

**REVUE SCIENTIFIQUE DE LITTÉRATURES,  
LANGUES ET SCIENCES HUMAINES**



**Université Alassane Ouattara**

Two large, curved, light-brown objects, possibly tusks or horns, are positioned symmetrically on either side of the title. They curve upwards and inwards, framing the text. The objects have a textured, slightly mottled appearance.

# **LETTRES D'IVOIRE**

***LITTÉRATURES, SCIENCES DU LANGAGE ET DE LA COMMUNICATION***

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## LETTRES D'IVOIRE

### PROTOCOLE DE RÉDACTION

#### I- Critères généraux

**Lettres d'Ivoire**, Revue de Littératures, Langues et Sciences Humaines, est une revue scientifique de l'Université de Bouaké. Sa parution est semestrielle. Elle alterne numéro libre et numéro thématique.

Le comité de rédaction de la revue ne publie que des articles originaux de haut niveau qui se rapportent aux Lettres, aux Langues et aux Sciences Humaines et rédigés selon les instructions du présent protocole de rédaction. Tout article qui ne respecte pas les exigences de présentation du protocole ne fera pas l'objet d'examen même si le contributeur s'est acquitté de ses droits.

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Le titre de l'article, le nom de l'auteur, son adresse électronique ainsi que l'université de provenance de l'auteur sont indiqués en début de texte.

Le corps du texte comprend nécessairement une introduction, un développement et une conclusion.

L'article, accompagné de résumés en français et en anglais d'environ 100 mots chacun et de 5 mots-clés, n'excède pas 5000 mots.

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Pour un ouvrage collectif, n'inscrire que le premier auteur du collectif suivi de l'abréviation latine *et al.* en italique.

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Le volume et le numéro sont en chiffres arabes.

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NOM (Prénoms), *Titre*, nature du document (Thèse, Mémoire), Université de soutenance, année.

Exemple :

ANOH (Adjé Joseph), *Jeu et enjeux du discours rapporté dans l'œuvre romanesque d'Ahmadou Kourouma*, Thèse de Doctorat d'Etat, Université d'Abidjan, 2011.

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Exemples :

JACQUEY (Marie-Clotilde), « Entretien avec Massa Makan Diabaté : "Etre griot aujourd'hui" », in *Notre Librairie : Littérature malienne*, n° 75-76, 1989, pp. 72-86.

SENGHOR (Léopold Sédar), « Femme noire », in *Poèmes*, Paris, éditions du Seuil, 1964, pp. 14-15.

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NOM (Prénoms), *Titre* ou *Titre. Sous-titre*, Lieu d'édition, maison d'édition, collection s'il y a lieu, année.

NOM (Prénoms), « Titre », dans Prénoms NOM [dir.], *Titre*, Lieu d'édition, maison d'édition, collection, année, pp. x-y.

Exemple :

PAILLIER (Magali), *La Katharsis chez Aristote*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2004.

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Exemple :

DOMINICY (Marc), « L'évocation discursive. Fondements et procédés d'une stratégie opportuniste », in *Semen* n°24 : *Linguistique et poésie : le poème et ses réseaux*. Mis en ligne le 17 mars 2008. URL : <http://semen.revue.org/6623>. (Consulté le 5 août 2011).

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## EVOLUTION OF AFRICAN WOMAN STATUS IN AYI KWEI ARMAH'S *SELECTED NOVELS*

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this current paper is to demonstrate the inconsistency in the evolution of woman in Armah's selected novels. The study puts into relief the different images of woman in the process of her social metamorphosis. As a matter of fact, the article covers thoroughly *Two Thousand Seasons*, *Fragments*, *Osiris Rising* in which the Ghanaian writer has depicted different facets in the emancipation of the woman. The study shows that in Armah's literary universe woman has shifted from her traditional status to controversial one with its consequences on the society. In traditional society, according to Armah's perception, woman is submissive and to some extent custodian of transmission of cultural values to the off springs of the society whereas in the progressive society he has depicted a reactionary and committed woman. Furthermore, I want to prove basing my reflections on the Ghanaian writer's fictional works that contemporary African woman bears the social vices that affect social ethics and degrade her image and reputation. My analysis has also pointed out that modern African woman actively contributes to the spread of the germs of underdevelopment of the African continent though it is recognized that no effective social construction is possible without woman's effective and efficient implication in the process of development. In this research work, I have examined how the writer has constructed and deconstructed the intrinsic values of woman within her community.

### KEY WORDS

Evolution, African woman, status, metamorphosis, , committed.

### RÉSUMÉ

Le présent article vise à démontrer l'inconsistance dans l'évolution de la femme dans quelques romans de Armah. L'étude met en relief les différentes images de la femme africaine dans le processus de sa métamorphose sociale. En réalité, l'étude couvre les ouvrages tels que *Two Thousand Seasons*, *Fragments*, and *Osiris Rising* à travers lesquels l'écrivain d'origine Ghanéenne a peint plusieurs facettes dans l'émancipation féminine. L'étude a montré que dans l'univers littéraire d'Armah que la femme africaine est passée de son statut traditionnel au statut moderne avec ses répercussions sur la société africaine. Selon la perception de Armah, dans la société traditionnelle, la femme est soumise, et dans une certaine mesure gardienne de la transmission des valeurs culturelles à ses progénitures tandis que dans la société moderne l'écrivain a peint la femme matérialiste et engagée. Par ailleurs, je veux montrer en axant mes réflexions sur la fiction de l'écrivain ghanéen qui stipule que la femme africaine contemporaine porte en elle les vices sociaux qui affectent l'éthique et dégradent son image et sa réputation. Mon analyse a aussi prouvé que la femme africaine moderne a activement contribué à la propagation des germes du sous développement du continent africain bien qu'il est admis qu'aucune construction sociale effective n'est possible sans l'implication totale et efficace de la femme dans le processus du développement. Dans ce travail de recherche, j'ai examiné comment l'auteur a construit et déconstruit les valeurs intrinsèques au sein de sa communauté.

### KEY WORDS

Evolution, femme africaine, status, métamorphose, engagement

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## INTRODUCTION

In most African traditional cultures, a systematic sign of discrimination based on sex, or better still, on gender exists. In any side of the human community, woman is marginalized. The structural systems settled by humans on the different scale of the society save less important position for women. Traditional system settled years ago acknowledged the weak position to the fair sex which is bound to adopt and show in her everyday life through her different relationships with the other sex known as the stronger. As imperialism finds racial justification to the domination and the exploitation of the settled people by creating the myth of the inferiority of the black people, sexism as an ideology and discriminatory attitude create the myth of the superiority of male sex. African woman has experienced that worse situation firstly with the Arabs predators in the novel under study. In fact, according to Armah through *Two Thousand Seasons* at the beginning there is a general social equality, male and female equality is recognized, and women share in all tasks related to governing and maintaining society as mentioned as follows; "The way is not the ruling of men. It is never women ruling men; the way is reciprocity"<sup>1</sup>.

This social architecture is overturned, however, when Africans come under Arab rule. In the memory of mankind, it is the first time that African women have experienced exploitation and oppression because they are forced to serve as sex slaves for Arabs "Our women the predators from the desert turned into playing for their decayed pleasure. And our women, they endured, acquiesced in the predators' orgies so uncomplainingly that in time a profound confidence drew the predators to them"<sup>2</sup>. Beside, women seem to be disadvantaged in comparison with men because of their morphological constitution and their physiological features. On these two birth considerations, the dissimilarities between man and woman are real, natural and undeniable. But with technological progress, it is no longer necessary to be physically stronger in order to be socially functional. Be it in the field of any decision making steps likely to set on or reinforce the development of human society such as educational, cultural and economic activities, to name but a few, no important place is spared to woman. Molara Ogundipe-Leslie draws attention to such situation in the extract below:

A brief glance at woman all over the world today shows that women are oppressed. A brief glance suggests that educational attainments, participation rates, occupational structure private and public laws, family planning systems, technological advance and, above all, socio-cultural attitudes, are all weighted against them<sup>3</sup>.

The aforementioned quotation shows that women are marginalized and socially inactive. It is a burden that overwhelmed them. Contrary to this submissive status described in the quotation, one can read both in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Osiris Rising* that women are in fight for change through respectively the charisma of Abena and Ast. Their actions prove the evolution of women status in literature.

My paper intends to point out the way Armah has constructed and deconstructed woman's image in some of his literary works. Furthermore, the article shows the consequences of the women metamorphosis on the development process in the contemporary Africa. It is important here to notice that the writer has constructed different facets of women by taking into account some paradigms of women within his environments. His source of inspiration is life experience. Does woman constitute a true vector of development of African continent? Or is the contemporary African woman a bottleneck that clogs the development of the black continent?

In fact, the issue of woman in the contemporary Africa is double edged knife in the process of the development. In the past woman was a temple of virtues that transmitted moral ethical values to the off springs of the community. Unfortunately, the notice today is that when I have read Armah's novels that

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<sup>1</sup> Ayi Kwei Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons* (London: Heinemann AWS, 1973), p: 16.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p: 19.

<sup>3</sup> Monlara Ogundipe-Leslie, *Recreating Ourselves, African women and critical transformations* (Africa World pres), 1994, p. 17.

women bear the germs and vices that hamper the development of the continent. It is worth observing that Armah has in some of the selected novels satirized woman's pressing inclination to materialism and snobbism. Such behaviour reinforces the Ghanaian writer's view about the inconsistency of the modern women. The current study work will thoroughly carried out through documentary online researches. The entire paper has been decrypted into three essential component parts. In the first section I have dealt with construction and deconstruction of feminist paradigm during the pre-colonial and colonial eras, the second section is entitled from hindrances to woman's emancipation to the combat of liberation and changing of women status, the beginning of the development.

## I- CONSTRUCTION AND DECONSTRUCTION OF FEMINIST PARADIGM DURING THE PRE-COLONIAL AND COLONIAL ERAS

On the coming out of the reading of Ayi Kwei Armah's fiction works I have realized that the Ghanaian writer has dealt with the winding evolution of African women in his novels down the different historic eras on the African continent. It will be fundamental erroneous option to study the evolution of the status of African women following the chronology of publication of the author's because his very first trial as regards novel writing has depicted the post colonial Africa. This said, I can start my analysis with the almost appropriate novel in order to respect the coherence in the different stages of the change of the status of African woman.

Unanimously, the very first generation of African writers has qualified the pre-colonial African women as traditional ones. Ayi Kwei Armah has not departed from this reality. In his second novel *Fragments*, I come across Naana the old female character of the novel, playing her custodian role. She galvanizes the young generation anxious about Baako's non return home. Here is the old blind woman's prophetic mystic insurance:

Each thing that goes away returns and nothing in the end is lost. The great friend throws all things apart and brings all things together again. That is the way everything goes and turns round. That is how all living things come back after long absences, and the whole great world all things are living things. All that goes returns. He will return.<sup>1</sup>

The foregoing extract expresses Naana's worries for her grandson Baako, a 'been to' whose prolonged study stay in the United States. Though she is preoccupied, she utters her thoughts and believes that Baako will return. In this circumstance of great despair, she makes use convincingly and confidently of words and the force hidden in these words. So, it clearly appears that Naana is a traditional custody for the inexperienced generation. In this respect, the writer has shown plainly a woman worrying of the welfare of her descendents. As the saying goes 'woman is a refuge for her children.' She plays her protective role in the pre-colonial era. Altogether, in this era women have been the caretakers of her offspring. This birth and natural function becomes obvious through Efua's concerns for her son Baako. She fearfully expresses her concerns for her son in this dialogue between Juana and herself:

"I don't understand", the woman said, and her eyes had begun to fill with tears. "I cannot understand. All my hopes went with him, and he was going to live me here, like an old woman on the shore, struggling to take my snuff in a hurricane." Her tears stayed unshed, and she smiled. "Because of him I have come to the prophet. I have prayed harder than any woman who has lost her precious trinkets, and I do not want to tempt God, but I think my prayers are soon to be answered"<sup>2</sup>

In the citation about, the narrator shows the sacrifice a woman can consent to her offspring. On all grounds, in the pre-colonial Africa children constituted women's zest for life "Children are the most important things in this life"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ayi Kwei, Armh, *Fragments*, Ibadan : Heinemann, 1974, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, pp. 34-35.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

Furthermore, one can observe that Naana is custodian of tradition and thereby respects strictly it and draws and sharpens the attention of the young generation to the importance of the traditional principles in the life of the human beings and invites the youth to respect them and even points out the impacts of the non-respect of them. In this vein, Naana has flayed the naïve behaviour of the youth concerning Araba's new baby's outdoor ceremony and proved the repercussions of this immaturity and haste on the newly born. As guardian of tradition Naana demonstrates to the youth that she perfectly masters the endogenous realities through the dialogue she has with her son Baako. This is the way the writer blames the youth for their acculturation through Naana's utterance:

"Araba's son is coming out today," Baako answered. But that is not possible," she said, "Or have I lost count of my days all over again? Is it then a week since your sister came back with the child?" "You have not lost your count, Naana. It's five days now, but it's been decided. This is to be the day.

"Five days," the old woman whispered in her astonishment.

"Five days. The child is not yet with us. He is in the keeping of the spirits still, and already they are dragging him out into this world for eyes in heads that have eaten flesh to gape at."

"Araba wanted it that way," Baako said "My mother too, and in the end Kwessi agreed to it.

"The child is one of the uncertain ones. If he stays he may bring great things." His grandmother shook her head. "They themselves say he refused the world several times. And it should have made them think, the way he finally came. He was weeks before his time." [...]

"Baako, how can I say what is in my soul? Often a quick child like that is only a disturbed spirit come to take a brief look and go back home. But I am too old. Let me say this to them and inside their hearts they will accuse me, calling me a witch who would take the infant life just to lengthen mine."

"No one will think such thoughts of you," said Baako.

"You are still young, and know you little of the forest people have for their souls. But that is good; you have enough in you to make you generous." Naana sighed, then leaned forward. "And you, what do you say to all this masquerade?"

"Nothing," Baako answered. "I do not fully understand the ceremony itself."

"Ah, that is a shame. The ceremony you ought to understand, or where do you get the meaning of it, even if it is done right? Don't you see? You know the child is only a traveler between the world of spirits and this one of heavy flesh. His birth can be a good beginning, and he may find his body and this world around it a home where he wants to stay. But for this he must be protected. Or he will run screaming back, fleeing the horrors prepared for him up here. How is it that you do not understand that?"<sup>1</sup>

From the quotation about it appears crystal clear that in the traditional Africa woman has a heavy and unfailing responsibility to assume within the society. One can assert without doubt that woman in African society transmits the customary and cultural values to the young generation. In addition, she ensures the traditional education of children sharpens their consciousness about the communal values and beliefs. Apart from this function of daily teaching cultural heritages to the children woman is above all the core element of every temple and shrine. She animates these temples and shrines assure their mysterious and social functions in the African society as whole. In this field I can mention the concrete and vivid example of the priestess Shielo in *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, who rules the shrine of caves and gloves. This priestess is even feared by the powerful men of the Umuofian community like Okonkwo. Here is a scene described by the narrator to justify this status of the active role of the woman in the African shrines, temples and convents:

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<sup>1</sup> Ayi Kwei, Armah, *Fragments*, Ibadan : Heinemann, 1974, p.p.96-97.

It was Shielo the priestess of Agbala, prophesying. [...] Once in a while shielo was possessed by the spirit of her god and she began to prophesy. But tonight she was addressing her prophecy and greetings to Okonkwo, and everyone in his family.[...] The priestess had now reach Okonkwo's compound and was talking with him out his hut. She was saying again and again that Agbala wanted to see his daughter, Ezinma. Okonkwo pleaded with her to come back in the morning because Ezinma was asleep. But Chielo ignored what he was trying to say and went on shouting that Agbala wanted to his daughter. [...] The priestess suddenly screamed. 'Beware, Okonkwo!' she warned. 'Beware of exchanging words with Agbala. Does a man speak when Agbala speak? Beware!'<sup>1</sup>

This quotation underscores the paramount authority on the men even those of title in the community. But the writer has bartered this radiant image of woman to bleak one in his *Two Thousand seasons*. As a matter of fact, during the rule of the Arab predators women have been reified and used like animals. They have sexually abused. Women have undergone sexual violence. The sudden conversion of hosts in parasites has seriously degraded the African cultural fabric. Undoubtedly, African women are the main victims of the Arab predators' horrors. Indeed, our African women were degraded and turned into things under the Arab predators' domination. In fact, African women are forced to satisfy the predators evil who use our women as sexual thing: "Our women gave the predators an overflowing measure of joy, filled them with such exquisite happiness their senses grew over loaded and pleasure turned them dumb, insensate. Outside stood the askaris, Zombis kept guarding the predators, destroyers of our people"<sup>2</sup>. Apart from being sexually abused women have also been morally and psychologically persecuted the kings or chiefs that ruled the community or the kingdom.

Just because these sadistic and sex addict kings and chiefs wanted to satisfy immoral desires. Concerning women's misfortune, it is worth mentioning that in *Osiris Rising*, Armah has depicted a scene of rape undergone by Ast. Here for understanding reason it becomes imperative to define the word rape. What is then rape? Rape can be defined as the fact of having sex with someone by force without his or her consent. Rape is caused by lust or uncontrollable sexual urges or uncontrollable need for sexual gratification. It is an act of physical violence and domination. It implies that violence is involved in a love affair between a man and a woman. In Africa community described by Armah, women are often raped by indelicate men unable to control their desire. In *OSIRIS RISING* for example women and children are sexually brutalized. Ast story is a vivid example. She is raped by the " DD" (Deputy Director) even if the DD was not able to come at the end of his project. The scene is described as follows:

Her head was clearing. When she opened her eyes she saw the DD crouched upon her, pressing down on her with his right hand. Simultaneously he was fumbling with his trousers, attempting to remove them. He was half-seated astride her hips, his right foot on the floor, his left, shoe and all, on the bed. Feeling strength return into her body, Ast swung out with her free hand. The thumb encountered the DD's nose. Swiftly, Ast felt above the nose the eyes with spread-out fingers, and found them. With all the strength she had left she tightened her grip. The man crouched upon her gave a low growl and pulled his head back. Ast, trying to maintain her grip, rose slightly. But her body collapsed back onto the bed, exhausted. She needed to rest a while, just to get back some resistance. But DD brought both elbows down with tremendous force against her thighs.<sup>3</sup>

As Ast, a lot of African women are raped, the fact that they do not know their right some of the women prefer to resign because, may be, they think that the rap is a shame for a woman. In the case of Ast, she defends herself until she humiliates the " DD" but how many women can behave as Ast? Avoidably hideous awkward manner from DD psychologically disillusions Ast and gives another conception about her dreamed origin. After this deviation in the evolution of women's social status, women did not cross their arms contrary started the fight for their liberation from men's yoke.

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<sup>2</sup> Ayi Kwei Armah, *Two Thousand seasons* p: 20.

<sup>3</sup> Ayi Kwei Armah, *Osiris Rising*, Novel, Per Ankh Publishing, 1995 pp. 62-63

## II- FROM HINDRANCES TO WOMAN'S EMANCIPATION TO THE COMBAT OF LIBERATION

Before I proper deals with the current section it will be better I analyze briefly the fundamental cause of under domination of woman. In fact, Patriarchy is the weapon through which woman is kept in inferior position to man. What is patriarchy? Patriarchy, explains the reasons of women's ill-treatment through ages and what it means regarding their future and success in life. Patriarchy not only explains how the society functions but also how it controls women. According to *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary of the Current English*, "Patriarchy means a system or country that is ruled or controlled by men". The ideology of patriarchy emphasizes male importance, his dominance and his superiority to enslave women and make them second-class citizen. The opposite of patriarchy is matriarchy which is a society or a system controlled by women rather than by men. Obviously, the culture of many African countries is based on male ascendancy. Men have power and control over women. Women must constantly fight for their rights and sometimes they struggle just to survive despite the power and domination of men threatening them. In some African villages, no female is allowed to go to school because nothing good comes out of it. This attitude is similar to that of Mr. Tulliver who expresses his fear that education will be too much light to that of women. Tulliver adds that it might unbalance the society. He declares: "it's bad; bad a woman's no business being so clever"<sup>1</sup>. This is also conformed to what Mawdo's mother states in *So Long a Letter*. "School turns our girls into devils who lure our men away from the path"<sup>2</sup>. This means that women do not need to work to acquire social promotion. What they need as educated women is that they would be given good cares in the household.

As a result, it seems that the community represented in *Two Thousand Seasons* during colonial domination is a male-dominated world where certain conditions have been made especially for women. Men maintain women in a status which appears pitiful today. In such a society, women's activities are limited where as men have all venues opened to them. Women are just invisible and their common place of activities is generally home, farms and market. During their marital life, women cannot take important decisions even those concerning their own life, this being men's task. Indeed, the instable status of women in the African communities translates at all points of view their commitment to change living conditions imposed on them by male chauvinism. All this is clearly seen during the Arab predators' domination. It is worth examing the social, political, and economic women status evolution during colonial period. It challenges the myth that African women have been among the most oppressed in the world. This part also identifies the different practices which diminished the status of women in colonial period. While such activities as the involvement of the women's organization in decision making process, participation of women in rituals for the welfare of the community and strong presence in the economy aided women's visibility and influence in Africa society, women are marginalized by the predators.

To understand Arabs predator attitude against African woman in *Two Thousand Seasons* during their domination, it is important to know that in the Arab world, women have throughout history experienced discrimination and have been subject to restrictions of their freedoms and rights. Some of these practices are based on religious beliefs, but many of the limitations are cultural and emanate from tradition as well as religion. These main constraints that create an obstacle towards women's rights and liberties are reflected in laws dealing with criminal justice, economy, education and healthcare. In Africa the predators bring the same cultural constraints to woman or worse. In fact, the Arabs treated African women less than a thing. Arab enslavement of Africans was radically different from its European counterpart. It was more complex and varied depending on time and place. Also Arab is not a racial group, some Arabs are African and some are White.

One of the biggest differences between Arabs slaving and European slaving was that, slaves were drawn from all racial groups and they were rarely used as a means of crop production; slaves were

<sup>1</sup> Georges Elliot, *The Mill On The Floss*, (Penguin Popular Classic), 1994, p. 66

<sup>2</sup> Mariama Ba, *So Long A Letter*, (NEA, Dakar-Abidjan-Lomé), 1987, p. 17

not the economic engine behind Arab economies. Arab slavery generally lacked large droves of sugar plantations where slaves toiled to the crack of a whip in the hot sun. Many women stolen from Africa were stolen to serve the infamous Arabian harems. Their children were thus born free to Arab fathers and thus would have been heirs to wealth and status, fully and equally assimilated into the population. Many African people thus rose to great stations by virtue of their Arab fathers. The infamous eunuchs were infertile, and the other men who were enslaved would have gradually married non-African women, hence facilitating the absorption of African culture and lineage into an Arab one. The contrasting differences between racial definitions on the Arabian continent as oppose to Europe assist in blending the majority of Africans stolen from Africa into the general population of Arabia. Armah describes in *Two Thousand Seasons* how dangerous were the Arabs predators against African people in general and the women especially. He says "after a stubborn silence they talked, a language hard to understand. With deranged, fantastic interjections of pain they told us of attackers who had pillaged everything, killed men, enslaved the rest and transported them across the desert, leaving no survivors except the two themselves"<sup>1</sup>

This kind of social status is more incipient and is engaged in probably without much thought. There is a systematic form of violence that is against and is experienced by every woman by the fact of her gender in various and different ways especially in the domestic area. Right from childhood there is a type of gender stereotyping which is patriarchal. Women are expected to submit to patriarchal authority and this is reflected in the way children are treated at home. The girl takes the role of serving while the boy is normally served. This is even reflected in the way the parents relate. Psychologically, the boy builds a patriarchal ego while the girl knows her position as that of service. Even in society, the situation is not better. The contribution of oral literature to violence against women is already outlined. Anything to do with shyness, weakness, emotionality, cowardice and those negative attributes is associated with women. The courage refers to men. This socialization process promotes inequality and lack of respect for human dignity. Women are often abused in society, segregated and used as sex objects. The above situation is described by Armah in the following words: "In the suppression of women first, in the reduction of all females to things- things for pleasure, things for use, things in the hands of men- these admirers of the white predators' road saw a potent source of strength for men"<sup>2</sup>

Major progress against racial segregation in some countries, gender inequality remains widespread. In the same vein, the growing number of workers seeking better employment opportunities abroad has engendered hostility and anxiety in societies resulting in greater discriminatory practices. Traditionally, women are considered less important than men. Women have specific role to play in the society. That is surely what Oladele Taiwo emphasizes in *Female Novelists of Africa* when he writes that: "A girl is inferior to a boy; a wife is valuable only as source of producing children; (...) the word of a man is law (...) and woman exist only to serve his pleasure and obey his command"<sup>3</sup>

Traditionally, the man is expected to go to farm or to hunt while woman is expected to cook and to care for children at home. In many modern African countries, the incompatibility between positive and customary justice systems may reinforce discrimination, especially against marginal groups. In some cases, customary law may even reinforce certain inequalities, involving women, such as the denial of their rights to property or other assets. In other cases, laws may even underpin ethnic-based structures of power. Most African women still earn less than men and are more likely to be trapped in low-paid, low-skilled jobs-often in the informal economy. But, beyond that, women are not given the same chance as men as far as schooling and education are concerned.

In addition to traditional forms of discrimination, other forms of discrimination include social isolation, violence and verbal harassment or abuse is noticed. The participation of women in public

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<sup>1</sup> Ayi Kwei Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons* (London: Heinemann), 1973, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p: 59.

<sup>3</sup> Taiwo Olade, *The Female Novelists of Modern Africa*( Macmillan Publishers), 1984, p. 103

administration is very weak. It is worth noticing in Armah's novel women have fought for their liberation. This is seen through the revolt against the oppression from anti-colonial discourse to liberal discourse.

In the introduction to the book *World History of Women (Histoire mondiale de la femme)*, Pierre Grimal argues that historians write only the history of men. To show the opposite of this assertion Armah, describes in *Two Thousand Seasons*, the revolt of a group of women against Arab settlers who reigned as supreme lords on African land. In this violent protest, those women often subsumed under the generic of "our women" have shown that if they pay the menstrual blood by biological determinism, they are also able to voluntarily pay for freedom. In this perspective, the eleven women who died fighting for the dethronement of the Arab invaders are thus seen as martyrs. In order to emphasize the spirit of the community in relation to the personal action, Armah avoids focusing the story on a single female character. For Armah, passivity is not an essentially feminine attribute. It is probably for this reason that from one sequence to another, he makes acquire his female characters a dimension increasingly important. In fact, it makes them adopt violence as the only method of resistance. Thus, he legitimizes Fanon's remark in which he justifies the violence of the colonized. In this logic, Armah describes in the penultimate chapter of *Two Thousand Seasons* female characters as real strategists. This chapter entitled "the return" recounts the rebellion of a group of Africans captured with the complicity of King Koranche. They succeed in forcing the boat in which they are shipped to Europe to take another way and undertake to release five other vessels filled with captives. In this confrontation, Abena the female character whose leadership is not subject to any dispute is described as an intelligent, methodical and meticulous. The narrator says in this regard:

Those first days of the long wait Abena's patience was endless. Weariness made the great part of us prone to impatience, but Abena went about the work of preparation, completed, repeated, perfected each necessary detail. And always, even after the seventh day of unrewarded waiting, her voice carried the same message: 'They will be coming this way. They have no other route'<sup>1</sup>

In this passage and throughout the story, the patriotic spirit of Abena leads a double resentment exacerbated rancor against settlers and contempt for royalty and all those among her countrymen help the colon to secure the African soil. The character Abena has a great influence on women and men around her, showing thus she has a positive influence on the community presented by the narrator. But the representation of dynamic female characters does not stop at this point. In order to give concrete substance to the ideals embodied by his female characters, Armah gives them a fighting spirit that catalyzes all the characters defending the philosophy of "way". One can see them perform actions in which they show all their bravery they give orders, act, direct, use of guns, kill; reinforce the camp of freedom's fighters or neutralize Arabs' accomplices including the king. Political commitment and boundless activity of those characters belong to a heroism on which she cannot fail to wonder. Why did Armah choose to portray the female characters with fundamentally different from those that most male writers recognize their qualities? This description falls under the influence of feminist discourse or the tradition he wants to update? This question is interesting insofar as the representations of the female characters are not organized solely around the anti-colonial discourse.

I can simplify this question by asking if the roles assigned by society to each sexual category are subject to change or remain an insurmountable determinism. If I can make reservations on universal issues about the relationship between men and women, it seems that their conceptualization remains almost identical in African and Western societies.

By analyzing the different registers in which these characters evolve, I see that it has been little discussion about the denunciation of a female condition. The typology of female characters and the evolution of the story reveal that women have held various positions. They are depicted in leadership roles, as freedom's fighters, protective for men and the community. But in any case, I do not see them

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<sup>1</sup> Armah Ayi Kwei, *Two Thousand Seasons*, (Heinemann, London, Ibadan), 1973, p. 175.



speak to issues that are specific to women. Rather, they show a sense of community that can be seen through this quotation that Abena, the most important female character says: "There is no self to save apart from all of us. What would I have done with my life, alone, like a beast of prey?"<sup>1</sup>

In this regard, the female character makes the choice to stay with his people when she understood that the king would enslave them. And when toward the end of the story, the woman kills king Koranche due to his treachery; one understands that the narrator made him carry hatred that African people have felt against colonialism, its horrors and its avatars. Abena is seen as the character around which the anti-colonial discourse is woven into this novel. The opinions expressed and the role that the narrator made her play transcend those of her kind and represent the legitimate claim of the African people to freedom. Arguably, the rhetoric of the narrator argues explicitly to improve the image of women in contemporary African society. After representing the difficulties of post-independent society is facing, it has sought to create characters that are hopeful.

Those characters, obviously, were created by Armah to serve as models for modern society. Armah is not an isolated case in this scenario. Thus, in *The God's Bits of Wood (Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu)*, when Sembene Ousmane portrays female characters as strong as Pinda, Ramatoulaye to fight against colonial rule during the railway strike, the author is guided by no other motives than that shows the political awareness and inner strength of African women. Taking into account gender differences, Ousmane shows that political awareness demonstrated by women also keep them determined as men in the quest for freedom. I see in particular the description of Pinda whose prostitute life is allegorical to self-sacrifice she has shown in the liberation struggle. Similarly, it is described a young female character named Abdibidji which menstruation occurs at a time when other women are concerned about the twists and turns of the union and social struggle.

The parallel between this physiological phenomenon, and the blood that will flow from veins of Pinda, portrayed as a martyr of the social struggle, is explicit in the story of the narrator, then the blood of women is sought at all stages of the life, procreation as in struggle, the latter reference is seen as the paradigm of childbirth or the conquest of freedom. In this novel by Sembene Ousmane, sexual difference is clearly specified but the gender are not hierarchied. In this regard, Pinda and Ramatoulaye are also valued as the old Fa Keita or Bakayoko, the enigmatic leader of the movement of the rail strike represented by the Senegalese writer. In this scene of colonial resistance, Armah's writing and that of Ousmane maintain close relationships.

Indeed, it is likely that the portraits of female characters by Armah are inspired by the history of West Africa. More than Ousmane, the resurgence of memory is easily visible through his female characters. Abena's portrayal has two complementary aspects: its inner beauty, altruism, courage, and her physical beauty on which there is a form of economic narrative. But if I want to do a thorough analysis of this character, there is an important detail that I cannot neglect: it is her sex life. I remember that she has not only declined the advances from King Koranche but also those of other men around of female characters has been made taking into account a number of qualities which tend to raise the profile of women in contemporary society. Unfortunately, it is at the expense of their sex life. Busia complains when she writes. her. She seems to live only for the community for which she represents the unity and resistance against the first onslaught of the colonial powers. It reminds one hand, the myth of the Amazons, these powerful women, warriors, who in Greek mythology, are portrayed without any reference to their sex life, and secondly, the Amazons of the Kingdom of Dahomey actual republic of Benin. In general, I can say that the portrayal of Abena, the female protagonist in the process of liberation of twenty young initiated is very significant. Abena's leadership underscore all the women's capacity to liberate themselves. Ayi Kwei Armah writes about women's prowess:

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<sup>1</sup> Ayi Kwei Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, Heinemann (London, Ibadan), 1973, p. 111.

The most important woman in this section, whose spirit dominates the end of Abena, the last in the long line of liberators. Like the other women, she sees more clearly than most people of her time, yet despite this, she has faith in the human spirit. Like Anoa, Idawa, and others before her, she is physically and spiritually a beautiful person. Yet we do not actually know what she looks like. As has been mentioned, Armah's strong, prophetic women in this text are divorced from their physical bodies<sup>1</sup>

### III- CHANGING OF WOMEN STATUS, THE BEGINNING OF THE DEVELOPMENT

We are all aware that despite achievements and progress made, African women face major challenges and obstacles. For example, the primary development policies in many countries, known as poverty reduction strategies, still do not take into account differences in income and power between men and women. In addition, the majority of African women is still denied education and employment, and has limited opportunities in trade; industry and government, this state of thing cannot favour the emerging of Africa. To avoid the perpetuation of under-development of Africa, one must offer good conditions for the great numerous part of the population in order to contribute efficiently to the continent's development. These conditions will be analyzed in the social, economic and political field.

Here, women are at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the production channel. As mentioned above women most of time, are producers and sellers. This control that they have on production channel is an advantage which unfortunately, remains unexploited. Not only women are the most numerous in terms of population, but also they are the most present in economic activities. And yet they do not seem to take advantage of this situation to improve their economic status. Of course it is difficult to imagine something different from what is being done now: production is in rural areas and marketing in cities. But a well planned commercial channel profitable for everybody can be built by women so as to impulse the economic boom indispensable for the development of Africa. To reach the shared objective of sustainable development, women have in the economic sector an important position that needs to be exploited more profitably and efficiently.

Human beings are important constituents of the society, and as such no sustainable development can be set without any of them. And as women are the most numerous, more involvement from their side is needed. In sum, women's forming a unified body with men is very important as far as the development of the society is concerned.

### CONCLUSION

My research work has helped to highlight women's status evolution in African society. This status can be classified in three main categories which are traditional women status considered as inferior to men, women as an important constituent of the society regarding the roles played by them even if those roles are discretely played and at end, the status of developed women whose status bit positively change. Of course, African traditional culture does not put women in general good conditions as far as rights are concerned. My analysis regarding traditional women status reveals that African women in fiction about Africa are not second-class citizens as Buchi Emechita writes it in *Second-Class Citizens*. They are given room to fulfill themselves as their male partners. Thus, women's activities did not stop at the level of kitchen and childrearing only. They had other things to do in the society. They were university lecturers as Ast in *Osiris Rising*, doctors as Ama Nkroma, the woman healer in *The Healer*, they knew the virtue of the plants able to cure a disease.

Women as well as men ruled the country in the old days. They contributed to the settlement of matters of great importance. An example is given by the Queen-Mother on the occasion of General Asamoah Nkwanta's refusing to lead the arm against the British colonists. She was the one whose words

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<sup>1</sup>Abena Busia, "Parasites and Prophets : the Use of Women in Ayi Kwei Armah's Novels" in Derek Wright (editor), *Critical Perspectives on Ayi Kwei Armah* (Washington: Three Continents, 1992), p.63.

finally convinced the general. In *L'Aventure Ambigue*, the power of La grande Royale exceeded her brother's. She had been the one who pacified the North. Her words were taken into consideration whenever she made a decision.

As far as the defense of the country is concerned, men are not the only soldiers. Women knew how to handle guns, matches and other weapons on the war fields. In *Behanzin*, the amazons were fierce warriors. Queen Nzinga in *Nzinga* represented another face of the amazons. A hunting dog is just seen in its childhood. Nzinga displayed her courage early while she was still a child by throwing down her half-brother. So, when her father died, she was given the throne. With army, she fought the Portuguese slave traders and the surrounding empires which helped them. Before her death, she had succeeded in finding a peaceful place for her people. In Armah's novel *The Healer*, the women soldiers were finally those who saved the gold throne of the Asante confederation from the British.

Every society is made up of families either nuclear or extended. Women are given the natural rights by the Supreme Being to conceive. This natural role on its own is a pointer to the strategic role women play in every society, Africa inclusive. Unfortunately, these natural women rights are biased in the society. For our continent to be vibrant as all African wish and highlight from the statement above there is the need to individually and collectively participate actively in the continent's economy irrespective of the gender differentiation. This case study paper points out the important and strategic roles women play in the Africa society although the abuse and marginalization they are victims, persuaded on the notion that, Africa's growth and development lies on the role of African women and their contribution to achieving the continent's potential, excellence in human capability, an entrepreneurial spirit and belief in self-determination are the keys to the socio-economic and political development of African people.

African women's fundamental contributions in their households, food production systems and national economies are increasingly acknowledged, within Africa and by the international community that is why everybody recognizes easily the importance to promote women initiatives. So, African leaders have to take joint responsibility for promoting the role of women in social and economic development by reinforcing their capacity in the domains of education and training; by the development of revenue-generating activities through facilitating access to credit; and by assuring their participation in the political and economic life. By improving women own positions as social and economic agents, they would concurrently strengthen African society. Invariably, the continent's broader development prospects will be enhanced. Africa will not be able to sustain rapid growth without investing in its people mainly in women. As African men conscious of the strategic role women can contribute to the mainstream of Africa's economy, the study empowered women through gender equality, access to entrepreneurship education and mentoring as a potent force for accelerated poverty reduction. It gives credence to women in helping them become active economic agents in Africa.

Women have a significant role in Africa's socio-economic development is beyond question. Women need to acquire the right skills and be mentored in harnessing their abilities to contribute to Africa's development. Based on the passion of the team members, this case study suggested that an open learning platform like traditional women association in villages could be used to cluster women into teams for entrepreneurial education and development. I discovered that, women when rightly motivated irrespective of their socio-economic and educational background could learn new skills and use them to their benefits and the community. Though a small pilot project, I am convinced that, this could be a potent prototype to develop women entrepreneurship in Africa. Africa's sustainable growth and development is only assured when women are enabled to participate actively in the economy. Moreover, solutions to be applied don't concern only women but all the African population because, as we stated earlier, development is not just a concern of a group, small or big in the society, but all African people. Development should be the first and most important objective everybody wants to reach. The valuable development is to be reached, many things are still to be done and one rather keeps in mind about ways and means to at least profit by the great number women represent in the population.

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