 'upward mobility' narratives in Bruce Robbins' terms, is a rebellious and dissatisfied practice (an adversarial internationalization) that seeks to recover the forgotten histories through a productive engagement with culture, with the aim of both displacing the Eurocentric "logos" from its position of sanctity ("London and Paris") and allowing 'new configurations to spring up'. Bruce Robbins considers the 'Voyage in' narrative as a transfer of "the dynamic economy of cultural resources", symbolized by Third World 'educators, writers, and artists.'" These transfers from the periphery to the centre "do not leave the centre as it was". Instead, they contribute in the redefinition of western patterns of authority and complete a substantive progress in the struggle for decolonization (Robins 1994:

32). His reading of Saidian “Voyage in” is enabling because it suggests how Said re-conceptualizes the issue of resistance within the contemporary world system of what Arjun Appadurai calls “global cultural economy” and its movement of cultural resources across national boundaries. For Bruce Robbins, The ‘secular’, exilic, migrant intellectual’s narratives of upward mobility can be viewed as “a courageous and well-timed effort to take back these narratives, to use them in a different sharing out of intellectual authority” (34).

Far from being simply a reaction to imperialism, this form of resistance writing that Said adopts in his *Culture and Imperialism*, is regarded as a different but promising way of ‘conceiving human history’; a “conscious effort to enter into the discourse of Europe and the West, to mix with it, to transform it, to make acknowledge marginalized or suppressed or forgotten histories” (Said 1994: 260). He states Salman Rushdie’s novel *Midnight’s Children* as a brilliant work which “is based on the liberating imagination of independence itself, with all its anomalies and contradictions working themselves out” (260).

It is within this theoretical framework that I will attempt to read Ama Ata Aidoo’s text. Generally, the main concern here is to show how *Our Sister Killjoy* negotiates, subverts and reinvents the Orientalist discourse in order to serve the author’s cultural expression, resistance and self-representation. It is an investigation into “the extent to which the colonized peoples engaged the orientalizing discourse, resisting its stereotypes, subverting its epistemology, amending its practices and sometimes even re-applying its stereotypes to the [colonizers] themselves” (Codell, Sachko 1989: 3). Accordingly, the assumptions that lie beneath the Orientalist tradition can be inventively inverted and subverted by the culturally and racially different Other.

The Rhetoric of Blackness: Re(dis)orienting Otherness

Over the course of the author’s-inspired travel narrative, Sissie, the protagonist travels to Europe as a student and moves across the boundaries of a racially and culturally different space. It is through this movement that the reader becomes aware that Sissie is not the Other for the Western imagination; but Europeans, particularly Germans, are “the other for her firmly centered, African Self” (Samantrai 1995: 143). The position of Sissie’s “subjective centrality affirms the particular perspective of her black-eyed squint against the claims of the universal” (143) which consider the West as “the great family of man” (Aidoo 1977: 121). So, there is already a self-conscious counter-discourse that the narrative articulates in order to metaphorically penetrate this great family of man and reverse the whole western discourse on Otherness. It is in a highly experimental fashion that Ama

Ata Aidoo has conversely and subversively chosen to reverse the rhetoric of the “Self” and “Other”. She has, throughout her protagonist’s journey, assumed the role of a subject who has strategically and self consciously managed to resist, twist, subvert the preconceived images of Europeans towards Africa, unveil the deeply-seated Orientalist ideology that has fuelled up Western thought for long, and reverse the already established modes of representation. Sissie, the black Other, projected by the Orientalist histories as an object of scrutiny, has assumed the role of a subject capable of destabilizing the discourse of mastery.

Our Sister Killjoy chronicles Sissie’s trip to both Germany and England. The text is typical in defying all genre conventions unstably shifting between poetry and fiction. It fills some pages entirely while it leaves others almost blank, which is already in itself a political act which is meant to fissure and destabilize the Western literary canon; but at the same time to reverse the historical mode of Europe’s representation of its Others. Adopting the discursive strategies of colonial discourse and with a conscious desire to authorize her authority over the place, Sissie creates a scope of anticipation which allows her to explore the Bavarian town and river, and this position of authority already “constitutes the commanding act itself” (Spurr 1993: 14). Thus, the position adopted by the protagonist becomes similar to the traditional position of the Western traveller which is often endowed with a more honoured position over what is under observation. Indeed, Sissie is metaphorically placed on a privileged position, “the round sentry post” (Aidoo 1977: 19) which allows her to evaluate the German landscape. If Orientalism adopts a strategy which reduces the non-western Other into an object of analysis, accessible to have power over, *Our Sister Killjoy* allows a counter hegemonic terrain to blossom from the very beginning. The outlying position she adopts is that of an outside observer but which is fundamentally a position of power whereby she aesthetically tries to contain the surveyed landscape. By so doing, the German city seems to be more visible through her black-squinted eye.

Looking at the river, Sissie sees history’s manifestation in its most vicious and wild ramifications. She sees a past of the West’s historical abuse and its colonial brutal rape: “Looking at the river / how many / virgins had / Our sovereign lord and Master / unvirgined on their nuptial nights” (19). Reading beyond and against the brochure describing the German countryside and its glorious castles, Sissie’s black-eyed squint realizes that it’s not only virgin lands that were raped in the name of expansion and domination, but she sees in Germany’s river the primitive history of patriarchal, feudal exploitation, distressing rape, pain and anguish. The whole Europe becomes immediately a heart of violence, savagery, ignorance and lust.

The Europeans and specifically the Germans in Aidoo’s book are the natives and Bavaria is the novel’s exotic enframed locale. To describe the Germans, Aido uses

tropes familiar to colonialist narratives whereby she primarily means to shake the West in its essence through a systematic reversal of the order of things. Through Sissie, Aidoo deploys a counter stereotypical discourse, twisting racial prejudices and sending them back to the source that has fabricated them. Hence, Aidoo's narrative makes the Germans inarticulate and ignorant of Africa and by extension the whole world outside of their continent. Their heavy accent dehumanizes them further and highlights that ignorance. When first encountering Sissie, Marija (a phonetic and non-German spelling of Maria) immediately associates her to some Indian friends she had: "I really liked zose Indians. I sink of zem weri much as you speak English" (28); "Neegeria, Ah-h, Nee-ge-ria. Vas did you go to do in Neegeria?" (52). This awkwardness and ungrammatically articulated phrases reflect Marija's insensitiveness. Her English is therefore rendered absurd. Marija's insensitive nature lies in the fact that she can't distinguish Indians from Sissie and confuses Ghana to be geographically closer to Canada. When Aidoo has Marija mix up the words "flesh" and "meat" and offer Sissie "cold flesh", the author indeed links Marija's inarticulateness to her almost cannibalistic savagery. Marija's accent is a sign of her "primitive" nature lumping together Nigerians and Indians, and exhibiting such a crude interest in both of them. She does not only show signs of half truths but also demonstrates total unawareness of European colonial history which was based on the amplification of racial hierarchies.

Marija stands for the other natives in *Our Sister Killjoy*. Germans are depicted as the exotic, brutal and ignorant others robbed of humanity and individuality. Naming Maria's husband and son both Big and Little Adolph(s), Aidoo displays her disinterest in individualising these characters; they are strategically meant to allude to the aggressive history "that makes Bavaria the heart of Darkness of Aidoo's tale" (Hoeller 2004: 137). She, in a certain sense, fissures the discourse of mastery through an inventive way of manipulating prejudices and stereotypes. Consider how the protagonist stresses blackness in the text. She describes "the black Bavarian soil" (Aidoo 1977: 40), the Bavarian women who all wore black, and the dark plums with which Marija tries to seduce Sissie and which have a "skin-colour almost like her own" (40). So, as it is the case with old travellers in exotic lands wherein they encountered gloomy darkness, Sissie finds herself in Bavaria's "Brooding pine forest, on the / Bank of a soft floating river" (41). Bavaria's black forest is crammed with savage fertility, producing plums bigger and juicy than anywhere else on earth.

Sissie's story informs us about her relationship to Marija and the forbidden moment of lesbian interracial desire from which she withdrew and resist. Aidoo foregrounds that moment of temptation as steamed up in Darkness: "they sat and time crept on. The false dusk had given way to proper night. Darkness had brought her gifts of silence and heaviness, making the most carefree of us wonder, when

we are alone, about our place in all this” (61). Marija seduces Sissie and invites her to come up to the bedroom. The move upstairs gives the impression that Sissie is already contained and appropriated by the lascivious Marija; yet, what emerges abruptly is an intricately interwoven discourse of resistance through her refusal to be dominated. Instead of functioning as a passive and unconscious object of fantasy and desire, and significantly important when the reader is expecting both white and black bodies to come in a mutual embrace, Sissie pulls back and reacts against Marija’s different sexual orientation. If the Orient is depicted within the conventional stereotypical discourse as sensual, despot and lascivious, Aidoo works out a counter-stereotypical discourse, bringing clear evidence that the Western other is morally cruel and decadent. Her refusal to answer part of Marija’s desires is significantly important; it has created anxiety and brought her to tears, and has allowed a wonderful moment of the Oriental irony to thrive.

Sissie does not take the racial taxonomy imposed by the Western social order for granted. Indeed, she shows signs of spectacular resistance to the predominant colonialist mindset. Marija is attracted to Sissie thinking that she could use her as an exotic object for sexual desire and derision. To achieve her goal, she adopts a faked bourgeois lifestyle during her warm invitations to Sissie who is fully aware of the social masks she is mobilizing towards a strange, awkward and perverted love-affair. Marija attempts to turn Sissie into a “male”, trying to involve her to play the role of “a bastard. Not a bitch. A bastard” (Aidoo 1977: 75). Sissie rejects this conception of love and reacts with intense distaste and revulsion. Such an individual relationship is not to be taken for granted as a mere fiction, it is rather symptomatic of wider mechanisms of power. This is an instance whereby the whole Western discourse on Otherness becomes vulnerable to challenge. If the Orientalist ideology advocates a Western white identity that is superior and historically unbroken, Sissie, and by extension Ama Ata Aidoo, displaces this assumption and celebrates her ethically valued Otherness. Sura Rath argues that it is “no longer whether the subaltern can speak but what s/he is saying and how loud and clear the voice is ” (Rath 2004: 352). As a subalterned subject, Sissie makes a loud and clear voice against the degraded and degenerated moral structures of the West.

Drawing on Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of ambivalence, it becomes apparent that this very scene is inscribed within a complex and unstable space which “project[s] and disavow[s] difference” (Young 1990: 143). To keep the ‘Other’ under control and to expose his inferiority, the ‘Self’ asserts his difference; thus, “in order to possess and appropriate the native, the colonial discourse allows him enough sameness so as to make him knowable and familiar...without really completely erasing the traces of his difference” (Bekkaoui 1998: 59). These traces of difference are not only object of knowledge but also ambivalent terrains for

dreams and desires. For Bhabha, “it is the force of [this] ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency, ensures its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalization” (Bhabha 1994: 66). As Marija gazes at Sissie, she encounters herself reflected in the black Other who becomes at once reassuring and menacing; “a subject of difference that is almost the same but not quite” (86). If this sameness for Said stands for containment and appropriation, it is rather a subversively disruptive force for Bhabha. Hence, Sissie’s difference has definitely contaminated her observer’s ‘purity’ and has drawn it in complicit sameness; and instead of functioning as a contrast, she turns into a fearful double that disorients the German identity. In an act of subversion and appropriation of the dominant codes of power, the protagonist drives Marija, who is caught in the notion of the exotic and sensuous Other, into despair and psychological trauma in two different occasions: when she refuses to succumb to her lustful tendencies and her erotic flow, and also when she unexpectedly left to the North of the country. What Marija gets, accordingly, is total neglect and an incredible rejection. What is also worth stressing is Sissie’s self empowerment characterized by the dominance of her intellect over her emotions. This self-empowerment proves to be enabling for the protagonist to transcend the gaze of discrimination and assimilation.

Gendered Postcolonial Writing: African Immigrant Intellectual Revisited

Much of the African feminist writing that has emerged since the 1970s “addresses itself to the lives of men and women in poor peasant communities, and is concerned to convey an impression of the phenomenology and materiality of everyday existence-of what it feels like to live at a certain time in a certain place, within the constraints of particular social relationships” (Lazarus 1986: 59). As female subject from “post-colonial” Ghana, Aidoo creatively takes the concern further and with greatest sensitivity and awareness, she “engages in the discussion of the salient issues associated with Africa and the African Diaspora” (Ohaeto 2003: 158) and interrogates the potential intellectual male and his role in the decolonization process: “Things are working out / Towards their dazzling conclusions.../...so it is neither here nor there / what ticky-tackies we have / saddled and surrounded ourselves with / blocked our views / cluttered our brains” (Aidoo 1977: 3-4). From the outset, Aidoo, and through her protagonist’s black-eyed squint, charts out the in-betweenness of the “bad dream” the black intellectual male has embraced. Such a third space of non-belonging, which seems to be a “dazzling conclusion”, is what she treats with suspicion, interrogation and critical

consciousness. She believes that this form of diasporic identity hampers the African post-independence process of decolonization, liberation and self-determination. Such an illusive view of identity puts the role of the black male intellectual at stake; instead of being the agent of nation, history and culture, he becomes a “parrot-like” figure representing the position of his Western “bosses”:

What is frustrating, though in arguing with a nigger who is a “moderate” is that since the interests he is so busy defending are not even his own, he can regurgitate only what he has learned from his bosses for you (6).

This statement underscores Sissie’s deep sense of frustration at the unsafe position the African intellectual male has assumed in a supposedly post-colonial era. In adopting a position of the “official” spokesman for the western official discourse, he turns out to defend the interests of his neo-colonial masters, while on the other hand, fails to foreground the real issues pertaining to the shifting tensions of independence politics. This view is mainly due to the implicit forms of domination characteristic of the colonial-mindset that still defines the present relationship between the West and the rest. Sissie is not only frustrated by what she refers to as a “moderate” male model of the intellectual, but she is upset about the “idealist professional intellectual” as well. She declares vehemently that

The academic-pseudo- intellectual version is even more dangerous, who in the face of reality that is more tangible than the massive walls of the slave forts standing along our beaches, still talks of universal truth [...] without doubt, the experience is like what a lover of chess [...] must feel who goes to a partner’s for a game, but discovers he has to play against the dog of the house instead of the master himself (6).

As this passage clearly renders, Sissie, and by implication Ama Ata Aidoo, shows her total disapproval of the academic pseudo-intellectual version. For her, the academic pseudo-intellectual plays a more dangerous role than that of the diasporic intellectual, who views identity as a myth, and than that of the “moderate” intellectual, who is reduced into an ideological subject for his Western masters. That very danger lies in his almost unsighted conviction about the survival of universal truths. Indeed, such an assumption remains a Western-based aesthetic perception of the world that tends to adopt a depoliticized approach and a decontextualised view of human experience. This is what Sissie, however, can not accept by any means; instead, she politicizes the role of the intellectual and insists on a “universal” definition of the term.

The reality of Africa in general and Ghana in particular is shaped up by the power of the ex-colonizer who has deployed the political elite to represent his interests. It is that power which Sissie seeks to redefine, remodify and subvert and in so doing, she adopts an inspective approach to the intellectual that is similar to Edward Said's. In fact, Aidoo's view echoes Said's stance on the role of the intellectual; the only variation is that she is more explicit about her location, history, and culture. She seems, through Sissie, to voice out her position as third worldist and foregrounds the role that the political elite should play to go beyond the myth of universalism; a role that engages a "serious game against the master himself, and not just the dog of the house." Such a game implicitly involves the idea of struggle over power in mind. In his *Representations of the Intellectual*, Said declares that

The major choice faced by the intellectual is whether to be allied with the stability of the victors and rulers or – the more difficult path to consider that stability as a state of emergency threatening the less fortunate with the danger of complete extinction, and take into account the experience of subordination itself, as well as the memory of forgotten voices and persons (Said 1996: 35).

Said's position is fundamentally based on "speaking truth to power." Definitely, he is concerned with a critique of the perpetuation of the colonial legacy, and similarly, Aidoo stages the important role of the intellectual as an oppositional voice against the overriding colonial continuum so that he or she could be said to truly epitomize the postcolonial critical consciousness.

Equally important, the protagonist in *Our Sister Killjoy* does not take the trope of border crossing and black immigrants' experience in England for granted. With a historically loaded exilic consciousness, she reconsiders and puts the implications of the issue in an "apprehensible experience". Throughout the novel, and with a feminist consciousness in mind, she brings into the fore the other side of immigration as an index about the perpetuation of colonial legacy.

Through Sissie's subversive eyes, the reader is confronted with the plight of most black immigrants in England; victims of exploitation and disillusioned subjects who are relegated to secondary positions and "subjugated by the epistemic accidents of history" (Sanjay 1998: 8). For her, the west has nothing to offer for the ex-colonized but white supremacy, domination and disguised forms of subordination. She states that

Oppressed multitude from the provinces rushed to the imperial seat because that is where they know all salvation comes from. But as other imperial subjects in

other times and other places have discovered, for the slave, there is nothing at the centre but slavery (Aidoo 1977: 87-88).

The myth of glory associated with the “Self” is intensively denied in Aidoo’s narrative and the everlasting colonial allegory that conceives of England as a source of prosperity gets subverted. This colonial myth is undone through the deconstruction of what she refers to as “the been-tos” experience. Aidoo insists that the “been tos” experience is a mere fabricated lie (91) and that the whole pretense called independence is a mere “Hoax [...] a refinement of the colonial system, not its abolition” (Lazarus 1986: 55).

Sissie closes with a request for all immigrants to return home. This plea symbolizes a deeply-seated “concern for the priority of allegiance to Africa” (Samantrai 1995: 141). By so doing, she seems to be engaged in a counter discourse that aims at subverting the colonial stereotype which views the West as a source of wealth and power; a stereotype that is legitimized, reinforced and fostered by male African immigrants. Such a male myth is undermined by Sissie through uncovering the ideological insinuations inherent in the experience of black immigrants who are on a permanent quest for instant success, urgent prosperity and accessible freedom.

Clearly, then, and in calling the whole African immigrants to go back home, Aidoo’s narrative seems to back up an essentialist nationalism which is based on an African racial essence, and which condemns the nation-defying identification of immigrants and Diaspora dwellers. But Aidoo’s main concern, I believe, is to expose the ongoing process by which the spectre of colonial epistemologies still continues to haunt the neo-colonial era. She argues that conditions of life in contemporary Africa show the extent to which the present continues to be shaped by forces that can be traced back to the European colonial projects. This is the context in which her black-eyed squint protagonist insists on allegiance to Africa, and puts into question the implication of African immigration to Europe. Sissie’s outspoken decision to go back home is not an act of individual choice; the economic circumstances that make immigration a fascinating option for middle class Africans have to be read in the larger framework of international politics and hegemony.

Though Aidoo shows strong commitment to the ‘African cause’, her nationalism is not anti-western; and though she privileges an African identity, she does so but as a reaction towards the moment when she is fixated by a German woman as “a Black girl” (Aidoo 1997: 12). The whole novel, then, becomes a moment of reflection over the significance of “difference in human coloring” (12); and “More than being an effect of or a witness to the apparatus that lynches the colors of humanity into deathly pale rubrics of its reign, Sissie dislodged such fixity that

mutilated her into a placeless rupture in the Great Chain of Being” (Haiping 2002: 260). She continues to interrogate the use of race in the West as a measure of sameness and difference and eventually endeavors to resist its fixity in a naturalized hierarchy. Hence, the nationalism she suggests might be seen as quintessentially founded on the proclamation of a racial essence; but what she rather undertakes is the undermining of race as a foundational identity through the category of gender. Her return to Ghana shows, on the one hand, a racial solidarity that is founded on her knowledge of the history of colonialism and race relations. The whole novel, thus, becomes creatively textured with chronotopes of various messages which provide “a modal for a nationalism that is not essentialist or reactionary, but rather provisional, historically committed and pragmatically conscious” (Samantrai 1995: 142). On the other hand, the homecoming does not totally exclude this initial insight to back up a simplistic confirmation of a foundational racial identity. On the contrary, during her whole travel in Europe, she keeps questioning and problematizing the histories that have emanated from the use of the notion of race and the historical *epistemes* that have hampered the potential unity of the African experience. Aidoo’s focus on the African woman and her support for nationalism are not based on the fixity of an essential African identity. Although she celebrates the African collectiveness, she does it only as a political strategy similar to what Gayatri Spivak would call “strategic essentialism”, with the aim of unmaking the Western view of race as an essentialist measure of sameness and difference.

Consequently, While Edward Said’s thesis believes that “the West is the actor, the Orient a passive reactor” (Said 1978: 109), and if his model advocates a muted otherness reduced into a passive object vulnerable to penetrability and domination, it seems that Aidoo is actively engaged in sketching a counter discourse which subverts the Orientalist tradition and allows Sissie to assert her identity and resist both the psychological burden of colonial dogmatic beliefs and the dominant ideological currents that devalue Africa and its people.

Notes:

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