

Title: Issues of Identity and Acculturation as a result of border- crossing with special reference to Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*

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Abstract

According to Oxford English Dictionary, the term 'Border' refers to a line separating two countries, administrative divisions, or other areas. Basically border- crossing refers to the state of crossing any boundary and it results in the intersection of two different cultures. Identity refers to the close similarity or affinity and acculturation refers to assimilation to a different culture, typically the dominant one. Crossing of a border of any system basically results in the crisis of identity and acculturation with other system directly or indirectly. Multicultural theorist James Banks refers to "multiple acculturation" as the incorporation of different heritages into the identity development process (Dorris, 239). Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* attributes a lot of instances regarding the issues of identity and acculturation. The protagonist Sissie is found travelling many places and hence through her encounter with those settled people from Africa we can get the description of how the lives of those Africans have changed in the European land. This paper is an attempt to root out the instances of identity and acculturation as a result of crossing the border of a nation.

Keywords: Border- Crossing, Identity, Acculturation, Nation, Africa.

Introduction

Society is dynamic in nature. It undergoes many changes with the passage of time. Society does not only possess people from the same community rather sometimes it becomes a fusion point of people from divergent communities. Identity and acculturation are two integral part of a society. With over 1.2 billion people across 58 countries and between 1200 and 3000 ethno linguistic groups; Africa is one of the most culturally diverse regions of the world. People move from one place to other place due to several reasons and Africans basically prefer to settle themselves in European land for the sake of a better life as a result of which they try to cope up themselves with the European culture.

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This process of assimilation to a different culture, typically the dominant one is referred to as acculturation. The process of acculturation may impact both social and psychological well- being too some extend resulting in identity crisis. Similarly, identity makes individuals either similar to other people or different from them. It contains different aspects of who the individual is; from biological aspect, psychological processes and to the social positions held by the individual

(Schwartz, Luyckx, & Vignoles, 2011). Identity is both stable and unchanging in the case of race, ethnicity, or biological gender; or fluid and dynamic as in case of nationality, religion, psychological gender, or employment (Oostendorp & Jones, 2015). Again the process of acculturation and maintenance of one's identity in other land are not an easy task. Crossing the boundary of a certain administrative system hence is a compound of both good and evil outcomes. In the novel *Our sister killjoy*, there are lots of description in which we can observe lots of instances related to identity crisis and acculturation with the European society.

Objectives

This paper aims to focus on the follows issues:

1. To find out the issues of identity and acculturation in the novel *Our Sister Killjoy*.
2. To explore how the lives of the characters in the novel are affected by the crisis of identity and acculturation.
3. To explore the influence of border- crossing upon the lives of the characters in the novel.

Methodology

The paper is carried out through secondary sources including text books, journals, thesis and some articles related to the topic. The paper is narrative in nature.

Analysis

'Border- Crossing' is a common term in Geographical Studies. Whenever we hear the word it leads us towards the concept of national border. But it may be used for referring several concepts in literature or other social sciences. According to Oxford English Dictionary, the term 'Border' refers to a line separating two countries, administrative divisions, or other areas. Basically border-crossing refers to the state of crossing any boundary. Border studies theory began when post-colonial and cultural studies theorists explored the complex political and cultural exchanges which were occurring along the United States and Mexican border (Anzaldua 3; Gamez- Pena 43; Grant and Ladson- Billings 34). The theory has grown to encompass the dialogue and cultural exchange among groups of people from different ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds (Grant and Ladson- Billings 35). Border studies theory further develops what multicultural theorist James Banks refers to as "multiple acculturation" the incorporation of different heritages into the identity development process (Dorris, 239). While conventional multicultural theory tends to emphasize individual cultures, border studies examine the intersection of cultures and the resulting effects. This borderland can be viewed as a new territory for exploration. Root calls this borderland as a "significant frontier" (Root, 1996, xiii).

The term "border crossing" is coined by Gloria Anzaldua which refers to moving across diverse borders such as race, gender, or geography. The term "border crossing" arises from the border studies theory. Maria Root offers four possible ways of thinking about border crossings. Firstly, individuals can bridge borders by having both feet in two groups. According to Root, the former concept of "straddling two worlds in a one- foot- in, one- foot- out metaphor... fractionalizes the multiracial person's existence"(Root, 1996, xxi). By having both feet in two groups, the person can be wholly immersed, respected, and accepted by two cultures simultaneously. Secondly, Root says that the individual can shift foreground and background identities to cross borders defined by race and ethnicity. At certain times, a person with a bicultural

identity may wish temporarily to emphasize or highlight on background while deemphasizing another in what Root calls “situational ethnicity and situational race” (Root, 1996, xxi). Thirdly, Root discusses about the individual who “decisively sits on a border, experiencing it as the central reference point” (Root, 1996, xxi). It explains that certain individuals wish to invent a new or revised identity. Fourthly Root refers the camp in one cultural group “for an extended period of time and making forays into other camps from time to time” (Root, 1996, xxii). She states that this instance is not one of changing loyalties but merely of adapting to one’s personal needs, saying that “people might change ways of identifying themselves over their lifetime”(Root, 1996,xxii).

Victor Turner develops Van Gennep’s model of three stages later on. In his study, *Ritual Process* (1969/ 1977), Turner examines social order in an African society with the concepts of “structure”, “antistructure”, and “liminality”. Turner claims that in a society, a member moves from one social position to another through liminality which forms a ritual process. Those who move to a socially higher position, for example, are first separated from the social and institutional structures and placed in the liminal space socially, institutionally and spatially. In this liminal space, no ordinary rules prevail but the candidates for the new social position must bare various trials and tribulations, even humiliation. After these liminal experiences, the candidates can become members of the social structure and gain a new higher social position (Turner 1977:95-97; 102-106). Hence, Turner’s concept of “liminal” or “in-between” can also be applied to analyse those individuals who have crossed the national border more permanently, but have not become full members of the new society. These individuals can remain in liminal spaces for long periods of time.

Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Our Sister Killjoy or reflections from a Black- eyed squint* (1977). The novel is divided into four sections. The first section is named as ‘Into a Bad Dream’ in which the protagonist Sissie, a Ghanaian student travels to Europe on a scholarship. Throughout the novel, the protagonist travels several places like Germany, London where she encounters with people with their diverse thoughts. This novel is a relentless attack on the notions of exile as relief from the societal constraints of national development and freedom to live in a cultural environment suitable for creativity. Here Sissie’s opinion is shaped by her encounter with the western world and it’s comparison to her homeland. She meets several fellows of her native land but they are on the verge of transforming themselves into a complete European due to which they are in the ‘liminal space’ as referred by Victor Turner in his study, *Ritual Process* (1969/1977). In the beginning section of the novel we find Sissie’s encounter with an African single man, popularly known as Sammy in the dinner party arranged by the ambassador who is seemed to carry an artificial smile all the time as described by Sissie. Sissie explains about Sammy that he acts as if he is there in the party to sing of the wonders of Europe. Sammy tries to realize Sissie in the party that she is unbelievably lucky enough to be selected for the trip to Europe. Sammy speaks the European language fluently and easily seems to become comfortable with those of Europeans present there which ultimately makes Sissie feel uneasy. Through Sissie’s encounter with Sammy we find that some of her native people try to settle themselves in the European land and in their process of acculturation with the European culture they are ready to ignore their identity and culture as an African. She feels uneasy and often realizes that she is the only person at that time who does not feel insecure or inferior to her identity or race. This section ends with “power to decide/ who is to live/ who is to die”. The line throws some light on the existence of colonial power upon the African mind due to which African people often try to negotiate their identity and follow western tradition. The second section entitled as “The Plums” shows that Sissie meets Marija

Sommer, a German lady who gradually develops an attraction towards her. In this section we find the comments of Marija's neighbour about Sissie and the post- independence struggle of African continent. In the third section of the novel named "From Our Sister Killjoy" also Sissie observes many of her native people in her visit to London. In this section Sissie is found hurt of watching her native people from the pavements of London in torn dresses and leading a very pathetic life there. Sissie explains that those women who use to be dignified matrons in their native homes are now leading a pathetic life in other's land and do not in fact have enough cloth to fight against the bitter cold of London. Watching all these Sissie primarily is found not being able to control her emotion and often spends time alone in deep thought for her those settled native people in London. But later she gets angry at those settled native people's decision of leaving their land permanently leaving their warm homes to stay in such chilly places. She also wonders of the fact that those native people often try to hide their bitter livelihood to their relatives of their motherland. This instance can be explained from Maria Root's point of view on border crossing where people want to invent some new or revised identity for themselves and try to shift their background and foreground identities to cross borders as defined by race and ethnicity. These people are in the position of in between. Neither they can well- establish themselves nor they can go back to their native land. Then Sissie meets Ghanaian self- exile, Kunle who believes that the problems of Apartheid will be solved by Western technology. He states that White South African doctor uses the heart of a black man for a transplant to keep an old White man alive. Sissie soon realizes from the behaviour of Kunle that he values the Colonizer's world more than his own and belongs to the category of 'been- to' who comes home to complain and exploit rather than building a nation and improve the conditions of its material environment. In such way, she also comes across the hypocrisy and corruption of the African elite. She also observes that the emigrated people of her land have forgotten their culture and their motherland by adopting completely the European culture. Sissie refers this as a outcome of the influence of European culture and tradition, their living style, thought upon the emigrated Africans which lead them to ignore their origin. Sissie has become just a silent observer. Sissie as a radical to stand in strong opposition to those black people such as Sammy, Kunle whose mind do not seem to be filled with the thoughts of their own. Here Maria Root's concept of border studies, Victor Turner's concept of "structure", "antistructure" and "liminality" relating to the use of power in contemporary border studies can be used to analyze the condition of both Sissie who develops herself to be more patriotic and the other emigrants who are on the verge of losing their own culture and not in a position to be a complete member of the European society. Though Sissie crosses the border of her nation but she is completely opposite to those who forget their culture and origin by observing the shine of the other culture.

Throughout the above discussion it is observed that there are some complications regarding the issue of identity and acculturation. Sissie comes across several people throughout her journey and she learns about the fact that people basically due to their urge for achieving higher sometimes violates moral behaviour due to which they have to face lots of problem in their life. Characters like Sammy, Kunle are among those who try to assimilate with the Europeans as a result of which later on they are neither in a position of complete European nor in a position to return back to their origin. On the other hand, the protagonist Sissie stands in a powerful position by maintaining her origin and assimilating to a certain limit with other culture. This position of character can be defined as what Maria Root defines "straddling two worlds in a one- foot- in, one- foot- out metaphor... fractionalizes the multiracial person's existence" (Root, 1996, xxi). By having both feet in two different groups, the person can be respected by both the group. Throughout the paper

we come to the outcome that border- crossing of a certain system creates certain problem in the survival of the immigrants. Those settled in a different land are hardly accepted by the native society. Again it is not possible to transform our original identity to completely a different one. To maintain equilibrium between two culture is very important in this respect. As society is dynamic and hence movement of a person from one place to another is a common fact but for this we need to learn to keep balance between our identity and assimilation with other culture.

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