

## AFRICAN WOMEN AND LITERATURE

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If “literature, though imaginative, can be used for a systematic study of society,” the status of women’s authorship, and the nature of their depiction within the African literary tradition are certainly issues of great relevance (Ogundipe-Leslie *Re-Creating* 44). For the degree to which works are penned by women, the manner in which these texts are critically received, and the roles women occupy within the general body of African literature, are all reflective of societal attitudes toward women. Unfortunately, the African literary canon is characterized by the inadequate representation of female-authored works. Moreover, the literature it is inclusive of, often perpetuates the gender myths that are typically projected onto African societies via the Western gaze. In many instances, African women writers are marginalized by their male counterparts, and their works either remain unacknowledged or tokenized by literary critics.

This lack of inclusion is not without its socio-historical roots. For the marginalization of African women’s literature may be clearly linked to the gender specific repercussions of European colonization. Although regional and cultural specificities affected the degree of demotion, the position of African women was significantly compromised by the imposition of colonial institutions. Ifi Amadiume- author of *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*- argues:

“whereas indigenous concepts linked to flexible gender constructions in terms of access to power and authority mediated dual-sex divisions, the new Western concepts. carried strong sex and class inequalities supported by rigid gender ideology and constructions” (119).

While the forced implementation of European governments, Western schools of thought, and religion were introducing these gender distinctions, the colonial government’s educational systems were reinforcing them.

Initially, colonial schooling was exclusively offered to males, and when education did become available to both sexes, the male to female ratios regarding student enrollment clearly demonstrated women’s continued restriction from formal education. Amadiume documents this gender-biased access with statistics regarding Nigeria’s Province schools. In 1906, the ratio of boys to girls in this nation’s Eastern Province schools was greater than 5:1, and an astounding 20:1 in the schools located in Nigeria’s Central Province. These sex-based disproportions in student registration become further evident when considering progressing levels of study. For instance, Nakanyike Musisi, author of “Colonial

and Missionary Education: Women and Domesticity in Uganda, 1900-1945,” notes that in 1963, “girls received only the first three years of formal education. [making] up 39.4 percent of the Primary I enrollment, but only 24.1 percent of the Primary VI enrollment” (187). Although theorists have attributed these discrepancies to a number of factors, C.K. Graham, author of *The History of the Education of Ghana from the Earliest Times to the Declaration of Independence*, suggests that the apprehension of parents may have been a significant deterrent to the enrollment of female students. Because the types of employment formal education ensured was solely offered to boys, parents were reluctant to send their daughters to school- a decision that would intensify the familial workload without guarantee of any future employment. Nevertheless, the correlation between decreases in female registration and increasing levels of study suggests that social factors regarding gender resulted in the limited access and lowered prioritization of academia for women.

The content of the education children received was also reflective of the gender ideologies European colonizers imposed. Despite the more equitable treatment of women in indigenous African populations (particularly in the West), female students were mainly schooled in the matters of the private sector. While their male counterparts received an education steeped in public affairs, the former was subject to curricula that addressed “practical domestic work combined with religious education to build character”- one that “heavily outweighed the time given to academic studies” (Musisi 174). This home-oriented instruction contradicted women’s historical involvement in the dealings of the public sector, and as previously suggested, imposed rigid gender distinctions that were previously fluid.

Inevitably, the discrepancies that existed in primary and secondary colonial education were perpetuated with the establishment of university institutions. Gender- biases concerning access to university education stifled women’s contributions to the literary production higher education generates. Therefore, “even when education became more varied and more sophisticated for women, .the writer’s gap was not closed”- rendering the authorship, critiquing, and publishing of African literature, a dominantly male enterprise (D’Almeida *Francophone* 5). In fact, an “all-male canon” exists, including the works of Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Ngugi wa Thiong’o (Stratton *Contemporary* 3). The omission of female authors from the collection of works that are definitive of literary excellence is a matter of great concern, and this lack of acclaim can be partly attributed to the lack of criticism these author’s works receive.

As previously suggested, women authors are often excluded from anthologies and critical texts regarding African literature. In *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*, Carol Boyce Davies provides the historical context that has spawned the contemporary relationship between women writers and literary critics. According to her essay, “Feminist Consciousness and African Literary Criticism,” African literature was initially critiqued by “European academicians

who communicated the Western, male-oriented mode of creating and evaluating literature” (2). The critics of the West were then succeeded by male African writers who perpetuated the phallogocentric criticisms that were previously ascribed. Hence, the critique of African literature was founded upon the marginalization of women’s issues; the characterization of females and the political significance of their portrayals remained unacknowledged. Because the peripheralization of women was so imbedded in the literary criticisms of the day, the first female critics (forming the third wave of criticism) “had to utilize the same critical apparatus as their male contemporaries” (Davies 2). Although women like Margaret Amosu, Lilyan Kesteloot, and Molly Mahood were now contributing to critical anthologies, the vantage point from which they explicated these works was identical to that of their predecessors. For the characterization and eventual authorship of African women retained its peripheral status. Davies further suggests that although there is a contemporary surge of female writers and feminist critics, the gender-based discrepancies in literary criticism still exist- the political significance of which Ama Ata Aidoo firmly illustrates.

Aidoo, who has been described as perhaps the most renowned African woman writer, declares that she and her female colleagues, “are just receiving the writer’s version of the general neglect and disregard that women in the larger society receive” (James *In Their* 8). In an interview conducted by Adeola James, Aidoo speaks of the double oppression African women writers suffer, and demonstrates disdain toward the critical disregard of literature written by those who share either or both of these identities. Aidoo questions the perspective of critics who aren’t African and in some cases, are dismissive of the significance of African commentaries. She further discredits those critics who have not applied “their best in time and attention as well as the full weight of their intelligence” to women’s literature (qtd. in Nfah-Abbenyi *Gender* iv).

Flora Nwapa, the first African woman writer to publish a novel, also addresses the relationship of the critic to the writer stating, “every artist thrives on controversy, so you are killing the writer if you don’t even talk about her” (James 2). The fact that many African texts are subject to critique by non-Africans and most frequently, males yields very significant consequences regarding African female authorship. For the tools by which literary excellence is measured are often both Euro and androcentric- excluding any work that is created within the framework of African feminism. According to Mikene Schipper, author of *Beyond the Boundaries*, “literary criticism is primarily in the hands of male critics and since the critics determine who is and who is not an ‘important author’, the status of a writer depends largely on their assessment.” Unfortunately, critical regard of African women’s literature is minimal; their texts denied “canonical status,” and in most cases, excluded from the mainstream publications that examine African literature (Stratton 3).

When these women are finally recognized, their works are often explicated within

an exclusively female designation- resulting in the marginalization of their works and oftentimes, the stagnation of their careers. The publications in which they are included are habitually “marked for feminine gender”- a trend that is reflected in the compilation of texts utilized for this article (Stratton 3). Sources include: *African Women’s Writing*, *African Women’s Poetry*, *Writing African Women*, *Francophone African Women Writers*, etc. Florence Stratton, author of, *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*, inquires, “Why is Gerald Moore’s book, [*Twelve African Writers*] not entitled ‘Twelve African men writers?’” (3). For Moore’s piece, like many other works of its kind, only includes literature written by males. Obviously, female-authored works are alone in their subjection to gendered-based categorization- a fact that is indicative of the presupposition that literary authorship is an innately male preserve. Fortunately, female identified/authored criticisms are gradually subverting these exclusionary and marginalizing practices. For those critics who are completely dismissive or condemning of female discourses are being challenged by those who value the centrality of womanhood on the page. Unfortunately, the perspective from which many of these feminist critics are examining the works of African women is also problematic.

Although the general body of feminist criticism has been greatly instrumental in the increased awareness of female-authored texts, the application of Western feminist theories onto the writings of the “Third World” has been questioned. In an essay entitled, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” Chandra Mohanty examines the political implications of Western feminist scholarship. She argues that feminist authorship is “inscribed within relations of power” that place Western theory and the “Third World” women it is imposed upon, at polar ends of a spectrum (53). The West, which is perceived as the sole dispenser of scientific knowledge and scholarship is placed at the height of intellectual analysis, while the discourses of Developing Nations are considered “politically immature” and undeveloped (57). Although Mohanty acknowledges the need for the gender discourse Western feminist scholarship renders, she asserts that it must be considered within the context of the binaries it creates- West versus the Third World “other” and specifically, Western feminism versus the Third World female.

Mohanty has identified several of the shortcomings that characterize Western feminist scholarship. Feminist theory itself is depicted as a Western phenomenon, and the issues that are relevant to this specific feminist agenda are assumed to be universally applicable; matters around which all women, regardless of geographical or historio- cultural distinctions, should become mobilized. Furthermore, the white, middle- class feminists of the West tend to project their own gender dynamics onto the nations of the Third world- portraying male to female relationships as dichotomous or adversarial despite local gender relations and cultural specificities.

The fact that women’s position to men deteriorated under the constraints of

European rule is rarely acknowledged; the partial loss of their economic, political, and social agency remains unaddressed by Western feminist theory. Furthermore, the public and private spaces of pre-colonial Africa are juxtaposed according to gender despite women's actual participation in both arenas. In *Re-creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations*, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie challenges the notion of African tradition being inherently restrictive to women and supports the claim that these patriarchal structures were actually Western imports. She declares, "The British simply swept aside previous female political structure in society, replacing them with completely male structures and positions" (Ogundipe- Leslie 29).

Although colonization is largely defined by economic exploitation and political dominance, Mohanty suggests that it is also characterized by the creation and homogenization of "the other," and alludes to the "production of a particular cultural discourse about what is coined the third world" (52). Mohanty asserts that cultural colonization pervades Western feminist theory- an example of which being the construction of a singular "Third World" woman. She is the personification of every woman residing in a Third World nation, and is depicted as an amateur in regards to political mobilization. This "Third World woman", and the billions of other women she is made to represent, are considered powerless subjects that require "[schooling] in the ethos of Western feminism" (57). Their assumed dependency on men renders them as victims within the Western feminist discourse, and Mohanty compares this to the sexist discourse that suggests all "women are weak, emotional, having math anxiety, etc." (57).

Third world women are typically considered in terms of how they are affected by certain social institutions and systems, not in terms of their own agency, and certainly not in regards to the specific cultural/historical contexts in which they live. "Male violence, the economic development process, the colonial process, the Islamic code," and particularly the sexist ideology which is believed to be inherent in these "undeveloped societies" are all depicted as aspects of the equal oppression of the Third World woman (57). Unfortunately, Western feminists typically don't acknowledge their position in the global distribution of power, the relationship between "First" and "Third World" economies, and how these factors affect the women of the Third world. Mohanty not only urges Western feminists to consider these issues, she also demands that they acknowledge their privileged status in scholarship. She argues that the "production, publication, distribution, and consumption of information and ideas in the West", marginalizes Third World scholarship just as mainstream U.S. literature peripheralizes feminist theory in the states.

Mohanty claims that there are three basic problems that exist within Western feminist discourses- the first being the assumption that women constitute a coherent group with identical interests... regardless of class, ethnic, or racial location. Secondly, she identifies the unsubstantiated universality placed on these women's experiences. Mohanty's third, and final claim addresses the bi-

aries that exist within these discourses. She discusses the juxtaposition of men and women, as well as the polarization of the Third World woman who is represented as “ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, and family oriented,” with the white, Western feminist who is depicted as “educated, modern, having control over [her] own [body, sexuality],” etc. (56).

Mohanty reiterates the importance of discussing the lives of women within specific contexts. She believes that feminists need to examine the particularities of the structures that exist rather than applying their own biased conclusions to them. For instance, “the mere existence of a sexual division of labor is [often regarded as proof of women’s oppression]” (68). Nevertheless, Mohanty states that the “meaning of, and the explanation for” these divisions can only be determined via socio-historical contexts (68). She also suggests that while motherhood is a relevant issue in various global societies, the status of motherhood changes depending on what society is being considered. Therefore, the concept of motherhood should not be considered an equally oppressive social structure. Unfortunately, Mohanty omits the fact that the concept of parenthood (a genderless construction) rather than motherhood may be equally relevant to certain cultural communities.

Mohanty also addresses the tendency of Western academics to employ very limited scholarship when studying the nations of the Third World. Mohanty believes that these “reductive cross cultural comparisons” are characteristic of Western feminist discourse (64). This brand of feminist theory dismisses the complexities and diversity of various women’s lives- projecting a false homogeneity that is just as oppressive as the structures feminists are attempting to combat. Mohanty believes that there is a distinct level of “disinterested scientific inquiry and pluralism” in many Western feminist works, and that these are manifestations of the economic and cultural colonization of the Third World (74). Fortunately, many of these scholars are beginning to acknowledge the shortcomings of the Western brand of feminism, and are considering the struggles and political priorities of women within historio- cultural and economic contexts.

Due to the above named criticisms of the feminist movement, the relevance of this agenda, as it pertains to the women of Africa, has been questioned. African women writer reactions to this concern ranges from the appropriation of this ideology to the avid objection of feminist principals. Still others are calling for the revision rather than the ardent acceptance or dismissal of Western feminist politics. One example of an African woman writer who subscribes to the feminist agenda is Abena Busia. Although she acknowledges the variances among African and Western women’s struggles, Busia considers the dissociation from feminism to be counterproductive- suggesting that the alternative terms that have been created to redress the limitations of feminism are “based on a ‘divide and rule’ philosophy” (qtd. in Kolawole *Womanism* 8).

Despite Ogundipe-Leslie’s chastising of those who have rendered feminist ideals

irrelevant, this theorist has coined the term “Stiwanism” (STIWA: Social Transformation Including Women In Africa) in an effort to discuss “[her] agenda for women in Africa without having to answer charges of imitateness” (230). Although she addresses the validity of feminism in African nations, Ogundipe-Leslie advocates the use of the former term because it frees African gender discourses from the critiques of, and comparisons to Western feminisms. Clenora Hudson-Weems, author of *Africana Womanism*, discusses the pitfalls of mimicry and addresses the “need to avoid tagging African women’s agenda onto white feminist values” (Kolawole 25). She differentiates *Africana Womanism* from several of the other terms that have been linked to the empowerment of women of colour (including Alice Walker’s *Womanism* and Black feminism), defining this ideology as one that is steeped in the particularities of *Africana* women’s needs, not one that serves as an “addendum to feminism” (Kolawole 25).

“*Africana Womanism*” or “*Womanism*” as defined by Chikwenye Okonjo, has been championed by some of the most respected African women writers, including Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta- the latter referring to herself as “a feminist with a small f” (Nfah-Abbenyi 9). Condemning the adversarial gender relations Western feminism often perpetuates, Emecheta and many of her colleagues have opted for an alternative that is more consistent with an African perspective. In fact, according to Mary Kolawole’s *Womanism and African Consciousness*, Aminata Sow Fall, Ama Ata Aidoo, Bessie Head, and Mariama Ba, among others, have all “denied being feminists at various times”- calling for the consideration of racial, economic, and cultural divergences among women (10).

While Werewere Liking has stamped the term “misovire,” writer Filomina Chioma Steady advocates a “humanistic feminism that encompasses men, women, and children” (Ogundipe-Leslie, 226). Not unlike Ifi Amadiume, Steady refers to the African woman as the “original feminist” rather than an apolitical subject who has benefited from the scholarship of the West.

While the issue of terminology has remained significant to several African women writers, many have objected to the use of labels in the struggle for women’s empowerment. Nevertheless, the varying terms that are being created and championed in light of the inefficiencies of Western feminism, are bound by a common interest- the complete liberation of Africa’s land and peoples; a goal that can not be achieved without the full political and social agency of African women. A large part of the success of this goal is the deconstruction of the adverse characterization women are subject to in the general body of African literature.

As a consequence of the male-dominated literary tradition, many of the depictions of African women are reductive- perpetuating popular myths of female subordination. Female characters in male-authored works are rarely granted primary status- their roles often trivialized to varying degrees- and they are depicted as silent and submissive in nature; remaining absent from the public sphere. Emecheta strongly criticizes this false characterization, stating:

“The good woman, in Achebe’s portrayal, is the one who kneels down and drinks the dregs after her husband. In *The Arrow of God*, when the husband is beating his wife, the other women stand around saying, ‘It’s enough, it’s enough’. In his view, that kind of subordinate woman is the good woman” (James 42).

In fact, despite his ranking as perhaps the most celebrated African writer, Chinua Achebe has been criticized by several scholars and writers who denounce his one-dimensional portrayal of women. Lacking the complexity and character development his male protagonists receive, the female characters in Achebe’s works are depicted as victims. Kolawole argues, “Achebe’s world in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* is the world of ostentatious male heroism, patriarchy, and patrimony” (111). In fact, many of the celebrated works of Africa include these sexist elements- dismissing the socio-political and economic agency women traditionally maintained.

Women’s participation in the struggle against European domination also goes unnoted despite their actual leadership in, and initiation of wars of resistance. One of the most noteworthy examples of said rebellion is the Women’s War of 1929, which involved the protests of Igbo women against British colonizers. The discrepancy between the roles women occupied historically, and those they are ascribed in fictional works is also addressed in Stratton’s work. She compares an incident that occurs in Achebe’s, *Things Fall Apart* to “the same or a similar” historical event Amadiume addresses in *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*. According to Achebe:

“the killing by a Christian zealot of a sacred python, which is in his story, ‘the emanation of the god of water’, [was answered by].’the male rulers and elders of Mbanta [assembling] to decide on their action” (Stratton 35).

However, Amadiume contradicts the former account stating:

“the women of Nnobi ‘demonstrated their anger by marching half naked to the provincial headquarters, Onitsha, to besiege the resident’s office’ and then ‘returned to Nnobi, went straight to the [home of the man who killed the python] and razed it to the ground’(Stratton 36).

Obviously, the contributions of African women are minimalized and even omitted in some male-authored fictional writings. Ogundipe-Leslie, addresses the recurring characterization of the “traditional/rural” African woman who has been depicted as a childlike subject lacking agency. The author describes this fictional woman as one who is submissive, apolitical and unable to comprehend modern

technological advances. Romanticized as the sole “repositories of culture and tradition,” these women are juxtaposed with evolution and innovation- creating a stagnation that the central male characters are not subject to (Ogundipe-Leslie 50). Passivity and socio- economic dependency, are portrayed as inherently female in several male-authored African texts- a negation of women’s large contribution to the agricultural, fishing, and herding industries.

The African literary tradition is also characterized by a prostitution trope- one that is certainly exemplary of the debasement African women suffer at the hands of male authors. For the African whore is a recurring image that has been described as the personification of Africa’s degradation under colonial rule. This literary device is clearly one that nullifies women’s agency and reduces them to mere physicality. Although she identifies a few exceptions- Sembene Ousmane, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Alex la Guma, and Nuruddin Farah- Ogundipe-Leslie maintains that history is being rewritten at the expense of women’s socio-political standing. Contrastingly, these women are also placed on pedestals- for the tools by which people are oppressed are usually dichotomous- and although this occurrence has positive origins, it is also done to the detriment of women.

Although the idealization of African women is another phenomenon that occurs in much of the male-authored literary tradition, it is particularly evident in Negritude literature. Since the end of World War II, the collective efforts and creative output of the colonized world’s most aspiring male writers has been applauded and subsequently coined the Negritude movement. Although the term Negritude has yielded multiple definitions, it is commonly described as the acknowledgement of one’s African ancestry, and is associated with a tremendous sense of pride and renewed self- respect. Leopold Sedar Senghor- one of its chief pioneers- defines Negritude as the “sum total of the values of the civilization of the African world” (Stratton 40). Sparked by both the Harlem Renaissance and the “literary activities in the Antilles,” the Negritude poets anchored their works in issues concerning colonization, slavery, self-awareness, and religious institutions such as Christianity (Schipper 28). Although this “cultural and intellectual movement” mainly provided a means of deconstructing the colonial images of the “dark continent” and its “savage natives,” another element of this movement did indeed exist (Kennedy *Negritude* xix). Unfortunately, the Negritude author’s seemingly positive portrayal of African women “operated against the [latter’s] interests” (Stratton 40).

One such depiction would be that of “Mother Africa”- a trope that is largely definitive of Negritude poetry. According to Irene D’Almeida, author of *Franco-phone African Women Writers*, this image is one in which “Africa is compared to a nurturing mother and the African mother is given the proportion of the whole continent” (91). Consequently, African women and their experiences are idealized- transforming them into “mythical and symbolic figures” (D’Almeida 8). Ba strongly opposes this element of the male-authored tradition declaring, “We can no longer be satisfied with the nostalgic songs dedicated to the African

mother, and confused by men in their anxieties with Mother Africa” (D’Almeida 8). Although the exaltation of African women may have been the original intention fueling the creation of this image, the Negritude poets and other writers who have evoked these images in their works, are being criticized for placing African women on fictional pedestals. For as D’Almeida suggests, “this notion. is far removed from the reality of women’s daily existence” (91). Nevertheless, the African continent is continually feminized – the female body likened to the African landscape- and as a result, women are disparaged once again. Stratton submits that the “Mother Africa” image must be examined within the context of female/male power relations. Her description of the elements of Negritude literature is as follows:

“The speaker is invariably male, a western-educated intellectual. The addressee is always a woman. He is constituted as a writing subject, a producer of art and of socio- political visions; her status is that of an aesthetic/sexual object. She takes the form either of a girl, nubile and erotic, or of a fecund, nurturing mother. The poetry celebrates his intellect at the same time as it pays tribute to her body.” (41).

The male author speaks of the woman and her virtues, but she remains mute- an object of his gaze. Although Ogundipe-Leslie identifies Ngugi wa Thiong’o as a male author whose characterization of women is exceptional, Stratton criticizes his use of both the Mother Africa and prostitution tropes in his celebrated work, *Petals of Blood*- rendering this author, one of the many who trivialize the full scope of women’s experiences.

Not surprisingly, it has been suggested that “the self-assertive and self-reliant aspect of the woman’s role in Africa” has only become visible due to the collective efforts of African women writers (Ogundipe-Leslie 52). According to Lloyd Brown, they “offer self-images, patterns of analysis, and general insights into the woman’s situation which are ignored by, or are inaccessible to the male writer” (qtd. in Nfah-Abbenyi 6). Furthermore, if “books are a weapon,” as Mariama Ba has suggested, women’s authorship is central to the subversion of the structures, ideologies and institutions that have facilitated of gender discrimination. Ogundipe-Leslie suggests that “the female writer should be committed in three ways: as a writer, as a woman, and as a Third World person” (Jones and Palmer 10). Many of the works these women produce are reflective of these three elements, and are further demonstrative of the various identities women assume in the larger society. The female characters in their works are portrayed as multi-dimensional agents who no longer remain marginal to the plot. The following is a profile of a particular author who has made a significant contribution to the contemporary body of African literature.

Dr. Abena Busia is a respected feminist scholar, poet, and short story writer who is presently teaching in the United States. She was born in Ghana, West

Africa in 1953, and was educated in her homeland as well as in Holland, Mexico, and England. In 1984, Dr. Busia earned her Ph.D. from Oxford University, but as an exile, (though she no longer is one), she has lived all over the world-an eventuality that is evident in the poetry she authors. The following are explications of three poems Busia has authored entitled, "Liberation", "Altar Call", and "Beatitudes of the Righteous Famished".

"Liberation" is a declaration of power and independence for women. Busia describes powerful, spirited women who have endured lifetimes of torture, but will no longer be victimized by the "lies and disguises of others". For their sight has been sharpened by "salt tears" and centuries of deception, and Busia proclaims that they have "mastered the language of the word" previously used against them.

Busia refers to womanhood as a balance of pain and joy- an anger and sadness from which wisdom results. They are not the weaker gender, but forces to be reckoned with- those who have the power to "laugh beauty into life" despite the hardships suffered through it. Busia acknowledges the fact that women have fallen victim to ignorance, "the broken pieces of [their] dreams," and self destruction, but the fire within continues to burn and the fragments of lost women and their hopes have been recovered by female hands. They have managed "to declare through pain [their] deliverance," and found triumph where there was once fear.

The women depicted in this poem have not only liberated themselves, but have brought their former abusers to their knees. Men "shall not escape what [these women] will make of the broken pieces of their lives," and Busia declares that the visions of women will transcend the imaginings of man. Women have toiled over their children, fathers, husbands, and worked lands they were never allowed to own, but the mothers and daughters of the world have found liberation- "unearthed [themselves] piece by piece" and uncovered the treasure that always existed beneath.

In "Altar Call," Busia addresses the lack of acknowledgement women (particularly mothers) receive in spite of their large involvement in socio- political or familial matters. In this case, the narrator is describing the many tasks her mother completes in preparation for her confirmation, and juxtaposes this with the letter her father writes in celebration of the event. "[Her] mother is there," and prepares the house for guests, tailors her daughter's dress and turban, as well as her own, and does a number of other things that are necessary for the occasion. Her father is absent, but addresses a letter to his daughter- mentioning his "ever present faith" and love. While the latter is treasured and kept within a special section of the narrator's Bible, each of the mother's activities- those exhibitions of "love and caring [have left] no trace".

This discrepancy in things honored is evident in the everyday lives of women. Throughout history, "women's work" has been a very necessary but devalued as-

pect of community and family. In fact women's labor has always been intensive, physically demanding, and vital to the greater society as a whole. Nevertheless, men's contributions to each of these spheres are considered more noteworthy; hence the father's letter being stored for twenty years while the mother's work lacks commemoration.

Busia addresses this with a reference to God the father and likewise, God the "Mother of us all who is prone to make us forget". By drawing analogies between earthly and heavenly mothers forgotten, Busia emphasized the women's role in creation and suggests that they be worshipped just as their male counterparts in patriarchal religions and other social institutions. Busia's "third libation" considers and criticizes the lack of regard for female contributions in and outside of the home and returns supreme power back in the hands of a woman who exists along with the male God Christian peoples pray to. This is also an allusion to the belief amongst her mother's people (the Ga ethnic group) that the ultimate creator is female.

Busia's, "Beatitudes of the Righteous Famished" is also a religious commentary-applying the scripture from Matthew, Chapter 5 to the hardships of Africans. The Bible says: "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted". Busia questioned the validity of these words when referring to the tears her people have suffered for centuries. The "poor-in-spirit" are promised the kingdom of Heaven, " but Busia points out that these same people are pushed off their lands on Earth- marginalized socially, politically, and spatially. She subsequently asks what price they must pay for a simple "home on earth" as opposed to an entrance into the gates of Heaven.

Busia also refers to the biblical passage suggesting that, "the pure in heart shall see God". She urges this Lord to "show [His] face now," for his children are becoming angry and the religion that has placated the oppressed citizens of the world may no longer be enough to calm their ire. Christianity has been used throughout history to extinguish the fires of revolt. Slaves and other afflicted people would be less inclined to fight if prayer to the God of Christianity would grant them freedom and the meek were promised the earth. However, Busia declares that their inheritance is "forty years long over[due]" and that the "children of God" have now gone to war.

Busia closes this piece with the quote, "Blessed are they, which do not hunger and thirst for righteousness sake," and asks that her people finally be filled and rid of generations of void. However, even amidst a great deal of cynicism, Busia affirms her belief that recompense shall be awarded, suggesting that those living in want "shall surely be filled".

Certainly, Abena Busia is a very powerful writer whose poetry is informed by her multiple identities and experiences. She and other writers of her caliber deserve and are demanding the same recognition their male colleagues receive. D'Almeida addresses the political importance of women's authorship when de-

scribing literature as a venue through which women,

“portray themselves as actors instead of spectators. They are at the core instead of the periphery. They explore, deplore, subvert, and redress the status quo within their fiction” (22).

Therefore, it is imperative that the illumination of female-authored works becomes the rule rather than the exception. Fortunately, with the increased presence of African publishing houses and the contemporary emergence of female writers, advances are being made, including the diversification of university curricula in and outside of Africa. Although the degree of inclusion must be greatly improved, classrooms are increasingly becoming a venue through which African women authors come to voice- their texts being the tools by which political and social change will be effected.

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**Citation Format**

HASH(0x8321c10). (2000) AFRICAN WOMEN AND LITERATURE. *West Africa Review*: 2, 1. <http://www.icaap.org/iuicode?101.2.1.15>