

Rewriting History through a Female Black-Eyed Squint in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*

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Abstract:

This paper examines Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* as a deliberate act of historiographic revision that re-members the post-colonial female subjectivity through the intertwined practices of rewriting official history, mobilizing palimpsestic memory, and performing everyday resilience. Synthesizing close textual analysis with Gayatri Spivak's notion of the subaltern's "discontinuous trace" and Homi Bhabha's concepts of mimicry and the ambivalence of colonial discourse, the paper traces how Sissie's epistolary journey disassembles imperial archives and re-inscribes subaltern knowledges instead. The study's contribution is twofold: it demonstrates that the novel's hybrid form—part prose poem, part travel satire—functions as a counter-archive, and it advances an ethics of reading that refuses to resolve Sissie's "killjoy" stance into tidy redemption. Ultimately, the essay argues that *Our Sister Killjoy* enacts a decolonial feminist epistemology in which history, memory, and selfhood remain under revision, offering a methodological template for re-engaging canonical texts within contemporary decolonizing pedagogies.

Keywords: Rewriting History, Postcolonialism, Female Subjectivities, Memory, Ama Ata Aidoo, *Our Sister Killjoy*

1. Introduction:

The contemporary resurgence of decolonizing initiatives within universities has intensified scholarly attention to texts that foreground the epistemic fractures of empire. Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977), composed during Ghana's transition from the euphoria of independence to the disillusionment of military coups, re-emerges as a paradigmatic site for interrogating these fractures. The novel's reappearance in current syllabi is neither nostalgic nor supplemental; rather, it functions as a theoretical artifact

Rewriting History through a Female Black-Eyed Squint in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*

that anticipates and critiques the very discourses now invoked to dismantle Eurocentric canons. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's assertion that "the subaltern as female cannot be heard or read" (104) provides a primary analytical lens through which to examine Aidoo's formal strategies of address. Sissie's epistolary apostrophes to an unnamed "you" repeatedly disintegrate into ellipses, parenthetical asides, and self-interruptions, dramatizing what Spivak terms the "irreducible heterogeneity of the subaltern" (104). The epistolary mode, conventionally aligned with bourgeois interiority, is thus estranged; Aidoo exposes its complicity in imperial circuits of knowledge production while simultaneously deploying it as a vehicle of partial, fragmented utterance.

Historical contextualization reinforces this reading. Between 1957 and 1977, Ghana experienced a precipitous decline from the Pan-African promise of Nkrumah's Convention People's Party to the economic austerity imposed by successive military regimes (Manuh 53). Aidoo's text registers this historical compression not through chronological narration but through recursive temporal structures that resist developmental paradigms. Consequently, the novel aligns with Spivak's insistence that subaltern consciousness is "dislocated in the extreme" (103), irreducible to nationalist or neoliberal teleologies.

Homi K. Bhabha's theorization of colonial mimicry—"almost the same, but not white" (122)—offers a complementary optic for analyzing the Afro-European characters whose hyper-correct English destabilizes the colonizer's claim to linguistic and cultural origin. Sissie's observations of these figures foreground the "metonymy of presence" (Bhabha 128) through which colonial authority is simultaneously asserted and undermined. The mimic's slight excess—an over-articulated consonant, an exaggerated etiquette—produces what Bhabha calls the "ambivalence of mimicry," a discursive space wherein the colonial subject is "the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis" (125). Aidoo, however, complicates Bhabha's schema by gendering mimicry: the Afro-European women's performances are mediated through patriarchal expectations that render their mimicry doubly estranged. The text thus reframes Bhabha's male-coded colonial subject to expose the intersectional pressures upon post-colonial female identity.

Between the triumphant rhetoric of mid-century independence and the creeping disillusionment of the 1970s, Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977) intervenes at the very moment when nationalist futures begin to harden into neocolonial present. Synthesizing Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's claim that the subaltern cannot be ventriloquized within imperial grammars with Homi K. Bhabha's insistence on the ambivalence of colonial mimicry, the novel performs an epistemic interruption that renders post-colonial female subjectivity an "unfinished, dialogic practice" (Bakhtin 166). Its hybrid form—epistolary fragments, lyrical interludes, and satirical sketches—refuses the linear closure demanded by either nationalist bildungsroman or metropolitan memoir, instead staging a continuous negotiation among voice, body, and archive.

Rewriting History through a Female Black-Eyed Squint in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*

At the center of this study stands a guiding research question: How does Aidoo stage post-colonial female subjectivity as an unfinished, ethically dialogic process through the triple negotiation of historiography, memory, and resilience? To pursue this question, the analysis is organized around four interlocking vectors: (1) the rewriting of imperial historiography; (2) the palimpsestic layering of embodied memory; (3) the aesthetics of resilience articulated through linguistic and communal practices; and (4) the ethical positioning of the female subject who elects the role of “killjoy” (Ahmed 65). Each vector is probed through a specific sub-question. First, how does the novel’s hybrid form function as a historiographic method that exposes and rewrites the imperial archive’s layered palimpsests? Second, in what ways does the text mobilize sensory and diasporic memory to unsettle the nostalgic “Commonwealth” imaginary, and how does this mnemonic resistance reverberate in contemporary discourses of return? Third, how does Sissie’s enactment of resilience—via code-switching, female communal networks, and the epistolary “you”—refigure post-colonial female subjectivity as ongoing ethical praxis rather than achieved identity?

Methodologically, the analysis combines close reading with post-colonial feminist theory, memory studies, and genre critique, positioning *Our Sister Killjoy* simultaneously as a historical document and an aesthetic intervention.

2. The Literary and Socio-Political Context:

Ama Ata Aidoo’s seminal work, *Our Sister Killjoy* or *Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint*, constitutes a remarkably polyvocal and radical intervention in the postcolonial literary canon. Her 1977 prose-poem is linked to a historical moment of profound disillusionment following the initial euphoria of African independence. The text functions not only as a narrative but as a sophisticated discursive weapon, questioning the protracted spectres of colonialism, the insidious nature of neocolonialism, and the complex intersections of race, gender, and diaspora. To fully apprehend its significance, one must situate it within a tripartite framework: the post-independence socio-political milieu of Ghana, the burgeoning tradition of African feminist thought, and the formal experimentation characteristic of late twentieth-century anti-colonial literature.

The immediate socio-historical context is one of ferment and fracture. The optimistic nationalism that characterized the immediate post-independence period in Ghana, under Kwame Nkrumah, had paved the way to a period of political instability, coups d’état, and economic precarity. This generated a pervasive sense of “postcolonial melancholia”—a collective anxiety over the unfulfilled promises of liberation (Abraham 127). Aidoo, like her contemporaries Ayi Kwei Armah (whose novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* serves as a thematic corollary), channels this disillusionment. *Killjoy*’s protagonist, Sissie, functions as a critical consciousness, her journey to Europe a metaphorical excavation of the “heart of darkness” trope, inverted to scrutinize the moral and spiritual decay of the West and its seductive, yet destructive, allure for the

Rewriting History through a Female Black-Eyed Squint in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*

African intellectual. The text is thus a sharp critique of the neocolonial condition, wherein political independence is undermined by persistent economic dependency and a debilitating cultural and psychological Eurocentrism among the African elite (Nkrumah 239).

Simultaneously, Aidoo's work is a cornerstone of African literary feminism, distinguished by its unflinching commitment to what would later be theorized as "intersectionality". Writing against the grain of both patriarchal African traditions and a Western feminist movement often blind to its own imperialist and racist assumptions, Aidoo articulates a specific womanist critique (Ogunyemi 67). Sissie's rebellion is not solely against European hegemony but also against the patriarchal constraints that seek to define and limit her agency, whether at home or abroad. Her refusal of marriage and romantic entanglement, particularly with the African expatriate she names "the man," is a potent act of intellectual and bodily autonomy. Aidoo thereby foregrounds the dual colonization of the African woman—subjugated by both indigenous patriarchal structures and external imperialist forces (Boehmer 7). This positions *Killjoy* in dialogue with the works of Buchi Emecheta and Mariama Bâ, creating a formidable trifecta of female voices redefining the African literary landscape through a gendered lens.

Formally, the text is a masterclass in generic hybridity and narrative experimentation, techniques employed to mirror the fragmented and dissonant experience of postcoloniality. Rejecting the conventional linear novel form—a genre itself implicated in the Western imperial project—Aidoo adopts a lyrical, episodic structure blending verse, prose, epistolary elements, and stream-of-consciousness. This avant-garde composition serves to destabilize the reader's expectations and enact a linguistic decolonization (Quayson 145). The title itself, with its subtitle *Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint*, announces its oppositional gaze; the "squint" implies a critical, sidelong look that defies straightforward, submissive observation. The use of free indirect discourse allows Aidoo to fuse the narrator's voice with Sissie's internal monologue, creating a powerful, unified, yet ironically fragmented critical perspective that lampoons the hypocrisy and alienation of the exiled African intelligentsia.

Furthermore, the novel engages profoundly with the diasporic dilemma. The figure of the "been-to" (the African who has travelled to the West) is subjected to rigorous scrutiny. Aidoo explores the psychological schisms of exile and the potential for alienation and self-hatred that can accompany immersion in a metropolitan centre that remains racially hostile. Sissie's encounters in Germany and England reveal the quotidian realities of racism and the seductive, soul-destroying trap of seeking validation from a world that fundamentally denies her humanity. Her ultimate return to Africa, rejecting the material comforts of the West in favour of a committed, albeit challenging, engagement with her homeland, is a powerful political statement. It

advocates for a responsible intellectualism rooted in the African continent, prefiguring later debates on brain drain and the role of the academic in the developing world (Gikandi 212).

Aidoo crafted *Killjoy* during a pivotal time when the landscape of Anglophone African women's literature was transitioning from the prevailing anti-colonial realism of the 1950s and 60s towards a more introspective and gender-aware type of writing. Bessie Head's *Maru* (1971) had already complicated the nationalist bildungsroman by foregrounding the experiences of a Masarwa woman's struggle with ethnic marginality (Lewis 42). Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* (1974) positioned the female migrant within the metropolitan context, illustrating the interplay between domestic patriarchy and imperial racism. Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), though published later, encapsulated trends that had emerged in the mid-1970s: the portrayal of female interiority in contrast to nationalist historiography (Willey 31). Within Ghana, Efua Sutherland's *Edufa* (1967) had offered gendered critiques of cultural nostalgia, yet remained within the confines of dramatic form; Aidoo's transition to the hybrid prose-poem/epistle marked a formal innovation that resonated with thematic shifts across the continent. The editorial landscape also evolved: Heinemann's African Writers Series, under the direction of James Currey, began actively seeking women's manuscripts, while feminist publishing houses in London and Lagos forged transnational circuits of reception (Currey 203). Thus, *Killjoy* emerged at a time when the designation "African woman writer" was being established, even as the texts themselves scrutinized the adequacy of such labels.

2.1. Reception Trajectory:

Initial critical analysis of *Our Sister Killjoy* was characterized by what Aidoo later referred to as "the charge of bitterness" (Aidoo, "To Be an African Woman Writer" 156). Early critiques from West Africa labelled the novel as "strident" and "unrepresentative," reflecting concerns that negative depictions of African men could reinforce Western stereotypes (Amuta 93). In contrast, European critics lauded its "lyricism" while feeling uneasy about its anti-Western satire (Killam 112). The text's hybrid structure further disrupted generic expectations: it was neither a realist novel nor a collection of prose poems, thus evading the classification systems of metropolitan review platforms. The feminist reclamation of the text began in the mid-1980s alongside the emergence of African and diasporic women's studies. Chikwenye Ogunyemi's 1985 article positioned Sissie within a "matri-centric worldview," while Carole Boyce Davies's 1986 interpretation highlighted migratory subjectivity and epistolary agency (Ogunyemi 79; Davies 62). By the 1990s, *Killjoy* had established itself as a fundamental text in post-colonial feminist curricula, cited alongside Head and Emecheta for initiating a critique of nationalist patriarchy. More recent academic work has complicated this celebratory narrative, pointing out how the text's Anglophone orientation and elite

Rewriting History through a Female Black-Eyed Squint in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*

protagonist challenge assertions of subaltern representation (Newell 45). Consequently, the novel's reception history reflects broader discussions within African feminism: from initial concerns about exposing "dirty linen" to later appreciations of disruptive female voices, culminating in contemporary efforts to re-historicize these texts within both national and transnational power structures.

3. The Politics of Rewriting History:

Ama Ata Aidoo's engagement with history reflects a deliberate and sustained effort to challenge the authority of colonial discourse by exposing the ways historical narratives are constructed, contested, and reimagined. Her work foregrounds the complex interplay between memory, identity, and power, positioning literature not merely as a reflection of history but as an active participant in its rewriting. Aidoo offers alternative frameworks of remembrance by conceptualizing imperial history as palimpsest, a notion that reveals how colonial accounts attempt to erase African epistemologies while inadvertently preserving fragments that testify to their endurance. These fragments, whether textual, material, or mnemonic, become the raw materials for reconstructing suppressed dimensions of African historical experience. To recover these silenced dimensions, Aidoo deploys counter-narrative strategies that foreground African voices, reclaiming agency while destabilizing the hegemonic version of the past. At the same time, her attention to genre as historiography underscores the role of literary form in shaping historical consciousness, illustrating how African literature operates as a critical landscape of intervention, resistance, and epistemic reclamation. Together, these strategies demonstrate Aidoo's conviction that the act of narrating the past is always political, and that rewriting history requires both a challenge to imperial authority and an embrace of literary experimentation.

Aidoo's reworking of history as palimpsest is most vividly staged in *Our Sister Killjoy*, where Sissie's journey—from the rural landscapes of Ghana, through the metropolitan city of London, to the former colonial center of Bonn—becomes a dynamic archaeological site in which layers of colonial narratives are revealed, overlapped, and partially obscured. The residues of empire appear not only in official documents but also in everyday signs of colonial intrusion: railway schedules, missionary cartography, and records of cocoa exports emerge in her recollection as "layered texts" (Mudimbe, *Invention* 25), each bearing the palimpsestic imprint of epistemic dominance. The faded "Buy Empire Cocoa" advertisement glimpsed from a train window illustrates what Ann Stoler describes as "imperial debris" (Stoler 195)—a material trace that simultaneously embodies the persistence and deterioration of colonial power. In this sense, Sissie's journey becomes a mode of reading history as accumulation, where stations, museums, and boarding houses manifest themselves as archival fragments rendered deceptively transparent by colonial discourse. Aidoo's refusal to synthesize these fragments into a single, cohesive story is deliberate: it emphasizes the violence embedded in the archival

Rewriting History through a Female Black-Eyed Squint in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*

endeavor itself, echoing Michel-Rolph Trouillot's insistence on "the power to define what is said about the past" (Trouillot 29). By exposing both the presence and absence of colonial traces, Aidoo foregrounds the precariousness of historical knowledge and the politics of remembering and forgetting.

If the palimpsest exposes the uneven terrain of colonial residues, Aidoo's principal method of resistance is the ironic subversion of the "civilizing mission." Sissie's biting address—"Dear O, you who brought us light when we had sunshine in abundance" (Aidoo 34)—turns the colonial trope of African darkness on its head, affirming indigenous epistemologies of enlightenment. Such reversals are woven throughout the text: European art museums are dismissed as "storerooms for loot" (42), while the English tutorial system is derided as a mechanism for producing "second-rate copies of yourselves" (57). These satirical inversions exemplify what Andreas Huyssen terms "counter-memory," a practice that works against the grain of dominant narratives (Huyssen 7). Yet, crucially, Aidoo does not replace one totalizing monologue with another. Instead, she destabilizes narrative authority itself, dispersing voice across proverbial insertions, italicized ancestral cautions, and sudden authorial intrusions. The cumulative effect is a decentering of historiographic authority, exposing what Gayatri Spivak has described as the "sanctioned ignorance" (Spivak 280) of imperial historiography—its selective amnesia concerning forced labor, ecological exploitation, and epistemic violence. Aidoo's irony, then, is not merely rhetorical play; it is a political strategy that reclaims the power to narrate from the colonial archive.

This commitment to disrupting colonial epistemologies extends beyond content into the very fabric of Aidoo's literary form. *Our Sister Killjoy* resists linear narrative progression, weaving together epistolary fragments, lyrical digressions, and satirical travelogue into a deliberately hybrid structure. The discontinuities in narrative perspective—shifting from second-person address to free indirect discourse—combined with the omission of chronological markers and the sudden resurfacing of memory without conventional flashback cues, all serve to destabilize the reader's expectation of temporal and causal clarity. Such formal choices echo V. Y. Mudimbe's concept of "gnosis," a mode of knowledge that contests the Western pursuit of singular truth (Idea 9). In rejecting the teleological structure that imperial historiography depends upon, Aidoo aligns herself with Homi Bhabha's notion of the "time-lag of enunciation" (Bhabha 250), where meaning emerges in the delay, disjunction, and repetition rather than in resolution. The fractured temporality of the text underscores the idea that history is not a seamless progression but a contested performance, marked by interruptions and contradictions. Through this genre fluidity, Aidoo transforms form into an act of historiography, demonstrating how literature itself becomes a medium of epistemic intervention.

Rewriting History through a Female Black-Eyed Squint in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*

Ultimately, Aidoo's politics of rewriting history demonstrates that resisting colonial historiography requires more than recovering silenced voices; it demands a rethinking of the very means by which history is narrated and remembered. By reading imperial history as palimpsest, she uncovers the violent erasures and lingering traces of empire. By deploying counter-narrative strategies, she destabilizes the authority of colonial archives and insists on the centrality of African voices. And by reconceptualizing genre as historiography, she exposes the epistemological assumptions embedded in narrative form, showing how discontinuity and hybridity can themselves function as acts of resistance. Through this triad, Aidoo not only critiques the imperial past but also offers new modes of imagining the future, affirming literature's capacity to act as a site of memory, struggle, and reclamation exposing the fractures that colonial discourse aimed to conceal.

4. Memory: Between Personal and Collective:

In *Our Sister Killjoy*, memory does not appear as a chronological archive or a neatly ordered record of the past, but rather as a fragmented, embodied, and politically charged process that mediates between the personal and the collective. The novel treats memory as something that lives within the body, resurfaces in moments of diasporic estrangement, resists colonial nostalgia through counter-narratives, and even asserts itself through silence and absence. Aidoo thus challenges the notion of history as a closed system of facts by suggesting that memory operates as an alternative epistemology, one that refuses containment within imperial or nationalist frameworks and instead gestures toward the ongoing struggle over how the past is remembered, forgotten, or deliberately silenced.

The body becomes the first archive in Aidoo's conception of memory. Sensory stimuli trigger recollections that bypass conscious cognition and disrupt the idea of memory as linear sequence. Vivid images such as the "sweet rot of mango bruised against enamel basins" (Aidoo 22) or the "wet heat rising from tarmac like a remembered slap" (31) function as more than atmospheric detail; they are eruptions of the past inscribed directly onto the body. Paul Connerton's argument that "bodily practices are mnemonic reserves" (Connerton 72) clarifies how these aromas and textures act as non-textual records, carrying within them remnants of pre-colonial lifeworlds that endure beneath the imposed structures of colonial education. When Sissie's nostrils flare at the smell of diesel on a London bus, involuntarily recalling childhood afternoons spent behind her uncle's lorry (Aidoo 36), the incident illustrates Connerton's idea of "habit-memory" (38), in which memory is preserved through bodily repetition and unconscious gesture. Here, the body itself refuses to forget, preserving histories that elude official archives and resurfacing them in unexpected moments of sensory recognition.

Rewriting History through a Female Black-Eyed Squint in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*

Nevertheless, memory in Aidoo's text extends beyond the body to the diasporic landscapes of Europe, where dislocation transforms recollection into an experience of estrangement. England and Germany appear not simply as geographical settings but as venues wherein memory surfaces in fractured and unsettling ways. In London museums, Sissie observes "bronze Benin heads gaze past me, catalogued and mute" (Aidoo 45), a scene that captures Pierre Nora's argument that modernity produces lieux de mémoire precisely because organic milieux de mémoire no longer exist (Nora 7). The museum embodies this transformation: once-vibrant cultural artifacts are stripped of their living contexts and recast as mute objects of imperial possession. Similarly, in Germany, the cold granite walls of a Hamburg guesthouse conjure the warm laterite of Sissie's village (Aidoo 52), collapsing spatial distance into a temporal fissure. Diaspora here is experienced as perpetual "un-homing," where memory is not evoked by familiar presences but provoked by unsettling absences. The estrangement of Europe thus transforms into a mnemonic landscape in which recollections are fragmented, displaced, and constantly mediated by loss.

Aidoo also insists on the importance of counter-memory as a form of resistance. Her work subverts the sanitized nostalgia of the Commonwealth—its rhetoric of "shared sacrifice and cricket greens" (Aidoo 58)—by foregrounding oral traditions, proverbs, and seemingly minor anecdotes that fracture the continuity of imperial narratives. A passing remark by an elderly market woman—"We traded gold for glass beads before we traded our sons" (61)—resonates with subversive force, recalling histories of exploitation that official accounts prefer to obscure. Nora's assertion that counter-memory "ruptures the continuum of official history" (Nora 15) underscores the significance of these moments: they do not merely supplement history but actively contest its legitimacy. By embedding these oral fragments into her narrative, Aidoo performs what might be described as archival rebellion, transforming casual utterances into records of exploitation, survival, and cultural endurance. In doing so, she preserves voices that colonial discourse sought to erase, ensuring that collective memory resists assimilation into imperial nostalgia.

Aidoo turns to silence itself as a mnemonic strategy, dramatizing how the unspeakable enters historical consciousness. In a haunting moment, when Sissie begins to narrate a sexual assault on a night bus, the account halts abruptly with an em-dash; the following page remains blank except for a single italicized mark: "—" (Aidoo 67). This deliberate typographical interruption functions as what Connerton terms a "negative commemoration" (Connerton 102), a way of preserving memory precisely by refusing its narrative incorporation. The blank page resists the smoothing over of trauma into discursive form, foregrounding instead the impossibility of representation. Here, memory operates not only through presence but through absence, reminding readers that colonial and diasporic histories are equally constituted by what cannot be said, what is

Rewriting History through a Female Black-Eyed Squint in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*

silenced, and what haunts the margins of narration. In this sense, Aidoo suggests that remembering also entails an encounter with the unspeakable and the unassimilable.

Through embodiment, displacement, counter-memory, and silence, Aidoo constructs a multi-layered vision of memory that unsettles both colonial historiography and nationalist mythmaking. Memory becomes at once personal and collective, sensory and political, fragmented yet enduring. It resists the closures of official history by surfacing through the body, by refracting itself across diasporic estrangement, by preserving oral fragments that puncture imperial nostalgia, and by insisting on the importance of silence as a form of testimony. In *Our Sister Killjoy*, memory is neither a simple act of recall nor a passive storage of the past; it is an ongoing, contested, and dynamic practice of survival and resistance, one that binds the personal to the collective and transforms literature into an alternative archive of history.

5. Resilience as Praxis:

In *Our Sister Killjoy*, Ama Ata Aidoo reimagines resilience not as the mere endurance of hardship but as an active, ethical, and communal praxis that transforms structural harm into life-affirming possibilities. Rather than reducing resilience to a stoic capacity for survival, she frames it as an intentional practice of resistance and creativity that challenges colonial and patriarchal structures while affirming alternative modes of living. This reconceptualization echoes Patricia Hill Collins's definition of resilience as the cultivation of "life-affirming responses to systematic dehumanization" (Hill Collins 11), positioning resilience not as reactive adaptation but as a conscious project of thriving. Through Sissie's journey, resilience is articulated in multiple forms—ethical defiance, linguistic flexibility, communal solidarity, and dialogic address—each of which demonstrates that survival alone is insufficient without transformation.

One of the clearest illustrations of Aidoo's rethinking of resilience emerges in Sissie's rejection of the Western narrative of the grateful immigrant. When offered a prestigious lectureship that would require her to "explain Africa" to a Eurocentric audience, she refuses, recognizing that such an acceptance would compromise her integrity by performing Africa through colonial expectations (Aidoo 78). Her decision exemplifies what Margo Okazawa-Rey describes as "transformational resistance" (Okazawa-Rey 89), a practice that converts structural harm into critical insight. Resilience here is not framed as acquiescence or the ability to adapt to exclusion but as the ethical refusal of positions that reproduce inequality. By declining opportunities premised on her subordination, Sissie embodies resilience as praxis: an action-oriented commitment to living otherwise, where thriving means resisting the allure of validation within oppressive structures.

Aidoo also dramatizes resilience through the sphere of language, transforming speech itself into a site of resistance and renewal. Sissie's code-switching—from the clipped

Rewriting History through a Female Black-Eyed Squint in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*

precision of English to the layered resonance of Akan proverbs—disrupts the colonial insistence on linguistic purity. Her insertion of sayings such as “The lizard that nods its head is not greeting the rock” (Aidoo 81) interrupts the smooth bureaucratic flow of English discourse, re-centering indigenous epistemologies and unsettling the assumed authority of colonial language. Hill Collins identifies such practices as a form of epistemic resilience that “challenges the colonial imposition of linguistic purity” (134), while Okazawa-Rey observes that linguistic fluidity “disarticulates Englishness while preserving collective memory” (112). In Aidoo’s text, language becomes a space of tactical flexibility: a means of embedding cultural continuity within everyday interactions while simultaneously refusing the assimilationist logic of empire. Speech acts thus acquire political weight, transforming conversation into an everyday decolonial practice.

Resilience also takes on a distinctly communal dimension in Aidoo’s narrative. In Ghana, Sissie is sustained by networks of women whose cooperative efforts embody what Hill Collins calls a “politics of care that sustains life worlds” (45). The sharing of communal bowls of groundnut soup, the maintenance of rotating credit systems to fund children’s schooling, and the presence of evening storytelling circles all testify to a collective ethic that prioritizes mutual care over individual accumulation (Aidoo 93). In sharp contrast, her experience in Europe is marked by alienation: in the cold corridors of London hostels, Sissie confronts “a chill intensified by the lack of collective support” (97). Okazawa-Rey argues that neoliberal societies “privatize risk and disperse resilience” (121), and Aidoo vividly illustrates this dispersal through Sissie’s isolation in a context where survival is cast as a private responsibility rather than a communal endeavor. By juxtaposing the cooperative care of Ghana with the atomized individualism of Europe, Aidoo underscores resilience as inseparable from community, care, and shared responsibility.

Our Sister Killjoy manifests resilience through the epistolary form itself, particularly in the second-person address that structures much of the narrative. Sissie’s persistent invocation of “you who left, you who listen” transforms her letters from solitary reflections into relational acts of accountability. Hill Collins suggests that “testimonial address transforms isolation into relational accountability” (203), and Aidoo’s use of the epistolary mode enacts precisely this transformation. Each “you” conjures the absent recipient, bridging geographical and emotional distances and ensuring that individual reflection is never detached from communal responsibility. The address is dialogic rather than monologic, situating Sissie’s thoughts within a network of care, memory, and obligation. In this way, resilience is not only embodied and linguistic but also textual: the act of writing itself becomes a medium through which resilience is continuously renewed and sustained across distances.

Rewriting History through a Female Black-Eyed Squint in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*

Through these intersecting dimensions, Aidoo advances resilience as a praxis that surpasses the limits of mere survival. Ethical refusal, linguistic re-signification, communal solidarity, and dialogic address each reveal resilience as an active, creative, and relational practice that undermines the structures of dehumanization while affirming alternative life-worlds. In Sissie's journey, resilience is never reducible to the individual; it is always situated within larger networks of meaning, care, and memory. By redefining resilience in this way, Aidoo not only critiques the reductive frameworks of Western liberalism but also offers a vision of thriving that emerges through collective practice, cultural continuity, and the courage to resist.

6. Post-colonial Female Subjectivity: Becoming *Killjoy*:

Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* presents a striking exploration of post-colonial female subjectivity, articulated through the figure of Sissie as a disruptive, uncompromising presence who refuses the roles assigned to her by colonial discourse, patriarchal expectations, and diasporic fantasies. Central to this articulation is the notion of the "killjoy," a term borrowed from Sara Ahmed's theorization of the feminist killjoy as one who unsettles the emotional economies that sustain structures of domination. By embodying this position, Sissie refuses the cheerful complicity expected of the "grateful African émigrée," resists the colonial gaze that renders her hyper-visible, redefines the meaning of return beyond nostalgic origins, and embraces an unfinished, open-ended subjectivity. The result is a portrait of female subjectivity that is restless, resistant, and transformative, embodying a politics of refusal that insists on the possibility of living otherwise.

Sissie's rejection of cheerful compliance is one of the most powerful expressions of this killjoy stance. In social settings in Europe, she refuses to perform the role of the appreciative colonial subject, declining to offer the expected laughter or praise in response to nostalgic invocations of empire. Aidoo dramatizes this in a London drawing-room scene where Sissie's intentional silence following a hostess's celebration of "Empire loyalty" unsettles the convivial atmosphere (Aidoo 102). Ahmed describes such moments as the killjoy's "politics of disaffection," where refusing to align with collective happiness disrupts the emotional economy that binds communities together (Ahmed 66). By refusing to sustain white liberal comfort, Sissie demonstrates how disruption itself can be a political act. As Ahmed argues, the killjoy "moves sideways, creating a disturbance" (68), and Aidoo translates this disturbance into a gendered and racialized refusal of the colonial fantasy of unity and gratitude.

This politics of disruption extends into corporeal practices, particularly through Sissie's confrontation with the colonial gaze. Historically, the colonial and patriarchal gaze rendered African female bodies both hyper-visible and objectified, positioning them as curiosities or as sources of knowledge to be consumed. Sissie's encounter with a

Rewriting History through a Female Black-Eyed Squint in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*

German museum guard—who “looks at me as if I am both artifact and thief” (Aidoo 109)—captures this asymmetry. Yet her decision to meet the guard’s stare and hold it until he blinks reverses the scopic hierarchy. By returning the gaze, Sissie refuses objectification and transforms the moment into an act of epistemic resistance. Ahmed observes that “bodies marked by difference are rendered hyper-visible” (Ahmed 132), but by reclaiming the gaze, Sissie disrupts this regime of visibility and asserts herself as subject rather than object. In this way, the body becomes a site of counter-knowledge, where defiance and presence undermine the structures that sought to categorize and contain.

Aidoo further complicates the notion of subjectivity by reconfiguring the concept of return. For Sissie, returning to Ghana does not signify a nostalgic retreat to origins but an ethical choice that resists assimilation into Western fantasies of progress and permanence. When she declines a permanent lectureship in London, stating, “I cannot trade my mother’s tongue for tenure” (Aidoo 115), she signals that return is not about recovering a pure past but about reaffirming a commitment to cultural continuity and collective accountability. Ahmed theorizes this as an “affective politics of return,” where departure from the metropole is not a backward move but a turning toward reparative subjectivity (Ahmed 158). Sissie’s refusal is thus both personal and political: she rejects the seductions of professional success in the West because they come at the cost of silencing her cultural and linguistic inheritance. Home, for her, becomes less a geographical location than an ethical orientation, a decision to re-engage the contradictions of the post-colony rather than escape them through diasporic assimilation.

Aidoo addresses the incompleteness of subjectivity through the open-ended structure of the text itself. The novel concludes with Sissie’s final letter trailing off into an ellipsis—“and so...” (Aidoo 122)—a typographical gesture that dramatizes the refusal of closure. Ahmed reminds us that “the killjoy does not resolve; she remains in disturbance” (Ahmed 171), and Aidoo’s narrative form embodies this principle by resisting the finality expected in both nationalist bildungsroman and Western confessional memoir. The ellipsis does not mark absence but an invitation, extending the dialogue to the reader, who implicitly becomes the “you” addressed throughout the novel. In doing so, Aidoo refuses to present post-colonial female subjectivity as a completed project; instead, she insists on its ongoing, dialogic, and relational nature. Subjectivity here is not about arriving at resolution but about inhabiting disturbance, opening up possibilities for future renegotiations of selfhood.

Through the perception of Sissie, Aidoo thus constructs post-colonial female subjectivity as a process of becoming killjoy—one that unsettles social expectations, reclaims corporeal presence, redefines return as an ethical stance, and embraces incompleteness as a mode of existence. This subjectivity resists the closures imposed by

Rewriting History through a Female Black-Eyed Squint in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*

both colonial discourse and nationalist ideology, instead foregrounding the ongoing work of refusal, critique, and reimagination. To become a killjoy, in Aidoo's rendering, is to live in tension, to disturb rather than to appease, and to remain open to the unfinished possibilities of selfhood in a world still shaped by the legacies of empire.

7. Intertextual Reverberations:

Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* does not merely stand as an isolated intervention in African literary history but resonates as an intertextual seed whose reverberations can be traced across subsequent works of African and diasporic women's writing. The novel's exploration of displacement, refusal, and subjectivity generates a genealogy that both foreshadows and informs later literary articulations of diasporic return, racialized embodiment, and hybrid form. In this sense, Aidoo provides not just a singular narrative but a framework for future writers to negotiate the entanglements of post-colonial modernity, diaspora, and gendered identity.

The dramatization of Sissie's ethical refusal to remain in the metropole initiates a literary motif that continues to shape narratives of return. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), for example, offers in Ifemelu a protagonist who echoes Sissie's recognition that return must constitute "a deliberate act of re-engagement, not redemption" (Adichie 476). Unlike the celebratory accounts of triumphant homecomings that circulate in nationalist discourse, both protagonists foreground the ambivalence of return, framing it as a process fraught with ethical and existential complexity. Ifemelu's critical blog entries, which interrogate the commodification of "authentic" Africanness in American multicultural markets, extend Sissie's insistence that diasporic subjectivity cannot be subsumed under the rhetoric of assimilation or nostalgia. Likewise, NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) inherits the sensory register of estrangement first articulated in *Our Sister Killjoy*. Darling's astonished perception of Detroit snow that "burns like pepper" (Bulawayo 184) re-enacts, in the voice of a child, the physical dislocation that Sissie experiences on European streets. In both cases, Aidoo's text inaugurates a conception of return that is not a resolution but an ongoing ethical and affective negotiation.

The genealogies of race and gender demonstrates that Aidoo's interventions extend beyond thematic resonance to shape the representational politics of later African and diasporic writers. Sissie's refusal of the role of the "grateful native" anticipates the ways in which Black Atlantic narratives resist the commodification of racialized femininity. Teju Cole's *Every Day Is for the Thief* (2007), though focalized through a male narrator, echoes Sissie's refusal to provide ethnographic transparency for Western acquaintances, exposing the ways readers often demand access to African life as cultural capital (Cole 92). The corporeal politics of the gaze, vividly dramatized when Sissie confronts the German guard who treats her as both artifact and thief, reverberates in Akwaeke

Rewriting History through a Female Black-Eyed Squint in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*

Emezi's *Pet* (2019), where Jam's trans body becomes "a question mark" in the perception of authority (Emezi 45). Aidoo thus establishes a representational trajectory in which Black subjectivity—particularly Black female subjectivity—emerges not from compliance but from a continual disidentification with imposed roles, whether those of colonial objectification, neoliberal self-branding, or heteronormative legibility.

The aesthetic innovations pioneered in *Our Sister Killjoy* also resonate with subsequent literary experiments, especially in their shared attention to hybridity and interruption. Aidoo's use of epistolary fragments, lyrical digressions, and abrupt narrative shifts anticipates the fractured narrative strategies of contemporary writers. Adichie's deployment of Ifemelu's blog posts, for instance, transforms digital media into a modern epistolary form, directly addressing a dispersed readership in ways that mirror Sissie's dialogic letters. Similarly, Bulawayo's disjointed vignettes resonate with Aidoo's poetic interludes, translating fragmentation into a stylistic principle that reflects diasporic dislocation. These continuities underscore how Aidoo not only interrogated the politics of subjectivity but also carved formal pathways for later authors to navigate histories of displacement. The hybrid form itself, with its refusal of closure, becomes a historiographic method, preserving what Aidoo envisioned as the "unfinished conversation" between Africa and its diasporas.

Such intertextual resonances ultimately point toward a decolonial ethics of reading. The present study has emphasized how Aidoo rewrites imperial history as a palimpsest in which erasures remain visible, mobilizes embodied and diasporic memory against the archival grain, and enacts resilience as a dialogic praxis of return. Taken together, these strategies highlight post-colonial female subjectivity as an ongoing process of epistemic unsettlement rather than a stable identity or purely reactive stance. By attending to the "discontinuous trace" of subaltern speech (Spivak 104) and the ambivalent mimicries that destabilize colonial authority (Bhabha 125), Aidoo positions Sissie's voice as an interruption that reverberates across generations. To read *Our Sister Killjoy* intertextually is thus to recognize it as both a foundational text and a continual provocation: one that demands future writers and readers remain engaged in the unfinished work of decolonial critique.

Nevertheless, canonizing *Killjoy* as only a "resistant text" risks re-inscribing the very teleologies it contests. When the novel is reduced to a counter-myth of heroic refusal, its polyphonic form—its ellipses, proverbs, and epistolary fractures—is flattened into a single moral lesson. Such instrumental reading replicates the extractive logic of the imperial archive, converting disruptive aesthetics into consumable evidence of African feminist triumph. A decolonial ethics of reading must therefore refuse the lure of closure, attending instead to the text's refusal to resolve contradiction.

Rewriting History through a Female Black-Eyed Squint in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*

Sissie's final, open-ended dash—"and so ..." (Aidoo 122)—offers a provocation to contemporary decolonizing movements: how might institutional critique itself remain unfinished? Rather than seeking to replace one center with another, present efforts to dismantle the Eurocentric narratives and adopt Sissie's method: an insistent questioning that keeps the conversation unsettled, the archives open, and the subject of enunciation perpetually in process.

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**Rewriting History through a Female Black-Eyed Squint in Ama Ata Aidoo's
*Our Sister Killjoy***

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