

'It Was as Silly as All Women's Stories': Women's Marginalisation and the Duality of Gender in the 20th C West African Novel

Zohra Mehellou, Lancaster University, United Kingdom

The Asian Conference on Literature 2017
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Twentieth century African literature, mainly the novel, is criticised for marginalising the African female character. In addition to being influenced by the colonial discourse, living in pre-colonial and colonial African patriarchal societies stressed further the portrayal of the African woman as an 'inaudible' character by African male writers. Thus, her participation became limited to the space that male characters/writers allow her to inhabit and function within. Through this paper, I use psychoanalysis, Carl Jung notion of 'femininity', and the West African mythology of the Dogon -a tribe in West Africa- to discuss the female role in West African novels. Even though he is criticised for ignoring females in his works, when it comes to the unconscious, Carl Jung argues that every human being has an 'inner opposite gender', *anima/ animus*, which creates a kind of balance between the two genders. The same goes for the Dogon's creation mythology, in which it is believed that the world is based on the male/female dualism.

Through using the notion of 'gender duality', I reflect on the role of female characters in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Gabriel Okara's *The Voice* (1964), and Obeng's *Eighteenpence* (1943). In doing so, I try to investigate how these marginalised females, and through their inclusion/ exclusion in these literary works, are able to influence, in one way or the other, the fate of male protagonists. Furthermore, I investigate the different speech acts that African female characters use in these novels as a method to *Signify* their teachings, desires, and challenges. In doing so, I try to study how despite being marginalised and voiceless, African female characters can make a difference in the development of the novels' events.

Keywords: Twentieth century, West African novel, Duality of gender, Women's marginalisation, African mythology.

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Introduction

Things come in doubles
Male and female
Heaven and Earth
Day and night
Morning and evening
Right and left
Life and death
Good and evil.¹

African female characters are often marginalised in African literature, more particularly if we speak about twentieth-century African novel. In a kind of a repeated mode, African female characters during this period are presented in three main images, the virgin, the prostitute, and the mother. In so doing, African male writers, mainly those who wrote under the Négritude Movement,² have used the female character as a trope, as Stratton refers to, and a symbol of the African continent (Stratton, 1994: 39).

The use of the African female character for these writers³ in such a manner is to deliver the idea of how colonialism and imperialism have influenced Africans. The virgin representation in these literary works is a way to indicate the pureness of the African continent before the colonial period. While the first trope inhabits the African 'village'; the second, however, is usually presented in the picture of an African female abandoning the village and inhabiting the city -which in itself is used as a symbol of colonialism. The prostitute, who fancies the city lifestyle with its expensive cars, clothes, and high life music, is a reflection of the decimation that colonial regimes caused to the African continent. The last trope of the African female character that is used in 20th century African literature is the mother. The African mother, she can be portrayed as the city prostitute who returns to her village, is a woman who holds tight to her people's traditions, and the bearer of the next generation of African nationalists (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997: 05). It should be noted here, however, that the modern generation of African writers⁴ has been dominated by males. It is only until 1966 when Flora Nwapa (1931-1993), a Nigerian female writer, published her first novel *Efuru* that this domination came to an end. This indicates that before the publication of *Efuru*, African females' ideas and points of view were only voiced by male writers and from a male perspective.⁵ Bearing in mind that the picture that African male authors have given to women is a result of a Western influence, in what way the

¹ Originally written in the Igbo language, the poem is an indication of the importance of complementarities in the African mythology. See Salami-Boukari's *African Literature: Gender Discourse, Religious Values, and The African Worldview* (2012: 16)

² Négritude: The term first was used in 1940 as a way to unite Black people, Africans and those of the African Diaspora, on the base of identity and Black cultural values against Euro-American white ones.

³ Writers such as Léopold Senghor, Kofi Awoonor, and Okot p'Bitek are commonly known for 'feminising' the African continent in their works.

⁴ The first (modern) generation of African writers are those who received a Western education, especially in missionary schools, and published their works during colonial and neo-colonial periods. See Simon Gikandi's *Encyclopedia of African Literature* (2003).

⁵ See Sougou's 'Rethinking Androcentric Representations of Women in African Literature' (2010).

African female used to be portrayed in more traditional works? Did the West African social structures and beliefs define a particular role for women, either to be subordinate or dominant in comparison to men? In order to answer these questions, I analyse three West African novels from different periods and different cultural backgrounds. These novels; Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Gabriel Okara's *The Voice* (1964), and R. E. Obeng's *Eighteenpence* (1943), offer varied levels of African female characters' exclusion/ inclusion in the stories' events, which reflects the importance of their roles.

Content

Using African female characters as a representation of the continent is not an African invention, for critics state that African writers inherited this method from the colonial discourse (Nnaemeka, 2005: 149). Works such as Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611), and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) represent the African female character in an inferior position, as she is left, mostly, 'inaudible'. The African male, on the other hand, is given a voice to deliver his ideas, even if it is in a 'broken' pidgin. In 'Silencing Sycorax: On African Colonial Discourse and the Unvoiced Female' (1991), Busia criticises this method of leaving the African female characters in literary works written by Euro-American males marginalised and unvoiced. Being an African herself (Ghanaian), the author concludes her article with an interesting remark, as she states that 'for women, "narrative" is not always and only, or even necessarily, a speech act. We women *signify*: we have many modes of (re)dress' (Busia, 1990: 104, *my emphasis*). In this quote, the word 'signify' itself is loaded with meaning, which I would like to explain before going any further. Signifying is a speech act used mostly by Africans and people of the African descent. The American writer and critic Henry Louis Gates (b. 1950), in his book *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1988), presents an overview of this type of speech, in which he goes back to the African myth of the Signifying Monkey⁶ and its move to the New World with the African slaves. Going through the linguistic background of such use, Gates quotes the definition given to this aspect from the African-American scholar Mitchell-Kernan, who states that;

The Black concept of *signifying* incorporates essentially a folk notion that dictionary entries for words are not always sufficient for interpreting meanings or messages, or that meaning goes beyond such interpretations. (quoted in Gates, 1988: 81).

Going through the two previous quotes (Busia's and Mitchell-Kernan's), it is given that Africans, in general, may/ can use other 'indirect' methods to disclose their ideas and to deliver their voices. Thus, in this paper, and in order to answer the previously asked questions, I try to investigate how the marginalised African women use the limited space given to them by the male writer/ protagonist to deliver their thoughts. Also, I reflect on the importance of their exclusion/ inclusion in the chosen literary works, and how that influences the development of the novels' events. Accordingly,

⁶ See Henry Louis Gates's *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1988).

this leads me to discuss the importance of their existence throughout the narrated stories in relation to the notion of balance and duality of gender and its use in the African cultural tradition. In so doing, I relate the degree of the female's marginalisation with the fate of the male protagonists and argue that in spite of their marginalisation, African females in *Things Fall Apart*, *The Voice*, and *Eighteenpence* play a significant role in bringing balance to the stories.

In patriarchal societies, like the ones used in Achebe's and Okara's works, and in the colonial discourse, females are not supposed to participate in public events (Wehr, 1989: 16).⁷ One of the main approaches dealing with this idea is the theories of the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), in which he believes that females are 'receptive' rather than being active in the society and that their identity is 'found in the service of a man' (ibid: 105). Jung in this point is criticised, especially by feminists, as being influenced by the patriarchal system. This perspective towards women is brought to the African continent by colonialism, in which it has introduced the 'Victorian notion of domesticity' (Allman et al., 2002: 03). Females, it was believed, are to be left home to serve men rather than having better education and work opportunities like their peer males, and with the colonial understanding, their marginalisation was stressed further (Ce and Smith, 2014: 96). The lack of education, thus, can be considered to be one of the major reasons that delayed the emergence of African female writers during the colonial period.

Nevertheless, when it comes to dealing with the unconscious part of the human mind, Jung states that every human being has an inner opposite gender. This opposition is presented by the *Animus* and the *Anima* (Johnson, 1988: 48). On the one hand, the female, according to Jung, has an inner masculine self, *animus*, and for the male, he has an inner feminine self, *anima* (Jung, 2004: 31). From this perspective, Jung sees this as a process towards individuation, in which through encountering the opposite gender, the person comes to identify his/her own self. Despite it being a Western approach, the method of individuation already exists and is rooted deep in the African mythology (Salami-Boukari, 2012: 15). The Dogon's⁸ myth of creation resembles Jung's belief of balancing both opposite genders. The people of the Dogon, who currently inhabit West Africa, more specifically Mali, have travelled from the Niger River until Egypt. Those travels enabled the tribe to exchange different beliefs from other cultures and traditions. In their myth of the world's creation, the people of the Dogon believe that the world is based on the balance between the two genders, male and female. Amma, the creation god (a goddess in some references)⁹ for the Dogon, has created the Nummos -or the Nommos- twins, a male and a female, who started the life of everything on the planet Earth. From such a belief came the idea that all human beings have a male and a female soul at birth. Such balance, for the Dogons, is a means towards 'wholeness' (Johnson, 1988: 54). Thus, whether according to Jung's

⁷ In the Igbo-land (South-Eastern Nigeria), women used to obtain a title, *Ekwe*, which signals their power in relation to *Idemili* (the water goddess). This title allows them to achieve equal powers to men, thus the same level of authority. Such recognitions slowly dissolved with the coming of Christianity (colonialism).

⁸ The Dogon: A tribe in West Africa (Mali and Burkina Faso) which is believed that it did not get affected by Westernisation (colonialism) until the beginnings of 1930's.

⁹ See 'Dogon Creation Account' (page 37) in *African Mythology, A to Z* (2010) by Lynch, P. A., & Roberts, J.

belief or the Dogon's myth, the continuity of the world depends on the interrelationship and *complementarities* between male and female. Some theorists,¹⁰ however, have a 'doubt about the authenticity' of the myths and symbolic interpretations of the Dogon's beliefs, and even about the reality of how French anthropologists¹¹ have managed to register the Dogon's myths and religious rituals at the beginnings of the twentieth century (Mosima, 2016: 48). Nonetheless, and only through relying on the carvings and drawings that the Dogon's tribe used to portray their gods, this duality or 'twiness' of the male and the female can be detected easily.¹²

The Dogon's belief that the absence of one of the two genders creates chaos in the world is used in Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Throughout the novel, Okonkwo, the male protagonist, considers the females around him as inferior. Weakness and emotions, according to Okonkwo, are 'womanly' characteristics that a *real man* should not get acquainted with. This can be related to his hate towards his father, Unoka, who is described as being a coward and an *agbala* (woman) (Achebe, 1958: 11). The word 'agbala' in itself holds another meaning in relation to the position of woman in Umuofia society, for, besides meaning a woman, agbala is used to refer to a man who has no title, thus giving him an inferior position beside the female. Female characters in this novel -which gets the lion's share of criticism as it is considered to be one of the masterpieces of Anglophone African literature- are presented mostly unnamed, or referred to in relation to their eldest child, as 'mother of Nwoye' for instance (ibid: 12). One of the major aspects that these female characters, Okonkwo's wives and daughters, relate to is narrating folktales to their children and younger siblings. Okonkwo, from inside his 'manly' shell, considers these stories to be weak and only for women, for he obliges his eldest son, Nwoye, to listen to his masculine, violent stories instead. The disrespect that Okonkwo has for the females around him has no limits, for upon remembering a story he has heard from his mother, he reacts by stating that 'it was as silly as other women's stories' (ibid: 55). Such reaction is a key stand for Okonkwo that leads to his destruction at the end of the novel.

In her book *The Politics of (M)othering: Womanhood, Identity, and Resistance in African Literature* (2005), Nnaemeka goes through the folktales used in Achebe's work and gives a lengthy explanation of their backgrounds and meanings. Most of these folk stories that Okonkwo's wives narrate are based on a male and a female character, which are often in a kind of quarrel. These traditional stories can be seen as a sort of warning to Okonkwo, who ignores them due to his belief that such stories are 'womanly stories'. As an example of this warning, Nnaemeka uses the story of *The Snake Lizard* and his mother to reflect upon the fate that awaits Okonkwo (Nnaemeka, 2005: 62). This folktale tells the story of a snake lizard that kills his mother out of distrust and ends up killing himself, as to show that by eliminating the female part, the male one cannot survive. The same thing happens with Okonkwo, for his disrespect was not limited to 'human' females only, he even commits sins against *Ani*, the goddess of Earth. First by beating his second wife on the week of Peace and then by,

¹⁰ See Pius M. Mosima's *Philosophic Sagacity and Inter-Culture Philosophy* (2016).

¹¹ Marcel Griaul (1898-1965): a French anthropologist who studied the people of the Dogon, and met one of its priests which resulted in his publication *Conversation with Ogotemmêli* (1948).

¹² See Johnson's article 'Image and Archetype: Male and Female as metaphor in the thought of Carl G. Jung and Ogotemmêli of the Dogon' (1988).

mistakenly, murdering a man from his village, Okonkwo is warned by his friend, Obierika, that if he is not punished for his crimes, Ani's wrath is 'loosed on all the land and not just on the offender' (Achebe, 1958: 91). The first punishment that Okonkwo receives is his exile from his fatherland to his *motherland*. However, upon reaching there, he is faced with his uncle's continuous questions and teachings about the importance of the 'mother' by reminding him that;

... a man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his *motherland*. *Your mother is there to protect you.* (ibid: 98-99, *my emphasis*).

By using such a comparison at this level of the novel, it sounds like the position of 'masculine' males, like Okonkwo, is questioned in relation to females'. However, it looks like Okonkwo is trapped inside his masculinity and 'manhood', for ignoring all that his mother clan did for him, as he describes it as a 'womanly clan' (ibid: 117) when they did not fight the coming of the white men (missionaries). To his surprise, and upon returning to his fatherland after seven years of exile, Okonkwo is faced with how his village, Umuofia, for the same reason as his motherland, has 'become soft like women' (ibid: 133).

Nonetheless, there are two female characters in the novel whom Achebe gave importance to beside Okonkwo. Ezinma and Chielo are able throughout the novel to voice their ideas with a kind of authority and power even in the presence of males. The first, Ezinma, is Okonkwo's daughter which he praises for being 'tougher' than her half-brother, Nwoye. Due to this, Okonkwo cannot hide his regret and disappointment of her being born a girl, for he expresses that he would be happier if she were a boy (ibid: 48). However, the presence of Ezinma and her relation with Okonkwo can be considered as a means to show the positive side of Okonkwo's character, for when she fell sick, her father spends a whole night preparing medications for her (ibid: 72). From this perspective, Ezinma's character is *used* to show the emotional side of Okonkwo and his 'manhood'. Chielo, on the other hand, is portrayed as both a normal woman and a priestess of the Oracle. In her normal life, Chielo is a *widow*, which, according to Stratton, gives her a sense of freedom from any kind of 'male hierarchy' over her (Stratton, 1994: 25). Beside this, Chielo is a representation of the duality in the spiritual world, as mentioned earlier in the Dogon's mythology. The gods and goddess presented in *Things Fall Apart* are based on the notion of the duality of gender. For instance, Chielo is a priestess for the male God, the Oracle. Also, such indication can be found in the narrated folktale stories by Okonkwo's wives about the Earth goddess, *Ani*, and the god of the Sky, *Chukwu*. The balance of genders that the spiritual world of Umuofia society in Achebe's novels reflects upon indicates at the same time the chaos that Okonkwo's world develops to. By ignoring females and their importance in his life, Okonkwo fulfils Obierika's warning when he commits suicide, thus giving in under Ani's wrath.¹³

¹³ Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) contains a number of cases that present the balance and complementarities between the two genders, however, due to the article's limited space I cannot refer to them in details here. See Nwando Achebe's article; 'Balancing Male and Female Principles: Teaching about Gender in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*' (2002).

The chaos that Okonkwo goes through due to his ignorance, and his disrespect of the other gender, is dealt with differently in Okara's *The Voice* (1964). The novel opens with Okolo, the male protagonist, running away from the villagers, who they believe that 'his head was not correct' (Okara, 1964: 23). This accusation is due to the fact that Okolo is looking for *it*, 'the right thing in life', which the elders of his village, Amatu, believe that he should not do. Throughout all this commotion, Okolo is continually saved, supported, and protected by Tuere, the only female character in the novel. Tuere is often located in the darkness of her hut at the edges of the evil forest, for she had been cast outside the village as it is believed that she is an evil witch (ibid: 31). In a flashback to the days she lived in the village, Okolo goes back to the death of everyone who approaches her, starting with her parents to anyone who proposes to her, and how she faced the accusation of being a witch with *silence*. This silence broke with the coming of Okolo, for in the first scene after hiding Okolo in her dark hut, she is the one who goes out and faces the elders and the villagers who were looking for Okolo (ibid: 29). From Tuere's point of view, her silence was due to the fact that she is a woman, and even though she and Okolo hold the same dangers towards the village's elders, they were able to put her out 'of the way... like a tree that has fallen across the path' (ibid: 54). However, according to her, this cannot be done to Okolo, for he is an *educated man*, thus he is someone like a 'big tree fallen across their [the elders] path. They could not move it or cut it' (ibid: 55). One of the interesting scenes in the novel, however, is Okolo's decision to face the elders and to question them about the whereabouts of *it*. Even though Tuere warns him about the elders' plan to kill him, Okolo sticks to his decision. Still, when he stands in front of the whole village, Okolo loses his ability to voice his challenge; instead, it is Tuere who comes and challenges the elders;

"Listen! Listen!" Tuere said as she walked fast to Okolo who had decided he had accomplished something by his mere reappearance and stood calm with the face of a god (ibid: 120).

The silent presence of Okolo and the stormy presence of Tuere reflect the balance that the two characters play in the novel. As, before Okolo's return from exile, Tuere confesses to a friend her desire to be a man as it is the only way for her to stand in the face of the village elders; 'If in this world we can recreate ourselves I would become a man. When I die I will return as a man.' (ibid: 115). Accordingly, the coming of Okolo is enough for her to be able to deliver her message. Okolo's 'mere' presence in front of the elders has given Tuere what she needs to break her silence; it has given her the needed half, the masculine part. Even though this brought the end of these two characters as the elders drown them, their messages did not (ibid: 127). Okara gives us a short conversation between two unnamed messengers who discuss how Okolo's and Tuere's words started to grow in their 'insides' (ibid: 96-97). It looks from this account that it needs the cooperation of the two genders, male and female, in order to get the message delivered. Another aspect that the novel presents in relation to the balance between a male and female is the use of the pronoun *It* (Fashina, 2009: 72). Used in the novel to refer to 'the right thing in life', the neutral pronoun can be used to refer to independence, nationality, or freedom, if we take into consideration the historical context of the novel, or 'a meaning of life' as indicated in the introduction of the work (Ravenscroft, 1969: 08). Moreover, the use of such a pronoun shows how

doing the 'right thing' for the society is neither the male's nor female's burden only, rather it needs the cooperation of the two.

If the previous two discussed novel represent a patriarchal society, the third novel used in this paper introduces the matriarchal system of the Ghanaian society.¹⁴ E. R. Obeng's novel *Eighteenpence* (1943) is the writer's only novel, where its events take place in the Obeng's hometown of Abetifi. In the Ghanaian system, or Akan to be more specific, the female is given a distinguished position. Even though she is still expected to serve the men around her, the Ghanaian female is meant to be financially independent from her husband (Dako, 1999: 64). However, with the coming of colonialism, Ghanaian women lost their position in this kind of society due to the patriarchal system that was brought along with the Western regimes (Amadiume, 1987: 07).

Such change in the women's position in this society can be seen throughout Obeng's novel, which is considered to be the first English Ghanaian novel, and its narration is taken to be based on Ghanaian folktales. Despite this, however, the novel is overlooked by critics and little study is done on it (Dako, 1994: 364). The novel is supposed, according to Dako, to tell the story of Akrofi, the male protagonist, and his rise from poverty to wealth. However, after introducing Obeng Akrofi in the first two chapters, he is left aside, and Konaduwa, a female character, takes over. This makes the novel read into two parts, the first narrates the story of Konaduwa and the second of Akrofi. Konaduwa is presented as a smart woman with harsh words which leads her from one trial to the other. These characteristics enable Konaduwa to challenge the people around her and to get what she desires, especially those who apply any level of authority over her, such as her husband -Owusu, the village's elders, and even the District Commissioner. Throughout her trials, Konaduwa outwits and ridicules the males judging her by labelling them as cowards. This can be seen especially in her trial in front of the British Magistrate, in which she starts to question his ability to judge her case, and after questioning her husband and giving her a chance to ask him any question, she exclaims; 'Ask him why he fears the white man. Is it because of his pale face or because of his eyes which are like those of a cat?' (Obeng, 1943: 35). Reducing the British Magistrate to his 'appearance' and voicing challenges against him in a colony where women are supposed to be obediently silent, Konaduwa is used as a means to 'insult the colonial administration' (ibid: 35).¹⁵ In an encounter during a trial, Konaduwa accuses the people around her for dragging her from one trial to the other because she is a woman who they believe she would not speak for herself, but she is, as she describes herself, a '*masculine* woman' (ibid: 49). The ability to challenge the males around her and her reference to herself as a '*masculine*' woman sets Konaduwa in direct opposition with Akrofi's wife who is presented in the second part of the novel. Unlike Konaduwa, Akrofi's wife is left *unnamed* and her voice is rarely heard. Moreover, unlike Konaduwa who is able to defend herself and to challenge people around her to get what she wants, neither Akrofi nor his unnamed wife is able to defend themselves from the continuous cruelty of Akrofi's uncle and his desire to control their wealth. Despite the fact that the writer concludes both parts of the novel by stating that the two characters, Konaduwa and Akrofi, led a 'happily

¹⁴ For the Ghanaian society, the children belong to their mother and the inheritance is given to the female members of the family, usually the sister.

¹⁵ See footnotes in page 35 in Obeng's *Eighteenpence* (1943).

ever after' life (ibid: 75 and 163), Konaduwa's character has been transformed radically. Obeng writes that; 'Owing to her experience, Konaduwa became the best wife and a very good mother and house-keeper' (ibid: 75), which reflects the negative influence that the colonial and Victorian ideologies had created on the system of a Ghanaian society in dealing with women.¹⁶

Before concluding I would like to note the social 'norms' that the societies narrated in the three novels follow when it comes to gender identity. If Okara's *The Voice* narrates the balance between a male and a female, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Obeng's *Eighteenpence* bring to the surface another form of gender representation that the villagers see as different, which is the 'feminine' male and the 'masculine' female. Unoka, Okonkwo's father, in Achebe's work, is considered to be a coward, that even his son is not proud of him, especially after labelling him an *agbala*. Unoka, that man who is fascinated by music is unable to do what other Umoufia's men usually do, as going to the fields and farming or being able to enter the evil forest. However, Unoka sticks to the area around the household, which in itself is a symbol of his femininity, as that area is supposed to be where women have their small farms (Achebe, 1958: 22). The other picture is presented in Obeng's work, Konaduwa as the 'masculine' woman. The Adontenhene,¹⁷ while going through another woman's trial, and affected by her 'soft-manners' and apologetic tears, remarks that 'how true is that women are of different kinds. What a vast difference there is between Konaduwa and this women' (Obeng, 1943: 80) as an indication of how her 'masculine' self distinguishes her from how the Akan women should be.

Conclusion

From this analysis and despite the marginalisation of the African female character, her role is as important as that of the male protagonist. Perhaps we can argue the universality of Jung's theories and beliefs when it comes to the subordination of females in a patriarchal society, but his notion of duality of gender is feasible. Even though what is called in Jung's theory an 'internal oppression' where women learn how to oppress their own ideas and feelings mainly in a patriarchal society (Wehr, 1989: 11), African women, as seen in the analysed novels, are able to *signify* their voice through different methods. Such methods vary from teaching stories, spiritual protection to constant challenges of their social hierarchy. Their importance also is reflected upon through the old African cultural tradition and mythologies, as she, the African female, is seen as a needed half to finish the whole existence of the world, whether in their cosmology or literature. Even from the females' perspective, mainly those who see themselves as 'womanists',¹⁸ African females believe that their recognition cannot be achieved without referring to their cultural background.¹⁹

¹⁶ The novel also reflects Obeng's belief that a woman should fulfil the 'Victorian notions of domesticity' to resemble Akrofi's wife in the novel. See Dako's *Gender Roles as Indicators of Social Change in a Colonial Novel* (1999).

¹⁷ A traditional military rank at the Akan society.

¹⁸ Womanism : First used by the African-American writer Alice Walker, as to show the importance of African women's cultural background in relation to her femininity. See Willmann's 'Is Feminism Un-African? Do We Need to Talk about African Feminism in Plural' (2015).

¹⁹ Black women, and women of the Third-World in general, believe that Western feminism sets them in crossroads between their gender identity and cultural heritage. See chapter three; 'Difference: A Special Third World Women Issue' in Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Woman, Native, Other* (1989).

Moreover, ‘... womanism argues for *a union of males and females* in joint endeavours to promote the advancement of the human race’ (Mogu, 1999: 69, *my emphasis*). Thus the balance between the two genders is not a mere quest to fulfill women’s rights; rather it is a quest for the progress of the human beings.

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Contact email: z.mehellou@lancaster.ac.uk / zmehellou@gmail.com