



## **Idealization of Female Characters by African Women Writers: The Case of *Anowa***

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### **ABSTRACT**

Owing to the erroneous, fragmented and most times derogatory representation of female characters by male authors of the Old Tradition, Barbara Christian exhorts women to write saying: "If black women do not say who they are, other people will, and say it badly for them" (xiii). Women, therefore, write not to idealize female characters but to validate woman's personality, authenticate her experience, reveal her psyche and provide a more realistic and complete image of woman as a separate human entity from man. It has become compelling for women to write to elucidate to fellow women and to humankind, in general, the true identity of woman and her tragic condition. This would enable women, the world over, to revolt against those retrogressive, social norms, imbibed through patriarchal socialization, which militate against women, so as to revolutionize those customs which, have hitherto inhibited women from full physical and mental development and self-actualization. In the play *Anowa*, the African female writer, Ama Ata Aidoo, confers the position of the principal character on a woman, *Anowa*, and endows her with positive qualities in her revolutionary and transcendentary roles so as to serve as a model for the contemporary African woman to emulate, for the positive transformation of the society.

### **INTRODUCTION**

To enquire into the idealization of female principal characters is to explore reasons why women write. The lack of extensive exploration of female characters and women's concerns by male writers who had, hitherto, dominated the literary scene - just as they had most other spheres of human endeavours, because they had an earlier opportunity to embrace western education - has compelled female writers to write. Just as the early African male writers like Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o had to write to correct the false myths and wrong impressions of alleged non-existence of culture or history in Africa before the arrival of the European colonialists, so also have African female writers like Flora Nwapa and Ama Ata Aidoo been

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compelled to write to correct the false gender myths that inhibit women from attaining self-realization and self-actualization. This is with the intention of getting women to revolt against their oppressive condition and fashion out avenues of revolutionizing the status quo. These female writers have set out not to idealize female characters but to validate woman's humanity and personality, authenticate her experience, repudiate the negative and derogatory images ascribed to female characters by male writers, and celebrate the physical and mental capabilities of women, reveal her psyche and provide a more realistic and complete image of woman as a separate human entity from man. It has become imperative for women to write to elucidate to fellow women and to humankind, in general, the true identity and the tragic condition of woman, and the double victimization of the African woman.

When female Africans write, they either make women the theme of their literary enquiry or female gender issues an essential part of their subject matter. Therefore, female writers do not set out to idealize their female characters as if in support of sexism.

### **Possible Reasons for the Subjugation of Women**

Men hardly understand the spiritual strength of women like their intuition and other apparent mysteries surrounding them, especially their reproductive abilities. Consequently, men tend to use all available avenues to dominate and subjugate women, and to sustain the latter's position as second rate citizens. H.R. Hayes posits that since:

...human institutions grow from deep and primal anxieties and are shaped by irrational psychological mechanism... Socially organized attitudes toward women arise from basic tensions expressed by the male (8).

### **Definition of Terms**

The term "Idealization of female characters" here refers to the conferment of all female characters with only positive qualities to render them more admirable to the detriment of male characters. This presupposes that the portrayal of all male characters by female writers is inferior and, perhaps, ridiculous.

The phrase "African women writers" refers to African female writers who either make women the theme of their literary enquiry or female gender issues an essential part of their subject matter, and who engage in the projection of female characters in both their creative and critical literary works for a better understanding of women's identity, psyche, experience and their almost global tragic condition of subjugation. In this context, "African women writers" does not include male writers who may sometimes write about women, no matter how positive their perspective.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The sociological approach qualified by the feminist critical theory and practice will be adopted in this study. This is because this essay has to do with the justification of the projection and apparent idealization of female characters in the play, *Anowa*. Although this study is limited to the analysis of *Anowa*, because it is the first of Ama Ata Aidoo's plays where the female protagonist is most clearly defined and portrayed to serve the female gender cause, this paper, first of all, examines the stages of development in the exploration of woman in African literature.

### **The Development of Woman in African Literature**

Although sexism and gender hierarchy already existed in Africa in pre-colonial times, colonialism aggravated the woman's condition with the introduction of western education which gave men an earlier opportunity to go to school. Consequently, there were initially only male African literary writers and critics who created stereotypical images and derogatory roles for women to suit men's needs in everyday life. Such images include that of the all-sacrificing mother who devotes her whole life to the service of her husband, children and the society, and never attaining full physical and mental development nor realizing self-fulfillment. One of Africa's leading women writers, Buchi Emecheta has demonstrated the falsehood of this type of motherhood in her novel, *Joys of Motherhood*. Another erroneous image of women in male-authored works is that of woman as primarily a biological aperture or phallic receptacle to satisfy men's sexual needs. This is evident in Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* and Abdoulaye Sadju's *Maimouna*. There is yet another stereotypical image of the unchanging, naïve, rural woman represented in Okot P. Bitek's *Song of Lawino*. This image tends to coincide with the wishes of most African men who prefer to discourage change and innovation in the lives of African women, so that women can remain subservient in the service of men and the society like the eternal cook or baby nurse and attendant to the old and infirm.

The image of woman as depicted by male African authors is often culture-based and usually inhibited by certain factors like the period of writing, its social realities and the nature of the experience explored. In the works situated in traditional societies, woman is often depicted as home-bound and contented with her roles as mother, daughter, wife or co-wife. Yet, while men's design, according to Simone de Beauvoir, has been not to repeat themselves in time, but to take control of the instant and mould the future (132), most women have been conditioned through patriarchal socialization to be involved only in repetitive tasks like child bearing, child-rearing and domestic chores which make them attain nothing but immanence and passivity. This is the image of them that male authors prefer to continue to represent in literature, as if time and culture were not dynamic.

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African literary criticism was also initially dominated by European male critics like Gerald Moore, Charles Larson, C. L. Innes, Bernth Lindfors, Robert Fraser, among others, in whose metropolis the texts were published. They were later followed by indigenous African male critics such as Eustace Palmer, Ernest Emenyonu, Charles Nnolim, Isidore Okpewho, Emmanuel Ngara, Chidi Maduka, Chidi Ikonne, among others, most of whom were educated in the western metropolis, and who had adopted some of the Victorian biases against women. These western-oriented African critics exhibited both phallic and Eurocentric biases because their evaluations of African texts were initially based on western standards and values, with hardly any cognizance taken of any possible African literary aesthetics. They transferred their western and indigenous sexist prejudices unto African literature. This is confirmed by Oladele Taiwo who states that the way female characters are represented in male-authored works mirrors the contempt with which women are generally treated in society. Oladele Taiwo asserts:

It is not always that male writers have been biased; they have merely presented the female social situation as it is. This is why for the most part a woman occupies a position of inferiority since the writer is anxious to be faithful to the realities of the world he portrays (11– 12).

Eustace Palmer, another African literary critic, transfers the mutilated and falsified images and derogatory roles of women unto literary criticism through the following allegation:

The traditional African woman does not feel that the acceptance of her man's dominance necessarily diminishes her. Contrarily, she sees her femininity as consisting precisely in her cheerful acceptance of and willingness to fulfill her allotted role (39).

Palmer's claim demonstrates how gender myths are formulated and women's disparaging roles perpetuated by male writers in literature.

Owing to the falsified, fragmented and most times derogatory representation of women by male authors, Babara Christian exhorts women to write by warning: "If black women do not say who they are, other people will, and say it badly for them" (xiii). It has been necessary for women to write in order to elucidate to fellow women and to humanity in general the true identity of woman and her tragic condition so that women could revolt and revolutionize the retrogressive norms which have, hitherto, subjugated them through socialization. For as Maryse Conde has rightly observed:

The personality and the inner reality of African women have been hidden under such a heap of myths, so-called ethnological theories, rapid generalizations and patent untruths that it might be interesting to study what they have to say for themselves when they decide to speak (132).

In recent times women are beginning to get involved in African literature as creative writers, literary critics, publishers and readers. The change, according to Grace Okereke, “reflects the changing concept of women in society in modern times consequent upon education, urbanization and the Women Liberation Movement, all of which have equipped women with self-awareness and self-expansion” (55). Ebele Eko celebrates this change in her article “Changes in the image of the African Women: A Celebration” (215). According to Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, the advent of women into an exclusively male literary world has been possible with growing urbanization, better education of women, and an increasing sensitivity to the inequalities of sexism (61). Consequently, from the African literary scene have emerged female creative writers like Flora Nwapa, Ama Ata Aidoo, Efua Sutherland, Zaynab Alkali, Bessie Head, Grace Ogot, Zulu Sofola, Micere Mugo, Mariama Ba, Buchi Emecheta, Tess Onwueme, among others. These female literary writers have tried to identify who the African woman really is, and sought to represent a more complete image of her. They are, thus, validating the existence of woman as a separate entity from man, and as his divine equal in the African world view. This is opposed to the western ethos where woman is believed to be an appendage of man, or to have been created from his rib as an after-thought so as to complement his inadequacies or those qualities lacking in him. They are, at the same time, attempting to authenticate woman’s experience which is her body.

#### **Double Victimization of the African Woman: A Remedy**

Since the African woman is doubly victimized, first as a woman and then as an African with a past history of slavery and colonization, Aidoo, an African female writer, is committed to the emancipation of women and all Africans, even in the Diaspora. Consequently, Aidoo celebrates the capabilities of women and the culture of black people as a means of restoring the oppressed people’s eroded self-confidence and of setting up models for them to emulate.

Aidoo’s female characters are so impressive that a critic like Mildred Hill-Lubin rates her portrayal of mothers as the best among African woman writers (256). Ebele Eko sees Anowa as the forerunner of Sissie, who in turn is considered a dynamic synthesis of Europe and Africa. Eko believes that Aidoo, in her exploration of the identity of women has been inspired to experiment with various genres like drama, the novel, short stories and even poetry (215). Aidoo’s women, especially her central characters, are often ahead of their times in terms of vision and ideas.

The beauty of Aidoo’s enquiry in the play *Anowa* lies in her success in using her feminist concern as a stepping-stone for the advocacy of universal freedom and peace through agape or sacrificial love and for the abrogation of all oppressive institutions like slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism of both territory and the mind. Conscious of the domination and subjugation of women in nearly all spheres of life almost the world over, Aidoo like most African women writers confers the position of principal character on a

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woman, Anowa. Some examples of African women writers and their works in which female characters serve as protagonists or principal characters are Aidoo's *Anowa*, *Our Sister Killjoy*; *Changes: A Love Story*, Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* and *Joys of Motherhood*; Zaynab Alkali's *Stillborn*; Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* and *Scarlet Song*, among others.

Commenting on the development of the female novel in Africa, Okereke writes:

The image of woman bearing her burdens in conformity with tradition which is obvious in their early novels, gives way to the image of woman adopting different strategies for survival and striving for self-assertion against the tidal wave of patriarchal definition of woman in their later works. These stages I designate the apologetic and feminist stages (60).

Thus, the heroine of "the feminist stage" is depicted as fashioning out her own method of revolt and breaking bounds to gain her freedom. Okereke contrasts thus the heroine of the "apologetic" and that of the "feminist" novel:

While for the heroine of the apologetic novel, spatial mobility is restricted by domestic needs, the heroine of the protest feminist novel symbolically launches out into a long physical and psychological journey to independence (60).

The female writers who define woman in the traditional ethos do so in protest to draw society's attention to the injustice meted out to, and suffered by women in the name of culture and tradition. Good examples of such novels are Nwapa's *Efuru*, and Emecheta's *The Bride Price*, *The Slave Girl* and *The Joys of Motherhood*. Ama Ata Aidoo in her short stories succeeds in defining woman in the traditional ethos or in the pre-colonial environment and in the urban setting. She depicts woman both in the proletariat and the bourgeois classes.

Aidoo is self-confident and literarily revolutionary probably because she is an educated woman from the matrilineal Akan clan of Ghana where in the pre-colonial or non-westernized society, power held by the men is channeled through female descent or the mother's lineage, and where like most places in coastal West Africa, women enjoy some measure of freedom and privileges denied others, especially in the West. So Aidoo creates strong, intelligent, resourceful and resilient, protagonists like the eponymous *Anowa*, *Sissie* in the novel, *Our Sister Killjoy*, and *Esi* in *Changes*, among others in her short stories.

Although the number of creative works by African women was initially exiguous or scanty, the growing corpus of their creative works has not made much difference. The female African writer has continued to be neglected,

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especially by male critics. This is corroborated by Sagaawa as quoted by Micere Mugo:

The discussion of African literature usually centers on the male writer and character. If the critic is concerned with women, it is mostly her significance to the style of the author that interests him. Rarely has the role of the woman in fiction been of serious interest to the [male] critic of African literature. And the female writer finds herself in similar circumstances. While most of the male African writers have received wide coverage, the female writer has until recently, tended to be neglected (Sagaawa 164, qtd. in Mugo 38).

In recent times, there has been a gradual change by a few male African literary writers in their portrayal of women. As Juliet Okonkwo and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi blazed the trail in feminist literary criticism by attacking the early male creative writers, this criticism has yielded positive results in the improved female portrayures in the later works of a few notable gynandrists, or African male writers with empathy for women. Even Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, whose female characters in the traditional novels were portrayed, according to Okereke' as "behind the scene, and only relevant as they fitted into the man's world (51)," have recreated and depicted improved images of the female characters in their more recent novels. They include Achebe's portrayal of Beatrice and Elewa in *Anthills of the Savannah* (1988), Ngugi's Mumbi in *A Grain of Wheat* (1967); Wanja in *Petals of Blood* (1977), and Wariinga and Wangari in *Devil on the Cross* (1983); Sembene Ousmane's *N'Deye Touti, Ramatoulaye, Penda and Maimouna in God's Bits of Wood* (1970), and Alex La Guma's Myra in "The Slipper Satin" and Ma Tau in *Time of thae Butcherbird* (1979). Other works with improved female portrayures include Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* (1966) and Wole Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* (1975).

In Sembene Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood*, for instance, women are depicted as contributing to the struggle for economic and social survival by taking up the challenge to cater for their families while their men, the railway workers, go out on strike to demand social justice. In the same novel, Penda, the heroine is depicted as an activist who leads the women of Senegal to march to Dakar to present their grievances to the French authorities. In Alex la Guma's *Time of the Butcher Bird*, Mma-Tau is built into a monumental figure and depicted as symbolizing black resistance to racial oppression in South Africa. With such increasing political awareness, Wole Soyinka creates a character like Iriyise in *Season of Anomy*, while Chinua Achebe depicts that of Beatrice in *Anthill of the Savannah*. In Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*, Wangara is liberated from the constraints of patriarchally imposed roles on women and allowed to organize and, like Penda, to lead the people of Ilmorog to Nairobi to quest for improved living conditions. These recent images depict women as active, intelligent, multi-dimensional human beings, capable of expansion and transcendence. They are not depicted as

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only limited to the home space or to postures of dependence and subservience.

Even though male writers sometimes depict female characters from a positive perspective, such portrayals cannot always be complete, accurate or comprehensive enough because male writers lack that advantage which Arlyn Diamond refers to as the “authority of experience” (i), which their female counterparts have. As a result, women have been compelled to write in order to correct those stereotype images and derogatory roles ascribed to their gender in majority of male-authored works. When women write, their scholarship, according to Emilia Oko, is tantamount to “reasoned judgment aided by empathy by the sex that experiences female existence as her body” (Oko; *Issues of Gender*, 35).

Apart from Juliet Okonkwo and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, more African female literary critics like Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, Nawal el Saadawi, Micere Mugo, Ama Ata Aidoo, Helen Chukwuma, Ebele Eko, Emilia Oko, Chioma Opara, Monique Ekpong and Grace Okereke have emerged, and are continuing the fight for women’s recognition and liberation in the world outside of texts.

According to feminist literary writers whose ultimate goal is to achieve equal rights and opportunities for both sexes man and woman should be seen as created equal in essence and design, but different in biological structure so as to complement each other for harmony in nature and for the ecological continuity of the human race. For that reason, man’s concept of woman as a socio-cultural construct should change. Woman should no longer be regarded only as man’s appendage, adjunct, servant, slave, a breeder of his children, or a biological aperture for man’s sexual satisfaction, without any consideration for her own sexual needs, for example, or for her self-realization. Woman should be regarded as a rational being that is capable of taking her own decisions and of contributing meaningfully towards the development of her community and nation.

Since man and woman are both emotionally sensitive, woman’s comfort, interest and satisfaction should be taken into consideration by man so that he can obtain the fullest possible joy and satisfaction from her. This is what the character, Oko, in the novel *Changes*, fails to do for his wife Esi which leads to marital rape and eventually to divorce. It is the failure of the society to understand that woman continues to be the completer of creation and contributor towards its perfection that women’s marginalization has continued to perpetuate disharmony, dissatisfaction and partial development of the society and the nation. Taking the African context as an example, Aidoo states sharply:

Over the last five hundred years, we’ve had African men in leadership positions, certainly since Africa’s collusion with the Western world. Isn’t it clear that the African man alone isn’t able to cope with our relationship with the West and the rest of the world? (Maja Pearce 1990:18 as qtd. in Wilentz, 4).

Most female African writers who have now emerged on the literary scene, including Ama Ata Aidoo, incensed by the earlier mentioned anomalies, are determined to comply with Anais Nin's exhortation, as she reiterates:

The woman artist has to create something different from man...She has to sever herself from the myth man creates, from being created by him; she has to struggle with her own cycles, storms, terrors which man does not understand (ALT 15:12 as qtd by Ogundipe-Leslie).

These female writers now exhibit gender sensitivity and empathy for the oppressed, especially women. They now revisit, criticize, and question the traditional African literary corpus, and are resolved to represent the entire African woman in her diverse life situations, and not the inauthentic, falsified and fragmented image of her and her socially prescribed disparaging roles alone as, hitherto, depicted in male-authored works. That is why Ibrahima Ndiaye asserts;

Writers with a feminist perspective are progressively moving away from the all too-often stereotyped images of women as victors or victims –dutiful wives, good mothers, foolish virgins, femmes fatales, prostitutes –toward stronger images of symbols of African women, not only taking active and shared roles with men, but also taking responsibility for their own destinies (1).

Resolved to treat women's concerns as part of a legitimate aspect of literature, they now create prototype of self that refuses to be the construct of man and they reject the false veneration of woman that sets impossible moral standards for her as virgin or saint, while man is free to live as an autonomous entity. They are determined to also create woman as an autonomous being, capable of attaining self-fulfillment, making mistakes or sometimes failing in her destiny like any normal human being, just as Esi Aidoo's, novel, *Changes*, does. Each of the female writers like Aidoo attempts to demonstrate a woman's power to understand, perceive and feel with her fellow African women, mirror the society, and interpret reality and her world from an African woman's perspective, for the liberation of women and the positive transformation of the entire society. It is in response to an exhortation such as that of Anais Nin that Ama Ata Aidoo has decided to write. How she achieves her goal through the play, *Anowa*, constitutes the main thrust of this paper.

### **Analysis of *Anowa***

Since Aidoo is educated and from the matrilineal Akan clan of Ghana, she is self-confident enough to explore the subjugation of woman and feels

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empowered to be literarily revolutionary. She creates a strong, intelligent, resourceful and resilient female protagonist like the eponymous Anowa. Even though the play *Anowa* is situated in a traditional, patriarchal society where women are usually subjugated owing to the existence of sexism and gender hierarchy, Ama Ata Aidoo still confers the position of the central character on a woman, the eponymous Anowa. Aidoo equips her with positive and unique qualities to revolt against those sociologically imposed inhibitions, deprivations, derogatory images and degrading stereotypical roles which impede women from self-definition and full realization of their capabilities. In addition, Aidoo uses her artistic vision to fashion out in the character of Anowa new complimentary images and positive transcendental roles for other women to emulate. In *Anowa*, Aidoo authenticates the female personality, and renders more human her experiences which reveal her psyche and provide a more realistic, accurate and complete image of woman.

Aidoo depicts Anowa as a specially gifted person with unique attributes, having been born a dance priestess. As a tragic character, she is destined right from birth to be special and her positive attributes are worthy of note and emulation. After successive child losses at birth, Anowa's mother, Badua, pledges any surviving child as a dance priestess to one of the several priestesses whom she consults. However, Badua fails to honour her pledge in spite of her husband's and society's pleas. Although a unique and gifted girl-child, Anowa still submits to the traditional institution of marriage. However, she chooses a husband without reference to her parents, thereby provoking a confrontation with her parents and the society. She, thus, challenges the retrogressive and obnoxious norm in African traditional culture of compulsory marriage to a parent-picked husband. Anowa also celebrates woman's mental capabilities through this choice. She gives the lie to the fallacy that women must depend on men to reason or take decisions for them. This choice of a husband thus serves as Anowa's first method of revolt. The playwright, Aidoo, individualizes woman's psyche in *Anowa* and accentuates the question of her individual destiny. Although Anowa has grown up freely in her matrilineal environment without sensing any inhibitions or deprivations, she is awakened later in early womanhood to the domination of the girl-child by her parents and the entire society.

Her parents' contention is not only with Anowa's individualistic choice of a husband but also with the kind of person chosen. This confrontation with her parents cannot but culminate in a tragic fall. As Anowa leaves home, she boasts to her mother, Badua, that she would "walk so well" that she would no longer return home to Yebi for support or assistance. She also promises to help her husband to do something with his life (18). This promise amounts to her ambition to be self-reliant, thus giving a fore taste of a tragic existence which is prophesied by the character, Old Woman, in these words: "...the sapling breaks with bending that will not grow straight" (8). This substantiates the evidence that women are subjugated even by the larger society and not only by their parents or immediate family.

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### **Anowa: The Feminist**

Anowa is, therefore, a revolutionary, self-assertive, intelligent, resilient young woman whose uniqueness of character and highly perceptive mind place her well ahead of her chauvinistic, unenlightened African traditional society as an avant-garde feminist. Anowa's choice of a husband for herself constitutes her search for self definition. She exercises her freewill not only by choosing a husband but also by departing from home and determining to start a trade with her husband in order to become self-reliant. This reveals her determination to take her own decisions, take her destiny into her own hands, and transcend traditional norms which subjugate women, in order that she might attain self-realization and self-fulfillment.

### **Anowa as Principal Character**

The conferment of the position of principal character on a woman, Anowa, is one of Aidoo's strategies of elevating woman from her subordinate position which she has, hitherto, been made to occupy both in the society and in male-authored literary works of the Old Tradition. Since the drama is predominantly Anowa's, it is her psychological conflicts that account for the conflict of emotion in the play. The sympathy of the audience tends to lie with Anowa, particularly as the playwright, Aidoo, gradually reveals that Anowa is indeed morally, spiritually and perceptively superior to her husband, Kofi Ako.

Anowa abhors slavery right from the first time she learns of it from her grandmother. Subsequently in her dream, Anowa assumes the super-mother figure and symbol of Africa, whose children were captured and sold to slavery by the western predators, though aided and abetted by the kith and kin of the enslaved Africans. Perhaps, it is this psychological revolt against slavery, as manifest in her dream that has caused Anowa to remain childless, so that she might not produce children who would later be taken into slavery. Aidoo through her literary art subtly reveals to all women and to humanity in general that the oppression of woman, especially in marriage, is a form of slavery and, therefore, should be eradicated.

### **Kofi Ako: A Less Admirable Character**

Even though the character of Kofi Ako is fairly extensively explored, the playwright, Aidoo, highlights certain negative traits which mar his personality. These include his laziness, love for the acquisition of wealth at the expense of any regard for the humanity of his fellow human beings, his egotism and ostentatious life—style. Kofi Ako's laziness is first insinuated by Badua, his mother-in-law when she refers to him as “This-I-am-the-handsome-one-with-a-stick-between-my-teeth-in-the-marketplace” (15). He enslaves his fellow human beings for his own prosperity, personal comfort and self-aggrandizement, and speaks of them as “not expensive. . .” (29).

Despite Anowa's highly perceptive mind and bright ideas, Kofi Ako's mentality is too deeply rooted in sexism and patriarchal socialization of gender hierarchy to accept her intelligence and soundness of mind. He is

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afraid of her because of her capacity to understand him and see through his short-comings and failures. It is this fear of the explosion of the bubble known as “masculinity” that causes most men to fight back and speak disdainfully and derogatorily of women once their false position of superiority is threatened. That is why when Kofi Ako fails to sustain his argument with Anowa in defence of his trading in slaves he resorts to denigrating womanhood by saying to his wife, Anowa: “Besides, you are only talking like a woman” (29). In the end, it is the exposure of the emptiness in Oko’s arrogance of male superiority that leads to his death when Anowa discloses that Kofi Ako, her husband, is impotent.

Although Kofi Ako’s personality is constantly reduced to a mere shadow through the deflationary technique whenever he is juxtaposed beside Anowa, the playwright, Aidoo, also creates other conventional stereotypical images of men in the characters of Old Man and Osam. Since it is a male-oriented society, these men appear more self-confident, objective and rational, unlike Old Woman and Badua, representing the conventional stereotypical images of women, who are fretful, easily agitated and complacent with woman’s subservient position in society, owing to their patriarchal socialization. The points of view of Osam and Old Man remain chauvinistic and subjugative of women. For example, when Old Man admires Anowa’s beauty, he thinks of nothing else but her suitability as a nobleman’s wife (7). However, Old Man’s objectivity can be sensed in his partial blame of the society for some of Anowa’s behaviour when he wonders aloud:

Who knows if Anowa  
would have been a  
better person if we  
had not been what we  
are! (64).

The portrayal of some male characters as assertive in the play, Anowa confirms the postulation that most African female writers, including Aidoo, do not set out to idealize female characters and ridicule the male. Since Aidoo is a woman, she does not expend her energy trying to think and introspect like a man, even though she has proved in her literary works that she can do so efficiently.

Concerning the issue of adopting women as central characters, here are Aidoo’s views as stated in her article, “Unwelcome Pals and Decorative Slaves”:

Whom am I to write about? Men? But why? Do you ask your male writers why they write about men? It should be natural for a man to probe, to mourn, to celebrate the human male. He is a male, in the image of himself. In a mirror he meets him every morning. More often than he meets woman. And that should go for women writers (Medium and Message 31).

Nana Wilson-Tagoe attributes the imbalance in the representation of male and female characters by any female writer, or Aidoo in this case, to the fact that:

Her identification with the female protagonists may be so total that it may consume all her creative energies, leaving her with a fully realized heroine, and only blurred images of the male characters with whom she relates (85).

### **Non-Idealized Female Characters**

To corroborate the postulation that women writers do not set out to idealize female characters, there are instances during the development of Anowa's character when her views and actions are inconsistent with her revolutionary feminist character. Such instances include her encouragement of Kofi Ako, her husband, to marry a second wife, thereby advocating polygamy; and her reference to her mother Badua as a witch. In spite of the African traditional culture which accepts polygamy, historical records reveal that women are not usually happy as co-wives in polygamy. The human wicked tendency of inhumanity to one another and the patriarchal socialization of woman against her sex and herself have caused her sometimes to speak derogatorily about her kind. Initially, the wrong concept of woman as witch was conceived by man, owing to his lack of understanding of woman. Afterwards, this wrong notion has been extended to and imbibed by women through patriarchal socialization. Lewis Althusser in his essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," illustrates how social regulation through ideological state apparatuses can effectively coerce people to willingly partake in their own exploitation (171-2). As a result, women get so indoctrinated in the patriarchal system that most of them are frequently used as agents of oppression against themselves or other women, just as Anowa serves against her mother. That is why Anowa refers to her mother, Badua, a fellow woman, as a witch. No wonder Emilia Oko laments that women turn out to become worst enemies of themselves or of one another. As negatively socialized patriarchal constructs, women are generally, in the words of Emilia Oko, "unreliable friends and companions" (230) to one another.

Since men, from primeval times, have devised the divide and rule strategy to disunite women, set them up against one another, and use them as agents for the enforcement of patriarchy, women cannot generally, relate harmoniously with one another to experience the sublimities of true friendship. It is not surprising, then, that even older female characters like Badua and Old Woman contribute in championing the cause of men. Badua blames her daughter, Anowa, for refusing to join her husband, Kofi Ako, in slave trade to acquire wealth. Upholding male-supremacy, Old Woman questions Anowa's self assertion and intelligence in relation to her husband

### *Idealization of Female Characters by African Women Writers*

when she asks: "What woman is she who thinks she knows better than her husband in all things?" (40). This corroborates the postulation that such women who accept woman's subordinate position and subjugated condition with complacency, as a matter of course, are constructs of a patriarchal male-oriented society. Badua's ideals and ideas regarding her wishes for her daughter conform to those of her Akan patriarchal society where women's roles, prescribed by men, are complacently accepted by women. The following is what Badua envisions her daughter to become:

a human woman, Marry a man, Tend a farm and be happy to see  
her onions grow. A woman like her should bear children Many  
children so she can afford to have one or two die (12).

These traditionally prescribed patriarchal roles involve repetitive tasks which make women attain nothing but immanence and passivity. Badua's wishes exhibit the stunted development of women's mentality and vision as a result of their patriarchal socialization. The remaining roles listed by Badua and expected of her daughter lend themselves only after menopause:

Should she not take Her place at meetings Among men and women  
of her clan? And sit on my chair When/I am gone? And a  
captainship in the army should not be beyond her when the time is  
ripe (12-13)!

These subsequent roles confirm that womanhood in Africa does not only relate to gender, and that situations exist where women adopt other gender roles. Another female character in the play who accepts without questioning the subservient position of woman is the Slave Girl. Her wishes for herself if she ever exchanged positions with Anowa corroborate the postulation that most women are complacent in their subjugated condition.

Why if I were her! What would I not do? What would  
I not have? As much as my eye will fancy and the best  
my heart desires (50)?

Owing to the wickedness of the human heart and negative socialization, discrimination against women has eaten so deep into our social fabrics that women themselves participate in the denigration of other more intelligent and self-assertive women, just as Badua and Old Woman do to Anowa.

### **CONCLUSION**

African women write to expose or elucidate to women themselves who have been, hitherto, patriarchally socialized, and to humankind, in general, the sexist tragedy of women. In the process, these female writers tend to idealize

their female principal characters to serve as role models for other women to emulate. Such positively represented female characters also serve as models, so that even the mentality of the rest of the society can get re-orientated and their concept of women's physical and mental capabilities and possible roles in society can get expanded. Such re-orientation is bound to take place if there are more self-assertive self-reliant and humane female characters and women with similar qualities in the society. A good example of such a female character is the eponymous Anowa who becomes an advocate for the abrogation of slavery, and the emancipation of women, especially in marriage.

The protagonist, Anowa, validates the existence of woman as a separate human entity from man and as his divine equal in the African world view. This is contrary to the western ethos where woman is believed to be an appendage of man, or to have been created from his rib as an after-thought so as to complement those qualities lacking in him.

The projection of positive images of both male and female characters by African male and female writers, respectively, would strike the needed balance, and increase the respect for and the value of women in the society. This would give women the opportunity to develop their physical and mental capabilities as part of human resources for a more holistic development of the nation.

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