Five: Ama Ata Aidoo's Our Sister Killjoy: The African Gaze of Resistance Today

Published by

Baer, Elizabeth R.
The Genocidal Gaze: From German Southwest Africa to the Third Reich.
Wayne State University Press, 2017.
Project MUSE. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/book.56612.

FIVE

Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*

THE AFRICAN GAZE OF RESISTANCE TODAY

All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz.
JOSEPH CONRAD

Travel implicitly involves looking at,
and looking relations with, peoples different from oneself.
E. ANN KAPLAN

As we turn to Ama Ata Aidoo, we listen again to black African voices as they parse the impact of colonialism on the continent. *Our Sister Killjoy, or, Reflections of a Black-eyed Squint* was published in 1977, almost one hundred years after Hendrik Witbooi began his archive. The intervening century had seen the Nazi Holocaust and the struggle for independence from colonialism in Africa. The title of Aidoo's novel invites the reader to consider again the African gaze—the squint—upon the Western imperialists. Aidoo, too, depicts the genocidal gaze, as did Hendrik Witbooi, hers a backward gaze, his an intuitive anticipatory gaze.

In his iconic novel *Heart of Darkness*, published in 1899, Joseph Conrad endeavored to capture the colonial intervention in what was then the Belgian Congo. His novel remains controversial despite its status as a classic: Chinua Achebe, the great Nigerian writer whose novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is seen as a founding text of postcolonial African fiction, famously termed the text "racist" while others read *Heart of Darkness* as a critique of the racial hierarchies that were an inherent part of colonialism.[1] While the novel, given its date of publication, would not be defined as strictly "*post*colonial," it remains a staple of courses in postcolonial literature and part of the "canon" of books a scholar of postcolonial studies should know.

Heart of Darkness has also provoked several intertexts: in a gesture of what is often termed "writing back" from the Empire (or its post-equivalent), novelists have riffed on Conrad's title, his journey structure, and his depiction of the "Dark Continent." Recent examples of such riffs stretch from Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* (1981) to a video game titled *Heart of Darkness* (1998) to Anne Patchett's best-selling novel *State of Wonder* (2012). Such deployments of intertextuality are often made by writers to signal their disapproval of a particular fiction and their subsequent re-vision of that text as a correction. For the purposes of this chapter, I will be using the following definition of intertextuality: "The fundamental concept of intertextuality is that no text, much as it might like to appear so, is original and unique-in-itself; rather it is a tissue of inevitable and to an extent unwitting, references to and quotations from other texts."[2]

Intertextuality calls into question the viability of originality and stability in literary texts; in turn, it calls upon the reader to trace references, quotations, or allusions to other texts. Intertextuality allows for the re-vision and appropriation of older texts to suit new situations and meanings, and presents the opportunity to critique outmoded assumptions. Intertextuality makes us aware of the ways in which the author of the book we are reading is morphing an earlier text and creating a new one.

In disrupting our sense of the text as a reflection of reality and positing instead the postmodern paradox that texts "both enshrine the past and question it,"[3] intertextuality as a concept can be said to instantiate the disruption of our notions of human nature, evil, and "history-as-progress," of meaning itself. I read intertextuality more broadly than simple influence; I read it as dialogue among a network of texts that at once destabilizes meaning and enables the writer to render ideological commentary.

One of the African writers who has engaged in such an intertextual appropriation of Conrad's novel is Ghanaian Ama Ata Aidoo. Aidoo is a late twentieth-century writer who has spent considerable time in the West. My reading of Aidoo occurs at the intersection of Postcolonial and Genocide Studies, the theoretical location of much of *The Genocidal Gaze*. *Our Sister Killjoy* is Aidoo's most well-known novel. Though brief (134 pages), this novel is challenging in that it includes unorthodox page formatting as well as several genres and a shifting narrative voice, which are frequent features of Ghanaian literature.[4] Like Uwe Timm's *Morenga* and William Kentridge's *Black Box*, *Our Sister Killjoy* uses pastiche to deliver its complex message. It is also highly intertextual, incorporating references to fairy tales, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, historical events, and the gesture of "writing back" to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. While a few scholars have noted

this link with Conrad, none has made the connection between imperialism and genocide in Africa and genocide in Germany that Aidoo is interrogating. Her novel thus provides a very useful case study for this emerging field.

Aidoo has reversed the trajectory of *Heart of Darkness* by focalizing the novel through Sissie, a college student who leaves Africa to visit Germany on a foreign exchange program. While recognizing the privilege and opportunity of such travel, Sissie encounters a very different Germany than she had expected. Physical traces of the Holocaust, the constant experience of being "othered," and an unwelcome lesbian advance all conspire to make her stay a dark and frightening one.

Thus Aidoo establishes Germany, rather than the Congo, as the heart of darkness in the twentieth century. The critique Aidoo offers is this: the very people—white Europeans—who came to Africa with the avowed purpose of "civilizing" indigenous Africans in the nineteenth century in fact demonstrated then, as well as a half century later, that they were capable of the most heinous crimes *against* humanity and "civilization." Europeans have long called Africans savages, and this, as Chinua Achebe has taught us, is certainly the view propounded by Conrad. Yet a mere fifty years after the 1885 Berlin Conference that parceled out Africa to colonization, Hitler had already established the first concentration camps in Germany. As we have seen in the preceding chapters, the continuity thesis establishes the links between savage European behavior in colonialism and in the Holocaust. While Aidoo uses many of the tropes of postcolonial writing such as mimic men, "new englishes," and colonization of the mind, she also references chimneys/smoke, Hitler, racial hierarchies, and other tropes of the Holocaust, thus creating a pioneering novel that has puzzled some critics unfamiliar with the intersection of Postcolonial and Genocide Studies. While other scholars have also noted the intertextual relationship between Conrad and Aidoo, none specifically links Aidoo's critique to Germany's extermination of six million Jews and five million other victims who did not meet the standards of the "Master Race" and "Aryan supremacy" set by Nazi ideology.[5]

Previous Critical Readings of *Our Sister Killjoy*

The critical response to Aidoo's oeuvre falls quite neatly into three categories that are largely chronological. In the 1980s, the first phase of response to her work, which includes plays as well as fiction, was feminist. This approach to Aidoo was encouraged by several early interviews in which she identified herself as a feminist. In her article "The African Woman Today" (1992), Aidoo declares:

> When people ask me rather bluntly every now and then whether I am a feminist, I not only answer yes, but I go on to insist that every woman and every man should be a feminist—especially if they believe that Africans should take charge of our land, its wealth, our lives, and the burden of our own development. Because it is not possible to advocate independence for our continent without believing that African women must have the best that the environment can offer. For some of us, this is the crucial element of our feminism.[6]

Almost twenty years later, in a 2010 interview conducted at Brown University, Aidoo again affirmed her commitment in the importance of feminism. While she believes that she "grew up among women who can be described as strong in terms of an understanding of their own lives and what is expected of them and how they should negotiate their own existence," nevertheless, "women have always been marginalized in every way—from the beginning of societies."[7]

Scholars have examined her women characters in terms of their awakening consciousness, which often results from transnational travel and encounters with the West. Chiomo Opara, appropriating the tropes of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979), reads the oppression of African women as a central theme in Aidoo's work. Opara concludes her somewhat confusing essay with the declaration that Aidoo is "a militant female writer [who] strives to arouse our consciences while taking a critical glimpse at the newly awakened African woman."[8] A more effective and, hence, persuasive feminist analysis of Aidoo can be found in Kofi Owusu's essay "Canons under Siege: Blackness, Femaleness, and Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*."[9]

The second phase of critical response might be termed nationalist. Critics such as Anuradha Needham and Ranu Samantrai labeled Aidoo as too nationalist and even as racist.[10] Elizabeth Willey's article, which looks at Aidoo's oeuvre in terms of her dialogue with the political discourse of Kwame Nkrumah, is perhaps representative of this category of critical approaches to Aidoo. Incorporating some of the earlier feminist insights on Aidoo, Willey asks about the "possibility that women and men experienced the colonial condition differently."[11] She answers the query in the affirmative, pointing out the compromised position of women under colonialism, "an emasculating enterprise" (Willey, 4) as well as in the postcolonial era. In this era, women are often viewed as the site of cultural authenticity of the African tradition as Ghana, in its newly found independence, sought to recover its African identity. Willey reads *Our Sister Killjoy* as Sissie's quest to find out "what it means to be a true African woman" (15), which is

embodied in the question of "how to define a 'life relevantly lived.' For Sissie, relevance involves a person's obligations to self, country, and Africa" (13). Willey devotes very little time to discussing Sissie's sojourn in Germany.

The most recent approach to Aidoo has been postcolonial, beginning about the time in which the field of Postcolonial Studies became robust in the 1990s.[12] Yogita Goyal's detailed analysis of *Our Sister Killjoy* serves as a fine example. Goyal opens her chapter on Aidoo with a meditation on Frantz Fanon and she reads the novel through that lens, focusing on the transnational consciousness of the narrative. "Aidoo stands firmly against the celebration of mobility, migration and hybridity, interested instead in how a neo-colonial world order comes into being in the wake of decolonization."[13]

None of these essays is necessarily "wrong," but they are too limited. While some identify Aidoo's intertextual appropriations, none specifically speaks to her attention to genocide. An example of a particularly problematic essay is Hildegard Hoeller's "Ama Ata Aidoo's *Heart of Darkness*."[14] Hoeller names her own subject position near the beginning of the article "as a Westerner and, more specifically, as a German" (132). She then immediately relegates herself to the *role of victim* by accusing Aidoo of racist depiction of her German characters: "Reading *Our Sister Killjoy*, I saw myself . . . reduced; like Achebe reading Conrad, I was forced to identify not with the central figure, the traveler and explorer, but with the crude, stagnant background characters, the 'black figures' and their caricatured history and culture" (132). Like the Austrians who greeted the arrival of the Nazis in their country with wild enthusiasm, and then, after the defeat of Germany, styled themselves as "Hitler's first victims," Hoeller wants to claim victim status for herself and deem Aidoo a "racist."[15] Though Hoeller's article goes on for another fifteen pages, she does not once mention the word "Holocaust" (or any of its synonyms such as "Shoah"), nor does she acknowledge the overt references in Aidoo's novel to this horrific genocide.

Hoeller also fails to mention the prevalent fairy tale tropes in the novel. Since these tropes have been used often by other novelists as well as survivors writing their Holocaust memoirs,[16] and since the German Grimm Brothers collections are some of the key sources of fairy tales, such intertextuality is just as crucial to analyze as that with Conrad. Instead, after some perceptive analysis of the textual links between *Heart of Darkness* and *Our Sister Killjoy*, Hoeller concludes that "Aidoo's heart of darkness is *Heart of Darkness*" (141), a gross simplification of Aidoo's work and one that completely ignores the critique Aidoo is offering: that the racial hierarchies established by Europeans as justification for their colonial crimes are, at once, false and yet also a leading cause of the genocide gaze.

In his recent essay "Reading *Heart of Darkness* after the Holocaust," Robert Eaglestone concludes by confessing: "This essay has tried to explore what it means to read other works of literature with eyes oriented by the Holocaust."[17] After those twelve devastating years between 1933 and 1945, can we do otherwise? Isn't it incumbent upon us to use our "eyes" to see the "genocidal gaze" and what its consequences have been? To recognize that when racial hierarchies are established, genocide will follow, whether in Berlin or German Southwest Africa or Rwanda or Darfur?

Our Sister Killjoy, or, Reflections of a Black-eyed Squint: The Trajectory to Genocide

Our Sister Killjoy is divided into four chapters: "Into a Bad Dream," "The Plums," "From Our Sister Killjoy," and "A Love Letter." The novel opens with three pages printed with only a few words and then a fourth page with a narrative voice that seems to be that of a black African speaking disparagingly about how misleading white perspectives on Africa are.[18] First, the narrator decries the colonization of the mind of the average black African worker who "regurgitates" "white" issues, such as the population explosion, and values, such as the sanctity of the UN charter. The narrator continues: "The academic-pseudo-intellectual version [of Africa] is even more dangerous, who in the face of the reality that is more tangible than the massive walls of the slave forts standing along our beaches, still talks of universal truth, universal art, universal literature, and the Gross National Product."[19] Postcolonial theory has, of course, pointed out that "universality" is almost always a code word for the supposed superiority of Western art. This jibe is directed at both African and Western scholars.

The narrative voice continues in a call-and-response pattern:

> Yes, my brother,
> The worst of them
> these days supply local
> statistics for those population studies, and
> toy with
> genocidal formulations.
> That's where the latest crumbs
> Are being thrown! (7)

Certainly for the white postcolonial studies scholar, this passage serves as a warning, much as the concluding pages of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* do by presenting a satiric portrait of the colonizer writing a condescending book about the tribal life he has observed. Aidoo's passage also calls to mind the short essay by Binyavanga Wainaina titled "How to Write about Africa," originally published by *Granta*, which went viral on the Internet a few years ago. Wainaina parodies journalists and academics who fall into stereotypes with their alarming depictions of Africa, all presented as a "how to" guide to such writing. "Always use the word 'Africa' or 'Darkness' or 'Safari' in your title. . . . Establish early on that your liberalism is impeccable. . . . If you are a woman, treat Africa as a man who wears a bush jacket and disappears off into the sunset. Africa is to be pitied, worshipped or dominated. . . . Be sure to leave the strong impression that without your intervention and your important book, Africa is doomed."[20]

So, I take Aidoo's warning to heart. But it is undoubtedly significant that she has signaled to her readers in this passage that genocide is under consideration in what follows and that readers will be presented with a "genocidal formulation" that is more accurate, more appropriate than that drummed up by the "academic-pseudo-intellectuals." The remainder of Aidoo's opening chapter provides details of Sissie's selection to study in Germany; the fawning of the German ambassador in his Mercedes-Benz; her encounter with Sammy, a classic mimic man; and her departure by plane for Europe.

Arriving in Frankfurt, Sissie is taken to the train station for transfer to a small village and there experiences interpellation for the first time, resulting in an epiphany. Overhearing a German woman say to her daughter, **"Ja, das Schwartze Mädchen"** (Yes, the black girl), she "was made to notice differences in human colouring" (bold in original text, 12). Indeed, this passage clearly echoes Fanon's own experience, as described in *Black Skin, White Masks*:

> "Look, a Negro!" It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile.
>
> "Look, a Negro!" It was true. It amused me. . . .
>
> "Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!" Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me.[21]

Such interpellation leads Sissie to new insights. Puzzled by the epithet, she looks around herself carefully: "And it hit her. That all that crowd of people going and coming in all sorts of directions had the colour of pickled pig parts that used to come from foreign places to the markets at home" (12). Just as in Timm's

Morenga Gottschalk begins to see the Germans as animals as his grasp of the genocidal gaze expands, so Sissie sees the Germans as pigs and understands that their gaze has racialized her.

She also comes to an important realization about colonization: "But what she also came to know was that someone somewhere would always see in any kind of difference, an excuse to be mean."

> A way to get land, land, more land . . .
> Gold and silver mines,
> Oil
> Uranium . . .
> Jewels to adorn, . . .
> Power, Child, Power.
> For this is all anything is about.
> Power to decide
> Who is to live,
> Who is to die, (13)

And then, for emphasis, Aidoo gives an entire page to each of her next three words: Where, When, How (14–16). Again, she has signaled that genocide is one of her themes and that arrival in the Fatherland has awakened Sissie's consciousness to the exploitation of African natural resources and the genocide of its peoples.

Chapter 2, "The Plums," is devoted to Sissie's experiences while in Germany. Sissie has been assigned to live in a youth hostel that is actually a huge old castle, bringing the tropes of fairy tales into the novel; the fairy tale intertext is enhanced by the occasional use of the phrase "Once upon a time" and a series of short tales in stanzas. Almost immediately, Sissie meets Marija, "a young mother pushing her baby in a pram" (19). Marija inquires whether Sissie is an Indian and confides in her that "my Mann is called A D O L F and zo is our little zon" (23), the first clear reference to the Holocaust. Many such references follow. Sissie's visit is sponsored by an international volunteer organization, INVOLOU, and she is assigned to work in the Bavarian woods, tending seedling Christmas trees. Hitler, of course, lived in Bavaria, and Munich, the capital of Bavaria, was the birthplace of Nazism. The students work along with Nazi war widows:

The blood of their young men was
Needed to mix the concrete for
Building the walls of
The Third Reich. (36)

As the students work, they wonder:

They wonder if, should they
Stop cultivating the little pine trees, would
Something else,
Sown there,
Many many years ago,
In
Those Bavarian woods
S P R O U T?

As the title of this chapter suggests, plums become a central symbol of the storyline here. Marija grows them and feeds them to Sissie in their daily rendezvous at Marija's archetypal little cottage near the castle. The plums, described as possessing a "skin-colour almost like [Sissie's] own" (40), take on the lure of the apple in the Garden of Eden and as proffered by the wicked stepmother in "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs." Marija provides bags of the fruit for Sissie to take back to her peers in the youth hostel. Marija's activities arouse the suspicion of her nosy neighbors, who treat Sissie as the exotic other. Their little village, we are told as the omniscient narrator weighs in, was the site of a chemical plant built by the Leader (i.e., Hitler) where "experiments were done on herb, animal and man. But especially on man, just hearing of which should get a grown-up man urinating on himself" (44). Thus, as Sissie is still learning about what happened in Germany, the narrator interjects information that reveals the genocidal gaze and its results.

One evening, Marija comes later than usual to fetch Sissie and informs her that she has baked a plum cake. The narrator contrasts the two characters as they walk through the village: Marija is "A daughter of mankind's / Self-appointed most royal line, / The House of Aryan" (48) while Sissie is "A Little/Black/Woman who / [should] . . . Not / Have been / There / Walking /Where the / Führer's feet had trod— /A-C-H-T-U-N-G!" (48). After several pages devoted to a blistering presentation of the corruption of postcolonial governments in West

Africa by the narrator, often in stanza form, the storyline returns to Marija and Sissie. Marija suggests they go upstairs to see Little Adolf sleeping and Sissie agrees; what follows is rife with fairy tale motifs. Climbing the stairs, Sissie feels as if "she was moving not up, but down into some primeval cave" (62). She enters the bedroom, which "indeed looked as if it was cut out of a giant rock" (63) and is dominated by "a giant white bed, laid out smooth, waiting to be used" (63). The tale of "Bluebeard" comes immediately to mind as does the passage early in *Jane Eyre* in which Jane finds herself in a red and white bedroom, also a riff on Bluebeard. Such foreshadowing proves accurate as suddenly Sissie feels "Marija's cold fingers on her breast . . . while her other hand groped round and round Sissie's midriff" (64). Sissie quickly shakes off this unwanted sexual advance and thinks longingly of home, of "how she always liked to be sleeping in the bedchamber when it rained her body completely-wrapped-up in her mother's akatado-cloths" (64), an image of safety. But the narrator intrudes with a far darker connection with the Holocaust: "And now where was she? How did she get there? What strings, pulled by whom, drew her into those pinelands where not so long ago human beings stoked their own funeral pyres with other human beings, where now a young Aryan housewife kisses a young black woman with such desperation, right in the middle of her own nuptial chamber?" (64). The reader is made to see the Einsatzgruppen doing their grisly work across Europe, shooting Jews into pits the Jews themselves have dug.

This scene has been interpreted in widely different ways by literary critics. For example, Yaw Asante notes that Sissie "returns to Africa unscathed because she shows restraint in her rejection of a death-dealing lesbian sexual relationship proffered by her German friend,

Marija . . . for Marija, Sissie is a sexual object just like Kurtz's savage Amazon in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. What Aidoo does is to evoke the stereotypical image of the black woman as represented in colonial fiction in order to subvert it" (n.p.). Cheryl Sterling reads the passage in terms of African perceptions of homosexuality.[22]

After her rejection by Sissie, Marija begins to weep and Sissie is prompted to contemplate the links between colonialism and the Shoah. She begins by reflecting on the trope of smoke from the ovens of the Holocaust.

> Suddenly Sissie knew. She saw it once and was never to forget it. She saw against the background of the thick smoke that was like a rain cloud over the chimneys of Europe,

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Forever falling like a tear out of a woman's eye.

And so this was it?
Bullying slavers and slave-traders.
Solitary discoverers.
Swamp-crossers and lion hunters.
Missionaries who risked the cannibal's pot to
bring the world to the heathen hordes.

Speculators in gold in diamond uranium and
copper
Oil you do not even mention—
Preachers of Apartheid and zealous educators.
Keepers of Imperial Palace and homicidal
plantation owners.
Monsieur Commandant and Madame the
Commandant's wife.
Miserable rascals and wretched whores whose only distinction in life was that at least they were better than the Natives. (65–66)[23]

In this passage, Aidoo brings together the various systems of oppression that stem from white supremacy and racial hierarchy, deeming one group subhuman: slavery, colonialism, genocide. She names the oppressors: slavers and slave traders, missionaries, speculators, preachers of Apartheid, zealous educators and homicidal plantation owners, Monsieur and Madame Commandant. All derive satisfaction from deeming themselves "better than the Natives," even the "miserable rascals and wretched whores." Sissie has grasped the concept of the genocidal gaze and seen the connections among these various systems.

In the remaining fifteen pages of this chapter, the story of a white female missionary to Africa is introduced with the classic fairy tale opener "Once upon a time" (66). It is a story of child abuse and homophobia. Sissie and Marija return to the kitchen and make a vain effort to eat a cake topped with "the melting dark purple of jellied plums" (68). Sissie departs from Marija's cottage, having experienced an initiation of sorts.

Sissie is taken with the other INVOLOU students on a round of visits to various sites in Bavaria, setting off a speculation about medical experiments done on women in Global South countries to control overpopulation, with the observation that "we would rather / Kill / than / Think / or / Feel" (71), another reference to genocide, here presented as the "efficient" solution (71). Again, a linkage is made between colonialism and the Holocaust, eugenics and genocide as a means of controlling undesirable populations.

Sissie breaks the news to Marija that she will be departing from Bavaria shortly to travel to other sites in Germany and Europe, and then return home to Africa. The pending separation causes Marija, who was planning a rabbit supper for Sissie, much grief, and Sissie is surprised to discover within herself pleasure at hurting Marija. "It hit her like a stone, the knowledge that there is pleasure in hurting" (76). Another epiphany: the human capacity for cruelty. Marija alternately goes white and then red as strong emotions surge through her; Sissie calls this her "blushing and blanching" (72), and she is prompted to wonder about the danger of being white: "It made you awfully exposed, rendered you terribly vulnerable. Like being born without your skin . . . is that why, on the whole [whites] have had to be extra ferocious?" (76).

Marija arrives on the train platform early in the morning as Sissie departs. She urges Sissie to spend a little time in Munich: "Because München, Sissie, is our city, Bavaria" (79). But Sissie rejects this advice, and the narrator summons the historical links between Munich and Nazism:

> Munich, Marija,
> Is
> The Original Adolf of the pub-brawls
> and mobsters who were looking for
> a
> Führer—
>
> Munich is
> Prime Minister Chamberlain
> Hurrying from his island home to

Appease,
While freshly-widowed
Yiddisher Mamas wondered
What Kosher pots and pans
Could be saved or not. (81)

Here Aidoo includes a reference to the Munich Agreement of September 1938, when leaders from England, France, and Italy met with Adolf Hitler in that city to discuss the future of Czechoslovakia. These discussions ended in ceding portions of Czechoslovakia to Hitler in an effort of appeasement to avoid war, an effort that was, of course, futile.

This reference is followed by one about a Jewish mother packing pots and pans in preparation for deportation, also a futile gesture as most women with children were directed immediately to the gas. With Sissie's refusal to see the sites of ignominious Munich, chapter 2 draws to a close.

The focus of chapter 3, "From Our Sister Killjoy," is also a postcolonial theme: the diaspora engendered by colonialism. Sissie travels next to England: "If anyone had told her that she would want to pass through England because it was her colonial home, she would have laughed," a reference to the British as colonizers of Ghana (85). But pass through she does, encountering far more people of color than she had anticipated, many of whom are students being exploited by the academic system:

For a few pennies now and a
Doctoral degree later,
Tell us about
Your people
Your history
Your mind.
Your mind.
Your mind.

They work hard for the
Doctorates—
They work too hard,
Giving away
Not only themselves, but
All of us—

The price is high,
My brother,
Otherwise the story is as old as empires. (87)

Here are the familiar tropes of fiction from West Africa about the "been to's"—that is, those who have immigrated to Europe to realize a dream, to earn money to send back home, to live in the imagined metropolitan paradise. Sissie sees her countrymen and women shabbily dressed, poorly employed, living in below-ground hovels, and yet lying to everyone back home in Africa, not able to admit that being part of the diaspora has been humiliating and disillusioning. The Irish and Scots try to depict themselves as fellow travelers, that is, fellow victims of the British Empire, but Sissie is having none of it: "the world is not filled with folks who shared our sister's black-eyed squint at things" (93). Her black-eyed squint, becoming more critical and astute as her journey continues, returns the gaze of resistance to the imperial gaze that would diminish her.

Sissie encounters a German-born professor now living in America who tries "to convince her of one thing. That this thing binds the Germans, the Irish and the Africans—in that order naturally—together. And that this thing is, OPPRESSION. 'Ja, our people have been oppressed for many many years, since the First World War,' he said. Our Sister's own mouth caught so rigidly open with surprise, and wide enough for a million flies to swarm in and out" (93). Sissie is so taken aback by the professor's attempt to claim that Germans were victims that:

She forgot to ask
Her Most Learned Guest
If he had heard of
Buchenwald,
    or come across
Dachau
    even in his reading? (93–94)

Colonial amnesia, or aphasia, becomes genocidal amnesia here as the German professor attempts to claim victim status and align himself with the colonized. Aidoo devotes the remaining several pages of this chapter to the visit of a mimic man named Kunle, originally African, who has lived in London for seven years. He is boasting about the recent heart transplant performed in South Africa. (The first successful heart transplant was performed by Dr. Christiaan Barnard, an Afrikaner, on 3 December 1967 in Cape Town; the heart of a black South

African man was transplanted into a white South African man.) Kunle runs on about how such a surgery "is the / type of development that can /solve the question of apartheid / and rid us 'African negroes and all other negroes' of the / Colour Problem" (96). Sissie is deeply skeptical of this claim, pondering the medical racism involved: "the Christian Doctor has himself said that in his glorious country, niggerhearts are so easy to come by, because of the violence those happy and contented bantus perpetrate against one another, in their drunken ecstasies and childlike gambols" (100). Aidoo closes this chapter dealing with the diaspora by recounting Kunle's death in a car accident upon his return home to Nigeria. The chauffeur he insisted on hiring drives too fast on the rough roads and Kunle's heart is "wasted," too far from South Africa to become a transplant.

The final chapter of the novel, "A Love Letter," recalls *Heart of Darkness* once again. Just as Marlow carries a letter to Kurtz's "Intended" back in Europe, Sissie writes a letter, in the first person, to her "Darling" that recounts whole blocks of conversations they have had about race and racism, slavery, language, colonialism, neocolonialism. Gradually it becomes apparent to the reader that Sissie and her lover have had a falling out. Both are African, but the lover has lived abroad for a lengthy period. Sissie challenges her lover to rethink his notions of what an African woman should be: "No, My Darling: [she writes] it seems as if so much of the softness and meekness you and all the brothers expect of me and all the sisters is that which is really western. Some kind of hashed-up Victorian notions, hm? Allah, me and my big mouth!!" (117). In recounting the suffering African women have endured, Sissie names the sins of colonialism:

> When she did not have to sell [her children] to local magnates for salt, rampaging strangers kidnapped them to other places where other overlords considered their lives wasted unless at least once before they died, they slept with an African woman. . . . Meanwhile, those who grew up around Mother woke up in forced labour and thinly-veiled slavery on colonial plantations. . . . Later on, her sons were conscripted into imperial armies and went on to die in foreign places, all over again or returned to her, with maimed bodies and minds. (123)

Sissie criticizes her lover, identified as a physician, and other Africans who remain in the West while Africa needs their talents, and their families need them to return. She recounts a student union meeting at which she railed against her fellow Africans for finding myriad excuses to remain in the West, thus providing one reason why the novel is titled *Our Sister Killjoy*. As Marlow attempted and failed to bring Kurtz back to "civilization," Sissie has endeavored to bring her fellow Africans home from the "heart of whiteness."

The novel closes with a narrative return to the third person. Sissie is on a plane, returning home to Africa, and it is on the plane ride that she has been writing this extended missive to her former lover. Significantly, the passengers have been watching "a bleary film of the American Wild West, dating from the early days of motion pictures" (132). Genocide of the American Indian serves as "lite entertainment," as do the sweets and liquor being served, the "familiar duty-free rubbish" being hawked, and the gossip going around. Sissie imagines that she feels the welcome warmth of the African continent as passengers are alerted by an announcement that the coastline is visible below. She decides she will not mail the letter; "she was back in Africa. And that felt like fresh honey on the tongue: a mixture of complete sweetness and smoky roughness. 'Oh, Africa. Crazy old continent,'" Sissie intones, not caring if the person in the seat next to her thinks she's crazy (133–34).

Aidoo leaves the reader there, with the journey not quite complete. Sissie returns a wiser, more sober woman, one who has recognized the links between the racial hierarchies of colonization and the German genocide of eleven million people whose "blood" did not meet Aryan standards. She has experienced the diminishment of the imperial gaze and grasped its evolution into the genocidal gaze. But Aidoo does not intend for the conclusion of the novel to be entirely bleak. In an interview, she noted: "*Killjoy* doesn't end on a note of despair. I want to say that we struggle through, in spite of the almost overwhelming nature of our grief, the horrors around us, we struggle through. One keeps looking for hopeful signs and invariably one finds them; however tiny."[24]