

The Indelible Memory of Woman-Ship: Ama Ata Aidoo, Women, Africa and Literature

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On 28 May 2023, Ama Ata Aidoo passed away. For those of us who have grown academically and, I may add, personally through her work, this date will remain a sad remembrance and yet, the various people that configure the team of *Africanías*, would like to transform the desolation of this unfortunate event into a meaningful mourning performance and so, we have decided to devote a special issue entirely to her. Aidoo's literary life delineates a firm and always convoluted path towards freedom, a freedom she implacably intertwines with her being a woman in Africa. From her early plays, *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1964) and *Anowa* (1970), written in her twenties, to her last collection of short stories, *Diplomatic Pounds and Other Stories*, published in 2012, passing through iconic titles such as *Our Sister Killjoy or Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint* (1977) and *Changes. A Love Story* (1991), the narration of a compelling storied self unfolds. This is a storied self that has experienced colonialism at first hand –her father was imprisoned by the British when Ghana, former Gold Coast, was fighting for its independence– has endured the disillusionment of a deceiving independence –she resigned as Minister of Education because she did not manage to implement a law that would guarantee free education to all Ghanaians– and has suffered exile –she spent several years in Kenya and later, in Zimbabwe after her resignation as Minister of Education. The life story that emerges out of her oeuvre offers an enriching literary tapestry wherein the woman question in Africa resonates on the pages of novels, short stories, poems, plays and essays. The eclecticism that monitored her life as a woman, an African and a writer –these terms are not meant to be read in a hierarchical manner– reflects the indelible memory of woman-ship that *Africanías*, the first Spanish journal on African literatures, is determined to celebrate.

This spirit of woman-ship is reflected in the various articles that form this special issue. Thus, Ariadna Serón Navas' article "Cross-Generational Sororities: Honoring the Feminist Legacy of Ama Ata Aidoo in Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay with Me* (2017)", explores the imprint that Aidoo has left in the African women writers that followed her. The specific case analyzed in Serón Navas' article is that of the Nigerian writer Ayobami Adebayo and, to be more precise, her debut novel, *Stay with Me*, published in 2017. Motherhood and child rearing, central themes in African literature, are articulated from the notion of "cross-generational sororities" and, in this way, Serón Navas demonstrates how Adebayo cements a new African feminist consciousness that is firmly rooted in the feminist legacy of Ama Ata Aidoo, her literary godmother. In a similar vein, Joanna Boampong and Benedicta Lomotey's article, "Centering Female Protagonists: Exploration of Ama Ata Aidoo's Influence of Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and Guillermina Mekuy's *Tres almas para un corazón*", relates the female protagonists of Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and Guillermina Mekuy's *Tres almas para un corazón*, with Esi, the protagonist of Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes. A Love Story*. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of postcolonial African feminism, Kristeva's intertextuality and Bakhtin's dialogism, Boampong and Lomotey examine the intricacies involved in Bolanle's (*The Secret Lives*) and Aysha's (*Tres almas*) decision to accept polygamous marriages in connection with their literary predecessor, Esi in Aidoo's *Changes*. The question the article ultimately tries to answer is the following: How do Shoneyin's Bolanle and Mekuy's Aysha, both educated women, echo, revise and/or build on Ama Ata Aidoo's Esi?

Violeta Jojo's "Ama Ata Aidoo Celebrating the 'Petticoat Princess' in 'The Girl Who Can'" is, as the very title of the article indicates, a celebration of Ama Ata Aidoo's feminist leadership. Jojo argues that Sabine Chebichi, aka the "petticoat Princess", a Kenyan prototypical young athlete, was the inspiration for Aidoo's main character –the young girl Adjoa– in her short story "The Girl Who Can". According to Jojo, this short story proves how Aidoo 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, where she self-exiled after resigning from her position as Minister of Education. In this tale, Aidoo brings forward the obstacles that Adjoa has to go through to finally become an athlete. Aidoo's feminist stance also guides the analysis of her collection of short stories, *No Sweetness Here*, carried out by Esther Pujolràs-Noguer. 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. Pujolràs-Noguer's article interprets this collection of short stories as an exercise in, after Homi Bhabha's fashion, the "writing-the-nation" project, whereby postcolonial authors, following Benedict Anderson's precept, *imagine* their heterogeneous, ambivalent and strangely modern communities. However, Pujolràs-Noguer infers, Aidoo's particular national narration is decidedly subversive in both its gendered approach and its generic deviation. Thus, Pujolràs-Noguer's "'What does 'Independence' mean?": The African Transcreator and the Configuration of the Nation-Space in Ama Ata Aidoo's *No Sweetness Here*" reads *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.

Isabel Gil-Naviera's article sets up a dialogue between Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta, two leading first generation African women writers. In "Representaciones de los abusos sexuales y el aborto en el matrimonio en Ama Ata Aidoo y Buchi Emecheta", Gil-Naviera explores, from a gender perspective, the vision of marriage in Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* and *Kehinde* and Aidoo's *Changes. A Love Story* as a restrictive element with regard to female identity independence and, specifically, the article analyzes the concept of sexual abuse or "conjugal rights" that have been normalized in the traditional families and communities portrayed in these novels. Gil-Naviera claims that despite the cultural and contextual differences of both countries and the Igbo and Akan communities represented, both authors coincide in offering the development of new female identities in these novels which point out the importance of education and the world of work as tools to try to escape from patriarchal contexts that can be limiting for their characters.

The last academic article to complete this special issue covers an area of Aidoo's creative oeuvre which, as its author, M^a del Carmen de Bernardo Martínez, points out, has been neglected by scholars, to wit, her poetry. "El valor social, político y estético de la poesía de Ama Ata Aidoo en *Someone Talking to Sometime*" unveils the ideological and emotional lyricism that characterizes her poetry by identifying the six aspects that, as de Bernardo contends, shape this collection: historical references, varied subject matter, dualisms, denunciation, perception of blackness and the description of Africa and its society. The article finishes with de Bernardo's own translation of one of the poems of the collection, "Of Love and Commitment", hence displaying the creative dimension of translation. The translation of the poem is de Bernardo's testimony of the literary intimacy between author and translator engendered in the very act of conveying meaning from one language to another.

Translation is probably the most challenging linguistic exercise. The translator must gracefully surrender to the creation of another individual while asserting their own aesthetic idiosyncrasy. As historical subjects, we are witnesses to the importance of translation in the propagation of knowledge and, since knowledge is power, we are perfectly aware of the geopolitical publishing forces that determine which author is translated and which author is not. Our author, Ama Ata Aidoo, whom we pay homage in this special issue, has received scant attention in the Iberian territory as far as the translation of her work is concerned. To date, only two of her works have been translated into Spanish: *Nuestra hermana aguafiestas o reflexiones desde una neurosis antioccidental* (*Our Sister Killjoy or Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint*) translated by Marta Sofía López and *Aquí no hay tregua* (*No Sweetness Here*) translated by Marta Sofía López and Maya García Vinuesa. Both were published by Cambalache, the former in 2017 and the latter in 2024. *Nuestra hermana aguafiestas* and *Aquí no hay tregua* are the outcome of the expertise, dedication, sensitivity and generosity of two scholars, Marta Sofía López and Maya García Vinuesa, who beautifully *transcreate* the varied innuendoes of Aidoo's world into a Spanish that resonates with the African accents of literary dissent. As the only published translations of Ama Ata Aidoo's works into Spanish, fragments of these books are included in this special issue. *Nuestra hermana aguafiestas* is preceded by an essay entitled "Cuando vi venir por un pasillo a Ama Ata Aidoo", written by Marta Sofía López, in which she shares with us her meeting with Ama Ata Aidoo while disclosing the affective attachment that is forged between translator and author in the very performance of translation. Likewise, the short stories from *Aquí no hay tregua* that appear in this special issue are prefaced by two essays written by Marta Sofía López and Maya García Vinuesa that contextualize the collection and explain the process of translation, respectively.

Spurred by the desire to right wrongs, I, as guest editor, and Bárbara Fraticelli and Maya García Vinuesa, as managing editors, decided that a special issue on Ama Ata Aidoo should amend the oblivions of the Iberian publishing scene towards the paucity of translations of her work and incorporate a section devoted to translation. Apart from the fragments of translations from the already published works previously mentioned, this section features translations from Aidoo's works that had never been translated into any of the Iberian languages before. In an attempt to be true to the generic diversity of Aidoo's oeuvre, this section on translation encompasses fragments from two novels, the abovementioned *Our Sister Killjoy/Nuestra hermana aguafiestas*, and *Changes. A Love Story/Cambios. Una historia de amor*, translated into Spanish by María Remedios Fernández Ruiz, alongside short stories, poems, the prologue from the play *Anowa* and one of Aidoo's most emblematic essays "The African Woman Today"/"La mujer africana de hoy".

The section on short stories is indisputably the most extensive one. Aidoo was a born storyteller and, in tune with the fecund African oral tradition that nurtured her childhood, she found in the short story genre a space to probe into the language hybridity that so forcefully defines her writing. Henceforth, short stories from her three collections –*No Sweetness Here*, *The Girl Who Can & Other Stories* and *Diplomatic Pounds & Other Stories*– are represented here. Maya García Vinuesa translates "For Whom Things Did Not Change" into Spanish ("Para quienes nada cambió"), Marta Sofía López translates "Everything Counts" and "No Sweetness

Here" ("Todo cuenta" / "Aquí no hay tregua") into Spanish, whereas Xavi Díaz translates "Everything Counts" ("Todo conta") into Galician. "Male-ing Names in the Sun" and "Nowhere Cool", two of the short stories from the collection *The Girl Who Can & Other Stories*, are translated into Spanish ("Viril-izar nombres bajo el sol" / "No hay respiro") by Juan Miguel Zarandona and Carlos Herrero Quirós, respectively. Aidoo's last work, the collection of short stories entitled *Diplomatic Pounds & Other Stories*, is illustrated here through the translation of "Diplomatic Pounds" into Spanish by María Recuenco ("Peso diplomático"), Catalan by María Vilanova ("El pes de la diplomàcia") and Basque by Naroa Zubillaga ("Diplomazia kiloak"). "New Lessons", also a short story from *Diplomatic Pounds & Other Stories*, has been translated into Spanish by María Recuenco ("Nuevas lecciones") and into Basque by Elizabete Manterola ("Lezio berriak").

Poetry granted Aidoo room to navigate the conflicting moments of existence that befell on her postcolonial being. Aidoo's poetry unfolds in the juncture of the postcolonial hope of liberation and the neocolonial constraint of peremptory slavery. Tamara Pérez Fernández has embarked on the arduous and yet fascinating task of translating into Spanish three poems from the collection *An Angry Letter in January* ("As Always, A Painful Declaration of Independence" / "Como siempre, una dolorosa declaración de independencia"; "An Angry Letter in January" / "Una carta de reclamación en enero"; "Speaking of Hurricanes" / "Hablando de huracanes") and three more from *After the Ceremonies* ("After the Ceremonies" / "Tras las ceremonias"); "Awoonor, Hmmm ... (The Translation)" / "Awoonor, mmm ..."; "These Days (III): A Letter to Flora Nwapa" / "Estos días (III): Una carta a Flora Nwapa". Teresa Muñoz Sebastián likewise took up the poetic enterprise of shaping Aidoo's poetry into Spanish. In her case, the translation comprises two poems from Aidoo's first poetry collection, *Someone Talking to Sometime* ("Of Love and Commitment" / "Sobre el amor y el compromiso"; "Routine Drugs I – for Eldred Jones" / "Drogas rutinarias I – Para Eldred Jones"), two from *An Angry Letter in January* ("Homesickness" / "Añoranza"; "A Young Woman's Voice Doesn't Break. It Gets Firmer" / "La voz de una joven no se rompe. Se hace más firme") and, finally, one from *After the Ceremonies* ("As the Dust Begins to Settle II" / "Ahora que el polvo comienza a asentarse II").

Aidoo's first incursion into literature was through drama and, therefore, the translation of the prologue from her play *Anowa* into Catalan that Núria Casado offers in this special issue must be understood as a recognition of her inveterate commitment to the genre that best exemplifies the orality inherent in any literary act. The play bears the same title as that of her heroine, the historical Anowa, an African woman that defied the impositions of a patriarchal society by asserting her right to exist under her own exigencies. In *Anowa*, Aidoo provides us with a woman who, to all extents and purposes, acted under the rubrics of a proto-African feminism that planted the seeds for future acts of female disobedience. All the academic articles of this special issue emphasize Aidoo's indebtedness to an African feminism that she both contributed to creating and nurturing throughout her entire life. Her essays reflect her incessant preoccupation with the plea of African women who strive to define their postcolonial selves in a nauseatingly patriarchal neocolonial scenario. As an African woman, their fight is her fight; there is no individuality outside the communal strength that emerges in the cradle of African womanhood. Therefore, I believe that the translation of her celebrated essay "The African Woman Today" was the ideal rounding up of this special issue. Alba Rodríguez García has undertaken the responsibility to translate this powerful statement on African womanhood into Spanish: "La mujer africana de hoy".

I would like to conclude this introduction by expressing my uttermost gratitude to the managing editors of *Africanías. Revista de Literaturas*, Bárbara Fraticelli and Maya García Vinuesa. Upon Ama Ata Aidoo's death, I approached them to ask them about the possibility to write an obituary for the journal. They replied back to me with an offer which I could not possibly decline: the edition of a special issue on Ama Ata Aidoo. To be honest, I was in equal measure excited and concerned about the enterprise displaying before me, but their unremitting enthusiasm and confidence allowed me to move freely among the various stages of the creation of this special issue. I also want to thank all the authors of this special issue who have graciously met sometimes impossible deadlines and, above all, I would like to stress their generosity in designing this bank of knowledge –this special issue– with the humility and grandeur that comes from loving the work of one of the leading writers of the past and present century. I am certain that Ama Ata would have been very proud of all of us.

