

## Ama Ata Aidoo Celebrating the ‘Petticoat Princess’ in “The Girl Who Can”

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**EN Abstract.** This article explores the possibility of considering Ama Ata Aidoo’s main character in her short story “The Girl Who Can”, the representation of a historical figure, Sabine Chebichi, aka the “petticoat Princess,” a Kenyan prototypical young athlete. In this research it is important to consider the writer’s family and social background. As she was brought up in a family of significant worth in their community, she became aware of all the political and social issues that affected the Ghanaians and the Africans in general. She gradually grew to become a declared pan-Africanist and a follower of the first president of Ghana Kwame Nkrumah, who initially dreamt and worked to create -not achieved yet- the United States of Africa. When she was appointed Minister of Education after the first coup, she proposed free schooling for all Ghanaians. It is said that this caused her self-exile. This short story is the best evidence to prove how she was concerned about Africans from all walks of life, and in particular, those women and young girls, whom she must have met, read about or heard of, during her stay in Kenya. In many of her texts she deals with women’s choices of jobs, professions, earning easy money, travelling, having properties, getting married, having children, becoming writers and other possibilities. In this case, Aidoo’s tale is about a family of three women of different generations: A grandmother, a mother and a very young girl. The author hits the target when she brings forward the obstacles the little Adjoa has to go through to finally become an athlete. Moreover, as the story is told by Adjoa herself, she confesses that it was better to act rather than create “wahala,” a fact that could have hindered all possibilities of achieving her dreams.

**Keywords:** Sports in Africa; Print Media; Social Change; African Female Athletes; Petticoat Runner.

## ES Ama Ata Aidoo celebra ‘la princesa de las enaguas’ en “The Girl Who Can”

**ES Resumen.** Este artículo explora la posibilidad de considerar el personaje principal del cuento corto de Ama Ata Aidoo, “The Girl Who Can”, una representación de la figura histórica, Sabine Chebichi. Conocida por el alias “la princesa de las enaguas”, era una atleta prototípica de Kenya de los años 60. Es importante tener en cuenta la procedencia y los antecedentes sociales de la familia de la autora. Debido a que creció en el seno de una familia de mucha valía e importancia social para su comunidad, Aidoo era consciente de todos los asuntos sociales y políticos que afectaban a los habitantes de Ghana y el resto de África. Gradualmente y con el paso del tiempo se convirtió en una seguidora del primer presidente de la independiente Ghana y una Pan-africanista. El presidente Kwame Nkrumah soñaba e intentaba crear Los Estados Unidos de África, que aún no se ha conseguido. Cuando Aidoo fue nombrada ministra de educación después del primer golpe de estado, propuso que las escuelas fueran gratuitas. Se dice que esto causó su auto-exilio. Este cuento corto es la mayor prueba de cómo se ocupaba la autora de toda clase de gente de Ghana y África, sobre todo de las jóvenes y las mujeres que probablemente ha observado, conocido o leído acerca de ellas o incluso oído sus historias. Muchos de sus cuentos y novelas tratan con los temas de la mujer y su elección de trabajo, de sus profesiones, de cómo ganaban dinero fácil, sus viajes, propiedades, casarse, formar sus familias, tener descendencia o convertirse en escritoras, así como otras posibilidades de salida. En este caso, el cuento de Aidoo es sobre una familia de tres mujeres de diferentes generaciones: una abuela, una madre, y una niña pequeña. La autora acierta cuando presenta los obstáculos que la pequeña Adjoa tiene que sortear para finalmente poder convertirse en atleta. Además, la historia está contada por Adjoa, y confiesa con sus actos

que es mejor actuar que crear problemas, una cuestión que podía haber imposibilitado a la pequeña mostrar su destreza.

**Palabras clave:** Deportes en África; prensa medios impresos; cambio social; Atletas femeninas africanas; corredora 'de las enaguas.'

**Sumario:** 1. Introducción. 2. Tres Personajes Femeninos, Tres Generaciones. 3. La Lealtad de Aidoo a los Africanos. 4. El Deporte Femenino Africano es Parte de Los Asuntos de Las Mujeres (*Mbaasen*). 5. Conclusiones. 6. Referencias.

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## 1. Introduction

For those of us who have made a life out of studying and writing about Ama Ata Aidoo's works still find in every new reading more knowledge related to the African human nature and behaviour as well as to the African social and cultural aspects. I have delved so deep to find out which were the problems Aidoo's works were trying to target, because it is common knowledge that it is not usual to pin down a single topic in each of her creations. She can tackle among other topics a dilemma, an obstacle, a question, a predicament, one at a time with simple words though sometimes complicated and hard to understand; or she can bring some issues together to function as eye openers for her people to start pursuing their way out of the daily life difficulties ahead.

I have read all her works and written many research papers on different topics. It was not easy to think of new aspects to unveil in her works, but one of my TFG-student's interests in sports lead me to look for any short story that could deal with the topic. However, while I started to research on African sports; the student, unfortunately, quit the course due to health problems. Nevertheless, I confess I got hooked to that unexplored field. I wanted to reread Aidoo's short story "The Girl Who Can" and find out if my suggestion could have been helpful. However, as many other things related to this call for papers, serendipity has played an important role and brought about the chance to watch a TV documentary on the subject of the South African Athletes and their first participation in the Olympic games in Barcelona. To my surprise it was not until then, in 1992 that they went back to participate in the Olympic games – they had participated from 1904 till 1960 – their newly designed flag waved change and their anthem spoke of freedom after Apartheid. Elana Meyer donated the flag to the Museu Olímpic i de l'Sport Joan Samaranch, because she was aware of the importance of Samaranch negotiations as an active member and agent in achieving this participation in the Olympic games (see links in references). Watching Derartu Tulu from Ethiopia win the golden medal in the Barcelona Olympic Games after competing with her South African opponent Elana Meyer, was a recomforting sight for many of the people and countries involved. Moreover, further in the documentary, watching how they both commemorated their victories after thirty years against racism, their endeavour became a lesson of resilience and a show of will and triumph. Elana Meyer kept saying once and again during the whole documentary "You sport for social change." Her words fell into place, since we all know that Aidoo's aim is to cause social change through her works. Hence, I started to look for evidence to prove Aidoo's awareness of the difficulties female athletes had to deal with at that time in different parts of Africa.

## 2. Three female characters, three generations

Aidoo published "The Girl Who Can" in *MS Magazine*, New York in 1985. That is more than a decade before she published the collection of short stories under the same title in 1997. This collection was not included in my field of research for my PhD dissertation because I had chosen the works written between the 1960s and the beginning of the 1980s. "The Girl Who Can" might not seem very different from other short stories in our author's previous collection *No Sweetness Here*, given that she has accustomed the reader to find in her works always women as main characters. In this case, a very special woman, a grandmother is the senior character and as it is expected, she would always know more than the younger characters and speak about the past, traditions, and values. In a family with no men to speak, the grandmother would be expected to be the closest to the ancestors, hence, the wisest and the perpetuator of traditions and knowledge about their culture and community. A grandmother is a pillar in every African family. In *Ngambinka*, Mildred A. Hill-Lubin's article "The Grandmother in African and African-American Literature: A Survivor of the African Extended Family" presents her observations about the importance of this figure in the different African or Afro-American families. According to this article:

The grandmother functions in three major capacities: one, as the preserver of the African extended family; second as the repository and distributor of family history, wisdom, and Black lore; and third, as the retainer and communicator of values and ideals which support and enhance her personhood, her family, and her community (Hill-Lubin, 1986, p. 258).

Our short story has three female characters representing three different generations: A grandmother (Nana), a mother (Kaya) and a granddaughter (Adjoa). Aidoo has appointed the seven-year-old Adjoa as her storyteller. Thus, Adjoa, the narrator, speaks to us, and Nana, who is stern and derisive at the same time, speaks to the fictional characters. Moreover, Adjoa highlights that her mother Kaya is subjugated to her grandmother's derision, so her mother hardly ever speaks her thoughts. Kaya is mostly bullied by Nana, who reproaches her for her decisions regarding Adjoa's father. Kaya feels very vulnerable because she never went to school. She and her daughter Adjoa are under severe stress due to Nana's attitude towards them mostly criticising Adjoa's long legs in every possible occasion. On the other hand, Nana has the responsibility to hold the family together under a kind of strict unspoken local traditions and rules. She is the leader of this group of three and the decision maker at home. However, Kaya's silence is emphasised by Adjoa's repetition in the short story of this idea that her mother does not dare to say a word or confront Nana in no way whatsoever (Aidoo, 2002, p. 33).

Reinforcing what I said above, the authors Lucy Bonku, Philomena Abakah Yeboah and Charles Oforu Marfo proposed three categories to describe the dominant old women stereotypes that appear in their article "Old Women as Repositories of Wisdom: Insights from Novels by Ama Ata Aidoo and Amma Darko." If we consider what Adjoa affirms in Aidoo's "The Girl who Can" describing her grandmother: "Nana has many voices. There is a special one she uses to shut everyone up" (Aidoo, 2002, p. 29), I cannot but stand by the researchers' proposal of what they called a third category where they describe Nana:

The third category includes an old woman who functions notoriously as an agent of patriarchy. She is neither materialistic nor exploitative but, as an agent of patriarchy, she insists on adherence to those cultural expectations that limit the woman's identity only to her child-bearing abilities (Bonku, Yeboah and Marfo, 2016, p. 52).

It is the case of Nana who keeps mocking Adjoa's thin and long legs or criticising and blaming Kaya's choice of husband. Nana keeps reproaching Adjoa's body for not having adequate legs or hips to carry babies. The role of a woman is to bear children and become mothers. However, the grandmother's disappointing attitude can be redeemed after her final reactions and the outcome of this short story. Sports will change her attitude and the way of treating her granddaughter. But this is an issue that will be left for later.

### 3. Aidoo's Allegiance to Africans

Not only do the literary works of writers and the critical essays on their productions disclose their abilities and ways of thinking, but also videos, Ted talks and interviews with them can make known useful personal and ideological information as well as their preferences and worries. I have relied, on many occasions, on Ama Ata Aidoo's friendship with Micere Githae Mugo. The latter had interviewed Aidoo for the homage that Anne V. Adams edited under the title *Essays in Honour of Ama Ata Aidoo at 70* published in 2012. On the other hand, before she passed, Aidoo has also honoured Mugo in an interview edited by Wachanga Productions under the title "Ama Ata Aidoo Tribute to Micere Githae Mugo" who also passed in 2023. In December 2012, at Brown University, Mugo's interview for Adams' special edition, mentioned above, was held under the title "A Conversation: Aidoo and Micere Githae Mugo" (pp. 29-45), where they both exchanged details about their experience in many aspects in social and political lives. They were close best friends and had gone through similar ordeals. They had lived in the same countries in various occasions. Their words reveal details as that they have known each other since the 1960s in Kenya. Later in the 1970s, when they were already writers, they were both political refugees or self-exiled in Zimbabwe, where Aidoo became the first president of the Zimbabwe Women Writers Organization. In their conversation Aidoo is asked to explain the aim of her organization *Mbaasem* which she founded when she returned from the United States, after being appointed as a Visiting Professor in African Studies, at Brown University for 6 years (*Essays in Honour*, p. 474). Aidoo informed that from this organization sprout writing workshops and the forum *Mbaasem* Writer's Club. Moreover, when Mugo asks her to explain why she chose this name for her organization, Aidoo translates the Akan word "Mbaasem" as "Women's Affairs" and she explains that it referred to women's issues, their written and spoken words. Furthermore, she humbly confesses that she is aware of the impossibility of solving all the problems and predicaments that the African women face, but she confirms that the African women writers can at least address the issues that worry them or hinder their progress. The most important idea that Aidoo proposed to her forum was to meet once a month and write all types of texts. They were planning to publish an anthology of short stories. Hence, to encourage the participants and guarantee the publication of their works they bought a page in *The Daily Graphic*. This print media was established in 1950 and it was and still remains being the most widely read daily newspaper in Ghana in our days. These words have inspired my analysis having in mind the importance of newspapers. An important daily or weekly popular print media is a source of information about any aspect of life: political national and international news, reports about economy, social activities and celebrations, cultural events, announcements and advertisements as well as sport news.

Aidoo's involvement with newspapers is a constant in her life. While I was doing my research in Legon-Ghana in 2004 at the Institute of African Studies, I had to read many critical writings, book reviews, essays and poetry written and published by Aidoo in newspapers. In the 1960s she mainly wrote in National and international magazines as well as in *West Africa*, which was an important source of international, national and local news about politics, economy, society and culture. The print media's income depended on advertisements. Reading and choosing the ideal literary corpus for my PhD dissertation, I could not ignore the announcements, ads and other scattered notes about products and other apparently unimportant

or insignificant issues related to African women and their success. While I was interested in the literary productions by Aidoo, such as critical reviews of poets and writers' works at the time, the photocopies I asked for were not executed as I had selectively ordered. In other words, I could not avoid observing and reading the advertisements in detail and the propaganda distributed at that historical post-Independence era in the 1960s in the Ghanaian newspapers. The result was a lot of photocopies of newspaper pages with more information than I needed at that time. But the repetitive messages through different ads lead me to keep all this valuable social and political material to write about a new way of colonising—what Aidoo herself called neo-colonialism—"imposing" skin whiteners and wigs. The article was widely accepted after its publication in 2007 in an institutional Series of Homages (Jojo, 2007). It was also used, after asking permission, in an Anthropology Grade class at a German University. Moreover, some years later, in 2013 publishers from Gale Cengage Learning republished it in *Short Story Criticism*, volume 178, (pp. 77-83). If I have exceeded writing about this experience, it is only for the sake of explaining how important a daily newspaper can be. Print media should be considered as a rich repository of information for scholars from all fields of research not only for journalism studies but also social, historical, political and cultural. My personal experience confirms this statement. I know that researchers look for information everywhere, and so do writers. Furthermore, Aidoo was aware of the possibility of reaching a large number of readers if the members of the "Mbaasem Writers' Club" published their writings regularly. Therefore, as mentioned above, it was important for her to have their own space to publish in *The Daily Graphic*, one of the most popular and important press nowadays. Hers is not only an association with the newspapers as a writer, but also as a reader. Aidoo, being a committed intellectual also needed to read about every issue that involved her continent, country, people and especially women's affairs, that is, *Mbaasem* in Akan language.

#### 4. African Female sports is part of women's affairs (*Mbaasem*)

Michelle Sikes who researches social and economic history of women's sport in Kenya (Sikes, 2016, p. 323) wrote about the topic in Africa, specifically in Kenya. Her article, "Print Media and the History of Women's Sport in Africa: The Kenyan Case of Barriers to International Achievement" (2016), seems to help us understand and decipher the odd situations Adjoa goes through before she is finally chosen to participate in the junior district games, running for her school even if she is not precisely from Kenya. According to what Sikes recompiled from Kenyan print media for her research, in 1968 Female Kenyan runners competed in the 19<sup>th</sup> Olympic Games in Mexico. She affirms that "Sport, particularly running, has been a defining component of Kenya's history" (p. 324). In spite of the participation of the three female athletes who ran for Kenya in the 1968 Olympic games, they were absolutely ignored by journalists, sociologists, geographers or anthropologists who only wrote about men. In fact, Sikes would have never known anything about the three female runners if she hadn't obtained the information from the Standard Staff Reporters for her research. Hence, Aidoo could not have read or heard about them either. It seems "It was the case that male runners were the predominant actors and focus of attention from officials and in the media at the time" (p. 325). What is more, the Kenyan Women who participated in domestic competitions before the Olympic games, in addition to those who competed in the Colony Women's Championships in the 1957 or the ones who ran the Domestic and school championships in the 1950s were not even mentioned in any pieces of news sources. These omissions just mentioned above might have been unnoticed by common readers of the time; but it is clear that Aidoo had perceived the non-existence of sport news about African women in the newspapers while she was living in Kenya. The African sportswomen were disregarded, exactly as the reception of her literary work has been overlooked by male critics in her early years.

The puzzle pieces come together when the clue is in front of our eyes. The edition of *The Girl Who Can and Other Stories* I have worked with for many years is the revised edition published in 2002. This edition has a cover illustration painted by Hassan Aliyu and it is designed in such a way that it renders the interpretation my article postulates. The cover focuses on a young girl runner with long legs, muscular arms and carrying a baton. She does not seem to be wearing any official outfit for this competition. But what is stunning is that she is running barefoot. I have seen the book cover innumerable times, but never stopped to think about the details until I delved into the world of sports in Africa.

My multifarious research task rendered many findings regarding women sports activities. Now, in this era, we are living the empowerment of women in all fields of life and it was not strange to learn about many African women athletes. Thanks to the documentary mentioned above "The 26<sup>th</sup> lap" about the participation of South Africa in the Barcelona Olympic Games in 1992, I was encouraged to keep researching for this paper. There are many videos of African women athletes on YouTube so I decided to concentrate on the 1960s and before 1985 when Aidoo had published this short story for the first time in *MS Magazine*, New York, in March 1985. I was interested in the black and white old videos or even short films or captions. It was not until I got to log in *The Standard* that I found a familiar black and white picture, but I could not affirm that I had known or heard about this young girl running in her undergarment— a specific piece of clothing women used to wear under their dresses—. That first picture was taken while she was running, not only dressed in a petticoat but also barefoot, on a competition track in a sports field. The picture was taken by the Kenyan internationally known photojournalist, Mohamad 'Mo' Amin, known as the Eye of Africa, or the Extraordinary African Image-Maker (Extraordinary YouTube Channel). He was the man who documented Sabine Chebichi's prowess. Going back to Aidoo's book cover, when we have a close look we can see the amazing resemblance between the illustration and the real Chebichi. After that first appearance and participation in that competition she won, she was dubbed the "Petticoat Princess". The resemblance between Chebichi and the book cover is

not enough evidence to affirm the proposal of this article, but it is no coincidence that the collection of short stories published in 2002 under this title mentioned above was after the tragic death of Mohamad Mo Amin. He had done so much for Africa. He risked his life in many occasions and lost his left arm in an ammunition dump explosion in Ethiopia in 1991. But before that he had reported and pictured all the wars and famine in Ethiopia and other countries in the continent, and achieved bringing the world together with Geldof and many famous artists to help Africa in 1983; mainly to raise funds to relief the famine in Ethiopia with the concert Live Aid. M. Mo Amin was a man who had the power to change Africa with his pictures and films.

The importance of M. Mo Amin's work for this article is that he was one of the few photojournalists who put the spotlight on female athletes. Hence, taking into account the core of the short story and the fact that "The Girl Who Can" is a title shared by the collection of stories; I believe that the illustrator decided to represent Adjoa physically in Chebichi's likeness paying homage to Mohamad Mo Amin's accomplishments regarding women athletes and their achievements. In addition to that, the artist himself saw the resemblance between Chebichi's story and Aidoo's character, since the writer must have been motivated by Chebichi's and other sportswomen's circumstances at that time. Mo's reports and pictures of Chebichi must have motivated Aidoo. She had an idea in her mind to tell a story about a new sphere where women can have agency. I can affirm with certainty that Adjoa could be the embodiment of Chebichi in fiction or her avatar since they both have common difficulties in their lives to accomplish their possibility of being taken seriously as professional athletes.

Aidoo's main character and narrator in "The Girl Who Can" is the seven-year-old Adjoa. Though mentioned before, it is repeated here for the sake of comparing both athletes. Chebichi doubled Adjoa's age. What can a little girl say or do to complain or prove anything designed by Aidoo's main objective of teaching, informing and encouraging the African women? Adjoa simply complained about her Nana's discussions with her mother and their comments on her thin long legs. Nana saw her granddaughter as a useless failed female who would never be able to bear children because of her weak legs (p. 30).

On the other hand, and according to Sikes study, the Kenyan press was under inspection and restrictions, imposed by colonial and postcolonial governments that aimed for certain areas of political and economic information as well as opinion columns and editorials. Sports news was not considered a menace and therefore was not censured just as humour columns or other sections (p. 329). Nevertheless, regarding sports, ethnicity was obviated to avoid rivalry among dominant groups (p. 330). In "The Petticoat Princes" text found in A Little Herstory website, the author presents Chebichi's biography and cannot avoid mentioning that she belonged to the Kissi tribes and minimizes the possibilities of contention by saying that according to local lore the people from those tribes in Kenya have longer legs, deeper chests and bigger hearts. And that is the reason why they always win competitions. Chebichi had long thin legs, and so did Adjoa.

Another similarity between these two real and fictional beings is the possible reason given to explain why they excelled at running. According to the author who wrote about Chebichi, children from that part of the world have to walk and run very steep hillsides or mountains to help their families with their livestock. This explains how trained they were and why they superior as runners. Adjoa, on the other hand, needs to know what other young girls' and women's legs are like. She comments that even if she sees different legs she cannot answer her grandmother's doubts about the strength of her legs or hips when it comes to issue of having babies. What she innocently says is that even if the distance between their little village and their school is five kilometres, it meant nothing to her. It seems that the older students who go to her school protest about the long distance they have to walk to and from school every day, but she did not mind the remoteness of the stretch of land since she liked going to school (pp. 30-31). This implies that Chebichi and Adjoa experienced training on a daily basis either doing family chores or going to school.

Another common ground that can be explained by Sikes' article is the genuineness of the hardships both real and fictitious runners have to face. The scholar wanted to find out why it was easier for men athletes to triumph internationally speaking; while female athletes were left back as laggards. The United States had university sports programs that endowed Kenyan student-athletes with full scholarship. This implied an advance for the Kenyan runner who trained in appropriate tracks and participated in official international competitions. But this was not yet implemented for female Kenyan athletes. This was due to the procrastination of the implementation of Title IX legislation that would permit the United States to sponsor female Kenyan athletes (p. 328). This situation can explain Chebichi running at school or local spaces and later compete in her petticoat and barefoot. This, as mentioned before, distinguished her with the alias "The Petticoate Princess". Once she won a medal people were impressed and she received adequate rudimentary equipment for athletics.

In the case of Adjoa, her thinking as a little girl does not explain why after running many times with her classmates and always winning could imply anything special to comment at home. She was surprised when she was chosen by her teachers to run for her school's junior section in the district games (p. 31). After winning she told her mother and grandmother who did not believe her and went to school to enquire. Nana and Kaya were both very happy and the grandmother started washing Adjoa's school uniform and iron it in such a way that it looked shiny and bright. That is to say, Adjoa did not wear any rudimentary runner's equipment while competing for her school just as Chebichi. She only wore her spotless and shiny school uniform.

It is important to highlight that we have no details about Chebichi's family relationship. Whereas in the case of Adjoa's family life, Aidoo will never let the occasion of representing more women slip in vain. To deal with Women's affairs—*Mbaasem*— in a short story is her objective. To make her readers think, she needs to exhibit the performances of more women belonging to different generations as mentioned earlier. That is why Adjoa's grandmother is portrayed as the most powerful woman in the story. She is respected and feared by

her daughter and her granddaughter because she is the oldest and, hence, the wisest according to tradition. But she will have to give way to Adjoa's new capacities and succumb to other new ways of life. The little girl is aware of her grandmother's influence on her and her mother Kaya. Nana's power emanates from her speech. In agreement with Adjoa's narration, "Nana has many voices" (p. 29) including that one that makes the rest shut up (p. 29). She explained that whenever she spoke her grandmother had two very frustrating reactions. She was laughed at by Nana and her friends; or she was forced to shut up and never repeat what she had said. With such a young character that lacks authority to confront her grandmother, the reader might question Aidoo's plans.

There are some aspects or issues that are like taboos. In those years, the most important wish for every mother or grandmother is to have new children and grandchildren in the family. Nana's obsession in the short story is the fact that she sees Adjoa's legs as extremely long and her hips as feeble and unable to carry a child when the time comes. Kaya suffers from her mother's psychological torture caused by her critical words concerning Adjoa's father and the girl's "problematic long legs". She hardly speaks, never complains and keeps her anguish to herself. No one will ever see her cry. Nevertheless, little Adjoa knows that her mother weeps inside, and that is the only thing she dislikes about her grandmother. Nana is capable of causing pain to Kaya and of hindering Adjoa's possibilities at school and her athletic future. Women are only here to bear children, according to the old and traditional Nana. In spite of the weight of tradition, Nana was very proud of her granddaughter when she wins the competitions. She even carries the cup Adjoa wins on her back as if it were a baby, her grandchild. In conclusion, this stubborn grandmother is being convinced by her granddaughter's success to accept new ways of life and open other doors to new spaces for women to participate by interacting actively. This old character becomes wiser thanks to her ability and adaptability to comprehend and embrace change. Nana's disappointing behaviour at the beginning of the story takes a turn by accepting that the roles of women can change and sport is the reason. She leaves behind the performance of an agent of patriarchy by accepting the unknown future about to happen ahead. Her words: "That even though some legs don't have much meat on them, to carry hips...they can run. Thin legs can run... then who knows?.." (p. 33). Nana is ready to accept an alternative to bearing children, though she has no idea what this change can bring, Aidoo gives her a chance to be redeemed. Thus, recapturing ideas from the beginning, the evolution of the oldest character in this story reminds us what the South African Athlete, Elana Meyer, had learned after her personal experience that sports has the power and the chance to cause social change. Aidoo depicted the first steps of change in this story because of the grandmother has accepted possible alterities.

Nevertheless, in Sikes' research she has a section dedicated to Sabine Chebichi and how she won her first completion barefoot wearing her school uniform. Chebichi's wins in time were record-breaking (p. 333). She was one of the fastest runners for 800 meters. Great expectations were expressed in the print media since she was described as "Kenya's latest track wonder" (p. 333). But ironically when she starts to run international competitions she becomes pregnant as Sikes quotes Pekka Rinne in "The Ills plaguing Kenya Athletics" from the *Daily Nation* on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April 1976:

This teenager ran a world-class time in Chrischurch in 1974. She could have broken the world record in both the 800m and the 1500m events the following year, But where was she? She was pregnant. Another unwed mother. It is possible to have children at the age of 40 but one cannot set world records at this age. These girls need advice (p. 334).

Pregnancy or not having babies is Adjoa's family's worries. This has always been the main "Mbaasem" in the whole continent. Aidoo's story is set in Ghana but Chebichi is Kenyan, so reproduction and motherhood is always on most African women's mind.

## 5. Conclusions

In comparing Ama Ata Aidoo's short story with a real story about a Kenyan female athlete known as "The Petticoat Princess", I can confirm that the author celebrates the African women athletes. Although her story is set in Hasodzi in Ghana, I insist that she was totally inspired by the Kenyan's runner's story. Thanks to Mohamed Mo Amin, who paid attention to Chebichi, Ama Ata Aidoo had many references to get inspired by and create her own story about Adjoa who is 7 years younger than the real runner. Furthermore, the book cover of the 2002 edition of the short story collection celebrates not only Chebichi but also M, Mo Amin's first shot of the athlete. Hassan Aliyu's illustration, an artistic painting of Chebichi also commemorates the "Extraordinary African-Image Maker", M, Mo Amin's, who depicted stories with his own images of different topics in Africa. The three of them, M. Mo. Amin, Aidoo and Aliyu honour Sabine Chebichi's feat and bring forward indirectly a new space for African women athletes. This last bit about Chebichi's triumph and then pregnancy intertwines the two stories allowing readers to compare, think and get convinced that sports can change many things in African women's lives. But children and pregnancy remain a part of Aidoo's definition of "Mbaasem" this agency and space for women can be obtained through sports.

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