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# Women Writers' Imagining of Men: The Imaging and Representation of Men in West African Women's Writings, Narratives and Novels: Implications for the Formation of the Human Subject/Individual and Induction into the Symbolic Order: Redirecting the Gaze

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## ABSTRACT

This work is an examination of women's writings, particularly of novels and narratives in West Africa, and what they structure for meaning in relation to men in the formation of the individual and their induction into the symbolic order of becoming human subjects. The paper supposes that women's writings imagine, image and typify men according to certain frameworks and practice consciously or unconsciously derived from some basic and yet indeterminate source. The study attempts to trace out the outlines of some of these representations of men, leading to the frameworks within which they are typified and cast using a specimen of four popular women's writings across West Africa. The significance of this study relates to the effect such imagination, imaging and typification have on the growth of young male children in West African societies. In other words, its goal is to understand the implications and effect of such representations and frameworks of imagination on the character of men and their empowerment for growth, maturity and productivity or otherwise.

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*eventual productivity within the normalcy of the growth process through the symbolic order.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The importance of the creation of the human subject and their induction into the symbolic order towards transforming him/her from the grip of nature to culture in order to ensure that they become persons capable of productivity who appreciate the repression of the pleasure principle in order to consciously channel their energies into the production of civilization and direct themselves away from the likelihood of degeneration and mental ill-health in support of mental wellness and mental well-being cannot be overemphasized. The task of this paper is to investigate the effects of women's imaginative writings about men in the manner in which men are portrayed and imagined that can affect the process of the creation of the male human subject, and even of the female human subject, towards productivity if these prejudice the process of children's induction into the symbolic order.

## II. THE PRESENT FOCUS OF WOMEN'S WRITINGS IN WEST AFRICA

In the effort to articulate and represent women's experiences of the realities of existence in a materialist existential fashion, women writers have taken resort to the notion of the power relations between men and women and have

elaborated these through literary works, especially through narratives in several domains. Making power relations the centre of focus has crystallized their imaginations around certain representations of men, affecting how they conceptualize the relationships between men and women and their implications for women. Whereas this may inure to the benefit of the female kind in society in several ways, its effect upon the male child and their upbringing seems to be ignored, dismissed, or articulated to accommodate an indeterminate focus controlled by the imaging of the male gender and species which nonetheless still remains unexplored. The question is, how does the imagination about, and the imaging of men through the power relations prism by women writers affect the male child's secure development through the symbolic order? (Eagleton 1992; Adjoe 2020). The symbolic order, as depicted by Freud, is the basis of the formation of the individual human subject related to the triad of man, woman and offspring (Eagleton 1992; Adjoe 2020).

### III. THE ISSUE ABOUT WOMEN'S WRITINGS IN WEST AFRICA THAT NEEDS EXPLORATION AND EXAMINATION

The purpose and future of male child upbringing towards productivity, maturity and mental health and well-being have not been subject to ceaseless debate yet in women's writing, which are focused mainly upon women's issues and struggles concerning gender, and therefore also on the girl-child education and protection, and the contestation of the treatment of women by men. This paper argues that by returning to a few basic questions about the symbolic order of the family a more productive focus could emerge for exploration – What should the preparation for a good human life be? What should its form or shape be? Where does it begin? And where is it achieved? What is the picture of human life in which a notion of development and well-being with this end and form fit? How can the development of the human subject and the individual be pursued and achieved? Is it possible, therefore, to refocus the debate on child

upbringing through the symbolic order and open new pathways and opportunities to develop a more meaningful system of mental well-being and productivity for youth? In the end, what should be the preparation for a good human life for the male child too? And ultimately, are the focus of women's writings in West Africa seeming 'to forge the world' in such a way that their effects might seem more detrimental to the well-being of individual, family, and the social entities at large than engendering positive and creative results? As expressed by John Lechte (1990: 22) in his examination of the writings of Julia Kristeva, "What is at stake is the analytic value of reading such thinkers, of working out what their texts are saying, and how they are saying it, even if there can be little consensus about the value of the content of the writing in question."

### IV. WOMEN'S WRITINGS IN WEST AFRICA SEEMING 'TO FORGE THE WORLD' TOWARDS AN END

Much of the discourse about power relations between men and women is dominated, often for reasons of urgency, by a number of very complex questions. How, for instance, are we to protect and advance the girl-child and their education? How can women be allowed to be heard, protected, supported and allowed equal opportunities to make their own impact as much as they can? How can women take control of their own bodies? And how can women secure the freedom to vote, to be represented in high political office, to hold property, receive higher education and enter professions formerly reserved for men? (Aidoo 1970; Ba 1981; Finlayson 2019: 7). Such questions can be pivotal; but much depends on the answers we provide. Yet these questions are by no means the only questions necessary. On the other hand, how can the same advantages be provided for the male –child through the symbolic order? And how can the male-child not be prevented and excluded from the symbolic order and the reality principle, as similarly for the girl-child, to enable them mature towards the goal of productivity rather than mainly towards the pleasure principle? (Eagleton 1992, Adjoe 2020).

The presumption that writing functions simply as sites for prospecting and excavating resources from experiences for the sake of sustaining one species of the genders, and not as places where preparation for a good human life goes on for both the girl-child and the male-child raises some of the urgent questions we come up against that the paper sets out to raise.

What are at stake, therefore, are the questions themselves, and the orientation and objectives of the academy of women thinkers and writers which seem to relegate such consideration to the background. It seems enough that remembering the weight of these questions and coming to see their inter-relations could allow us to apprehend how many of our institutions, expectations, and models fail to grasp the constitution of the individual or the formation of the subject at its most fundamental and the integrating principles and processes which operate to achieve it.

Much as women's writings originate from their experiences mediated by consciousness, attitudinizing and action (Guttenplan 2000), the nature of consciousness, attitudinizing and action could be influenced by many factors that need to be excavated in the fashion adumbrated by James Lasdun (2020), and by Frankl (1992) which entail an archaeology of consciousness. As Bloor (1997: 9) cites Wittgenstein, "There are of course, descriptions and descriptions. A superficial description will surely not give us what we need. A revealing description will be one whose power to illuminate comes from an interesting theoretical perspective". In this light, Halliday (2004) also presents ample and meaningful examples of how language, located through consciousness, is used to reshape experience from generalization, abstraction to metaphorizing in the effort to construe meaning. By implication, meaning-making of experience cannot be absolute, as it may be necessary, but not sufficient as a resource for establishing truth. Lasdun's (2020: 8) review of Sabar's book, *Bats in the Ceiling*, in the *London Review of Books* indicates the specimen of what risks are involved and capable of occurring in women's writings if not fully critiqued despite the worthy project 'in service of a larger goal' and 'enlarging one's imaginative universe'. Lasdun

makes the poignant point about the influence of attitudinizing and posture that could also apply almost without modification to West African Women's writings. His reflection pointed out:

"You could read this as the product of a lofty postmodern sensibility, unbound by crude categories of true and false. King's statements over the years certainly support that. 'History is not about truth but about power relations,' she wrote in one paper. Sticklers for the former were guilty of 'fact fundamentalism'. But such relativism, for her, was never an end in itself. It was always in service of a larger goal, and from the beginning of her career that goal was unabashedly religious. A committed Christian as well as a feminist, she has insisted that her academic work has always been about 'deepening one's understanding and deepening one's faith', just as it is about 'enlarging one's imaginative universe'. Its object as she put it at one stage (a little too aptly), is 'to forge the world.'" (Lasdun 2020: 8).

The crucial question arising from such a possibility that needs to be asked and investigated about women's writings in West Africa lies in the angst that perhaps such writing, with emphasis on power relations, does not inadvertently venture disproportionately towards trying 'to forge the world' in the manner in which it images men and the relations between the two genders on the African continent. That is an important question that must be answered, and from the perspective of this paper, beginning at the centre by excavating women's writings from the manner in which men are imagined, imaged and represented in these writings.

In the end, the paper seeks to locate the understanding of the development of the human subject or the individual in the symbolic order to enable the focus on the valuation of reconstituting the family towards the formation of the human subject as the basic goal of writing, and the consequent social engineering, welfare engineering programmes, education and development directed towards an emphasis on a process conducive for the attainment of the human subject.

Consequently, it seeks to focus the orientation of literary producers, especially of women writers, to re-examine their writings and the consequences of such writing within the framework of the stable formation of the individual or human subject rather than within the frameworks of the axis of power and sexuality, gender revolutions, and issues which negate the crucial process of the human subject's formation. It is thus necessary because the consequence of the focus on the axis of power and sexuality is that rather than achieving productivity and promoting mental wellness, in the long run, it promotes the disintegration of the human subject and their diversion from induction into the symbolic order as a result of the distortion of the process of growth through denigration, reductionism and outright negation and exclusion.

All in all, a critical understanding of the formation of the individual or human subject should concern writers so much as to discard concerns and orientations that do not promote its development in order to prioritize the things that inure to the development of the individual, the self, and the human subject beyond the discourses of blame, guilt, vengeance, exclusion, negation, and reductionisms which engender and drive the orientations towards disintegration and mental ill-health directly or indirectly in West African society.

## V. APPROACHING THE SUBJECT

It is noticeable that in the effort to articulate and represent the realities of existence in the manner women perceive that they experience it, women writers in West Africa have mainly resorted to the notion of power relations between men and women, and consequently have made this framework the centre of focus to crystalize their imaginations around certain types of preferences and representation of men. The study will examine some of these imaging and representations, the structure and meaning of such representations, and their implications for understanding reality as a whole and their implications for the formation of the male individual in African society. It will further, and in particular, examine the effect of women's

preferred representations of men on the character, decisions and life-course of men, and particularly on the creation of the human subject, especially of the male child and the human subject in contemporary West African society and culture.

In examining the subject itself, the study follows the psychoanalytic methods of understanding the formation of the human subject proposed by Sigmund Freud and outlined by Terry Eagleton (Eagleton 1983; cited in Adjoe 2020), and the adaptation of Freud's psychoanalysis by George Frankl (1992) in his *Archaeology of the Mind*, who while countering the notion that "reality, as we experience it, has an objective existence independent of man", also expounds the outlook that "the reality we confront is made by man, that it is humanity which creates its own conditions and, what is more, does so largely unconsciously, and then depends on the conditions it has created" (Frankl 1992: viii). In effect, it should help us, like the archaeologist, to ask "what the material artefacts uncovered ...tell us about the myths and religious beliefs of early men, their concepts of the world, their work practices, their family relationships and social organization." (Frankl 1992: Back cover page). In this case, the method will enable us to understand the process of the formation of the human subject in the process of growth, and hence the implications of women's choice of representation of men and their effects on the growth process of the male child when choices are based on the constructs of meanings consciously or unconsciously forged through generalizing, abstraction and metaphORIZING framed upon the specific construct and contestations in question. In this respect, the study poses questions regarding the choice of approach to subjects regarding male representation in society and the trajectory of attributions to male engagement with females in African society. The challenge hence is how to examine the different perspectives from which male interaction with females in African society can be generated that can tend towards the creation of stability of human relations and the maximization of the opportunities accruing towards the formation of human subjects. Such perspectives and interactions should be devoid of

the elements and principles that pose a threat of degeneration and mental instability but rather promote the building of mental health for society without recourse to the domination of power relations as a necessary tool for disintegrating and undermining the growth and stability of the male child.

The analysis will take recourse to four main and popular women writers and writings as core references and imagery typification of contemporary women writers and their writings. The choice of this sample of women writers is based upon the frequency of use of these authors' writings as texts for school work and teaching and for other educational purposes; as popular public reading and referencing, and the respect, honour and fondness accorded and associated with them as cultural icons, especially when they are being used as textbooks for students or youth. These include: Ama Ata Aidoo 's short stories, *No Sweetness here*; Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*; Emecheta Buchi's *Second Class Citizen*; and Chimamanda Adichie Ngozi's *Purple Hibiscus*. Whereas references will be made to all texts, the core text will be Chimamanda Ngozie's *Purple Hibiscus*. This novel focuses and anchors the perspectives of this analysis and provides a distinct trajectory and pathway towards understanding the effects of the choice of women's representations of men in their writings. It provides, alongside the estimation of various trajectories, a distinguishing departure from other West African women's representations of men in their writings in spite of the fact that the same problems and issues preoccupy each one of them, and as they search for modes, and attitudes and postures for the valorization of their experiences. It provides similarly for them as they project, explore, and attempt to resolve the challenges accruing from women's experiences of interactions with their male counterparts in West African societies.

Making Sense of the Choice of Power Relations as a tool of interpretation of women's experiences: How writers' experiences are selected, theorized and grammatically represented to make meaning through literary language.

Halliday (2004: 4) observes that the reshaping of experience is accomplished over 'three successive waves of theoretical energy'. These he describes as follows: "generalization, i.e. from proper noun to common noun, making possible our commonsense theories of knowledge; abstractness, i.e. from concrete categories to abstract ones, making it possible to re-theorize in 'uncommonsense' terms; and metaphor, i.e. from congruent construals to metaphorical ones, allowing us to re-theorize over again, in the form of our technical and scientific theories of knowledge. Each wave takes us 'one step further away from ordinary experience', but at the same time each step may be thought of as having 'enlarged the meaning potential by adding a new dimension to the total model."

In consonance with this type of reasoning about meaning-making, the theoretical justification for women's posture in writing derives from African Literary thinking and direction from the 1980s on the challenges confronting literary theory, criticism and pedagogy in the African setting. The challenges confronting literary theory, criticism and pedagogy in this period was about how to relate experience to posture and the eventual product of writing and interpretation of writing. As Amuta (1998: 198) described the challenge and the directions of thinking on the subject, "*At the level of critical practice, the challenge is for a political criticism even though all criticism is somehow politically predicated. To the extent that the various works in African literature are fictional meditations of the contemporary African experience, critical explications of these texts must progress from the known to the relatively unknown.*"

*Besides the approach, the content was contemplated as a product of the material conditions of life of the African people as:*

*"The need to historicize our explications and evaluations dictates that critical practice insists on the dialectical relationship between the context of the work and its specific content and form. This methodology ensures that there is a marriage between theory and practice, thus removing the halo of mystique that has continued*

to surround bourgeois criticism of African literature to date. In effect, we must insist that the experience and formal realization of literature is a knowable area, not one of metaphysical inscrutability that can only be commented on through timid statements. If, in referential terms, our literary and general social criticism derive from the same source (i.e. the material conditions of life of the African people), the way to ending the present alienation of our literary discourse from social discourse will have been opened.” (Amuta 1989: 198).

Literary discourse and social discourse were to be united and rendered inseparable and indistinguishable. These approaches and postures were consequent to and driven by the experiencing of the material conditions of the populations under the now independent States governed by people mostly liberated from colonialism. Thus, a certain directedness was supposed to be necessary and emphasized for African literary endeavours and specifically relevant to experiencing and action – in this case, oppressive conditions. In effect, “As unemployment queues lengthen and privileges accruing to fresh graduates contract, bourgeois pedagogy is becoming increasingly dysfunctional. An alternative pedagogy, a pedagogy of the oppressed, is urgently called for. Such a libertarian pedagogy would not only challenge the values that inform today’s curricula of literary studies in Africa but will replace ‘neutral’ texts with those that present the African experience in its starkness and from a class-partisan perspective.” (Amuta, 1989: 198).

Literary activity was to help in the search for solutions to the problems of the peoples of the newly independent Africa and the search for liberation for the remaining territories still under colonialism. The perspective in relation to this approach lies in the belief that “The understanding of reality with a view to changing it should be the object of the new pedagogy of African literature. In addition, literary study must take into cognizance the literary productions of the peasants in the rural areas and the workers and unemployed in the urban slums and ghettos.” (Amuta, 1989: 198). Literary

endeavor should be inclusive of all economic classes of people on the continent. Nevertheless, ‘the understanding of reality’ would need to be formulated somewhat for the goals of this project to be realized and operationalized, resulting in the effort to ‘create, theorize on, criticize, enjoy and participate’ in the project of literature on the African continent.

In effect, “Ultimately, the effort to create, theorize on, criticize, enjoy and participate in literature in Africa (as elsewhere) ought to be one and the same with the struggle to banish those conditions which dehumanize humankind and threaten the nobility of art itself. “(cf: Amuta, Chidi, 1989: 199).

The implications of all these orientations, arguments and approaches is that “*The business of literature ought to begin from the creation of the conditions necessary for economic and political freedom, for it is from these that cultural freedom flows. A literary culture that sets itself this vital task cannot but be defined in rigorous activist and radical political terms that go far beyond the bourgeois insistence on superstructural decolonization. To insist otherwise is to advance the cause of imperialism and deepen the exploitation and oppression of our peoples.*” (Amuta 1989: 199).

However, it could be said that even before this crucial benchmarking and agenda-setting in the 1980s, women’s writings in West Africa were already firmly oriented towards a posture of activism and the representation of women’s issues and liberation, not mainly against imperialism as men writers were advocating, but against oppression by men in the African domain – cultural and political liberation as illustrated in Ama Ata Aidoo, Emecheta Buchi, and Mariama Ba in the 1970s and 1980s, as it were, a pedagogy of the oppressed (not primarily of economic conditions but of power and sexuality as centre).

Hence, it could be said that even before Soyinka’s challenge in his pitch of 1980 cited by Amuta (1989: 12), which is regarded as the rallying point for refocusing of African literary endeavours and change, women were already focused on

fashioning a trajectory of liberation from men's oppression seen to be contextualized in cultural practices and the cultural and political positioning of women.

Women writers, such as Ama Ata Aidoo, in her Short story writing titled, *No Sweetness Here*, was pre-occupied with issues of struggle against oppression, against men's exploitation of young vulnerable, poor, helpless girls, against multiple wives, girlfriends, and illicit affairs; against sexual abuse of young females, against polygamy, against women adopting non-African values and fashions, and also the debunking of master-slave relationships expressed in male domination and the creation of inferiority complex in women. In *Everything Counts*, the first story of the book, her narrator recounts her initial posture of cooperation with men as against her eventual re-orientation towards a revolutionary stance to launch into a revolution meant to recapture 'confidence in ourselves', depicted in a reversal of the situation she described as 'she would laugh with him', at first, when her lover tended to ridicule her thinking instead of taking her seriously when she expressed certain recurrent frustrations she had about certain persistent material circumstances. A similar reversal occurred as she changed her posture to take care of what she often described as 'the hatred of wounded lovers'. She wanted to take a stance to commit herself to achieving what she considered as 'the beauty of being oneself', to match talk with action:

"She used to look at their serious faces and laugh silently to herself. They meant what they were saying. The only thing was that ... she also knew them. She knew them as intimately as the hems of her dresses. That it was so much easier for them to talk about the beauty of being oneself..." (Aidoo, 1970: 1).

*She recounted issues that irked her:*

"At other times, when her world was sweet like when she and Fiifi were together, the pictures that came into her mind were not so terrible. She would just think of the words of that crazy highlife song and laugh. The one about the people at home scrambling to pay exorbitant prices for

second-hand clothes from America ... and then as a student of economics, she would also try to remember some other truths she knew about Africa. Second-rate experts giving first-class dangerous advice. Or expressing uselessly fifth-rate opinions.... And now, wigs – made from other people's unwanted hair." (Aidoo, 1970:1).

"At this point, tough though she was, tears would come into her eyes. Perhaps her people had really missed the boat of original thinking after all? And if Fiifi asked her what was wrong, she explained, telling the same story every time. He always shook his head and laughed at her, which meant that in the end, she would laugh with him." (Aidoo, 1970:2)

As the persona encountered men and their concerns, she found them, in her opinion, quite frivolous. Men were concerned with issues such as the wearing of wigs when she was thinking about serious matters like the material conditions of people:

"At the beginning, she used to argue with them, earnestly. 'But what has wearing wigs got to do with the revolution?' 'A lot, sister,' they would say. 'How?' she would ask, struggling not to understand.

'Because it means that we have no confidence in ourselves.' Of course, she understood what they meant.

'But this is funny. Listen, my brothers, if we honestly tackled the problems facing us, we wouldn't have the time to worry about such trifles as wigs.' (Aidoo, 1970:2)

This set the stage for the separation of agenda-setting with the male counterparts of female writers. Not only did they not consider the men's agenda as tackling serious enough issues, but men's attitudes were repugnant when their orientation and projects were critiqued and rejected, especially when they could not respond convincingly enough to the interrogation and apparently superior perspectives of the 'beautiful and intelligent' female counterparts. In such defeat, men's attitudes had the semblance of what

the persona described as ‘the hatred of wounded lovers’:

“She made them angry. Not with the mild displeasure of brothers, but with the hatred of wounded lovers. They looked terrible, their eyes changing, turning red and warning her that if she wasn’t careful, they would destroy her. Ah, they frightened her a lot, quite often too. Especially when she thought of what filled them with that kind of hatred.” (Aidoo, 1970:2).

In the perception of the persona, this attitude typified the contemporary generation of men, inviting what she referred to as ‘a battle of the sexes’. After some time, she gave up arguing with them. But it was to think of an alternative response, culminating on the evocation of the ‘battle of the sexes’, and reversing the status quo ante in which ‘she laughed with them’ and when she used to think that ‘in her society men and women had more important things to do than fight each other in the mind’. Hitherto, it had to be different because:

“This was something else. She had always known that in her society men and women had had more important things to do than fight each other in the mind. It was not in school that she had learnt this. Because you know, one did not really go to school to learn about Africa... As for this, what did the experts call it? War of the sexes? Yes, as for this war of the sexes, if there had been any at all in the old days among her people, they could not possibly have been on such a scale. These days, any little ‘No’ one says to a boy’s ‘Yes’ means one is asking for a battle. O, there just are too many problems.” (Aidoo, 1970: 2-3)

On the other hand, one other way in which men’s anger could have been kindled and pitched against women was described by Joe de Graft in his poem ‘Akosua ‘Nowa’ in the 1970s, a poem in which the male persona complains, “*I met Akosua ‘Nowa this morning;/ I greeted:/ Akosua, how is your treasure?/ She looked me slowly up and down,/ She sneered:/ The man is not yet here who’ll find it! / Akosua ‘Nowa has touched my manhood;/*” (Soyinka, ed. 1975: 258)].

Men’s anger may then have had their origins that are seldom explored and articulated in women’s writings (beyond the wrongs perpetrated by men against women) such as the perceived disrespect or disregard for men manifested in probably taken for granted contemptuous attitudes and utterances exhibited by the opposite sex culminating in what could be considered a challenge to the manhood of men.

Winston (2002: 245) marks some of the most desirable features which instinct promotes in the mating process between males and females as: “Women, on the whole, prefer high-status ambitious males. How do these men show women their status? They display symbols of their financial and social superiority.”

On the other hand: “Women also look for heroes; the unselfish and the altruistic. Showing off these qualities is a permanent feature of male courtship display: the gentleman is, traditionally, supposed to hold open the doors as well as reach for the bill when the time comes.” (Winston 2002: 246).

However, women begin to reject the well-known codes of courtship and mating, either because they are not persuaded by the heroism of their male counterparts, by their altruism, social status or ambitious nature and agendas. What has changed? Where can the generators of these changes be located?

In *So Long a Letter*, Daouda Dieng, a suitor to Ramatoulaye, could be said to match all the desirable features which instinct promotes in the mating process in respect of males and females, yet all his efforts to woo her failed, ending only in the offer of friendship (Ba 1981: 61-72). Throughout their encounter, Ramatoulaye purported to be employing reason and logic in all her choices and interlocution, yet in the end, her treatment of the suitor left even Farmata, her long time attendant, shocked as Ramatoulaye seemed to have been playing a cruel game and a battle of wits with her suitor, which according to her own understanding, she won with distinction.

Although inexorably pleased by her own performance, choices and decision-making, the strong, idealistic, independent and self-sufficient

women characters portrayed by the narratives end up becoming what Primo Levi describes as persons practicing the ‘Darwinian vision of the survival of the hardest bargainer’ (Angier 2002: 377).

In addition, men’s proposals to initiate a revolution appeared to be looked down upon and evaluated as being unconstructive and trivial as well as their resolve and ability to commit to what it takes to achieve the visions they were setting for themselves. This type of rebuff is expressed by the narrator in *Everything Counts*:

‘Would they please leave her alone? What was more, if they really wanted to see a revolution, why didn’t they work constructively in other ways for it?’

She shut them up. For they knew their own weaknesses too, that they themselves were neither prepared nor ready to face the realities and give up those aspects of their personal dream which stood between them and the meaningful actions they ought to take. Above all, she was really beautiful and intelligent. They loved and respected her “ (Aidoo 1970: 3).

Emerging from it all, is the simultaneous downgrading of men’s efforts and the effort at an articulation of an image of the African woman by the narrator tending towards the emphasis on her qualities as ‘beautiful and intelligent’ and who must be consequently ‘loved and respected’ in contrast to their male counterparts.

As African literature began to articulate itself firmly within a socio-historical definition and context, and articulate itself towards building the consciousness of class positions in writing, according to Amuta, inwards, ‘in order to rediscover its real motivations, challenges and social relevance’ (cf: Amuta 1989:12), the search for and redefinition of the realities of life were expected to be carried out by the different constituencies and composites of society, and inevitably by the privileged literary components from their privileged positions and perspectives fighting to be inserted into the class positions formation and the redefinition of where they wished to belong and how to be regarded, leading

to and leaning towards various ideological positions and colourings.

Thus, “The crucial ‘point of genesis’ and ultimate conditioning factor of literary criticism is to be sought in the very heritage of society itself. The class position of the critic, his self-perception in and mode of insertion into the prevailing class formations of his society, influence, and even (orientation) determine the ideological colouring of his critical products. In this context, we conceive of ideology simply as ‘a relatively formal and articulated system of meanings, values, and beliefs, of a kind that can be abstracted as a ‘worldview or a class outlook.’” (Amuta 1989:14).

In effect, we begin to see an articulation of a system of meanings, values, beliefs, and class outlooks fashioned upon ideological worldviews. It accorded with the position that criticism and critical theory should always promote ways of dialoguing both with the specific literary works as well as with the issues that define the state of consciousness in the referent’s social world.

Consequently, various approaches to doing literature were examined and discarded as unsuited for literary criticism in the African context. Foremost among the rejected approaches to literary criticism as a result of the avowed orientation was Colonialist criticism. Such criticism, supposedly so designated by Chinua Achebe and defined was the ‘elaboration of the cardinal axiom of colonialist ideology into a tradition of criticism with specific application to the emergent literature of the erstwhile colonized – in this case, Africans’. It was supposed to be characterized by ‘a supremacist arrogance predicated on racial prejudice...’ (Amuta 1989: 18-19).

It was supposed that the African disciples of this mode of criticism operated from the same basic assumptions of supremacist arrogance and racial prejudice.

However, for women, the period may have resembled that of the contemporary experience of political explosion of anger and revolution, except that this was one carried out in the mind and expressed through writing by women. The

experience may have paralleled the description of the contemporary events in America given by Shatz (2020) culminating in the belief that:

“They’ve been ridiculed for their sense of entitlement by those who’ve enjoyed far more prosperity and, for all the mainstream criticism of identity politics, they understand far better than previous generations that racism is a system, rather than a matter of individual hatred, prejudice or ‘ignorance’; they know that it’s embedded in institutions, and that unless it’s rooted out, American democracy will remain an unequal and unsafe space for black and brown people.” (Shatz 2020).

The similarity of sentiments cannot be missed as they evoke the period and conditions upon which African literary endeavours gained momentum in the 1960s and 70s, and the passion, power, and motifs and goals driving the movement of writings of the generation and others to follow, including the trajectory of women’s liberation and its ancillary projects.

In his introduction to *So Long a Letter* in 2008, Kenneth W. Harrow recounts that: “Until this point in African literature, the portrayal of such women was primarily presented as that of women’s ‘plight’, that is, as victims like those appearing in the fiction written by Senegalese men. ... The novels by other African women writers like Flora Nwopa, Buchi Emecheta and Ama Ata Aidoo also often emphasized the images of women abandoned by their husbands, maltreated by their fathers, or even, as in ‘The Joys of Motherhood’ (1979), ultimately ignored by their own grown children. Women were represented as disempowered or abused.” (Ba 1981:ii).

However, Harrow continues specifically to outline the trajectory of Mariama Ba that made a difference and inspired new writers. Referring to the narrator, Ramatoulaye, he said that “At first, she is forced to confront a series of suitors, beginning with her husband’s elder brother Tamsir, who expects to make her another one of his wives. As she responds forcefully to him, we hear the expression of a new passion, a new voice:

‘My voice has known thirty years of silence, thirty years of harassment. It bursts out, violent, sometimes sarcastic, sometimes contemptuous’. She rejects both his offer and his arrogant assumption of male superiority, and she puts in their place the brother, the suitor and imam, along with all the former prerogatives of the patriarchal order that attempted to assert its control over her again.” (Ba, 1980: v).

The question, nevertheless, is the basis upon which women’s writings instituted a ‘battle of the sexes’ and the imagination and imaging of men upon which their consciousness and ideologies have been systematized and settled about men in African society. Harrow (1980) proposes the ideological perspective of women’s orientation as the confrontation of a ‘patriarchal order’ (Ba, 1980: v). A sole mixed group of Level 100 students among ten other groups presenting a project and citing other sources renders it this way: “The common belief among most feminist critics of African literature today is that men are the worst enemies of women. These feminist scholars have denounced men, accusing them of being the major source of women’s unhappiness particularly in the family. They claim that men oppress, mistreat and exploit women by inhibiting and restricting their self-realization. Women therefore suggest a complete rejection of patriarchy in all its guises in order to create a world without men, where they would be safe, sane and supportive of one another.” However, the contest between the ‘patriarchal order’ and the ‘matriarchal order’ is of universal and ancient origin.

## VI. THE LOGIC OF PRACTICE OF WOMEN'S WRITINGS

Frankl (1992) suggests through the research carried out by the Swiss historian, J. J. Bachofen and published as *Mother Right*, the possibility of the existence of an ancient matriarchal culture that was ultimately superseded by patriarchy and whose evidence could be somewhat derived from their representations in Greek culture and by the Greek playwrights, Aeschylus in *Oresteia* and Sophocles in *Oedipus*. Frankl (1992: 13) citing Bachofen notes that: “The advance from the maternal conception of mankind to a paternal

conception was the most important turning-point in history which brought with it fundamental changes in the psycho-social orientations of human beings.”

Matriarchal cultures, being once governed by a gynocracy, that is, by the blood-bond between the members of a family group and their mothers, considers the father only as a friend, guest, helper, who holds no significant legal importance for a group's cohesion. It is characterized in such terse modern matricentric examples and slogans as 'Behind every successful man is a woman; behind every successful woman, is herself'; and in others such as 'A woman: without her, man is nothing'. In such slogans, man is not needed; man is only a friend, guest or helper, or a hopeless case that needs to be helped by woman to exist. The blood-bond symbolizes love between mother and her offspring, promoting a sense of sisterhood and equality whose governing principles are not characterized by fear or sacrifice but by love and compassion. The 'matricentric complex' created out of such a blood-bond, while characterized by a feeling of optimistic trust in mother's unconditional love and far fewer guilt feelings, stand in contrast to those shown by 'patricentric individuals'. Embedded in a weaker superego and lower threshold of repression as a result, the matricentric individual tends towards a greater capacity for pleasure and happiness. However, the seemingly good and benevolent mother goddess invariably quickly turns into a ruthless Fury or goddess if the law of blood is offended against, creating the rage of the mother against the transgressor of her laws. The result is the production of the principle of revenge, leading to the horrible aspect of matriarchy which entails a relentless cruelty characterized by endless cycles of violence and revenge that is complemented by the tendency towards illogical and inconsistent travesty of judgements based upon no clear principles and meaningful logic except on instinct.

Patriarchy emerged in reaction to the inconsistencies and inadequacies of the code of justice of the matricentric culture which was accused of being based upon the blind demands of instinct and the incapability of taking into consideration the complexities of individual cases.

The inevitable blood feuds constituted by matriarchy on account of its basic constitution led to a culture of vendetta in which progressive series of insoluble blood feuds and endless series of murders running into successive generations became the norm. By such nature, matriarchy provided neither a safe moral guide nor a secure means of fair justice for society as it was based primarily on instinct.

In this regard, the replacement of the matricentric code was in search of a higher code of law and morality governed by reason and persuasion, and hence by intellect, logic, meaning and order rather than by the blind forces of instinct. This new higher code is associated with the rule of the father, constituting an emergent code and culture, the patriarchal order.

A fight then against patriarchy suggests a contestation against intellect, logic, meaning, order, reason and persuasion, the individual and complexity, and a posture towards an advocacy for the return to the predominance of instinct in its manifestations as the pleasure principle of love, compassion, happiness, indulgence, worship of instinct and the principle of revenge and blood feuding, altering the psycho-social dynamic of society towards regression.

The search for a higher moral guide and a more secure code of justice meant that the traditional dominance of the mother under the gynocratic order had to be broken and the superior importance of the father in the family and the state unequivocally established. The claims of the father to a higher level of intellectuality and his capacity of reasoned persuasion had to be illustrated through a rational victory over the instinct-dominated demands for revenge as illustrated in the Greek playwrights. The new order was erected upon and represented not merely by a demonstration of power but by a demonstration of a higher level of rationality, meaning, judgement and persuasion. It was especially not based upon and represented by violence but by the employment of holy persuasion to assure victory and validate the new dispensation (Frankl 1992: 16).

In the light of this reasoning and understanding, one of the most crucial things evoked is the need to understand West African women's writings in their consciousness, attitude and posture to determine whether consciously or unconsciously, these textual productions are not a struggle towards the re-establishment and promotion of a gynocracy and the discredited system of a moral code, justice system and meaningfulness that could not bode well for society's goals of reason, intellect, logic, persuasion, and individuality. If it is so, can it explain to a large extent, the reason that the male child's induction into the symbolic order for growth and towards the reality principle and productivity, and the de-emphasis of the pleasure principle been hitherto seemingly downplayed, dismissed or ignored by writings with such orientations?

## VII. CONSCIOUSNESS/MIND, ATTITUDE/ POSTURE, AND ACTION

In the choice of subject, content, and approach, women's writings in West African society follow a logic of practice of writing, and an ideology (Bourdieu 1992; Amuta 1992; Halliday 2004) which derives from both the material conditions of experience, literary selection and selectivity, and from a consciousness based on the processes of generalization, abstraction and metaphorizing of these selected scenes, characters, circumstances, and ideas. In *So Long a Letter*, for instance, the men do not have a voice. The reflection of the narrator is a long digestion and grinding of the wrongs of men against women and the triumph of women's strength and intelligence over that of the men in the story whose morals, loyalty, responsibility, intelligence, logic, strength, self-sufficiency, vision and goals are often disappointing and either confused or non-existent. In reading the story, students of both genders (youth) invariably cast a judgement against men, portraying men as wicked, selfish, insatiable in their sexual desires, irresponsible and inconsiderate, in their responses and critiques of the novel. Surprisingly, out of a total of 104 students, the majority of male students tended to be even more critical of the men in the narrative than the female students did. Some of

their observations include the following contrasts: "Despite their unconditional devotion and loyalty, both Ramatoulaye and Aissatou are sadistically rewarded with deception and dupery by their unfaithful and fickle husbands who take new and much younger wives." In *Second Class Citizen*, a similar depiction of men is evoked as Ada became too intelligent for her friend turned husband who could not make use of all the glaring opportunities designed for him by Ada herself to study abroad in preparation for a life together. Ada's husband was also fully X-Rayed and presented as an imbecile, keen only on sexual predation, pederasty, pleasure, and abuse, and yet having an aversion for hard work in full contrast to Ada and her resourcefulness and extraordinary intelligence. The young man was not given any voice to explain anything about his own philosophy, principles, struggles and toils, and worldviews except to be portrayed as the author purported. In *Purple Hibiscus*, however, a different approach is adopted towards the male characters. The father's voice is clear, the son's voice is clear, and it is possible to reason along to understand their reasoning, logic, vision, direction, and goals or otherwise whether one agreed with them or not. It is, therefore, easier in *Purple Hibiscus*, to make a judgement about the actions of male characters as well as for female characters and to be persuaded to agree or disagree with their thoughts, attitudes and actions.

## VIII. WOMEN'S WIGS AND HAIRSTYLES

What women writers considered as trifles and the lack of seriousness about African men in setting an agenda of revolution to fight imperialism and neo-colonialism by identifying even women's wigs and hairstyles or fashion as a reference item to struggle over might have been generated from an oblivion of the origins of women's focus on fashion and lifestyle matters rather than on productivity and the concern for the individual's psycho-social growth and orientation through the symbolic order, which itself is the result of a colonial production and consequence.

The *Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*, under an article contributed by Peter Hinchliff on Africa, in tracing and describing the penetration

and practice of Christianity in Africa from its inception through to the colonial times, and describing European exploitation of the African continent includes a cartoon that it described as “a savage Dutch cartoon of 1897”. It is a cartoon in which ‘The French corrupt the natives with useless frivolity, the English – greater hypocrites – sell rum and rifles with the Bible’. (Hinchcliff 1992: 473).

In this cartoon, a strong stoutly built African female figure of presence is being dressed up by a Frenchman with a top plumed hat, an open brace vest revealing most of the upper front part of her body from the cleavage of the breast and embracing a v-shaped waist; below the vest, a mini-skirt ending close to the upper thigh of the woman, and wearing stockings from the feet to just above the knees. The lady-in-the-making is facing the Frenchman who was holding a mirror to her to view herself like a Narcissus. The woman, with her back firmly turned to the man and oblivious of him, with a confused smile, albeit in a narcissistic style, raises her right hand in admiration with her left hand straightening her mini-skirt with a powerful hand and her little finger sticking out in excitement. Her male counterpart, separated from her by a British colonialist, was standing to the left of the female - a hulky and powerful man, almost naked with a covering only to the front of his waist in animal skin, the rest of him unclad, standing bewildered with the British colonist holding a huge bottle of rum to his mouth with the right hand while in his left hand the colonist was also ironically sticking a Bible into his hand; meanwhile, the colonist had already suspended a gun on his wrist of the hand receiving the Bible. The history of women’s separation from men in African society and their focus on fashion and the frivolities associated with fashion in West African society cannot be divorced from this kind of reality. Neither can their separation from each other as depicted in the painting, both taken far apart from each other as they were being separated through different orientations and agendas and no longer governed by the aspirations and agendas of the African society itself, be taken for granted. The French separated women from men, and the agenda in

their mind was a separation through the process of re-orienting them towards fashion and narcissism, while the men were separated by the British colonialists by equipping them with aggression, drunkenness, and paradoxically, also with a Bible. The halo effect created by the logic of practice of this consciousness cannot be discounted, and the agenda of male and female writers perhaps ought to tend towards an archaeology of the mind that can discover the myths planted through colonialism in respect of the harmonious co-existence and cooperation of male and female for African society rather than continuing to build a system of values consistent with the effects of the separation of male and female initiated through colonialist adventures and advanced through the battle of the sexes.

Whereas men may have noticed the separation of their women from themselves by the diversion of their attention from the kind of values and things that once attracted them towards cooperation, co-existence and harmony in traditional society, women, on the other hand, because of the halo effect created through the narcissistic fashion objects they were endowed with by French ruse, could not realize the shift from their own native values and where it was generated from. Instead, the orientation seems to warrant a defense of the separation to the hilt through a battle of the sexes like a natural property that cannot be tampered with, and that needs to be fought for with ‘a battle of the sexes’. Ironically, it is the ‘battle of the sexes’ that men had tried to prevent as they began to deconstruct the situation and recognized that the distraction of women from their productive roles in society had been compromised by the newly-found and colonially-cultivated focus of fashion, lifestyle and its associated frivolities. Ironically, women’s logic of practice had entrenched them to view fashion and lifestyle choices and their associated frivolities as essential to their being, although the end result of these colonially-cultivated values were, in fact, initiating African women towards the commercialization of the body and the employment of sex as an expression of power.

Men, on the other hand, plied with rum and the gun, and devoting themselves to a confused melee

of colonially-cultivated values and agendas seemed to be sobering up and attempting to re-articulate their goals and a new agenda for which they must struggle. Nonetheless, the position of women and their agenda-setting was tending towards a battle of the sexes that perceived any reference to the colonially-cultivated values of narcissism implanted through the cultivation in fashion and lifestyle pursuits as trivial and irrelevant.

Thus, already, colonial exploits had cultivated a division between women and men in African society. It separated women from men's agendas. The attempt by men writers to re-articulate men and women's agendas and the resistance to the threat of the loss of the colonially-cultivated values of fashion and lifestyle, when challenged, was labeled as the 'hatred of wounded lovers', ironically generating the determination of women to undertake the battle of the sexes. The decision to pursue a 'battle of the sexes in the mind' culminates in the focus on women's writings on power relations.

Is it, therefore, possible that if women writers' efforts had focused on discovering the myths that governed their relationships with men in African society as they were fashioned primarily by colonialism, they could be rediscovering new grounds by which to emerge closer to men and their agendas in order to regenerate cooperation and understanding rather than assuming a posture of the battle of the sexes in the mind from which the negative imagining, imaging and metaphorization of men issues, and thereby alienating them from the upbringing of male children into the symbolic order towards the reality principle and productivity and away from the pleasure principle.

## IX. LABOUR AND STRUGGLE VERSUS SEXUALITY AND POWER

In their *Psychology of Existence*, Kirk J. Schneider and Rollo May (1995) argue for the recognition of the historical perspective of an existential psychology with three essential thematic elements. These include the realization that human experience is characterized by human

freedom and by limitation; the dread of either freedom or limitation that promotes extreme or dysfunctional counter-reactions or banal timidity; and the desire and effort towards a confrontation with or integration of the polarities to produce psycho-physiological resilience.

Within this framework, they define and recognize myths as possessing healing power through bringing into awareness the repressed, unconscious, archaic urges, longings, dreads, and other psychic content in an individual. In this regard, myths engender in themselves a revelation of new goals, new ethical insights, and new possibilities by providing breakthrough meanings which were not available before. In this progressive regard, myths provide a higher level of working out a problem and leading towards a higher level of integration. Consequently, myths are a means of discovery and a progressive means of reaching the structures in relation to nature and our own existence. In effect, myths are educative. *"By drawing out inner reality, they enable the person to experience greater reality in the outside world. ... They are roads to universals beyond one's concrete experience. It is only on the basis of such a faith that the individual can genuinely accept and overcome earlier infantile deprivations without continuing to harbor resentment all through one's life. In this sense myth helps us accept our past, and we then find it opens before us our future."* (Schneider 7 May, 1995: 18).

Perhaps the myth of the utter separation between male and female in African society ought to be debunked. Much as it is still repressed and made invisible, the benefits can be liberating if a search begins to unveil the myths structuring, holding and sponsoring the supposed separation between men and women in West African society.

According to Schneider and May (1995), during the industrial revolution, a radical separation between product and workers was made. This separation created an alienation of labour or product from the worker and between workers themselves. Thus, personhood was lost. Similarly, "With the growth of industry and the bourgeoisie, sex becomes separated from persons; one's sexual

responses are bought and sold, as is the product of one's hands" (Schneider and May 1995:35), creating a curious relationship between society's attitude towards power on one hand and sexuality on the other. Within this period also, the values of hard work and effort were established, depicted in such works as Goethe's *Faust*. These values consisted in "action, striving, effort". In this sense, it was established that the active deed takes supremacy over other forms of human existence, promoting an eternal struggle, effort and restlessness as a definition of hard work – an extolling of the practical and creative over the intellectual, reflection and reasoning. In the West African women's writings, the practical, creative and passionate and constant striving efforts of women are evoked and extolled as the basis of man's life, culminating in the listing of all the household chores and family engagements that women carry out and the constant strivings involved in them as the crux of work, rendering men's activities and efforts invisible. *Purple Hibiscus*, on the other hand, makes visible the strivings and efforts and struggles of man (Achike), visible together with his complete outlook on life no matter how flawed, and illustrating him as an industrial age man exhibiting all the values of hard work. Separated from men in African society and invested with a commercial outlook and its power, are women writers' framework perhaps being overly-influenced by the values of the industrial revolution to define their male counterparts in African society?

## X. CONCLUSION: THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE LOGIC OF PRACTICE OF WOMEN'S WRITINGS

The consequences of the battle of the sexes is the departure from the symbolic order essential for the maintenance and building of family life and a stable production of the individual in society which depend upon the triad of mother, father and child and the symbolic order it creates to set the individual towards growth towards a realization of either the positive goal of induction into the reality principle and productivity or, unfortunately, towards the negative pursuit of the

pleasure principle and the ultimate proximity to mental health issues and instability.

West African Women's writings, like all other literary writings, are striving towards an effort to examine the human condition in one form or the other. In this case, however, they seem to be premised more upon the 'battle of the sexes' engineered upon an ideology of selection, posture and typification of men and their gender that is seemingly influenced by the consequence of a colonially engineered value system based upon the separation of men from women in African society, rendering the society without the essential symbolic order for raising viable offspring undergirded by the reality principle and the stability needed to become productive members of society.

On the other hand, women's writings in West African society could be regarded as the settings for the excavation of myths in the sense of the methods advocated by the psychologists of existence who perceive the possibilities of an integrative process of a discovery. In this case, these writings could serve as an excavation of the progressive revelation of the structure of our relation to nature and our own existence as human beings rather than as a battle of sexes between men and women in society.

Consequently, the essential question that remains is, when writers begin to explore their world, with what aims should they craft their imaginations and endeavours? "Given that we live in a shared world, in which our actions impact and involve others, how should we want an inhabitant of this world to be educated?"

Answering this question means first looking towards two other questions: How does writing fit into this life, singular, and shared, whose ends give it its ends? And what are the ends of this life?"

The importance of the creation of the human subject and their induction into the symbolic order towards transforming him or her from the grip of nature to culture to ensure that they become persons capable of flowering in productivity who appreciate the need for the

repression of the pleasure principle and being focused towards the appreciation of the reality principle in order to consciously channel their energies into the production of civilization and direct themselves away from the likelihood of mental ill-health toward mental wellness and mental well-being is a pursuit that needs to be given inevitable consideration by every well-meaning human being.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, which this paper considers as essential to illustrating the consequences of the destruction of the symbolic order of the family and society, the father, Achike is killed through the arrangement of the mother, denying and destroying the structure of the symbolic order. After getting rid of the father, the mother sought to claim authority over both the male and the female siblings, attempting to advance a taken-for-granted notion that the children intrinsically understood the matricentric order which was being claimed for them. The presumption did not work; it created the destruction of a whole family – the father killed, the son exhibiting mental problems after recognizing that he may have, after all, not benefitted from the events and the new order as he thought they might benefit them. The only positive character promising a future after a progressive re-examination of the mythical structure in which they had existed was the daughter who had from infancy adhered to the expectations of the symbolic order by which the daughter was attached to the father until the natural bonds separated them and oriented her towards her mother. The son, on the other hand, who, tacitly and patently at times, was encouraged by the mother to defy the father, failed to enter into the symbolic order and develop as an individual oriented towards the reality principle and productivity. The matricentric values he adopted encouraged him towards seeking the pleasure principle that destroyed his development and his ability to make choices and decisions according to reason, justice, persuasion and order. He failed to understand the order of persuasion.

The understanding of this orientation involving the symbolic order should enable the refocus on the valuation of reconstituting the African social

imagination towards the formation of the human subject so that any social engineering, welfare programming, and especially writing and educational endeavours should be directed towards an emphasis on a process conducive for the attainment of the successful enabling of the processes of the formation of the human subject and their successful achievement. To achieve this, women's textual productions will have to rediscover collaboration with men rather than a focus on X-raying men or their male counterparts.

It is also suggested to draw attention to the focus and orientation of literary producers, especially of women writers, to re-examine their writings and the consequences of their writings within the framework of the formation of the individual and the human subject rather than within the frameworks of power, resistance, and gender issues, which rather than achieving productivity and promoting mental wellness tend towards promoting their disintegration and diversion from induction into the symbolic order and the reality principle. Child protection, for instance, should be inclusive of male-child protection and not synonymous with girl-child protection. The psycho-social dynamic of society may thus tend towards balancing itself for the common good.

It should consequently lead to discarding the frameworks and orientations that don't inure to the induction into the symbolic order and prioritize the frameworks and orientations that inure to the development of the individual, the self, and the formation of the human subject, rising beyond the discourses of blame, guilt, vengeance, and the reductive imaginations which engender the orientations towards nursing, nurturing and shaping the disintegration of the self and the mental health and stability of the individual and the human subject.

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