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"What does 'Independence' mean?": The African Transcreator and the Configuration of the Nation-Space in Ama Ata Aidoo's *No Sweetness Here*

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EN **Abstract.** Published in 1970, the stories that give shape to *No Sweetness Here* encompass the historical period that goes from Ghana's independence under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah in 1957 until the coup d'état that marked the demise of the man himself in 1966. Aidoo's dissection of Ghana's national past is to be inserted as part of the "writing-the-nation" project (Bhabha, 1990) whereby postcolonial authors, following Anderson's precept, *imagine* their heterogeneous, ambivalent and strangely modern communities (Anderson, 1983). However, Aidoo's particular national narration is decidedly subversive in both its gendered approach and its generic deviation. This article proposes a reading of *No Sweetness Here* as an African *fefewo*, a whole dramatic performance, which Aidoo *translates* into English against the backdrop of a clearly feminist agenda. Hence, the African transcreation that ensues restores the original African writing to the literary palimpsest of what appear to be eleven discrete short stories.
Keywords: Ama Ata Aidoo; *No Sweetness Here*; fefewo; transcreation; nation-space

ES "De qué sirve la Independencia?": El transcreador africano y la configuración del espacio nacional en *Aquí no hay tregua* de Ama Ata Aidoo

ES **Resumen.** Publicado en 1970, las historias que dan forma a *No Sweetness Here* abarcan el período histórico que va desde la independencia de Ghana bajo el liderazgo de Kwame Nkrumah en 1957 hasta el golpe de Estado que culminó con su muerte en 1966. La disección del pasado nacional de Ghana que Aidoo realiza en esta colección debe insertarse dentro del proyecto de "escribir la nación" (Bhabha, 1990) en el que los autores poscoloniales, siguiendo el precepto de Anderson, *imaginan* sus heterogéneas, ambivalentes y extrañamente modernas comunidades (Anderson, 1983). Sin embargo, la particular narración nacional que Aidoo exhibe en esta colección es decididamente subversiva tanto en su enfoque de género como en su desviación genérica. Este artículo propone una lectura de *No Sweetness Here* (*Aquí no hay* tregua) como un *fefewo*, una actuación dramática típicamente africana, que Aidoo *traduce* al inglés en el contexto de una agenda claramente feminista. Por lo tanto, la transcreación africana que se desprende de esta transformación desarrollada a dos niveles –lingüístico (del Fante al inglés) y formal (de la oralidad a la escritura)– restaura la escritura africana original –fefewo– al palimpsesto literario de once cuentos aparentemente independientes uno del otro.
Palabras clave: Ama Ata Aidoo; *No Sweetness Here* (*Aquí no hay tregua*); fefewo; transcreación; espacio nacional

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1. Introduction: Translation/Creation. The African Writer and the Nation Paradigm

In *Elizabeth Costello's* Lesson 2, "The Novel in Africa," J. M. Coetzee provides readers with a disturbing view on the generic and linguistic alienation facing the African novelist who must adapt their African cultural paradigms to a genre –the novel– and a colonial language that are both allegedly foreign to them. Moreover, as Coetzee intimates, the novelistic experience of the African novelist is stamped by their urge to perform their Africanness before an eminently *foreign* –read non-African– readership; this is indeed an obligation that does not bind writers with other *national* affiliations such as English and Russian, as Elizabeth Costello, the protagonist of Coetzee's novel, surmises. Coetzee's provocative deployment of the existence of an essential difference between African novelists and European novelists points out the uncompromising tenet upon which the European novel was shaped, namely the inseparable link between "nation" and "language", on the one hand, and the latent assumption that writers naturally create by means of their respective native languages, on the other (Corse, 1995; Moretti, 1998; Parrinder, 2008). The national bias that stood at the core of the emergence of the novel-as-genre has long since been dismantled in view of the impending transnationalism that defines contemporary existence (McMurran, 2009; Lewis, 2011; Brantly, 2020). Rather inadvertently, colonial history played a crucial role in de-nationalizing the novel as the transnational flavour of the literature produced by current African writers such as Abdulrazak Gurnah, M.G. Vassanji, Helon Habila, Taiye Selasi, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Dinaw Mengestu, along with others, testifies to.

However, the aim of this article is to move away from the confident transnationalism of the present and recuperate instead the controversial moment in which first generation African writers, the heirs of first-hand colonialism, had to mould their novels into the imported national ethos of imperial discourse. The layers of compromise, assimilation, accommodation, rejection and intervention in Europhone African novels have been dutifully explored by critics such as Simon Gikandi in *Reading the African Novel* (1987) and M. Keith Booker in *The African Novel in English* (1998) and therefore, the critical journey to the past I claim here might seem redundant at first sight. The novelty of my proposal resides in the selection of the text that will lay out the controversies of a disputed literary inheritance –African and European– in the textual construction of the nation: Ama Ata Aidoo's *No Sweetness Here.* Unlike the unquestionable novelistic stature of the work of her male colleagues –Chinua Achebe's (Nigeria) trilogy, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *Arrow of God* (1964) *Anthills of the Savannah* (1988), Nuruddin Farah's (Somalia) trilogy, Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship: *Sweet and Sour Milk* (1979), *Sardines* (1981), *Close Sesame* (1983); Ayi Kwei Armah's (Ghana) allegorical intimations, *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) and *The Healers* (1979), among others– Aidoo's collection of eleven short stories is a decidedly subversive exercise in writing the nation (Bhabha, 1990) in both its *gendered* approach and *generic* deviation. Aidoo's incursion in the writing-the-nation project should be read as her premeditated betrayal of a tradition that, on the one hand, undermines gender (Stratton, 1994; Boehmer, 2005) and, on the other, submits to the novel as the genre wherein the nation is literally imagined. Moreover, I sustain, this act of betrayal is endorsed by a translation/transformation of the nation-*state* into the nation-*space*.

The writing-the-nation project that stands at the core of the postcolonial literary endeavor to historicize Africa is contingent upon an entrenched ambivalence, that of freeing Africa from European colonization while retaining the translation performed by European colonial cartography. To this territorial colonization should be adjoined the linguistic colonization that the whole of the African continent underwent under European domination and which enfolds the African writer's dilemma in an irretrievable language predicament: to what extent can the African experience be apprehended by European languages? Hence, as Kwaku Gyasi affirms, "African literature expressed in European languages occupies a unique position" (Gyasi, 1999, p. 75). The dilemma born out of this national/linguistic diatribe situates the African litigation in a particular and peculiar case of translation. Following the trend in Translation Studies (Berman, 2005; Levine, 1991; Bassnett, 2005) that approaches the figure of the translator in terms of a negotiator whose primordial task consists in deciding how much of the otherness of the foreign must be preserved in the translation performance, I acknowledge the African writer as a *deviant* translator for whom "English" is just as foreign as it is familiar, for whom their otherness is concomitant with their self, for whom *translating* and *creating* are indissoluble and simultaneous acts; in short, they are as much a translator as a creator.

In "Writing as Translation," Gyasi admits that "African novelists, since the colonial period, constitute a special kind of creators" (Gyasi, 1999, p.75). He regrets that most criticism on the language question in Africa has focused "on the attitude of the African writer vis-à-vis the European language rather than on the creative use of the language" (p.75). My position is that Aidoo's *No Sweetness Here* stands as an example of the linguistic creativity that is an inherent component of African writers. As a matter of fact, and unlike the explicit pronouncements of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Saro-Wiwa on the language question –the former's rejection and the latter's accommodation of English– Aidoo never publicized her stance on the matter. Nonetheless, her preoccupation with the language question has traversed her fictional work and thus, I contend, it is in her creative use of the language, in her stature as *transcreator* that she resolves her conundrum. In *No Sweetness Here,* shrouded in her translator/creator veil, Aidoo defines a *national* space marked by a state of "borderlessness" (Levine, 1991, p.183) wherein otherness is "reconceptualized as something that can be negotiated in a contact zone, an in-between space" (Bassnett, 2005, p.87). Thus, in the contact-zone, in the in-between space of *No Sweetness Here,* the polarizations between English/Fanti, otherness/self, creation/translation are diluted and are absorbed into a literary palimpsest. According to Webster's Dictionary, a palimpsest designates something which contains usually "diverse layers or aspects beneath the surface." My interpretation of *No Sweetness Here* as a literary palimpsest prompts me to disclose the African *fefewo* in the short stories, which Odamtten describes as "the totality of a story-telling event–performance *and* reception"

(Odamtten, 1994, p.185; italics in original). The literary palimpsest that ensues from a reading of *No Sweetness Here* as a *fefewo,* is configured by acts of *transcreation* (translation/creation), whereby the novelistic genre is transcreated as a whole dramatic performance (*fefewo*) and not *solely* as a collection of short stories.

Previous criticism on the book shows how the interrelationship among the stories is dealt with in an aleatory way showing no sign of a cohesive thread that stitches them *all* together (Azodo & Wilentz 1999). Even the more recent collection of essays edited by Anne V. Adams in honor of Ama Ata Aidoo's 70th birthday approaches *No Sweetness Here* as merely a collection of short stories disowning the text from its African anchorage, the dramatic performance known as *fefewo* (Adams, 2012). I must emphasize that Odamtten is, so far, the only critic that approaches *No Sweetness Here* as a *fefewo*. The validity of his analysis notwithstanding, I believe he does not provide a conscientious exploration of *No Sweetness Here* as a subversive exponent of Bhabha's writing-the-nation project in its deliberate distancing from the novelistic genre to expose the controversies of historical discourse. In other words, he does not delve into the intricacies of the conflagration of genre and gender that *No Sweetness Here* displays and which, ultimately, bring to the fore the latent African *fefewo*.

The nation that Aidoo writes in *No Sweetness Here* captures the crucial moment in which the colonial state (Anderson, 1983) becomes the independent postcolonial state, a turning point in the history of the nation and henceforth in the nation as narration which, as Bhabha succinctly perceives, "must be viewed in light of an *ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation*" (Bhabha, 1990, p.311; italics in original). Surely, this ambivalence originates in the translated quality that envelops the very concept of "nation" when applied to the African territory and which *enslaves* African nations in a geographical demarcation imagined by European empires as much as it *frees* them from imperial domination. By *transcreating* the inherited nation-*state* into a nation-*space*, Aidoo's *No Sweetness Here* offers a terrifyingly gendered-sensitive account of how the ambivalences and ambiguities that shape the strangely modern community that is the independent African nation affect and are affected by the experiences of African women.

2. Transcreator/Betrayer. The Gendered Nation-Space of *No Sweetness Here*

Published in 1970, the stories that give shape to *No Sweetness Here* encompass a period of the history of Ghana –from independence under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah in 1957 until the coup d'état that marked the demise of the man himself in 1966– which defines this crucial juncture where the colonial state becomes the independent nation.[1] The monument that presides Independence Square and which bears a resemblance to the triumphal arches of European capitals destined to commemorate a nation's victory should be read as Ghana's national victory: the colonial British Gold Coast becomes the independent nation of Ghana. The year 1957, marked as "Anno Domini," unashamedly proclaims the beginning of the history of Ghana and, taking into account that Ghana holds the disputable title of being the first African country to gain independence, there lurks behind this nation the promise of independence for the whole African continent.[2] The future loomed on the horizon of that jubilant present, and yet that first flame of national optimism was soon to be replaced by the deceptive flickers of national convulsion which reached a crisis point with the coup d'état of 1966.

In order to free "nation" from its geographic, cultural, economic and linguistic constraints, I entreat a reading of "nation" from the perspective of space propounded by geographer Doreen Massey, which will allow me to move from nation-state to nation-space in an attempt to extricate limiting boundaries to the notion of "nation" (Massey 1994). It is my contention that although "nation" as experienced via state served its purpose in offering a sense of national identity after independence, it failed to flesh out this identity in the varied subjectivities, especially female subjectivities, that were created after independence and which, paradoxically, might endanger the very notion of national identity.

Massey proposes a re-examination of space as necessarily dynamic, not perceived as an appendage *of* time, but *in* time, and delineated by social relations. Space "is by its very nature full of power and symbolism, a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, and of solidarity and co-operation" (Massey, 1994, p.265). This powerful and symbolic space which is woven by relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and co-operation is none other than the nation-space captured textually in *No Sweetness Here.*

I read *No Sweetness Here* as a Bahktinian dialogic space (Bahktin 1981) where the sign, the independent African nation, strives to construct a meaning. This space is, following Massey, dynamic and defined by social relations. These social relations which give shape to the space do so dialogically, establishing a complex network of connections in which narrator, characters and reader are actively entangled. The success of Aidoo's task should be measured by the translatability of her text, or otherwise put, her ability to translate a total dramatic performance, a *fefewo,* into a written work. And this she achieves through the peculiar narrative voice that keeps the performance, *No Sweetness Here,* together.

On a first level, specific narrators are to be detected in each story which range from third-person narrators ("Everything Counts," "For Whom Things Did Not Change," "Certain Winds from the South," "A Gift from Somewhere," "Two Sisters," "The Late Bud,") to characters within the tale who are turned into the tellers of the story ("In the Cutting of a Drink," "The Message," "No Sweetness Here," "Something to Talk About on the Way to the Funeral," "Other Versions"). However, the reading of *No Sweetness Here* discloses yet another narrative level, less apparent than the easily discernible narrators mentioned above, but, ironically,

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1 Due to the time span covered in *No Sweetness Here*, namely, the immediate years following independence, I specifically refer to the "independent nation" rather than "postcolonial nation."

2 Sudan was actually the first African nation to gain independence in 1956. However, Ghana's influential and charismatic leader, and incontestable Pan-Africanist, Kwame Nkrumah, undoubtedly contributed to this historical misunderstanding.

more substantial in its very inessentiality. I am referring to a narrative voice that hovers above the text rather than directly inhabiting it, less authorial than an omniscient narrator but endowed with a more perceptive presence than that allotted to an omniscient narrator. And this presence is felt by the reader in two ways: (a) as a powerful dramatic voice which radiates orality and (b) as a "conscience manifestation," as a thought that intrudes in the mind of the narrator and carves its way into the minds of the readers. In the first instance, this voice represents the ultimate act of impersonation –the voice embodied in a living character– whereas in the second instance, this voice represents the ultimate avoidance of impersonation –the voice disclaiming any specific allegiance to a body, a character, its presence ethereal but not for this reason, less real. This narrative voice is thus defined by its very ambivalent nature, experienced by the reader as both absolute concreteness or absolute etherealness, as both embodiment and disembodiment, as both essentially oral and manifestly written. This voice Odamtten recovers from Aidoo's first literary manifestation, *The Dilemma of a Ghost,* and thus gives it a name "The Bird of the Wayside" (Odamtten, 1994, pp.80-115). As its very nomenclature reveals, this is a voice with a peculiar positioning, it is near, *along the side* of a road but it is not *on* the road, it is delimited and conscripted by the road but, at the same time, it eludes the road, it is part of the road and yet it claims its waywardness. And it is a bird, a creature of the skies, a fluttering presence above the earth, but also capable of walking on and inhabiting this earth. In short, it is the voice which "can furnish" us "with reasons why / this and that and other things / happened" (Aidoo, 1970, p. 7) but this can only be validated if the stories are contemplated as a whole.

No Sweetness Here's dramatic performance develops throughout five different phases which Aidoo indicated visually in the first 1970 publication by inserting blank pages between each distinct dramatic performance and which the post-1972 editions totally ignored, hence disinheriting the text from its specific African ties (Odamtten, 1994, p.185). Each dramatic performance is thus built upon a distinctive and salient aspect of the independent nation, an aspect that contributes to the emergence of new social relations and henceforth, following Massey's predicament, results in the charting of another space. However, ingrained in each dramatic performance, there is an egressing idea, a seed subtly planted by the narrative voice –the Bird of the Wayside– which will take center stage in the next phase, reassuring and substantiating the storytelling thread by creating allegiances which will, in turn, imagine yet another space. The independent nation that Aidoo imagines in *No Sweetness Here* configures a gendered space socially related where the five dramatic episodes are likewise interconnected.

3. Phase 1. On National Culture. The Native Intellectual and the People

Sissie and Kobina, the protagonists of "Everything Counts," and "For Whom Things Did Not Change," are the disturbed intellectuals Fanon describes in *The Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon, 1963, pp.179-189). Their disturbance is defined by a feeling of estrangement and a persistent longing to overcome it and thus become one with their people and their nation. They are both concerned about the future of their land –Ghana– and they are both convinced of the relevant role they are to play in this future which emanates after independence.

Sissie returns home as a young lecturer determined to help to construct the nation after independence. She treads upon the university campus loaded with the knowledge she has gained in the West and which, she senses, distances her from her people, represented in her case by the female students that sit opposite her in the lecture room. The cause for her estrangement is caught by the sight of an object, the wigs that her female students are all wearing.

She used to wear a wig when she was a student in the West but once back in Ghana, lured by the Fanonian native intellectual's desire to blend with the people, the wig, with its ominous colonial undertones is discarded from her attire in an attempt to anchor her subjectivity in a decolonized, independent Ghanaian nation. Confronted with the sight of her young female students wearing wigs, "not discreetly short,"[3] (*No Sweetness*, 3) as she used to, but "blatantly, aggressively, crudely" (p.3), irretrievably challenges her subjectivity and, consequently, her allegiance to the nation is put to the test. As the Fanonian native intellectual that she embodies, she is certainly disturbed but, unlike the Fanonian native intellectual, the nature of her estrangement is a perception of the people as Westernized others, not native-African others. Her estrangement culminates with the beauty contest she, reluctantly, watches on TV, and which, as a crude continuation of the phenomenon witnessed on the university grounds, displays the wig as a beauty object worn by all the contestants except one, the winner, whose "hair, a mulatto's, [q]uite simply, quite naturally, fell in a luxuriant mane on her shoulders" (p.7). At the painful and nauseating realization that this contestant won because of her non-African features, Sissie vomited "for what seemed to her to be days" (p.7).

What Sissie cannot digest is the racial othering and gender othering African women have to undergo in this independent, decolonized nation. The beauty pageant reveals women's perpetual enslavement to a reproduction of otherness which denies them any possibility to develop as subjects. All aspirations to a black subjectivity will be masked by whiteness, either in the form of a wig or in the faded color of light-complexioned skins. The crude ambivalence of the national culture is viscerally rejected by Sissie in her vomiting for days.

In "For Whom Things Did Not Change," the native intellectual striving to locate himself in the independent nation is Kobina, a young scholar from the South of the country who has been sent to the North and stays in a Government guest house there. If Sissie confronted and defined her subjectivity through her female students, Kobina's self-other politics of identification is enacted via Zirigu, the caretaker in the guest house where he is staying.

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3 Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

In his struggle to blend with the people, Kobina, the native intellectual, asks Zirigu, the representative of the people, to share the food he and his wife, Setu, eat. However, food is not the only cultural symbol that distances Kobina from Zirigu since there is a more alienating factor working in this relationship: English. Kobina and Zirigu's different command of the language situates both parties in an unbalanced relationship. Zirigu's English is tainted by his lack of formal education, "'At eight I com, you no wake. At 'a pas' eight, I come', you no wake" (p.8), whereas Kobina's flows seamlessly, enclosed as it is in an immaculate grammatical framework.

The broken English that identifies Zirigu as servant is nonetheless gracefully *translated* into a monologue, concisely and beautifully articulated in immaculate English at the end of the story. Aidoo dignifies his presence by entrusting him with a voice, powerful, honest and sensitively humane. His is an account of pre-independent years and immediately post-independent years proffered with an astoundingly precise mastery. Thus, readers are informed about his participation in the Second World War, his endurance of racist abuses from whites and blacks alike, his betrayal by his own brother, his human desire to improve his future, his concern for his children's education and, above all, his disillusionment with independence.

Kobina, the master, is *masterfully* silenced by Zirigu, the servant, in the servant's headquarters –the kitchen– eating the servant's food. Zirigu's story not only undermines and questions Kobina's role as native intellectual in the independent nation-space but, in an upturning of positions, "For Whom Things Did Not Change" becomes the story of Zirigu. Zirigu's subjectivity has never been endangered for, as he himself puts it, "I am still Zirigu" (p. 26); Kobina's, on the contrary, is ambushed by Zirigu's last question: "My young Master, what does "Independence" mean?" (p.29)

The Bird of the Wayside does not take flight without leaving a trace of optimism. The hopeful future has to be found in the figure of Setu, Zirigu's wife. Although in the background, her presence is the one who guides Zirigu all through his life, who saves him from despair after his deceptive encounter with independence, whose work outside the home pays for their children's education. Hers is the voice who administers the next episode of the *fefewo* when she discloses a new space being formed in the independent nation, the one occupied by young women –"those girls" (p.9)– who leave their villages to go to the cities, easily tempted by promises of comfort and riches.

4. Phase 2. The City as the Stranger

With the advent of independence, the African nation is confronted with a Western modernity which it tries to adapt and inscribe onto its African reality. This was Nkrumah's objective as far as Ghana was concerned. He believed that for the country to achieve economic plenitude, modernization was a must and for this reason the urban areas were clearly privileged to the detriment of the rural areas which were, in some cases, utterly neglected (Birmingham, 1998; Boahen, 2000). Migration thus followed. Waves of migration from the country to the city created a set of new social relations that configured the space of the independent nation.

"In the Cutting of a Drink," the story that shapes the second phase of the performance, captures this migratory phenomenon. Through his compelling storytelling, the unnamed narrator lures us into hearing his story about the search of a lost sister who twelve years ago left the village and never came back. He embarks on a journey which will take him to the city, which, from the very beginning, he experiences as a site of strangeness.

Strangeness is being en-gendered via the women he encounters in the city and who speak to him in the white man's language "which everyone, even those who have not gone to school, speak in the city" (p.35). Approaching him through the white man's language, a woman entices him to dance with her and it is while dancing that they realize they both speak Fanti. Communication then flows and with it the realization that the young woman with the long hair that "fell on her shoulders," (p.36) and the lips "with red paint" which "looked like a fresh wound" (p.36), and her skin trapped in her tight dress was none other than his sister, lost for twelve years in the city.

We are facing here a cruel and most painful manifestation of estrangement; the one that sears the cord that binds you to your own blood, the one that blinds you to the extent that your eyes cannot discern your own sister. Lurking behind there is the ominous site of estrangement that the city impersonates and which devours these young women who leave their villages for the promise of a better future in the cradle of modernity. The Bird of the Wayside opens the eyes of readers to the neo-colonialism which penetrates the independent African nation and which enslaves, above all, these young women in a "job" in which they are impelled to sell their bodies. Prostitution is, after all, one of the many forms through which slavery is revealed.

However, in the very blood lines which the city threatens to cut off are the seeds for the defeat of estrangement. Once Mansa, the sister, has been discovered by the brother, reunion is on the horizon. There is a sense of bondage being wielded which cannot be explained through rationalizing processes; it is more attuned with what Raymond Williams (1985) sensitively formulated as a structure of feeling, a trace of the lived experience of a community distinct from the institutional and ideological organization of the society, a profound feeling of belonging which is essentially and universally human. Mansa, the once lost child turned into a grown up woman, promises to come back at Christmas time. The lost child has been recovered and a new tale has been released: the marginalized other will inhabit the third phase of the performance.

5. Phase 3. National Othering. The Margins of the Independent Nation

The characters whose experiences shape the performance of this third phase –Esi Amfoa, M'ma Asana, Maami Ama and Mami Fanti– are confined to the margins of the nation. Their agency in the making of the

space of the independent nation is curtailed by the preponderance of an imagined community whose identity is secured by the European conception of the nation-state.

In *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (1992), Aijaz Ahmad identifies "class" as an element of paramount significance in the making of the independent nation-state. The independent nation, as Ahmad remarks, is that of the native bourgeoisie, educated in the West and proficient in the European languages of the metropolis, a community closer to the urban ideas of the Western bourgeoisie than to the realities of their rural fellow countrymen and women. As Ahmad emphasizes, in this independent state, markedly bourgeois, English becomes the language of national integration formalized as the language of the administration, in other words, the institutional language.

This third phase is a search for the exclusions, the margins of national consciousness, the voicing of those whose language denies them entrance into the nation-*state* but which, nonetheless, builds the independent nation-*space*. And this search starts with Esi Amfoa's –the protagonist of "The Message"– journey to Cape Coast to recover the corpse of her dead granddaughter, who died while giving birth. It is there, in the hospital, where the bourgeois state embodied by the nurse, Jessy Treeson, meets its margins, which in this story is embodied by a devastated Esi Amfoa. The old woman is left voiceless, her suffering silenced by the rudeness of a nurse who refuses to hear Esi Amfoa's plea simply because she does not speak any English. The granddaughter's inscription in the hospital, a state institution, was executed through the language of the state, English, and so her Christian name replaced her African name. Yet Esi Amfoa does not know her granddaughter's Christian name and so the so longed-for reunion –as expressed through the excruciatingly painful recovery of a dead body– is denied to her. Fortunately, in the end, Esi Amfoa recovers her granddaughter, who is not dead at all but who, through a Caesarean section, gave birth to twins.

Esi Amfoa may be illiterate, she may not speak English, but this does not make her stupid, insensitive or inarticulate. And thus, her story, empowered by the Bird of the Wayside's unbending voice, leads the way towards another brave, illiterate and implacably wise woman, M'ma Asana, the protagonist of "Certain Winds from the South."

M'ma Asana's story opens up with the forced migration of her son-in-law from the North of the country to the South in search of a better future. In her son-in-law's migration, M'ma Asana reads her own story of desertion, when her husband left her to fight in the white man's war against the Germans. In both cases she pinpoints the "government's people" (p.55) as the perpetrators of her husband's and her daughter's husband's abandonment. In M'ma Asana's story, the "government's people," are the colonial state, in Hawa's –her daughter's– story, the "government's people" are Ahmad's bourgeois state; in both instances individuals like M'ma Asana and Hawa are to be eternally displaced on the margins. And yet they are women, who, deserted as they are by their husbands, face their turn of fate with commendable endurance. They have each other, their reliance sustained through their womanhood, "today even if it takes all the money, I hope to get us some smoked fish, the biggest I can find, to make us a real good sauce" (p.55).

The close bond between mother and daughter that M'Asana and Hawa incarnate is rephrased in the relationship between Chicha and Maami Aba, the protagonists of "No Sweetness Here." In this story we travel to Bamso, a village, where Chicha –the Fanti word for "teacher"– has been sent by the government to teach in the village school. There, Chicha develops a close friendship with Maami Aba, the mother of Kwesi, her favourite pupil.

Kwesi, Maami Aba's ten-year-old boy, becomes a vessel of desire where the hopes of mother and teacher are planted. To both of them, Kwesi epitomizes the *national* future, namely, the village boy who, through education, will contribute to national progress. When Kwesi unexpectedly dies of a snake bite the *national* desire that he embodied is left unfulfilled, its inherent "presumptuousness" laid out bare. And yet, Kwesi's decease is tied to Kweku's miraculous survival in "A Gift from Somewhere," the last story to complete the third phase. Contrary to all expectations, Mami Fanti, through Kweku's recovery, is finally granted the "gift" of motherhood. Her previous children had all died and it is precisely after Kweku's survival that she is endowed with more children and, as she wisely admits, "this strange world always has something to surprise us with" (p.81). Chicha's "presumptuous daydreams" (p.72) conflate with Mami Fanti's simplicity of wisdom. In "No Sweetness Here," Kwesi's totally unexpected death makes the dreams of a blissful future go astray, whereas in "A Gift from Somewhere," Kweku's totally unexpected recovery makes those dreams see the possibility of fulfillment. Life's failure, in the former story, was utterly incomprehensible; life's success in the latter is likewise incomprehensible. The nation's success is, therefore, incidentally ingrained in its very failures.

The native bourgeoisie *produced* the nation-state. The margins of the nation-state, the four stories point out, *reproduce* the nation-space. Production implies the creation of economic value, of goods and services whereas in the concept of reproduction there lies the sense of producing individuals. I believe it worth noting that the four stories involve women in an act of reproduction. Hence, in "The Message," the family line is secured by Esi Amfoa's granddaughter's successful delivery of twins; in "Some Winds from the South," M'ma Asana's future is outlined by first, the birth of her daughter and later by her grandson; in "No Sweetness Here," we are forced to witness the tragedy of the loss of a child and yet the following story, "A Gift from Somewhere," grants us the "gift" of recovery of the lost child. The future of the nation-space is en-gendered in the fruitful experiences of these women.

6. Phase 4. Contrappunto: Nation, Women, Sisters

A *Contrappunto* is a musical term which designates a composition which consists of adding related but independent melodies to a basic melody in accordance with the fixed rules of harmony. The fourth phase

of the performance orchestrates a melody in which nation and women are contrapuntally –or/and sisterly– interrelated.

In "The Sisters," Mercy and Connie are contrapuntally attached to a patriarchal melody which denies them agency to develop as free subjects. Connie's subjectivity is maimed by her identity as wife and mother and Mercy's is helplessly and hopelessly enmeshed in a perpetual mistresshood. The former is trapped in an unhappy marriage to an unfaithful husband whereas the latter is enslaved in a relationship with a "big man," Mensah Arthur, a member of Parliament, whose patriarchal power is constructed and supported by the institutional strength of the nation-state, a nation geared towards ruthless mercantilism, brute capitalism and bold neocolonialism.

The coup d'état that crowned Nkrumah's collapse and which was justified as a means to liberate the nation from corruption and materialism, incarcerates Mercy and Connie even more firmly in their roles as mistress and wife/mother, respectively, always at the service of the patriarch. Mercy *serves* another Mensah-Arthur, Captain Ashey, whereas Connie resumes her unhappy life with her husband.

The melody we hear at the end of the story is the one composed by Mercy's high heel shoes stamping on the ground, playing the same song over and over again,

> *Count, Mercy, count your blessings*
> *Count, Mercy, count your blessings*
> *Count, count, count your blessings*. (italics in original, p.88)

These are the shoes which instead of walking their owner, Mercy, towards freedom, enslave her further in a permanent servitude. Little does it matter whether the shoes were bought by Mensah-Arthur or by Captain Ashey –"Are those shoes the old pair which were new a couple of months ago? Or are they the newest pair?" (p. 101)–; their meaning, like that of the nation-state, remains unchanged.

If Mercy's *contrappunto* was her sister Connie, in "The Late Bud," Yaaba's is her sister Adwoa. Yaaba's story develops alongside the "good/bad girl" dichotomy, placing her under the "bad" category simply because she would rather play "by the Big Trunk" (p.113) than help her mother in the household chores. This is what distances her from her sister Adwoa but, more regrettably, this is what distances her from her own mother. As an attempt to bridge this mother-daughter separateness, Yaaba decides to fetch some red clay for her mother to polish the floor of the compound. On the way back home, however, she falls and is severely injured, leaving her unconscious. Yaaba's mother nurses her all through the night, in a generous display of love and care which is intensified by her recognition of her daughter's intention to please her.

The turn of events that Yaaba's accident unleashes, unlike the coup in Mercy's case, produces a change. The contrapuntal relationship between "Two Sisters" and "The Late Bud" renders this fourth phase with its melodic structure: city and country, Mercy and Yaaba, Connie and Adwoa, father/patriarch (Mensah-Arthur, Captain Ashey) and mother (Yaaba's mother), societal identity and emotional subjectivity. The nation-state, created for the aggrandizement of patriarchy may not be the answer, but in the motherland that "The Late Bud" seems to shape, there is a site for hope. A late bud conflates with the promise of a nascent independent new nation, whose space harmonizes better with a motherland than a state, becoming a space where women are given the chance to explore their female subjectivities. The Bird of the Wayside's melodic narration ploughs the ground for the fifth and last phase of the performance.

7. Phase 5. Mothering the Nation-Space

I read this fifth and last phase of the performance as Aidoo's definitive inscription of the mother figure in the making of the independent nation. It is my claim that she has been sketching the "mother" figure throughout the performance as if laboriously weaving the texture which will eventually render it a face in a final, smoothly accomplished climax.

The funeral of "Something to Talk about on The Way to the Funeral" is none other than that of Auntie Araba. As a young village girl, Aunti Araba was sent to the city to work as a housemaid for well-to-do people. Her beauty, "a come-and-have-a-look type," (p.116) propelled her downfall since the master of the house could not ignore the "plaits that hung at the back of her neck like the branches of a giant tree" and the "skin of her arms" that "shone like charcoal from good wood" (p.116) so he gave vent to his seduction tricks. The result was Auntie Araba's pregnancy and banishment from the house, forcing her to return to the village. Auntie Araba's seduction, nevertheless, is not tainted by despair and tragedy for her mother welcomes her back and together they raise her son, Ato. Instead of a life of penury and loneliness, Auntie Araba manages to set up a business and marry a good man, Egya Nyaako, who is not deterred by the existence of Ato, an illegitimate child. Life, as always, procures some unexpected turn of events. In the case of Auntie Araba's story, the seed of discontent is her own son, Ato, who, in an ironic narrative twist, follows in the footsteps of his biological father and impregnates Mansa, a young girl, and refuses to marry her. Repudiated by her own family, Mansa finds solace in Auntie Araba who generously takes her in.

Auntie Araba's union with Mansa is contingent upon her distancing herself from her own son, Ato, who leaves the village to get an education and marries another woman. Auntie Araba's bread song, which is sung in *her* funeral as a celebration of *her* life, exhibits her link with her job, the baking of bread, the symbolic representation of which as source of nurturance cannot be evaded.

The son that Auntie Araba lost is somehow recuperated in the voice of the protagonist of the last story, "Other Versions," a university student in the United States. His is a story of endurance and evolution colored by his attachment to his mother, the one that set him on the path towards education and social improvement.

It is on American soil that he learns to recognize his own mother in, first, the face of Mrs Hye, the black woman that works for Mr Merrows, his host-professor, and later, the face of an anonymous black woman he sees in the underground and to whom he hands some money that she refuses to accept. The process of recognition, however, does not flow unobtrusively but is instead enveloped in agitation and disturbance. His mind is assailed by incomprehensible feelings of uprootedness until the moment of recognition comes through. This is a disenchanted, painfully realistic moment of understanding between mother and son, one that transcends geographical borders. The son's recognition of his mother in the faces of those two black women bears witness to a familial bondage which persuasively contrasts with the mother-son relationship of the previous story of this episode, hence providing the audience with another version.

8. Conclusion. The Indigenous Experience of English and the Nation/Narration

The colonizing transaction demanded a re-conceptualization of "English" and "national literatures." Under colonialism, both colonizer and colonized underwent a transformation whereby their cultural paradigms, sometimes willingly, sometimes inadvertently, were *translated* into new modes of epistemological and ontological experiences. In the domains of the British Empire, linguistic colonization resulted in English ceasing to be the exclusive property of the English; imperial subjects were conjointly *forced into* and *entitled to* English. In the linguistic interstice that issues forth, wherein servitude and willing participation are inextricably intertwined, imperial English is transmuted, transfigured, in short, translated into the variegated forms of colonial Englishes. As African literature proves, and *No Sweetness Here* corroborates, it is possible to read *African* in English.

In *The African Palimpsest*, Chantal Zabus uses the term "indigenization" to capture the transformation –I would add, translation– that English and French experimented in texts produced by African authors. This textual transformation/translation evinces a creative impulse geared at preserving the remnants of the African language in the European –English or French– script. In a similar vein, in the literary palimpsest that Aidoo's *No Sweetness Here* epitomizes, the *African* has been restored, taken to the forefront, so to speak, alongside its *English*. The alienation and secretiveness that, according to Levine, engulfs the translator, relegating his (sic) status to a mere "voice of passage" (Levine, 1991, p.183) does not apply to Aidoo's stature as "transcreator" since in the figure of the "transcreator," translator and writer are reconciled. "The Bird of the Wayside," the *im/material* narrative voice of *No Sweetness Here*, belongs to *and* is alienated from her own language; the transcreator both creates –Ama Ata Aidoo– and remains secret –the Bird of the Wayside– and although it is a "voice of passage" (p.183), the whole writing process becomes a (w)rite of passage (p.184). As a literary palimpsest, *No Sweetness Here* throws readers, Africans and non-Africans, into a contact zone, a perennial in-betweenness where the linguistic paradigm being set is one defined by the seemingly impossible combination of "neither-nor *and* both."

Neither a *fefewo* nor a novel, Aidoo's *No Sweetness Here* stems from both. Its indebtedness to this African oral performance grants us readers the opportunity to digest the collection of short stories as a single novelistic unity which infuses the text with an extraordinarily rich variety of voices, oral and African in essence, but written down in English. The Bird of the Wayside –this most elusive and, at the same time, substantial presence– that hovers around the narration, translates a web of subaltern experiences which weave the terrain for another version of the independent bourgeois nation-state to blossom. The postcolonial arena painted in *No Sweetness Here* leads the way towards a nation-space femininely construed where mothers, grandmothers and daughters– biological or otherwise en-gender a national consciousness which embraces fathers and sons. It is a step towards inclusion and not exclusion. Realistically apprehended, *No Sweetness Here* urges the audience to realize that there is indeed no sweetness here, and yet, without stepping out of reality, it grants readers the possibility for hope. The *No Sweetness Here* of the title of the book is to be read against the painting on the cover of the Longman African Writers publication: a mother smiling at her son's attempts at reading, the African landscape looming behind them. Another version on the horizon.

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