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Writing About Writing: African Women's Epistolary Narratives

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Writing About Writing: African Women's Epistolary Narratives
Suzanne Marie Ondrus, PhD
University of Connecticut, [2014]

This dissertation examines the following six Anglophone and Francophone African diasporic novels: *So Long a Letter* (*Une si longue lettre*) by Mariama Bâ (Senegalese), *Juletane* by Myriam Warner-Vieyra (fifty-year resident of Senegal, originally from Guadeloupe), *Imagine This* by Sade Adeniran (Nigerian living in the U.K.), *Going Solo* and *To a Young Woman* by Hope Keshubi (Ugandan), and *Zenzele: A Letter for my Daughter* by J. Nozipo Maraire (Zimbabwean living in the U.S.). This dissertation argues that the detailed characterization of the writing narrators cultivates intimacy, making these works worthy of serious literary consideration. Starting from book reviews' emotional engagement with these texts, it points out literary techniques that create engagement with the writerly narrators. This study examines how the writing characters convey both intellectual and emotional intimacy through their writerly dispositions and their literary techniques such as similes, proverbs, metaphors, images, and literary allusions. H. Porter Abbott's techniques of *writing mimesis*, Robyn Warhol's work on intimacy with the second person address, Joe Bray's epistolary techniques of representation of consciousness, and cognitive scientist Keith Oatley's concept of literature as simulation contribute to technique analysis. The women writing characters examine present political and social issues that are roadblocks for women in their societies, such as unjust inheritance laws and traditions in Uganda; AIDS in Uganda; child abuse in Nigeria; braindrain and materialism in Zimbabwe; literacy in West Africa; and discriminatory treatment of the mentally ill in West Africa. Chronicles of African epistolary history and African female writing characters are given.

Writing About Writing: African Women's Epistolary Narratives

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APPROVAL PAGE

Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

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Introduction: Background & Context to Project

This project has its roots in a question asked years ago before I knew my specialty would be African literature. In 2005 I studied African literature in Burkina Faso with Université d'Ougadougou professor Roger Coulibaly. While discussing Mariama Bâ's epistolary text, *Une si longue lettre*, he asked, "what do African women need in order to write?" Writing space, time, resources, female writer role models, publishers, and an audience were some responses. This question addressed both African female authors and African female writing characters; it engaged both the real world, as well as the creative world. I continued to think about Coulibaly's question during the course of my graduate studies in comparative cultural and literary studies. The proclamation that Africa's greatest loss is its loss of imagination, stated by film director Jean Pierre Bekolo, also contributed to this project's conception. Where was women's imagination alive and how? How could women writers mold female writing characters into role models for social and political change? What power is there in vicariously experiencing someone's imagination through writing characters? Can emotionally engaging texts that provide access to the intimate sphere of creation, intellect and sentiment, produce change in readers and thereby possibly change society? In asking these questions, I felt first person narrators provided answers with their replication of intimate mental, creative, and emotional access. I found the epistolary genre (fiction in the form of letters) merged first person narrators and writing characters, permitting intimate access to the aforementioned questions pertaining to African women writers.¹ Epistolaries, which are written in first person, replicate the heart, mind, and creative spirit, enabling one to actually experience the narrator's experience.

¹ Note, not all epistolary novels use first person narration; however, the novels I selected for study do.

As early as 1979, Mariama Bâ's epistolary text *Une si longue lettre* featured a female writing character. Her text is now canonical in Africa literature, having won the prestigious Noma Award in 1980. I foresee her text as constituting the foundation for African female writing characters. In surveying African literature I find few female writing characters; most are in novels by Calixthe Beyala, Ama Ata Aidoo, Werere Liking, Veronique Tadjo, and Nana Ekua Brew-Hammond.² While there were African epistolary novels published before Bâ's text, none reached near her text's level of recognition or acclaim.³ This genre's key precursor is Bâ, hence her inclusion in this dissertation. Outside of articles on the female writing narrator in Bâ's text, there are no academic articles on African female writer characters. Also, there are no articles on the unique genre of African epistolaries, aside from those on Bâ's text; hence, African female writing characters and African epistolaries are areas in need of scholarship, and this dissertation

² This categorization of female writing characters includes novels that have any mention of a female character writing, as well as novels with a writer as a primary protagonist; it also includes male authors writing about African female writing characters.

The African female writing character trajectory emerged from mere scenes of women characters writing and now features women writers as characters whose prime action is writing. Calixthe Beyala's *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée* (1987) (*The Sun Hath Looked Upon Me*, 1996) includes a few brief scenes of the female protagonist's desire to write, her acts of writing, and her imagination. *Agaat* (2004) by Marlene Van Niekerk and *The Mirror* by Lynn Freed 1997 are first person narrations in the form of a diary. *La Mémoire Amputée* (2004) (*The Amputated Memory*, 2007) by Werere Liking and *A vol d'oiseau* (1986) (*As the Crow Flies*, 2001) by Veronique Tadjo both have characters who observe their writing processes and thereby reflect a writing consciousness. The story "Choosing- a moral from the world of work" from the short story collection *The Girl Who Can* (1997) by Ama Ata Aidoo features a young woman who wants to be a writer and the financial dilemmas she faces in doing so. Although this story does not portray the act of writing, this story is exemplary because it presents a writer making the career decision to be a writer. *Powder Necklace* (2010) by Nana Ekua Brew-Hammond stands out for its published girl protagonist; no other stories or novels have characters who have published their writing. *Powder Necklace's* protagonist does not exhibit what I categorize as innate writing proclivities; she enters into writing because she is asked to do so as part of a project.

³ According to Christopher Miller's chapter "Senegalese Women Writers, Silence, and Letters: Before the Canon's Roar," there were four epistolary novels published before Bâ's novel: *Un Negre a Paris* (1959), *Lettres de ma cambuse* (1964), *Lettres kinois* (1974), and *Lettre ouverte a Soeur Marie-Pierre* (1978). See Mwamba Cabakulu's book *Forme Epistolaire et Pratique Litteraire en Afrique Francophone* for further chronicle of African literary epistolaries.

strives to contribute to these subjects through addressing six texts. All six texts I examine are written by female authors, and all of these texts feature women as writing narrators. The writing narrators have different degrees of writing engagement; however, they all are choosing to write. The narrators have different reasons why they are writing. Also, for some of the writing narrators the letter they are writing may be their last or only letter, while some writing narrators may actually become professional writers. Thus, the writing narrators' writing interests vary; their writing skills vary too.

I am using the term "writerly" to connote the character's career and talent. My term "writerly" is in contrast to Roland Barthes's term of writerly that refers to readers who through the act of reading become the writer; for example, "Writerly text is a perpetual present...is ourselves writing" (Barthes *S/Z*, 5). My term pertains to the character doing the act of writing, taking the text as proof of the character's writerly inclinations.

Largely lesser known, but highly accomplished African women authors are examined. Three of these texts have not had a significant amount of literary analysis: *Going Solo*, *To a Young Woman* and *Imagine This*. The Anglophone and Francophone epistolaries this dissertation will examine fall into a twenty-eight-year time span: *Une si longue lettre* by Mariama Bâ (1979), *Juletane* by Myriam Warner-Vieyra (1982), *Zenzele: a Letter for my Daughter* by J. Nozipo Maraire (1996), *Going Solo* and *To a Young Woman* by Hope Keshubi (1997), and *Imagine This* by Sade Adeniran (2007). I define epistolary as addressing one's writing to someone; all these novels, including the diaries, have an addressee.

Only two African epistolary novels have been the subject of substantial research, namely those of Bâ and of Maraire. Among worldwide epistolary novel authors, Ugandan author Hope Keshubi has most transformed the epistolary genre, taking it in new thematic and stylistic

directions. Keshubi's 1997 letter-format novel *To a Young Woman* responded to Uganda's AIDS crisis⁴ with AIDS prevention advice. This novel adds mock newspaper articles and mock science book excerpts. In her 1997 letter-format novel, *Going Solo*, she addressed how a woman who unknowingly has an affair with a married man can reach out to the betrayed wife in a letter-dialogue for peace. Keshubi is also the grandmother of the Ugandan epistolary form since many Ugandan authors' novels published after Keshubi contain fictional letters. Yet despite her value to Ugandan and African literature, her work has remained greatly overlooked.

This dissertation treats narrational techniques, textual elements, and emotion, looking beyond connections with authors' obvious real-life inspirations. Biography is an important element to address in literary critique; however, focusing on biographical connections between an author and her text is limiting. Attention is given to discourse analysis, the "expression plane" in Seymour Chatman's words (146). As it is necessary to distinguish between real readers and the real author, so it is necessary to differentiate between implied readers⁵ and implied author, and narratees, and narrator. Real readers and real authors are the easiest to distinguish as they are located in our actual world. Implied readers and an implied author are alluded to in texts. The implied reader is as nebulous as the implied author, coming from what the book gestures at. Chatman explains that the implied author is "reconstructed by the reader from the narrative," so that the implied author is "the principle that invented the narrator" (Chatman 148). The implied author is not an entity but more of a series of impressions that come to us "through the design of the whole" book (Chatman 148). The narrator's and the narratee's existences are located in the text. Both the narrator and narratee can vary in their given details and development. "The

⁴ Uganda during this time period had the world's highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS, with a rate of 15-30%

⁵ The term "implied author" was according to Chatman, coined by Wayne Booth.

narratee-character is only one device by which the implied author informs the real reader how to perform as implied reader, which *Weltanschauung* to adopt” (Chatman 150). Chatman emphasizes the creative pact that one enters when reading, where we readers add another of ourselves in becoming implied readers (150). This is performative in nature, engaging another aspect of ourselves while reading.

The authors of these selected African epistolaries focus on female writing characters who have a specifically literary (not merely pragmatic) connection to writing. The female narrators use poetic descriptions, literary allusions, and self-reflection. They also have writerly proclivities, such as a love of vocabulary, a hobby of reading literature, or an emotive need to write. The focus of this project is how authors write about writing characters, foregrounding narration and techniques of verbal art in connection with sociopolitical themes. The authors’ writing characters address these themes in an emotionally engaging manner. Through application of cognitive literary science and epistolary techniques, this dissertation also explores how works by women in the genre of African epistolary novels cultivate a sense of intimacy in readers for political change. I define intimacy as entering characters’ creative spirit, mind, and heart. In this analysis I use the term intimacy in terms of identification and *verstehen*, whereby *verstehen* as explained by Jonathan Cohen is “the act of imaginative understanding, of entering into another’s lived experience” (italics mine 285). *Verstehen* in my framework is akin to Keith Oatley’s concept of simulation whereby “each narrative is a simulation creating a world in the mind space of each reader or listener” (*Best Laid Schemes* 245). Of course the consequences of this approach are that “each person’s interpretation will inevitably be different. Each will arise from a meeting of the text created by the writer with the simulation resources and preoccupations of each individual reader or listener” (*Best Laid Schemes* 245). Likewise in my analysis,

“identification is a mechanism through which audience members experience reception and interpretation of the text from the inside, as if the events were happening to them” (Cohen 245), and thus the political becomes personal.

A secondary focus of this project is how select literary techniques make it possible to enter the writing characters’ creative process and thereby enable experiencing intimacy. I aim to point out the writing characters’ existing creative space, which is very personal, private, dynamic, and transformative. In this way I allow my readers to feel a close proximity to the writing narrator, who is impacted by a range of socio-political issues. My project merges epistolary literary techniques and cognitive science emotive literary techniques to explain the intimacy I perceive in these texts. The intimacy, however, is not purely personal. Rather, the letters or diaries at issue are personal representations of larger political issues that impact the lives of African women and thereby African societies. Thus, the intimacy results from techniques of the genre embedded in socio-political concerns. Women writers use women writing characters to challenge the status quo by being emotionally engaged with the act of writing regarding these issues. The women authors examine present political and social issues that are roadblocks for women in their societies, such as unjust inheritance laws and traditions in Uganda; AIDS in Uganda; child abuse in Nigeria; polygamy in West Africa; and discriminatory treatment of the mentally ill in West Africa. Additionally, the women narrators use writing to confront and manage these situations.

My discussion of these African novels’ portrayals of writing characters will extend scholarship on epistolary fiction, which has focused on European texts and also has not engaged with cognitive science. In analyzing the writing characters’ writing proclivities that ultimately lead to intimacy with readers, I merge diary fiction scholar H. Porter Abbott’s techniques of

writing mimesis and cognitive scientist Keith Oatley's concept of literature as simulation. While epistolary novels have existed for over three hundred years, there has been little scholarship on the nature of the intimacy that this specific form creates. Epistolary scholar Joe Bray, a specialist in consciousness in epistolaries, says that speech and thought discourses have been studied, but not "the representation of writing" which has "received the least critical attention" (388). Bray cites that narratologist Monika Fludernik (1993: 3) also finds that writing representation is neglected (389). Jean Rousset contends that it is the writing in the letters that becomes central to the action of the novel.

The dissertation primarily extends H. Porter Abbott's concept of mimesis to the creative mind and spirit of specifically writer-characters. This idea of mimesis of the mind can be grouped under the term Theory of Mind from cognitive science. Mind-Reading is where we understand people or characters' behavior based upon their "thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires" that we experience through trying on states of mind via the act of reading (Zunshine 6, 21). Theory of Mind enables us to "construct and navigate our social environment" (Zunshine 6). The epistolary genre naturally lends itself to intimacy and emotional engagement because writing, a personal activity, is the action of the characters. Also, the genre itself is intimate because it is contained in the private space of a letter. Emotional engagement extends to readers through another trademark of the epistolary genre: mimesis. Here mimesis entails simulation of the act of reading and of writing. The act of writing is central to the epistolary form's mimesis because in the epistolary novel the narrator is literally on the page, composing, thinking, feeling, while the reader is reading and thus concurrently experiencing the narrator's composing, thinking and feeling. Here reading the narrator's writing allows readers to try on "different

mental states” and lets readers experience “thoughts, intentions, and feelings of other people” (Zunshine 25).

Cognitive scientist Keith Oatley, in his reader-oriented analysis, has proved empirically the emotionally transformative value of literature and has explored several literary techniques, such as simulation, images, poetic language, and identification that positively affect readers’ sense of “social support” (Exploring the Link between Reading Fiction and Empathy 422). He has also posited that characters’ goals and motivations create intimacy; I extend his analysis to frame goals and motivations as epistolary literary techniques. I argue that another aspect of Abbott’s concept of mimesis can be seen in the motivations and immanent writerly skills of the writer-characters. Writing includes a spectrum of behaviors and resides in a non-action space--the mental and emotional realm.

In exploring mimesis and simulation from a scientific and literary analysis, I examine the writing characters’ writing motivation, asking what brings them to the page. Are they writing to give their daughter their last words? Are they writing to show and document love? The motivation is important as it sets the foundation for the connection between the reader, the writing character, and the political issues. It is the door through which one enters the writing character’s world. The distinction between the writing motivation and goals is that writing motivation is what initially brings the writer to begin writing, while goals are actually *stated* in the writing. Examples of goals are: trying to teach a love of village life or planning to return home. Keith Oatley has said that in simulation we take on characters’ goals and plans, which therefore leads to engagement, emotional connection, and empathy. He contends that the act of simulation expressly functions on readers assuming characters’ goals. The techniques of writing

motivation and goals are certainly a window for readers into the brain and psyche of characters, something so subtle, yet the very essence of the examined characters.

This study is unique in its focus on specific writing techniques because in the field of African literature, the craft of writing often gets overlooked; instead, content is usually focused on. I draw attention to how African women writers are artists who are conscious of their craft through documenting writing narrators' characterization techniques. This involves examination of inner traits, proclivities, and predispositions, all centered around writing, and employing epistolary studies and cognitive science studies on literature. I argue these character techniques are emotionally engaging and provide depth of thought and feeling. The writing characters' writerly characteristics range from literary appreciations (love of books or words), literary skills (i.e. writing of similes), and imagination.

Overview of Chapters

This project orients itself in chapter one through a look at how a number of book reviews (primarily from America) focus on testimonial validity as opposed to literary techniques. Although attention to biographical information is fine, it is excessively limiting in terms of viewing the literary work. Many critics find these chosen texts to be emotionally engaging and praise the novels for this engagement; however, the critics do not explain what literary techniques create emotionally engaging effects. This chapter explains how concentrating on biographical connections stems from the epistolary genre's historical connection with "found letters" and from popular reading culture's fixation with truth. This chapter considers my question about what African women writers need in order to write; part of the answer is a need

for rigorous literary technique analysis. Critical feedback on one's craft and of one's peers is vital for improving one's writing as well as for building a canon. This chapter explains the driving force behind the project's literary technique analysis of intimacy and emotional engagement

Chapter two addresses Mariama Bâ's canonical novel *Une si longue lettre*. The writing character embraces such writerly associations as books, oral literature, formal education, letters, imagination, and divination. Robyn Warhol's work on the use of the second person for intimacy is presented and applied to the novel's addressee. I explain the use of the second-person pronouns as a way to establish an open connection to all readers. Another narrational technique this chapter addresses is writing in isolation through the obligatory *Mirasse* (a Muslim widow's prescribed period of mourning confined to the home), which spurs the act of composition.

Chapter three turns to two epistolary novels by a little known Ugandan author, Hope Keshubi. I examine how *To a Young Woman* contains both a real and an implied reader as frames. The novel is grounded in the existence of a real author and the existence of a real recipient, as it concerns sex education and AIDS prevention. It is unique in the epistolary genre because it is a work aimed at changing people's behavior. The novel's dominant emotion is love. *To a Young Woman* and *Going Solo* resist patriarchal structures and customs, such as Ugandan inheritance laws that only allocate fifteen percent of any estate to widows and taboos against discussion of sex. Contemporary misogynistic Ugandan literary criticism (verbal and written) frames my examination of these deeper misogynistic issues. *Going Solo* advocates humane interactions between people, using a letter as the vehicle. Reconciliation is this novel's dominant emotion.

In chapter four the elements of narrational address in chapters two and three are combined, giving attention to narrator and narratee issues, connecting to concrete real life issues. Nigeria's laws regarding child abuse are compared to the abused girl narrator in Sade Adeniran's *Imagine This*. This book is also in diary format. The legal situation here connects to the real readers issue presented in chapter three. This chapter features the writing character who has the most writerly characteristics, such as love of vocabulary, books, and writing. An imaginary addressee is the driving force behind the narrator's writing; it is also her survival mechanism. Books are an additional friend for the narrator, helping her to understand others and her life. The narrator's literary allusions illustrate her keen love for literature as well as her love for writing, which in turn help her to successfully survive her abusive situation by transferring her pain to the page.

Chapter five uses Zimbabwean J. Nozipo Maraire's *Zenzele: a Letter for my Daughter* to complicate the second person address through a mother writing to her daughter with the purpose of challenging her daughter's beliefs. The narrator here has a different attitude to the addressee when compared to those discussed in the prior chapters. The narrator wants to change the narratee. Her observations provoke her narratee to think about Shona culture and brain drain. I apply cognitive linguistics' explanations of conceptual metaphors for insight into the narrator's use of metaphors. This chapter also explores how the narrator's choice of similes indicates information about her political and social agenda, which is to advocate against materialism in favor of valuing human connections, especially among the Diaspora.

Chapter six deals with two levels of narrational structure in Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane*, which is in diary format. It is a more narrationally nuanced work, also involving a reading non-narratee. This narrator's rage at her youngest co-wife turns to murder. The writing

narrator documents the abuse she encounters in her family due to her mental illness. The writerly notations of the narrator are presented, which allow a view into the writing craft space. Dreams are another way that the narrator's interior space is explored; they are presented as emotive renditions of factual suffering already presented. Because they are highly visual and function as framed vignettes, they are capable of engaging readers to feel empathy for the insane narrator. This chapter includes both the stigmatization and the care of the mentally ill in West Africa.

Popular literary critics of these texts, as we shall see in chapter one, praise the texts' ability to emotionally engage. However, these critical reviews do not analyze how these texts emotionally engage readers. I will delve deeper than the popular critics have done, exposing how specific literary techniques are used to create emotional connections. One of the prime literary techniques these epistolary authors use is writing characters with writing proclivities. This project presents emotionally engaging literary techniques that come through female writing characters and attempts to explain how they create intimacy in discussions of political themes.

Chapter One

Critics' Limits: Reading Epistolaries as Testimony

This chapter examines popular American book reviews of two African fiction epistolaries by contemporary women writers, *Zenzele: a Letter for My Daughter* by J. Nozipo Maraire (1997) and *Imagine This* by Sade Adeniran (2006), published respectively in America and in the U.K.⁶ This chapter brings to our attention the challenges for the epistolaries examined in this dissertation. It looks at instances of critics reading the texts primarily for their testimonial validity rather than their literary quality, foregoing a rigorous literary evaluation. Testimonial validity means a predominant focus on autobiographical connections to the text and focus on the text's geography, a term I call "geographical marginazliation." Despite the book's fiction genre label, a number of critics assume the author is the narrator. Some reviews take the novels' African setting as a focal point of response. This chapter explores how the epistolary novel's 17th century reception history of discriminating against fiction still echoes in contemporary reception. It explores how and why people generally seem to relate to nonfiction more than fiction. Examination of these reviews may concur that in regarding black women's literature, the main issue has been "gaining recognition for the quality of the writing itself and respect for its principal subject, the lives and consciousness of black women" (Robinson 123). Anne L. Bower's article "Dear____: In Search of New (Old) Forms of Critical Address" found that

In reviews of the book [Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*] contemporary critics who reacted positively ignored the work's form, while those who found the book

⁶ In my analysis I group both these works as epistolary because they are both writing to a narratee. *Imagine This* is in the diary format, with a narratee throughout. Maraire is a Zimbabwean living in the U.S. , and is Adeniran a British Nigerian living in the U.K.

objectionable did so partly on the basis of the form...[so] “Blind eye or rejection—is part of the reason that epistolary criticism languished until quite recently. (158).

These reviews do reflect interest in the subject of black women, yet little attention is given to craft. Looking at purported contemporary nonfiction (i.e. James Frey) provides insight into the testimonial-focused reception of the examined novels. This chapter considers how emotional engagement and intimacy foster perceptions of novels as autobiography instead of fiction.

Mainstream America’s fixation with truth, emotional engagement, and rigidly defined genres is evident in the popular James Frey scandal, regarding Frey’s 2003 purported nonfiction novel *A Million Little Pieces*. I use this scandal as a lens to inspect similar phenomenon in the field of African women’s fiction reviewed in America. My research reveals that when critics become emotionally engaged with first person novels, there is a tendency to focus on finding autobiographical truth instead of examining literary techniques. Critics esteem the novels’ real life connections to their authors. While focusing on these novels’ autobiographical truth, it is interesting to note that the question never comes up about what aspects were changed or invented, so imagination is thus precluded. Why is there attention to the real instead of to the creative? One could fairly say that popular critics’ job is not to provide an objective academic (formal) critique. Might acknowledging craft be seen as alienation, while attention to real life connections is perceived as humanizing? Newly discovered autobiographical information about Shakespeare is a case in point.⁷

People were thrilled with the idea of Shakespeare as more ordinary and less of a god-like writer, bringing him closer to us (Pinching 285-286). Likewise, readers’ desire for immediacy with authors is reflected in their interpretations of novels as factual truth or as subjective

⁷ When excavations of Shakespeare’s home revealed drug remnants, much of the media responses focused on degrading Shakespeare’s literary work, claiming his creativity to be a result of drug use, instead of innate creative genius.

emotional truth. Although both fiction and autobiography can emotionally engage readers, it seems many readers perceive that truth is closer to them than fiction. Perhaps truth is perceived to be more immediate and therefore more tangible. Imagination cannot be pinpointed. It cannot necessarily be transferred. Reality exists in birth certificates, school diplomas, police reports, places of work, witnesses, friends, and diaries, but imagination is in the sparks firing in our brains. It is hard for an author to say how or when an idea came. It is also difficult for readers and critics to explain why they feel emotional engagement. The experiences that fictional characters have undergone serve as initial justification for readers' emotional engagement; however, for many readers, deep emotional engagement is to them a source of truth. Readers may take emotional engagement as actual proof of the story's truth.⁸ Many of the reviews I examine acknowledge emotional engagement and allude to an autobiographical connection on the part of the author as a reason for this; many reviews do not proceed with technique analysis. It must be acknowledged that since these are popular reviews, slated for a general audience, these reviews can be held to different standards than those of academic journals. Reviewers may simply know that for their audience, biographical information is more interesting than the formal elements of the book.

Fascination with truth-based content is evident in contemporary American popular culture, notably with James Frey's novel *A Million Little Pieces*, as well as in the reality TV explosion. Readers were outraged that Frey's purported memoir was in fact fabricated because they were emotionally invested. They found it difficult to conceive that their strong feelings experienced by Frey's novel were not indicators of a real occurrence. Likewise, if they had

⁸ Conversely, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in "Truth is no stranger to fiction" (Mail & Guardian Africa's Best Read, 10 May 2013) notes that "the parts of my work that people most tell me are 'unbelievable' are those that are most closely based on the real, those least diluted by my imagination."

known his book was fiction, their feelings would have been different. Patrick Hogan finds that in fictional crime stories we simply accept anti-heroes in cases that we would not accept in real life. This begs the question, what is it that makes us accept egregious things in fiction but not the same things in real life? Timothy Aubrey analyzes this case and deduces that: “Truth...has come to connote . . . *a particular kind of content*—often painful and grotesque—capable of promoting aesthetic experiences for its consumers that are paradoxically *empowering and uplifting*” (155 italics mine). Conversely, “Shame or embarrassment” also can shock readers into either belief or disbelief (Aubry 158, 168). Maraire’s and Adeniran’s novels deal with suffering: child abuse, discrimination, racism, and the severing of family ties. Lionel Trilling, according to Aubrey, deems “suffering” as a “necessary condition for authenticity” because it is “to apprehend in a palpable way the painful and essential reality of *one’s own* existence” (162 italics mine). This connection to one’s self is read as a source of truth. The examined autobiographical references I explore here are an attempt to reach intimacy, for characters are relegated to an improbable dimension as they are imaginary, while authors are in the land of the living, touring with their books, available for interviews--immediacy. This begs the question, if people today *think* that a novel is based on reality or taken from real events, do they *feel more* and therefore *perceive* the work as superior? Is there a perception of truth as pain and pain as truth? Might there be a perception that emotions and experiences based on an author’s life are more authentic and as a result are less likely to be considered lurid?

Kevin Young (who examined fake memoirs in the spring 2013 edition of *The Virginia Quarterly Review*) observes that “millions” of readers, including Oprah, judged Frey’s novel as true based upon their emotional response, as “feeling as fact, feeling over fact...therapeutic and theatrical...” (52). In the case of Oprah’s reaction to Frey’s work, Aubrey notes: “Apparently

the certitude that the suffering described was experienced by an actual person, and not just a fictional character, intensifies and adds a kind of legitimizing concreteness to her [Oprah Winfrey reading a suicide description in Frey's novel] own empathetic bodily response" (169-170). So this means "compassion" is achieved and thereby "identification" results, creating signals of veracity in readers' minds (170). Is it more difficult to emotionally invest one's self in fiction? If so, why? Is it just that investing in fiction is different? I think the answer lies in the perception of imagination. The Frey case reveals that there is not a belief that imagination can heal, but rather a perception that if someone has experienced something, then their shared experience of it can touch readers. Reviews of *Zenzele* and *Imagine This* praise the texts for their emotional engagement; however, a significant number of reviews address autobiographical connections as a way to validate this emotional engagement instead of literary techniques.

Attention on authors' lives is problematic because it is a shift *away* from examining craft. First, this indicates not fully seeing the novel. Secondly, it means not experiencing the novel in its entirety and therefore not completely appreciating it. As a result, both the reviewer's imagination and the writer's imagination are invalidated. The reviewer's reading imagination remains unused, and the writer's imagination is not fully appreciated because it is not recognized. In early epistolary history, content was what sold copies and letter writing was not considered an art. Has the epistolary genre remained in such a confined reception track since its inception? Yet, it must be acknowledged that because this genre's roots are found in the excavation of truth one can justify how readers and critics could have a tendency to think of novels written in epistolary format as autobiographical, even if that is not accurate.

Ruth Perry's seminal 1980 analysis of the genre's history from *Women, Letters and the Novel* suggests that a tradition of personal writing for obtaining truth (an act of great intimacy)

later influenced an expectation of truth in fictional epistolaries. In 17th century England, with the Reformation, a trend emerged of private writing for self-examination in order to better one's soul. It was essential for the writer to fully reveal "private acts of consciousness," akin to a confession in Catholicism(x). Women and men used their scandalous situations or those of others as a subject of composition: Incest, sex, adultery, crimes, love, and moral examination were prime topics. Next, private writing entered the public sphere but encountered hostility when perceived as fiction. If a story was proclaimed fictional, its reception ranged from lack of publication to charges of corruption because inventing untrue things was seen as the work of the devil, as a hazard to peoples' characters. True stories were privileged over invented stories (x-xi). It was challenging to disguise authors of letters for reasons of confidentiality, while at the same time letting the public know that these were real letters. Sometimes editors would write prefaces in an attempt to verify these letters while still maintaining secrecy about the authors. Fictional epistolaries evolved in the 18th century; however, the impression of real letters being published was important⁹.

Additionally, the 17th and 18th century mindset of women's writing as hobby¹⁰, rather than high art, contributed to a predominant perception of fictional epistolaries as reality rather than as fiction. Moreover, this genre was seen as uncomplicated and simplistic due to its common instruction dissemination.¹¹ Despite not being held in high esteem, published letters

⁹ The desire for letters was so high that sometimes stolen letters or letters with names taken out were published (Perry 72). Occasionally, authors, such as Goethe, would present a stack of letters to an editor, so that in effect there was no author, only an editor. Early epistolaries presented themselves as real characters, whereby the epistolary "simply" appeared and was presented as found stashes of letters to the public (Rousset 75-76).

¹⁰ Women venturing into the public sphere of publication were "not taken seriously," and their work was seen as something to keep them "busy" (Perry 16).

¹¹ Schooling gave people letter writing skills. Students studied letters by Cicero and Voiture. In fact, "letter-writing was a standard composition assignment, and students read and copied from

were rampantly devoured¹² as popular entertainment, specifically because of their purported real life stories (8). These letters' simplistic style, almost like merchants' language, added to perceptions of veracity (75). Women and men were "craving . . . lurid and sensational" (8) public letters, which ranged from reports of pirates, confessions of prisoners, criminals, adulterers, people finding their way in life (8-9), and people in high places (72). Next, epistolary novels emerged from simple letter publications; their themes were: love affairs, incest, and travel. Perceptions of truth were still essential for epistolary novels. Epistolary scholar Jean Rousset notes the tendency of the 18th century authors to "se croit tenu de porter le masque" (believe they were obligated to wear the mask) with their composition of fictional letters; however, these authors had to present the text as a reality, not as fiction, as "des documents, des témoignages directs du réel" which "prétend toujours ne pas être un roman; il n'invente rien, il présente du réel à l'état brut" (75). (documents, direct real-life testimony that always pretends to not be a novel; it does not invent anything, it shows reality from a raw state. (translation mine)) This was a sort of attempt to deceive the reader.

Yet, even if the phrasings and stylistics changed, one thing remained and became essential for the form—expression of emotion. Readers liked that letters "were the spontaneous rendering of a person's innermost thoughts" (Perry 76), the "enregistrement direct d'un Coeur qui ne se gouverne plus" (the recordings directly from a heart that no longer governs itself) (Rousset 77) and "the history of the human heart" (*The Life of Marianne* (1736) qtd. in Perry 12). Epistolary novels were perceived to have the ability to enable readers to understand

classical examples" (Perry 64). Letter writing manuals were ubiquitous. People aimed for simple and direct expression (Perry 75). Although people devoted attention to crafting letters, letter writing and epistles were not considered high art.

¹² People flocked to Coffee houses that carried papers (How 14, Perry 6), while many hack writers worked on Grub Street writing tons of letters to satisfy the high demand (Perry 67).

emotions' very coming into existence"¹³. "La suite épistolaire est conçue comme un instrument privilégié pour appréhender ce qui retiendra très particulièrement l'attention du XVIII^e siècle: L'éveil et les vibrations de la sensibilité, les caprices de l'émotion" (The epistolary sequence [exchange of letters or multiple letters] is conceived as a privileged instrument to learn about that which gained special attention of the XVIII century: the rousing and vibrations of sensitivity, caprices of emotion (Rousset 68).

The 18th century criteria of emotional engagement as veracity for epistolaries is still relevant and observed today. Many reviews of *Zenzele* and *Imagine This* praise the novels for their emotional engagement. For example, Linda Lockhart's review in *The Capital Times* says "everyone should have a mother who could write letters like" this (9A). Marian M. Ramsey in her review in the *Rocky Mountain News* comments it "is wonderful, profound...[and] I recommend *Zenzele* for enlightenment, delight and refreshing insight" (25D). Smith's review notes a text that is "immediate, intimate, and forceful...laced with humor and pathos" (212).

Although not many reviews of these novels delve into analyzing how the writers establish successful emotional attachment with readers, some do appreciate their literary values, noting: voice, tone, writing, character portrayal, mode, and narrator. A few of *Zenzele*'s reviews reflect an appreciation for the stories the novel tells, as well as noting some basic literary techniques. For example, Alice Evans Handy in *Book Report* notes "The narrator speaks in a soft, self-effacing voice that grows in strength and eloquence" (42). She further says that "The writing is measured, beautiful, poignant, and full of earned wisdom." In *The Western Journal of Black*

¹³ Montesquieu, who reflected on the epistolary genre in 1754 in *Lettres persanes*, found this genre much more authentic and emotional than any third-person narration as it lives from moment to moment, in "real-time," (qtd. in Rousset 66-67) attunes to shifts in sentiments (Rousset 68) and for different visions, as a character is always mutating, moment by moment (Rousset 73-74).

Studies Frances Stallworth acknowledges “the contemporary mode of the letter format” which Maraire uses. Stallworth also associates Maraire with “other post-modernist writers such as Amy Tan in [*The*] *Joy Luck Club*, Alice Walker in [*The*] *Color Purple*, and Paula Marshal in her trilogy...” (228). There is some attention to language. Pamela J. Olubu Smith in *World Literature Today* notes the book’s “humor and pathos” with “language [that] is poignant [and] simple.” She also acknowledges “the tone is conversational, one of ease, providing a sense of immediacy and connectedness” (212).

Appreciation of literary techniques is also discernable in reviews of *Imagine This*. Jamieson Villeneuve, critiquing *Imagine This* in *The San Diego Chronicle*, focuses on character portrayal. His review dealt with how three-dimensional Lola, the narrator, was. “I am haunted by her; by the sound of her voice in my head, her words on the page, it’s hard to believe that Lola does not really exist. It’s hard to believe that I can’t reach out and touch her. This is the power of Adeniran’s amazing first novel.” Tola Ositelu of *Pambazuka News: Pan-African Voices for Freedom and Justice* also comments on the astute portrayal of the narrator’s developing psyche in *Imagine This*, as “a little girl of great social awareness who can articulate her feelings of discontent in a way that intimidates those around her.” She notes that, as the narrator matures, “the novel shows a more philosophical Lola.” She critiques the Yoruba chapter markers as “a bit too laboured.”

Despite some critics’ discernible notations of literary techniques, an observable amount of fixation with autobiographical connections or with geographical categorization exists, detracting from realization of these works’ artistic merits. Certainly Maraire and Adeniran do want to inform readers about their countries. They present specific topics relating to their countries, such as Zimbabwe’s history of liberation and child abuse in Nigeria. While the setting

and subjects of these novels are an important aspect, it should not be the only way to analyze them.

Four reviews of *Zenzele: a Letter for My Daughter* have frequent autobiographical inferences to the novel that detract from rigorous literary evaluations. The first review by critic Monica L. Williams in *The Greensboro News & Record* expresses the view that Maraire's novel *Zenzele: a Letter for My Daughter* is taken from the author's life: "The beautifully written memoir makes the reader wonder if the work is not in some way autobiographical. The realistic parables seem to suggest that it is" (F5). Regardless of Williams' interview with Maraire about where her stories in *Zenzele* came from, it is problematic that Williams uses the term "memoir." Memoirs are associated with nonfiction; this is not Maraire's memoir. Williams states two similarities between the author and narratee, which she supports with research.^{14 15}

The second review, by critic Linda Lockhart, in *The Capital Times* notes that "it is easy to think that many parts of the book are somewhat autobiographical" (9A). She provides an example from the book, which to her seemed autobiographical: "When Zenzele's mother reminds her daughter of the younger woman's reluctance to leave the comforts of her home in the bustling city to visit relatives who remain in a small village out in the countryside, *it is easy to picture the author in a similar situation*" (italics mine 9A). The critic does not explain in detail how this seemed real. She simply finds that "it is not hard for the reader...to envision such a case

¹⁴ Through an interview with Maraire, Williams learns that "many of the tales in *Zenzele* are from actual stories passed on for generations from villagers in Zimbabwe" (F5). Williams also adds how Maraire said that her father "had so many stories to tell; some were political, of the struggle for independence or our traditional customs, others were simply about life, sorrow, and love" (F5).

¹⁵ In *The Oregonian*, critic Angie Jabine clearly separates the author and the narrator through using the narrator's first name. Most impressive is that Jabine clearly understands how this novel is a creative work, as evident in her statement that "Maraire [does] impersonate a worldly-wise mother that it comes almost as a shock to learn that the author is just 31 years old".

of arguing with offspring when it's time to visit grandparents or other older family members who live in the small towns and forgotten places of any culture" (9A). This supposes knowing the author personally in order to make such a comparison. Yet, this reviewer does not know Maraire personally. She did not interview Maraire as Williams did. This critic does refer to the characters as fiction; however, she simply connects them to reality: "While the author's characters are fictional, there is little room for doubt that such people did exist and were key to making a free Zimbabwe possible" (9A). The critic indicates that inspiration can come from real-life, acknowledging the creative process, yet I take issue with an approach that could espouse using literature as a socio-anthropological tool.

The third review revealing autobiographical prejudice is from one of the most prestigious papers, *The New York Times*. Critic Penelope Lively ends her 1996 *New York Times Book Review* critique with "Yet I wished that the fictional pretense had been abandoned and that we had been given Zenzele's mother's illuminating life story as autobiography" (25). This statement conveys that Lively misses the point of the novel as representing the story of the birth of Zimbabwe;¹⁶ it is not solely the mother's story, but that of a nation.¹⁷ Further examination of this concluding statement reveals a dismissive stance. The phrase "fictional pretense" rather seems to point to the author, as if to demand Maraire's autobiography. It seems to assume that the narrator's story is Maraire's own life. By demanding an "autobiography," Lively calls for a re-write in genre. It is possible to assume that Lively could mean a fictional autobiography. While Lively says that she wants to hear *the narrator's* "illuminating life story;" this is in direct

¹⁶ Lively does note "a view of the traumas of the struggle for independence" (25).

¹⁷ Thomas C. Spear questions autobiography as a Western genre highlighting individualism. "The national identity within which an author places the autobiographical persona" needs consideration (91) as well as if autobiography is "less common in a society where group values dominate" (99). See Spear's "Autofiction and National Identity".

conflict with the narrator's admission of living a "simple life" (Maraire 3). It seems therefore that this last sentence of this review is rather directed towards *the real author*, as if to presumptuously say "Maraire, please write your autobiography." A fictional autobiography, if that were what Lively was calling for, would still in fact be a fictional pretense, but this is not what she intends. Lively does not qualify her call for an autobiography by citing why Maraire's own life should be put down on paper.

Finally, a fourth review, from an academic journal, also reveals marginalization of Maraire's text. In Frances Stallworth's 1996 review in *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, the term "author" is used to refer to the fictional writing character. Six times throughout the review "author" is used instead of narrator or Shiri. The eliding of the term "narrator" is surprising as this review appeared in an academic journal. Given other indicators that verify Stallworth's perception of the real-life author as being the writing narrator, it appears that the term "author" is more than a terminological error. Stallworth writes early on in her review that "*Maraire interweaves history...with a recurring theme of admonishing her daughter How could she, as the mother, allow her daughter to grow up reading the classics*" (italics mine 228).

The reviewer's conflation of the narrator and author is unequivocally confirmed by the very last statement in this review: "Maraire has lived both lives—the life in the village and the life of a Harvard student, . . . her narrative is directed at *her daughter who is a student at Harvard . . .* (italics mine 229). This says that Maraire has a daughter and that she is writing this novel for her daughter. Maraire at the time of this review did not have a daughter. Maraire did attend Harvard for undergraduate studies. Again, the review is conflating the real-life author and the fictional author, (the narrator) Shiri Shungu. In the review there is a lack of a division

between the writing character and the real-life author. Or might there be something more here than a simple lack of attention to detail?

An article reflecting on an interview with Maraire, author of *Zenzele*, also reveals autobiographical perceptions around *Zenzele*. Lois Blinkhorn's article, from *The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* article, contains a summary of a 1996 interview with Maraire. Blinkhorn writes "It's a bit of a shock to learn that Maraire's parents divorced when she was 8 and that she lived with her father during her growing-up years" (3). Why is this a shock? It seems to be because Blinkhorn apparently *expects* the inspiration or source for the novel to be Maraire's own mother, which we can deduce through seeing the sentence prior to the aforementioned one, which states that Maraire's "little book is a collection of warm, loving stories and anecdotes from Zimbabwe told by a mother in a letter to her daughter" (3). Blinkhorn's "shock" supports the idea that there is an assumption on her part that the novel *is* the author's life, so when Blinkhorn learned Maraire's life was different than her novel she was surprised, actually in disbelief. Blinkhorn's reaction leads me to believe that for her it was inconceivable that Maraire's life could be different from the narratee's. I wonder how much the title of the book, *Zenzele: a Letter for my Daughter*, plays into the perception of the text as real. What if the first person possessive pronoun "my" were replaced by the third person pronoun "her?" How much of these autobiographical inferences stem from being unable to separate first person pronouns from associations with the author? This dilemma harkens back to the success of published "found letters" of the 17th century in England. The second to the last paragraph of the novel is a case in point, where the narrator tells Zenzele, the narratee: "It is a pity that I have not more to leave you than words. But what is a life, after all, but a story, some fiction and some truth? In the end, there are words. They are the very manifestations of our immortality" (193). To what extent

does the fact of the author and the narrator being the same gender contribute to autobiographical assumptions?

Likewise, several interviews with author of *Imagine This*, Sade Adeniran, reveal a fixation with obtaining confirmation about the novel's autobiographical truth. Some of these reviews are from the Diaspora, and I chose to analyze them due to their fixation on autobiographical truth. Tola Ositelu's 2007 review of *Imagine This* in *Pambazuka News: Pan-African Voices for Freedom and Justice* reflects a fixed reception stance regarding the veracity of the novel and connections to the author's life. "When asked, Ms. Adeniran denied that the book was autobiographical—all the more reason she should be commended for making Lola's story so credible" (italics mine).¹⁸ The phrasing bears examination. Deny means "to state that (something declared or believed to be true) is not true."¹⁹ Moreover, the seven further meanings of deny all have a negative connotation to them. The other definitions include refusing to agree, withholding enjoyment of, refusing to recognize, preventing, and refraining. This expression is typically associated with not telling the truth; for example, on the news one might hear something like "the senator denied he took government funds." This phrasing alludes that the novel is based on Adeniran's life.

Ositelu is not the only critic to assume a stance of associating the novel with Adeniran's life. Sally Scott of the *Daily News* focusing on the connection of truth and fiction, wrote, "Though Adeniran says the book is not autobiographical, to an extent she knows of what she writes" (4). Scott's phrase "knows of what she writes" is an autobiographical allusion to Adeniran's novel. The implication is that Adeniran's knowledge comes from her life experience,

¹⁸ It is possible that this question was asked by an audience member at "the book launch of *Imagine This*," which the reviewer attended.

¹⁹ This is the first definition of the word in *Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* from 2001.

as substantiated by Scott's following two statements on Adeniran's narrator and Adeniran's life. Following Scott's comment that Adeniran "knows of what she writes," she mentions that the narrator of *Imagine This* is uprooted at age eight from London to Nigeria. She also notes that Adeniran the author moved to Nigeria from London when she was nine. It is as if Scott is leading readers to make a connection between the similarities of the novel's narrator's life and the author's life. While there is this similarity between fiction and fact, what is the purpose of bringing this up? Is it to draw prospective readers in? Is the purpose that Adeniran is presenting a sort of fiction that can tell us something about the real world and if so, should that be the sole evaluatory focus? If taking the novel as a real-world reflection were to be the evaluatory goal, it seems that pedagogical objectives would be needed as to what the novel should inform about. If readers can associate the narrator's child abuse with the real life author would readers be keen to read the review? Lastly, Yemi Adebisi of All Africa Global Media, writing for *The Daily Independent* in Lagos, Nigeria, interviewed Sade Adeniran. She asked Adeniran if her novel was connected to her "personal experience." Adeniran mentioned having spent time with her grandmother in the village mentioned in the novel. In the interview, Adeniran admirably conveys the idea that her novel is inspired by her life experience, but the novel is also a creative, imaginative work. "I imagine my past," she said. Further, she said that she looked back on how she lived with her grandmother in the village and thought that it made an "interesting . . . situation" (Adebisi).

Author of *Juletane*, Myriam Warner-Vieyra, is a point of comparison regarding inspiration from life.²⁰ While she too shares many similarities with her character, she explains imagination's role in her writing:

I tried to put myself in my character's place and see what would happen. I took up the problem of polygamy in Senegal, asking myself what I would do and how would I react in Juletane's place. Although Juletane doesn't represent my life, she is me. I make Juletane react the way I believe I would in identical circumstances. (111)

It is noteworthy that Adeniran's critic did not probe with questions about Adeniran's imagination. Possible questions to learn about Adeniran's imagination might have been: What points of view did you hold while imagining the situation of growing up in the village? Did you imagine the darker side of people you grew up with? Yet, the interest remains on the author and where the author is from, instead of the author's craft. This is one type of what I term geographical marginalization.

In addition to focusing on the nationality of the author, some critics gravitate to the simple fact that these novels take place in countries in Africa. Place, or the story's setting, becomes of prime importance, rather than literary technique. To qualify this categorization, I am referring to an exoticizing of place, rather than literary analysis of setting. It involves stereotypes and generalities rather than specifics of a country or group of people. If the novels were set in America but written by African authors, I think that critics would not give place such importance. I use the term "geographical marginalization" to characterize fixation on the story's place. Geographical marginalization of place is also significant in *Zenzele*'s reviews. Four

²⁰ Stratton notes that Femi Ojo-Ade "confuses autobiography with pseudo-autobiography or fiction..." in regards to analyzing *Une si longue lettre* (168). See Stratton's article: "Still a Victim? Mariama Ba's *Une si longue lettre*." *African Literature Today* 12 (1982) 71-87.

reviews of *Zenzele* are prominent in this type of marginalization. First, Alice Evans Handy reviewing *Zenzele* in *Book Report* says that the novel is “reminiscent of *I Heard the Owl Call My Name* by Margaret Craven.” Handy does not explain the connection between these two novels. She merely states, “it leaves the reader rich for having read it.” Incidentally, the Craven novel focuses on a missionary working with Native Americans. It is not an epistolary. It is not narrated by a mother. Is Handy trying to connect Native Americans to Africans? Beyond this question, why does Handy not mention other novels that *Zenzele* is evocative of?

Secondly, Sybil S. Steinberg in *Publishers’ Weekly* also geographically marginalizes *Zenzele* through literary terms. She notes that the book’s message is “filtered through an oral history” of the narrator and characters. Steinberg does not mention the elements of oral history, which Maraire incorporates, nor does she give examples of Zimbabwean oral history. She says “Maire writes with the deft touch of a natural storyteller, creating vivid characters and situations seemingly at ease. Though the tone of her tales is *distinctly African*, their messages are universal and mark the debut of a talented new literary voice” (italics mine). First, Steinberg does not explain what “seemingly at ease” means. “Seemingly at ease” could have three interpretations. It could refer to the writing, to the creation of the characters (looking at them as a final product), or it could refer to the novel’s story scenarios. Is this to mean realistic or believable? So then the next question is how does Maraire make her characters or scenarios seem “at ease?” Citation of specific techniques or citations from the text to illustrate this point would give the impression of serious reflection. Secondly, the review’s word “tone” implies a relation with word choice, which creates an overall mood. Steinberg does not provide examples of phrases or words which are “distinctly African” in their “tone.” It appears that this geographical focus comes from the subject matter and setting. Moreover, the word “tale” refers to the multiple

stories of various characters. The words “story” or “narrative” are frequently used in literary discourse (literary criticism journals); hence, “tale” seems to be an unusual word choice. The word “tale” implies something that is exaggerated for effect, such as stories of Amos Tutola or legends of Paul Bunyan (the term “tall tales” comes to mind).²¹ *Zenzele* is not in the magical realism genre, so “tale” does not seem to be an accurate word. Moreover, in addition to “tale” referring to a story, its other meanings are a falsehood, rumor or gossip. In common usage it tends towards an archaic tone.

There is also a case of a review that markets the book solely to the Diaspora. Frances Stallworth’s 1996 academic journal review, as discussed earlier, concludes with “the lessons taught and learned are truly *universal* in application to *all Black people of African origin*” (italics mine 229). One can say that the review was written for a journal of Black Studies, so she may be trying to point out that the issues of cultural connectedness bear on all Africans, not only Zimbabweans. However, the lack of distinction between narrator and author is disconcerting. In contrast, many other reviews²² do successfully emphasize the universal nature of this book, noting motherly love, concern, and lessons provided. Restricting *Zenzele*’s audience to the Diaspora is a way of limiting this text’s audience and of limiting its aim.²³ It also seems false to

²¹ In comparison to Lively’s use of the term “tales,” reviewer Jamieson Villeneuve of *The San Diego Chronicle* says that Sade Adeniran’s novel *Imagine This* “is pure, unadulterated storytelling.” The word “storytelling” seems to reflect reality-based events. It is of no surprise that this critic addresses multiple literary techniques in his review.

²² Yvonne Zipp in *Christian Science Monitor* notes “the issues—prejudice, leaving home for the first time, the desire for a better life for one’s children—are universal”. Marian M. Ramsey of the *Rocky Mountain News* envisions universal reception as well, “Readers will welcome the awakening and awareness given . . . I recommend *Zenzele* for enlightenment, delight and refreshing insight”.

²³ This sort of marginalization at the academic level is addressed in *Zenzele* by an American anthropologist professor character who is sad that the African students giving a “symposium” in America had “no drums” because she thought that no “discussion on Africa is complete without them” (74).

assume that this book would or could connect with everyone in the Diaspora, for readers are individuals with individual preferences. Kevin Young finds authors' work that "feature [s] figures [characters] . . . that express certain ideas about race, namely stereotypes, damn lies, and statistics" (47) with a sort of "veneer" (48) so that what is "at stake . . . is nothing less than savagery and civilization" sells (47). Although Maraire does not do this in her novel, it seems that some reviews try to realize success through a strategy of emphasizing stereotypes and exoticism—things which evidently appeal to average readers. One such stereotype that Stallworth plays to is that of associating Africa with "village life" (Stallworth 228). In fact, Stallworth conflates Zenzele's childhood origins. Stallworth writes as if Zenzele grew up in the village, when in fact she grew up in the city and visited the village. Stallworth writes: "The author [Shiri] reflects wistfully of her daughter's determination to attend Harvard where she will experience an entirely different culture from the village life . . ." (228). This statement leads readers to believe that Shiri's daughter has grown up in a village, that a village is her home. Moreover, in addition to placing the narratee in the village, her review's conclusion explicitly places Maraire in the village: "Even though Maraire has lived both lives—the life in the village and the life of a Harvard student, and even though her narrative is directed to her daughter who is a student at Harvard, the lessons taught and learned are truly universal in application to all Black people of African origin" (229). The words "village" and "Harvard" catch readers' attention. These words conjure up detailed images. Perhaps there was some desire to attract attention. After all, book reviews' purposes are to engage readers and motivate them to read the reviewed book. More importantly, it is difficult to ignore the association that many Americans have of Africa with villages. It cannot be disputed that the reviewer misrepresents the story and the author. Maraire is not writing to her daughter, for at the time of the novel she had no children. The novel

is fiction and its narrator is Shiri not Maraire. Moreover, this last sentence also tends towards a misrepresentation of Maraire, for according to interviews and articles on her she did not grow up in a village.

Conclusion

Looking at the opposite spectrum, that of purported nonfiction, provides insight into the reception of these novels. While Young's project involves discovering what is untrue in made up memoirs, further research of my project here would ask for fiction pieces to have their truths ascertained in an attempt to find where fiction begins and truth ends. What would be the benefits to pulling out and labeling the nonfiction parts of fiction novels? This would call for comparing the real events from life to the creative rendition in the novel. One would have to question the degree by which details are altered. How much of a real life scenario remains in comparison to creative additions? Then an analysis of the literary techniques used in this rendition would have to be done. But what would be the purpose of this? I suppose it would be like trying to dissect the imagination, to prove its existence, to quantify it, as if one could put a novel through some sort of scanner machine and tell you a percentage of creative contribution versus accumulation of experiences and scenarios. But what role does memory play? And what of grouping things together? In short, a reality to fiction comparison seems to be devoid of literary appreciation; such a process dwells on pragmatic analysis rather than an artistic sensibility. Young explains that untrue memoirs, such as Frey's and Margaret Seltzer's, are not actually working on "believability" but rather "distraction" of "one outrage after another" where readers do not question veracity but are rather absorbed by "being shocked and awed" (45). It seems that readers of purported nonfiction are engaged by fiction, while readers of fiction are enamored

with nonfiction, broaching Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's recent call for "a new way of reading, where we read fiction with the eyes of memoir and read memoir with the eyes of fiction."

Young examines the perception of therapeutic benefit on readers, where "these fake memoirs are nothing more than 'self-help'" that rely on "helping someone else get through a similar struggle—which becomes the measure of the book's real 'truth'" (46-47). Indeed some critics of *Zenzele* and *Imagine This* conveyed a psychological benefit from thinking that the novel is true. This is a field of further study, demanding tests where readers would be given the same story but one group told it is fiction and another group told it is nonfiction. Keith Oatley, who researches the cognitive and emotional processes of reading and writing fiction, has documented differences between fiction readers' outlook and those of non-fiction readers. He has empirically proved that fiction yields a greater positive transformation in readers than nonfiction. His studies found that fiction, in comparison to non-fiction, resulted in readers generating more memories, which lead to readers being more personally engaged as an actor in the story being read.²⁴

Many readers of Frey's book evidently did not care about the book's lies; they cared more about experiencing emotional truth (Young 52). But what is telling is that some readers refused to acknowledge the fiction; they wanted to see reality, not fiction, like early epistolary

²⁴ 166 undergraduate students were surveyed on the affects of literary literature in 2006. Half of the group read Chekov's story "The Lady With the Toy Dog" and a control group read a documentary (facts only) version of the same story. They found that as a result of reading the artistically rendered story, participants had changes in the assessment of their own personality traits and greater changes in their own emotions. Although the study could not ascertain specific traits being impacted by the story, it did find that each individual "had unique changes across all five traits" (27). This study shows that art changes how we perceive ourselves and attests to the effect of emotion on the relationship between literary form and trait change" (28). "This study shows that *the potential for change* is there, given that the human psyche appears to *respond* to the *artistic form* through subtle *shifts* in the *vision of itself*" (28 italics mine). See "On Being Moved by Art."

history. Young critically connects this reading trend to Oprah's show's mission--for people to find their own subjective truth (52). Subjective truth as seen in private writing during the Reformation meant a torture process, whereby pain produced truth. But with subjective truth openness to another's imagination falters:

Gone is the idea that something made up, unreal or surreal, could move us. Instead, readers insist that the thing that isn't real is: that if it affects them it can't be affected; that they cannot have real feelings about made-up things. This explains why many mistrust poetry—what to do with art that doesn't insist on emotion but suggests it (Young 55-56).

If literature “can't be affected,” then it cannot be creative. This is a denial of examining the art of literature.

According to epistolary scholar Joe Bray, the epistolary genre's portrayal of mental states (subjectivity) has been perceived as “relatively unsophisticated and transparent ... as its letter-writers apparently jot down whatever is passing through their heads at the moment of writing” (Bray 1). Yet, this genre contributed to novels' development of self-consciousness, where characters record their thoughts and feelings, examining their own reflection as well. Other epistolary scholars, such as Watt, Day, and Perry say epistolaries show thought processes, the heart, direct feelings, reasoning, and development. Perry characterizes the epistolary genre by the “mental life of its characters,” and Day phrases this same observation as “motions of the mind” (qtd. in Bray 9). The majority of scholars (Rousset, Perry, and Bray) would concur that the epistolary does lead us into the inner workings of the mind.²⁵ Whether we want to call the inner workings of the mind rational thought or scattered ideas, the consensus is that readers are

²⁵ Bray mentions one scholar, Mary Favret, who contests this notion of the epistolary as giving access to intimate selves.

provided with a way to enter into the mental and emotional space of characters through the characters' own construction of words and thereby construction of their worlds.

The reviews of these two novels point towards a decline of literary examination on the contemporary American literary review scene. Do we fear taking apart something that moves us for fear that like taking apart a clock, we will not be able to reassemble it again and have it run as smoothly as before? Do we fear touching the invisible, that is imagination, and thus either ignore it or turn to reality, that is tangible and visible?

Although these American literary reviews do not predominately engage in technique analysis, the field of African literature presently demands examination of writing techniques. Odile Cazenave and Patricia Célérier in their seminal 2011 book *Contemporary Francophone African Writers and the Burden of Commitment*, argue that “aesthetic as well as political issues are now at the forefront of debates about the African literary canon as writers and critics increasingly acknowledge the ideology of form” (2). This is a trend of both writers and critics consciously thinking about form. Even if form is considered as informing on politics, the fact remains that form is being considered and examined. Moreover, Cazenave and Célérier find that although there has been an established pattern in the field of postcolonial literature of “disillusioned representations of the African continent,” whether that be of writing taking place in Africa or outside the continent, there is a “desire on the part of the authors to be identified as writers rather than as people from a specific national, cultural, or geographic origin” (5). The impediment to African writers, according to Carlin Romano in “Ignoring Authentic African Literature Means Ignoring Africans” is that “The American appreciation of African literature has not fallen apart. It's never been built” (B13). Part of appreciating a literature is knowing its context (thematic and canon), but another part of its appreciation is attention to literary techniques. African women writers need attention on literary techniques from American critics.

Patrice Alain Nganang says that African literature needs critics to acknowledge writers' "aesthetic project[s]." He elucidates that this is a complex endeavor for critics, who must work "like midwives, [to] free it [the aesthetic project] from the confines of the womb and into the world" (qtd. in Cazenave and Célérier 160). This project contributes to refocusing discussions on African literature. I posit writing characters' writerly traits are a main reason for readers' engagement in these epistolary texts. The following chapters seek to address techniques that create emotional engagement and intimacy in an attempt to provide concrete literary reasons why these African works capture readers' attention and appreciation.

Chapter Two

The Source of the Tradition: Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*

Une si longue lettre involves one of the first African female writing characters. Additionally, the novel is one of the earliest African epistolaries.²⁶ Thus, it serves as a fundamental text not only for writing characters but for African epistolary studies as well. It is the story of a Muslim widow, Ramatoulaye, writing a letter to her friend Aissatou. Ramatoulaye mourns her newly dead husband; however, she also mourns her lost marriage. Ramatoulaye figuratively first lost her husband and marriage when after many years of marriage her husband Modou took a second wife. The writing narrator looks back at her past, analyzing it. Through writing her letter she becomes more self aware and confident, towards the end of her letter fully asserting herself in difficult situations. This chapter presents Ramatoulaye's writerly identity, which is evident through her appreciation of written material and of things associated with writing. Ramatoulaye embraces such writerly associations as books, oral literature, formal education, letters, imagination, and divination; these create her writerly identity. Ramatoulaye's esteem for writing is inseparable from her concerns with education. Moreover, Ramatoulaye's use of an addressee and second person address will be examined as a general technique for writing motivation and intimacy.

This text is canonical in the field of African literature; it is also taught widely in various subjects such as "gender studies, religion and anthropology" (Gueye). Furthermore, "Heinemann estimates that there are about twenty thousand copies of *So Long a Letter* in print, with 'perhaps

²⁶ Due to the lack of exchange of letters, Ramatoulaye's letter functions more as a diary than a letter; however, because there is an addressee this novel is an epistolary. Additionally, there is a signature by Ramatoulaye. Signatures are another hallmark of the letter format.

half of these in North America;” this does not include the copies in the British Virago edition” (Miller 287). Her book’s publication is important in the history of African book publishing as it was published [in 1979] by the newly-formed Nouvelles Editions Africaines, a consortium organized in 1973 by the Senegalese and Ivory Coast governments to promote African publication of African works (five French publishing houses nevertheless hold minority shares in the venture). (Miller 286)

The novel rapidly gained world acclaim when it won the inaugural Noma award in 1980.²⁷ It was praised by the “Noma committee” for its ‘social significance’ and for the fact that it was “written from the point of view of a Muslim woman in a society in transition’ (Mortimer *Writing* 72).

Bâ’s text was chosen from a field of approximately 130 works from 17 African nations. . . . [with] three categories of submissions: scholarly works, children’s books, creative writing. Of the total entries, 82 were in English, 21 in French, 19 in African languages. (Mortimer *Writing* 113)

After the announcement of the prize, the publisher received requests for translations for the European community in six different languages (Mortimer *Writing* 72-73). It presently is available in sixteen languages (Engelking 327).

Bâ’s work has impacted other novelists and the canon of African literature. *Une si longue lettre*, according to Kenneth Harrow, influenced “the novels of Ken Bugul, Nafissatou Diallo and Catherine N’Diaye.” These novelists “aspired to convey new visions of the woman’s experience, especially in terms of the project of defining the New African Woman within the

²⁷ The Noma award was established in 1979 by Shoichi Noma, president of the Japanese publishing house Kodansha Ltd. Shoichi Noma sought to promote literary development in countries struggling with literacy. The award ended in 2010 (The Noma).

space of a new order of modernity” (Harrow ii). This new vision entailed deviating from women’s prior victim portrayal(Harrow ii). *Une si longue lettre* also inspired J. Nozipo Maraire’s *Zenzele: a Letter for my Daughter* (Ondrus personal interview). Much scholarship (literary criticism, books, and dissertations) has been done on this novel. Predominately, scholarship has focused on women’s empowerment, feminism, polygamy, and Islam. Some scholarship has addressed narrative structure and the epistolary genre.

Background on Mariama Bâ²⁸

Mariama Bâ was born in Dakar, Senegal in 1929. She died in Senegal in 1981. She came from a fairly well off family; her father was the Premier minister de la santé (the Minister of Health). Another significant background fact is that Bâ’s mother died when she was young. After her mother’s death she lived with her maternal grandparents. She attended French school and also Koranic school, largely due to her father’s future vision versus her grandparents’ traditional vision (Dia 2).²⁹ French was the only European language [and written language] that she knew (Harrell-Bond 398). Bâ’s early schooling greatly influenced her writing career. While in school her work appeared in the school publication *Esprit*. At an early age she “refuted assimilation,” as evident in her published school essays (Dia 4). Ms. Legoff,³⁰ director of her school, inspired her with her postcolonial vision of Africa. Bâ remembered how Legoff spoke of “embracing of one’s traditional values as well as opening outwards” (Dia 2, my translation). Legoff saw talent in her and demanded she enter the competition for entrance to L’Ecole

²⁸ Alioune Toure Dia’s and Barbara Harrell-Bond’s interviews with Bâ provide a fair amount of background information. Here I just provide a basic outline of her life.

²⁹ Bâ in her interview says “Mais grâce a mon père et a la vision juste qu’il avait eu de l’avenir, j’ai été a l’école, malgré mes grands-parents qui étaient des traditionalistes” (Dia 2).

³⁰ See Mortimer *Writing from the Hearth*, pages 85-87 for more on Germaine Legoff.

Normale des jeunes filles de Rufisque (Dia 2). She entered the school in 1943 (Mortimer *Writing* 86), obtaining her instructor's degree in 1947³¹ and taught for twelve years, becoming a school inspector when her health declined. Similar to the novel's protagonist Ramatoulaye, Bâ experienced marital problems and also had a large family. Bâ had nine children and was divorced. Personal troubles did not deter her from being engaged with social issues of her day. She was a member of several female associations, one of which was her "own women's association, Les Soeurs Optimistes Internationales...[that] organize[d] dinner debates..." One such dinner debate centered on discussing her book and "the situation, on polygamy and on the caste system" (Harrell-Bond 395).

Her friends encouraged her to write (Dia 4). A friend of hers who was a member of the publisher NEA's reading committee, read the manuscript of *Une si longue lettre* and "recommended it to be published immediately" (Harrell-Bond 400). In addition to school officials who stimulated her writing, African writers inspired her too with their texts. Ernest N. Emenyonu in an interview with Chinua Achebe mentions that Bâ told Achebe in 1980, just a year before her death, that she "started writing after reading *Things Fall Apart*" (10). Bâ conceived of her inspiration as a "bee flitting from flower to flower, sucking out the liquid, but the honey [one's own book] is really the bee's own unique product" (Harrell-Bond 398).

Her outlook on love and marriage was rather realistic and pragmatic. Bâ believed men to be incapable of sexual fidelity. For her, "polygamous desire" transcended races and cultures, and polygamy was "legalizing a man's escapades" (Harrell-Bond 390-391). In contrast, in her interview with Alioune Tour Dia, it is evident she saw polygamy as less offensive for older women than for younger women, viewing polygamy as giving older women access to

³¹ In the Harrell-Bond interview Bâ says that she "wrote a dissertation, which was published by the *Revue Esprit* . . ." (398). I am not sure if "dissertation" was a translation error.

relationships (5). When asked about love, Bâ explained that she saw her era's society as "almost ashamed to find love and sentiment," so her book "put sentiment, emotion back into its place," which explains its "success" (Harrell-Bond 389). Regarding the issue of feminism, Bâ pointed out that African women have "confidence in their femininity" and "do not imitate men," being "fulfilled as women" (Harrell-Bond 385). Bâ also realized the social significance of her novel for her country and continent. Winning the Noma Award pleased Bâ because someone [a "Japanese publisher"] was investing in Africa's development by promoting literacy and "African literature" (Harrell-Bond 401). Bâ explained that in her view books are "instruments for development" and "weapons" (401).

Une si longue lettre: The Sensitivities of a Writer

The narrator Ramatoulaye writes a letter during her mourning confinement to her best friend Aissatou, who presently lives in America. She chronicles, reflects and analyzes Aissatou's life as well as her own. Aissatou's life mirrors Ramatoulaye's in many ways. Both women were educated and had husbands take second wives. Aissatou chose divorce though. A significant part of Ramatoulaye's interior is her writerly proclivity. Although she has many other defining aspects, such as being a mother, a teacher, a Muslim, a widow, it is Ramatoulaye's writing identity that specifically leads to the creation of the text. Awareness of Ramatoulaye's love of words permits readers insight into Ramatoulaye's interest in writing. Attention to her relationship with texts and writing informs readers about her writing motivation, providing reasons for writing, beyond the obvious cause of relieving her pain due to her recently deceased husband. Ultimately, what we discover is an agenda of self and social development based on literacy and education. Ramatoulaye is aware of books' and formal education's economic and

social transformative power, as she sees in her friend Aissatou's life. She is also aware that nontraditional education holds value and power.³²

Writing in Isolation

Just as Virginia Woolf advocated for women's need of a room of their own to write, Ramatoulaye was in need of a space and time to write. Modou's death served to create this writing space that Mortimer refers to as "a refuge" (77) and Irlam refers to as a "therapeutic space" (84). Ramatoulaye's abandonment and her husband's taking of a second wife were not enough to push her to write. The emotional pain that Ramatoulaye experienced in her abandonment was not a strong enough force to motivate her to write. Perhaps she did not consider picking up the pen at that stage (still rearing children and fully employed) in her life. Instead, she sought out the cinema for healing from Modou's betrayal. I might also add that with twelve children, for whom she was solely responsible, she had no time to write. Thus, *Mirasse* forced her to stop, sit, and reflect. I argue without the obligatory *Mirasse* Ramatoulaye might have never picked up her pen to write something extended. *Mirasse* is a confinement of four months and ten days in the Islam faith where the widow reflects on the deceased person's character and flaws. It "calls for the disclosure of all known and secret possessions of the deceased for the purpose of inheritance" (Mortimer *Writing* 81-82). While in confinement Ramatoulaye turns inward to reflect, motivated by her goal of completing *Mirasse*. Ramatoulaye has the fundamental goal of fulfilling her religious "duties fully" (*Mirasse*), and she states "I expect not to fail" (9). Her primary goal entails submitting herself to forty days of confinement

³² Ramatoulaye's recognition of oral education's value is evident in her recounting of Aunt Nabou's education of young Nabou through oral stories that she uses to guide her towards specific modes of thinking and behaving. Although Ramatoulaye does not include how she wishes to see oral education incorporated in formal education structures, she is aware of the power of spoken words to shape listeners.

as well as to the rigorous personal and moral examination of her husband.³³ She knows that *Mirasse* will be a challenge for her, but she bravely meets it, looking at reasons for why Modou was drawn to leave her and their home. She also examines her own decision making process that led her to marry him against her mother's advice. Ramatoulaye inquires if she herself could have avoided the pain that came from her relationship with Modou. She fully embraces *Mirasse* in terms of intellectual and moral inquiry. In fact, she may be exceeding the expectations for *Mirasse* in terms of her depth of inquiry and writing. Mortimer finds "Ramatoulaye reinterprets the practice to fully disclose the extent of her husband's emotional and financial treachery" (Mortimer *Writing* 81-82).

While in *Mirasse*, Ramatoulaye was not working but fully confined to her home. This confinement creates an opening for her imagination or creates an infiltration of boredom, both of which could push her to the pen. In fact, it is Ramatoulaye's imaginative form (the letter) that liberates her. Miller notes a double mimesis of the form, whereby Ramatoulaye "writes to create a simulacrum of contact with the outside world, with her friend" since as a Muslim widow in mourning she is not permitted outside contact, so she "constructs artificial exchanges, in which others speak and write through her recollections" (Miller 281-282). The double mimesis is 1) imagining a friend to speak to in the flesh 2) the construction of a letter while writing what in effect is a diary. Moreover, *Mirasse* demands that widows reflect, and Ramatoulaye chose to do her reflection on paper.

³³ "Dépouillement d'un individu mort de ses secrets les plus intimes. Il livre ainsi à autrui ce qui fut soigneusement dissimulé" (26) "Stripped of his most intimate secrets, thus is exposed to others what was carefully concealed. These exposures crudely explain a man's life" (10).

Epistolary and diary novel forms likewise employ isolation. In these genres writing occurs when writers are secluded; the writers write individually, not collaboratively. Ian Watt discusses how for epistolary author Richardson:

the pen alone offered him the possibility of satisfying his two deepest psychological needs, needs which were otherwise mutually exclusive: withdrawal from society, and emotional release. ‘the pen’ he [Richardson] wrote, ‘is jealous of company. It expects, as I may say, to engross the writer’s whole self; every body allows the writer to withdraw.’ At the same time the pen offered an escape from solitude into an ideal kind of personal relationship” (190).

Isolation is necessary for writing; it is a hallmark of the writing tradition. Ramatoulaye’s diary writing is a further enclosure. Ramatoulaye’s sequestering and choice of composition form both create feelings of intimacy and privacy. H. Porter Abbott contends that the diary form:

evokes an intensity of privacy, cloistering, isolation that the term ‘letter’ does not. From our point of view, the strategic decision that the author makes is not the decision to have periodic entries in letter form or in diary form, but the decision to create cumulatively the effect of a consciousness thrown back on its own resources, abetted only by its pen. This effect is enabled by a proportionally suppression of other writing, writing by narrators or correspondents. Cloistering both the writer and the text in this way creates the conditions for the kind of reflexive drama (11).

Isolation greatly impacts access to the writing character’s thought process. In fact, the writing character’s thoughts arguably become a key force in the story. An isolated writing character is “acutely introverted and self-conscious . . . alienated . . . [has] no gift for social life . . . is alone . . . prone to melodrama . . . is doomed” (Abbott 16). Much of Ramatoulaye’s writing is a

reflection on her past as well as her present; however, one could hardly say she that is a doomed character. She emphatically states that “I have not given up wanting to refashion my life. Despite everything—disappointments and humiliations—hope still lives on within me. It is from the dirty and nauseating humus that the green plant sprouts into life, and I can feel new buds springing up in me” (94-95). “Je t’avertis déjà, je ne renonce pas a refaire ma vie. Malgré tout—déceptions et humiliations--, l’espérance m’habite. C’est de l’humus sale et nauséabond que jaillit la plante vert et je sens pointer en moi des bourgeons neufs” (165).

Lastly, isolation provides for communication and thoughts directed outwards. Though Ramatoulaye is isolated, away from the world, she is still connected to the world and engaged with it through her writing. Ramatoulaye’s writing “introduces the tension between enclosure and the outward journey...[so that] “writing to Aissatou” is the impetus for this movement” (Mortimer “Enclosure” 70).³⁴ D’Almeida and Hamou conceptualize Ramatoulaye’s writing as radiating outward from herself in circles of movement, from one’s self out to the family realm and then out to the society realm.³⁵ The result is that not only does Ramatoulaye benefit therapeutically from the writing, but others do as well. Ramatoulaye is aware that her own suffering resonates or connects with others, so she uses her pain as insight into larger issues, finding purpose in her suffering and motivation for change to better society (Ezeigbo 17). So while we might say that Ramatoulaye is writing in isolation, the truth is that her consciousness includes many other people and dimensions, proving that the space in her mind is greater than her physical confines during *Mirasse*.

³⁴ Mortimer’s point contrasts D’Almeida and Hamou’s vision of the self as the locus for movement and writing.

³⁵ Instrumental in this outwards movement according to d’Almeida and Hamou, is the self stage that comes in the first circle of examining one’s self in order to find one’s real self (45). They see this as an creation of one’s self precisely coming from “the pain of a new being and of a new social partner” (translation mine 43).

Ramatoulaye's Love of Language

Ramatoulaye's love of words and love of literature inform readers about her as a person. As a writerly character, Ramatoulaye is keenly aware of how people use speech around her in this time of mourning, noting that "the procession of old relatives, old acquaintances, *griots*, goldsmiths, *laobes*, with their honeyed language" (8). "Suit le defile de vieux parents, de vieilles connaissances, de griots, de bijoutiers, de laobes au langage chantant" (23). It seems that in the French text the Laobe ethnic group is referred to as possessing a singing language, that is a reference to their manner of speaking. It does not seem that "chantant" refers to all the people and various groups mentioned. The word choice here of "chanter"-- to sing-- evokes another dimension, that of the auditory realm, when used to describe language. While "chanter" is primarily describing the Laobe group singing, this word has a second value. Ramatoulaye describes the Laobe's language as singing. On the one hand this could be a simple description of what she is hearing, but on the other hand the word "chantant" could be an indication of Ramatoulaye's pleasant reception to hearing the Laobe language. The English translation uses the expression "honeyed language" for this phrase. This expression makes the language into something that one can ingest. Moreover, honey is noted for its curative effects on skin wounds. What is essential is that Ramatoulaye is observing language and indicating language's transformative effect or special quality. Although Ramatoulaye does not cite specific examples of such language, it is noteworthy that she observes how people's language is used.

In another ritual, namely a marriage proposal from Daouda that she encounters as a widow, she also comments on language. She perceives "a woman can always predict a declaration of this kind...those well-worn words, which have for long been used and are still being used, had taken root in me. Their sweetness, of which I had been deprived for years,

intoxicated me . . . ” (68). “Une femme peut infailliblement prevois une declaration de ce genre— . . . les mots uses qui ont servi, qu’on sert encore, avaient prise en moi. Leur douceur, don’t j’etais sevrée depuis des annees, me grisait . . . ” (122). Through Ramatoulaye’s comments on language, it is possible to know her feelings, that she indeed did feel something from Daouda’s marriage proposal because his words “took root” in her. However, upon further reflection, Ramatoulaye states she is “touched by the sincerity of [Daouda’s] words, but...[is] not carried away by it . . . ” (69). It is only Aissatou’s written words that comfort her: “These caressing words, which relax me, are indeed from you” (75). “Ces mots caressants qui me decrispent sont bien de toi” (133). Ramatoulaye does not comment on Aissatou’s affection or friendship; instead, she chooses to say that words make her feel better. She gives words human power, as if they are capable of embracing her. To illustrate this reverence for words, we turn to Wendy Wilson-Fall’s article “Literacy in a West African Context.” She mentions the powerful value of the spoken word for the Dogon people of Mali who “as well as most of their neighbors, [hold a]...metaphysical value to the spoken word” (Wilson-Fall 227).³⁶ So, words connect to the invisible, to the divine; words are powerful.

Early on Ramatoulaye informs us that words are an essential furnishing in her confinement: “J’ecoute des mots qui creent autour de moi une atmosphere nouvelle ou j’evolue, etrangere et crucifée” (13). “I listen to the words that create around me a new atmosphere in which I move, a stranger and tormented” (2). Words have the power to create a reality for Ramatoulaye. Words transform her, specifically her emotional state. In the French version of the text, the word “evolve” is used, referring to Ramatoulaye. The words make her change. Ramatoulaye values both spoken and written words; this is an important aspect that makes her a

³⁶ Ramatoulaye and Bâ are not of the Dogon ethnicity.

writerly character. By spoken words I refer to literature verbally stated or words said by people, and by written words I refer to letters or books. While McElaney-Johnson contends that Ramatoulaye's "act of reading" is "crucial to . . . [her] *prise de parole*" (117), I broaden McElaney-Johnson's concept of reading, extending it to the auditory realm. Ramatoulaye observes words from the mourners, from prayers from the Koran, and from visitors. She comments on the effects of these words on her.

Ramatoulaye's extended writing is another writerly aspect. While she has clearly written to Aissatou before, writing in a notebook is a more serious writing endeavor than that of letter writing. Writing in a notebook conveys the idea of a large project, perhaps a novel, and thus it is perceived to be a serious writing activity as opposed to a simple communication. A notebook is structurally similar to a book. Moreover, Ramatoulaye is writing consistently in the notebook, creating a document with a trajectory, not a haphazard collection of writings as one may use notebooks for. She chooses to write, not to merely silently reflect. Her thoughts are represented visually, as they are written on paper. Also, her thoughts are put forth in a permanent manner since they are on paper.

Book Appreciation

The first book Ramatoulaye mentions is the Koran. The Koran connects to Ramatoulaye's feelings and spirituality; it is a timeless book for her. This book is intertwined with her memory: "Cross-sections of my life spring involuntarily from my memory, grandiose verses from the Koran, noble words of consolation fight for my attention" (3). "Tranches de ma vie jaillies inopinément de ma pensée, versets grandioses du Coran, paroles nobles consolatrices se disputent mon attention" (14). As a point of criticism, Ramatoulaye does not quote from the

Koran. If she had quoted from it, there would be a much stronger writerly dimension, offering further proof of words entering her heart and mind. Quoting would give more of a writerly dimension to Ramatoulaye's letter because the quoted text would show that Ramatoulaye values the words enough to either remember them or cares enough to re-write them in her letter. Rather, Ramatoulaye's spirituality is discernable through her noted reactions to hearing the sacred words. She describes the physical effects on her of hearing the Koran:

Comforting words from the Koran fill the air; divine words, divine instructions, impressive promises of punishment or joy, exhortations to virtue, warnings against evil, exaltation of humility, of faith. *Shivers* run through me. *My tears flow* and my voice joins weakly in the fervent 'Amen' which inspires the crowd's ardor at the end of each verse.(italics mine 5-6) Et monte, reconfortant, la lecture du Coran; paroles divines, recommandations celestes, impressionnantes promesses de chatiment ou de delices, exhortations au bien, mise en garde contre le mal, exaltation de l'humilite, de la foi. Des *frissons me parcourent. Mes larmes coulent* et ma voix s'ajoute faiblement aux <<Amen>> fervents qui mobilisent l'ardeur de la foule, a la chute de chaque verset. (italics mine 19)

For Ramatoulaye, hearing the Koran leads to emotional and physical reactions. She is able to release her pent up pain when she hears these verses. She is overcome with emotion upon hearing these divine words, a joyous, ecstatic response, evocative of, for example, some Baptist worshippers who shout, cry, or call on God in their worship. Ramatoulaye's feelings have been touched by the Koran's verses.

While Ramatoulaye does not mention books she reads for pleasure, she does note the transformative aspect of books, specifically for education and career advancement. She lauds

books. Knowing how she feels towards books aids readers in understanding her desire and inclination to write. As Ramatoulaye writes to clarify her own experience (her relationship with Modou), she also pens her story in order to help her friend Aissatou as well as other women. Irlam opines Ramatoulaye “promotes a culture of the Book and a fetishization of the commodities of print culture” (86). This refers to the passage where Ramatoulaye writes to Aissatou about how Aissatou left Mawdo and education saved her:

The power of books, this marvelous invention of astute human intelligence. Various signs associated with sound: different sounds that form the word. Juxtaposition of words from which springs the idea, Thought, History, Science, Life. Sole instrument of interrelationships and of culture, unparalleled means of giving and receiving. Books knit generations together in the same continuing effort that leads to progress. They enabled you to better yourself. What society refused you, they granted” (33) “Puissance des livres, invention merveilleuse de l’astucieuse intelligence humaine. Signes divers, associes en sons; sons differents qui moulent le mot. Agencement de mots d’ou jaillissent l’Idée, la Pensée, l’Histoire, la Science, la Vie. Instruement unique de relations et de culture, moyen inégal de donner et de recevoir. Les livres soudent des generations au même labeur continu qui fait progresser. Ils te permirent de te hisser. Ce que la société te refusait, ils te l’accorderent. . . .” (66)

It is interesting that Ramatoulaye returns to think about the “sound” of language since earlier she wrote on how hearing the Koran’s verses impacted her emotionally. Upon closer examination, it is evident that she is actually speaking about the process of becoming literate, where the first step is to make the connection between a visual representation with a sound, then a connection between a more complex visual representation, consisting of a combination of letters, to form a

word. Ramatoulaye values the written word and literacy. She realizes how books can transform lives, as evident in the financial transformation of her friend Aissatou who has obtained a well paying position in an embassy overseas after having done special studies for this. She has enough financial capacity to return to visit Ramatoulaye and to buy Ramatoulaye a new car. Miller states “Bâ sees literacy as providing the means to overcome the marginalization that education may cause: once one reaches a certain level of education—and that is the entire problem—books allow one to think one’s way out of the margins, as Aissatou did” (291). She mentions a variety of books and the range of subjects they can cover. She also acknowledges books’ power for “culture” and people. When she speaks of how books “knit” people together we may assume that the Koran is one such book. Ramatoulaye’s memorization of letters she has written, as well as one Aissatou has written, serve as further proof of her appreciation of the written word.

Ramatoulaye realizes writing’s power and the power of literacy;³⁷ however, she is aware of different ways of knowing and different skill sets whereby people manage and control their environments. Ramatoulaye does privilege formal education and writing, over, for example, the illiterate griot’s divination knowledge. Yet, she is open-minded enough to observe and note different knowledges (skill sets) that are forms of reading and of writing the world.

Ramatoulaye’s formal education and teaching profession sharply contrast the *griot* Farmata who is “associated with a degraded orality that embraces gossip and superstition” (Irlam 88). I contest the idea of Farmata as representing “a degraded orality” and instead show her to have social significance. In contrast to Farmata who is not formally educated, “Ramatoulaye and

³⁷ Irlam contends Ramatoulaye is an advocate for literacy.

Aissatou are able to write because they were among the first female graduates of the French school” (Larrier 748). Bâ herself was also among the first female graduates of this school.

Ramatoulaye is a teacher, and being an educator is a prime component of her identity. If we look at her as a parent, her esteem for education is evident: “Ramatoulye has raised her twelve children to respect and value education, a theme that runs throughout the novel. Many of the trials and tribulations she faces are connected to her children’s education which she discusses with them openly Ramatoulaye advises the girl (Binetou) to stay in school . . . ” instead of dropping out of school to marry (Engelking 329). Ramatoulaye’s high regard for education is reflected in her support for her high school age daughter Aissatou, who becomes pregnant out of wedlock. Although pregnant, Ramatoulaye’s daughter will, with the support of her boyfriend, finish high school and continue on to college. It is highly probable Ramatoulaye’s daughter took her mother as a role model for education and thus continues on with her studies. Despite personal tragedy, Ramatoulaye as head of the family, prioritizes education: “In spite of their father’s midlife crisis which results in his second marriage and leads him to abandon his family, all of Ramatoulaye’s children seem destined to at least complete secondary school” (Engelking 329). While Ramatoulaye shows how writing can lead to self-reflection, inquiry, and development, literacy has further implications for society.

Literacy is necessary for democracy. One reason is because it permits or makes possible the exchange and movement of information. Printed documents ensure freedom and rights; however, one must first know that such rights exist and reading is a primary way for awareness (Wilson-Fall 225-226). Moreover, when one is literate, one has access to different groups of people, compared to when one is missing reading skills. Literacy helps people deal

with such issues as AIDS/HIV, degradation of the environment, sanitation and hygiene, and other societal concerns (Fagerberg-Diallo 166-167).

Literacy has been and is an issue of concern in Senegal. At the time of Bâ's novel, "Only 1% of women and 15% of the entire population had the ability to read French in Senegal" (Latha 185). In 1983, Senegal's government sought to reduce illiteracy by five per cent per year for a five-year plan (Sall 111). Women were primarily addressed, comprising 75 per cent of those 135,000 targeted for help in becoming literate.³⁸ Today adult's literacy is below 50% in Senegal, and as of 2006, women's literacy in Senegal is below 45% (UNESCO Office in Dakar). A major problem is still to be found in primary education. As of 2001, the:

gross enrolment of sub-Saharan Africa stands at 81.2% . . . lower than any other region in the world, while about 40% of the children of school age in sub-Saharan Africa remain out of school—proportionally more than in any other region of the world . . . more than two out of every three children of primary school leaving age in sub-Saharan Africa enter the labour market with, at best, limited literacy and numeracy skills. (Verspoor 15-16)

Ramatoulaye is very aware of how one's life can drastically change with formal education.

However, this novel additionally engages spiritual, social, and professional "life skills."

Ultimately, though, it is Ramatoulaye's own writerly crafting of these life skills that is most empowering, showing how writing and literacy transform people.

³⁸ It is interesting to turn to the complications that the literacy agenda encountered. One of the prime concerns was the disconnect "between training programmes and people's real needs and concerns" (111). Participants lost motivation, and as the majority were adults, many felt that their instruction was not handled with an approach for adults (111). One goal of the mission was "communication for a change of behaviour" (113) as well as "developing life skills" (112). There was a need for "setting up the basic learning competencies (writing, reading, mathematics in real situations)" (Sall 112).

Appreciation of Oral Literature

In addition to noting formal book learning, Ramatoulaye also comments on oral education and oral literature. Oral literature, according to Ramatoulaye, “Tales with animal characters, nostalgic songs” (49), is also included in the nontraditional realm of books and is powerful. Ramatoulaye mentions how young Nabou was groomed with oral stories to be Mawdo’s wife by Aunt Nabou, effectively destroying Mawdo’s and Aissatou’s marriage. Here literature is presented as having the power to shape people, to direct their behavior and actions. Oral education fueled Aunt Nabou’s “rage for vengeance” permitted her to shape young Nabou’s mind to Aunt Nabou’s plans (49). Ramatoulaye deduces that “oral education” is “easily assimilated, full of charm, [and] has the power to bring out the best in the adult mind...” (49). “Use of proverbs and maxims” also belong to oral literacy, and according to Larrier “function to imitate the spoken voice.” Most of these proverbs are used by other characters, and Ramatoulaye relays them (Larrier 751). They transmit wisdom and serve to encapsulate the meaning of the stories in which they are used. For example, when Aissatou’s neighbors want to urge her not to leave her husband, they say: “On ne brule pas un arbre qui porte des fruits” (49). “You don’t burn a tree bearing fruit” (translation mine). The maxim that frames the reason for Ramatoulaye’s strayed husband is one her mother told her, “une femme doit epouser l’homme qui l’aime mais point celui qu’elle aime; c’est le secret d’un Bonheur durable” (87). “A woman should marry the man who loves her, not the one she loves; this is the secret of lasting happiness” (my translation). Ramatoulaye sees that education, whether that obtained through books or through oral works, has power, the power to determine people’s lives. Moreover, Ramatoulaye shows divisions between literate and illiterate as well as “between an educated ‘aristocratic’ orality and ‘caste’ orality” (Irlam 88).

While she shows how oral education can be used for one's personal gain, she does not show negative effects of books. Ramatoulaye comments on the power of the storyteller to influence:

It was especially while telling folk tales...that Auntie Nabou wielded her power over young Nabou's soul: her expressive voice glorified the retributive violence of the warrior; her expressive voice saluted the courage of the reckless; she stigmatized trickery, laziness, calumny; she demanded care of the orphan and respect for old age. . . . And slowly but surely, through the sheer force of repetition, the virtues and greatness of a race took root in this child. (49)

Young Nabou was not only educated in stories and events, but she was guided towards honoring her breeding and background so that Tante Nabou's proposal of her becoming her son's second wife would seem a dignified thing to do.

Ramatoulaye's neighbor Farmata is a *griot*. She is a human book with social impact. Thus, I include her *griot* profession in oral literature and oral education. Some griots are completely illiterate and "rely only on the oral medium to practice their art" (Diop 277). *Griots* are trained people who know about the region's history, its famous people, stories, and events. Their roles include: genealogist, adviser, spokesperson, mediator, interpreter and translator, musician, composer, teacher, exhorter (compelling people to action), warrior, witness, and praise-singer (Hale 19-48). They also sometimes participate in such ceremonies as courtship, naming ceremonies, initiations, funerals, marriages, installations, and divinations (Hale 48-57). *Griots* are "keepers of tradition...masters of words and keepers of history." They are called on all over the region "to commemorate heroic deeds of ancestors" ("By Profession"). They are respected for their words, not only how they use them, but also for their memorization of words.

Naturally words are used to transmit knowledge, the history from century to century. *Griots'* patrons or listeners offer them money to show appreciation and esteem for their work. *Griots* specifically are human knowledge vessels for a certain family's history, so in effect, each family has its own *griot*. The Fall family's *griot* is present at Modou's funeral. Ramatoulaye notes the *griot* is "proud of her role as go-between" (7) ("fiere de son role de liaison transmis de mere en fille" (22)) where she collects the guests' financial gifts, counts them, publically thanks the guests' for their monetary gifts, laments Modou's passing, praises him, and then passes the money to the Fall family with the words "accept this money, you worthy widows of a worthy man" (7). "Recevez donc les sommes, vous les dignes veuves d'un homme digne" (22). *Griots* talk about a family's "feats in battle and ways in which they amass their wealth" ("By Profession). *Griots* are like living history books.

Griots have a unique social role particular to West Africa. They are responsible for history; they may not alter historical events or reinterpret history. Their profession's honor demands they speak with integrity. This is a profession that is passed from family member to family member. One begins learning how to be a *griot* at a young age. Although Ramatoulaye does not write about Farmata's singing of ancient history, awareness of Farmata's profession informs another layer of literacy, for as real-life female *griot* Fanta Djabate from Senegal says, "If we know who we were in the past, we will know who we are today" ("By Profession"). Farmata is "Ramatoulaye's lifelong griotte." She remembers her courtship history with Daouda Dieng and judges Ramatoulaye's decision to not marry him as unwise (Hale 52-53). In a way, one can say that Ramatoulaye has appropriated the position of *griot* through her writing. She is writing about her family history. She engages a bit with shaping the future through for example, telling Daouda Deng about women's needs for political and social advancement. By pointing

out that the National Assembly has only four women deputies, she raises awareness of the need for social change (63). She mentions that “the Family Code has been passed” and laments the fact that there has not been a female minister despite “twenty years of independence” (63-64). Here the narrator, like the savvy *griot*, is shaping the future. Moreover, attention to writing form also reveals *griot*-like elements, such as “the rhythms and repetition characteristic of African orality and the *griots* of Senegalese society” (Latha 191). These *griot*-like characteristics are seen in Ramatoulaye’s dialogue with Daouda Deng: “But Daouda, the constraints remain; but Daouda, old beliefs are revived; but Daouda egoism emerges, skepticisms rears its head in the political field” (61).

Another way in which Ramatoulaye is *griot*-like is how she retells Aissatou’s history to her. She writes her friend’s history to her, just how a *griot* would perform through singing his or her patron’s history. She tells Aissatou about her marriage to Mawdo and the path that lead to separation from him. The novel opens with the history of friendship between Aissatou and Ramatoulaye’s grandmothers and mothers: “Your presence in my life is by no means fortuitous. Our grandmothers in their compounds were separated by a fence and would exchange messages daily. Our mothers used to argue over who would look after our uncles and aunts” (1). “Ton existence dans ma vie n’est point hasard. Nos grands-mères dont les concessions étaient séparées par une tapade échangeaient journellement des messages. Nous mères se disputaient la garde de nos oncles et tantes” (11). Recounting the bonds of their mothers and grandmothers visually shows the roots of their friendship, creating an impression of being intertwined. She sings Aissatou’s praises, noting her personal victories overcome: leaving her husband, studying for a new career, entry into this new career, finding success in it, and the successful raising of her sons.

Divination Literacy

Ramatoulaye's *griot* and neighbor Farmata represents divination knowledge. This is another nontraditional form of education included in Ramatoulaye's writerly consciousness; it is observed through her fortune telling neighbor who reads cowrie shells. Ramatoulaye does not always heed Farmata, although she is frequently in her life. For example, Ramatoulaye does not act on Farmata's proclamations of grief over her break with Daouda Dieng. Yet, she finally listens to Farmata's warning of a pregnancy in her house, albeit after numerous hints. "Farmata, the griot woman of the cowries, very cleverly led me to this discovery. . . . Each time she cast her cowries to cut short our discussions . . . she would breathe a 'Hm' of discontent. With heavy sighs, she would point out in the jumble of cowries a young pregnant girl" (84). "Farmata, la griote aux cauris, m'a habilement manoeuvree vers cette decouverte desastreuse Chaque fois qu'elle lancait ses cauris pour couper nos discussions . . .elle poussait des <<han>> de mecontentement. Avec force soupirs, elle signalait dans la masse desordonnee des cauris: une jeune fille enceinte" (148-149). The griot's throwing of cowries is like a book; she understands the representations of the shells' various alignments and configurations. Divination connects humans to the sacred realm of the ancestors. There is a parallelism between the reading of the cowries and the reading of the Koran; both are sacred, coming from the divine. Ramatoulaye sees that humans are the connective force between both spiritual forms. It is the act of reading that creates this connection.

Ramatoulaye writes about Farmata's reading of the cowries, explaining how Farmata had tried to let her know that her daughter was pregnant. First Farmata reads the shells, telling Ramatoulaye what the shells' alignments and positions mean:

Look, I say, look! This separate cowry, hollow side turned upwards. Look at this one, adjusting itself to the other, white side up, like a cooking pot and its cover lid. The child is in the belly. It forms one body with its mother. The two groups of cowries are separated: this indicates an unattached woman. But as the cowries are small, they indicate a young girl. And her hand threw down, again and again, the gossiping cowries. They fell away from each other, collided, overlapped. Their tell-tale chink filled the winnowing fan, and the same group of the two cowries always remained separate, to reveal distress. I followed their language dispassionately.⁽⁸⁵⁾ “Regarde! Mais regarde donc. Ce cauri isole, creux en l’air. Regarde cet autre cauri qui s’y adapte, face blanche en haut: comme une marmite et son couvercle. L’enfant est dans le ventre, fait corps avec sa mère. Le groupe des deux cauris est isole: il s’agit d’une femme sans attaché, donc une jeune femme sans mari. Mais comme les cauris sont menus, c’est bien d’une jeune fille qu’il s’agit.” (150)

Ramatoulaye’s narration of the divination shows that she is aware that a language of cowries exists; however, she is illiterate in reading it. Moreover, she has no interest in the message from the shells.³⁹ Her lack of interest is at odds with the spiritual impact she feels from the Koran’s words that move her to tears.

Next, Farminata explicitly tells Ramatoulaye who is pregnant. She uses an analogy to illustrate the conception and pregnancy. She informs Ramatoulaye several times from the language of the shells that Ramatoulaye’s daughter is pregnant:

³⁹ A point contrary to this interpretation is that Ramatoulaye indicates that this is not in fact divination. She writes that Famata knew because of “La rumeur publique” or “son sens developpe de l’observation” (148-149). Thanks to Patrick Hogan for this insight.

The cowries cannot always be wrong. If they have insisted for so long, it means there is something there. Water and sand have been mixed; they have become mud. Gather up your mud. Aissatou does not deny her condition. I have saved her by exposing the matter. You guessed nothing. She did not dare confide in you. You would never have got out of this situation” (86). “Les cauris ne peuvent se tromper tous les jours. S’ils ont tant insiste, c’est qu’il y a quelque chose. L’eau et le sable sont mêlés; ils forment de la boue. Ramasse ta boue. Aissatou ne nie pas son état. Je l’ai sauvée en te révélant ce qui est. Toi, tu ne devinais rien. Elle n’osait pas se confier. Vous n’alliez jamais sortir de cette situation” (151).

Although it seems that Ramatoulaye clearly prioritizes formal education over traditional oral education or divination, she records all of these types of education and literacy in her writing.

The spiritual, monetary, emotive, and social transformations gained from these various skill-sets are evident in Ramatoulaye’s own observations and notations of her writing process. Ramatoulaye realizes the benefits that writing holds and enacts for her: “My reflections determine my attitude to the problems of life. I analyse the decisions that decide our future. I widen my scope by taking an interest in current world affairs” (93). “Mes réflexions me déterminent sur les problèmes de la vie. J’analyse les décisions qui orientent notre devenir. J’élargis mon opinion en pénétrant l’actualité mondiale” (164). She is aware of the power of writing to shape her mind, actions, and life. She tells Aissatou (or chronicles to herself) her writing actions and writing transformation: “I reflect. My new turn of mind is hardly surprising to you. I cannot help unburdening myself to you. I might as well sum up now” (93). “Je réfléchis. Cette tournure de mon esprit ne te surprend guère...Je ne pourrai m’empêcher de me livrer à toi. Autant me résumer ici” (163). Ramatoulaye’s “new turn of mind” is a new

consciousness and a new state of being. She gained this new awareness through writing and thinking. Ramatoulaye also takes other people's written personal transformations into her heart as reflected through her memorization of her friend Aissatou's letters.

A Writer's Memorized Letters

Ramatoulaye's memorization of Aissatou's letters serves as proof of Ramatoulaye's affection for the written word. Her memorization shows that she values the spoken word too, realizing that words can live on through minds, paper, or mouths. Memorization is a key function and skill of *griots*. Also, memorization of letters is evocative of how some *griots* are witnesses for written documents. Usually one memorizes things of importance, things that are dear. Memorization is to learn by heart, the ingesting of words into one's innermost sphere. Writers usually are avid readers and lovers of language. Ramatoulaye's "reading of Aissatou's divorce letter is crucial in her search for self-understanding" proving "formative in Ramatoulaye's development as a writer in her own right" (McElaney-Johnson 117). This builds on the idea of Aissatou as a "model" for Ramatoulaye (Mortimer 70). Aissatou's other received letters, according to McElaney-Johnson, are not addressed in scholarship. According to McElaney-Johnson, these letters that Ramatoulaye refers to serve "as a bridge" for her relationship with Aissatou (117). Moreover, the correspondence "protects intimacy and possesses a healing power that obscures physical separation" (McElaney-Johnson 117). McElaney-Johnson also notes the letters' "metonymical role" where "the letter becomes a substitution for the confidant..." (118). She mentions the scenario where Ousmane brings Aissatou's letter to Ramatoulaye, noting the physical details such as "handwriting, the smell of lavender" that stand in for Aissatou's body (118).

Irlaum dissects the value of this memorized letter and finds it has four roles: it attests “to the culture of letters and literacy”; is performative; is “an artefact in Rama’s larger project of memory”; it “takes its place as an exhibit from the battle of the sexes and is proof of women’s reinstatement of power (Irlam 85). McElaney-Johnson comments that Ramatoulaye’s recitation of Aissatou’s letter is an example of the writer acting as a reader. She finds that Ramatoulaye’s “reading of Aissatou’s divorce letter is crucial in her search for self-understanding; this articulate and decisive missive proves formative in Ramatoulaye’s development as a writer in her own right” (117). In addition to reciting Aissatou’s story, Ramatoulaye also cites the story of Jacqueline, a foreigner in Senegal who suffered a mental break down due to her cheating husband. Like a griot, Ramatoulaye’s retelling of Jacqueline’s story is a way to honor her, to remember her and to impart wisdom to the community. The insertion of Jacqueline’s story has a performative aspect for Aissatou to whom it is told, like that of a griot, but here in the literary context it is “a mise-en abyme of Aissatou’s and Ramatoulaye’s stories...[that] is cathartic” (Larrier 750). But what will she do with her notebook, with this writing that is foremost for herself? Certainly Ramatoulaye will use her writing to reflect, as evident in her contemplation about why she “recall[ed] this friend’s [Jacqueline’s] ordeal” (47). She wants her narration to have a purpose, likely a transformative one.

The Power of Imagination

Imagination is another writerly trait that Ramatoulaye demonstrates through imagining how Aissatou’s mother-in-law operated against Aissatou. Imagination and creativity are also skills that *griots* possess, evident in their performances and approaches to transmitting material. Halling explains that Ramatoulaye’s imagination is evident in how she “assumes the identity of

her best friend's nemesis" when she writes about Tante Nabou (94). Halling sees the purpose of this imaginative act as providing "spiritual benefits" to Aissatou who with Ramatoulaye's help can explore "her repressed pain" (Halling 94). This is like acting; it has a performative aspect akin to a griot performing. The epistolary form can be seen as mimicking the griot's public performance space. It is imaginative writing. Yet, this is not purely fantasy writing; it is of a high caliber. Halling dissects Ramatoulaye's portrayal of Tante Nabou. There is much depth and significance in Ramatoulaye's construction of Tante Nabou's narrative. Halling explains that Ramatoulaye portrays the "present tense" with

modern conveniences such as highways and a newly constructed, beautiful mosque . . .
[while] in contrast, . . . the past tense . . . [has] "the stately woman's discomfort during
the bumpy bus trip to her kingdom . . . with picturesque image of Bâobab tress,
shepherds, cows and people kneeling in prayer at the side of the road . . . similar . . . [to]
The African Queen . . . and . . . *Lawrence of Arabia* . . . However, . . . predominant[ly] . . .
time is static, as illustrated by the constancy of nature . . ." (Halling 92-93)

Ramatoulaye, like the *griot*, has skillfully crafted her product. As the *griot* at times guides patrons or aids them in their endeavors, Ramatoulaye's discussion of Tante Nabou likewise seeks to heal Aissatou in an attempt to bring her forward in her life. Just as a *griot* may emphasize a word, a note, or a gesture in order to bring about understanding, Ramatoulaye engages her imagination in the attempt to bring emotional transformation to Aissatou. Aside from wishing for her own healing, Ramatoulaye's writing has the goal of healing her friend Aissatou. Halling, expanding on Irlam's concepts of wounds to include the narratee's wounds, finds that Ramatoulaye's signature finalizes her own spiritual journey, but it means "the beginning of Aissatou's spiritual journey" as she reads the letter and "relive[s] her own personal tragedy

through Ramatoulaye's eyes . . . her wounds . . . reopened by the images and scenes" that Ramatoulaye has written (97).

Addressee (s) as Motivation & Invitation

Addressees are essential⁴⁰ for epistolaries; they define the existence of the letter format, for addressees are the reason letters are written. Moreover, addressees are often connected to a writing character's writing motivation. In the case of Ramatoulaye, her addressee Aissatou inspires Ramatoulaye's reflection, healing, and self-development. While Aissatou is Ramatoulaye's sole addressee (technically her narratee), some scholars posit that there are other addressees and those will be addressed later in this section. While grieving, Ramatoulaye writes page after page for four months to her dear friend Aissatou. This section examines a writing character's use of addressee, and it also examines the addressee's intimate effect on readers. Some epistolary novels have exchanges of letters, so readers can immediately see the effects of letters on the addressee, but in the case of *Une si longue lettre* there is no exchange of letters. Readers are thus left to imagine the addressee's reaction, which puts them in a participatory role. Ramatoulaye includes much information about Aissatou's life, which could aid in readers' ability to imagine the narratee's response to Ramatoulaye's letter.⁴¹ Second person address is another narrative technique connected to addressee that fosters a feeling of intimacy through creating letter simulation.

Ramatoulaye is "focus[ed] on [her]self", yet:

⁴⁰ If the letter is not addressed to someone, then the writing form changes. Without an addressee the writing could change to being expository writing, a statement of fact or a diary entry.

⁴¹ Ramatoulaye informs us of Aissatou's last letter in which Aissatou informs Ramatoulaye that she will arrive at the end of Ramatoulaye's *Mirasse* (75).

she reaches out to a confidant in what becomes an act of self-examination and affirmation which reinforces the bond between Ramatoulaye and Aissatou. It is this bond between narrator and narratee that enables Ramatoulaye to write her life. As in many epistolary novels [according to Altman], the letter's confidentiality structures the thematics, character relationships, and narrative action. (McElaney-Johnson 114)

Another role of Aissatou as addressee in addition to that of confidant is as "an important role model" for Ramatoulaye, one that aids in her "journey to self-understanding" (Mortimer 70). In this interpretation, Aissatou's severing letter to her husband Mawdo becomes an example of the direction Ramatoulaye aspires to move towards. Prior to Modou's death, she did not have the courage to follow in Aissatou's footsteps to make a new life for herself, but she now has the courage and strength to "refaire ma vie" (165), "refashion my life" (94), "to redo my life" (my translation).

The writing character's addressee functions as an "active confidant" that is "involved to varying degrees in the story" with "twenty-one of the twenty-seven sections...invok[ing] Aissatou in the opening sentence and four of the remaining sections address[ing] her at a later point" (McElaney-Johnson 116). Peter Hecht, who examines communication in real-life letter writing, finds that the author's writing is affected by the recipient to whom he or she is writing, yet in the writer's mind the recipient is always evolving (21-22). Indeed, Aissatou serves as a role model for Ramatoulaye. Writing to her increases Ramatoulaye's confidence and assertiveness.

Ramatoulaye's imagination becomes palpable with the use of an addressee. Imagination, emanating from the invisible realm of the soul, brain, lived experience, and inspiration becomes visible with Ramatoulaye's imagined responses of her friend. In addition to Semujanga's concept

of the addressee as an asset for the form, McElaney-Johnson perceives that Aissatou serves to draw Ramatoulaye's story out. Aissatou is Ramatoulaye's muse. This is evident in how Ramatoulaye imagines speaking to Aissatou, as well as how she imagines what Aissatou will say. The imagined conversation and address creates a feeling of closeness with the narrator. "Anticipation of another's words" is an element of discourse that elicits intimacy (McElaney-Johnson 113). While McElaney-Johnson points out that Ramatoulaye "creates the illusion of dialogue by posing her interlocutor questions to which she often supplies Aissatou's expected response—"tu me diras" (81) 'you may tell me' (55) and 'tu me repondras' (83) 'you may reply (56)" (116), I see this technique as proof of the narrator's imagination, for she is inventing what her friend will say. This technique is similar to couples who accurately complete each other's sentences. Ramatoulaye anticipates her friend's responses. Not everyone can complete another's thoughts or anticipate them, so when a person is able to do this, it indicates a special relationship with the person whose thoughts are completed.⁴² For the reader, such an exchange illustrates and makes palpable the intimacy between Ramatoulaye and Aissatou. Helene Cixous conceives of such an exchange as telepathy:

Telepathy is empathy sent. It's a letter. And this letter travels and reaches a number of addressees who receive something exactly as you received it . . . Telepathy is . . . traveling to the scene of the encounter . . . [and] it's really making or creating a place where a passersby will suddenly discover that it's them that have been expected.

⁴² The narrator and the narratee need not know each other well in order for there to be intimacy. There might be instances where intimacy occurs in even the most horrific exchanges, such as in the film *Silence of the Lambs*. Hannibal Lecter's mind is not a pleasant place to be in; however, most viewers are in that space. Conversely, just because two characters are close friends, does not mean intimacy for all readers.

This feeling of “having been expected” leads to a feeling of intimacy, which also of course comes from identification. Certainly, not all readers will feel this, but it is one way to explain why some readers might feel close.

An addressee enables real readers to simulate receiving letters. Because letters are usually addressed to one recipient, they are intimate; therefore, readers’ simulation of being Aissatou creates entry into personal space in the story. According to Semujanga, the addressee gives a sense of confidentiality that extends to the reader (292-293). Semujanga explains that “La fonction appellative de ce recit designe le lecteur comme le partenaire du jeu de la lecture autobiographique” (293). So the reader plays an active role in the “game of autobiographical reading,” meaning that readers are “inviter a entrer dans le jeu des souvenirs et dans le roman” [invited to enter into the game of memories and enter into the novel](292). However, as the simulation takes on theatrical elements, readers are left asking if a dialogue is created or a series of monologues (Semujanga 294).

Use of second person pronouns is another way that readers enter into letter recipient simulation. Literary scholar Robyn Warhol writes on techniques of engagement with narrators in women’s fiction in her article “Toward a Theory of the Engaging Narrator: Earnest Interventions in Gaskell, Stowe, and Eliot.” She examines second person pronouns as a technique of engagement. Warhol specifically looks at how the use of the second person pronouns creates a technique she terms “engaging narrators” as opposed to “distancing” narrators, whereby there is not much distance “between the narratee, the addressee, and the receiver” (811). Building upon Gerald Prince’s observations that readers rarely identify with narratees, especially when the narratee is fully described, Warhol finds that when the narratee is not detailed but left open or uses “names that refer to large classes of potential actual readers,”

then readers can step into the place of the narratee due to this general, fairly wide encompassing description (813). Warhol's example of such an open address is "Mothers of America" from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (813). So, the purpose of using the "you" address is to "evoke recognition and identification in the person who holds the book and reads, even if the 'you' in the text resembles that person only slightly or not at all" (811).

Warhol names five techniques of intimacy through second-person address: un-named or general named narratee; frequent use of narratee address; narratees "in perfect sympathy" with narrators (813); narrator's belief in other characters (815); and an engaging narrative attitude. The engaging narrator's attitude brings up sympathy, arouses feelings, and then asks "the readers to project those feelings into compassion for actual" real-world connections (815). (In comparison to Lola's narratee Jupiter in *Imagine This*, which is not even a person, Ramatoulaye's narratee has a gender and history.) Larrier terms Ramatoulaye's addresses to Aissatou "signs of orality" in which he includes use of Aissatou's name, address to her as "my friend" and use of the second person pronoun (750).

Despite having a detailed addressee, a space is left for the reader to enter (with his or her own imagination) because of the lack of included written replies from Aissatou. An exclusion of the narratee's replies coincides with Warhol's technique of general narratees because it causes an exclusion of narratee details; of course this is not total exclusion of information about the narratee. Readers are given information about Aissatou by Ramatoulaye, indicating that narratee details do not have to come from the narratee himself or herself. While readers may know the narratee's life, as is the case here, Aissatou's excluded replies create creative space for readers to imagine receiving and replying to Ramatoulaye's letter. Readers engage most with

Ramatoulaye's problems and feel a need to respond to them, rather than imagining how to respond to a shared history that is mentioned by Ramatoulaye.

There is also an emotional dimension to Ramatoulaye's addresses to Aissatou, which can transfer to real readers. Ramatoulaye's narrative content reveals trust and intimacy. She discloses her distress, heartbreak, challenges, and hopes to Aissatou. The addressee functions as someone to whom the narrator turns to and speaks to, fostering "camaraderie, sharing, a reaching out to another" (McElaney-Johnson 113). Azodo notes Ramatoulaye's various affectionate addresses to Aissatou. In the novel we see: "Dear Aissatou" (1), "My friend" (1), "My Sister" (53) (qtd. in Azodo 79). These affectionate terms further establish the reader's close role as a loved one.

A deviation of the address, specifically to Aissatou, is the plural address. There are "nearly one hundred references to the first-person-plural form of pronouns and possessive adjectives" (McElaney-Johnson 114). Azodo argues that addressees extend beyond Aissatou to emphasize a social agenda of change for Senegalese society. The various addressees of the text, range from Aissatou, Modou, "the world's most wretched, handicapped, and diseased persons" (Azodo 79), "the Senegalese elite in general, men at the heels of the departed colonialists" (Azodo 80), and "many a Senegalese woman, who like the narrator has suffered emotional humiliations and indignity at the hands of men" (80). A point of critique is that these are not narratees, for they are simply people or groups mentioned; they are not being spoken to directly. In Azodo's view, the so-called narratees "are individuals, as well as the majority and minority groups of the Wolof people that make up Senegalese society . . ." (Azodo 83). Azodo contends that sometimes such addressees are subtle, "indirectly perceived" and are discerned by "The narrator's constant, persistent attacks, queries, solicitations, even support at times of the

oppressors’ assumptions, attitudes and behavior . . .” (80). One might assume that in the one instant when Modou is addressed that he is a temporary narratee; however, Ramatoulaye is not intending this letter for him; therefore, to call him a narratee is inaccurate. Ramatoulaye likewise does not write (and therefore think) that her writing is for “the world’s wretched.” Class issues and social issues are in her mind; she is conscious of her environment, but she is not actively reaching out to others besides Aissatou, making Aissatou the sole narratee.⁴³

Conclusion

Readers come to know and feel Ramatoulaye through her writerly appreciations, her comments on knowledge, skill-sets, and education. While these are only a few aspects of Ramatoulaye’s identity, they reveal how she manages her world. They are elements of her mind and heart, so when readers encounter these elements, they are perceiving fine detailed dimensions of Ramatoulaye.

Ramatoulaye has considered Aissatou’s educational path to liberation and her creation of a new life for herself. Aissatou as Ramatoulaye’s addressee acts “as a mirror reflection” of Ramatoulaye’s past and future self (Berge 113). Ramatoulaye is inspired by her, saying that she will “refashion” her life and “search” for “happiness” (94-95). However, writing has aided Ramatoulaye in becoming aware of where she has been and where she wants to go. Ramatoulaye appears fearless as she concludes her letter, unafraid of failing in her attempt to find happiness: “I shall go out in search of it [happiness]. Too bad for me if once again I have to write you so long a letter . . .” (95). Through writing, Ramatoulaye has achieved healing from her husband’s

⁴³ It is possible to consider these are addresses of the implied author, yet this interpretation would take Bâ as the one addressing them. The focus in my analysis is on the narrator, so I have not included this alternative view.

betrayal and from his death. She is cognizant that writing is a mechanism that can assist her in coping with life's difficulties, even if she does not mail her writings. She is aware that education was essential for self-development, for with knowledge and degrees more opportunities become possible. Ramatoulaye reflects on the injustices not only in her society, but in her own life as well, such as polygamy: "Ramatoulaye and Aissatou have been enabled by their education to use formal writing as a vehicle in their protests against an ubiquitous symbol of traditionalism" (Latha 192).

The question is whether Ramatoulaye will continue with writing once Aissatou comes or after her visit is over. Scholars debate over the question if Ramatoulaye will continue to write when *Mirasse* is ends. Irlaum believes she will continue to write and Picano does not believe she will continue to write. Irlam says Ramatoulaye is in effect someone who loves the written culture (86). Written words are literally dear to Ramatoulaye's heart, as evident in the fact that she remembers Aissatou's divorcing letter to her husband and speaks about the consoling effect of words from the Koran and comforting words from Aissatou. She also has had a history of correspondence with Aissatou, so it is probable that she will at minimum continue to write letters to Aissatou.

The more significant question is whether Ramatoulaye will take her long letter and put it forth into the public space. Will she shift from writing for herself to writing to engage with the world? Her conclusion seems to indicate that she views her writing within the confines of *Mirasse*, rather than as something she will readily seek out when mourning is over. Writing has been transformative for her, aiding her in becoming stronger. Writing and the love of words are dear to her. Writing helped her to deal with her problems and to become confident. It seems that if tragedy strikes her again, she will readily reach for the pen. Indeed, readers are left to wonder

what direction Ramatoulaye's life will go in. Might she pick up books to powerfully chart a new career course like Aissatou? Might she pick up political books? She has set and achieved her goal of getting through *Mirasse* and of healing. What new goals will she set? How might writing join in her goals? Even without writing, it seems probable that she will continue to think and be critical, as evident in her dealing with her pregnant daughter and her refusal to be a second wife to a man she still has some feelings for.

Chapter Three

Hope Keshubi: Healing and AIDS Prevention

In the prior chapter Ramatoulaye's belief in the power of education was one defining aspect of her persona as a writing narrator. In this chapter a writing narrator who has a primary purpose of educating her narratee on sexual health is one of the focuses. This chapter addresses two 1997 epistolary novels, *To a Young Woman* and *Going Solo* by the late Ugandan author Hope Keshubi. Keshubi's primary agenda in these novels is to promote dialogue on the following issues concerning women: sexual health, sexual maturation, AIDS prevention, domestic violence (wife battery and paternal abuse), subjugating traditions, discriminatory inheritance laws, and social relations among mistress and wife. Through an examination of the current slanderous literary reception of Ugandan women authors, it is possible to see Keshubi, a decade prior, deftly working against patriarchal constraints on speech and actions that have real and harmful consequences on the lives of Ugandan girls and women. In Keshubi's works it is the private act of writing to one addressee that constitutes agency. Similes are a central literary strategy that her writing narrators use to powerfully articulate their ideas and emotions. It is important to acknowledge the real author's role in the fight against AIDS, for she chose to address the issue of AIDS prevention in her novel at a time when efforts to combat AIDS' outbreak were emerging. As a professor and teacher trainer, Keshubi conceived of her novel as a way to reach the youth (the real readers) and protect them from AIDS, as is evident in her introductory notes in *To a Young Woman*; the book is organized by the implied readers. It is grounded in the existence of a real author and a real reader. It is aimed at changing people's behavior. Keshubi's contribution to society, keenly shown in *To a Young Woman* and in *Going*

Solo, is to provide a new social vision of emotional transformation through prior *unimagined* dialogues. Love and reconciliation are the prime emotions these works engage.

Background: Hope Keshubi's Life

In both her fiction and her educational career, Hope Keshubi (1961-1999) was highly socially engaged. Mary Karooro Okurut, author and founder of FEMRITE⁴⁴ (a Uganda women writers organization), describes Keshubi as someone who was primarily concerned with the welfare of others: “In the world where we are engulfed by the new ‘I’ generation of people who do not think beyond their self, Hope stood out as someone who had a lot to share with others” (qtd. in Barungi “In Memory of” 35). Susan Kiguli expounds that Keshubi “wanted to write things that would be useful, to make people engage with life’s problems, challenges and situations” (personal interview). Violet Barungi in a memorial article for Keshubi writes that many of Keshubi’s eulogies describe her as “a strong, no-nonsense young woman, who, in Goretti Kyomuhendo’s words would ‘tell it to you straight’” (“In Memory of Departed” 33). In an article on Keshubi and her novels for the Ugandan newspaper *The New Vision*, reviewer Michael Wangusa best summarizes Keshubi’s physical appearance and character:

One might be deceived by her diminutive stature but behind her larger rimmed spectacles and below her thin long curved eyebrows are eyes that perceive the ramifications of life in a unique way and put them glaringly in print. She is a humorous but blunt steadfast woman who will tell it to you straight.

⁴⁴ FEMRITE’s meaning comes from the French word for woman, “femme,” and from the word “to write,” thus merging gender identity with professional identity; it was coined by Monica Chibita (Krüger 2).

Bob Kisiki, Associate Editor of Fountain Publishers in Kampala, sees “Violet Barungi, Goretti Kyomuhendo and Hope Keshubi as cornerstones [of Ugandan women’s literature] who gave women an institution and a prime position” and says that what they started is still big and “was a kind of prototype.” Moreover, he finds *Going Solo* as “the first novel . . . by a Ugandan woman to bring woman in as a situation.” He clarifies that “Prior women in the stories did not move the story” (personal interview).

Hope Keshubi Mwanaki was born June 15, 1961 in Kanungu, Uganda to parents Elly Joy Mwanaki (nee Lutagwera) and Ephraim Mwanaki who were primary schoolteachers. She was their first-born child. Hope was followed by: George, Henry, Arthur, Dennis, Fred, Brian (deceased), and Edna. There was an age distance between the siblings. Edna was born in 1981, when Hope was twenty. The name “Keshubi” means hope in a language from Tanzania, which Mr. Mwanaki learned during his travels.

Mr. and Mrs. Mwanaki are both of the Bakiga ethnicity⁴⁵ and speak Rukiga and English. Mrs. Mwanaki was born in Kabale District in Kamwezi Subcounty, Rukiga County on Sunday, August 25, 1936 and Mr. Mwanaki in Kabale District Kamwezi Sub-County, Kyogo Parish, Rukiga County, early January 1926. Mr. and Mrs. Mwanaki met when Mr. Mwanaki was going to teach in Kabale and Mrs. Mwanaki was going to study to be a teacher in Kabale. Their form of courtship might have contributed to Keshubi’s choice of genre. Mr. Mwanaki recounts how he first saw Mrs. Mwanaki on the bus to Kabale when they were both heading there for the first time to respectively teach and study. For six years Ephraim wrote to Elly Joy requesting her hand in marriage. It took her six years to accept. Mr. Mwanaki was determined. He made

⁴⁵ In “The ways of the Bakiga of south westsern Uganda” Hope Keshubi writes that “the Bakiga came from areas which are in present day Rwanda and settled in Kigezi—currently Kabale, Kisoro and Rukungiri districts—before 1500AD or slightly earlier” (19).

friends with Elly Joy's uncles, won favor with them, and eventually won Elly Joy over. So letter writing was the basis of Keshubi's parents' union. It was something that was linked with action and results, which is how Keshubi implements her epistolaries. Mrs. Mwanaki was twenty-five years old when Keshubi was born.

Keshubi grew up in different villages outside of Kabale (southwest Uganda).⁴⁶ As her parents' teaching assignments in the Kabale District changed, so did the family's places of residence. Her parents built their ancestral home in Kyogo, about an hour away from Kabale, and this remains the family's anchor to this day. Kabale District is a very hilly, mountainous area. The Irremire Ridges surround the Mwanaki home. Kyogo used to be known for banana production when Keshubi was growing up. Kyogo borders Rwanda. Arthur Mwanaki said that people shifted from Rwanda to Kyogo during the genocide, and during that time period Kyogo used to be dangerous (Ondrus personal interview).

Keshubi grew up in the Anglican Protestant religion. Her parents and family were involved in the church. Spirituality is a prime trait of Bakiga culture as Hope Keshubi notes:

The Bakiga also believed that religion was a way of life and that it was part and parcel of both an individual's life and the life of the community.... Without spiritual direction, the Bakiga would seem to have no meaning, hence acts of worship always linked the spiritual and physical worlds, putting the natural in touch with the supernatural.... Anybody could pray to the Supreme Being at any time and any place, even at public meetings. Prayers always included praise and thanksgiving and had specific intentions. ("The ways" 20).

Mrs. and Mr. Mwanaki were church wardens, leaders, ushers, and part of the church council in their spare time. They also worked in church schools. Mrs. Mwanaki was a member of the

⁴⁶ Kabale is eight hours from the capital Kampala.

church senate. (Henry Mwanaki). Fred Mwanaki expressed that growing up “it was a crime to miss church service.” Yet Keshubi’s friends did not feel that she lived in a rigid framework; rather, she espoused the philosophy “live and let live” (Kisiki, Kamba). She “believed in co-existing, believed in God, [but] drifted away from strict godliness; believed people should be good to others” (Kisiki).

Hope Keshubi came from a family with a literate background and a respect for education. Although those on Hope’s father’s side did not have much of an education, Hope’s paternal great aunt, Faith Kazeire, sponsored education for others. She did not marry. On Hope’s mother’s side, her grandfather Lutagwera was a teacher, a local chief, and a church catechist. Another noteworthy influence was Hope’s maternal aunt, Maria Lutagwera; she is Elly Joy’s youngest sister. She was a big influence on Keshubi. Maria, who did not marry, was a single mother with one child, Jeremiah Guma; she provided a different life model for Keshubi. Maria encouraged Hope by helping her financially with her studies. According to Elly Joy, Hope “didn’t lack anything” due to Maria. Maria went on to become a social worker at Makerere University.

Education was very important in the Mwanaki family. Mr. and Mrs. Mwanaki (both still alive) elicited a reading culture in their family through daily reading and homework activities, inculcating a love of learning in their children. Elder brother Henry Mwanaki relates that the atmosphere at home was one that was conducive for learning; books were there and the parents were “inculcating to [their children to] read hard” (Ondrus personal interview). Friend Bob Kisiki remembers Hope relaying to him how “one parent always sat them down and told them stories as kids; she was encouraged to listen to and to tell stories.”

This academic atmosphere molded Keshubi early on into a fierce student. Mrs. Mwanaki remembers how as a very young child her friends named Keshubi “Little Miss Bright” because

she was so clever; the name was taken from a series of books with this name used at school. She remembers her as loving to sing, tell stories, and be social. As a child she was involved in drama, school development activities, and church activities. Drama became a lifelong interest. As a teacher she aided in putting on plays, and when she met her husband, the writer and dramatist Cliff Lubwap'Chong, she also aided in his productions. She and her husband also wrote a few plays together.

Drama connected to Keshubi's personality as well, not in the sense that she exaggerated personal dilemmas, but in the sense that she was vivacious and full of energy. Keshubi's former student and friend said, "every word that came out of her mouth was dramatic" (Kamba, Ondrus, personal interview). Deep engagement drove her life. Bob Kisiki said that "She never did a thing unless she was passionate about it" (Ondrus, personal interview). Kamba remembers that she taught through comedy and as a result, "Whenever she'd have a class, all her students would attend cause they'd want to attend." Friends and family remember her as "jolly" (Kamba, Barungi), "cheeky" (Hab'lyalemye), with "a good sense of humor" (Kyomukama, Hab'lyalemye), a "no nonsense woman" (Ocwinyo), and "Someone who didn't have walls around herself" (Twongiere). Kisiki mentions the contrast between her stature and her immense personality, saying that she was the "biggest woman. . . . She was so small and diminutive but it wasn't one of the things that would stay with you."

Strength is another important aspect of Keshubi's personality, one which enabled her, according to friend Phoebe Kyomukama, not to worry about the possible reception of her novels. Kyomukama deduces that because Keshubi "was the first born and had parents who were teachers who encouraged her, she had a lot of self confidence and [it] helped her a lot" to be courageous in her writing (Ondrus personal interview). Indeed Keshubi's parents recounted to

me how she would play soccer with her brothers and was very capable with the ball. Her brother Henry said, “as a kid she even exchanged shorts/trousers with him/the boys” (Ondrus personal interview). Siblings Arthur Mwanaki, Fred Mwanaki, and Edna Mwanaki all related to me how Keshubi aided them financially and with tutoring from primary school throughout their college studies. Brother Dennis Mwanaki said that she “took brothers as her own kids.” She had a great sense of responsibility, and likely this transferred to her relationship to Ugandan society regarding her writing. Kyomukama points to further evidences of Keshubi’s strength that manifested later in life when she married Cliff Lubwa p’Chong, who was a different ethnicity from Hope; he was from Gulu and was Acholi, from “the other end of Uganda [from Hope].” Usually “if one marries someone from another tribe there is resistance, but it seemed that Hope’s parents did not mind” (Ondrus personal interview). However, some of the community at Kyambogo University looked unfavorably upon Hope and Cliff living together in Cliff’s home on campus for several years before marrying. Kamba commented that Cliff and Hope’s relationship was not acceptable at Kyambogo because they were teachers and not properly married. But they “lived above it and made fun of it.” For example, Cliff would say “Hope has just hoped outside” if she was not at home (Kamba).

Another point I want to emphasize about Keshubi’s character and strength is her passion for justice. Justice regarding women’s rights is a theme that occurs in her novels, which will be examined later. Her concern with justice for women is evident in her *New Era* writings. In addition to a fictional piece about a woman losing her property to her in-laws after her husband dies⁴⁷, Keshubi wrote at minimum two articles on justice and gender, inspired by her own

⁴⁷ “Robbed of her love and inheritance” in *New Era* September 1998 closely resembles *Going Solo*; however here the husband dies in an airplane crash, and this story does not say what

experiences. In December 1997 she wrote an article on the elections in her town of Nsangi where administrators failed to note that “at least four” positions would be given to women. This was supposed to mean that choosing four women for the positions was obligatory. She was outraged that the dominant mode of thought was that four positions was the maximum number of spots possibly allowed to women. Keshubi spoke about how the majority “of the electorate” found “nothing wrong with the proceedings [wrongly perceiving four women as the maximum allowed] and to them those who had queried the procedure were only interfering with the obvious course of events” (“Civic Education” 10).

The other true-life article about Keshubi’s strength involves a taxi driver who refused to drop her in her town as contractually agreed upon. Instead the taxi driver became so enraged that a woman was asserting her rights that he lost his reason completely. Instead of going to Keshubi’s town to drop her off and pick up passengers for the return to Kampala, he turned around and sped back to Kampala with only Keshubi. When Keshubi wrote down his plate number, he threatened to break her glasses. Keshubi did triumph, reporting this driver to the taxi bureau (“A free taxi ride” 8-10). In Hope’s advice column, she frequently advised women to seek help from FIDA, the Uganda Association of Women Lawyers, for cases of men refusing paternity and child support, denial by husbands for wives to see their children, and unjust inheritance practices.

Although Keshubi was not a political protestor, she did speak up against injustices that directly came her way in the course of her teaching. Former colleague Phoebe Kyomukama remembers at various times during staff meetings when discussions of discipline would come up and negative comments about a woman student would be made, Hope would “flare up and say

happens to the widow after she loses all her possessions. It too critiques the Father-In Law’s right to his son’s wife’s virginity and the tradition of common sexual access to wives.

‘that’s unfair.’ ” Former colleague Connie Hab’lyalemye said Hope was “outspoken,” implying that she openly reacted to things and said what she thought. Likewise, Lydia Kamba a former student, remembers that if the faculty wanted to expel a student, Hope would not be a part of it. On a personal note, Bob Kisiki said that “One of the few times you’d hear her raise her voice” was regarding women and injustice and that she was “passionate about inheritance law and the way women treated.” Kisiki remembers hearing how a personal example of injustice inspired Keshubi’s novel *Going Solo*. Keshubi’s kindergarten teacher⁴⁸ came to be her student at college. She had lost everything just like the character in *Going Solo*, and “Hope was bitter about that kind of thing [injustice towards women]” (Kisiki).

So while Keshubi is not remembered as someone who agitated for justice, she is remembered for how justice was important to her. The times when there might have been factions in meetings, Hilda Twongyeirwe remembers, “She sorted situations instead like a judge in a group.” A concrete example of Keshubi’s belief in justice comes through her parenting. Kisiki relates how Keshubi raised her son Ray to be independent, with ideas of justice. One day when Ray was around age four, his teacher asked the class to give an example of an animate thing. Ray said a car because it eats fuel and moves. His teacher slapped him for his creative thinking. Ray said this was “not proper” and went across the road to his Mom’s office to tell her what happened. Kisiki relays “that’s an assertive child...she [Keshubi] trained him...how to stand up for his rights.”

Keshubi’s strength is also evident in her inquisitive nature. Bob Kisiki comments that she, “Made the pursuit of knowledge a lifestyle. She made you want to acquire more knowledge” (Ondrus personal interview). Friend and neighbor Phoebe Kyomukama remembers

⁴⁸ Henry Mwanaki says Jeninah (Konokw) was the widow who inspired *Going Solo*.

that she loved reading, that she would “read anything, she’d just grab something and concentrate” (Ondrus personal interview). Her passion for acquiring knowledge is evident in her formal education.

After earning a Diploma in Education at the Institute of Teacher Education at Kyambogo in 1982, she taught at Kabale Teachers Training Institute and at various schools around Kabale. Deep inside heartbreak pained Hope. She had a son, Pele, in 1984 when she was twenty-three years old working in Kabale, yet she did not ever relay details of his birth or of his father to her friends. Phoebe Kyomukama perceived that Hope wanted Pele’s father buried in the background, for she did not talk about him. Kyomukama speculates that maybe there had been a conflict between him and Hope; maybe her heart was broken. Kyomukama wondered why Pele lived with Hope’s parents and not with Pele’s father. She said “this is unusual, so “you know there’s a problem and [you] better not scratch it further.”

Around 1985 or 1986 she came to Kampala to teach at National Teachers College, Nkozi⁴⁹ (Kyomukama). “There were ten such institutions across the country” (Kyomukama, email). Keshubi was a teacher trainer at Nkozi. “When she left Nkozi she worked in the Ministry of Education” (Kyomukama) before she came to teach at Kyambogo University (Hab’lyalemye). In 1990 she received a Bachelor of Education degree from Makerere University. She was the first woman graduate from a university in the area of her hometown Kyogo. She then went abroad to England and earned a Certificate in Academic English and Study Skills for Language Teaching and Linguistics from The University College of St. Mark and St. John in 1991 and a Master of Education degree in Education in the Teaching of English for Specific Purposes from

⁴⁹ “It is about 2Km from the Kampala-Masaka road. The turning off the highway to that place is at Kayabwe trading centre[,] which is between the Equator land-marks and Katonga bridge. Eventually Nkosi College was phased out” (Kyomukama, email).

the University of Exeter also in 1991. While studying in England she met Pat Haward who became a friend. Haward later became a freelance editor for Fountain publishers, coming to Uganda for three to six months a year. Haward nominally edited *Going Solo* with Keshubi (Ocwinyo). Keshubi taught English Language and Literature at various institutions in Uganda. She served as a Chief Editor on the Northern Integrated Teacher Education Project and an Educational Editor-in-Chief for the Support for Uganda Primary Education Reform. She also worked as a program co-coordinator for Basic Education of Redd Barna-Uganda her last few months of life.

While teaching at Kyambogo University she met Cliff Lubwa p'Chong; they married in 1995 and had a son on August 28, 1992, whom they named Rupiny, which means ray of sun making the morning in Acholi, Cliff's language. His name is further appropriate as he was born at five in the morning. Lydia Kamba and Bob Kisiki recount how Hope had been resigned to a single life when she met Cliff. Likewise, Cliff had been resigned to a solitary life too since he suffered from the tragic death of his wife. Cliff had lost hope of finding love again and of ever getting a child again from a woman he loved. Hope had lost hope of finding love and having more children. Thus, when Cliff and Hope met, their love was a sort of miracle, so they named their son Rupini, to evoke a ray of hope or sunshine (Kamba).

Cliff and Hope's time together was relatively short. They met in the late 80s, then went to England together, returned, had their son and married. Cliff was and still is a noteworthy Ugandan writer. At FEMRITE's 2012 literary symposium held at the National Theater in Kampala titled "A public dialogue on the theme; 50 years after independence; where is the Ugandan writer?" a survey of influential Ugandan writers and poets was given; Lubwa p'Chong was included. He wrote poetry, drama, and fiction. He is best known for his plays, some of

which were performed even at The National Theater. Also noteworthy is the fact that the famous poet Okot P'Bitek was his best friend⁵⁰. Lubwa p'Chong was charged with overseeing his literary works after his death. In 1987 he was a fellow at the International Writing Program at The University of Iowa.

Only two years after they married, Cliff died, on February 6, 1997, six months before Keshubi's novels were published. Hope's friends relayed that Cliff's health had not been good the last couple years of his life. He lost his hearing, became deaf, and stopped teaching (Kamba). He went into St. Peter's Nsambya Hospital January 27 and died in there. "He had the bacteria which causes meningitis" (Matsiko), but everyone I interviewed perceived he died from AIDS, as they saw his health decline. Ultimately, AIDS is what Hope died of too. Friends I interviewed confirmed this. They noted she was strong in the face of this disease, joking in the final year of her life that her weight was "zero" when questioned about how much she weighed (Kyomuhendo, "A Tribute"). Kamba remembers how she turned humor on her faltering body. Joking about her illness and the noticeable changes on her skin (spots), she would smile and say, "How do you like my flowered body?" (Kamba). Kamba relates that she remembers Keshubi's spots manifesting "before she got Ray," before 1992. Her brother Dennis Mwanaki told me that Hope had informed the family that she was suffering from AIDS.⁵¹

While some friends thought that she was in denial about her illness, looking at Keshubi's article, "Coming to grips with the AIDS scare," that she wrote for *The New Era* (December 1997) informs us about how she chose to manage and think about her and her husband's illness. She wanted to focus on her life and her life's work rather than her illness. In the article Keshubi

⁵⁰ Lubwa p'Chong did the foreword and biographical sketch of Okot P'Bitek for his 1986 book *Artist, the Ruler: Essays on Art, Culture and Values* that came out due to Lubwa p'Chong.

⁵¹ This was the last year or so of her life.

writes about an anonymous woman she named Provia who she calls “a friend of mine.” Keshubi relates Provia’s story and includes her dialogue with her.⁵² In the article Hope tells Provia that “There are two ways out of your fears. You either go for an AIDS test and prove that you don’t have AIDS, or you don’t go for the test and convince yourself that you are going to live your life to the full without endangering yourself or exposing others to a potential health hazard” (32). Provia asks Hope to clarify what she means. Hope confides that she too is a widow with “whispers behind my [her] back indicating that I am [she is] a time bomb” (32). Hope in the article chooses to believe that she can control things with the power of her mind by focusing her attention on positive things:

I have ruled myself against it [taking the AIDS test] because I don’t think I *am psychologically prepared for the news, especially if the news happens to be positive. I have convinced myself that I could live my life to its full if I stopped worrying about the possibility of dying within one year of my husband’s death. I have better things to worry about than to worry about dying which, after all, we are all destined for. I only know that I want to put in the best into my life.* Provia, I am not saying that you should not go for the AIDS test. Rather... before you go, make sure that you are prepared to take the results, positive or negative, without bitterness. If you are not ready for this, it is better for you to hold on a little longer and learn to cope with constant whispers and the accusing fingers [of people saying she killed her husband by giving him AIDS]. For either way, they will be there. But the way you feel about them matters a great deal. (32 author’s italics)

⁵² Some elements of Provia’s story resemble Hope’s story, such as, “Provia’s husband had a meningitis attack from which he never recovered” (32). Similarly, Keshubi’s husband had also had meningitis in the hospital when he died.

Keshubi accomplished a lot in the remaining two years of her life, arguably due to this train of thought and the belief in the power of one's mind. Some of Hope's friends felt that had she acknowledged her illness she would still be alive today, presumably having sought treatment. Provia's husband's position reveals a fear that knowledge of having this disease could possibly destroy their marriage:

He was convinced that theirs was a marriage built on trust and respect. . . . he had no cause to ever suspect her, or himself, of being HIV positive . . . He told her . . . if we were going to worry about every other illness, many people were going to die of worries for fear of being HIV positive. . . . ***Before her husband died, he, in a faint voice told Provia, 'I don't believe I have AIDS and please don't buy the stories you will hear from our enemies. They want to drive you to an early grave.'***” (author's bolded italics 32)

In summation, it is possible that Keshubi might not have found out that she had AIDS in order to preserve the mental quality of her life and the sanctity of her marriage. Proof that she knew about her disease can be seen in how she joked about it. Kamba relates that “she'd somehow talk about it, indirectly, make fun-- if someone died, she'd say ‘who is next?’” In the 90s, the stigma associated with AIDS was high, so getting treatment from a public clinic would have been a psychological hurdle. Her friend Kamba mentions that people were “scared” and tried to “cover [it] up saying fever, chest pain [because of the] shame in the 90s; it made people shy. The fact it was sexually transmitted made it sound improper.” Also, in the 90s public AIDS clinics were not common or easy to access.

Keshubi's strength is best seen in the period after her husband's death. Since Cliff had died, Hope did not have the right to continue to live at his home at Kyambogo University because it belonged to the university. She went to live with her brother Henry and then lived

with her friend Phoebe Kyomukama, who also lived in Nsangi, for three months while she started construction on her house there. Commencing and finishing the construction of her home in Nsangi, forty-five minutes outside of Kampala, was quite a feat to do after being newly widowed. Hope's house is 20 km from town on Nsaka Road; it still stands today, managed by Hope's elder brother Henry Mwanaki. Hope designed the house herself, making it unique with five sides and painted in an unusual green color that stood out in the neighborhood.

Professionally things developed swiftly for Hope after Cliff's death. Her novel *Going Solo* came out in August of 1997, and her novel *To a Young Woman* came out in October or November of 1997.⁵³ Keshubi occupied herself with marketing her books, even taking them from store to store. She also participated in public readings of her work in Uganda and Kenya. One might say that Cliff's death imparted a sense of urgency in her, as she self published *To a Young Woman* shortly after *Going Solo* appeared. However, there was the reality of bills to pay that also impacted her. In fact, while her husband was dying in the hospital he told Hope that it was necessary, according to Hope, "to continue working or else we would not be able to clear the hospital bills" (Matsiko, 17). She also continued to write feature articles and advice columns, titled "Lean on Me," for FEMRITE's journal *The New Era*.

Instead of focusing on the death of her husband, Keshubi actively participated in the birth of something new in 1995 that was formally established in 1996—FEMRITE, the Ugandan

⁵³ *New Era's* first issue was July, 1997; it was issue number 1. Issue number 2 was in August, issue number 3 in September, and issue number 4 in November, 1997. In the November, 1997 number 4 issue, there is a full page color ad inside the inside front cover stating "now out!" with a drawing of Keshubi's *To a Young Woman* novel. Also in the November issue there is a "now out" review of this novel. Keshubi's novel could have come out in October or November of 1997.

women writers association. As an early member of FEMRITE,⁵⁴ Keshubi was instrumental to many of FEMRITE's projects and publications, typing and typesetting manuscripts. "She did a lot of voluntary editing ... was on the first Editorial Team and was on hand to hold the firstborn, *New Era* magazine⁵⁵ when it was launched in July 1997" (35 Barungi "In Memory of"). She also contributed articles and a regular advice column titled "Aunt Hope" to *New Era*. Poet Susan Kiguli remembers Keshubi typing her first poetry manuscript and notes Keshubi "did a lot of sacrificial work for FEMRITE" much of which was "inspired by her [then recently] dead husband" (Ondrus Personal Interview).

Entrepreneurial, Keshubi and her husband formed their own publication house called Lukesh Educational Publications, which was a combination of her husband's first name (Lubwa p'Chong) and her name. Through this publication house her 1997 novel *To a Young Woman*⁵⁶ was published; her other 1997 novel, *Going Solo*, was published by Fountain Publishers. FEMRITE did consider publishing *Going Solo*, but it was picked up by Fountain. *Going Solo* had a second edition in 2000, also by Fountain. Although Keshubi's novels came out six months after her husband's death, she actively worked to promote them. She completed her third

⁵⁴ Mary Karooro Okurut spearheaded FEMRITE, coming up with the idea for the organization. Though Keshubi is not listed on FEMRITE's website as a founding member, Violet Barungi writes "Hope Keshubi joined FEMRITE right at its inception. She was there when the idea of a women writers' organisation was born, took shape, concretised and later, in 1996, was launched as FEMRITE" ("In Memory of" 35). Hilda Twongyeirwe in a personal interview related "Hope came to the early subsequent meetings. You could call Hope a founder. Hope was at the first creative writing workshop and travelled to Kismu in Kenya for a East African Women African symposium" (Ondrus personal interview). Founding meetings were held in 1995; FEMRITE was founded officially May 3, 1996.

⁵⁵ It is now a defunct publication of FEMRITE

⁵⁶ *To a Young Woman* is currently out of print and not available at bookshops in Kampala. The publication house Lukesh Educational Publications went defunct after Hope Keshubi's death.

(unpublished) novel, *Lopsided Justice*, her autobiography *In Search of Myself* (unpublished), and her husband's biography (unpublished) before her death on August 1, 1999.

Keshubi began working for Redd Barna around March 1999, just months before her death. Although Keshubi was not well at all, she took the arduous trip to Karamoja to access school kids for her job. She got sick there and then went straight to her elder brother Henry and then to the hospital where she died two weeks later. Further tragedy followed her death.

Upon returning from Hope's funeral in Kyogo (eight hours on the highway) to Kampala, a van load of mourners died when colliding with a truck. Hilda Twongyeirwe explained that "they died in Masaka, where a truck had been parked on the road. Otim was driving, [he] didn't see [the truck], all died, died right away, the van went under the truck." Among those in the accident according to Twongyeirwe were the highly respected writer and professor Otim and Phoebe Kyomukama's sister and daughter. Twongyeirwe's friend Joy also died in this fatal crash. She remembers an insightful and eerily prophetic comment her friend made to her before leaving for Hope's funeral and burial in Kyogo. Joy said "life was like a string in space and every time we walk we fall off and die or hold on and walk but it's tedious you have to walk this string and keep your head up and that's when you'll have a life like Hope had" (Ondrus, personal interview Twongyeirwe

Background: Literary Reception in Uganda

1. Keshubi, Women Writers, Politics & Publishing

Although it appears Keshubi's 1997 novels received no negative critical reception due to their sexual content, save for shocked audience responses,⁵⁷ Ugandan contemporary women writers writing on sex (referring to sex or rape scenes in their novels) have been slandered by Ugandan male literary critics both in print and in public forums. An examination of Keshubi's works provides insight into this current slander, and an examination of the current slander provides insight into the lack of negative reaction to her works incorporating sexual material. Before Keshubi wrote *To a Young Woman*, which is a sex education novel, Ugandan women writers did not focus on sex.⁵⁸ It is important to acknowledge Keshubi's thematic focus in the canon of Ugandan women's literature. Also, Uganda's early 90's social context is important to note, where with the new government after Idi Amin women were urged to join in politics and social progress work in order to improve their country.

After 1986, when Uganda's five-year civil war ended, women were instrumental for the country's development; they were encouraged by Museveni's government to participate in improving the country through active and forceful political participation.⁵⁹ Autonomous women's movements emerged, one of which was FEMRITE, the Ugandan women writer's association, founded by Ugandan women in 1996. FEMRITE is the most successful African organization for women's writing, widely promoting fiction, poetry, nonfiction, and the collecting of illiterate women's stories. From the start FEMRITE authors, including Keshubi, delved into key issues such as marital rape, domestic violence, and degrading traditions for

⁵⁷ Summer of 2012 I interviewed eighteen of Keshubi's fellow writers, colleagues, friends and relatives, none remembered a scandalous reception or book review.

⁵⁸ Susan Kiguli notes that Lillian Tindyebwa's *A Recipe for Disaster*, 1994, and Goretti Kyomuhendo's *The First Daughter*, 1996, include sex.

⁵⁹ See *The Women's Movement in Uganda*, edited by Aili Mari Tripp, 2002.

women. With FEMRITE's founding, a renaissance of Ugandan women writers occurred. Keshubi was a social and political barometer, keenly perceiving pertinent issues.

According to Professor Susan Kiguli, "Ugandan women writers in the 1990s ...were very much aware that they had to tackle subjects from the female perspectives that were apparently taboo or actually taboo as far as women's engaging with them was concerned" (Ondrus, interview). Marie Krüger notes that the subjects that Ugandan women writers "remain committed... to [are] the promise of social mobility and democratic participation, and of economic prosperity and cultural autonomy" (16). The aim of using art to transform society is still being championed today. For example, writer Betty Kituyi in a 2008 presentation at the National Theatre in Kampala called for women's freedom of expression as essential for "social sustainability" (2). Hilda Twongyeirwe, Co-ordinator of FEMRITE, explains that in "the first Femrite personal trainings we were trained to write our stories without censoring ourselves" (Ondrus, interview). Keshubi's novels stand out for their overt sexual material and anti-patriarchal material.

It is probable that *To a Young Woman's* sexual content was not objected to because of the novel's sex education and AIDS prevention objectives, which are explicitly stated in the preface and in the story's prologue. The novel may have escaped denigrating reception regarding sexual material in part because the novel was self-published, so it might not have reached mainstream critics and readership as compared to novels published by Fountain Publishers. However, the fact that Keshubi self-published *To a Young Woman* deterred its success. According to Julius Owinyo "schools would have thought about *To a Young Woman*," but "in Uganda the book is first published [assumedly by a mainstream publisher] and then it can get shown to the National Curriculum Center" (Ondrus personal interview).

That said, the novel was positively reviewed in FEMRITE's *New Era*, and Keshubi did actively promote her book, marketing it from bookshop to bookshop. *Going Solo* became secondary school supplemental reading, officially listed on schools' supplemental reading list. However, despite such reviews and inclusion on school reading lists, the reception to *Going Solo* was not popular.

2. *Reviews of Keshubi's Novels*

Julius Ocwinyo said that Fountain Publisher's initial sales of *Going Solo* were "moderate sales by Ugandan standards, i.e. 800-1000 copies" (Ondrus, Personal interview). Although this was an average publication, the novel was reviewed in *The New Vision*, *The Monitor*, and *The Crusader*,⁶⁰ according to Bob Kisiki. Presently examination of book reviews on Keshubi's works is limited to FEMRITE's publication *New Era* and *The New Vision*.

In *New Era* there were three reviews, two on *Going Solo* and one on *To a Young Woman*. *Going Solo* is about a widow who rebuilds her life through education and a teaching career after losing everything according to traditional inheritance practice. The review of *Going Solo* was in the inaugural edition of *New Era*, in July 1997; its anonymous "coming out soon" book review says that the novel "contains bitter realism of a woman's struggle to survive in an all male-dominated world" (30). The review praises the emotional impact that Keshubi's portrayal of unloving male in-laws carrying out unjust inheritance practice makes. The reviewer's enthusiasm is shown by the reviewer's own simile used to describe the novel's greedy in-laws as "hungry eagles" who "strike" and "scoop all Doreen's property" (30). The review summarizes Doreen as a character who survives due to "her ability to fight back... in order to survive even if it means her going it alone—hence, the pregnant title—"Going Solo"(30).

⁶⁰ *The Crusader* is now defunct.

Going Solo's themes of independence, terrorism, and reconciliation are addressed by Ayeta Wangusa's full-page review in the August 1997 issue of *New Era*. The epistolary form is acknowledged, as well as the African grandmother of this form, Mariama Bâ. Wangusa sees women's emancipation as the novel's dominant theme. She sees that the novel advocates that women "first come to terms with themselves" by "clearly set[ting] their goals and slowly but surely [working] towards achieving them" (20). Wangusa believes that the novel does not teach, "self pity and regret" but stresses using "past experiences as a springboard for forging ahead" (20). To her the book models that women "meet them [problems] squarely and look for means to solving them amicably" (20). Ayeta Wangusa says that "Keshubi's image of the soloist is so impressive owing to the fact that she, through Doreen, is able to say no to being a dependent and submissive woman" (20). Wangusa astutely notes that Doreen's return to her education [after her husband James dies] is a reversal from how she had left her education "in preference to getting married to James" (20). It is Doreen's education, Wangusa says, that allows her "to adequately care for herself" and to defend herself from predators or deceivers, and enabling Doreen to become "self reliant" (*New Era* 20). Likewise, Michael Wangusa's 1997 critique in *The New Vision* Ugandan newspaper notes that Keshubi's mission in *Going Solo* is "to tell women that they need to be able to stand on their own feet and think for themselves. She [Keshubi] does not, however, consider herself a feminist of extreme nature and in fact concedes that men and women need each other but she decries a situation where women are down trodden and entirely dependent on men" (20). Michael Wangusa connects Keshubi's teaching experience to her creative portrayal of Doreen as a teacher suffering from sexual harrasement, noting that Keshubi taught in "Kigezi College Butobere where she was the only female teacher for two years" (20).

Ayeta Wangusa also notes a background of “terrorism” which was the “epitome of Uganda in the 70s” under Amin, which destabilized “family life” (*New Era* 20). Her review explains that the turmoils of Amin’s regime are seen in the novel at the local level where soldiers at a road block threaten to rape Doreen, where Doreen’s husband is killed by thugs on the road, and where Doreen encounters corruption from headmasters where she teaches, as well as sexual harassment by fellow teachers. In her review she lastly touches on Keshubi’s social agenda for peace. She sums the book up as “a book about two women reconciling after bitter feelings caused each other by the one man they loved. Keshubi believes that it is after this reconciliations that genuine emancipation can take place” (*New Era* 20).

Ayeta Wangusa had another review of *Going Solo* in the newspaper *The New Vision*. It was in the Vision Weekend section under books. In this review she addresses reader engagement, form, and the female hero. Regarding reader engagement, Wangusa says “You will not put down the novel once you start reading” (22). She then makes a bridge from the form to this intimate connection: “The style alone is so homely; it draws you into the novel like you are reading an intimate letter from a close friend” (22). I think she uses “homely” to say cozy and intimate. Homely is an interesting word choice, conveying a personal sphere. It is apt since letters take place in personal space. In the course of narrating the arc of the story, Wangusa arrives at another aspect of form that Keshubi gestures to, “a different mode of story telling called orature.” Wangusa sees that orature arises at a specific moment in the story, when Keshubi has Janet invite Doreen to her house “to share with her the HERstory of her life face to face” (22 author’s capitals). She seems to view Keshubi’s novel as a new form of oral literature that is “superior to the oral medium” (22). The last major element of this review is Wangusa’s analysis of its strong narrator. “Doreen is the heroine since she is able to beat all forces that suppress a

woman's life down. And the greatest of all is *Woman turning against woman*: Janet's feelings for Doreen change when she reads the story of her life" (author's italics). In this review Wangusa notes that just when it seems that Doreen has countered corruption and remade her life solidly, she then falls prey to Bernard who deceives her, yet Wangusa finds strength in the fact that "Doreen doesn't let her heartache eat at her conscience but lets her mind take over" allowing her to do something proactive—write (22).

The anonymous November 1997 *New Era* quarter of a page review of *To a Young Woman* stressed the importance of the novel's subject matter, saying it, "brings out what has hitherto been considered taboo" breaking the "sacred silence" around "rape, defilement, teenage pregnancies . . . sex, courtship and marriage" (28). The reviewer notes that the book takes on the responsibility of the community and of the aunts to educate young girls. Her "style" is commented on as "interesting" and that includes "fictitious" and "factual and instructional" (28). While the review does not evaluate its literary technique, it does mention that the novel due to the weaving of different forms "makes the material [literature] different from what we have been having" and it is therefore a "novelty" likely "to attract the attention of many readers" (28). Yet, Uganda did not have a vibrant reading community to support writers as I will discuss shortly.

Ayeta Anne Wangusa's June 1998 review of *To a Young Woman* in *The New Vision* focuses on form, though leaves one wondering if indeed the novel is positive. Wangusa credits Keshubi with using "a new style to addresses subjects like sex, courtship and marriage that are considered a taboo with such boldness" (24). In this review it is not clear if Wangusa means epistolary technique by "style." Wangusa observes Keshubi's different registers reflected in

teacher tones, *senga*⁶¹ tones, and newspaper tones, perhaps this is what she means by “style.”

Wangusa suggests that the novel “cannot easily be refereed [sic] to as a novel because it does do not [sic] take on a clear plot to tell one story but uses different genres of literature to tell her story.” She finds the book “reveals the writer as [a] woman bold with words.” She notes that Keshubi is “consistent” with her “use of the letter.” Wangusa comments that the epistolary is a powerful form: “The letter as a stylistic device has the strength of revealing the dissatisfaction of women about the life they live that has been dictated upon them by gender stereotypes created by the societies grow in [grown up in]”

It is rather odd that Wangusa chooses to conclude her review with a lengthy excerpt about a father molesting his daughter. It seems odd because the majority of the novel is on consensual sexual relations rather than rape or molestation. The excerpt that Wangusa cites comprises a total of one page. Concluding the review with this excerpt gives a lewd perception of the novel through implying revulsion. It seems like an unfitting excerpt to use for exemplifying the novel; however, it can also be viewed as a salacious excerpt, and *To a Young Woman* does draw a lot on these sort of stories. Perhaps Wangusa was hoping to entice readers with this excerpt.

3. *Reading Culture in Uganda*

Uganda’s lack of a reading culture greatly hinders critical literary reception. When few Ugandans buy books, newspapers obviously will not devote space for book reviews. Illiteracy is

⁶¹ A *senga* is a paternal Aunt who educates her niece on sexual and love relationship issues, preparing her for marriage. Krüger says this is part of the Baganda ethnicity from central Uganda; however it now is “a nationally recognized resource (181). According to Tamale, sengas “assisted prospective brides in courtship and marriage negotiations and taught them appropriate gendered behavior...[teaching also how to] exploit their entrepreneurial and erotic skills in order to improve their socioeconomic status...[through] knowledge of manipulative performance” (qtd. in Krüger 179).

one of the largest problems for writers' reception.⁶² Ugandan scholar Henry Ford Miirima, in his 2010 book *How to Acquire an Insatiable Thirst for a Reading Culture*, highlights major reasons why Ugandans are not avid readers; he divides his analysis into faults with books and faults with culture. He explains that un-illustrated books are not engaging and the price of books is prohibitive. Moreover, he says that the educational system does not encourage the art of learning to read because teachers read aloud instead of requiring individual reading (30, 58-60). He also mentions that parental-reading role models are lacking (123-131). Only in 2003 was The National Library of Uganda created, and there are "36 public and 56 community libraries" in the whole country (118), which are poorly maintained with few current novels and few patrons (36-37). Uganda's economic and political history further explains the present low reading culture. When the economy collapsed in the 1970s, so did the publishers, and international publishers, according to James Tumusime, founder of Fountain Publishers:

stopped promoting their books in Uganda. . . . Uganda's book sector was for over twenty years-between 1972 and 1994-described in donor circles as a worst case scenario on the African continent (38). Moreover those bad times killed the book-reading habit as many teachers resorted to stenciling or photocopying occasional pages and some used past examination papers to teach from. There were children who came out of primary school never having handled a book. (Tumusiime 43)

Yet, Anita Bongere explains that in the sixties Uganda had a vibrant reading culture with "library services all over the country, reading clubs which maintained reading material and encouraged members to read" (10). In fact, since WWII The East African Literature Bureau had an office in

⁶² In 1991 the illiteracy rate in Uganda was 50%, specifically 55% for women (Mbowa 111). In 2002 66.8% of the Ugandans were literate and in 2003 69.9% were literate according to the CIA World Factbook (Index Mundi).

Kampala until the end of the 1970s (Varughese 105). Bongere attests to this prior reading culture; she says how it was ubiquitous for people to quote “from famous books” (10). Eckhard Breiting in *Uganda: The Cultural Landscape* explains how in the 1960s Uganda was culturally flourishing with an “intellectual atmosphere and . . . mix of personalities . . . conducive to the production of creative literature . . . [, yet] no major novel was ever published in Uganda itself” (163). In 1962 Makerere University (the most prestigious university in East Africa at the time) hosted the first African Writers Conference where Uganda was “initiated into international literary culture” (163). Ngugi Wa Thiong’o studied at Makerere and wrote two novels there, *Weep Not Child* (1964) and his most famous work *The River Between* (1965) (Breiting 163). Paul Theroux author of *Fong and the Indians* as well as V S Naipaul author of *In a Free State* were also at Makerere in the late 1960s (Varughese 106). Literary journals such as *Transition Magazine*, *Penpoint* (a student journal), and *Dhana* emerged from Makerere University championing Ugandan writing (Varughese 104).

However, in 1973, when “the Association of Commonwealth Language and Literature Studies held its triennial conference at Makerere...many scholars and writers boycotted because Idi Amin had started his ‘Economic War’ against the Asians and terrorized intellectuals” (Breiting 163). According to Breiting, this conference was the point when Uganda disappeared from “the world map of cultural places” and instead “became notorious for killing its writers or driving them into exile” (Breiting 163). Today, in Bongere’s opinion one of the reasons why Ugandan literary culture has declined is that “Most Ugandans still hold the misconception that nothing good, including books, can come out of Uganda” (11).

Ugandan playwright and writer, Violet Barungi, comments that the reading culture in Uganda

is nonexistent really. Other factors like poverty [stop] people from buying books—one would rather buy a pint of milk than a book. You find most people who buy books buy textbooks for their children because those are a must. Reading for leisure is considered a luxury many people cannot afford. (*Over My* 64)

Tumusime says that an average Ugandan book is equivalent to “a manual worker’s weekly wage” so “sales of non-essential titles are naturally low” (43). FEMRITE was selling its books in 2012 to the public for 10,000 UGShillings, about four US dollars. *Going Solo* by Fountain Publishers was sold for 5,000 UGShillings at Makerere Bookshop. As a current comparison, I found in summer 2012 a standard housekeeper’s salary in Kampala was 15,000 UGShillings a week.

4. Women’s Position in Publishing

Another issue regarding critical reception in Uganda is the fact that Ugandan women writers have not had a notable presence since Ugandan literature’s inception. There had not been many female writers in Uganda up until 1996 when FEMRITE was formally created.⁶³ In fact, FEMRITE was formed in order to encourage future women writers, as well as to bring to the public’s attention current women writers through publication. Another key reason for the founding of FEMRITE was to counter the fact that “women were generally not positively portrayed in the existing literature [predominantly by men]” with the goal of creating “positive portrayals of women . . . in the media” (Keshubi, “Uganda’s” 5). Observing the larger media landscape of the 90s, Hope Keshubi noted in 1998 that:

⁶³ Krüger mentions several women authors who achieved recognition by the early 1990s. See Krüger 2011, 3. Lynda Gichanda Spencer notes that “prior to 1985 only four women writers had published creative writing in Uganda” (92). See Kyomuhendo interview, Gray, 123.

The most oppressive acts against women like: wife battering, rape and defilement, wife swapping, are generally accepted in society. The only women issues[,] which are given ample coverage[,] are those which are dramatic and derogatory and only serve to portray the woman negatively. Such stories like when a woman cuts off her husbands [sic] penis or pours acid on her co-wife. And even then, the stories are reported verbatim, *giving no platform for the women to talk back*. (italics mine, Keshubi, “Uganda’s” 5).

Thus, there was an urgent need for the presentation of issues pertinent to women, as well as a need for women’s voices about those issues. Mainstream Ugandan society was evidently inured to the mistreatment of women. Women did agitate for social transformation on the social and political landscape, starting with a force when Museveni came to power⁶⁴; Ugandan women’s movements are noted for being “autonomous from parties and the state” (Tripp et al 21). By 1998 FEMRITE had published four books by female members.⁶⁵

Author and founding member of FEMRITE, Goretti Kyomuhendo, explained how drastic the situation of Ugandan female writers was before FEMRITE, saying, “there was only one woman who had appeared among all the big male writers, like Okot p’Bitek” (123).⁶⁶ Lynda Gichanda Spencer notes that “prior to 1985 [eleven years prior to FEMRITE] only four women writers had published creative writing in Uganda” (92). A significant part of women’s publication problem was a dearth of publication houses. Goretti Kyomuhendo in an interview with Stephen Gray mentions that there was only one publishing house, Fountain Publishers, before FEMRITE was founded in 1995 (124). Julius Ocwinyo, Associate Editor of Fountain

⁶⁴ See Tripp et al page 34-35 on women’s pre-independence movements.

⁶⁵ See “Uganda’s Reading Culture: a focus on grassroots women” by Keshubi

⁶⁶ Krüger mentions several women authors who achieved recognition by the early 1990s. See Krüger 2011, 3. Dennis D. Muhumuza in “At ‘sweet 16’, Femrite waves Uganda’s literature flag high” published May 19, 2012 in *The Daily Monitor* notes two Ugandan female authors from the 1970s, essential before FEMRITE: Elvania Namukwaya and Jane Kironde Bakaluba

Publishers Ltd., explains why so few publication houses existed. He says that during the reign of Idi Amin all private publication shut down. As Amin especially targeted writers, many writers fled. Amin's government published textbooks but no creative writing. Fountain was founded in 1988, two years after the civil war ended (Ondrus, personal interview). However, an equally probable barrier to the prior lack of publication by females was a cultural aversion to women articulating taboo themes.

5. *Denigration of Women Writers*

Looking at the current slanderous Ugandan critical reception about Ugandan women writers writing on sex shows Keshubi to have been remarkable. Through examining current women's reception it is possible to imagine the atmosphere of women's publication prior to the emergence of FEMRITE. Ugandan poet Susan Kiguli, in her 2007 essay "FEMRITE and the Woman Writer's Position in Uganda: Personal Reflections," speaks vividly about the distress she experiences as a female writer. She makes an analogy of her public reception as a writer to a couple passionately kissing at a taxi stand in Kampala, something shocking and uncouth in Uganda. Indeed Kiguli's strong analogy, which viscerally conveys a deep sense of unease, is further supplemented by a male literary critic, Joseph Were, of the Kampala newspaper *The Monitor*, who labeled in 2003 "a number of" Ugandan women writers, including Goretti Kyomuhendo and Mary Karooro Okurut, in his published review of Okurut's 2003 novel *The Official Wife*, "Vaginalists" (Kiguli 180). This review is not available, so I will quote from Kiguli's quotation of it. Were wrote that:

Ms. Mary Karooro Okurut's latest novel, *The Official Wife*, will do more than make her the top honcho among the *Vaginalists*, *that emerging club of women whose pastime is literature through sex* [. . .] I like Karooro's book partly because I am comfortable in the

world of women. *There was a time when I was not, though. Like when another author, Jane Kaberuka, sought my views on her manuscript. I recall, how I felt that her writing was great but wondered why she chose to write “those things.”* Such thoughts are misleading when reading books like *The Official Wife*, or for that matter, the writings of that other *Vaginalist*, *Goretti Kyomuhendo*. (qtd. in Kiguli 180-181; Kiguli’s italics and Kiguli’s brackets and ellipsis)

The Official Wife has a significant amount of scatological reflections and commentary; it also includes some sex scenes, as well as the female narrator’s thoughts on sex. Were is using the term “Vaginalists” to mean vulgar. In this definition of vulgar he includes any writing on sex and use of scatology. Note, Kyomuhendo’s novel does not use scatology, nor does she use gratuitous sex descriptions. As a point of comparison, Evan Maina Mwangi notes that according to Tamale (2005) the Ugandan government banned *The Vagina Monologues*, deeming it “offensive to cultural sensibilities” and “obscene” (*Africa Writes* 289-290). With pejorative labels being slapped on female writers, it is easy to understand Kiguli’s analogy of being a writer to a couple making out in public. Kiguli states that “the Ugandan society renders being a woman of achievement into something of a dangerous spectacle” (170). This label, “Vaginalists,” makes these authors something to be gawked at, despite having won the 2004 National Book Trust of Uganda Award, as Okurut did for this novel. This label reduces women to sexual organs. Some Ugandan men feel entitled to single women out who according to them are not following moral codes. Again Kiguli cites daily life as an example of how women who are pushing against Ugandan society’s norms, perhaps by wearing short skirts or revealing clothes, have been subject to abuse. She recounts how “idle men” in the streets yank women’s skirts or clothing off them, thus publically exposing them. It appears there is a similarity between these men of the street

who strip women of their dignity and Ugandan male critics who place vulgar terms, such as “Vaginalists” on women’s writing. It seems that there is an aim to shame women who do not remain in their designated subject territory.

In addition to the pejorative label of “Vaginalists,” a Ugandan male lecturer in a talk at the Alliance de [sic] Francaise in Kampala in 2000 stated that author Goretti Kyomuhendo’s 1999 novel *Secrets no More* “bordered on pornography.”⁶⁷ Moreover, this critic clearly demarcated what he thought should be Kyomuhendo’s writing’s audience-limits—that of school children (179). Kyomuhendo’s novel includes sex in order to portray rape and to show a rape victim’s acquisition of sexual pleasure years after rape. What makes this literary abuse more disconcerting is that these male critics are clearly not “idle men” like the men on the street. They are “keen reader(s) of women writers” and they are even trying to acknowledge the merits of women’s work; however, according to Kiguli, “the dominant reaction is that of opposition combined with a trivialization of the topics discussed” (179, 182). Critic Joseph Were, who used the label “Vaginalists” in his review, does acknowledge some of the social aims of Okurut’s novel: “globalization, poor work ethics, corruption, hypocrisy” (qtd. in Kiguli 180). Still, in a trivial manner, he says that Okurut’s novel is “a deep search for answers to issues other than those below the belt” (qtd. in Kiguli 180). Finally, he acknowledges that it “has relatively anaesthetized my fear of talking about sex” (qtd. in Kiguli 180). This indicates that he is aware of the issues she is discussing in her work; it also indicates acknowledgement of work against a taboo. Although Were does acknowledge that the act of questioning why women write about sex can negatively influence evaluating these writers’ works, he continues to embrace the term

⁶⁷ *Secrets no More* has a vivid description of a girl witnessing her mother’s rape where the mother is “spread-eagled” and the Colonel’s (the rapist) “manhood obscenely pointing in front of him” (16). See pages 16-18 on the rape. The girl is herself raped years later; see pages 56-57. A somewhat erotic kissing scene is found on page 137 and a detailed sex scene on pages 145-146.

“Vaginalist.” Evidently Were has not fully realized his position as a reader or the influence of his society on his reactions and so he lets his visceral reaction dominate, which begs the question “who is the real gentle person?”

Susan Kiguli points out that the issue is not so much what is being said, rather who is saying it. Kiguli mentions that men have written about sexual issues in novels, but when women write about these issues they are berated. Thus, “Women writing can be a navigation of the slippery spaces between the long standing institution of patriarchy and the emerging positive attitudes towards women’s right to take centre stage and debate as openly as men do “ (Kiguli 177). Certain women can talk about sex, such as *sengas*. A *senga* is a paternal aunt who educates her niece on sexual and love relationship issues while preparing her for marriage. Her nieces seek her for relationship advice. According to Tamale, a *senga*’s “educational” duty means that she is “exempt from the taboo of vulgar speech...” (qtd. in Krüger 180). Yet, she is still careful to ensure that “her advice is...coded in metaphors and symbols, in a figurative language that skillfully avoids offending cultural sensibilities” (qtd. in Krüger 180). Although there are emerging, more liberal attitudes towards women, predominately patriarchal attitudes and practices exist in domestic, community, and legal spheres in Uganda; these will be discussed later in this paper.

6. *Keshubi’s Courage Against the Patriarchy*

Hope Keshubi, writing in 1997, had courage and determination to publish her work involving sex education and an illicit affair when such topics were still today taboo. Fellow writer and friend, Goretti Kyomuhendo, in a personal interview said that

Keshubi was a very brave writer. One time at a FEMRIRTE reading, she read a part in *Going Solo* with the phrase “A widow never despises a penis...irrespective of how small

it may be” (38)...the audience did not laugh but rather gasped. Keshubi just continued reading.” (Ondrus, personal interview)

The audience’s reaction, of “gasping” reflects the Ugandan taboo concerning speaking about sex; however, it is worth noting that people did not leave the reading nor were there reviews that lambasted Keshubi because she included sexual material in her book. Yet, the context surrounding this excerpt is the attempt to critique what men believe about women. Kyomukama remembers attending a launch of *To a Young Woman* where she perceived that the “public thought she was too sharp to have written such things” (Ondrus personal interview). Keshubi “knew they’d criticize, but she didn’t care” (Ondrus personal interview).

Keshubi read from *To a Young Woman* at a book fair in Nairobi where Susan Kiguli was present. Kiguli remembers that an audience of sixteen to eighteen year olds were extremely excited because Keshubi “brought a subject that was....like a challenge. She gave them a voice taking questions like an Aunt...[It was] an opening up of spaces, that’s not usually familiar ground, talking about things people and children are challenged with, [things] that are not heard every day” (Ondrus personal interview). Hilda Twongyeirwe was with Hope Keshubi at a public forum reading in Jinja, Uganda, where she read an “exciting” excerpt from *To a Young Woman* involving a woman slapping a man. Twongyeirwe calls how people responded: they found it “hilarious, but people related with it like it’s your story, a story next door and their reaction was ‘Good you brought that out’” (Ondrus personal interview). Kiguli further expounded that in the 90’s there was no talk about sex, so

Hope was opening doors that children were only allowed to peep through, making the young readers feel they were right to be where they were. She removed the [sex] stigma

so the young could come into their own to admit that they were human and facing problems... [and finally] to have own a voice.

Kiguli says that Keshubi had a goal of writing a novel that sustains a dialogue: “Hope embraced her times, she seized opportunities ... [like a] political activist ... through her writings.” She wanted to “give confidence to women... [the] power that lies in the tongue, [to] bring issues that might not be debated. Writing can be used, as a springboard for debate, to identify, and Hope wanted people to identify” (Kiguli, personal interview). Keshubi’s motivation for social change was and is one of FEMRITE’s objectives.

FEMRITE still serves to unite women and to help them resist and persist against sexist pressure through providing writing workshops, literary festivals, and publication of women’s works. As FEMRITE has published many books by women since the late 1990s, Ugandan critics have actually had the opportunity to encounter more and more female writers. Although there is “sustained subtle resistance to the woman writer” (Kiguli 183), critics’ mere mention of women writers’ aims and themes indicates that critics and readers’ consciousness is shifting towards acknowledging women writers’ craft; however, the prejudice against women speaking about taboo issues is very strong and can still outweigh the central task of doing a literary evaluation.

Introduction to Keshubi’s Employment of the Epistolary Genre

In her 1997 epistolary novels *Going Solo* and *To a Young Woman*, Keshubi opens with an initiating letter labeled “prologue” to the addressee and closes with a letter of reply from the addressee (labeled “epilogue”). These opening and closing letters serve as a framework. The epilogue letter from the addressee contrasts Bâ’s and Maraire’s epistolary novels that do not have an explicit exchange of letters among characters, though Bâ’s novel includes references to the

narrator having received a letter from the addressee. Additionally, both of Keshubi's texts' prologue and epilogue letters frame a first person narration. The stories contain a large amount of dialogue. Although the novels open and close with letters, one could easily overlook that these are epistolary novels because of the lack of repeated salutations and scant use of the first and second person pronouns. Outside of the prologue and epilogue letters, neither novel has salutations for the narratee. However, in *Going Solo*, occasional second person pronouns are used throughout the story, which create an impression of the novel as being one long letter. Although *To a Young Woman* does *not* employ second person pronouns,⁶⁸ it does have further epistolary merit, as it contains several letters (17, 19, 28, 29, 30) between two characters; it also includes an anonymous letter (without a story background of the letter's author) to illustrate a concept the narrator is discussing (135).

Regarding content, in *To a Young Woman* the social goal is to protect the daughter-recipient from sexual problems through sex education, while in *Going Solo* the social aim is to avoid woman-on-woman violence through the start of reconciliation; it is a mistress's explanatory letter to the wife she inadvertently betrayed. In *To a Young Woman* it is necessary to acknowledge how the real world shaped this novel's form. The title addresses the youth, particularly young Ugandan women, while the inside dedication is directed towards Keshubi's step-daughter. As Keshubi herself was a victim of AIDS, along with her husband, it is likely she considered leaving a legacy not only to her step-daughter and son, but to all Ugandan youth as well. The implied author differs from the real author in this text according to the boldness of breaking taboos. The real author breaks all sexual taboos in her discourse; however, the implied

⁶⁸ *To a Young Woman's* frame story, (a very thin one) uses second person address; however, only once in *To a Young Woman's* story within the story is the second person address used, see page 61.

author, who exists at a level between the real author and the narrator, i.e. “the principle that invented the narrator” (Chatman 148), struggles with discussing sexual matters. Conversely, the narrator visibly struggles in discussing sexual matters and defers to her friend Rose to narrate these delicate matters. Thus, through narrative analysis it is possible to see how complicated sexual discussions are for women, even mothers.

To a Young Woman’s Educational Goals & Taboo Information

This novel educates young people about sexual maturation and reproduction through a mother writing a story to her unnamed maturing daughter.⁶⁹ The narrating mother, in the frame story, tells her daughter in the prologue that “I hope the story I have told here will help you in your growing up” (2) and the recipient of the letter, the unnamed daughter, writes to her mother in the epilogue letter “Mother, it is a great story” (145). The embedded story involves the narrator⁷⁰ *talking* to her eleven-year old daughter named Rose (12). The embedded story commences with the narrator employing storytelling in the form of recounting dialogue in which the narrator also participated; it involves adults discussing sexual issues in society around a dinner table. Vignettes about teen couples, sex education, and moral stories are also weaved together.

⁶⁹ Technically, the narrator’s daughter is not her daughter by blood, as evidenced in the prologue letter, which states “I hope that it helps to bring out my role as your mother, the mother you were cheated of at the tender age of eight. It [the story to follow] brings out what I sincerely wish for you in life, the best upbringing as befits any decent girl, for to me you are more than a daughter, the daughter I never had in life but I have in you” (2). Note that the book is dedicated by Keshubi to “my daughter Sandra [stepdaughter] and my sister Edna and all young women who like them are beginning to discover themselves” (i).

⁷⁰ It is unclear if the narrator in the prologue letter is the same narrator as in the embedded story.

In *To a Young Woman* Keshubi breaks through barriers of silence around sex.⁷¹ Discussion of sex and sexual topics are taboo in Uganda, specifically by women.⁷² Shunning, “disapproval,” and “direct confrontation” are encountered today by adolescents “entering health centres for family planning services” (Nyakato 33). In an interview with Evan Mwangi, Keshubi testifies to the silence around sexual matters. She explains that “Some are issues you cannot discuss verbally because they are sensitive.... The easily available alternative is using literary writing as the medium for what you can’t say by word of mouth.” In 2001 Makerere University investigated sex education in schools. They found that students were hesitant to discuss sex and puberty issues, largely due to a cultural aversion toward publicly discussing these topics. A prime finding of this study is that students clearly voiced a desire and need for more information on “sexual maturation” (Kasente and Musisi 11). This study found that “the past and present education establishment does not address sexual maturation concerns of children” and that “instructional materials . . . will need to be re-examined for their exclusion of relevant sexual maturation information” (14). Girls interviewed expressed frustration and anxiety at not understanding the changes that their bodies underwent and they wished someone had prepared them for these changes (18). Girls also wished to know “how the parts of their bodies function, particularly the reproductive system” (19). Mercy Nalubega attests to young college women seeking sexual instruction from modern day *sengas*,⁷³ that is *sengas* by profession instead of by family relations. Nalubega explains that her aunt has made a paying profession from giving girls

⁷¹ The topic of AIDS prevation was important to Keshubi as evident by her and her husband’s creation of *The Drama in Education Approach to the AIDS Plague—An African Perspective* (unpublished) (Keshubi, *To a Young i*).

⁷² *The Travelers’ Guide to African Customs and Manners’* section on Uganda contains a section on conversation advice, which states “To talk about sex is taboo either in a mixed group or in public. It is less prohibited among peers” (200).

⁷³ A *senga* is a paternal Aunt who educates her niece on sexual and love relationship issues, preparing her for marriage.

guidance in such matters as well as “issues related to love, romance and marriage” (25). Due to the decline of extended families living together, the traditional *senga* practice has deteriorated precisely because the physical family structure has been altered (Nalubega 26).

In Keshubi’s fictional narration, she transmits her social concerns about rape, teenage love, and infidelity, to “young women who . . . are beginning to discover themselves” (*To a Young i*). The novel rebels against Ugandan patriarchy through explicitly confronting the sex taboo and employing reader engagement techniques aimed at both male and female readers. In the narrator’s epistolary prologue, the taboo around sex is explicitly stated, which deflates the taboo. The narrator in this prologue explains to her daughter that her own mother had not discussed sex with her because “she had been brought up to think that certain things were taboo—they were never to be talked about. One of these was sex. So, we never talked about it” (1). Moreover the narrator continues:

Since sex was regarded as sacred we were never let into the secrets of its intricacies. Like the secret of the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden, this too was left to our guess work and as I grew up, I pondered a lot about it. (55)

The direct mention of sexual subject matter serves as a warning and a preparation. This is followed by an ideological explanation of sex’s validity as a subject for the letter and novel. “It is my responsibility as your mother, and the responsibility of all parents, the community and religious institutions to develop a character and conscience that give you the strength to do what is intelligent and right in regards to sex” (2). This is a pointed statement advocating a break in the silence; she urges readers to react to the taboo subject with reason rather than aversion. However, the mother from the embedded story cannot discuss reproduction and so chooses to have her friend Margaret relay this sensitive information in full detail through face to face

discussion conveyed through dialogue related by the mother narrator to her daughter Rose leading to the deduction that certain barriers still exist even in the imagination (61).

Keshubi effectively breaks the silence regarding sex in *To a Young Woman* through reader engagement, employing entertainment and gossip-like stories in order to captivate readers. She includes stories that involve such topics as teenage lovers, incest, affairs, teenage pregnancy, and fables. She integrates elements that give a factual impression, such as the creation of a fictional newspaper article, scientific language about sex, and drawings of reproductive organs. The newspaper article, which encompasses a whole page, inserts readers into the physical and visual sense into the story. Keshubi also employs oral storytelling by opening her novel in the middle of a dinner conversation that the narrator is retelling to her addressed daughter. We the readers are seated at the table, listening to the conversation.

Audience engagement is nothing new to theater for social change, which was also part of Keshubi's background.⁷⁴ Ugandan playwright Rose Mbowe, who produced plays for AIDS sensitization, knew the effectiveness of actively engaging audience members. She strategically had her actors dress in everyday clothes and had them interspersed in the audience so as to blend in with audience members. The goal was to induce audience members to feel included in the drama. Mbowe championed her theatre's type of AIDS work with targeted audience engagement "because people are attracted by the element of entertainment" (Mbowe 111). Likewise, Keshubi strategically sets her novel's opening (at the dinner table) as inclusive and intimate so that like Mbowe with her actors in everyday clothes, readers will not perceive distance with the narration in the hope that readers will see how close the issues and lessons are to them.

⁷⁴ Keshubi and her husband Cliff Lubwa P'Chong produced *The Drama in Education Approach to the AIDS Plague—An African Perspective*, noted in forematter of *To a Young Woman*.

To a Young Woman's Connection to AIDS in Uganda

AIDS was first diagnosed in Uganda in 1982 (Human Rights Watch 3); four years later, in 1986, “national response” began (Green 151), and five years later, in 1987, Uganda implemented AIDS education in all primary schools.⁷⁵ Uganda’s AIDS rate peaked in 1992 to fifteen percent of the population and declined in the 90s (Human Rights Watch). AIDS is still a significant issue for Uganda.⁷⁶ *To a Young Woman* provides a way for women to take responsibility for their own lives through being informed about sexual matters. Marie Krüger, in a section titled “The Pleasure of Disciplined Sex: Hope Keshubi’s *To A Young Woman*” (from her 2011 book *Women’s Literature in Kenya and Uganda: The Trouble with Modernity*), contends that Keshubi “defensive[ly] retreat[s] into moral discipline” (198) and that “the novel gradually translates into the fictional equivalent of an ABC program” (186). I posit that Keshubi employs numerous literary techniques, so the novel is not a simple rendition of an ABC program but rather plays multiple notes and chords to arrive at its message. I will examine the writing character’s literary techniques that aid in transmitting sexual information deftly to both male and female readers.

To a Young Woman provides a way for women specifically to take responsibility for their own lives through being informed about sexual matters. Early in the novel, AIDS information is

⁷⁵ “HIV/AIDS sensitization and preventative education have been in the primary school curriculum and syllabus since 1987 through the School Health Education Program (SHEP) of the Ministry of Education” (Green 183). SHEP had financial assistance primarily from the Swedish AID agency (SIDA), as well as Danish AID (DANDIDA) and UNICEF. SHEP focused “on delay of debut” but it also “promoted” condoms.

⁷⁶ According to UNAIDS’s 2009 estimate, there are 610,000 women (age fifteen and older) living with HIV. Specifically, “six girls in Uganda were reported infected with HIV for every boy” (qtd. in Human Rights Watch 5). While Uganda’s rate of HIV was reduced to 6% as of 2005 (Human Rights Watch 1, 6) from 30% in 1991 (Genuis & Genuis), Uganda’s 2012 rate rose to 7.3% (Kron).

scattered in discussions of sexual maturity and reproduction.⁷⁷ Later, in chapter 15, AIDS/HIV are given explicit attention. Chapter 7 and 8 are about sex, reproduction, gestation, birth control, and baby inoculation. Although this educational section relies on a dialectical strategy where the narratee, Rose, asks questions to her Auntie Margaret, the mother has a clear agenda about what the sex talk's goals should be: "Together [the narrator and Margaret] we agreed that Margaret would tell Rose everything concerning the sacredness of sex and the need to be a virgin until a girl is married. Rose was also to know the need for faithfulness and honesty in marriage" (61).⁷⁸ At this point, there is no framing of these morals as health preventatives.⁷⁹ The emphasis is on marriage and on virginity.⁸⁰ However, in chapter 15 a health connection with AIDS and female virginity is presented. Margaret informs Rose that, "Virgins are especially vulnerable and likely

⁷⁷ The sex discussion starts in chapter 7 with the general concept of reproduction, (of "male organs...come[ing] into contact with the female organs"), albeit with a religious tone where "in the beginning of creation God made man and woman and told them to produce and fill the world" (62). Then the discussion (in chapter 7) moves to women's reproductive systems, men's reproductive systems, conception, gestation, birth process and disease prevention for babies. Chapter 8's trajectory starts with methods of "family planning" (68), AIDS prevention with condoms, and physical aspects of pregnancy.

⁷⁸ Margaret operates as a Senga for the narratee since the mother is not comfortable discussing sex with her (61).

⁷⁹ For examination of moral directives' measured change in Uganda see Green, *Rethinking AIDS Prevention*. He maintains that Ugandans' fidelity increased (158, 156), age of sexual debut increased (163) and abstinence increased (150) due to Museveni's program that utilized "a great deal of face-to-face discussion and learning . . . involving . . . leaders at all levels of society" (153).

⁸⁰ See page *To a Young* 12; "What's a virgin?" is asked twice, and the mother tries to tell Rose virginity is like uncultivated land. Early emphasis on virginity can be seen as the word is used to open Ch. 7's reproduction discourse. Auntie Margaret informs Rose that she and her mother did not give her "the best explanation" about what a virgin was; she then informs her that they will talk about 'other things related to growing up'(62).

to contract AIDS if their first sex partner is HIV positive.⁸¹ This is because the girl usually bleeds when the hymen is broken during their first sexual intercourse” (131).

AIDS discussion is deftly tucked into conversations about sexual maturation, family planning, and partner selection. Although AIDS is a pressing and important topic, it is not fully presented until the end of the novel. In fact, the mother’s very last paragraph of her letter to her daughter is on the subject of traits for an optimal “marriage as a partnership” so that “there are less chances of unfaithfulness hence less chances of acquiring STDs and AIDS” (144). The end placement of this topic accentuates its importance. There is no closure or signature after this last paragraph, so these words are the mother’s last words in the letter to her daughter; they in a way serve as an embrace for the daughter, wishing her the healthiest and happiest relationship. While a closer reading reveals the prologue letter as being written after the narrator wrote the novel, hence being the mother’s true last words, the larger letter in the story’s last paragraph lingers.⁸² When the narratee asks her Auntie Margaret “How can a girl avoid getting pregnant?” (68),

⁸¹ **Youth, the Arts, HIV & AIDS Network page “Girl-Specific Guide to HIV” states:** “From a biological perspective, a girl’s immature female genital tract is more likely to tear during sexual activity which creates a higher risk of HIV transmission...According to statistics[Oxfam and UNICEF], girls are getting infected with HIV faster than their male counterparts. In sub-Saharan Africa, two young girls aged 15 to 24 are infected for every boy in the same age group. In some worst hit areas, the statistics are even more alarming, as adolescents girls aged 15 to 19 are being infected at the rate of five or six for every male of the same age.”UNICEF’s section: “Children and HIV and AIDS” says: “Women and girls are at an increased risk for HIV infection biologically. In unprotected heterosexual intercourse women are twice as likely as men to acquire HIV from an infected partner.”

http://www.unicef.org/aids/index_hivaids_girls_women.html

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention in their section: “HIV Among Women” states: **“Unprotected vaginal sex** is a much higher risk for HIV for women than for men, and **unprotected anal sex** is riskier for women than unprotected vaginal sex.”

<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/risk/gender/women/facts/index.html>

⁸² In the prologue letter AIDS is mentioned just once, as an “epidemic which is presently spreading throughout the world” (1).

Margaret replies that abstaining from sex is the surest way to avoid unplanned pregnancy; however, she notes, “in the present situation, the dander [sic] of contracting the fatal disease called AIDS is far more important” (68). Although it may seem that preventing pregnancy out of wedlock may be Margaret’s first priority, she really wishes to convey that she does not want Rose to contract AIDS.

Condom usage is the last family planning method Margaret presents. She uses it as a segway to briefly touch on AIDS. Her discussion includes condom usage as preventative for AIDS transmission. She also mentions how condoms are not wholly reliable against AIDS. After explaining the condom’s prophylactic function, she explains, “The condom can also help prevent the spread of venereal diseases including HIV/AIDS. But it is not a complete safe guard” (71). She informs Rose that “35% of the condoms leave the factory damaged. . . . And even the 65% are not a complete guarantee because some of them can burst during sex” (71).⁸³ She also poses concern over possible dangers of pre-ejaculation fluid (71) as causing AIDS.⁸⁴

It is through discussion of the condom that free love as a topic is subtly inserted. She cautions Rose that condom usage involves discipline and “self-restraint” and to “always make sure that they do not have sex without the condom *if they are not sure of their partners*” (italics

⁸³ Condom efficacy is a contemporary issue in Uganda. According to Wairagala Wakabi’s 2006 Lancet article “a recall of some brands of condoms in 2004/05 due to concerns about their quality led to a national shortage. Several batches of condoms—of which Uganda uses 5 million a month—were found to be defective as they had a foul smell, while others had tiny holes in them. But although tests showed other batches to be okay, the government said public confidence in the “Engabu” brand, the cheapest and one of the most popular on the Ugandan market, had been dented so badly that even quality-assured sheaths would have to be destroyed.”

⁸⁴ See The Human Rights Report on the Engabu condom crisis in Uganda and on the Uganda conspiracy theory about condoms. Regarding efficacy of condoms: “Latex condoms are not a complete solution to HIV/AIDS, but they provide an essentially impermeable barrier to HIV pathogens and if used consistently reduce the risk of HIV transmission by 80-90 percent” (Human Rights Report “Vii. Restrictions on Condoms” <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2005/uganda0305/7.htm> - [ftn196](#)

mine 71). At this moment, Auntie Margaret does not explain how one obtains knowledge that one's partner is "sure," nor does she elucidate what "sure" means. She does tell her soon after this that "one should have a partner who is trusted and faithful" (72). Margaret returns to this subject in chapter 10, telling Rose that "behaviour of the spouse to-be, educational level and health" are considerations. She also notes that "In African traditional society, families with chronic diseases were avoided" (82). When the mother returns to the discussion with her daughter she informs her that "love between a husband and a wife should have three main components—caring, intimacy and attachment" (139). She explains that "infatuation" does not have these elements, so the "relationship crumbles" and people thus "are likely to jump from one relationship to another . . . exposing themselves . . . to AIDS . . ." (141). Rose's mother also acknowledges and prepares Rose for the fact that even in marriage, where ideally both man and woman have both been virgins and been tested for AIDS before marriage (134), that faithfulness is important because one can "lose one's life to it [AIDS] because one of the couple is cheating" (134). She concludes chapter 15's discussion of AIDS by weaving in one of Uganda's ubiquitous AIDS prevention slogans, "love carefully and faithfully" (134).

In terms of conveying the devastating effects of AIDS, the writing narrator uses statistics and two similes. The writing narrator chronicles when AIDS was first discovered in Uganda and then presents the disturbing statistic that "AIDS cases has [sic] been doubling every six months and in December 1991, it was estimated that 30,190 people were infected with HIV virus. The true number of cases and those who have died of AIDS could be three or more times higher"

(130).⁸⁵ Indeed, in 1991 “HIV prevalence peaked” in Uganda and it was the highest in the world, at 15% (Green 151 and 148).

The first AIDS simile that the mother uses involves someone who does not physically look well. When describing the character Joanitta who has just gone through a lengthy trauma, the mother says “Joanitta looked like someone suffering from full-blown AIDS . . .” (37). This conjures up images of emaciation and body scabs. The mother’s use of AIDS to describe Joanitta’s poor physical appearance assumes that the narratee is familiar with what people with AIDS look like, thus illustrating how common the disease is. When describing how AIDS has impacted Uganda, a religious-toned simile is employed: “AIDS is like a snake in our midst, threatening our lives. Our main concern should be to kill the snake before we worry about where it came from” (130). This is evocative of how Satan in the Bible assumes the shape of a snake and enters the Garden of Eden, effectively destroying peace. Also, note how the mother uses the plural in reference to those impacted. Use of the plural implies that AIDS is the society’s collective problem; it is not an abstract idea. Furthermore, the biblical allusion to Satan connects to the idea of how one cannot visually see HIV and thus one is vulnerable to infection, just as “the devil hath power to assume a pleasing shape,” appearing nice but inside harboring evil intentions. Moreover, this snake simile evokes the government’s fear tactics used early on in their AIDS prevention. Green’s book shows a photo of a fear inducing AIDS preventive poster that has a picture of a skull and cross bones, above which is written “I wish I had said NO to AIDS” and underneath the picture is the phrase “My quick pleasure led to a slow, painful death.” In the foreground there is a small photo of a male and female couple holding hands (142). Green

⁸⁵ This might refer to Tembo, G., J. Twa-Twa, G. Asiimwe, et al., 1991, AIDS Surveillance Report: December 1991, Ministry of Health, AIDS Control Programme Surveillance Unit, Entebbe, Uganda, unpublished Report; I found this citation in: “HIV AIDS Profile Uganda” 6. pdf <http://www.census.gov/population/international/files/hiv/uganda08.pdf>

explains that “fear arousal” was an explicit tactic of the government: “there were somber radio messages accompanied by the slow beating of a drum and a stern, raspy voice of an old man talking about AIDS in the manner of announcing funerals. Posters used imagery of human skulls, coffins, and Grim Reapers harvesting humans” (178). Green interviewed Sam Okware who was “the first director of the National AIDS Control Programme;” he explains that fear was actually Uganda’s “first approach” (178). This fear is still palpable in today’s youth who yearn for explicit reproduction and AIDS preventative information instead of mere moral advocacy.

Instead of looking at inserted similes about the AIDS tragedy, a large metaphor can be applied to the novel and to the origins of Uganda’s AIDS crisis. Marie Krüger uses the opening dinner scene to view the novel as a “culinary metaphor” for sex in terms of market forces (i.e. “greed”⁸⁶ and “consumption”); however, she finds this to be a restrictive “vision of social change” (182) with simple demarcation of men’s voracious sexual appetites that necessitate violence versus women who need sexual empowerment. To her, the novel has significance in how it uses disease and hygiene to map borders of behavior like colonialism did; she also sees the novel’s advocacy of “reasonable appetite” (sexual consumption) as a policing mechanism (191). The text to her emphasizes “moral and medical hygiene” that mirrors the “production of modern sexuality” (192). She finds that the novel “links [sexual] emancipation to the performance of a desirable [sexual] normativity... [and that] *conviviality*... asserts itself when the patriarchal ideology that sanctions *masculinity as excessive consumption* is replaced by the *normativity of moderate consumption*” (190 italics mine). In her opinion, the novel “obscures

⁸⁶ Lillian Tindyebwa in her 2000 book *Recipe for Disaster* focuses on the dangers of materialism in connection with sex with men for young women, a theme which Keshubi alludes to in her preface letter, mentioning “greed”. Tindyebwa’s protagonist eventually dies of AIDS after choosing riches over her family and continued schooling.

the ambiguous cultural context of power and politics in which human sexuality is articulated” (182). Despite noting the novel’s overarching cuisine metaphor, she seems to find the novel to be too didactic as it aims to “demonstrate...standards of acceptable behavior” (189). In response, while I concede the novel tends towards being didactic, with moral overtures, I examine the text’s gendered literary benefits and approaches and see it as an instrument in the war on AIDS⁸⁷.

Techniques of Answering a Cry for Information

Though HIV/AIDS sensitization and preventative education have been in the primary school curriculum and syllabus since 1987 through the School Health Education Program (SHEP) of the Ministry of Education (Green 183), the findings of a 2000-2001 study in Uganda by Makerere Institute of Social Research attest to young people’s needs for information on maturation, AIDS prevention, and reproduction, something which Keshubi perceived a decade prior. This study discovered that sexual maturation and AIDS prevention information were not adequately provided in schools. Additionally the study found a need (on the part of the teachers and parents) for educating students on moral codes in relation to sexual conduct. Ugandan School children vocalized an overwhelming desire for more information on sexual development and on how to control sexual urges. Many female students in particular lamented not knowing about menstruation; they expressed a desire to have known about anticipated changes in their bodies before they had occurred, which would have allayed fears and anxiety (Kasente and Musisi 18-19). This study found that girls preferred sexual information from intimate sources,

⁸⁷ The 2002 book *Sunshine After Rain* is also a work of fiction that tries to bring awareness to the AIDS epidemic and provide advice for young people. It is written by Rose Rwakasisi. Also see Doreen Baingana’s story “A Thank-You Note” from her collection *Tropical Fish* that is a letter of a woman suffering from AIDS to her former lover.

such as relatives (“personalized sources of information”), while boys preferred “more public sources of information” (Kasente and Musisi 28). Though leaning more towards a female audience, Keshubi’s novel incorporates both female and male wishes for a preferred way of information dissemination. Krüger comments that the novel’s prominent position[ing of] writing and reading [through literary techniques]...anticipate[s] the formation of an ideal speech community that extends beyond the family while adopting its role of mentor and guardian” (191). This speech community can also serve as a role model, thus influencing what social cognitive theory calls self-efficacy, “the belief that one can influence things that happen in everyday life...emphasi[zing] confidence—believing one can master difficult tasks...” (Perloff 35). As relates to HIV prevention, Communications Professor Richard Perloff in *Perusading People to Have Safer Sex* says that the more confident people feel about broaching the topic of safe sex will “translate safer sex intentions into behavior” (35).

In terms of incorporating female preferences, Keshubi employs the epistolary genre to create an intimate personal sphere. She uses a mother as a narrator writing to her daughter to accentuate close bonds. Her choice of narrator seems to be well made, as attested by the fact that schoolgirls believed that “sexual maturation is a sensitive issue” which “should not be handled by just anyone and, being girls, they are believed to be closer to their parents, especially their mothers” (Kasente and Musisi 28). Though the point must be made that the novel is a sort of public forum, intimacy and privacy still exist between the reader and the novel since reading is a private act. Also in line with implementing female preferences for conveying sexual information are the fictional personal stories Keshubi inserts, which coincidentally categorically fulfill girls’ need for “personalized sources of information” (Kasente and Musisi 28). Personalizing can be interpreted as humanizing or providing a real-life context for a situation. Keshubi personalizes

sexual attraction through teenage characters. One of the main love stories conveyed through the large letter is that of Joanitta and Jackson, teenage lovers who are tragically separated for several years as a result of Joanitta's father's rage at her unexpected pregnancy.⁸⁸ In the narration of Joanitta and Jackson's story there are several letters from each incorporated into the text, which seem to add a thrilling dimension where readers actively sense Joanitta's "trembling hands and a pounding heart" (17). Jackson's desire is strongly evoked as well. "Every night I try to sleep, you invade the solitude of my bed, making it impossible for me to sleep" he writes to Joanitta (17). Reading these love letters can serve as a simulation experience for young people and give them an opportunity to consider how they might respond. One cannot help but feel that one is in the middle of the action transpiring.

Keshubi also incorporates more "public sources of information," such as a newspaper article and scientific text, which would perhaps appeal more to boys according to the Makerere study. Incorporation of these types of information show the writing narrator to also be a reader and an engaged citizen. The newspaper vignette visually looks like a newspaper article, set in smaller type and with a bolded title: "**A man of 40 defiles a 12-year-old girl**" (6, author's emphasis). Keshubi inserts this fictitious newspaper article to heighten readers' attention to one of the dangerous results of silence around sexual matters. Keshubi might have wanted to emphasize a national problem and thus used the newspaper framework. Indeed, before the newspaper article the characters discuss instances of rape and consider "what was really happening to our society" (6). The fictitious newspaper insertion pushes on the public sphere

⁸⁸ Also thematically linked to Keshubi's *To a Young Woman*, regarding teenage pregnancy, is Goretti Kyomuhendo's novel *The First Daughter*, published in 1996, the year prior to Keshubi's novel. It deals with a girl becoming pregnant before her exams. However in the end she overcomes her obstacles.

(versus the private domestic sphere), as if to say that this is public knowledge, a public problem, and not just local gossip. So the newspaper framework, with its official impression, brings sexual problems and issues to the national level.

Keshubi strategically bridges the gap between distant news stories, which “We had always thought ...were fictitious stories put into the papers to spice them and, therefore, help boost paper sales,” with stories from the narrator’s own neighborhood (7). Thus, she tries to show how sexual problems are not located away from one, but close to home as well.

Additionally, on the side of boys’ preferred information style is the minimal inclusion (one page) of scientific information and scientific language on female and male maturation and procreation. Like the newspaper’s visually authentic artifact appeal, Keshubi slightly replicates a textbook-feeling on the discussion of reproduction and maturation through inserting two pictures of the male and female reproductive systems (62). Scientific language for sexual organs and the process of sex is used. However, Keshubi caters to the female reader through inserting a female narratee and use of a dialogic structure between the narratee Rose and an Auntie who takes on the role of *Senga*,⁸⁹ a paternal aunt who discusses maturation, sex, and marriage with her nieces (62-64, 68-69, 71-75, 77-80). She also embraces traditional oral storytelling through what Krüger calls “ogre tales” that include in this novel “sexual violence, horrifying scenes of child and marital rape, ...perpetrators who change from trusted friend or loving father into the archetypal beast, stripped of all humanity and insensitive even to the cries of their victims” (189).

⁸⁹ Marcy Nalubega in “Senga and today’s youth” from *New Era* Dec. 2000 writes: “It was the responsibility of sengas to unravel the mysteries of life to the young girls, teach them the proper way to conduct themselves and when they reached puberty, prepare them for the role they were purportedly created for; namely to become good wives and good mothers. In fact[,] in the Ganda culture, a female child was taken from her parents and grew up in the aunt’s home and it was up to the aunt to find her a husband” (25).

Women's Designated Space in Fiction

There are four main ways that Keshubi considers the patriarchal oppression of women: wife battery, paternal abuse, subjugating traditions, and discriminatory inheritance practices. Examining her novels' domestic violence and subjugating practices elucidates contemporary male critics' slander towards women as an attempt to maintain the status quo of women's designated space and subject matter. In fact, the mere fact of being a man gives some men a sense of entitlement to abuse. Ugandan Mary Karooro Okorut's 1998 novel *The Invisible Weevil* has a male character (Genesis' father) that exactly espouses this point,⁹⁰ stating, "I am a man with two testicles and my word is law" (150). Abuse of women in Uganda is a significant issue. In 2000, in two districts surveyed, "41% of women reported being beaten or physically harmed by a partner; 41% of men reported beating their partner;" (UNICEF 6). In 2008, "Some 92 percent of 6,000 people surveyed by the Uganda Law Reform Commission reported some form of domestic violence was taking place in their communities" (IRIN). This same report found that "physical and child abuse...accounted for 36 percent of the respondents" (IRIN).

Though wife battery is not a central point in either of Keshubi's novels, Keshubi shows two distinct types of men committing it, one a sensitive heartbroken man and the other a deceptive man. Interspersed throughout *To a Young Woman* is the tragic vignette of Jackson and Joanitta. Jackson and Joanitta are teenage lovers at separate boarding schools. When Joanitta's family finds out that she is pregnant, they send her away, and she is not able to inform Jackson.

⁹⁰ He gets livid that his wife sides with his son. He tells his wife to leave the house, tells her she'll leave with nothing" (150). "I am a man with two testicles and my word is law. Rwenzigye and his mother must leave my house now if you people don't want to see blood.' Everybody knew that when the old man mentioned his two testicles, then the matter was indeed serious. 'A woman to question my authority! I will not hear of it. A woman listens to her husband and goes wherever he goes. But this one wants to take a different direction from me. Just remember, when you change from the food you eat in old age, you lose your teeth. Get out'" (150).

Jackson, a man unwillingly and unknowingly separated from his teenage love, Joanitta and married to Adela, a wife of his parents' choosing, beats Adela apparently out of great heartbreak; he cannot even bear to consummate his union with her. Before the fateful separation from Joanitta, Jackson is portrayed as a tender and loving man for whom "having sex with you [Joanitta] was not part of the adventurous nature that characterizes most boys" (35). He even composes love letters to Joanitta and in one asks her to marry him. Keshubi uses Jackson's psychological and emotional torment at separation from Joanitta as an attempt to provide insight into Jackson's violence. Jackson becomes violent in school soon after the separation.

He had become more and more withdrawn and in class more and more passive. One day, without any apparent reason, he stormed at a teacher who had asked him why he looked depressed. He beat him so badly that people thought the teacher could never recover the use of his legs. (31)

Jackson's parents do not deal with his public violence, and his public violence escalates into domestic violence. While Jackson is "living in limbo," [unaware of Joanitta's location] he continues to physically act out his frustrations (36). He "would look for the slightest excuse to batter Adela [his wife].... One night Jackson hit her straight in the eye nearly sending it out....he would sometimes give her a sound beating, depending on his mood" (34-35). Although Jackson's sensitive and caring side has been shown through his love towards Joanitta, his violence is still horrific. His rage comes from his anger at having to obey his parents' wishes to marry instead of following his individual desires.⁹¹ Keshubi has made his violence understandable but not pardonable; however, she does not show Jackson or his family to be

⁹¹ Much thanks to Carrie Walker for her insight on this point.

sympathetic or caring towards the victim, Adela.⁹² Moreover, Keshubi sacrifices Adela for the story of Jackson and Joanitta. There is scant character development of Adela; she is a disposable character. Jackson shows a complete lack of respect for his wife Adela by deciding to get rid of her. He “announced his intention to send away Adela and go looking for the love of his life” after he receives Joanitta’s letter five years later (36). Jackson’s parents “did not know how to break it to Adela” (36). The narrator provides insight into Adela’s reflections on the separation:

Adela on her part knew Jackson enough not to insist on staying here anymore. The suffering... taught her that life with Jackson lacked the basics of a family—love. There was no caring for each other, no intimacy and absolutely no attachment. To cling to such a meaningless marriage was to be a constant pain in one’s neck. (36)

Adela sees a lack of love and tender feelings in her marriage; however, she does not consciously think that abuse is a reason for leaving a marriage.⁹³ She ignores respect as criteria for happiness, as does Jackson. Might it be possible that there are some cultural norms impacting her vision? Keshubi does not provide such insight. However, presently “In Gulu district, there is a belief that to be a ‘true married wife’ a woman should have lost a tooth as a result of being battered by her husband” (IRIN).

Jackson does not address his responsibility in Adela’s suffering, nor does he address his abusive behavior; this is a flaw with Keshubi’s social transformation agenda because ultimately maintaining and changing one’s own anger is a central way to peace. She does not address this aspect at all. Jackson does not reflect on his anger; he only focuses on his yearning for Joanitta. He does not wish to improve himself as a person. So while Keshubi speaks to controlling one’s

⁹² There is also the point that Adela is shamed by society “for an unconsummated marriage” (Krüger 188).

⁹³ Krüger sees that the text denies Adela’s “rights and dignity” as a legally wedded wife (189).

sexual urges, she does not address controlling other feelings, specifically destructive emotions such as anger.

Contrarily, in *Going Solo* Keshubi does not show the abused wife as disposable but directs our empathy towards her. Towards the end of the novel, Bernard, a cheating husband, beats his wife Janet who discovers him *in flagrante*. Bernard's infidelity and abuse both come as a surprise to readers because the whole novel has been about the narrator Doreen's life struggles, one of which is the death of her husband, and her path to happiness—establishing a career, standing up to corrupt employers, and finally finding love again. Another surprise, which comes at the end of the novel, is the realization that the narrator Doreen is writing to the wife whose husband she unknowingly had an affair with. Keshubi's treatment of Bernard lacks the same depth of psychological and emotional insight given to Jackson's abusiveness; instead, she uses strong images to make an emotional connection with readers. For example, she describes Bernard as “cursing and heaving like a boiling pot of beans” while he beat his wife (67). This is a visceral description calling up getting burned by hot beans popping. His beating technique is compared to that of “soldiers [who] beat people at the road blocks” (67). In addition to beating, Bernard “tied you [Janet, his wife] with your kandoi and threw you in the store” (67). He also verbally threatens Janet “that you should not come anywhere near my house unless you are looking for death” (67). Doreen, the narrator and the mistress “saw a different Bernard in the man I could never have thought was capable of hurting even a fly” (67). In contrast to Jackson's abuse, which is mentioned factually without similes, in *Going Solo* the abuse is also portrayed through images, creating an alienating effect towards Bernard. With Jackson in depth details are given on his emotional suffering from his separation from Joanitta, skewing empathy towards him instead of hate. In contrast, Bernard's emotional suffering is a synopsis of what he told to

Doreen and Doreen in turn is summarizing to his wife Janet. We learn from Doreen that being a soldier made Bernard “bitter with life” and suicidal till he met Janet who “breathed life into his ebbing body”; however, he realized they “were not cut out for each other....[he] decided to go to a teachers’ college and organize his life hoping.... [Janet] would forget all about him and get another man to marry you [her]” (68). Doreen probed Bernard about why he had had two other children with his wife after he realized he did not love his wife. Doreen says Bernard said he did this out of pity and fear of his wife (68). Bernard’s unclear thinking is presented as an explanation for his violence. Doreen tells Janet that “I could not understand his line of thinking anymore” (68). Due to scant details of his soldier experience, of his love affair with Doreen, or of his relationship with Janet, the violent images stand out, thus loudly defining his character as an abusive man.

In addition to spousal abuse, Keshubi shows paternal abuse as destructive. In the vignette of Jackson and Joanitta from *To a Young Woman*, there is paternal abuse on the part of Joanitta’s father. Joanitta’s father is described as having “a fiery temper” (22). Upon finding out that Joanitta is pregnant he “grabbed her and threw her onto the ground, face upwards. He then placed the sharp end of his spear shaft on her belly” and threatened to rip her open if she did not name her baby’s father (24). Joanitta felt “that all the vengeful spirits of his forefathers had possessed ” her father at this moment (28). It is exactly the father’s abuse that leads to further suffering on the part of Joanitta and Jackson. Had Joanitta’s father been empathetic or even civil, perhaps Joanitta and Jackson would have had an opportunity to see each other again, even to wed as teenagers. Joanitta was terrified to state Jackson’s name, fearing her father would kill him. According to Lynda Gichanda Spencer this “phallic spear” and the father symbolize “all patriarchal hardships that women constantly have to endure” (97). The father’s killing rage at his

daughter's loss of her virginity corresponds to how the Bakiga (Keshubi's ethnicity) used to kill women who lost their virginity. According to Keshubi, in her article "The Ways of the Bakiga of South Western Uganda":

Premarital sex was a taboo. It was...unheard of for a girl to become pregnant before marriage. That was why it was important for a girl to get married when she was a virgin. If she got pregnant before marriage, she would in the majority of cases, be immediately killed—thrown down a cliff or into a deep hole—as a punishment and a lesson to other young girls. (19)

While I was touring Lake Bunyonyi (in Kabale District), the local guide informed me that an island in the lake had been used to exile women who had lost their virginity outside of marriage. These women could be married by men from other ethnicities, and they were seen as "bargain brides" since they did not demand bride price. Keshubi points out that families could choose to help their daughter (who lost her virginity) marry, provided that the couple was of different "clans" ("The ways" 19).

In both *Going Solo* and *To a Young Woman* Keshubi's narrators reflect on the same oppressive marriage ritual ("give-away ceremony") that signals that the new wife is sexually accessible to her brother-in-laws and father-in-law (*To a Young*, 87, *Going*, 15). Keshubi mentions these traditions in an attempt to allude to men's view of women as inferior.

During the give-away ceremony, the girl was expected to urinate on a stool and all her in-laws, the father-in-law inclusive, were to sit on this stool in turns thus dipping there [*sic*] manhood in the urine. This would symbolise her commitment to oblige all of them, in

health or in sickness, day or night save those days in the month when God's curse on Eve and all womankind is in effect. (*To a Young Woman* 87)⁹⁴

The word “oblige” connotes a lack of ability to decline. Women's lack of consent to sex is still a pressing issue today in Uganda and one not limited to a specific region of the country. An attorney in Kabale stated that Women in the Karamoja region, are seen as “to be ruled” and “not a partner in marriage” (IRIN). Moreover, “the father-in-law had the birth right to break [a] young wife's virginity on the wedding night, as his forefathers before him had done” (87). Additionally, access to each other's wives was expected, symbolizing solidarity and family bonds (87). In *To a Young Woman* this ritual is mentioned in order to inform the young Ugandan reader and narratee about one of the ethnic groups in Uganda. In this novel several different ethnic group's courting and marriage preparation rituals are mentioned, which points out Uganda's diversity and complexity. In *Going Solo* the give-away ceremony is mentioned in order to gain the narratee's [Janet] empathy and understanding. Doreen writes of this example in order to explain the misogynistic mentality of her brothers-in law, which factors in their ill treatment of her. Doreen utilizes the phrase “these people” to reference her in-laws to Janet; this phrase functions as an exclusionary tactic, perhaps one that designates them as traditional and herself therefore as modern. The traditional ceremony is associated with the phrase “these people” linked with a horror of it (14). Doreen further expounds on her perception of her in-laws' mentality through clearly stating to Janet how her husbands' brothers

expected to have a free ticket to enter and exit as and when they felt like it...[However,]

They were not to enjoy the luxury of visiting us and expecting James [her husband] to

⁹⁴ Hilda Twongierwe of FEMRITE informed me that “Those were very old practices in western Uganda tribes. Banyarwanda, Banyankole Bakiga.”

leave his bed, and obviously his wife, for them to enjoy her in comfort while he stretched himself on the sofa or in the visitor's bed pleased with his act of brotherly solidarity (15). Doreen's husband and marriage sharply contrast this cultural expectation. She speaks up to her parents who refuse to let her marry, reflecting that she "did something ...unprecedented in my [her] culture" (5). Also, her parents do not require her fiancé to pay bride price (6).

In addition to this marriage tradition, which subjugates women, Keshubi also mentions in *Going Solo* an anti-women inheritance practice. Eight months after Doreen's husband dies, her brothers-in law come to acquire their property: Doreen's baby, house, and possessions. Doreen retained "only one suitcase of rags" (31). Keshubi's fiction is evocative of a reality where "To be a widow in Uganda is to be an outcast" (Bennett 2). Women lose everything. Moreover, Keshubi's character Doreen enlightens us that both "widow and widower" are perceived "among my people" as "taboo, cursed, unclean," with "a bad thigh" so that "people always look at you [widows and widowers] with suspicion and fear" (*Going Solo* 31). There is an accusatory position taken towards the surviving spouse; however widows certainly fare worse than widowers. According to Ugandan law, legally married women are entitled to receive fifteen percent of their deceased husband's estate and a deceased man's children receive seventy-five percent⁹⁵. However, "no regulatory mechanisms exist to see that the law is followed or that the widow's rights are protected" (Bennett 13). Moreover, there is no law allocating the children to the mother; rather "the Succession Act provides that, on the death of a father of a child, the deceased father's father, mother, brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles all enjoy a right to obtain custody of a child ahead of the child's own mother" (Bennett 11). Although Buganda women in

⁹⁵ Also in Mariama Ba's epistolary novel *Une si longue lettre* the narrator Ramatoulaye suffers from property division. However, her savvy elder daughter and Son-in-Law successfully fight for her acquisition of property.

Uganda do inherit property as Kefa M. Otiso explains, (83), customary law (patrilineal) is commonly used instead of law (Bennett 4). Often tribe or religious leaders do not know what Ugandan law is, so it is not even considered. “The law also terminates a widow's right to occupy the home if she remarries or is suspected of having a relationship” (Bennett 9). With this background knowledge it is evident that Doreen’s brothers-in law call her “prostitute” in order to justify their acquisitions (29, 31). Doreen has lost assets, which she worked for during her marriage.⁹⁶ This phenomenon too is ubiquitous (Bennett 10, Kafumbe 103). Doreen perceives her in-laws as murdering “thugs” with “seething hatred” who she has “ceased seeing...as humans” and as a result she was “drained of the energy to put up a fight” (30). Keshubi strikes back at this patriarchal tradition through the term “thug,” writing to Janet “there was no difference between them and the thugs who had robbed me [killed] of my husband” (30). This is a strong slap, merited by the in-laws’ disrespectful behavior of suddenly appearing and ripping everything out of the house, including her daughter.

Both Uganda’s customary law and statutory law regarding women’s issues mirror male critics’ verbal abuse. Customary law is not focused on written rules, rather on “common sense, local norms, and social ties” (Khadiagala 64). Keshubi’s inclusion of the give away ceremony reflects one sort of negative tradition that according to the narrator informs her in-law’s dismissive attitude towards her regarding inheritance. This dismissive attitude can be seen in real-life legal interactions with women. Interviews regarding customary law in the Kabale district in Uganda attest to the prominence of bribery and personal connections. Women surveyed about Local Councils (LCs) voiced experience of extortion and cronyism. They found

⁹⁶ Doreen recounts how both she and her husband “together” worked hard “to build a permanent house, and buy two cars,” so naturally she was indignant at the idea of her in-laws saying “this was their property” (30).

that the local beer drinking communities had ties to the local courts and administration. They experienced that if one could not pay bribes or pay for beer, then one's case did not even get heard (66-68). Moreover, "LCs deny the justiciability of women's claims and send them away with admonishments to behave 'like women'" (Khadiagala 71). This indifferent and unprofessional behavior is evocative of literary critics' slander that was designed to keep women in a constrained space that was favorable to men. Moreover, along these same lines, LCs frequently construe "women's grievances as a function of individual behaviour rather than a violation of legal rights, [and thus] trivialize conflicts" (Khadiagala 71).

Statutory law presents some better protections for women, stating that widows' receive fifteen percent of their husband's inheritance;⁹⁷ however, many widows do not fight for this legal entitlement because of financial and cultural barriers. "The formal institutions regulating succession to property in Uganda are fraught with cumbersome procedures thereby making it difficult for widows to utilize the law to their advantage" (Khadiagala 112). "The administrative office (The Administrator General's Office) which oversees estates is located in Kampala, meaning everyone is to travel there. Obviously this deters many widows from accessing their legal entitlements" (Kafume 104). Paperwork must be filed, starting with the papers of the deceased, and these are prohibitively expensive due to extortion. Women in Kabale between 1995 and 1996 recounted paying two to three times the fees mandated (Khadiagala 66).

⁹⁷ Despite the 1995 Constitution's Chapter Four, article 21 (1) that specifically addresses women's "legal equality and protection in political, economic, social and cultural spheres" there has been "little effect on the courts in the absence of statutory reforms." Even the Land Act, which was supposed to give women Joint marital property rights" was revoked by President Museveni in 1998" (Khadiagala 62). Also, "It is not uncommon for some of these state institutions to prejudice widows by acting *ultra vires* when exceeding their jurisdictions" (Kafume 104).

Cultural barriers exist in a woman's family as well as in her community and legal system. First, a domestic dispute concerning inheritance is viewed as pertaining to the private sphere which should be handled privately, in the family. Male relatives' decisions are largely respected and adhered to so as to maintain family ties. Because formal cases are "Modeled on English values, they are [perceived as] adversarial and therefore alienating to many people accustomed to non-confrontational dispute resolution mechanisms" (Kafumbe 103). A view of women as inferior is another reason why cultural barriers exist. Justice Kikonyogo said that one of the obstacles towards including women in Uganda's government is that

women in Uganda historically have been valued exclusively because of the men in their lives. In other words, women were-and continue to be valued as property of men. In the past, women only had status because of the men in their lives...they weren't an important person in their own right. (Criminalising, 2)

The fact that sexism is still an issue in the higher levels of government asks us to consider the difficulties with sexism at the other ends of the legal spectrum. From OkumuWengi's field research in Kabale we learn that she found blatant sexist mentalities where "there is a persistent reluctance among men to associate women with the notion of individual rights" (Khadiagala 71). One secondary school teacher shouted "you just wait until the next presidential election. We are going to throw Museveni out and put these women back in their places" (Khadiagala 71). It seems men wish for women to remain in subjugated roles, as illustrated by some men who say "The government should have seminars for women on how to behave toward their husbands" (Khadiagala 71). When women do not follow traditional roles they have trouble succeeding professionally because they are not respected. Mary Karooro Okurut is a case in point. She campaigned in 1994 for a "a seat in Uganda's Constituent Assembly...the body elected to debate

and complete the Draft Constitution” (Tripp et al 28). A prime reason she lost was because she “had not experienced motherhood,” causing people to question “her capacity to lead and be empathetic” (Tripp et al 28). On the one hand, the domestic sphere is associated with credibility for women. However, on the other hand, the domestic sphere is where many Ugandan men wish for Ugandan women to remain.

Conclusion

While the Constitution of Uganda from 1995 explicitly states “laws, cultures, custom, or traditions which are against the dignity, welfare or interest of women...are prohibited” (qtd. in Fida 29), Uganda retrograded in 1998 when it failed to ratify the 1998 Land Act and the Domestic Relations Bill, both of which would have assured women explicit gender equity. This is not a favorable situation for women. Fiction is one way to move past the aspects of traditional thought that limit women, showing an alternative reality and alternative choices. Keshubi shows that women can triumph in spite of discrimination and taboos. Doreen succeeds, attending school and becoming self-supporting. Keshubi also shows that women can physically overpower men, where Doreen’s Auntie Flavia heaves “her strongest brother-in-law” sent to accost her and “threw him in the big beer pot” (25). Women too can be capable of murder, as Janet tries to stab her husband *in flagrante* (66). Keshubi also shows both men and women how they can overcome negative emotions, thus becoming more civil and peaceful members of society.

Keshubi’s novels *Going Solo* and *To a Young Woman* both model humane interactions. Through her model we can see a new social vision of emotional transformation through dialogue. *Going Solo* demonstrates humane exchanges, specifically in tense social situations, such as those between mistress and wife. She provides a model of letters as fruitful reconciliation for betrayals

of the heart. Keshubi also shows, through modeling Doreen's success, that it is possible for widows subjected by traditional customary law to triumph through their determination. So although "it is only prudent that an accessible but speedy court system be established to enable widows litigate with their in-laws easily," Keshubi's advocacy is for humane interactions on a personal level, emphasized by her portrayal of reconciliation between mistress and wife (Kafumbe 103). In the prologue letter it is clear that Janet does not like Doreen, as Doreen writes to Janet, "Knowing what you [Janet] feel towards me, though, makes it extremely difficult for me to try and share my feelings with you" (1). Yet, Doreen bravely opens up to Janet, hoping for Janet's emotional transformation. She tells Janet, "I hope that after reading the story of my life, you will be able to see me in a different light" (1). Indeed this desired transformation happens when Janet at the end of the novel replies, "My feelings gradually changed from those of hatred to admiration" (70). Moreover, it is evident that Doreen's letter will lead to a dialogue between these women, as Janet specifically requests Doreen to "come and see me when you come back....[because] I am sure we shall have more to share then" (70). Furthermore, the empathetic reception of Janet is clear as Janet actually apologizes for her own prior violent behavior. When she came at her husband with a knife and entered "on us [Doreen and Janet's husband] like angry bees descending on the honey collectors, and shattered the morning clam like thunder" (66). It must be noted that Keshubi does not make Janet's violence successful; Janet does not kill or physically injury either Doreen or Bernard. What is palpable, though, is Janet's rage. Doreen's simile of stinging bees elicits fear in readers, from the point of view of Doreen, and it elicits fury in readers, from the point of view of Janet. This simile shows that Doreen is capable of perceiving Janet's anger. Moreover, Doreen's use of this simile serves to highlight the pain that both women encountered. Janet asks Doreen to "Please forgive me for all the pains I may have

caused you” thus proving that reconciliation is possible (70). Although Janet is asking for forgiveness, she is foremost trying to apologize, to ameliorate a wound that she caused. This is important because by apologizing one realizes one’s own responsibility. In contrast, Jackson in *To a Young Woman* never apologizes to his wife who he battered. He does not accept responsibility for his violence. Likewise, Bernard too is guilty of eschewing his role in Janet’s and Doreen’s suffering.

To a Young Woman models humane interactions through women characters directly providing sex education, AIDS prevention, and a moral compass for a girl addressee. The mother’s advocacy of chaste and faithful behavior is in order to prevent physical and emotional suffering. Above all she believes that it is imperative to use one’s intellect to navigate the perilous waters of sexual desire and diseases. In *To a Young Woman* the mother narrator explains

Today, it is generally believed that people must do or avoid doing something based on reasoning and not on taboos, fear, threats or emotions. When people use the powers to reason properly the sexual desires and urges will not drive them to behave irresponsibly.

The powers to reason help one to formulate personal principles. (42)

In *Une si longue lettre* the writing narrator Ramatoulaye, who is also a mother, also champions reason as a panacea for marital and romantic relationships; she in turn sees the family as the building block of the nation. Perhaps Keshubi is distilling the building block of nations into critical and logical thinking, a skill transferable to all dimensions of social interaction. Marie Krüger likewise comments that *To a Young Woman* “reclaims individual health as a *public resource* essential to the country’s survival” (italics mine 179), and she argues that the novel advocates a “marriage of romance and reason” (188). Personal empowerment can result when individuals are prepared with sexual knowledge and informed about some ethnicities’ sexist

traditions. Breaking the taboo around discussing sex has the potential to save lives, which is a goal of *To a Young Woman*.

Keshubi's rebellious legacy is one of a contribution to social transformation. Hope Keshubi had courage and determination to publish her work involving sex education, unjust inheritance traditions, and an illicit affair when such topics coming from a woman's mouth or pen are today still taboo. Ultimately Keshubi asks readers to consider how they might educate the future of Uganda regarding sex education. Will readers write letters to their children, pass on the novel, or request help from friends? I ask what author will pick up the pen to further challenge unjust inheritance laws or to champion safe behavior regarding sex and AIDS prevention? Keshubi's female writing characters are positive role models not only for social change but also for the power of the pen too.

Chapter Four

Intimacy and Survival in Imagined Friends in Sade Adeniran's *Imagine This*

While in chapter three unjust inheritance laws and traditions concerning women were connected to real readers, as were sex education and AIDS prevention, this chapter combines narrator and narratee issues to concrete real life issues raised in conjunction with technique analysis. It also builds upon chapter two's examination of writerly traits. Here we will examine the ways in which some narrative elements are purely fictional and some real, thus combining the issues of chapters two and three.

Imagine This addresses redemption from abuse through imagination and creative writing; the story is told from the point of view of the abused child and teenager. This chapter deals with the emotions of grief and homesickness, while the writing character's use of metaphors and similes are examined as writing techniques indicative of a budding professional writer. How the narrator uses second person address is the primary narration element that is explored here.

Imagine This won the 2008 Commonwealth Prize for Best First Book. This award was particularly impressive since Adeniran self-published her novel. It has since been printed by Cassava Press in Nigeria and is available as an E-book. Self-publishing was a courageous act on her part since there is great stigma attached to self-publication. In fact, initially many bookstores did not want to carry her book because it was self-published. Adeniran had thought she might have better luck with publishers if she could hand them a printed book to read rather than a manuscript and thus was inspired to self publish her novel while at a writers workshop in Spain, where she read an article on self-publishing (Pack). She was determined to see her book in print, setting up a website to increase awareness about her novel. Jasper Rees of *The Sunday Times* noted that Adeniran's active promotion included blogging and public speaking to library book

clubs. Soon her book sales increased due to “word of mouth” and the book won the Commonwealth Prize (Scott *Imagining the Possibilities*). As noted in chapter one, the novel was widely reviewed and praised for its emotional engagement.

Author Background

Sade Adeniran was born in Britain. At around age nine her father moved the family to Nigeria where she grew up (Pack 2). She spent time in the village of Idogun in Ondo State in Nigeria where she lived with her grandmother (Adebisi). Adeniran remembers Idogun as “a village with no electricity, running water or the basic necessities I was used to” (Pack 2).

Adeniran holds degrees in Media and English from the University of Plymouth in the U.K. As an exchange student in the U.S., she also studied at the University of Massachusetts. After college graduation she was a consultant for a telecom company but quit to devote herself to writing her novel (Scott, “*Imagining the possibilities*”). Quitting this job was a pivotal moment for her. She recounts how she lost part of her very being working in business. “It was the sort of work where you never see the benefit of what you do” (Scott, “*Imagining the possibilities*”). Presently, she works in the business world on and off to just maintain herself so she can dedicate herself to writing (Adebisi).

Adeniran’s Origins of Writing

Adeniran’s writing passion began in her childhood, although she says that she never dreamed of becoming a writer and calls herself “an accidental writer” (Adebisi). In fact, writing letters was an important medium of communication between her and her father, even when they lived together:

We had this relationship where most of our communication was done through letters.

When I still lived at home and we had a disagreement I'd send him a letter, [sic] I'd stick it on his bedroom door where he couldn't miss it. It was the only way I could get him to listen to my point of view. He always calmed down after reading one of my missives. I guess that's when I realized the power of the written word. (Pack 2)

Her present love of writing is not limited to fiction or private correspondence. In all cases her mission in writing is to effect change: "I want to move people and change the world – Starting with the person who confronts me each time I look in the mirror" (Adeniran, Sade's-World).

Adeniran's web presence is further proof of her volition to impact people widely. She maintains a website on her work, part of which is a blog. She also has a Tweeter writer account.

Before publishing *Imagine This*, Adeniran experienced professional writing success in theater. Her plays and scripts were staged at "West End's Lyric and other London theaters" (Scott). Also, while in her last year at university, the BBC Radio 4's First bite Festival chose her radio play *Memories of a Distant Past* (Scott "Imagining the Possibilities").

Future and Current Projects

As of February, 2013 Adeniran is working on a film of *Imagine This*. She is also working on the sequel, tentatively titled *Imagine That*. Additionally, she has three stories available on her website. Her 2009 story "E Go Betta Oh" was commissioned by the BBC; it appeared May 29, 2009 on the BBC News Nigeria website page. It is a story about a British Nigerian son who returns home to Nigeria after an absence of ten years (living in the U.K.) for

his mother's funeral. The story ends on a passive note, as the son closes his eyes "to the impoverishment . . . and prayed the ubiquitous Nigerian prayer. 'One day, e go betta oh'" (4).⁹⁸

Adeniran also has started a novel "provisionally titled 'Kidnapped'" (titled on her website as "BTH") dealing with a child kidnapped by a woman (Scott "Imagining the Possibilities"). The child kidnapped has a fashion designer for a mother. Adeniran has been researching the fashion industry and its working conditions for this novel (Scott "Imagining").

In October 2013 her movie *More Cake*, from the script titled *Martha Mauden & Co* was a Raindance official selection. Only in February 2013, she was crowdfunding for her fourteen-page script *Martha Mauden & Co.*, which concerns a young boy experiencing psychosis. This script has one guessing who is delusional, the doctor or the mother, only to realize that it is the third character, the son, who is delusional. The piece is set in England and has a Nigerian character, Martha, who tries to murder her son by putting pills in his milk. The script moves between scenes of a birthday party at home to a doctor's office in a psychiatric hospital.

Analysis of Novel

Imagine This is the story of a girl, Lola, born in the U.K. to Nigerian parents, but who grows up in Nigeria. When she is around age two her mother leaves the family⁹⁹ and at nine

⁹⁸ The story opens with the son quibbling with his conscience over his father's political graft, of which he is benefitting by his air ticket home. As he passes through passport control, the police officer checking his passport tells him that "I cannot afford my child's school fees and his children live abroad away from the disgrace that is our country, tell your father we are suffering oh. . . . 'Maybe if they spent our money on hospitals, your mother would be alive'" (2). The son is then greeted at the airport by his brother who has two bodyguards due to his father's high status. He rides with his luxuriously dressed father in a SUV and observes horrid conditions, which in his mind can only be changed through rebellion.

⁹⁹ Shalini Nadaswaran talks about how the absent mother is unique to third-generation women writers. "However, this severance of maternal ties does not render the female characters void but instead equips them with emotional fortitude to achieve their sense of empowerment." (26).

years old her father takes Lola and her brother to Nigeria to live with his relatives in the village of Idogun while he works in Lagos. In addition to dealing with culture shock, Lola experiences consistent physical and emotional abuse in both the private and public sphere consisting of: food deprivation (7, 25-26, 34, 275), molestation (31, 75, 169-171, 224-228), beatings (7, 8, 21, 30, 78, 113), verbal abuse (58, 122, 178, 180), attempted rape (160-161), and labor exploitation (16). Lola retaliates against this abuse and against her general lack of power to alter her situation through getting bad grades, through self-protective acts of getting into fights with her classmates and with her grandmother, and through starving herself. Ultimately, writing is what saves her. In the safe spaces of writing and the imagination intimacy occurs, which allows for the healing of abused body, mind, and heart. The platform for Lola's healing is a diary; however, it is explicitly the narrator Lola's imagination that leads to transformation as she creates a friend for herself, named Jupiter, to whom she consistently writes in her diary. Both the diary and epistolary genres are hallmarked by their insular space, which is created by writing narrators who isolate themselves to write. Lola's imagination, diary, and writing actualize in confined personal space precisely because it is safe.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, this isolation leads to what H. Porter Abbott, author of *Diary Fiction: Writing as Action*, calls "confinement of the reader to the internal world of a single ego" (24), a trait unique to the diary genre where "*the will of the writer...* is the central mystery and point of focus" (44-45). Reading the act of writing provides access to emotional and intellectual spaces inside the narrator's head, so writing becomes in effect a crystallization of a character's desires, ambitions, and goals. Paramount in Lola's desires is her wish to escape to a safe place away from her abuse. Shalini Nadaswaran in "Rethinking Family Relationships in

¹⁰⁰ Even if writing narrators are not isolated when writing, the page becomes a sort of wall between the writing character and other characters. In the case of Lola, sometimes she is not alone when writing; however, there is clearly a sense of the page or journal as her safe space.

Third-Generation Nigerian Women's Fiction" contends that this healing desire drives Adeniran's novel:

Adichie and Adeniran clearly imply the process of returning to their childlike state and rising from such a traumatic event, with phoenix-like qualities which give these young female characters strength to break away from the patriarchal hold and instead discover an identity separate to their former selves, completing the process of transmission, placing power and decision-making into their hands. (25)

In the diary Lola is able to open up and confide in Jupiter as a friend. In turn, readers simulate being Lola's friend through appropriating Lola's addresses to Jupiter, thereby caring and feeling for her. Patricia Meyer Spacks in *The Female Imagination* contends that "if conflict is the essence of fiction, adolescence provides rich material . . . [with] severe opposition of fantasy and reality. . . . [Moreover,] in adolescence, the woman makes her crucial choices" (146). The phenomenon of girls developing into strong and self-confident young women is a focus in contemporary Nigerian literature. Adeniran's novel is classified with third generation Nigerian authors whose work has "a distinct pattern . . . of the young girl-child/woman character developing into a matured, strong womanist" who challenges "familial relationships" while "reclaiming wholeness, authority and female subjectivity" (Nadaswaran 19).

This analysis brings together the work of cognitive scientist Keith Oatley and literary scholar Robyn Warhol to discuss how a narrator's writing techniques can engage readers. Oatley, who studies the connection between reading, emotions, and engagement, contends that simulatory literary techniques such as a character's goals and vivid descriptions are central for reader engagement. Robyn Warhol demonstrates second person address as a conveyor of intimacy. I build on her work, as well as on Oatley's techniques, to include literary allusions and

second person address as literary devices that elicit intimacy and reader engagement. It is not only the fact of having someone to confide in that leads to healing; it is the space of the imagination and of the diary that leads to the abused narrator's full development both as a person and as a skilled writer because she, Lola, is able to speak in her own language, that is, a writerly language and thus fully express herself. Another aspect of Lola's development, albeit small in this novel, is the integration of her Nigerian identity with her British identity, which results from and in writing. I address how Lola's healing can be seen in her writerly skills by way of her creation of an addressee, literary allusions, similes, statements of goals, and proverbs. These writing techniques provide in-depth access to her feelings and thoughts for both her and for readers. Lola's writerly modes provide a detailed characterization,¹⁰¹ specifically with regard to Lola's mind and emotions, while the epistolary genre facilitates the vicarious experience of writing and reading. As Lola grows from age nine to twenty-one, it is probable, based upon an examination of writerly skills and traits, that at the end of the novel she will become a writer.

Lola exhibits writerly traits, thus categorizing her as a writerly character, not simply a character who writes. Adeniran's novel is unique due to its writing girl narrator, compared to the other epistolary novels examined that contain married women narrators. It is important to note that Nana Ekua Brew-Hammond's book *Powder Necklace* also involves an adolescent writing character; however, that novel is not written in the first person. The writing character in *Powder Necklace* becomes a published author, yet, this writing character does not exhibit writerly traits, nor does she indicate a desire to write. For Brew-Hammond's writing character, writing a book is something that is actually foisted upon her by an adult. Conversely, Lola indicates a passion

¹⁰¹ Usually characterization entails physical descriptions and personality descriptions. Interestingly, there are very few physical descriptions of Lola because Adeniran emphasizes the interior (mental and emotional) realm of the central character.

for writing and a high regard for her diaries. Both these novels are part of an emerging trend; Adele King, prefacing her 2004 contemporary African fiction anthology, contends that in African stories first person narratives are becoming more prevalent, as well as the “use of self-reflecting fiction techniques” (x). This observation resonates with Irene d’Almeida’s concentric theory of writing from “L’Ecriture Feminine en Afrique Noire Francophone: Le Temps Du Miroir” (1991) and in *Francophone African Women Writers: Destroying the Emptiness of Silence* (1994). D’Almeida contends that writing begins with the self in the “I” sphere (whether or not one is writing about one’s own experience or not) and then radiates outwards towards family and society. It is within this “I” sphere that self-awareness occurs as “mirror writing.” This form has its roots in the pain of a new identity, so writing is a form of self-discovery, which we can equate to the Confessional poets, such as Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, who focused on their own intimate problems in order to arrive at a better understanding of themselves. According to d’Almeida, in this sphere one becomes rooted in “a strategy of rupture in order to arrive at this intimate silence.” “Intimate silence” is the space whereby a writer hears her muse, touches her craft, and draws it out visibly on the page, focusing on one’s self first in order to listen and then create.

Imagine This, narrated in the first person through a diary format, is also an epistolary novel because all entries are addressed to a fictional addressee-- an imaginary friend, named Jupiter. Thus, the novel joins the emerging canon of African epistolary novels with women writing narrators, prominently including the works discussed in this dissertation.¹⁰² However,

¹⁰² A few African male authors employ the epistolary form. Deceased Burkinabe author, Patrick Ilboudo in his 1988 book *Les Carnets Secrets d’Une Fille de Joie* uses the epistolary form; the story is narrated from the point of view of a female prostitute writing to her girlfriend back in her village. Also see South African male author Aryan Kaganof’s 2006 *Uselessley: A very funny book about me, my dad, the Devil and God*.

Adeniran's novel differs from these epistolaries because its narrator is a girl, not a married woman. Epistolary tradition has also been recently seen in African American texts such as Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Sapphire's *Push*. Walker's text is unique among the diasporic texts because it incorporates multiple exchanges of letters among characters, in contrast to the above mentioned African epistolaries that take the form of one long letter directed to one narratee. *Push*, which contains a few exchanges of letters, is unique for representing writing towards acquiring literacy. These diasporic epistolaries contain female writing characters who use poetic descriptions and literary allusions and engage in self-reflection. They also possess writerly proclivities, such as a love of vocabulary, a hobby of reading literature, or the emotive need to write. Because the characters are writing from the standpoint of their own personal pain, their writing becomes all the more powerful and empowering. While these characters are not immune to the situations around them, they all find personal empowerment on the page and with the pen. The act of writing and expression of one's self without concern for a reply validate these women, not only rooting them in the present, but also propelling them towards the future. Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido in their chapter "African Women Writers: Toward a Literary History" in their book *A History of Twentieth-Century African Literatures* posit that epistolaries and diary novels are not written much by African women writers because, even more than autobiographies, they are such a revealing genre (323). How does this genre enable revelation? It is a form that provides for the greatest intimacy because it allows readers entry into characters' own minds and hearts. Imagination is the vehicle for this revelation, and Adeniran's novel intimately reveals not only how abuse affects a young girl but also how she copes with abuse through her imagination. The abuse she encounters is horrific, yet it is not the abuse that creates intimacy with Lola. The novel's abuse is on par with the abuse in *Purple*

Hibiscus. What stands out in *Imagine This* is how the narrator processes the abuse. Before examining the processing of abuse it is useful to look at the types of abuse Lola encounters and how these are violations of Nigerian law.

Child Abuse of a Writing Character

Imagine This takes place from 1977 to 1987 in Nigeria.¹⁰³ During this time period Nigeria began to form organizations to address child abuse.¹⁰⁴ Adeniran's novel was published in 2007, four years after Nigeria had in 2003 formally adopted "the Child Rights Act . . . at the Federal level" (UNICEF), after ten years of debates. This legislation explicitly stated "No Nigerian child shall be subjected to physical, mental or emotional injury, abuse or neglect, . . . [or] degrading punishment" (UNICEF Fact Sheet on Child Rights Legislation in Nigeria). Of most recent significance is that "the Child rights law is . . . in 17 out of 20 . . . States" in Nigeria (UNICEF Nigeria). As of March 9, 2013 "The Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) has urged the National Assembly to pass the bill on violence against women and girls (Oche), and President Goodluck supports COMMIT "the new United Nations initiative[,] which calls on leaders worldwide to take a stand to end violence against women and girls" (Adetayo). Eunice Uzodike in "Child Abuse: The Nigerian Perspective" suggests that the issue of child abuse needs to be examined at "three levels—global, cultural and individual...[comprised of] structural conditions

¹⁰³ In 1986 a Nigerian chapter of The African Network for the Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect (AN PPC AN) was founded. The U.N. in 1989 formed the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Of most recent significance is that "the Child rights law is now domesticated nationally and in 17 out of 20 target States of the country" (UNICEF Nigeria).

¹⁰⁴ In 1986 a Nigerian chapter of The African Network for the Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect (AN PPC AN) was founded. In 1989 the U.N. formed the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

in the world socio-economic order, . . . normative child-rearing practices, . . . [and] specific parent-child behavioural acts” (330).

In *Imagine This*, Lola encounters abuse from her father, relatives, teachers and doctor. With her father she experiences physical abuse as a child to a young adult. He canes her and makes her stoop down while living in England (7, 8). One of these punishments is for wetting her bed (8). Her aunt gives her “welts all over . . . [her] body” (30), and her Uncle Joseph gives her “a bump the size of a football on the back of . . . [her] head” (78). While Lola describes having “welts” on her body from these beatings, the beatings are much worse for her brother Adebola who is beat with a “*koboko* (horse whip” that “leaves gashes that take ages to heal” (78). Nigeria’s Criminal Code allows physical punishment of children under age sixteen by parents, guardians, or teachers; however, the “blow or force must be reasonable and not extend to a wound or grievous harm” (Uzodike 336). Clearly Adebola’s “gashes” would be in violation of this code. While it is debatable if Lola’s “welts” would be a legal infraction, certainly the blow to her head would be a violation. In terms of normal cultural practices, a 2010 article that surveyed 260 parents who were randomly selected in Ilorin, north-central Nigeia found:

52.35% of “parents reported that they beat their children to correct unwanted or unacceptable behaviour. They described it as ‘gentle beating’-but the sense of what constituted a gentle beating ranged over flogging, giving a ‘few’ strokes of the cane, and a ‘gentle’ slap. Some respondents, however, admitted that sometimes they were unable to regulate the extent of beating. Being old . . . or unemployed . . . and of low education . . . were significantly associated with disciplining a child by beating.” (Nuhru and Nuhru 29)

This study also found that older parents believed that abuse is the only way to teach children (30-31). Nuhru and Nuhru mention a Yoruba proverb that champions child abuse, “A cane is the medicine for correcting a child’s misdeeds” (31).

The most egregious abuse Lola experiences from her father occurs while she believes she is seeing her dead brother, Adebola. Lola throws a glass bottle at her step-sister who calls her “mad” for believing she is seeing Adebola. Further, the step-sister calls Lola’s mother “crazy” since she left her children (121). The bottle hits the step-sister’s head, and she gets taken to the hospital. Lola’s stepmother is livid and declares that Lola must go (122). Lola’s father remains controlled during the incident but will later choose to act violently towards Lola. In fact, he will plan how he will beat her and how he will prevent intrusion from Lola’s uncle who is also in the house. As the narrative progresses, he hides canes in his bedroom and then calmly tells Lola that they need to talk. Lola follows her father into his room where there were “at least twenty canes and he got through most of them” (122). Lola’s uncle finally breaks down the bedroom door and takes her to the hospital. She passes out after the beating, experiencing a period of unconsciousness. The abuse inflicted is so severe that she cannot remember her name (123). This planning of abuse by Lola’s father points to his consciously choosing to deal with Lola’s problems with physical force, rather than abusing out of uncontrollable emotions. In *Purple Hibiscus* the father also commits egregious acts of controlled violence, such as having his children step into the bathtub while he pours boiling water on their feet. However, Adiche gives an explanation for this pattern of abusive behavior by having the father remember how the missionaries had abused him in a manner similar to how he abuses his children; thus, it seems he is repeating the abuse that he himself experienced as a child. In *Imagine This*, the only abusive connection to Lola’s father’s past is seen through his former boxing career. This is a unique

deviation on Adeniran's part from the assumed norm of domestic violence repeating itself.

Lola's father's boxing career alludes to the personality of a fighter. He became a professional boxer and boxed professionally in England. His boxing is a claim to fame for his mother. Indeed boxing became his vehicle for upwards social mobility when he moved his family to England for a better life.

Family abuse reaches the level of killing in Lola's extended family. When Adebola becomes very ill, the uncle he is living with refuses to take him to the doctor (326) and refuses to contact his father. This abuse stems from an inferior view of Adebola by his relatives, as illustrated when Adebola writes to Lola that his uncle is "*working me like a servant instead of treating me like his nephew*" (author's italics 91). Adebola finally writes to his father for help, explaining the situation, but the letter arrives too late. In this letter Adebola gives his father the details of his dire condition: "*I'm a bag of bones can even feel my ribs now . . . I had a coughing fit . . . [with] blood in my phlegm . . . I'm so tired all the time but they think I'm being lazy. Despite my illness they won't let me rest, I still have to do the chores and everything takes ten times long because I have no energy . . .*" (author's italics, my ellipsis 326). Lola's brother, in effect, dies due to family neglect, a violation of "Section 301 of the Criminal Code" where the head of the family is responsible "to provide the necessities of life" for children under age fourteen "who are members of his household," or risk losing custody (Uzodike 341). While one may say that this was a poor family that did not have money for a doctor, the family stringently worked sick Adebola and did not voice concern over his illness. Labor exploitation also factors into Adebola's death. Adebola's letter to his father attests to physical problems due to excessive work, especially while ill. Mistreatment of domestic help, specifically children servants, is a common phenomenon in Nigeria and one that calls for further research. In 2002, "Anti-Slavery

International estimated that twelve million children below the age of fifteen were enduring exploitative child labour in Nigeria” (qtd. in Akhilomen 238). Exploitative labor can range from domestic workers to street hawkers to factory workers. It is commonly found that domestic servants or house boys or house girls “are largely unkempt, discriminated against, over laboured, maltreated, and unhappy” (Akhilomen 239). Many of these children are not sent to school, or if they are, they are sent to the cheapest schools possible (Akhilomen 239). While Adebola’s uncle could be viewed as the responsible party for his nephew’s death because Adebola was in his charge, the fact remains that Adebola’s father placed him with his brother. In so doing, Adebola’s father put the responsibilities of raising his children on others instead of fulfilling his own parental obligations.

One of the first abuses in Nigeria that Lola encounters is that her Idogun relatives view her as a foreigner, essentially as British. In other words, Lola is perceived as Other, rather than one of the family. To be clear, she is not treated as a foreign guest would be treated with extra portions of food, for example, but she is treated rather as a domestic servant who receives the scraps from the family. For Lola’s relatives, Lola represents the U.K., which signifies in the poet Tanella Boni’s words, “the idea of the forbidden.” Thus, Lola is at once viewed with fear and with envy. Boni, in her January 30, 2012 public lecture at Case Western Reserve University, explains that the representation world-wide of foreigners in both the media and in people’s imaginations of them as untrustworthy people specifically creates the idea/existence of foreigners. One of Lola’s first observations about her inferior treatment involves her Aunt Iya Rotimi’s eye-gaze: “I don’t like the way she looks at me, she makes me feel as if I’m naughty all the time. Whenever she sees me, she rolls her eyes, kisses her lips and claps her hands while moving her head from side to side, and finishes with ‘you no go kill me o, I no go let you’” (5).

This inferior treatment, a prelude to far worse things to come for Lola, is a hallmark of how domestic servants are treated in Nigeria; in psychological terms, “these kid servants are abused, with a sense of inferiority inculcated in them at this early stage of their lives” (Akhilomen 239). Moreover, the story is set in the south of Nigeria, where children “belong to the least respected age grade in all Southern Nigerian traditional communities.” Their well-being is “considered only after those of their elders in the society” (Akhilomen 241). However, upon deeper inspection, Aunt Iya Rotimi’s eye contact may also stem from a cultural norm in Nigeria where parents “use eye contact to discipline a child [and where] winking is often used to convey a disciplinary message” (“Nigeria Country”). Staring is one methods of discipline that James Hake’s respondents mentioned as a less frequent form of punishment, as well as “frightening the child” (40-41).¹⁰⁵ It is possible then that the aunt’s reprimanding with eye contact is something both foreign and upsetting to Lola.

Lola’s food deprivation acts as another form of family neglect. Lola experiences “real starvation” where she “has no food for days” (161). She worries about where her “next meal was [is] coming from” and notes how her stomach pains her “like a vice” to the point of being “dizzy with weakness” and nearly fainting (160-161). So, she is suffering, experiencing pain due to not having food. As the mature Lola looks back at her time living with her grandmother in Idogun she refers to her in no uncertain terms, as “starving me” (275). Close examination of this abuse reveals that the abuse Lola suffers most likely stems from her family’s inferior view of her as not immediate family. When Lola is with her aunt she notes that “She and her son . . . ate a whole loaf of bread by themselves and didn’t offer me any. She’s so selfish” (7). Moreover, when her

¹⁰⁵ Thirty-one per cent of Hake’s respondents with Northern Nigerian parents cited “beatings and whippings” as the most frequent form of punishment (40).

grandmother cooks, “as usual she gave most of it to her other grandchildren, that is her daughter’s children, which means they get to have two meals” (58). When Lola challenges her grandmother about this denial of food, her grandmother tells her “she couldn’t cook and watch her grandchildren starve” (58). Lola recounts being denied dinner because it is assumed that she stole food (25). She further informs us that “I never get dinner and I have to wash all the dirty plates when everyone else has finished eating. What’s worse is when no one is looking, I lick the plates for a taste of something because I’m so hungry all the time” (25-26). “A taste” is hardly considered nourishment. She further laments that “I haven’t had a proper meal since I moved here” (34). While one may say that this could be a child simply whining, a mature Lola is the one writing and she still sees this treatment as abuse. She clearly notes that others are given more than her. While “socio-economic theory of child abuse posits that abuse is linked to social deprivation, lack of social support, poverty and poor housing” (Akhilomen 236), it is difficult to believe that Lola’s abuse falls within this category considering her father’s material success and the financial stability of her city relatives, although her father’s first apartment in Lagos was very small, without even a toilet. Why is the food unfairly divided? In James M. Hake’s examination of child-rearing in Northern Nigeria, he found that 1/5 of those he surveyed cited lack of adequate food and clothing as children. Moreover, “This was especially true when they were cared for by relatives or step-mothers who felt more responsibility toward their own children than the adopted ones [from other relatives] in the family” (Hake 26).

The physical abuse Lola suffers in the domestic sphere extends as well to verbal abuse, and the type of verbal abuse she encounters is blaming in nature. According to Lola, her grandmother “says I can’t be taken anywhere and anywhere I go or anything I touch always spoils. She said that’s why my mother left Daddy” (58). Her Aunt Iya Folso also engages in this

abusive blaming. Lola writes that “As far as she’s [Aunt Iya Folso] concerned I’m an evil girl and now she understands why HE [her father] left me to rot in Idogun. She thinks I should never have been born. That way I would never have caused grief for my parents and for her and her family” (178). In a later entry Lola writes “Iya Foluso is right and I never should have been born” (180). Another way that verbal abuse comes to the fore is through offensive statements made about Lola’s mother, directed towards Lola. For example, Lola’s step-sister Ronke tells Lola that her mother must have been crazy because only a crazy woman would leave her children (121). A cousin also verbally abuses Lola by referring to her in Grimm-like terms as “my evil step sister” (14).

Lola encounters abuse even in the public sphere, an abuse albeit more cultural than personal. A teacher in Idogun mandates that she walk on gravel and be outside in the strong sun (21). When taken to a medical doctor for her silence after Adebola’s death, Lola complains that the “doctor . . . just kept hitting me and pinching me” (113). Lola’s dad takes her to a *Babalawo* to cure her of seeing Adebola. Both the *Babalawo*, and Lola’s dad put “three deep cuts” into her back that were filled with “nasty black powder” (119).

Abuse in school is documented in Nigeria. UNICEF’s 2007 *Assessment of Violence against Children at the Basic Education Level in Nigeria* found that physical violence and psychological violence “accounted for the bulk of violence against children in schools” (viii) where physical violence at school can include: “whipping with horse whips, flogging with cane, beating with hands, hitting on the head, pinching, kneeling, sitting on an ‘invisible chair’ and fetching buckets of water” (29). UNICEF’s study found that both of these forms of abuse were more common in the south of Nigeria; moreover, physical violence was found to be higher in rural areas (vii). Personally, as a pedagogical assistant to school inspectors in Allada, Benin

from 2006 to 2007, I saw pieces of rubber from tires sitting on teachers' desks; however, I also saw 100% well-behaved, attentive, and participative students. Frequently one teacher was managing fifty to seventy-five students in one class room with one book for five to ten students; note that these were students of CP1 and CP2, generally under the age of twelve. I was impressed by the classroom order. So, it is necessary to try to contextualize what might have been Lola's situation in school.

To me the fact that such brutal punishments exist in the public sphere of schools indicates that the same or even worse treatment exists in the private, domestic sphere. Attesting to this claim are the frequent stories in Nigerian newspapers and in scholarly articles of children maimed or killed by their parents and guardians. There are also frequent occurrences of children being labeled as witches by their family and then being cast out from their home. In the town Esi-Eket alone there are 186 children who have been labeled witches and cast out of their homes (Njoku).

In contrast to child abuse that may be classified as cultural differences in child rearing, there is definitely a sort of personally determined child abuse. When Lola is seventeen years old her paternal uncle molests her by fondling her breasts at night while she is sleeping. She tells no one about this due to feelings of shame and fear of eviction (224-227). Lola's uncle has taken her in to live with him, to help her out when no one else would. His touch is a violation of her trust in him; moreover, his abuse creates fear and anxiety in Lola who worries "maybe one day he'll think he can get away with it and want to go below my belly button, and what will I do then? Will I ever feel safe again in this flat?" (226). While Nigeria's Criminal Code Act and Penal Code Act protect children from sexual abuse, Lola would not be protected from this under the Criminal Code due to her age. A study of 2, 290 students in Ibadan revealed that fifty-five

percent were sexually abused, and thirty-six percent “of the abuse occurred within the family (31). The Criminal Code differentiates ages for boys and girls who are violated; it also sets up different punishments according to the gender of the victim. If a boy is the victim, under age fourteen, the perpetrator “is liable to imprisonment for seven years” while if a girl is the victim, under age thirteen, the perpetrator may get “imprisonment for life with or without whipping” (Uzodike 33). If the girl is “13 but under 16, the punishment is two years with or without whipping” (Uzodike 333). While the Criminal Code does not explicitly address incest, the Penal Code does, punishing with imprisonment (334). Uzodike contends that incest tends to happen less in the villages than in the city because of the tighter ties in the village “and the fear and shame of being forced to participate in a [atonement] ritual may be a strong deterrent factor” (332). Indeed, Lola’s brush with incest occurs while living in Lagos. Also while living in Lagos she is almost raped by a student, Wale, a few years older than her while in his house for a party (169-171). Since Lola is sixteen and Wale has been in this remedial class for several years, it is probable that he is older than her. A study in Ibadan found a fifty-five percent rate of child sexual abuse (Nuhru and Nuhru 27). Nigerian parents are thus duly concerned about sexual abuse. A 2009 Ibadan survey of primarily female Yoruba parents found that many felt that child sexual abuse was a problem, and 90% of these participants did educate their children about “stranger danger” (Ige and Fawole).

In as much as Lola experiences physical and emotional abuse, she nonetheless has an innate sense of entitlement to just treatment. Indeed she envisions a day when she will be in control of her life. She writes, “One day I’ll be my own person, that’s a promise” (124). There is an overriding sense that she will not let others hurt her, and that she will protect herself. This statement in a way alludes to children’s rights. To be sure, this novel asks readers to consider the

rights of children in terms of child abuse scholar Michael Freeman's words: "that children are not property...but individuals whose physical, sexual and psychological integrity is as important as—indeed, more important than—that of the adult population" (9). Instead of focusing on abuse, Adeniran's novel focuses on redemption and survival through writing.

Imaginary Friend (Addressee) as the Foundation for Writing Survival

In *Imagine This* the use of second person pronouns is one of the most easily identifiably and ubiquitous literary mechanisms through which it is possible to experience reception. The analysis here builds upon Robyn Warhol's work with addressees as mentioned in the prior chapter. Lola's imaginary friend, Jupiter, to whom she writes, is the foundation for her survival. Without Jupiter she would not write or overcome her abuse. Disclosing to Jupiter and believing Jupiter cares provide intimacy for Lola, something she lacks in her daily life. Moreover, intimacy allows Lola to recover from the abuse she encounters because she feels free to recount what happened to her, to express her feelings about the abuse (often seen in similes), and to state her wishes and desires. Without the first step of creation of a friend, Lola might not have obtained her goal of returning to England. Having an imaginary friend enables Lola to keep her heart open, which permits her to eventually thrive. Lola writes each diary entry with "Dear Jupiter" or "DJ" short for Dear Jupiter; she also dates each entry. Writing to an addressee,¹⁰⁶ with frequent second person addresses, is a writing technique that elicits intimacy and engagement with readers through letter recipient simulation. In this analysis I use the term intimacy in terms of identification and *verstehen*, whereby *verstehen* as explained by Jonathan Cohen is "the act of

¹⁰⁶ In *Imagine This* Jupiter is technically the narratee since Lola is the narrator and speaker and Jupiter is the person/entity to whom she is recounting her days; see Gerald Prince (1971) for definition of narratee.

imaginative understanding, of entering into another's lived experience" (italics mine 285). Use of second person address makes Lola's mental, emotional, and physical suffering more immediate.

Adeniran employs the expected dates and stereotypical "Dear Diary" address consistently throughout her novel. However, she changes "Dear Diary" to "Dear Jupiter." Although we never learn why the name Jupiter is chosen, Jupiter becomes a sort of muse and confidant for Lola. Lola consistently uses the address "dear," which conveys a formal tone and a serious approach to her diary writing. However, as she matures, she opts for the abbreviation "DJ" to substitute for "Dear Jupiter." Lola has Jupiter in mind throughout her ten years of diary writing.

As readers, we are apt to step into the role of Jupiter, that is of the addressee, simply through the openness of the second-person address. There are no references to a shared past with Jupiter nor to Jupiter's life or being. Warhol explains that the purpose of using the "you" address is to "evoke recognition and identification in the person who holds the book and reads, even if the 'you' in the text resembles that person only slightly or not at all" (811). So, Lola's second person tags target implied readers, as if to nudge them forward or to reach out and tell them that this story is meant specifically for them to hear. Moreover, these tags provide a role in the story for the reader to be the reader.

The use of the second person contributes to implied readers feeling close to the writing narrator. It is almost as if she is directly addressing readers because it is possible to interpret the "you" as intending the implied reader. Lola writes to Jupiter that "I'll keep you posted" (46), "I'll keep you updated on what is going on" (52), and "I keep forgetting to tell you things" (62). These are personal tags, like post it notes, whereby future action is anticipated, demanding that readers expect a follow up. Lola imagines that Jupiter eagerly awaits her news and fully digests

her entries. “You’re wondering what happened,” she writes (235) and “I’ll let you know what happens with the debate and my pretend illness” (130). In contrast, South African author Lynn Freed’s 1997 diary novel *The Mirror*, written in first person as a journal without a narratee, narrates with less introspection, reflection, or details of the soul; it is rather a factual narration. One could argue one reason for this lack of intimacy is that the character is a businesswoman, not a writer. I would argue that intimacy in this diary or epistolary form is intimately linked with narratees. For example, the South African 2006 diary novel *Uselessley: A very funny book about me, my dad, the Devil and God* by male author Aryan Kaganof features a writer as narrator who addresses his writing to God. These addresses open up entry into the intimate sphere of the spirit and mind, including the character’s reflections on writing. It is as if the narrator is really talking to God.

In addition to the informative second person tags, there are more personal addresses that give the impression that Lola views her diary as a very close friend. She writes Jupiter that “I just had to tell you about my exciting news” in regard to seeing her dead brother’s spirit (117). She considers Jupiter a living entity, who she tells, “Goodnight, Dear Jupiter” (68). This special greeting is evocative of a mother tucking her child into bed with a hug. Further intimacy is expressed in terms of endearment: “I’ll always have you Dearest Jupiter” (210). These intimate addresses are highly transferrable to implied readers because Jupiter as a character is not detailed. It is as though implied readers are the recipients of these entries. We are invited to pretend we are the narratee; accepting this belief heightens suspense and gives a feeling of immediacy. We crane forward for Lola’s next news.

These second person addresses specifically convey a sense that the person addressed is cherished and valued, a feeling that is at the heart of intimacy. Lola’s writing space is important

for her well-being. Jupiter is a muse in Lola's creative space, functioning as an imaginary friend, who is vital for her emotional well-being. Epistolary scholar Jean Rousset also sees the value of an addressee for narrators, where "Les protagonistes ont besoin de quelqu'un à qui ils puissent tout dire." "Protagonists need someone to whom they can tell everything" (translation mine). They need someone to whom to reveal themselves to. Rousset says it is this aspect that drives Richardson and Rousseau's epistolary works (93). In Lola's third diary entry, shortly after her arrival in Nigeria from England, she explains, "I'm going to have to spend the rest of my life here [in Nigeria] with no one but you [Jupiter] to speak to" (6). Lola sees Jupiter as her best friend. Since Lola does not speak the language of Idogun she feels particularly isolated, so Jupiter represents someone who truly understands her. Use of the second person address early on also establishes the implied reader's role as friend and confidant. Warhol explains, "the narrators' earnestly confidential attitudes toward 'you' [referring to the engaging narrator as opposed to the distancing one] encourage actual readers to see themselves reflected in that pronoun" (814).

Lola's exclamation that Jupiter will be her sole confidant is not overly emotional because Lola does not have friends for the first few years of her arrival in Nigeria. Lola's writing motivation is to have a friend to listen to her. Her initial need for Jupiter is especially keen since upon arriving in Idogun she cannot carry out conversations. She laments, "No one understands a word I'm saying, . . . I have no friends to play with" (8). Lola needs to have someone to listen to her, and she needs to express herself. In Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* the narrator Celie writes in order to release pain of incest, abuse, and subjugation. She writes to God as well as her sister Nettie. When Celie claims Nettie's letters to her (that her husband has hidden), Celie becomes empowered to take control of being abused; she becomes fully in control of her life.

Lola's need for an imaginary confidant parallels Celie's writing to God in *The Color Purple* and Juletane's writing for her estranged husband, who she hopes will one day read her diary, in *Juletane*. In these texts God and the estranged husband are simple addressees for the writing characters. The writing characters do not visualize responses from the addressees, whereas Lola does imagine that Jupiter is responding and reacting to her narration.

Turning to the page for friendship does happen in real life. Contemporary Ugandan author Margret Katwesige experienced physical and verbal abuse as a teenage house maid before publishing her first novel *Mother's Secrets*. She recounts how she too kept a diary that she named Alice. Katwesige's experience uncannily resembles Lola's. Katwesige would tell her abuse to her diary Alice before going to bed and "felt relaxed instead of keeping it on my heart and feeling depressed, knowing this book wouldn't hurt me, shout at me . . . [writing] was safe cause the diary couldn't tell anyone" (Ondrus personal interview). Psychologists Shmuel Shulman, Inge Seiffge-Krenke, and Lilly Mimitrovsky studied adolescent boys and girls in Israel who wanted pen pals; they found that the children wanted pen pals in order to have someone to confide in (92) as well as to have someone with whom to share information about "family and friends, [and] close friendships" (94). In her diary Lola tries to make sense of a new culture, of events that she does not understand and of her breaking heart. This creation of an imaginary friend is not unrealistic; it is supported by the research of Shulman, Seiffge-Krenke, and Mimitrovsky who contend that "many of the adolescents in our sample seemed to approach the need for intimacy, self-disclosure, and social comparison in a manner that was, in some ways, unrealistic" (97). Many adolescents studied created a relationship with "imaginary components" (97). The imaginary can be a source of salvation. Katwesige expounds, "[I] felt relieved after writing and knowing this 'person wouldn't tell anyone...It was like it [imaginary friend and

diary] carried it [abuse] for me cause I couldn't handle [the abuse]" (Personal interview). In fact, after eighteen years Lola attests to how writing to Jupiter, saved her:

I started this journal as a little girl and sometimes I think you're the only thing that has kept me going and kept me sane. I started writing my thoughts and feelings down all those years ago because I felt lost and had no one to talk to, so I vented in your pages. I could pour out my thoughts [sic] feelings and frustrations without fear. To you I bared my soul and now that a new chapter is to begin, I look back and I ask myself who is Omolola, Olufunke, Olufunmilayo Ogunwole? I don't really know, but I do know that she's no longer a lost little girl looking for salvation (331).

Mature Lola can look back and see how valuable her diary-friend Jupiter was to her. Lola's writing attained a high value to her as a mature young woman because she made it a point to mention packing her diaries in her suitcase before being thrown out of her uncle's house at age seventeen. "I packed my clothes into two blue nylon shopping bags, along with my journals. I couldn't leave those behind" (239). Interestingly, Lola does not mention moving her diaries throughout her childhood. However, it is obvious that she has preserved her journals through all of her turbulent moves, and this fact further points to how she values her own writing.

Without writing, it is debatable whether Lola would have survived the child abuse and isolation as well as she did. Had she not created an imaginative confidant, she might have lost self-confidence and her goals completely. Katwesige also comments that "If I didn't write I might be depressed cause many things [verbal and physical abuse] happened..." Further, Katwesige was able to manage her abusive situation because she knew "no matter how the day would be [she'd be] able to write" and this helped her to go on. She would look forward to

writing again the next day (Personal interview). Likewise, writing to an imaginary friend kept Lola sane.

Imaginary friends can be dangerous though:

As Fraiberg (1959) noted with regard to imaginary companions earlier in development:

If the child abandons the real world and cannot form meaningful relations with others, there is cause for concern, but if he or she maintains good contact with reality, the periodic excursions into fantasy via the imaginary companion will only contribute to the ties with reality” (qtd. in Shulman, Seiffge-Krenke, and Mimitrovsky 98).

Lola (age eleven) does experience a psychological breakdown (154) following her brother’s death that resulted from relatives’ neglect, whereby she does not maintain “good contact with reality” as she imagines seeing her dead brother. She even abandons writing for a period of five years, from Dec. 31, 1979 to March 3, 1984. And while she may have survived without writing, her health suffered during her writing hiatus. Sixteen-year old Lola acknowledges her five-year break from writing and from her imaginary friend Jupiter as a dark period:

A lot of time has passed and it’s been a while since I last wrote anything or confided in you. It’s not that I didn’t want to, I did, but something happened inside me that made me stop. *For a while I even stopped being.* It’s hard to explain. I was nothing and had no one. . . . So for a long time I’ve *just existed*, did what I was told, didn’t complain[,] didn’t say a word. There were times when I wanted to give up; I didn’t see any reason to carry on living. I thought of a thousand ways to end it, but each one seemed so painful and so final. Adebola [Lola’s deceased brother] was my constant companion.” (154, italics mine)

Lola does not write during this grieving period foremost because for her writing is an act of being connected to real life.¹⁰⁷ Lola's immense grief causes her to withdraw, and she withdraws not only from society through imagining her brother, but also from her very self. Lola's core self manifests in the art and time she devotes to writing in her journal; hence, withdrawing from herself means withdrawing from writing. She describes this period of psychological distress as living in a "cocoon," which again connotes isolation and her not being connected to reality (155). Ultimately, through human contact she emerges out of her withdrawal as her Uncle Jacob takes her to live with him in Lagos, where Lola will reconnect to writing.

Books as Friends for Survival

In addition to the comfort provided by Lola's friend, Jupiter, Lola has friends in books, primarily western novels and cartoons. Numerous times she refers to fairy tales that she read as a child in England before coming to Nigeria; mentioning these books' characters serves as a lifeline for her goal of returning to England. She explicitly mentions sixteen different books, ranging from *The Bible*, to *Julius Caesar*, to *Cinderella*. Lola reaches out to her book friends through making comparisons between her own life to various books or even to T.V. shows. The books mirror her emotions; thus, in a way, she creates empathy through her literary allusions.

As an avid reader, Lola has a wide choice of novels from which to paint and articulate her emotions. *Cinderella* is one story frequently used by Lola to describe her fervent wish to leave all of her horrible circumstances behind with the wave of a magic wand. "What I need is a fairy godmother, like *Cinderella*, someone to come and rescue me," she says while recounting the

¹⁰⁷ Certainly, the difference between Lola and the writing narrator in Myriam Warner-Vieyra's diary novel *Juletane*, is the quality of contact with reality, for in *Juletane* the narrator does not fully grasp her immediate world, nor her life options, and writes in an insane state, and even acts insane. On the other hand Lola fully reflects on her options for reaching her goals.

horror she felt at returning to Idogun after visiting her father in Lagos (57). Imagining her book friends enables Lola's own imagination to flourish, all of which gives her respite from the grim reality of her life. For example, when mired in family accusations of being a witch, Lola draws on the powers of *The Wizard of Oz* and *Cinderella*: "Sometimes I dreamed that the red slippers transported me home, but I am still not sure where home is. I even imagined myself as *Cinderella*" (156). Lola progresses from book memory to her own pragmatic literary allusion where she "dreamed of flying in a magic car to a far away land where children were cherished and fed" (156). Although she does not provide visual details about the car or the land, there is a redemptive quality to Lola's creative creation. The car implies swift action, taking her quickly away from her terrifying situation. She also proceeds to imagine a whole different society where all children are well, not just her. Later, Lola even reaches out to a book friend when contemplating her goal of higher education. She wonders what career to pursue and considers being "a lawyer like Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* and argue[ing] the quality of mercy" (158).

Books help Lola mourn her dead brother, allowing her to fully express her loss. She writes "I found a book on Greek mythology. . . . Maybe I could go to Hades and bring Adebola back, like Orpheus went to bring back his wife Eurydice, only I won't forget to not look back" (111). She keenly taps into Orpheus' pain of losing his wife, which connects to Lola's own loss. Lola has found inspiration through reading, which then leads her to write about her grief, to imagine a way to revive her dead brother, and to work towards the goal of his revival. Around Easter she connects this literary idea to religion and "prayed for a miracle, the miracle of resurrection. . . . to bring my brother back to me like he did with Jesus" (111). She fasts for forty days like Jesus, and then sees her brother.

A Child Narrator's Creative Writing for Survival

Another coping mechanism for Lola is creatively writing about her abuse, through allusions, similes, metaphors, and proverbs. She either makes her own comparisons or draws on books to do so. Through Lola's creative writing it is possible to know her mindset. Ingram (1986) contends that intimacy is "the experience that what one most feels to be one's self has been engaged (qtd. in Bowker-Larsen 26). Although Lola encounters much abuse, it does not define her; rather, her conscious choice of choosing to spend her free-time writing best defines her.

One characteristically skillful use of a book allusion may be found in a diary entry written by ten-year old Lola about a school fight that she entered into because her enemy Emman "started to pick on me [her] again" and had been "tormenting" her for months, "him Goliath, me David" (43). As Lola succinctly reports this horrific fight in one page to Jupiter, she invokes literary allusions of David and Goliath and Daniel from the Bible, the lion from *The Wizard of Oz*, and a simile from celebrity boxer Muhammed Ali. She connects the biblical allusion and Ali's simile to a fight she just got into at school, and connects them to a prior memory of her retired boxer father teaching her to box when she lived with him in England. "I was Daniel in the lion's den but, like the lion in the Wizard of Oz [sic] , my courage deserted me, and there was nowhere to run" (43). So she fought, remembering her Dad's techniques of "jab, jab, jab" and "uppercut" (43). She recounts that

I sidestepped his [Emman's] fist and followed it with a jab...my knuckles cracked with the impact of my fist connecting with his jaw, but I felt no pain as I floated around him.

... [I] jumped on his back and made him eat dirt. I floated like a butterfly, stung like a bee, undefeatable, that's me. (43)

While some may say that this is a rather mechanical implementation of allusions, drawing primarily on other's literary works, Lola has fastened all of these literary allusions together. This single entry reads like a prose poem, framed at the beginning and at the end by Ali's simile of "I floated like a butterfly then stung like a bee" (42-43). This allusion shows an unequal power structure. The butterfly connects to David in the biblical allusion, who is so small and helpless compared to Goliath. Lola was smaller than her opponent, like David. Use of Ali's simile here truly evokes her transformative power, a power that is also seen in her writing. She is determined to beat her opponent. This scene is echoed several times later in the novel, namely when Lola aggressively fights off a schoolmate trying to rape her (169-171): "I was prepared to die. . . . I felt such rage that I just about destroyed his living room" (170).

Lola's self-protection becomes much stronger the older she becomes due to the solidification of her identity; this solidification of identity is reflected in her use of Nigerian proverbs.¹⁰⁸ As her father hits her with his belt when she is eighteen years-old, "a red mist" rose before her eyes, and she "told him that if he ever laid a finger on . . . [her] again that would be the last day he'd ever be able to refer to . . . [her] as a daughter" (272). Lola connects her own words to her father with a Nigerian proverb that surely precipitated their utterance: "They say 'my child is dead is better than my child is lost'" (272). Lola then reflects how a child being disowned, "lost" (272) to a parent is the worst thing for a parent, so she is not surprised when her father stops hitting her and never touches her again. Because she has learned Nigerian culture, she was able to adeptly choose the right thing to say to protect herself from further abuse. These

¹⁰⁸ I am not referring to the section headings with proverbs, but to the proverbs in-text.

Nigerian proverbs are in her writerly repertoire, in her toolbox if you will. They are not used in a mocking way, but genuinely seem to flow naturally from Lola's mind and heart. Also, as she matures she draws on the proverbs of one of her abusers, her grandmother, to express her feelings.

Lola transitions from a child who could only use her own similes and western literary allusions to a young adult who at age eighteen freely incorporates Nigerian proverbs and sayings. Here we will look at examples of how on occasion as a mature teenager she cites proverbs. For example, in examining a phase in her life where she failed to get into university, she says her grandma "always said 'it's the fly that has no one to advise it that follows the corpse into the grave.'" She then responds, "It seems I've dug mine" (251). Although the first expression is her grandmother's, Lola is remembering it and using it in her journal to analyze and comment on her situation of not getting into the university. She responds to this Nigerian proverb with an English idiom. This example shows how she is linking both cultures. It also shows how she is able to link literary renditions. She also stands up for herself with her relatives, the "vultures" (327) who vie for her rich deceased father's inheritance, by obtaining sufficient assets so she can realize her dream to "start my [her] life" in England (331). When Lola asserts her physical safety and her inheritance rights, she becomes self confident in her conflicted identity, even embracing proverbs learned from her abusive grandmother in Idogun.

Lola's full transformation is seen at the very end of the novel. Lola optimistically discusses her future in England: "when it is the turn of a man to become the head of a village, he does not need a diviner to tell him he is destined to rule" (331). Lola has risen above her abuse and above her abusers; she is fully in charge of her life now. As a result, she realizes that "the time has come for me to start my life. THE BEGINNING" (331 author's capitals). Nadaswaran

explains that “The female quest for empowerment, agency and self-identification is achieved at the end of the text, allowing the newly developed female personhood to lead a life filled with new opportunities [with] self-determined lives...[as] courageous, willful and strong womanists” (31). Lola’s self-protection extends to her writing, specifically to her journals she packs. In addition to being protective of her journals, Lola creates and envisions a future writing space, “a new chapter in ... life” as both British and Nigerian (331). It is fitting that she chooses the word “chapter” to describe her life in terms of a book because writing has meant her survival; it is an integral part of her being.

In early childhood Lola’s talent for creative writing is evident, as well as her passion for writing. Creating metaphors and similes permits young Lola to contain, shape, and understand her pain, allowing her to exist. Upon first arriving in the village of Idogun at age nine and wanting to run away at first sight, Lola writes in her journal that:

The bus caught up with me before I could even make it out of the village, and the driver grinned at me with his crooked black pirate teeth. The first time I saw him smile was when he took Daddy, Adebola and me to Idogun that first time. I was so scared of his blackened teeth, I told Adebola I thought he was a pirate but he just made fun of me. (7)

Teeth, something so small, scare her. They scare her so much that she expands the teeth to say something bad about a whole person, the bus driver, that he is a pirate. These blackened teeth, an inversion of the white teeth Lola is habituated to seeing, represent her trepidation of being in foreign surroundings. Lola’s fear feels to be the size of the bus, not the size of the teeth due to her notation that the bus reached her. She is utterly shocked by her surroundings and is not sure how to orient herself. However, after her visual conception appears in writing, she then realizes that “I suppose I have to get used to calling this place ‘home’ ” (7-8). Her emotional and

reasoning processes have coalesced as a result of her literary expression. Expressing her poetic perception has proven cathartic. H. Porter Abbott discusses how writing characters can change their consciousness and how the writing can be a testimony to this change. He says that the chronological order of writing and the act of writing “become independent documentary objects capable of exerting an influence on their creators” so that the written text reverberates on the writing character, the text swinging as a “pendulum” (39). So, Lola’s writerly expression of her fear and its artistic rendering enable her to progress past fear to a coping stage.

Lola’s writerly sensibilities as seen in similes and metaphors help her to process the abuse and neglect she encounters from her extended family by allowing her full expression of her feelings, which then permits her to proceed with her life. The therapeutic benefit of creative writing expression is evident in one of Lola’s diary entries as a nine-year old girl living with her Aunt Iya Rotimi, with whom she experiences psychological abuse. Lola vents to her diary Jupiter that “I didn’t even know that I could have gone [on vacation to see my Dad] until she mentioned that I couldn’t, so I feel like a cockroach or beetle that she’s just stepped on. I feel so empty” (14). While this simile that alludes to house cleaning is simplistic, it does clearly convey a sense of defeat. Its simplicity is reflective of a nine-year-old’s mind and abilities. Lola does not feel that she is wanted, just as cockroaches or beetles are not wanted in people’s homes. She senses limitations on her freedom and on her very existence. These feelings persist as Lola moves to live with many different relatives. This simile is one illustration of Lola’s budding talent as a writer. While the simile appears simple, it is adeptly chosen. Lola could have mentioned that she felt like a chicken being slaughtered, or some other animal being killed. However, her precision with choosing something, such as an insect, which is specifically not welcomed in the home and will be killed for being in the home is astute. She has keenly tapped

into her own feelings, the feelings of her relative and most importantly, tapped into her creative articulation of this experience. For a child of nine years old, she is very perceptive and articulate about what is happening to her. Seconds after writing this simile, Lola vents about feeling “empty . . . being sad . . . feeling alone” (14) then she progresses to state how she would like to live with her dad and brother. Next, she fancifully dreams that she would “like a dog” and “a parrot that I could teach to say things like Captain Hook’s parrot in *Peter Pan*” (15). The encapsulation of Lola’s abuse into simile proves to be pivotal for her healing and survival. It is after such artistic renderings of pain that Lola is able to further expel residual pain and then finally move on to envisioning better times with her family. Meri Nana-Ama Danquah’s autobiography *Willow Weep for Me*, which focuses on the author’s clinical depression, elucidates how creation aids in healing. “Healing is about much more than remembering. Healing is about reinterpreting events, aligning the fiction with the fact” (125). Lola heals with creative rendition.

As Lola’s abuse later includes physical abuse, one of her metaphors aptly reflects this type of abuse: “I’m a football, kicked from player to player only I don’t know who’s winning the game or which teams are playing. I’m an unwanted parcel” (124). The kicked football is evocative of the caning (7, 63), beating (30, 77-78), and hitting (113, 272) that she endures. Again after the metaphor, Lola vents about her situation, “My ex-father only came to see me once, but that’s okay, I’m used to him not caring now. It hurts but I’ll get over it” (124). She then quickly arrives at an optimistic point when she says, “One day I’ll be my own person, that’s a promise” (124). It is after her writing of the metaphor, the creative rendering of her pain experienced, that she is able to proceed to further processing her emotions.

Stating Goals in a Safe Space

An essential part of Lola's vision of being her own person are her statements of goals in her diary, which lead her to return to England. Stating goals is another technique that elicits intimacy with readers according to Keith Oatley. It is through identification, a psychological process, which connects readers to texts, that simulation of experience occurs. Readers assume a character's goals, become engaged with these goals, and as a result experience intimacy. Art depends on simulation "in order to clarify aspects of the relation of emotions to goals and action, and hence help improve our models of self" (Oatley *Best Laid Schemes* 127). Before looking at goals, I wish to address how this book's form contributes to the voicing of goals.

Kenneth Burke says that the form creates an appetite in the mind of the reader. Adeniran creates an appetite for readers through a specific structure she employs in the diary form. One prime technique Adeniran employs is that of placing the climax immediately at the beginning of the diary entries, which entices readers to learn the details that built up to the crux of a problem. Additionally, starting entries with a climax serves to showcase the writing character's will, highlighting what irritates or devastates her. For example, Lola starts an entry with "I have triumphed over my arch-enemy" and throughout the entry we learn about how she came to triumph over him. (43). This is a sort of technique that works backwards, starting at the end result and finding the causes or path to it. Starting entries with the climax catches the reader's attention. While this may come across as a reporting sort of writing, Lola does engage in critical reflection, reasoning, analysis, and poetic thought. Lola is clearly quick witted and action-oriented, which the entries convey well. Overall, in agreement with Abbott, this novel's diary

genre is about the external world meeting the interior world and how the narrator reflects it (Abbott 45). For Lola the external world consists of much abuse and suffering. She reflects this suffering through reporting the abuse she has encountered and through her saving literary allusions.

Lola is able to state her wishes and desires due to the imaginative safe space she has created through Jupiter, book friends, and her notebook. Lola's stated goals build upon the intimacy elicited by the use of the second-person pronouns. Without these support mechanisms she might not have found a venue to express her goals. Moreover, because she has a space to express her goals and someone to direct them to, Lola has hope. However, twenty-three-year old Lola, whose entry prefaces young Lola's story, believes that it was the fact that she "simply wanted badly enough what I [she] didn't have and others seemed to have in abundance" (3). Yet, writing goals down gives them another space in which to exist, making them more powerful. Lola's goal of returning to England is stated in her first diary entry as a child in Nigeria:

Dear Jupiter,

Why, why, why, why, why? I hate them all, I want to go home, I don't want to live with my Auntie, I don't want to live in Idogun. I want everything to go back to the way it once was, with Daddy, Adebola and me living at number 4 Edgecomb House" (4).

Adeniran has begun¹⁰⁹ the story with conflict and the expectation is resolution of the conflict, which in effect is the realization of the character's goals. Lola clearly and concisely states her primary goal, to return to the U.K. and live together with her family.

¹⁰⁹ The story actually begins with mature Lola writing in the U.K., so readers know young Lola will triumph. Hogan in *The Mind and Its Stories* mentions that readers and characters may perceive goals differently, as they have different knowledge and viewpoints. For example,

Lola's goal of returning to England is at first unobtainable because as an eight-year-old child, she does not have independence or power to fulfill her wish on her own. Lola's suffering also contributes to her goal's sense of importance, especially to her readers. Cognitive theorists Keith Oatley and P.N. Johnson-Laird in their article "Towards a Cognitive Theory of Emotions" mention that if goals are high and if there is a lot at stake, then emotions are high (37). Why is Lola so agitated? What is at stake for Lola? Moving to Igodun has meant separation from her nuclear family, her father and brother. She has lost a basic connection to people due to differences in language and culture. Lola misses her life with her family as well as her life in England. Moreover, the key source of Lola's frustration is that her primary goal of returning to England is beyond her own capabilities: "Power is for adolescents an issue of peculiar vividness. Moving from the impotence of childhood, fantasizing the vast resources of adulthood, they feel with anguish the limitations on what they can do, what they are allowed to do, how much they can affect the world" (Spacks 190). An additional reason why Lola's goal is high in value is because it is important to her physical and emotional well-being, which becomes evident throughout the story as Lola is consistently abused. If she could return home, she would be out of her abusive situation. Readers likely respond with empathy to Lola's negative situation due to her artistic expression of her own feelings, as well as her straight-forward articulation of abusive events. Of course readers' reactions do depend on readers' unique experiences, "priming" (Hogan 157) that influences individual reader response and empathy. Empathy arguably results after priming because as Hogan contends, the more we know someone the more he or she

Hogan mentions *Romeo and Juliet*, where Romeo thinks Juliet dead and therefore kills himself, perceiving his goal to be failed; however viewers know that Juliet is still alive. Therefore viewers' goal perception is different from Romeo's (150). Likewise readers' omniscient knowledge in Adeniran's novel comes from having met a strong and confident twenty-three year old Lola before reading distraught nine-year old Lola (1-3).

becomes a multidimensional (complex) being, meaning we fully see/recognize him or her (145-146) which then “leads us to think of this other person in moral terms, as someone to whom we have obligations, as someone who has rights—in short, as someone like ourselves” (Hogan 139-140). While Lola’s frequent recounting of abuse serves to *validate* her goals of escape, it is the fact that we know Lola as a fully formed character that elicits our empathy, for “As we develop greater emotional identification with a character, we automatically come to view his/her preferences as more human and valid” (Hogan 209).

Young Lola’s secondary goal early on in the novel is for her brother Adebola, her father, and her to live together again in Lagos. She wants to be a family again. Primarily, she wants her father’s love and affection. Although one might say that Lola’s yearning to live in Lagos with her Father falls short of her primary goal, Keith Oatley explains that sub-goals, which lead to a goal, are termed a “plan” (qtd. in Hogan 144). And it is Lola’s notion that once her nuclear family is united, she and her brother can convince their father to return to England. Indeed, both Lola and Adebola are united via letter writing in the goal of returning to England, living together again, and at minimum of escaping their respective abusive situations with relatives. Spacks notes that “Lacking social authority, they [adolescents] must operate by devious means” (190). It is assumed that Adebola and Lola’s letters are private, which suggests the possibility of subterfuge. Adebola writes Lola with ideas on alternates to their goal:

we’ll have to do something about our situation, maybe running away would be the better option because quite frankly I can’t take much more of this. I think we should’ve taken off when we had the chance in London. It will be harder here but I’ll get a job and take care of you since father isn’t really up to the job, we’ll just have to wait till I’m a bit older. (91)

He also returns to the main goal with hope, saying, “when we see each other we can try softening Daddy up and see if he’ll change his mind. We might get lucky” (91). Adebola is in partnership with Lola in the goal of winning back their father’s affection, returning to England, and living as a family, demonstrating as Hogan explains that people work together to create goals, making them “deeply social” (146). Adebola is actively working to make it happen through brainstorming. Lola and Adebola’s love for each other serves as the social mechanism that makes this goal “deeply social” (Hogan 146).

I argue that readers are intertwined in this goal as well. Readers have witnessed how horrible Lola’s relatives are to her—falsely accusing her of theft, abusing her, overworking her, psychologically abusing her, starving her, and ostracizing her. Readers have also gotten to know Lola as a critical thinker and a budding writer, and have “develop[ed] greater emotional identification . . . view[ing] his/her [Lola’s] preferences as more human and valid” (Hogan 209). The frequent mentions of her abuse-filled life serve to validate her goals of escape. Empathy is achieved because as Hogan contends the more we know someone the more we respond with our subjective mind and are therefore empathetic (145-146). Aside from learning Lola’s story of abuse, readers get to know Lola as a person, a person who loves creative writing and reading literature. Arguably, she becomes three-dimensional to readers through intimate access to her mind and creative spirit via writing.

When her brother dies, Lola’s world falls apart. Readers feel upset for Lola’s loss of her dear brother, but why? As Oatley and Johnson-Laird explain, when a plan or goal’s outcome is altered it is as if a person is falling down a staircase, because in effect the goal becomes unreachable. Oatley and Johnson-Laird explain that “The cognitive system adopts an emotion mode at a significant juncture [possible termination] of a plan, typically, as Draper (1985) has

pointed out when the evaluation (conscious or unconscious) of the likely success of a plan changes” (italics mine Oatley and Johnson-Laird 35). With Adebola’s death, Lola’s goal of living together as a family, whether it be in Lagos or in England, is no longer possible; Lola’s dream is irrevocably altered, as well as her conception of the present.¹¹⁰

As a result of this negative impact on Lola’s goal, readers will likely feel Lola’s devastation because they perceive that her goal is now gone; indeed Lola no longer yearns to return to England after her brother’s death. Oatley and Johnson-Laird explain that “Emotions arise as disturbances which accompany interruptions and discrepancies among multiple goals and representation” (30). What results from the loss of a goal is often despair. Hogan explains that despair is a result of 1) The loss of hope in achieving a goal and 2) The loss of a project, that is when one feels it is no longer worth pursuing (223). After her brother’s death, Lola does not write in her diary for five years, thus signaling her depression, which ostensibly comes from the loss of a goal.

Soon after Adebola’s death, Lola rapidly assumes a new goal, to resurrect her brother through fasting for forty days and through praying. She pleads “for a miracle, the miracle of resurrection” so that her brother will come back to her as God “did with Jesus” (111). Lola invests immense energy and focus into this new goal, so when he appears before her joy is felt. “I have exciting news! After days of despair . . . I woke up and Adebola was sitting on the end of my bed. It is truly a miracle!” (117). Lola is thrilled with seeing Adebola and encounters depression when “he started to fade away [while her father was beating her] . . . I didn’t want to

¹¹⁰ When she moves to Lagos with her Father after Adebola’s death, Lola almost looks on her former goal with horror, thinking that her prior strong wishing might have resulted in Adebola’s death. “Maybe he died because I wished too hard; anyway, they think I’m a witch and I killed him. I’ve already been accused of being a thief by a *Babalawo*, why not add witchcraft to my list of crimes?” (110).

live” (123). Lola’s depression following to her brother’s death lasts for five years. She does not write during this time period. However, her primary goal of returning to London remains with her. Five years after Adebola’s death and after somewhat coming out of a depression, Lola still expresses a desire to return to England. She plans to save money for a ticket back to London (182). So when Lola obtains money after her father dies, readers expect her to use it to fulfill her wish of returning to London, and she does.

Lola’s maturation is reflected in her goals. Mature Lola states a goal for her own self-improvement while in the hospital reflecting on her life: “I didn’t want to be Lola Ogunwole any longer, I wanted to be someone else. I wanted to be someone who was happy, a person who had a sparkling future ahead, a person with no fears. I didn’t want to be the person who people pitied” (245). She did not want to be like the misguided fly “that follows the corpse into the grave,” so she proceeds to improve her life (251). Since readers have gotten to know Lola intimately and have seen all of her suffering, there is compulsion on the part of the readers to desire this new goal with her. She proceeds to achieve her goal by passing her university exam,¹¹¹ standing up to her greedy relatives, and then finally going to the U.K. to live and study, reaching her primary goal of pursuing her life’s passion: writing, which has already allowed her to articulate and sustain her goals.

Conclusion

This novel shows how remaining committed to one’s self and craft can be a saving mechanism. Through writing Lola creates not only a friend, the narratee Jupiter, but also a tangible product-- her diaries. It is through the guarding of these journals that readers are

¹¹¹ Likewise, in Sapphire’s novel *Push*, Precious’ goal was to graduate high school and to make a better life for her and for her children, stressing the transformative value of education.

ensured of Lola's future fight for her craft. I have pointed out how readers may feel intimacy through the experience of being both readers and writers through the use of a created addressee, literary allusions, similes, and statement of goals. It remains to be seen if this novel will in turn make readers fight for abused children, a situation which is keenly felt in Nigeria and which the Nigerian government is addressing. On March 5, 2012 "the state Ministry of Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation took to the streets [in Lagos] . . . to create awareness on child rights. . . . officials of the ministry gave out yellow cards" to familiarize people about the dangers of child abuse, as well as the consequences for committing it (Falayi). While change regarding child abuse is occurring in Nigerian legislation, work needs to be done in the private sphere.

Adeniran's heroine Lola might serve as a role model for how to help abused children; Lola certainly is a concrete model for future writers. It would be interesting to form a book group with abused children reading *Imaging This*. Would the novel prove therapeutic? A further question is what will readers do after empathizing with Lola? Warhol contends that "If the narratees can feel for the characters, then the actual readers the narratees represent should be able to feel for the actual persons the characters represent" (815-816). Suzanne Keen, discussing narrative empathy, notes that while one may feel sympathy while reading novel, a reader knows that they can do nothing for the character: "there can be no expectancy for reciprocation involved in the aesthetic response" (67). We know that characters cannot help us (Keen 68). Yet, empathy involves both "cognition and affect," so that "when texts invite readers to feel, they also stimulate readers' thinking" (69). While Lola projects a caring recipient, Jupiter, further study is needed to ascertain if readers will be inspired to reach out to abused children in the real world.

Chapter Five

J. Nozipo Maraire's **Zenzele**: A Mother's Challenge

In this chapter we transition from the last chapter's intimacy with an imagined narratee to a writing narrator's engagement with a real narratee¹¹² through the use of similes. The prior chapter's writing narrator created an imagined person to write to; without this inspiration it is doubtful if writing would have occurred. In this chapter the writing narrator has a real recipient. This real recipient has specific preferences. Instead of a narrator who does not need to worry about her narratee's reception of her text, here the narrator could have cause to worry about how her daughter, the narratee, might receive her letter. While Lola had concrete goals for herself, here the narrator has a desired outcome for her daughter. She wishes for her daughter to embrace all parts of her identity and to privilege human relations over material goods. She does not want her daughter to become part of the braindrain. *Zenzele: a Letter for My Daughter* is the story of a Zimbabwean mother's memories and advice given to her daughter studying at Harvard. The mother, Shiri, writes a letter to her daughter, Zenzele, while aware of her own imminent death due to an unnamed illness. She tells her daughter stories from her life that could shape her daughter's national consciousness as well as her global awareness. Goals, observations, self-reflection, and similes are these narrator's techniques. These techniques inform readers' connections with Shiri as well as about Shiri's connection with her narratee.

Zenzele was published in 1996 in the United States. A 1996 *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year and a Boston Globe Bestseller, it was selected as a text for many book clubs, reading groups, schools, and colleges in the U.S. (Ondrus personal interview). Many American

¹¹² To be clear, by the term "real narratee", I am still referring to a fictional character. In the story the narratee is an actual person that actually exists.

newspapers, book review magazines, and scholarly journals reviewed the novel or featured interviews with Maraire. Her success echoes that of fellow successful Zimbabwean authors, noted for being “first published outside” Zimbabwe, such as Tsitsi Dangarembga,¹¹³ Yvonne Vera, and “pre-independence black male” authors (Primorac 116). Successful publication by Zimbabwe’s elite is a complicated issue. Education is one of the factors for this phenomenon, where the aforementioned authors had access to education overseas and then their books’ publications at foreign publishing houses occurred. In contrast, access to education,¹¹⁴ a fundamental vehicle for potential authors, remains a challenge in present-day Zimbabwe where school is not free, not even primary school (Walker 109). Social and political aspects also contribute to Zimbabwe’s writing situation. After the war of liberation “it became easier for women to become novelists . . . independence brought an increase in publishing activity, [and]

¹¹³ Dangarembga’s novel *Nervous Conditions* is a rich point of comparison as both “contain the figures of a daughter who is being educated away from home and a mother who has stayed there” (Primorac 116). In Dangarembga’s novel the daughter narrates, while in *Zenzele* it is the mother (Primorac 116), and in *Zenzele*, the capital Harare is the “starting point,” while in *Nervous Conditions* it is the village as starting point (Primorac 117).

¹¹⁴ Walker provides the background of formal education in Zimbabwe and Rhodesia, stating that mission schools were some of the earliest formal schools (1890’s), yet the early Rhodesian government mandated that the African students only be educated for service jobs (108). Males were privileged in being sent by their families to school (108). In 1902 schools that were independent of the government emerged; however, in 1925 the government banned independent schools by establishing the Department of Native Education (108). Walker notes the discrimination seen on student spending under the Rhodesian government, where “only 12 percent of black students attended secondary schools” (109). Then, in 1980 school became compulsory and free; however, presently school is not free, not even primary school (109). Walker touches on private education and its drawbacks of isolation from indigenous culture, finding it “exacerbate[s] existing socio-economic inequalities” and “privilege[s] Western curriculum over local knowledge” (110). She then turns to the novel to examine the education of the narrator and finds that “Zenzele’s parent’s education achievements were the exception rather than the rule under Rhodesian control,” as they earned an American law degree and a teaching degree (109). Shiri addresses her family’s history of investing in education. Astutely, Walker notes that Shiri “does not explain her decision to send Zenzele to an international school” (111). An international school seems to be in conflict with the message that Shiri is sending to her daughter about the importance of valuing one’s own culture and country.

saw the founding of Zimbabwe Women Writers (a non-governmental organisation aimed at encouraging and promoting women's writing)" (Primorac 104).

Sadly, *Zenzele*'s reach in Zimbabwe has not been wide (Ondrus personal interview). According to Ranka Primorac, writing in 2006, it was not republished in Zimbabwe; however, she says the novel is carried in bookstores in Harare (204). Carrie Walker notes, though, that according to Tanya Lyons the text "is not widely available to readers within Zimbabwe" (Walker 133).

Biographical Background on Maraire

J. Nozipo Maraire is a small woman of five feet with diminutive features. Like the saying goes about good things coming in small packages, this is true for Maraire. She is a real renaissance woman: a mother of four, a neurosurgeon, a writer, and a founder of various international medicine organizations. She was born in Mangula, Rhodesia in 1964, now called Zimbabwe. Her name Nozipo is from the Ndebele language and her last name is Shona. According to Maraire, "Nozipo" means the mother of gifts; it was her paternal grandmother's name. Her last name means meat eaters. She is of Indian, French, South African (Xhosa), and Zimbabwean ethnicity (Ondrus personal interview). She spent her childhood in Zimbabwe (Zichittella), specifically Harare (Shufro). She left due to the war that broke out, but returned "before the war ended[,] during the height of racism and fear" (Wohl). Maraire studied at missionary schools and remembers being impressed by the nuns that treated the students well. She remembers that the nuns did not show superiority like other whites did (51 Zichittella). The schools she studied at were "elite schools" (Shufro 2). Maraire comes from highly educated

parents. Her father was “a college professor, banker and tobacco farmer” and “her mother is a pediatrician” (Shufro 2).

While Maraire was not in Zimbabwe during the war, her family was involved in it. Her “grandparents, parents, and other close family members were directly involved in the war for independence from both the British and the white elite” (Wohl). In Shufro’s article, she explains how Maraire’s parents “were always raising money or collecting clothes for the revolutionary forces fighting to overthrow the government of Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith” (9). The family was very much tied to Zimbabwe, and never thought of severing ties with it. So that “even when her father’s academic appointments took the family abroad to live,” Maraire says, “it never occurred to my parents that they were not going home” (9). Maraire’s parents divorced when she was eight years old (Blinkhorn). “She lived with her father during her growing-up years. Only recently [as of January 1996] has she reconnected with her mother, a physician in Washington D.C.” (Blinkhorn). Part of her youth was spent in Wales, Canada, the U.S., and Jamaica (Wohl). She is conversant in Shona, English, French, Spanish, and Norwegian. Maraire returned to Zimbabwe before the war of independence was over and attended school at an all white school. Maraire recounts, “it was horrid, the air seethed with anger and hate” (Wohl). From 1981 to 1983 she attended Atlantic College in Wales, England for her international baccalaureate (high school degree).

As a child she dreamed of “studying medicine in America” (Wohl). Shufro writes that at age five Maraire informed her father of her decision to be a neurosurgeon. While it seems incredible to choose such a specific career at such an early age, it appears that visualization and a positive attitude are what drove Maraire to realize her life’s goals. Shufro explains that Maraire “plans for her future by picturing how she wants to live—what she calls ‘doing the visioning

thing’ “ (10). She finds it paramount to consider how one wants one’s life to be and then consider ways to make it happen (Shufro 10). Maraire, according to Shufro, has a mindset that focuses only on success. Shufro explains: “She can accomplish whatever she chooses to undertake, even when she can claim no special expertise in a field” (10). Shufro learned that her determination comes from living in the “Third World, where fewer people have the education and the connections to get things done. [So, according to Maraire:] ‘If you have the opportunity to do something, you have to seize it’ “ (qtd. in Shufro 10). Challenges excite her. She was drawn to the neurosurgery profession because “it sounded like the most difficult thing I could do” (Shufro 2). Indeed, Maraire seems drawn to challenges and to realizing her full potential. Maraire, according to Shufro, “feels drawn to the intellectual challenge of working out the puzzle of what afflicts a patient: asking good questions, listening carefully, visualizing the neuroanatomy, doing research” (2).

Maraire received a B.A. in biology in 1988 from Harvard University, a medical degree from Columbia University in 1992, and specialized (with residency) in neurosurgery at Yale University from 1992-1999.¹¹⁵ Also while at Yale she obtained a Masters degree (1998) in public health. In addition to drawing attention for being a specialized surgeon and a highly successful novelist, Maraire is further distinguished at Yale where she is presently only the “second woman to have completed neurosurgical training at Yale since its program began in 1925” (Shufro 2). Moreover, Maraire is likely the only “black female neurosurgeon on the African continent” (Shufro 2). She has published on neurosurgery “on intercranial cavernous malformations that lead to many neurological disabilities, hemorrhages, and seizures” (Wohl).

¹¹⁵ Neurosurgeons take five to seven years of further study; they are more specialized than neurologists.

In addition to her scholarly pursuits, she has dedicated much time and energy to establishing and aiding organizations and structures to help her country. While at Yale she “laid the groundwork for a partnership between Yale and the medical institutions of her native Zimbabwe” (Shufro 2). As of May 2013, she is building a surgical hospital in Zimbabwe called Ecosurgica. Her hospital’s mission is to reverse the brain drain by recruiting African surgeons. It also will send American surgical trainees over. Also, as of May 2013, she has a second medical program in Zimbabwe for children with hydrocephalous. The mission is to do free surgeries for the children and to provide them with free medical equipment at home. Maraire also teaches at the medical school, Pari hospital in Zimbabwe. Before finishing her residency, she worked “on AIDS education for the World Health Organization in Geneva” (Shufro 6). She did this work from 1987-1988 while finishing her studies at Harvard. She was “part of a core team that began early education and research on AIDS” (Maraire LinkedIn). Her work expands out to the business world too. She is on the board of directors for South North Development Initiative, “which finds innovative ways to provide capital to African and Latin American businesses considered too risky by conventional investors” (Shufro 6). In 1999 she founded and became the president of the Limpopo Foundation, a nonprofit to help Southern Africans with health and art. In 2010, she co-founded Cutting Edge Surgeon. As of May 2013, Maraire has an Internet startup for cutting edge surgical advice so that surgeons can stay abreast of changes in their field (Ondrus personal interview).

While Maraire was in residency at Yale, she opened “a small African art gallery and gift shop in New Haven, Connecticut” (Oder). She has a vision of creating an art organization for all of southern Africa to “galvanize civil society.” She envisions it comprised of a “cultural center,

museums, and theaters” (Shufro 8). Her literary influences are “as diverse as Maya Angelou, Somerset Maugham and Chinua Achebe” (Oder).

In 1994 she met Allen Chiura; they married in 1998. They were childhood friends that had drifted apart and met again later in life. He is from Zimbabwe and is a urologist. Maraire found that “their common frame of reference (comprised of social class and having lived through the upheaval in Zimbabwe) gave them a deep understanding of each other” (qtd. in Shufro 6-7). Maraire describes this relationship as empowering for her, where “it was like the whole house was open. Light came in compared to other relationships (comprised of men from different cultures) that were not so stimulating or fulfilling (Shufro 7). Even in Maraire’s personal life, the merging of African with Western traditions is evident. She had a “traditional Shona *kuroora*” ceremony in Zimbabwe by proxy with *lobola*. So, although she and her fiancé were not present, the ceremony took place with “representations from family, jokes and money” (Ondrus personal interview). She also had “a large Roman Catholic wedding in Zimbabwe” with 1,600 guests “held at the botanical gardens in Harare” (Shufro 7).

Maraire wrote *Zenzele* while doing her residency, research, and course work at Yale, while “on-call every other night” (Wohl). She found that writing calmed her and gave her an “outlet” (Oder). It was also a relief intellectually. Maraire explained in 1999 about writing that “I’m so full of neurosurgery and it’s like a release valve that allows me to escape” (Shufro 4). “So in hours snatched during overnight on-call sessions, she began reflecting on her home and her heritage” (Oder). She actually wrote in the hospital. Reflecting on her writing of the novel in *Congress Quarterly* in 2009 Maraire says how the experience was Kafkaesque and surreal where “by day . . . I was . . . scurrying about the wards in spattered surgical clogs and sagging and

faded scrubs . . . where some of the finer tenets of hygiene and basic nutrition were discarded, sleep was elusive and its want as intense as any lover's desire . . . ” (16). But at night:

She borrowed the key to an empty computer room, and at midnight, or 2a.m., or whenever her day finally ended (and her call began), she wrote for two hours. She says her need to write outweighed her need to rest, and she often got by on three hours' sleep. (Shufro 5)

For her this writing was “an act of survival” where she could “collect the thoughts she'd offer relatives about to leave home” according to Maraire (qtd. in Oder). In an interview with Roberto Zichittella she says that

Every so often I sat in front of the computer and wrote, maybe only three lines; however, afterwards I felt better. Writing gives me a great sense of peace. It helps me to express what I feel inside and cannot express in my profession [medicine]. (my translation Zichittella 50)

Writing was sustenance for her. She says that writing the novel “was born of a primal need for wholeness, a sense of self” (“Writing” 16). For Maraire being a surgeon is only part of her identity; she needed to acknowledge and utilize the other aspects of her self, which writing did. She writes, “Zenzele was my spring, each word writ with a joyous surge of delirious freedom of expression. It completed me” (“Writing” 16). Writing was not confined to paper, but even occurred while she was in surgery. She notes that while in surgery:

A phrase, a word perhaps a twist to the plot, would come to me like a whisper and I would savor it, cherish it and store it alongside the complex . . . [scientific work.] The words were alive—they had found their voice and their presence, like the beating of the

heart, or the breath as it flows in and out . . . a constant reminder that I was alive, I was whole.

With my novel as my key, I entered a different enchanted world. (“Writing” 16)

Oder notes that Maraire realized after writing eighty pages that she had a novel. Furthermore, she became cognizant of the power of her voice and the importance of her literary work. She saw her book as a chance to challenge people’s stereotypes of Africa as “chaos, poverty and famine” (qtd. in Oder). She also wanted to “give something back to Zimbabwe” and saw this book as a way to do so (qtd. in Oder).

Maraire’s writing encountered some resistance in her residency program. She recounts how her chief resident yelled at her: “You have to decide if you are a neurosurgeon or an author” (17). She also recounts how her fellow residents “regarded me with deep suspicion . . . [as if] I was leading a double life” when they learned of her book’s publication (16). Luckily her chairman supported her. She notes that these hostile and jealous reactions indicate “seemingly forgetting the long proud heritage of physician authors that have gone before us like John Keats, Anton Chekhov, Wilder Penfield, and Walker Percy [and William Carlos Williams]. Realizing our full potentials as artists, musicians, authors need not and should not be regarded as threatening or subversive” (Maraire “Writing”).

Maraire’s novel was an instant success. It was “sold and published in 14 different countries and languages from Portuguese to Mandarin.” Part of the book’s success stems from the marketing and publicity push from her publisher, Random House that “treated [her] to a 14 city US book tour . . .” (Maraire “Writing” 16). Her novel was also a great success in Italy, translated and published by Mondadori. Mondadori invested in marketing and publication by inviting Maraire to Rome, where she was “interviewed by more than ten Italian journalists . . .

[with] thoughtful, insightful questions . . . [as well as appeared on the Italian] equivalent of the Oprah Winfrey Show” (Maraire “Writing” 17). A year after her book came out she was invited to the Gothenburg book festival in Sweden where she met Wole Soyinka. The impact of this novel on Africans has impressed Maraïre who notes that she had met

a lot of young Africans who’ve told me it’s the first time they’ve read a book in which they *recognize themselves*, the generation of children who made the transition from pre-independence to the struggle for independence and the post-independence era, and the ensuing cynicism that inevitably followed’ (italics mine Shufro 5).

This refers to people who identify with the narrator, Shiri. Maraïre sees that this generation, including herself, is “lost between the traditional African culture and the modern culture. We don’t now how to incorporate them, and there are no role models. The world is so Western, and we want to retain our core identity” (Shufro 5).

Although Maraïre has not published a second novel, as of 1999 she was working on a second one. It “tells the story of a return from the West: a Zimbabwean woman orphaned by the brutal assassination of her family escapes to the United States. Years later, she goes back to Africa to confront her past and the meaning of home” (Shufro 5).

A Narrator’s Cooperative Principle

In *Zenzele* the writing narrator, a mother, has a tempered approach in her writing to the narratee. A desire for connection and not for repulsion is a prime aspect of the narrator’s writing motivation. In order to reach her communication goal, the narrator uses an approach that acknowledges and affirms her daughter’s background. Her approach has two components: western similes and an indirect approach. The narrator Shiri uses man-made similes in an

attempt to successfully communicate with her Western-oriented daughter. By the term “man-made similes” I refer to similes that employ objects fabricated by people to make a comment. For example, a simile such as “his eyes were like mirrors” is a “man-made simile” in my analysis because the man-made object “mirrors” is being used as a comparison. This analysis addresses the writing narrator’s writing intention. Shiri’s agenda is to anchor her daughter, and thereby Zimbabwean youth, to its culture, history, soil, and people. While Shiri does convey her love of Zimbabwe with stories of Zimbabweans and Zimbabwean culture, she also advocates for her daughter’s respect for Zimbabwe, for the Diaspora, and for nature through her use of nature and man-made similes. Shiri uses both indirect and direct approaches in her communication with her daughter. Shiri’s man-made similes are an example of indirect approach, while her stated observations of her daughter’s aversions to Shona culture and village life are a direct approach. Although Shiri explicitly explains Shona culture and etiquette, Shiri does not use Shona proverbs, similes, or metaphors to communicate other issues with her daughter. As one of the adages of writing is to know your audience, it is possible that Shiri is keenly aware how employing Shona culture in her writing could repel Zenzele. This basic idea connects to Paul Grice’s cooperative principle (1975) that states both sender and receiver need to work together in order for communication to occur. Grice’s four maxims from this principle are quality, quantity, relation, and manner. Expression and comprehension of intention are central to Grice’s theory. In her tempered approach in communicating her belief in Shona culture, the Diaspora, and nature to her daughter, I posit that Shiri has a cooperative writing strategy. According to Shiri’s remembered and relayed dialogues with Zenzele, Zenzele herself does not employ Shona idioms, proverbs, or similes; therefore, Shiri could realize that in order for her advice to be heard by Zenzele, she had best employ Western objects for her similes. Further substantiating the

existence of the narratee's aversion to Shona culture is the fact that Zenzele is not ecstatic about certain aspects of Shona culture, such as the naming practice for mothers or bride price (*lobola*). Shiri also observes her daughter's unease with performing certain Shona customs.

According to Rudo Gaidzanwo, Zimbabwean literature rarely has "tension" or "antagonism" between mothers and daughters (qtd. in Bungaro 78). In fact, many critical works about *Zenzele* ignore the techniques and themes of tension that exist.¹¹⁶ Critics have noted provocation in the narrator and narratee. While Leb dai finds provocation on the part of the narrator, Bungaro notes provocation in Zenzele's voice. Bungaro sees that Zenzele does not find her mother to be an acceptable "model" because she does not "resist patriarchal form of oppression" (77). In Maraire's mother-daughter relationship, the daughter must "separate from her mother and what she represents. . . . [while the mother] accept[s] and support[s] her daughter's decision" (Bungaro 77). For Bungaro the narratee has much power over Shiri as evident in the self-reflection of Shiri as resulting from Zenzele's provocations (77-78). Shiri relays how even the act of talking with her daughter demands preparation on her part: "I often feel compelled to prepare for a conversation with you" (4).

Applying the cooperative principle to narratology, narrators and narratees need to communicate with respect in order for communication to happen. Shiri acknowledges her daughter's lack of enthusiasm for Shona culture. For example, Zenzele's statement (relayed through Shiri), "And do you know what else truly bothers me about our culture?" (regarding their discussion of *lobola*) reveals Zenzele's exasperation (34). Zenzele's statement gives the

¹¹⁶ Benaouda Leb dai's 1999 article "Zimbabwe and Nozipo Maraire's Beginnings" deals with several literary techniques, several of which address tension: self-revelation (47, 53), provocation to the narratee (49), anticipation of the narratee's questions (50) and incorporation of stories (51). Leb dai finds these all apparently contributing to feelings of "confidentiality" and "urgency" (47).

impression that she holds a list of complaints about her culture. Repeating Zenzele's words, at least this phrase, is reminiscent of the tactic of repeating one's adversary's words in an argument. Rather than emotionally reacting to the words or logically explaining the reasons why the statement is wrong, the narrator chooses to let the narratee reflect on her own words so that the narratee achieves insight on her own. This is an interior observation of Zenzele's feelings, feelings that though not always vocalized by Zenzele, were perceived by her mother. Now Shiri is presenting them as a way to acknowledge to her narratee that she realizes her daughter's position. Shiri also acknowledges Zenzele's relationship with Shona culture through direct address: "There are many aspects of our culture that you find difficult to accept" (31). This is the crux of the confrontation between Shiri and Zenzele. Presenting this area of confrontation elicits tension.

Shiri perceives Zenzele's visceral aversion to her land and traditions: "I know that you *dislike* the heat of the village at Christmas. I can sense your *resentment* when on bended knee you must pass the basin of water to every member of our large clan, in strict cultural hierarchy" (italics mine 6). Shiri acknowledges, through observation, how Zenzele feels. This is a technique that opens communication because in effect, it means one is heard. Shiri might even be applying a bit of reverse psychology here as a rhetorical strategy to advance her own goals (of valuing Shona culture and village life), which are not shared by the addressee.

In contrast to the emotions that Shiri perceived about Zenzele regarding her aversion to Shona culture or village life, she recounts Zenzele's various physical reactions to experiences and discussions of village and traditional culture, thereby also acknowledging Zenzele's feelings. Physical reactions refer to body language, nonverbal clues that inform about emotional stances. Shiri reveals that Zenzele "winced" (8) at the "tattered . . . toothless villagers reeking of sweat

and local beer” (8). Shiri recounts this same reaction from Zenzele when Shiri observed and followed traditional Shona etiquette: “I can still see you wincing whenever I would use the traditional titles in greeting” (10). To wince is to draw back or retreat physically from something or to clamp down in disgust or anticipation of pain or unpleasantness. Zenzele’s reaction in effect says that she dislikes the villagers and Shona customs. Shiri remembers Zenzele’s bored reaction to her stories of investing in children’s education versus spending money on superficial material things like dresses. “The long fingers covered your floppy mouth as it stretched into a yawn” (30). Zenzele’s spontaneous reaction of boredom is revelatory and should as such make Zenzele reflect on her position vis-a-vis the villagers and Shona culture. Her reaction indicates that she is not engaged with issues of materialism or education as concerns her country’s people; however, when education personally concerns herself, she becomes zealous, like a preacher. These are some reflections that Shiri’s observations about her might inspire in Zenzele.

Shiri’s observations about her daughter’s aversion to Shona culture through reporting language have a subtle agenda, that of trying to get her to realize her shortcomings and to see value in Shona culture. Argumentation theory provides insight into goal expression. Raphael Micheli’s (an argumentation specialist) article “Arguing Without Trying to Persuade?” deals with arguments existing without persuasion or confrontation. Micheli explains that in “the field of argumentation studies” argumentation is predominately viewed as “*a verbal activity oriented towards the realization of a goal. . . . [and it] aims to produce an effect upon an addressee, and . . . this effect consists in a change of attitude with respect to a viewpoint . . .*” (author’s italics 115). He summarizes three approaches that lay the foundation for the pragmatic approach to argumentation. One approach has a goal of “convincing” through justification or refutation. The second approach focuses on persuasion with reasons provided, and the third approach focuses on

getting listeners to “adhere” or conform to the proposed argument (116-117). Micheli points out that all three types function toward obtaining a goal; they just differ in definitions of what the goal is, how it is envisioned, or how “the exact *nature* of the intended effect” (117). However, these approaches all converge in “the defining criteria of argumentative discourse...that *the speaker pursues the goal of provoking a change of attitude in the addressee with respect to a viewpoint*” (author’s italics 118). Shiri, I argue, has the intention of persuading her narratee to believe that Shona culture is of value, that Zimbabwean history is important, that racism is a reality, that materialism is dangerous, and that connecting to the Diaspora is necessary.

A Narrator’s Self-Reflections

Another way that Shiri establishes a hospitable atmosphere for her daughter is through writing her own self-reflections. Shiri criticizes herself. We might ask what purpose this serves. One justification is that it can help to put the narratee at ease. Shiri is in a higher position of power due to her age and mother role, so when Shiri considers her flaws or when she admits that her daughter was right, the balance of power shifts towards more equality, which should make Zenzele feel more comfortable and thus lead to a more receptive response on her part to Shiri.

H. Porter Abbott¹¹⁷ finds writing characters can change their consciousness; moreover, the characters’ own writing can be a testimony to this change (39). Subjectivity is, according to epistolary scholar Joe Bray, where rich information about characters, i.e. writing narrators, comes from. Bray primarily draws on John Locke’s 1689 essay on consciousness to analyze the epistolary. As Locke believed that one’s personal identity comes from the identity of the

¹¹⁷ While Abbott analyzes fictional diaries, he finds “The letter strategy and the diary strategy are so similar that what can be said analytically about the one is frequently transferable to the other” (10).

consciousness, he also believed that one could be different people at different times as our consciousness changes. He saw consciousness as making “a Being to be Present with itself” and that it resulted from “thinking” and “relating to oneself” (qtd. in Bray 11). This implies that in the epistolary, readers may be able to point out different states of consciousness within one narrator. For example, a character may narrate from a past or future version of self and intermingle narration from the present.¹¹⁸ Locke contended that consciousness is “the vital criterion of personal identity” (qtd. in Bray 11) and that it leads to the creation of self (qtd. in Bray 12). The narrating self versus the experiencing self (in past or present) creates a tension of “anxieties of self and identity” (Bray 20). There is also “complex interaction between thought and feeling within the divided minds” (Bray 27). Tension can come, Bray explains, from the narrator writing in the present and also writing from the mindset from the time of events in the past.

Writing letters can be reflective and transformative, especially when “epistolary fiction [is] confined to the letters of one correspondent” (Abbott 39). The letter’s goal, content, and space contribute to possible reflection. Shiri’s letter’s goals are to leave a legacy for her daughter, to say goodbye, and to give her guiding advice. Her specific goals are to convince her daughter that it is important to remain connected to Zimbabwe, Africa, friends, family, and nature. She wants to show that these things have value. Shiri explicitly recounts how she stated her husband’s and her parental goal of appreciating nature¹¹⁹ and village life to Zenzele: “We do not want our children to grow up thinking that the city is all there is, as if we sprang up from cement sidewalks and towering high-rises. The city is such a small part of African life; it leaves

¹¹⁸ To clarify, this does not mean that the narrator is in the past or future; the narrator is still located in the present, physically.

¹¹⁹ Shiri also expresses the value of nature she desires for her daughter to have through recounting her own childhood experiences in nature, see page 27.

out so much” (19). She does not want “priorities lost in the frantic urban rhythm” or “values” either (19). In regards to the “values” that Shiri wishes to convey to her daughter from Shona culture, they are: “respect and compassion” (59). She does not want her daughter to lose a human connection,¹²⁰ that is a caring relationship with people. She does not want her to value material possessions over human relationships,¹²¹ to “get lost” in America, and “never return . . . lost to that dreaded black hold, the ‘brain drain’” (46), or to fall prey to “integration, assimilation, and social mobility” (73). Shiri sees human connection as essential: “Foreign cash is not the answer to our problems . . . Africa needs the hearts and minds of its sons and daughters to nurture it” (64). Moreover, she wishes for her to “be proud of your roots” (63).¹²²

The letter’s content is of a personal nature, and the space is intimate not only due to the content but due to the writing location, her kitchen. The kitchen is known as the heart of the home, so it is not surprising that the self can come forth in this region and be analyzed. It is where food is prepared, and food is sustenance for family activities. Shiri makes her writing location seem hospitable through mentioning the cold weather: “the first day of winter” outside the house where “there is a thin frost on the ground . . .” (1). The cold outside is strong enough that the flowers have “all shuddered and collapsed” due to the “cool” air. In contrast to the cold outside, Shiri articulates the kitchen as her “refuge.” It holds the warmth of “the orange glow of the dawn” inside it, while Shiri adds the warmth of her “morning tea” to this space (1). Lastly, Shiri designates this intimate sphere for her daughter, telling her that this space was Zenzele’s

¹²⁰ She does not want her to become in Mukoma Byron’s mother’s words “a stranger” (61).

¹²¹ Shiri’s relaying of Mukoma Byron’s mother’s words vocalize what Shiri later conveys in similes: “Money? Who cares for your ignorant money? What is money? We sent you overseas to learn, to drink and eat the knowledge of white men. Instead, you cast away your *tsika*[dignity] and learned nothing but his manners!” (60).

¹²² This statement is uttered by Shiri to Mukoma Byron; however, I find it to be a core component of Shiri’s message to Zenzele.

“stage,” that “it is here that we encountered each other” and that explicitly this room “reminds” her of Zenzele (1). Although Shiri’s mission is to help her daughter, Shiri also gains invaluable insight into herself as well, attesting to “the reciprocal participating role of the text in the tale of its fictive author” (Abbott 39).

Shiri questions if she was a good mother. She chastises herself for retreating from her daughter’s obsession with leaving for Harvard and berates herself for sinking into domesticity, “ironing” (3), instead of fully engaging with her in her moments of ecstasy over the idea of Harvard:

Was I too distant? Perhaps. I was often bewildered by the task of motherhood, that precarious balance between total surrender and totalitarianism. How could I prepare you for a world that I did not even understand? . . . Had it been up to me, I would have constructed a very different world for you. (3)

Shiri admits her possible failure as a parent by not being fully engaged with her daughter. There is a sort of tension in self-examination, in looking at one’s flaws. It can be scary and jarring. Shiri admits her shortcomings and failure. She juxtaposes the domestic realm against the academic realm and indicates her comfort lies in the domestic realm. Shiri proceeds to justify her observation of her bad behavior, saying that she did not fully grasp this new world. She reveals a viewpoint that is self-critical. Shiri chastises herself when she reminisces about telling Zenzele that she could not vacation with her friend Petranella. In reflecting about this, Shiri relays to Zenzele that she felt she was “cruel” and “adamant” (10). Shiri is judging herself and judging her behavior in a specific incident. She is harsh with herself, but in being so she is trying to open herself up to her daughter, as if to say “I wish I had behaved otherwise” or “I did not mean to be so harsh.” It is important to remember that the narrator too reads her own identity

as she writes. “Such an act of writing/reading is simultaneously to say who I am and to ask Who am I? The self disclosed *behind* the text is the *project* of the text” (Abbott, author’s italics 49).

Shiri moves from critiquing herself as a mother to critiquing herself as simply a person, specifically in regard to her intelligence and confidence:

My eyes are resigned to observe, detached, from some distance. They want no part; they do not take in. They keep out. In your company, I often feel blind, groping for firm objects, hesitant lest I collide with some obstacle I cannot characterize, let alone surmount. (4-5)

It is as though Shiri feels less intelligent than her daughter. Perhaps she realizes her limitations. Here it seems that it may be painful for Zenzele to hear her mother’s self-deprecating talk. What reaction might this elicit from Zenzele? Usually if one’s friend says something bad about herself, the friend replies by stating the opposite, providing a type of cantilever. These strong observations that Shiri enacts on herself demand such a reaction from her daughter. Further self-reflection regarding intelligence occurs when Shiri’s husband was recounting to Zenzele about his professor who reduced African studies to drums. Shiri was also in the room listening at the time. Shiri notes how she felt isolated and underappreciated: “I suddenly felt all alone in my corner chair, knitting. I was outside the glow of admiration that you were beaming on your father” (75). And she believes that “his words would become a part of you, while my little sweater would always be external . . . ” (77). Again Shiri is reducing herself to domesticity, or resigning herself to it. She is also self-critical while reflecting on attending a party where she first met Zenzele’s dad. She says, “I had a reputation . . . of being the responsible and obedient one in our family” (128). This references that Shiri did not drink, smoke, or swear; rather she took care of others.

Shiri critiques her own intelligence and finds herself inferior to her daughter. She feels “outdated” (35) compared to feminist (35) and idealist Zenzele (36), who persistently questions her about why society is filled with gender injustices. Shiri realizes the validity of her daughter’s arguments and observations about unfair treatment of women. However, she realized this silently. As she writes to Zenzele about their instances of confrontation regarding issues such as women’s naming (34-35), *lobola* (31-34), and catcalling (35), she expresses how these discussions raised by Zenzele left her feeling “inadequate and obsolete” (37). Shiri explains how these discussions were “difficult” for her, so that she “spent the entire afternoon [after debating the above issues with Zenzele] ironing, in vain to attempt to smooth out the terrible inconsistencies of our lives” (37). The inconsistencies involve issues such as naming practices. These inconsistencies are uncomfortable to face. It is hard to admit that they exist within one’s self as well as in one’s society. Ironing clothing is a tedious chore. Sometimes even after an item is ironed, lines and wrinkles are still visible, though one has pressed down hard to try to efface them. This is akin to how one can ruminate over situations or discuss them *ad nauseam* but not perhaps find a solution or closure. Shiri does not have solutions for the injustices that her daughter raises. In fact she wishes to “relinquish the role of mother and assume . . . [the] role as audience” (35).

Shiri reflects on her own acceptance and rejection of patriarchy. This revelation occurs after reflecting on her discussion of traditional naming practices, where women become named according to the children they give birth to. Zenzele is outraged at this custom and debates its dehumanizing aspects with her mother, but at the time Shiri maintained her position of embracing this tradition; however, upon writing to her daughter she tells herself and her daughter (“musing”) that “What’s in a name? What difference does it make if Katie is called Mai Farai,

Professor Marodzi, or Professor Marimba? She is the same person. But deep down, I knew it did [matter]” (37). This reflection shows Zenzele’s influence on Shiri. This reflection also reveals contradictions in Shiri’s mind and is evocative of cognitive dissonance theory. More contradictions will soon be presented.

Richard M. Perloff in *The Dynamics of Persuasion* includes cognitive dissonance as an element essential for persuasion. Cognitive dissonance theory speaks to holding incongruous thoughts or “mental elements” (Perloff 224). “Two cognitions are in a dissonant relationship when the opposite of one cognitive element follows from the other” (224). Shiri’s admission that naming for women is important is an emotive shift from indifference about the subject to acknowledgement of serious repercussions from the same subject. Drawing on Aronson, 1968, Perloff explains that dissonance is **“a negative, unpleasant state that occurs whenever a person holds two cognitions that are psychologically inconsistent”** (author’s bold 225). In Shiri’s case it is psychologically inconsistent to say that a woman’s name has no influence on her esteem or recognition of her self when she can see that names assign roles and patterns of recognition. It does not make sense for Shiri as a woman to “engage in behavior that” detracts from her self as a woman (Perloff 225). Perloff notes that “dissonance is psychologically uncomfortable, physiologically arousing, and drives individuals to take steps to reduce it,” so there is the possibility that Shiri could be shifting her mind due to reflecting on her statement (225). A further dissonance pertaining to feminism occurs. For example, there is a thematic shift to female empowerment. Indeed, the rest of Shiri’s narrative after this point involves female military role models and Sister Africa. Shiri returns to the question of naming later in her letter. One could say that Shiri adds the story of Sisi Rudo, who chose to remain in a domestically violent relationship, as an example of a woman who fits herself into the confining

space of a name (role of wife) or of an inferior concept (subservient to her husband). Shiri remembers how her sister Linda analyzed that Sisi Rudo “has made herself no better than a dog or a baboon” by choosing to stay with her abusive husband who beat her regularly (172).

Lastly, Shiri has self-inquiries about co-dependency and seeking gratification through someone else. This comes about when she relays new information to her daughter through recounting to her about her first love, the sculptor who died in an ambush. While Shiri’s motivation was to educate her daughter about love, she also comes to reflect on the issue for herself too. She reminisces about her sculptor lover who drank and got in rows with his dad and reflects that “I suppose a part of me wanted to save him [her lover] in some way. He became my mission. I waged a crusade for his happiness, for relieving the burden of his family, for stopping his bouts of drinking, for persuading him to stop smoking” (118). She was expending her energy on someone else rather than transferring this energy to a career endeavor; therein lies a difference between her and Zenzele. Zenzele allocates much of her energy into her own thinking and her education. This reflection seems like something that would come up in psychotherapy, concerning why one is drawn to certain things. Why was Shiri drawn to this man who needed fixing? Shiri does not romanticize this relationship; instead she looks at a blind spot she might have had. Shiri’s words “mission” and “crusade” are strong word choices that express the fervor she felt about healing her lover. Interestingly, the word “crusade” is used too when Shiri describes Zenzele’s passion for the Harvard prospectus, further accentuating another difference between Shiri and Zenzele. Although this revelation is not sinister, it shows Shiri’s shortcomings. She also realizes an aspect of this prior relationship that she does not have with her present husband:

To this day, I do not know where my own soul lies, but I knew for certain that his dwelled in his hands. In that room, I found a spiritual fulfillment that has eluded me since. I, too, like the wood, the earth, and the stone he collected, had been touched by him in an indescribable way. (119)

This is a risky and vulnerable admission to make both to herself and to her daughter, and as such is provocative. Shiri tells Zenzele that a part of her is still not happy or fully healed. This is like sharing a secret with her daughter, an inner revelation about something she does not even tell her husband. This secret sharing implies complicity with the narratee, a cooperative mechanism. Surely, Zenzele will not reveal this information to her father for fear of emotionally wounding him. This reflection and admission reveal a pain that still is present in her mother's heart.

Abbott explains that:

Writing the text, the self seeks (or projects) the intending self behind that same text. In the process, assumptions about the world—assumptions to which the intending self is attached—come into focus or remain screened from view. Only by coming into focus do they lead, finally, to Ricoeur's 'new modes of being' (49-50).

Shiri's prior love pains, fears of inferiority, and fears of failure as a parent are reflected back and come out of the "screened view," giving Zenzele interior access to her mother, particularly to a vulnerable territory. Shiri could fear Zenzele might judge her or look at her unfavorably; however, she takes the risk and writes these self-reflective thoughts.

Trees, Seeds, and Soil: Similes Advocating for Unifying the Diaspora

While on the surface *Zenzele* is about preserving Shona culture and Zimbabwean history, it presents an argument through natural and manmade similes that materialism can be society's downfall. Shiri's metaphors and similes champion nature and human relationships. Her stories, such as those about present-day spoiled ungrateful children with abundant material goods and painful memories of apartheid (reflected in material segregation), substantiate her argument. Shiri also uses nature in similes to explain human behavior. I use linguistic analysis to examine the writing narrator's similes and metaphors, drawing largely upon George Lakoff's and Mark Johnson's book *Metaphors We Live By*. Lakoff and Johnson reveal metaphors to be informative about human's conceptual systems. Because this examination of similes and metaphors involves "thought processes" which originate in the mind, a personal and private sphere, this epistolary examination also explores how a writing narrator's similes foster intimacy.

Science explains how intimacy results from similes and metaphors. Jonah Lehrer, author of *Imagine: How Creativity Works*, elucidates that metaphors and jokes rely largely on the right part of the brain "and its ability to uncover linguistic associations. . . . From the perspective of the brain, a metaphor is a bridge between two ideas that, at least on the surface, are not equivalent or related" (10). Metaphors are powerful in and of themselves. They also demand a lot from the brain in order to be understood. Lehrer explains that in grasping metaphors, the brain's "left hemisphere focuses on the literal definition" while the right hemisphere aids in "detecting the nuanced qualities they [the two things compared in a metaphor] have in common."

The right hemisphere is “able to zoom out and parse the sentence from a more distant point of view” (10).¹²³

Many components make up metaphor, and metaphors vary according to the person issuing them. Lakoff and Johnson elucidate that metaphor

is a matter of conceptual structure . . . [that] involves all the natural dimensions of our experience, including aspects of our sense experiences: color, shape, texture, sound, etc.

These dimensions structure not only mundane experience but aesthetic experience as well . . . pick[ing] out certain dimensions of . . . experience and excluding others . . .

provid[ing] new experiential gestalts and, therefore new coherences. Art [metaphors and metaphorical language] is a matter of imaginative rationality and a means of creating new realities.” (Lakoff and Johnson 235-236)

Similes can provide insight into characters’ points of view, experiences, dreams, and realities. A close reading of *Zenzele*, including analysis of the writing narrator’s use of similes, reveals Shiri’s arguments about humanity that extend beyond the borders of Zimbabwe or beyond her daughter’s body. Shiri’s similes reveal metaphorical concepts of nature as intertwined with humans and their love, while her material similes represent ideas and the life of the mind. Shiri’s similes ultimately show that she privileges love over ideas and believes love to be the saving way for humanity.

¹²³ Lehrer mentions Beeman and Kounios who “discovered the ‘neural correlate of insight’: the anterior superior temporal gyrus (aSTG). This small fold of tissue, located on the surface of the right hemisphere just above the ear, became unusually activate in the seconds before the epiphany...A few previous studies had linked it to aspects of language comprehension, such as the detection of literary themes, the interpretation of metaphors, and the comprehension of jokes. Beeman argues that these linguistic skills share a substrate with insight because they require the brain to make a set of distant and original connections. Although most of us have probably never used age, mile, and sand in a sentence before, the aSTG is able to discover the one additional word (stone) that works with all of them. And then, just when we’re about to give up, the answer is whispered into consciousness” (17-18).

Shiri uses trees, seeds, and soil, her strongest nature similes, to discuss the need for members of the Diaspora to establish and retain connections with each other.¹²⁴ Foremost, she fears losing her daughter to the West as she saw happen with her dear childhood friend, Mukoma Byron. Much of the scholarship on *Zenzele* has mentioned how the text raises the issue of braindrain.¹²⁵ However, little work has addressed the text's comments on the Diaspora. This analysis builds on this issue and adds a new focus, namely that of materialism. Byron left to study in England and eventually severed ties with his family, friends, and culture, later claiming to Shiri that he has changed identity: "I am English" he states (66). Byron's only ties left to his family are financial ones; he sends money to help his mother and pays for her funeral. He no longer speaks his maternal language, Shona. Shiri wants her daughter to understand that there are ties stronger than money and tells her "our pride derives not from . . . material things" (93). She wants her to feel cultural, family, and racial ties and so she invokes a simile of a tree. A tree has a system of roots below ground that anchor it, in addition to a network of branches that reach for sunlight to make food for itself as well as fruit for humans. Shona culture, family, naming practices, the Diaspora's connection to Africa, racism, and prejudice comprise the tree. Naturally, the connection to the expression "family tree" is also associated with this simile, whereby one's family lineage is visually mapped out in the shape of a tree. Family and human connections are very important to Shiri: "The extended family is your community, your

¹²⁴ Shiri also compares an aspect from the material world to a tree. Shiri talks about a hideout play place she shared with Linda under a cement bridge where there was a floor made from a baobab trees' roots that "were plump and fleshy like an old woman's thighs..." (20). She also includes how her mother compared finding the right love to a tree. Shiri's Mom told her 'The second...like the mighty trees in the forest that we do not see before us, yet there they are, strong and tall; in rain and sun, they dig their roots deep and shade us with their leaves. It is the second one who you must marry. He will be a good husband and father to your children' (113).

¹²⁵ According to UNICEF (2009) 20,000 teachers left Zimbabwe from 2007 to 2008(see "Zimbabwe Education System: Emerging Challenges and the Implications for Policy and Research" 2010, page 39).

emotional, financial and cultural safety net. It is Africa's most powerful resource" (31). Shiri tells Zenzele in response to pointing out the failings of Mukoma Byron that

We must develop a cultural ecosystem—some eternal cycle of African regeneration—planting our roots firmly, spreading and growing as the tubers and rhizomes, deep in the earth and sowing in our children (the fruits) the seeds to reap another harvest. Each time one of us, like Mukoma Byron, is lost to the West, it is worse than losing a fruit; we also lose the seeds therein. (69)

Shiri realizes that the problem is not simply the brain drain, but a loss of human connection among members of the Diaspora. Human relationships belong to her nature category: "We should get to know each other as really connected branches of the same tree, not as stereotypes delivered by a distorted media" (94). She also is of the mind that African Americans need to have a profound connection to their continent of origin, not one where "They purchase a few colorful items of native attire . . . then become local experts on Africa . . . [with] little contact with the very people they sought to discover" (94). Material things do not guarantee happiness. One component of happiness is human relationships.

Shiri also comments with a nature simile that human relationships are more important than material goods. She recounts Amai Tawona who chose to spend money on "new dresses" for "each Sunday" rather than "plow[ing] . . . investments" into her children's "hearts and minds" (29-30). She notes that this materialistic behavior "sowed the seeds of discontent and resentment in her children, which she reaps today" (30). The tree's roots are evocative of the profound human connection Shiri is advising, where superficial connections are not made, but real friendships are formed. She frames her view that members of the Diaspora need a substantial physical connection to Africa in terms of nature. She proclaims the Diaspora's need

for their original soil: “It must be so very difficult to take root, to blossom, and to flourish without nourishment from one’s own soil” (93). She is puzzled over “how they [African Americans] could exist in foreign lands so far from their true origins” (93).¹²⁶ She conversely realizes that Africans too suffer when they are not connected to the Diaspora, for Shiri admits to conceiving of African Americans only in stereotypes of “big movie stars, pop singers, and tall, muscular athletes” (93).

Shiri sees Africa --its culture, history, beliefs, tradition--as fertile soil, necessary for the nourishment of all members of the Diaspora. This African soil she contends is needed for any stage of development, from seed to full tree.¹²⁷ The power of the earth’s soil reaches into the realm of spiritual healing. The soil Shiri speaks of has healing benefits as well as metaphorical ones. According to Shiri, the soil is the fundamental anchoring mechanism for Africans: “We are close to the soil. This is where the African foundation is. We are still standing on the ground of our ancestors; we are rooted, where others were scattered” (93). Through touching on history and politics, she proceeds to explain the value of the land for both Zimbabweans and Africans:¹²⁸

We have fought off those who sought to take this native earth from us, the colonizers, the big companies, the mercenaries, even the missionaries. We have struggled and won what was truly ours. Now we must fight the enemy within. The soul of the African is deeply

¹²⁶ Shiri includes a saying she has heard about the baobab: “As the ancients say, the baobab tree, as majestic and solid as it is, would wilt if it was removed from the rich springs and the plentiful soil that gives it life” (93).

¹²⁷ Baba Africa sees the Diaspora as scattered seed, see (104). Shiri also discusses Baba Africa’s daughter as “his very own seed, that which has borne such sweet fruit” (107).

¹²⁸ Zimbabwe has a complicated history of land issues. Recently, in 2005, President Mugabe had an operative to drive out the poor from prior designated shantytowns, decimating their homes. Also, in 2005 he implemented policies of taking land from white farmers and giving it to his military men as payment. These recipients were by and large not skilled or trained in agriculture or land management. Zimbabwe went from being known for its food abundance, to receiving food aid due to this policy decision.

connected to the earth. We were the first to spring from it and our crumbled remains lie buried in many lands. (93)

“The enemy within” addresses the appropriation of Western culture. Certainly one way colonizers dominate indigenous people is through forcing their language on them, for language carries with it cultural views, ways of perceiving, and acting. It is a form of mind control. Language brings about certain cultural behavior and ways of seeing as shown in Lakoff’s and Johnson’s work that dissects English expressions regarding time as a production mechanism. For example, in English the idea “time is money” is seen in English language analysis, where expressions such as “wasting time,” “saving time,” “having time,” “spending time,” and “budgeting time” are reflective of this perception (Lakoff and Johnson 7-8). Materialism is the cultural value that is represented by these expressions.¹²⁹ What ensues is a way of behaving that reflects this linguistic perception of time. However, one could also say that the culture has a perception that in turn has linguistic influence. A case in point for American culture is how we are infamous for asking, “How are you?” and then not stopping to listen to the answer or not to supply a detailed answer to the question when we are addressed. According to Ngugi Wa Thiong’o in *Decolonising the Mind*, when the language of the colonizer is learned by the colonized, it is not simply language that is learned, but cultural codes and ideology as well.¹³⁰ Shiri’s tree, soil, and seed similes are an attempt to articulate in her own unique way--without visual markers of the colonizer--her position on the Diaspora.

¹²⁹ How much would the expressions change, if instead of conceiving of time as a commodity, it were conceived of as a vehicle for fostering human relationships?

¹³⁰ Ranka Primorac in *The Place of Tears* mentions “Chinweizu and his co-authors wanted African writers to develop an aesthetics inspired by rural ‘orature’ (oral literature), and to refrain from ‘Western,’ modernism-inspired stylistic experimentation practiced by Soyinka and others” (7).

Reaching the Narratee with Man-Made Similes

While trees and soil are seen as a unifying force for the Diaspora, and ultimately all of humanity, Shiri provides explicit critiques about materialism as a downfall for society through reported speech and direct speech. She explicitly states that some friends of hers who went to live in the West “succumbed to moral anarchy and glittering materialism” (69). She also admits that she herself as a young person believed that the west “had all the promise of the treasures” (69). Reported speech is a way that Shiri indirectly presents her views on the corruption of Zimbabwean youth. Shiri mentions through reported speech Zenzele’s friend Petranella as an example of a youth corrupted and spoiled¹³¹ by abundant material goods. Shiri recounts Petranella’s mother’s laments about the ills of emulating whites after independence by acquiring the same goods and services they had:

There were horse-riding and French lessons, video games and trips to London and New York. There was nothing that our children asked for that we denied them. We who had grown up knowing only deprivation, austerity, and hard labor. We wanted only the best for them. We even sent them to the best private schools with plenty of whites. (14)

Had Shiri directly told Zenzele that she agreed with Petranella’s mother’s view, or had Shiri directly stated a similar view regarding Zenzele, these would be likely be perceived as confrontational to Zenzele. Shiri presents Petranella’s mother’s words as an indirect way to bring up the topics of loss of culture and materialism. The idea conveyed by Petranella’s mother is that acquiring numerous material goods and symbols of prestige would somehow yield

¹³¹ Petranella’s mother fumes to Shiri about Petranella that “I should ship her off to the bush. Maybe then she would understand just how lucky she is. She does not know what it is to work” (16-17).

success.¹³² According to Shiri, such success is, after all, is nothing less than a duplication of the former oppressor.¹³³ Shiri ruminates to Zenzele about the issue of fully appropriating Western values and disowning one's original culture; however, she uses an indirect approach rather a direct one. She reflects on Petranella's mother's predicament of having a daughter who is disrespectful and pregnant out of wedlock, and she notices how Petranella's mother suffers. Shiri tries to explain to Zenzele the nature of this suffering so that she may avoid this pain:

All of the peri-independent generation shared a common vision of a better life.

Unfortunately, too many of us had translated this into a material definition of success.

We developed all the symptoms of the postcolonial syndrome, endemic to Africa:

acquisition, imitation, and a paucity of imagination. We simply rushed to secure what the colonialists had. We bought their homes, attended their schools, leased their offices, spoke their language, played their sports, and courted their company. We denied our own culture, relieved to leave our primitive origins far away, in some forgotten village. And so we believed ourselves sophisticated at last, integrated into the mainstream of cosmopolitan culture. We created an invisible white line of ultimate aspiration: to achieve what the Europeans had. This was the epitome of civilization, the very definition

¹³² Shiri notes how Petranella's mother's sentence about schools "was uttered with particular disappointment, as if some guarantee had been recanted or some promise broken" (14).

¹³³ Shiri recounts going to town as a child [under apartheid] being fascinated to "watch the whites in their spotless starched clothes...Their clothes never had a stain or a hole in them, and their hemlines were sharp and straight...[Their shoes] matched perfectly and the strings of their shoelaces stayed put neatly in their holes instead of cutting through them and becoming all shredded and unraveled, so that in order to tie one's shoes one had to crisscross the laces unevenly in the remaining holes. ...their shoes were shiny, not dusty and worn...fit their feet instead of pinching or flopping about like the Africans' shoes did" (24). She comments as viewing the whites as having a "smart look" (24).

of evolutionary advancement. *We ceased to dream, to have our own vision of happiness and success.* (italics mine 17-18)

According to Ashis Nandy, colonization emphasized the ugly, brutal aspects of British political culture. It emphasized competition, control, and achievement (Nandy 32). These traits spread in colonization's wake. As Shiri deduces above, the acquisition of material goods was taken as a prime way to advance one's status, so many people became fixated with material wealth. Aside from the thematic discussion, Shiri's use of the plural first-person indicates inclusion with the narratee. Moreover, this inclusion involves the narrator herself in the problem through the use of the third person. Shiri or Zimbabwean youth are not singled out. This problem is presented as general to Zimbabwean society. Another example illustrates the fixation with material goods: "We glorify the Western world. It is true that we wish our children to return with diplomas, but we rejoice no less to see them laden with chests of electronic treasures—televisions, videos, cameras, stereos, cars, and computers" (70).¹³⁴

Shiri uses man-made items to reach out to Zenzele as well as to critique neo-colonialism. She critiques both the colonizer and the experience of being colonized. First we will examine Shiri's similes that critique neo-colonialism; then, we will turn to an examination of her wide range of similes with man-made items. Two critiques occur: one involving a white woman's body and one concerning the learning of English. Shiri observes the appearance of Mukoma Byron's English wife whom she perceives to be a "frail-looking, pallid creature" with a "nervous" disposition (56). She describes her as wearing clothes that "hung on her in a flimsy, shapeless way, like clothes pinned on a line to dry" (56). This is a painful and sad description. It makes Byron's wife seem dehumanized, devoid of blood, as if the pins that fasten clothes on the

¹³⁴ Shiri also mentions dishwashers, kitchen gadgets and computers (92).

line could be on her body. Additionally, hanging clothes do not conjure up pretty visions of women's attire; instead, the image of clothes hanging on a body evokes emaciated bodies. It is also interesting to contemplate the visual aspect of the clothesline as a straight, boring line. It is rigid and serves the purpose of hanging things, keeping things still. A clothesline is an insignificant domestic tidbit, hardly noticed, especially when covered over by clothes. Byron's wife does not embrace Zimbabwe; rather, she views being in Zimbabwe as something to manage with medication. She has no desire to know Byron's family or friends. It is as if she is devoid of heart or life—flat and damp like clothes put on the line to dry, not clothes billowing and filling with air.

Shiri uses the man-made product, soft drinks, to describe the process of learning to speak English. Upon closer analysis of the simile, Shiri's criticism of colonization and how it imposed the learning of a foreign tongue can be deduced. Shiri describes speaking English while in school: "English was awkward for us; when we spoke it, it felt like a fizzy drink had gone down funny and all the bubbles were popping up your nose" (47). While evoking a sense of childhood playfulness, this simile also evokes the physicality of speaking a language, noting its physical resonance in one's body. It also touches on how something foreign and imposed (the English language) can feel disturbing. Just as carbonated drinks are not natural, this simile speaks to how learning English, the language of the colonizer, was an uneasy experience.

Shiri also comments on "big businessmen and cabinet ministers with sleek, dark Mercedeses" who have severed their village ties in favor of "the concrete splendor of the gleaming high-rises of the big cities" as leading to "rural areas" becoming "like obsolete factories . . . that are in a state of social and economic decay" (9-10). The word "factory" is incongruous with "rural areas." This is a subtle way for the narrator to get her narratee to pause

and reflect on what is being said. An “obsolete factory” loses business; it is shut down. This simile also makes one consider villages in terms of profit. This then leads to questioning what the value of villages and rural areas actually is.

Shiri uses a man-made simile to praise her daughter’s intellect. Examination of this simile reveals insight into Shiri’s outlook. Lakoff and Johnson explain how the English language reflects a conception of argument as war. They point out that concepts and philosophies reside in the metaphors and metaphorical language that we use. “Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities” (3). In this example they show that the language used to describe elements of argument has a rhetoric of war. For example:

Your claims are *indefensible*.

He *attacked every weak point* in my argument.

His criticisms *were right on target*.

I *demolished* his argument.

I’ve never *won* an argument with him.

You disagree? Okay, *shoot*!

If you use that *strategy*, he’ll *wipe you out*.

He *shot down* all of my arguments. (authors’ italics 4)

They proceed to explain how language in turn shapes our conceptions. They allude to cultural differences influencing perceptions and mention that in an unnamed culture, argument might be perceived as a dance rather than as war; however, to us in Western culture we might not even

recognize an argument as an argument in a culture that expresses argument in terms of dance metaphors (4-6).

In *Zenzele*, there is proof of argument being perceived as warfare, specifically through Shiri's similes. Shiri refers numerous times to Zenzele's questions (she had asked in the past) as "bombs" going off.¹³⁵ Questions are a form of intellectual inquiry, but they also can function as argument devices. Zenzele raises questions over such topics as "romantic curiosity" (113) about her parents and issues revolving around gender equality. For Shiri, Zenzele's questions are composed of "fervent egalitarianism and sweet idealism" (36) and challenge common perceptions. Shiri is uncomfortable with Zenzele's questions because they test her; they ask her to re-examine her self and her society, something that is unsettling because people often perceive comfort in the status quo. Sometimes Shiri feels she does not have adequate intellectual resources to respond to her daughter's questions. There are also instances when Shiri holds differing positions than her daughter and confrontation can ensue. Shiri refers to Zenzele's questions as "little bombs to disturb my orderly, swept, waxed, and shiny world" (36). They were and are a challenge for Shiri, who does not classify herself as an intellectual, a debater, or a revolutionary. Even though Shiri is a teacher by profession, Shiri's classification could be "domestic." Shiri explains, "The kitchen was my world. I could make sense of things there. The pretty blue antique china, my neat set of spotless appliances the coffee, the crockery, and the fruit arranged just so in the fruit bowl—all had their precise places according to my own system" (36). The home realm is the sphere where Shiri feels at ease. She is familiar and comfortable

¹³⁵ Although Shiri compares Zenzele's "penetrating and quizzical look" (38) to something manmade, she does refer to Zenzele's eyes with a nature simile, as "Mother Earth eyes of fossil depth" (37). Shiri's nature simile has a positive association with Zenzele's probing trait. She uses nature to speak about her daughter's intelligence, "depth." "Mother Earth eyes" denotes maternalistic and healing properties while "fossil depth" denotes wisdom.

with kitchen appliances. One might critique Shiri for being materialistic, seeing her description as evoking an attachment to things. However, she mentions other locations with significant value to her that are devoid of any material significance. For example, she later in the letter explains her peace at being in a church, looking at black angels (181-183), at being in her village Chakowa (186, 191), and in being in her family's cemetery where she can commune with her ancestors (191).

Questions dealing with the realm of ideas disturb Shiri. Before Zenzele posed the question about what being an African woman means, Shiri comments on seeing the idea forming in Zenzele's mind. She knows simply by examining her daughter's face that a question is coming and she braces herself for it: "You projected such a *penetrating and quizzical look* that I knew another little bomb was about to explode" (italics mine 38). So Shiri is even threatened by seeing questions form in her daughter's mind. Questions hold much power according to Shiri. Lastly, Zenzele's intellectual inquiry has the possibility of being embarrassing and disturbing, even unwelcome as it enters the private sphere of parents' romantic relations. Shiri remembers Zenzele as a child asking if Baba (Zenzele's father) was Shiri's first boyfriend. Shiri tells Zenzele in the letter how she laughed at "the bombs that those little lips dropped" as a small child (113).¹³⁶

¹³⁶Another destructive manmade simile that Shiri uses is one regarding beer halls. She says they are: "Like those bright fluorescent, but lethal mosquito traps, they attract and suck the life of our people" (10). Shiri's point of critique is towards "social and economic decay" in the villages (10). However, she does not develop this argument further. Similarly, according to Ranka Primorac, in Brian Chikwava's story "Seventh Street Alchemy," "those trapped in the officially unacknowledged universe are reduced to 'exploitable human material,' their lives rendered equivalent to the lives of mosquitoes or flies" (Primorac *The Place of Tears* 2).

“Bombs” is an odd choice of simile to use; however, in light of Lakoff and Johnson’s insight into the Western concept (English language) of argument as war, Shiri’s similes are fitting. One might ask what Shiri is trying to accomplish by inserting such hostile similes while writing to her daughter. Bombs are something powerful and destructive. They, with their varying size, can blow up cars, buildings, or annihilate whole populations. Likewise, one small idea can have the potential to effect many further changes. The bomb simile could be viewed as a form of provocation, of jabbing at her daughter from afar about old memories of her behavior. Shiri’s comments could be read as an argument to Zenzele to be cautious of her behavior, for it has the potential to be destructive like bombs. One could say that she wishes to warn Zenzele of the danger of being aggressive with her questions. The bomb simile could speak to those receiving Zenzele’s questions, commenting that they can feel abrasive and harmful. However, Shiri explicitly refers to Zenzele’s mental process, her “questions” as bombs, rather than her demeanor or delivery (36, 113). Clearly Shiri’s reference to “bombs” has an association with Zimbabwe’s war of liberation, something that transformed the country for better in the attempt to throw off colonial control. The relationship between questions and human interaction is charged. Though Shiri’s message is debatable, she uses the simile to say something she feels she cannot directly say. Thinking about the purpose of metaphorical language, DeBono states: “Metaphors [also similes] are used to express a relationship or type of action because ordinary language is deficient in describing ways of happenings...we use metaphors to carry complex relationships and interactions” (*The Art of Creative Thinking*).

Shiri’s “bomb” similes could be a way of saying that words and ideas *are* the new weapons. A case in point is the naming of Zimbabwe, eschewing the English name, Rhodesia. While Shiri discusses Linda’s and Tinawo’s War of Liberation war stories, which are full of

physical confrontation struggles, she specifically recounts her personal experience of seeing the individual letters going up to spell the name of her new country, a memory which points to the weight behind each letter but also to the power of words in shaping new realities, such as a new country: Zimbabwe. So, Shiri's bomb simile could speak to Zenzele's capability of shaping Zimbabwe's future through her questions and words.

Shiri uses manmade similes about the power of her husband's words to effect change. She realizes her husband's accomplishments with words:

to your father, they [words] are tangible tools. They are like the saw that brings down a towering tree, the wrench that pries open a closed door, the brush that can paint a scene of wondrous beauty, the hammer that destroys the obsolete barrier, or the key that unlocks the barbed cell. (132-133)

Shiri could have compared his words' power to lightning, thunder, a volcano, or an earthquake; however, she chose items that humans crafted for the comparison to words, something that humans also craft. While she does not mention scenarios with specific words or phrases where her husband's words were used for change, she observes how "his tone" and repetition of "one word here, thundering one there, and whispering another there—just so" were powerful and effective (132).

Shiri does use some manmade items (mirror, a monument, and coins) in similes to speak positively about her family or about her own experience. After describing how her mother-in-law undressed in front of her the night before she married, Shiri synthesizes the experience and more importantly the woman, by saying that her mother-in-law "had shown off her body as a magnificent monument of the human spirit over hardship" (45). Shiri's simile shows great admiration towards her mother-in-law. Monuments are usually erected in honor of a person who

has done honorary and exemplary things. Shiri's word choice of monument is to commemorate the worry her mother-in-law felt when her son "joined the struggle" and "when they threw him into the jail, and they beat him because he tried to defend the boys that were fighting for our freedom" (42-43). Shiri's word choice also commemorates her mother-in-law's pride in her aged female appearance. Shiri's use of a manmade simile instead of a nature simile is noteworthy since Shiri's mother-in-law has extensively used nature to discuss her body with Shiri. The shift from nature descriptions to the manmade garners attention, accentuating Shiri's message.¹³⁷ Shiri's mother-in-law sees her body as "testimony to the love I have given my family" (43). Shiri's simile of her as a monument gives tribute to her affection, beauty, pride, and hardship endured. Using the live human body is a contrast to the huge National Heroes Acre near Harare, built in 1981 to commemorate those who fought in the war of liberation; it features a statue called the statue of the Unknown Soldier. If we consider Shiri's choice of a monument for her mother-in-law and references bombs for Zenzele, we realize Shiri has chosen powerful man-made items to praise people.

Shiri uses a metaphor of a mirror to give a path of guidance for her daughter. She asks Zenzele to "let these peasants, this house and this crazy clan of ours be your mirror, your foundation, and your point of reference" (70). This metaphor urges Zenzele to recognize the humanity in her relatives and in her origins. She wishes her daughter to see herself in "the peasants, this house "[in the village of Chakowa], and her "clan." She fears that her daughter will turn into Mukoma Byron who has lost total connection with his family, heritage, and

¹³⁷ In addition to Shiri's own observation of her Mother-in-Law's breasts as "black prunes," her Mother-in-Law tells Shiri that Shiri's hips will be "full like the moon." She recounts that her birth pain "hurt like the lightning that splits the trees" (42). Shiri's Mother-in-Law does use a man-made simile for her own face—a "map" (43).

country. The mirror metaphor she gives Zenzele is to counter Mukoma Byron who has created a new identity for himself, who feels himself English and not Zimbabwean.

In even the most intimate discussion, about the subject of love, the most materialistic component is used—money. Shiri engages money to talk about the excitement of thinking of things to tell her lover the sculptor. She discusses how, as a young woman in love, she thought of things “all day” to tell her sculptor. She compares her “saved” and “collected words” to “precious coins” (117). Money holds and connects society together. It translates work into food, just as words translate for the heart. This simile shows the power of lovers’ words; they have weight and shine like money. The metaphorical concept reveals that love is a commodity bought with words. Shiri’s letter is a compilation of many words, all written for her daughter. Her letter is a tribute of great love and care for Zenzele. Ironically, Shiri “cannot recall . . . what the subjects we [she and the sculptor] discussed were,” but she “remember[s] that they seemed so important then” (117). Shiri does not remember content but remembers the feeling (love). Feelings can have weight to them, just like coins’ weight. This is as if to indirectly point out to Zenzele that Shiri has presented all these letter’s words to her in a grand gesture of love and affection.

Aligning Humans with Nature Through Nature Similes

Shiri also discusses women and emotions with nature similes. The majority of her nature similes show nature to be restorative and powerful, intertwined with humans and evocative of love. Shiri’s use of nature is not wholly positive; she does use nature to discuss negative aspects of human behavior as well. She draws on humans, plants, animals, weather, the sea, fire, and fruit for her similes. Shiri compares only women to animals, predominately to

Speak about their appearances, strengths, or behavior. Birds¹³⁸ factor in many comparisons, often coming across as if they are from the British English expression used for women. She prepares Zenzele for being viewed differently overseas through comparing her to a bird: “You are a rare bird, Zenzele. You shall be distinguished overseas by your colorful plumage, graceful flight, and beautiful songs. There are so many lovely features that shall make you conspicuous among the flock. One of these is your color” (81). Her comparison praises Zenzele for her individuality and physical beauty. While the phrase “rare bird” comes across as a common expression, Shiri elaborates on the specific parts of the bird, trying to touch on Zenzele’s numerous special qualities.

In contrast to using animals to praise women, Shiri reverses this approach to use an animal to speak of a female’s (Petranella) reproachable behavior that she observed while visiting with Petranella’s mother, Florence. Shiri’s animal simile serves to frame Petranella before Shiri reveals that according to Florence, Petranella “is smoking and drinking without shame” at home, with “her radio on full volume” and “is pregnant” (15). Shiri compares Zenzele’s rebellious friend Petranella to a horse, noting, “her distinctive mane of shiny plaited dreadlocks that gave the impression that at any moment she would fling her head back and, with a snort, gallop off” (11). This simile portrays the horse as a powerful, feisty, independent animal; this matches Petranella’s personality that rejects parental authority and has “neither respect nor gratitude” (14). Petranella is like a wild mustang, not to be controlled into carrying out proper Shona tea etiquette (12). These are offensive ways of behavior to her mother and to Shiri. So, Shiri’s horse simile is not intended to glorify Petranella but is rather intended to capture her wild spirit

¹³⁸ She mentions how she got the name Shiri from Byron “because he teased that I had the appetite of a bird” (48). Shiri recounts how she and Linda played in the woods “Like two little birds building their nest, we foraged about in the thick woodlands...” (20).

in a slightly derogatory manner. Wild horses, or broncos, can be dangerous, trampling people, bucking off humans trying to ride them. Likewise, shunning standard ways of social behavior can have the same effect, scaring or offending recipients.

In contrast to a pejorative view on a Zimbabwean young woman, Shiri turns to talk about courageous women who fought in the War of Liberation. She notes how these women:

were women of a new generation who wore trousers like men . . . who killed . . . were fit and strong, running through the bush brandishing AK-47s and machine guns. . . . they carried . . . runs of ammunition, maps, codes, and supplies to fuel the battle that ultimately was to lead us to independence . . . they were feared and admired in battle . . .

(168)

These were selfless women, a sharp contrast to Petranella. These revolutionary women were graced by a simile of honor by the enemy troops, the Rhodesians, who “called them the ‘bobcats’ because the Shona women were as fierce as lions” (168). Shiri uses a cat simile to speak about her sister’s behavior as a young girl, specifically behavior that indicates an aversion to having to conform to white Rhodesians’ standards. By Rhodesian standards I am referring to how Shiri remembers observing white Rhodesians in town with “spotless starched clothes . . . [that] never had a stain or a hole in them” and with shiny shoes (24). She remembers how Linda did not like her to brush her hair, so she put up a fierce fight against this. “Linda was worse than an enraged cat, clawing and screeching when I tried to brush her dense curls into a neat bun to render her presentable [for going into town]” (25). Interestingly Shiri uses the prey of the cat, birds, to also speak about women’s behavior.

Love relationships and grief are concepts that Shiri addresses with nature similes.¹³⁹

In advising Zenzele about love, she personifies love, telling her that, “the joy and pain of relationships . . . are inseparable twins” (108). On the one hand this may appear to be an odd analogy. Why use people for a simile on love since love pertains to people already? On the other hand, by choosing “twins” to speak about “joy and pain” coinciding with love, it is as if Shiri is using a human mirror to discuss this concept. Also while talking about love, she applies a nature simile to convey the depth of loss she felt when her lover unexpectedly died. She describes herself as being “lost in a sea of rhythmic grief” while standing among mourning women chanting (124). Shiri takes nature into her innermost grieving body to explain how her pain felt:

I was adrift, lonely, and shattered again; there was nothing to grasp, no hand to hold me steady. . . . There was a hollow space deep within me. When it rained, the space flooded with tears; in the flash and crackle of thunder, it would reverberate with pain; and in the dry heat of December, it was a scorched and arid, barren place. Nothing filled it—except perhaps regret. (125)

Shiri’s description of her grief is evocative of Birago Diop’s poem “Le Souffle des Ancêtres” where the dead are present in the natural world:

Les morts ne sont pas sous la terre,

¹³⁹ Racism is another concept that gets discussed with nature similes; however the simile belongs to Shiri’s husband. After discussing her experience in a Polish café of being offered a maid job by an elderly woman Shiri reiterates a simile about racism her husband used to encapsulate her personal story about experiencing racism in Poland. Shiri explains that while in Poland she went into a café for refreshment. While at the café an elderly Polish woman approached her, asking ‘You can cook? . . . You need work?’ (83). Shiri was “mortified” (83). She tells Zenzele that her father told her, ‘Racism is a phenomenal thing; it is like a *thick mist* that obscures the vision and judgment of even great minds’(italics mine 85).

Ils sont dans le feu qui s'éteint,
Ils sont dans le rocher qui geint,
Ils sont dans les herbes qui pleurent,
Ils sont dans la forêt, ils sont dans la demeure,

[The dead are not under the earth,
They are in the fire that glows,
They are in the rock that moans,
They are in the grass that cry,
They are in the forest, they are in movement, (my translation)]

The idea is that the ancestors have never left the living; they are invisible, but still perceivable. Conversely, Shiri's poetic words speak of the pain of loss and how nature actually pained her very being due to this loss. It is as if Shiri is saying that nature perceived her pain, was able to empathize with her. Shiri, like Diop, believes in the ever presence of the departed: "I believe, as our ancestors believed, that we pass on gifts to one another at the time of death. Just as we distribute the garments of the deceased to family and close friends, so, too, the dead will *bestow their spirit among those they love*" (italics mine 186).

Conclusion

Shiri uses trees, seeds, and soil, her strongest nature similes, to discuss the need for members of the Diaspora to establish and retain connections with each other.¹⁴⁰ This concept of human ties as related to something in nature transcends Shiri's generation and goes back at least a generation. Shiri's mother-in-law also used a nature simile to say how significant human connections are. Shiri includes her mother-in-law's conception of passing wisdom from one generation to the next: "that the wisdom of our ancestors may swell and ripen with each new bud that flowers. . . . So our roots grow deeper and our words never die" (44). Ultimately, Shiri presents Mukoma Byron and Zenzele's friend Petranella as evidence of the problem of disconnection with one's culture. They are detrimental to the ecosystem, to the unity of Zimbabweans and of the Diaspora too.

Petranella's parents have provided her with many Western goods and activities; however, she is not able to find her proper place and thus suffers. What has occurred is that to Petranella her original soil, i.e. Shona culture, feels foreign to her, so she shuns it. Her parents did not take her to the village as Shiri did with her children, and so Shona culture is a sort of foreign territory to her. Material things do not feed the deeper soul. Moreover, when solely material goods or solely Western ways are pursued, it is hard for a person to be whole, to be integrated-- such a person cannot give voice to the old or the new ways. A person's interior is not tended to by

¹⁴⁰ Shiri also compares an aspect from the material world to a tree. Shiri talks about a hideout play place she shared with Linda under a cement bridge where there was a floor made from a baobab trees' roots that "were plump and fleshy like an old woman's thighs..." (20). She also includes how her mother compared finding the right love to a tree. Shiri's Mom told her 'The second...like the mighty trees in the forest that we do not see before us, yet there they are, strong and tall; in rain and sun, they dig their roots deep and shade us with their leaves. It is the second one who you must marry. He will be a good husband and father to your children' (113).

principally pursuing “acquisition and imitation.” Shiri is trying consciously to prepare the right soil for her daughter to flourish in. Thus, Shiri is conscious to explicitly tell her daughter to follow her own inner vision: “be strong . . . at peace within . . . listen to that inner voice and not permit others to drown it out” (40). She wants her to be aware that “the true reflection of you lies within” (86). Shiri does not want to see Zenzele become like Mukoma Byron, who comes to hate himself,¹⁴¹ a victim of mental colonization where African psyches absorb Western projections of themselves. She recounts to Zenzele how she responded to Mukoma Byron’s disparaging remarks about Africa: “Have you swallowed whole every piece of Western propaganda? You sound like a parrot of their anti-African jargon” (63). She does not want Zenzele to become a “caricature” or to be filled with “shame,”¹⁴² as was Mukoma Byron. Shiri describes Mukoma Byron’s negative transformation:

It was not the age that had confounded me, nor the fact that he was clad in a three-piece suit, complete with a khaki safari hat, monocle, wing-tipped shoes, and a pipe. No, first and foremost, it was his face. It looked as if it had been reset—as if every feature had been taken down one by one, then replaced in a hurried and haphazard fashion, so that

¹⁴¹ Mukoma Byron’s self-hate is reflected in both Shiri’s observations of him as well as his own speech. After Mukoma Byron has come back from visiting his mother in the village, Shiri tells him “You did not lay a hand on your own mother! She who is your very flesh and blood.” I saw him shudder visibly, as if the thought repulsed him.” (66). He goes on to tell Shiri that England is his home “There are things there, Shiri, things that we never even dreamed of! You can live like a man, instead of an animal” (67). He calls Africa “the world’s most miserable excuse for a continent! . . . Africa is an economic wastebasket! A cultural desert and a political swamp. It is a wasteland! Absolutely pathetic!” (63).

¹⁴² There are several references to “shame” in the text. Mukoma Byron’s mother says that he has not brought his wife to see her because he is “ashamed to bring her” to his home (60). His mother further says to him that it is better to have “dignity” rather than “wander[ing] in foreign lands, full of shame” (61). Also, Mukoma Byron leaves his village visit with “the shame of an outcast” (62).

now each was a sort of caricature of its former position. He looked oddly disassembled and incongruous. (51)

Shiri further notes that his behavior was “still and formal” (55). She observes “his accent was absurdly British” akin “to a Monty Python imitation of the British Broadcasting Corporation” (55). She realizes that her friend has completely disappeared and is but a hollow shell of himself: “There remained not a trace of the local accent in his voice...it was not only Mukoma Byron’s fact that had become an incongruous caricature; it was his entire being” (55).

Shiri also realizes her daughter’s privileged position. She has been fortunate in her education, material possessions, and her parents’ education and professions. Shiri senses a cultural divide in her daughter. She realizes that such a divide can be difficult, and she wants not only to help her navigate this divide, but more importantly, she wants to be sure that she remains true to her inner self—to her unique personal vision. Ashis Nandy in *The Intimate Enemy* illustrates the precarious position of cultural divide with Rudyard Kipling and Aurobindo who felt they could accept only one culture.¹⁴³ The truly skilled individual embraces all dimensions (and cultural connections) of herself; neither Kipling nor Aurobindo were able to do

¹⁴³ Kipling in Nandy’s analysis illustrates self-hatred and the hyper-masculine position. Kipling was born in India to British parents and raised by Indian servants. He spoke Bengali. As a child he aligned more with Indians and the Hindustani language. He even felt the need to translate when he saw his Mother and had to speak English as a child. He was sent to the U.K. at age six for education. Due to his tan skin he was viewed as a foreigner in Britain. Being in the U.K. taught him that he could avoid his “Indian victimhood” by identifying with the British aggressor. As a result of this cultural adaptation his works do not portray India in a sympathetic light. He worked in stereotypes, not in complexities, showing the Indian as the opposite of the West.

Aurobindo was Indian, born of two Indian parents. However his Father was highly anglicized and wanted his son to be “English.” He forbid him to learn Bengali while in India and while in school in England forbid him to associate with Indians. As a young adult, Aurobindo chose Indian as his sole identity, a sort of reactionary traditionalism. Aurobindo learned Bengali and Sanskrit while in studying in England and became involved in organizations to fight for India’s freedom. He returned to India after college in England and worked with Indian groups (Nandy *The Intimate Enemy*).

this. Shiri does not want Zenzele to feel ashamed of being African, Zimbabwean, or Shona. She does not want her to obliterate any part of her identity: “You must absorb multiple frames of reality. Keep your eyes wide open. Take in the good and reject the bad insofar as you perceive them” (71). She specifically fears that Zenzele could easily discard both her Shona and her African culture. She also describes these “multiple frames of reality” in the terms of “urban and rural, old and new” telling her daughter that “We exist in contradictory time frames; in one we are creating computer programs for artificial intelligence and in another we are carrying a bucket to the river to fetch drinking water. It is our reality; we cannot run away from it” (18).

However, Shiri does make a slight mistake in this dialogue with Zenzele, for she tells her that her “ultimate destination is the home that you have left” (71). This seems limiting, whereas her statement that follows is much more open: “Africa will be whatever you and others make of it” (71). With this more open and general statement the narratee is left to more fully imagine her relationship with Africa and as a result is put in a more controlling position.

In conclusion, though the division is not absolute, there is a clear tendency for privileging human relations and nature over man-made things or social status. To critique man-made things and the danger of the West’s materialistic lure, Shiri inverts her strategy of nature similes using a manmade simile for the moon. Shiri contends that the West is “enchanted . . . an insatiable world of genius and decadence . . .” (47); however, “the neon blaze of fluorescent city lights . . . render[s] the moon a pale, [a] primitive bulb” (46). Shiri’s sad simile argues that man-made things (evoked by “city lights”) and materialism (evoked by “insatiable”) degrade nature and sever our connection with it. So, instead of the moon being a spectacular, powerful thing to gaze at, in Shiri’s point of view, the West and materialism make it something common, old fashioned, and powerless.

Through reflecting on her mother-in-law's visits to the city, Shiri observes this conflict between the human and the man-made. Shiri tells Zenzele how her father's mother does not like to come to the city: "She detests idleness. After one day sitting around our house, she is like a caged bird'(28). The cage represents the city; it stifles human nature (at least in the mother-in-law) and creates un-ease. This simile suggests that Shiri's mother-in-law is more comfortable away from the village. Shiri's simile highlights a difference between village and city life, one that is central for human nature. There is an element of lament in both the bird and moon similes, as if to say that distancing ourselves from nature and human connections creates a less dynamic and less enriching experience. The contrast of the Diaspora to a tree and to a "cultural ecosystem" (69) versus the moon to a bulb is stark, advocating nature as a way to unify and strengthen people. The image of a light bulb compared to the moon speaks beyond the words of the simile. Indeed, it is the image that is more powerful than the words: "What makes language so valuable for thinking, then, cannot be thinking in words. It must be the help that words lend to thinking while it operates in a more appropriate medium, such as visual imagery" (Arnheim 231-232).

Shiri does not explicitly write to Zenzele that she fears she will become like Mukoma Byron or Petranella; however, the fact that she talks about these people in terms of the loss of human connection reflects her concern. If Shiri had directly written that she did not want Zenzele to become like Mukoma Byron or Petranella, it is likely that Zenzele would feel anger and might rebel. By taking a soft approach Shiri has a greater chance of keeping an open dialogue with her daughter.

Chapter Six

Juletane: Rage in a Self-Reflective Narrative

In the last chapter we saw a narrator writing to maintain a relationship with the narratee; in this chapter the narrator writes in the futile hope of regaining a lost love with her husband, the intended narratee of her diary. This chapter addresses the most complicated text in this project. A more narrationally nuanced work, *Juletane* has two levels of narrational structure. The story involves Juletane as a narrator writing her diary while a non-narratee reader, Helene, reads the diary after Juletane has died. My analysis focuses on Juletane the writing narrator. The female narrator's writing is vital to the story. First, writing is a source of documentation of the abuse she as a mentally ill person encounters. Secondly, writing is a way for the narrator Juletane to realize her goal of getting revenge. The writing narrator reflects on her writing relationship and assiduously notes her writing process, linking the act of writing to the story's action.

Juletane is the story of a murderously psychotic West Indian woman, Juletane, who marries an African man in France and moves to live with him in Africa. Upon arriving in Africa, Juletane learns that her husband is already married and consequently, much mental suffering ensues.¹⁴⁴ It is on the boat ride to Africa that she learns of her husband's first wife. She is "devastated" and "filled . . . with despair" (14). She chooses to proceed forward with her husband in Africa, yet she does not fully integrate or resolve things with him.¹⁴⁵ The novel never

¹⁴⁴ Reasons for women entering psychiatric treatment in Dakar are listed as frustration with not having their work recognized, dependence on their husband and unease with co-wives (Sarr, Franklin and Gueye 155).

¹⁴⁵ Juletane's husband does not leave his first wife as he promised Juletane on the boat because he would lose his family ties and be "ostracized by the whole community" (23).

specifies where in Africa the story takes place, but it is in a French speaking country.¹⁴⁶ Juletane keeps a diary while suffering from psychosis (25), cross cultural shock (23), and betrayal by her husband (14-15, 22). Her diary is with her till her death in a mental institution. This diary novel, filled with agony, is typical for the diary genre. According to diary novel scholar H. Porter Abbott, diary novels with women writing characters frequently entail suffering:

The writer [character] is usually married; she is oppressed by the indifference, the insensitivity, or the love of her husband . . . ; she is a victim of the stereotyping imposed on her by virtue of her gender; her powerlessness is a function of her social condition as a woman; her sense of identity is more tenuous; she is less melodramatic (16).

Juletane suffers from all of these elements; her writing documents these sorts of grievances.

Author Background

Myriam Warner-Vieyra was born in 1939 in Pointe-a-Pitre in Guadeloupe, an island in the Caribbean colonized by the French.¹⁴⁷ In 1946 it became one of France's Overseas Departments. Warner-Vieyra left Guadeloupe when she was twelve (Mortimer 114). She spent her youth in Paris (Berrian 126) and visited Martinique for vacations (Dia 2). Guadeloupe's French colonization meant an education in which she did not know anything about the island where she came from: "Jusqu'a la fin de mes etudes primaires, je ne connaissais rien de l'ile su laquelle je vivais. Je connaissais pourtant par Coeur tous les departements francais, les fleuves et tout ce qui se passait dans ce pays. Mais je ne connaissais absolument rien de la Guadeloupe, encore moins de l'Afrique" (Dia 3). "Until the end of my primary studies, I knew nothing about

¹⁴⁶ Of course Warner-Vieyra has lived in Senegal for many years, and some scholars have commented on the similarities between the narrator coming from the West Indies and Warner-Vieyra from Guadeloupe.

¹⁴⁷ For a time the British were in power too.

the island on which I lived. I knew by heart all of the French departments of state, the rivers and everything that was going on in that country. But I did not know absolutely anything about Guadeloupe, even less about Africa” (trans. Mine). After her B.E.P.C.¹⁴⁸ she went to study cosmetology, but it was not her vocation so she did not pursue it (Rene 48). In 1961 she married filmmaker Paul Vieyra and moved to Senegal, where she continued her studies at l’universite de Dakar (Rene 48). She considers herself Dakarian since 1961 (Rene 48). At l’universite de Dakar she studied library science, archives, and documenting (Dia 1), and after obtaining her degree, she became a librarian and worked at the university of Dakar (Webb). While working in 1980 as a librarian she would write on the weekend, getting up at four in the morning to write. Her family and children were not a deterrent to her or her husband’s career. Instead, she raised her three children to understand that having their parents travel and work was normal, so they became independent children (Dia 2). She first started writing poetry and then moved on to writing fiction (Rene 48). She is president of a club called Zonta, which is a feminist organization to help women gain access to political and social resources (Webb).

It appears that Mariama Bâ’s novel was a source of inspiration for Warner-Vieyra, who noted that Bâ’s book *Une si longue lettre* “parle des problemes de la femme senegalaise” and that she herself desires to “parler de la femme qui n’est pas Senegalaise, qui vit au Senegal, dans une realite senegalaise” in order to show “comment cette femme percoit cette realite senegalaise...scrute la societe senegalaise dans ses realites les plus profondes” (Dia 5). Warner-Vieyra desires to “speak about the woman who is not Senegalese, who lives in Senegal in a Senegalese reality” in order to show how this woman perceives Senegalese reality . . . scrutinizes society Senegalese in its profoundest realities.” (translation mine) Warner-Vieyra was very

¹⁴⁸ Refers to: la basse d’essais de la petite ceinture, now known as diplôme national du brevet

much engaged in issues involving women and society. She saw where she as a foreigner in Senegal could present a unique perspective and thus wrote about a foreign woman marrying an African. “I took up the problem of polygamy in Senegal, asking myself what I would do and how would I react in Juletane’s place” (Mortimer 111).

Juletane as Documenting Treatment of the Mentally Ill

Juletane writes her diary to survive her disillusioned situation, comprised of heartbreak, abuse, and mental illness. She has a deep desire to have love with her husband again. She writes hoping her husband will one day find her diary, read it, have compassion for her, and fall in love with her again. Documentation of her abuse is one way Juletane uses her diary; this will be the focus of this chapter. She also documents how she met her husband and her life’s path to meeting him. She writes down the abuse enacted on her, as well as its impact on her consciously and subconsciously. She notes how the abuse makes her feel in the present moment, and she also recounts her traumatic dreams that result from her situation.

In her diary Juletane notes how her physical surroundings are a form of abuse. Juletane’s new family shows neglect and indifference, first noted by her bedroom furnishings. She lives in “a room five paces by four” with “a pallet . . . [that] never loses the shape of . . . [her] body” (5), “two empty whisky crates . . . as . . . [her] bedside table” and “a small chest” (5). It should be noted that Juletane did consciously chose to live in this room: “I decided I would no longer share Mamadou’s bed and I moved into my present room, which had originally been for the children” (37). However, there is some disregard for her as reflected in the distribution of material things and by the family’s behavior towards her. Juletane informs the narrator, and by extension us, that some of her garbage-type bedroom furnishings were given to her by the family

while her husband “unceremoniously took [her table in her bedroom] to replace the one in the kitchen which termites had eaten . . . ” (5). Juletane never mentions any family members or the maid (4, 8) coming in to clean her room. She is cognizant that “the young woman . . . works for the household” (4). However, she remains in her room with the bed sheets she has torn up, instead of having replacement sheets. Juletane does not receive any help from the family in maintaining her room.

Some opposing points of view contend that there are other issues pressing Juletane into a sort of self-sequestering. Valerie Orlando finds Juletane’s so-called prison¹⁴⁹ is constructed of: other’s perceptions of her, different cultural mores, and traditions (46). Building on Orlando, Rogers defines three main losses that force Juletane into exile/isolation: 1. Infertility 2. Loss of status of “first wife” 3. Loss of blackness, as labeled “foreign” and “white” by others (599). One must acknowledge that Juletane has several opportunities to rescue herself but refuses. Her husband Mamadou is willing to divorce Juletane and to send her back to France; however, Juletane is distraught and cannot envision a new life for herself (38). Also, when Juletane sees a French doctor early on in her illness, Juletane says that the doctor “offered to help me if I wanted to be repatriated to France (this was a possibility I had not known existed)” (32). Juletane also refuses repatriation. Although there are multiple factors that press Juletane to remain with her husband and to remain in her room, it seems that her unstable mental state is the prime reason for her seclusion. In addition to notations about her squalid living conditions, Juletane documents

¹⁴⁹ In contrast to conceiving of Juletane’s room as a prison, Mudimbe-Boyi defines it as “a womblike space providing security, alms and intimacy” (134). Writing adds to this security. Specifically, Rogers posits that writing Juletane’s “confessional-style journal” is a way for Juletane to return to her country of origin, to try to reconnect with “her Caribbean past” (600). Rightly, Juletane has no compatriots or contact with relatives back home, so writing allows her to access her mental space where home exists. Through writing Juletane reclaims her identity, getting rid of the “madness” identity others have given her (Overvold 201).

further abuses she encounters in the family. The family's unkind treatment accentuates her internal suffering.

Juletane also notes verbal abuse by family members. She is called names, and respect in the form of name address is missing. She says, "No one had called me by name for years. I am 'the mad woman'" (2, 63). Ndeye (the third wife) is particularly verbally abusive. Ndeye, according to Juletane, delivers a "usual volley of abuse" (3) and "insults" (40) to her. Juletane perceives that "Ndeye would be too happy to see me dead . . ." (30). Her perception of hostility seems accurate as Ndeye's response to meeting Juletane for the first time is: "I can't stand people who are crazy. She is going to have to stay out of my way, because I can't bear strange people" (42). Ndeye and Juletane live in the same house, sharing common spaces such as the kitchen, courtyard, and bathroom. Ndeye's comment is a way of relegating Juletane to her personal space—her bedroom.

Juletane's documentation of the treatment of the mentally ill extends to other afflicted individuals. Although Juletane's reporting on other's treatment comprises a small amount of her letter, it still means she is a spokesperson for others and this is empowering. Later in the story, Juletane meets a patient at the mental hospital called Oumy whose husband "locked her up in one room for two years and was living with another woman" (75). Juletane notes that this woman's husband did not properly feed her. Such abuse in the novel may very well result from a belief that the mentally ill are inferior. West African attitudes toward the mentally ill are suggested by a survey from Ghana. (Note, I am using the following article that pertains to Ghana because there is little on mental illness in Senegal; also, since the novel is not set in a specific country in West Africa, I am opening the research up to the West African region.) A 2010 article on the stigma of mental illness in Southern Ghana found that the majority of those surveyed believed the mentally

ill are like children and should be deprived of the right to vote (Barke et al 1993). Additionally, 40% of those surveyed viewed it as o.k. to take away the mentally ill's "individual rights" (Barke et al 1999).

In addition to name calling, Juletane perceives disdain and family shame towards her, writing, "I am the family scourge, the leper whom they hide and feed for love of Allah, the stranger who Mamadou made the mistake of bringing home" (41). From her youngest co-wife she feels "hatred" (4) and cruelty (43) and is ignored by relatives (61). When Juletane speaks to her husband after not having addressed him in two years, he only tells her "I would rather not hear about your household arguments" (51). Juletane's husband's reaction shows contempt and a desire not to be bothered by her. There can be several explanations for his abrasive reaction.

It is possible that Mamadou perceives Juletane to be a burden to him and to his household. The 1996 article, "Cultural Response to Mental Illness in Senegal," provides insight into this aspect, explaining that in Senegal wives are viewed as on loan, so to speak, from their families to the husband. There is an idea that in exchange for the bride price the wife will render "certain [domestic] services." When the wife becomes mentally ill, responsibility for her home's care falls to her family (parents, brothers, cousins) because this contract is seen as temporarily invalid (336). In Juletane's case she has no family with her to assume her duties. Juletane does not mention cooking or cleaning the house. Instead, she mentions tearing up her sheets and "scatter[ing] all of it over the yard" (17) and inconveniencing the family by spending hours in the shower (30). On the other hand, it is not mentioned that Mamadou paid a bride price for Juletane, for he never even met her family in the West Indies.

Another possible reason for Mamadou's abrasive attitude towards Juletane could be that he feels her madness is his responsibility, meaning his issue to manage. Juletane perceives this

and after her above-mentioned encounter with him she writes in her diary: “My madness is the private property of Mamadou Moustapha’s house . . .” (62). She does not feel that she is a person. Mamadou no longer acknowledges her: “Had I become a zombie? He no longer saw me. . . . I felt as if I was as small as an ant” (39). Her writing is an attempt to leave a legacy of herself for him. In regard to perceptions of mental illness as a problem belonging to a family member beside the afflicted, the article “Cultural Response to Mental Illness in Senegal” found “patient’s family members fear the illness as if it were *their* problem and responsibility, fully believing that the forces responsible for the illness have a major potential to impact on *their* lives too” (Franklin et al 326). As a result, the family is usually involved in treatment. However, in *Juletane* family involvement is limited. The fact that Juletane is taken to the hospital for treatment is noteworthy; however, if one considers treatment in a larger sense, it is obvious that care is lacking. Juletane’s husband’s uncle takes her first to the hospital (25); the uncle and his wife visit her (25). The second time, Juletane’s husband takes her (71). She is not taken to any traditional healers.¹⁵⁰ Juletane’s gender may also have contributed to the family’s ease in taking her to the hospital. According to a study of psychiatric treatment in Dakar from 1988 to 1985, women living in Dakar consulted psychiatric help more than rural women (Sarr, Franklin, Gueye 153).

Juletane’s family’s involvement in seeking psychiatric care is evocative of family engagement in traditional medicine in Senegal. Even in the text, Juletane attests to family involvement in her psychiatric care: “Certaines [les malades] sont accompagnées d’un parent” (136). “Some of them [patients] are accompanied by a relative” (75). Senegal’s psychiatric

¹⁵⁰ However, the youngest co-wife consults the *marabout* for her own personal gain, “aimed at keeping our husband permanently in her bed” (4).

care,¹⁵¹ originating in the 60's and 70's, actively encourages family involvement, mandating patients have a companion with them in hospital (Franklin et al 328). In 1996 only 3.7% of patients did not have a companion (334). The majority of patients, 78.6%, had at least one male companion (Franklin et al 334).¹⁵² A prime reason for prevalence of male companions is "Men in Senegal are more educated, more literate, and more fluent in French than women, thus favoring their interface with the modern medical system" (Franklin et al 331). Indeed, Juletane's husband is fluent in French, having studied law in France, and the uncle who first took her to the hospital had a government job, implying fluency in French.¹⁵³

Location could also factor into Juletane's stigmatization. A 2007 article¹⁵⁴ on stigma with mental illness in Ghana reports more stigmatization in urban versus rural areas. Juletane lives in a city in Africa, not in a village.¹⁵⁵ It is Awa, the first wife from the village (23), who seems kind to Juletane. After Juletane has suffered from her first bout of mental illness, Juletane moves into a house that Awa and Mamadou had relocated to. Juletane notes that "Awa welcomed me with great kindness, I must admit" (37). She notes that intrinsically Awa is "naturally soft, generous and submissive . . ." (37). The highest proof of Awa's kindness is reflected by the fact that she

¹⁵¹ According to Franklin et al, Senegal has three psychiatric facilities, as well as three "small psychiatric villages which are staffed by nurses or aids" (328). As of 1996 there were twelve Senegalese psychiatrists in Senegal (328). Of the 935 patients studied from 1984 to 1988, the majority were male and single, 25.3% were married monogamously and 9.5% were married polygamously (329). The majority of female patients were under age twenty-nine (329) and about half of patients were psychotic (322).

¹⁵² Females' husbands "were present 40.6% of the time" (335).

¹⁵³ "Uncle Alassance had a good pension from the government" (32).

¹⁵⁴ Neil Quinn surveyed eighty "family carers across four different sites in Ghana", two urban (Accra and Kumasi) and two rural (Ashanti Region and Northern Region) (176). He found more community support and less stigma and "greater acceptance of people with serious mental illness" in the rural locations versus the urban (186).

¹⁵⁵ City references are the street where Uncle Alassane lives, the "Thirty-third street" (32), as well as the "garden apartment, in a busy street in the town-centre" that Juletane mentions living in (32).

offers her newly born baby to Juletane, regardless of her own trepidation (38). Moreover, Awa “insisted” that Juletane celebrate with her and her friends her baby’s baptism (38). Part of Awa might have loved Juletane: “She looked after me like a mother, sometimes she had a dress made for me by her tailor. She bought me whatever little things I might need. She was the only person in the house apart from the children to whom I spoke . . . ” (40).

The third wife, Ndeye, is from the city, and she is the antithesis of Awa in both dress and demeanor. She is cruel to Juletane. She is obsessed with material things (wearing “numerous gold bracelets” (4)) and social events. She regularly has her hair and nails done and uses “perfumes from east and west” (4). “She costs him [Mamadou] a fortune: *boubous*, jewels,¹⁵⁶ movies, night-clubs; not to mention the money she generously dispenses at baptisms, marriages and all sorts of gatherings” (47). Despite Ndeye’s outward beauty, she is “spiteful” (2) and hateful (4, 40) towards Juletane. However, the novel does contain a city woman who shows empathy toward Juletane. Ndeye’s city friend, Binta, who is described as sporting a “shiny *boubou* and . . . jewellery . . . suited to an evening out” (3), is the one who shows “compassion” towards Juletane via her eyes (3). Juletane perceives that Binta “feels sorry for me” (3).

Hurtful discussions that are inconsiderate of Juletane’s feelings are another type of abuse that she documents. At the start of Juletane’s journal, Juletane complains about Ndeye’s inconsiderate comments about Mamadou’s “prowess in bed” that Ndeye is “boasting” about in the courtyard of the house, outside Juletane’s window, to her friend Binta. Ndeye tells Binta, “Mamadou is extraordinary, not at all like those men who take their pleasure and leave you unfulfilled. He is even sensitive enough to make sure I am really satisfied . . . ” (3). In addition to Ndeye’s insensitivity evident in her open sexual discussion regarding Mamadou in front of her

¹⁵⁶ See page 47 for more details of all her jewelry.

co-wife, Juletane observes that Ndeye with her friends “will gossip maliciously about all of the households in the neighborhood . . .” (48).

The destruction of Juletane’s personal property, another form of physical abuse, greatly distresses Juletane. Ndeye breaks Juletane’s prized record and slaps her. Juletane had been listening to her music loudly while Ndeye was entertaining her friends at home. Ndeye gets mad: “Furious, she took off the record, broke it and then slapped my face, yelling about my ‘crazy music’” (49). Physical violence is something foreign to Juletane, making her feel “astonishment” and “too surprised to react” (50) because as she explains, “I had never hit anyone, no one had ever struck me, except once when I was six or seven . . .” (49). The breaking of her record is deeply wounding to her for several reasons. First, music is precious to Juletane; it is one of her loves: “Music is the one thing which can still move me, make me feel alive again, . . . It is like a breath of fresh air which soothes and uplifts at the same time . . .” (48). Specifically, the record that Ndeye breaks, “the Ninth,” is one that Juletane has informed us “fills me with hope” (49). The notations of Juletane’s abuse aid readers in identifying with her desire for revenge. The quantity and degree of viciousness create empathy for Juletane.

Goals Fueled by Revenge

The analysis here will focus on Juletane’s hurtful goals. However, it is important to acknowledge Juletane’s prior failed goals because these contribute to readers’ engagement in her new goals, especially that of killing Ndeye. Such goals fuel Juletane’s rage. When Juletane reaches the point of assuming hurtful intentions towards her co-wife, Juletane reveals, “I have run out of tears. I have discovered hatred and this feeling drives me as much as my love did in the past” (66).

Initially, Juletane has an expectation of having a happy, monogamous marriage with Mamadou; this is her first goal. When she meets Mamadou's first wife, Awa, Juletane is shocked to find out that her marriage expectation is not reality. She is resigned to her situation however and chooses not to return to France or to divorce Mamadou. Yet, while she is resigned about the loss of love from Mamadou, she still ultimately hopes for some rekindling of his feelings for her. Thus, Juletane writes her diary in the hopes that her husband will one day read it: "I must finish my journal, it is the only legacy I am leaving to Mamadou. I hope he will read it and will understand how far from my dream he was" (72).¹⁵⁷ Reaching her husband is one of her intentions in writing, but a prime goal of her writing is plotting her revenge on her co-wife Ndeye.

Juletane's next significant goal loss is motherhood, which is connected to the primary goal of unifying with Mamadou once again. Juletane has a pedestrian accident, where she is hit by a car and has a miscarriage. The loss of her unborn child devastates her because she perceived a child as a possible way to salvage her marriage. With the hope of motherhood Juletane informs us that her "whole way of looking at things" changed and that "nothing else [aside from the future child] mattered . . . any more" (33). The hope of having a child meant a new relationship with Mamadou. When this goal is lost she is distraught. She states, "I was overcome with weeping and despair" (34). Her sadness over the loss of the child becomes worse as the possibility of her having children is finally confirmed to be medically impossible as a result of her accident. Juletane explains that this loss "was like a death-knell to my hope of happiness, to my zest for living" (35). Keith Oatley and P.N. Johnson-Laird posit that when

¹⁵⁷ Another point of consideration is that "Le cahier a la fois remplace Mamadou et lui est destine" (Overvold 201). ("The notebook at the same time replaces Mamadou and is designated to him.")

goals are significant, then emotions are high (37). The desire for a child is a significant goal since it demands a lot of time for it to be realized. When such a goal is destroyed, it shakes one's very self, and thereby readers too. Juletane lost her goal of having her own child and thus despair ensues. Readers have participated in Juletane's happy expectations for the future while she was pregnant: "Knowing that I was to be a mother changed my whole way of looking at things. My main preoccupation was to prepare for the coming of the baby. . . . Mamadou had never been so attentive. . . . During this period we were very happy in our life together, full of affection for each other" (33). There is hope in Juletane's goal of having a child. A new outcome between Juletane and Mamadou is starting to build. When this goal fails readers feel empathy for Juletane because they have felt her misery through past events as well as her joy and hope as things improved.

While Juletane's goals of reconciliation with her husband and of having a child are significant, they are not nearly as powerful as her later goal of revenge on her abusive and spiteful co-wife Ndeye. The diary serves as a planning element for Juletane's acts of violence, allowing her deeper goals of revenge to shape. The roots of Juletane's violence are found in her writing. Juletane's analysis through writing triggers her violence, setting "the wheels in motion for her acts of murderous revenge and destruction" that manifest in the "third phase of creolization which is one of direct contact and confrontation" (Rogers 600).¹⁵⁸ Why is it that writing cannot simply discharge Juletane's rage? Could it be that her imagination cannot save her? She must enact her violence in reality, for enacting it in the imagination is not satisfactory enough. For instance, Juletane visualizes hurting Ndeye before she actually does so. While in

¹⁵⁸ Creole identity comes about "wherever un-harmonious contact arises between opposing cultures" is raised in Juliette Rogers' 1996 article (595). This creole identity has three parts: 1. "self-healing or recovery" 2. "new growth and new definitions of self" and 3. "moment of confrontation" (Rogers 596).

different epistolary works “the heroines eventually find more satisfaction in *writing* about love than in love itself,” we might ask if Juletane likewise finds more satisfaction from plotting and planning her revenge than actually carrying it out (Kauffman 198). Juletane does not reminisce about her violent acts. In fact, she has difficulty at times remembering if she even committed them. In contrast, her descriptions of anger and of revenge show how she devoted time and effort in plotting her revenge. Sharing harmful and violent goals is also an aspect of intimacy, granted not favorable, but it is still an act that brings one close to another person. While in scholarship there is not a single idea about how to define intimacy or what constitutes it, “commitment, sharing, and self-discovery are discussed as primarily being identified with intimacy” (Bowker-Larsen 25). Readers discover Juletane’s violent side as she writes about hurting others.

Juletane’s irritations with Ndeye build, and the incident where Ndeye breaks Juletane’s record culminates in Juletane’s fateful plotting against the young co-wife. Irritations function as motivation for Juletane. Juletane vows to “become more than spiteful” and to make Ndeye “pay very dearly for the two years of insults” she has levied on her (50). She uses images to illustrate the force of her feelings about the situation: “That slap in the face was the last drop that made my cup of passivity overflow and transformed my patience into a raging torrent” (50). Juletane’s rage is palpable and strong. Indeed, her response up until the breaking of her record has been one of acceptance, but Ndeye’s insult and fury transform Juletane. She must take action: “I disdained her silently. Recently, I feel differently about her, more determined, more strongly” (49). Readers are aware of the depth of Juletane’s hate towards Ndeye as well as her harmful intentions. Readers are also aware that Ndeye is unaware of Juletane’s feelings or harmful plans. Juletane’s hateful feelings and harmful intentions are privileged information for readers. Peter Hecht, a psychologist who studied intimacy in real letters, found a connection between a writer’s

secrets and the recipient's strong feelings due to this shared secret. When there is secrecy in letters (such as is evoked by Juletane's word "silently"), value for the reader is heightened because the information or feelings disclosed become privileged (Hecht 39). When a letter writer reveals his or her aim, this makes for a more intense relationship with the letter recipient (Hecht 38). Yet, it is not just about knowing Juletane's motivational feelings and goals; the depth and breadth of those goals becoming known means a greater impact on the recipient. Again, according to the studies of real correspondence:

It is found that the more one knows about and with another person the more intense the anticipation or expectations that precede reading a letter in that one seeks more from the letter about the motivations and emotions of the author. The greater the sharing the more one can expect as a greater number of facets of the individual is open to question. (Hecht 39)

Juletane further informs us about the depth of her revenge through a domestic simile. She connects her destructive goal to something physical, like cooking: "I am preparing my vengeance like a very special dish. After I have carefully prepared it, seasoned it, I will savour it slowly, very slowly and carefully. It will be my last meal and my madness will vanish" (62). Here too there is a palpable rendering of Juletane's feelings in a visual image. In contrast to the "torrent" used to describe her feelings, cooking implies calculation and planning, things which are evident in her diary. At the point in Juletane's narrative where she reveals her murderous plot, she has already revealed her life story about leaving her island, going to Paris, meeting Mamadou, and relocating to Africa, so much is known about her, which can contribute to readers' heightened feelings in regard to her. Her scheming starts while she is alone in the kitchen: "I drink from the bottle. I don't normally do that. But I want to do something different

from my normal routine . . . I notice a knife, a long, beautiful knife. . . . as if hypnotised, I take the knife” (68; 1st ellipsis in orig.). Here she has focused on a specific killing instrument.

Because she has realized what weapon she will use, we can perceive her goal as becoming more precise.

Imagining her goal realized motivates Juletane’s vengeance. Thinking “of Ndeye who Mamadou is going to find dead” makes Juletane feel that she has her “vengeance” and makes her “burst out laughing at the thought of all that beautiful red blood flowing from Ndeye’s side.” Beyond the image of Ndeye dead is the peace Juletane has that “She won’t insult me any more. . . . Mamadou’s favourite out of the running!” (69). Assuming this goal of revenge makes Juletane “feel more secure” and makes her feel as if she had “come to life again” (51). But Juletane refigures her method of killing Ndeye, realizing that she ultimately wants to make her suffer in the most appropriate way fitting with her offense:

After imagining Ndeye’s bloody murder while looking at the knife, I hit upon the first idea which came into my agitated brain. I poured a litre of oil into a saucepan and I heated it. The first time I thought about revenge, I thought about taking Ndeye’s life. But all things considered, it was better that she continue to live, disfigured. So that as long as she lived, she could think about how she had hurt me. (72-73)

Juletane reflects on her goal of killing Ndeye, which makes her realize a “better” goal and thus a “better” killing method. She realizes that she does not want to simply kill her; she wishes for a greater, more enduring revenge. She wishes for Ndeye to suffer because she has suffered from Ndeye’s unkind treatment. Disfiguring Ndeye connects with Juletane’s true wish of making Ndeye suffer, for Ndeye will be destined to live with a burned face that no one will find attractive. Also, disfiguring Ndeye will hurt Mamadou because it is Ndeye’s beauty that

Mamadou sought. When Juletane's vision of revenge comes to her, she knows she wants to throw the oil directly in Ndeye's face: "I wanted her full face, with her eyes open" (73). Juletane succeeds with her plan, getting Ndeye to open her eyes so she could pour "the whole panful of oil in her face" (73). Although Juletane's joy is not written, she does make a further wish—for Ndeye to live "long enough to remember" and thereby to suffer longer (73).

Documenting Herself in Dreams

Juletane documents the facts of her family members' abuse, but she also documents the subconscious impact of this abuse on her when she recounts her traumatic dreams. Juletane writes her nightmares in her diary. She carefully records her nightmares in detail, painting vivid scenes of what she has experienced. The fact that she writes at length about her nightmares reflects her writing inclination. It is possible that she writes these nightmares down in an attempt for catharsis; however, there is no evidence of her improved mental state after having penned her nightmares. She does not analyze them, but she recreates her nightmares on paper and in doing so, readers are able to experience them, thus permitting close access to her psyche. A desire to engage her husband (Juletane's hopeful narratee) emotionally serves as Juletane's writing motivation here. These dreams come from Juletane's subconscious. It is uncertain if writers or artists have more vivid or creative dreams than non-artistic people, so I am not analyzing Juletane's subconscious as proof of her creativity. In brief, these dreams cannot be viewed as if Juletane had written a story that she assiduously crafted. I am interested in examining these nightmares for their literary value as diary artifacts. Vivid images convey the pain Juletane experiences during the day. Her nightmares vary in their levels of intensity, of horror. They also vary in their quantity of description. These dreams convey very well a sense of distress and

terror, giving readers a further emotional engagement with Juletane. Juletane's dreams bring us closer to her core self.

Dreaming is the most vulnerable time for humans; we are defenseless while asleep. People cannot control the events that rise up in dreams, nor can they control how they function in dreams. As a result, being privy to Juletane's dreams means being allowed to experience her vulnerability and defenselessness. Dreams are a visible marker on the page, like a painting. Juletane's dreams would classify as a horror genre, for scary things occur in them. Writing pain and suffering is one hallmark of the epistolary genre: "Epistolary heroines strive to document tangible signs of the body's suffering (tears, blood, etc.) on the letter" (Kauffman 203-204). Fears and wishes can become visible, just as dreams can present the deeper issues that one is struggling with.

Juletane's emotional suffering becomes visible in various locations; submerged settings are frequent in her nightmares. Pits function as a location for Juletane's suffering. She refers to them multiple times while writing about her life, as well as when discussing dreams. Angelina E. Overvold articulates the pain Juletane's pits represent:

Si l'écriture fournit l'analyse de la situation, le puits constitue le lieu imaginaire de la transposition de l'idée, du désir en acte. Le puits est tout d'abord le lieu commun qui symbolise la profondeur de la souffrance et du désespoir. Puis il représente le contenu du rêve: dans un premier temps, le cachot abject, l'oubliette ou pourrit le corps que visitent les cauchemars et ensuite le lieu d'apaisement et de redemption. (Overvold 204) (If writing provides analysis for the situation, the well constitutes the imaginary link from the transposition of the idea to desire into action. The well is above all the common place that symbolizes depth of suffering and hopelessness. Plus it represents the content of

dream: in the first time, the abject dungeon, the dungeon where the bodies rot that are visiting the nightmares and following the place of peacefulness and redemption.

Translation mine)

Juletane's pits include: a grave, the theater, a grocery store and an underground river. Though these locations are not technically "pits," they figuratively function as places of submersion for Juletane in her dreams. Moreover, it is significant that normal places from life become places of terror in Juletane's dream space; her quotidian life's transformation into a realm of horror indicates how Juletane cannot perceive life in a pleasant or optimistic manner. It is almost as if she reconfigures her past as unpleasant. By this, I refer to her dream that is set in Europe. She has no intention of returning to Europe, so it seems that this dream refers to the past, not to the future.

Beyond dreams as mere imagery, Juletane makes her suffering tangible and tactile through associating her dreams as a way to articulate her reality-based (waking) pain: "The only thing that mattered was my pain. I moulded it and shaped it with the clay from the pit into which my sorrow had cast me" (38). Her pain has become something that she can physically touch and alter, much like the writing process of being inspired by pain and transferring it to the page.

Through experiencing Juletane's dreams it is as though we are in her second life. She has directly narrated about the chain of events that brought her from her island home to France and then to Africa. Dreams viscerally supplement the emotional trauma that she has written about in a factual manner, such as being deceived, having no family, being betrayed by her husband. In one dream she recounts:

It was still dark when I woke up, bathed in sweat, my heart beating fast, surprised to find that I was not in the bottom of the pit where, asleep, I had been lying motionless, my

whole body crawling with worms which devoured me. I could not see them anymore, I felt them, they had left me paralysed. I was awaiting the very last moment, the moment when the mind falls into nothingness, when my eyes opened to the solitude of my room.

(60)

Juletane's nightmares are so engrossing that she wakes up "surprised" not to be in her dreams. In addition to psychological trauma, she experiences real physical stress from these dreams, such as waking up "bathed in sweat" with her "heart beating fast" (60). When she describes how she could no longer see the worms that were eating her, it is as if she has disappeared and only the worms remain. The worms are a visible sign of her suffering. Juletane evokes the moment of death: "the moment when the mind falls into nothingness." This phrase conveys an obliteration of the self. The connection to Juletane's suffering in her real life is that she has lost her very self, for she is now known as the "mad woman"; she is devoid of even her proper name.

Through Juletane's extensive emotional trauma she can be compared to people suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. While soldiers are typical PTSD victims, suffering from encountering the world of warfare, Juletane suffers from the upheaval in her world. Juletane has been deceived, lost her family, and been betrayed by her husband. As a point of real-life connection, people suffering with PTSD have a 71-96% rate of experiencing nightmares. Nightmare incidents are also high for those suffering from mental health issues ("Nightmares and PTSD"). Dreams represent day-to-day suffering; thus they inform us about one's reality. Sadly, Juletane feels that she is no longer alive. Her diary entries state her thoughts, but it is only through the rendition of Juletane's thoughts into the dream sequence that her depth of feelings is evident. Her feelings come with the pictures and visual images present in the dreams.

Her victimhood could be interpreted as a form of addiction. Much of her diary documents how she has suffered from Mamadou and her co-wives. Yet, it is as if Juletane's victimhood has metaphorically died. She has already decided to take revenge on Ndeye, which is a form of action and thereby gives her a feeling of control. When she decides to take revenge, she becomes a new person. Dreaming of her body being consumed by worms is making way for her new persona to emerge; it is the death of her old self. When one gives up addictions, dreams of death frequently occur (Lange). Juletane has given up her life in France and more importantly to a great extent her love for Mamadou; there is significant pain in these losses. Juletane was very much in love with Mamadou, and he became her whole reason for living. He filled her life, becoming her family: "I loved him with all the ardour and intensity of a first and only love. In my eyes he was perfect. I had no relatives, few friends, so Mamadou became my whole world" (13).

While the "heartbreaking stamina and vulnerability of trauma can be known and transformed in dreams" (Reis and Snow 8), here in Juletane's case there is little evidence of her dreams as therapeutic; rather, they serve as testimony to her suffering. Her dreams allow readers to viscerally experience Juletane's pain. Overvold finds Juletane's glance of "*une lueur lointaine qui laissait deviner les rebords d'un puits*" (132) ("a faint glimmer of light way above me which revealed the outline of a well") (73) as indicative of leaving the pits like "*une nouvelle naissance*" (Overvold 205). Yet, Overvold ignores the fact that it is actually from "*sous la glaise des parois*" (135) "under the thick clay of walls" (75) that Juletane finds "*la faille qui m'a permis de sortir du puits*" (135) "the crack which allowed me to escape from the pit" (75). This detail points out that it is the work of writing pain (the crack) that enables her to feel a new life. The perspective that the light brings about this change alludes to pure imagination or dreams as being

responsible for this, something that does not emphasize fully the act of putting thoughts down on paper. Moreover, one can touch a crack, like paper, yet light is visible but not tangible.

Juletane reflects and analyzes the subject of her death. Recent trauma in her life before this dream was the death of all three of Awa's children. Many people are in the house for the mourning period. These changes shock Juletane. She reflects pragmatically on her own death through experiencing the public mourning for Awa's children:

I will only need a simple grave, in a corner of the cemetery, with no cross or headstone, since I am already forgotten. Still it is strange to know that when I die no one will shed a tear, for I have already ceased to exist. I am a rudderless boat adrift in time and space. Is it because I was conceived accidentally one day in Lent?(60)

This entry occurs the afternoon before the above mentioned nightmare. The connection between Juletane's conscious reflection on death with her subconscious death response is clear.

In contrast to death dreams, Juletane also dreams of humans hurting her, specifically men:

After a relatively sleepless night, I was awakened before dawn by a veritable howling which tore me from the nightmare in which I was struggling: in my dream four masked men, with naked hairy bodies, grinning and taunting me in a language I didn't understand, were pulling my arms and legs. Between each cry I heard the voice of the *muezzin* calling the faithful to the *fajar* morning prayer. (53)

It appears that the "cry" is from Awa who discovers all of her three children dead; however, this cry from the living and waking sphere rips through the psychic dream realm, creating feelings of distress. Juletane's dream is evocative of rape. The men are naked and accosting her; she is helpless before them. This dream speaks to her reality of powerlessness, of being confined to her

bedroom. However, Awa's three children have just died, likely at the hand of Juletane. Perhaps the four men represent the three children plus Awa. Perhaps the dream is in reaction to Juletane's fear of having killed the children. Unfortunately Juletane does not remember killing the children, so this dream is open to speculation.

Juletane's dreams are also a way to take her away from Africa and back to Europe. Through such dreams she might make a vicarious trip back to Europe, which can be therapeutic:

I am in the Palace Theatre, it is a gala evening. The show is a lively French cancan and everybody is appreciative of the dancers' lacy underwear. Mamadou gets up to applaud and the room is transformed into a supermarket. I pick up a basket to do my shopping, remember that I have no money and let go of the metal basket. The noise it makes as it falls mingles with the gate opening...The applause was someone knocking at the door. And unfamiliar voice, then Mamadou's and the noise of footsteps disturb my dream and bring me back to the reality of a day dawning. (64-65; author's ellipsis)

Instead of Juletane being the spectacle that others mock as "the mad woman," she becomes the viewer of the dancers. She is further put in a position of power as she is able to do the shopping, equipped with a basket. She is not being acted upon in this dream but is in control. Earlier in her journal she daydreamed of her island home: "I forget about myself, I am lulled into sleep, I dream about streams and waterfalls. I am back in my island, a child again, on the banks of a clear-running stream. I wade in, my weariness dissolves in the cool water. My heart swells with happiness" (29).

Juletane's final nightmare seems to be set in hell due to its location "at the bottom of the pit" by "the banks of an underground river." Plus, it is "dark." In contrast to this dismal

location, happy people “were bathing” in this river (70). Juletane is in contrast to the happy people because she is covered in “mud from the pit”; however, once she bathes in the river she feels “cleansed and rested” (70). A perception of purgatory is also felt in this dream or hallucinatory passage:

Everyone here is on an inward journey and goes wherever he wants to. Earth is only a stage which we pass through, man’s body is dust. Only the spirit is inspired and divine.

We wash because we have to keep the outer shell which protects the soul clean, so that no impurity will trouble our reflection. (70-71)

Indeed according to Overvold’s symbolic interpretation application, “le tunnel symbole de toutes les transistions douloureuses qui peuvent mener a une nouvelle vie...” (206). “The tunnel is a symbol of all painful transitions that can lead to a new life...” (translation mine). Lastly, this space is one that uniquely belongs to Juletane. She creates this space from her subconscious. Noteworthy is the fact that she is the one creating it, stepping out of victimhood albeit in her subconscious. Even in the realm of physically battered women, “dreams constitute an autonomous space” (Stokes 40-41).

Writerly Notations

Although Juletane is abused and seemingly mentally ill, her writing is a way that she is redeemed as a character. Through examining her writing characteristics we see her other dimensions. Juletane’s writing traits and writing notations are an essential way for readers to get close to her, allowing them access to her working habits and to her character. Writing traits refer to a character’s love of writing and reading. Writing notations are informative statements pertaining to a writer’s location or her writing process. This novel is unique among those

examined in this project because of the writing character's numerous notations regarding her writing process. According to Abbott, the expectations for the diary genre (also pertinent for the epistolary) are: "the setting, the action, the writer and the writing" (15). The setting is typically a desk with "ink, pen, and paper" and is located "in a room" (15). The action is writing. Specifications about the diary writing character's personal traits explain that she or he is "acutely introverted and self-conscious . . . alienated . . . no gift for social life . . . is alone . . . prone to melodrama . . . is doomed" (16). Juletane suits this definition well. She isolates herself and has no friends with whom she converses. Details about the writing process are essential to the reader's getting a clearer picture of the character. Abbott notes that the diarist writes, "intermittently . . . unregulated," the writing is "marked by false starts and abrupt stops, by blanks, and by logorrhea. It [the diary] speaks in the present of present emotions. It is as self-conscious as its author, anxiously reflecting upon the words by which it manifests itself" (16).

Juletane's wide range of writing notations includes notes on her writing inspiration and on her writing process. Regarding writing inspiration, Juletane tells us that: "The idea of writing came to me this morning as I was distractedly thumbing through a half-used exercise book which had fallen out of a school bag. The exercise book belonged to a little girl who might have been my daughter, my child" (2). Through her notation she tells us when and how her writing inspiration came, so one learns information about what event made Juletane moved to write. She also notes when her inspiration is diminished. Sometimes Juletane feels overwhelmed by writing or by considering what to put down on paper: "I feel like staying in bed, and not thinking. A thousand thoughts of all kinds assail me, from the most disjointed to the most serious: Where do we go after death? Where are the children? Is there really a heaven, a hell, a purgatory?" (58). This is also an example of her brainstorming on the page, for it shows us part of her "minute by

minute” writing or brainstorming process.¹⁵⁹ This notation connects her inactivity (apparent not thinking) to the emergence of questions. Her desire to not think indicates writer’s block, a key stage in writing. Juletane notes when her inspiration has fully drained: “I yawn, bored. I don’t feel like writing for the moment” (17).

Juletane also consciously reflects on her writing relationship, thinking of its beneficial properties. She views writing as therapeutic for herself:

I snatched an exercise book belonging to Diary, Awa’s eldest daughter. It was the only way I could have something to help me record my thoughts. Only two pages had been used. Writing will shorten my long hours of discouragement, will be something for me to cling to and will give me a friend, a confidante, at least I hope it will. . . . (5)

Juletane expresses a similar confidential relationship to her diary as does Lola in *Imagine This*. However, Lola clearly addresses her diary entries to a named entity, while Juletane does not. Juletane writes in the hope that her husband will find her journal one day. In addition to hoping that writing will assuage her “discouragement,” she has hopes for a cure of her negative emotions: “For years I had wavered between abject depression and raging despair with no one to turn to. It had never occurred to me that putting down my anguish on a blank page could help me to analyze it, to control it and finally, perhaps to bear it or reject it once and for all” (30).

She charts her emotional progress acquired through writing: “It is three o’clock in the afternoon, I am back with my diary. Since morning I feel calm and serene, even a little happy. Writing does me good, I think, for once, I have something to keep me occupied” (46-47).

Juletane takes inventory of her feelings and links her good mood to the act of writing. It is also important to observe the notation of time in this excerpt. This example is similar to “minute by

¹⁵⁹ Richardson called his technique ““writing to the minute”” (qtd. in Watt 192).

minute” writing due to the fact that Juletane charts her writing day with time notations.

Likewise, Richardson in his epistolary novels strictly adhered to time, providing day of the week and time of day, which served “as an objective framework for the even greater temporal detail of the letters themselves” (Watt 24). Time notations impact readers’ mimetic experience with the form. References to time in Richardson’s work “induced in the reader a continual sense of actual participation in the action which was until then unparalleled in its completeness and intensity” (Watt 25).

She further expounds on writing’s benefits:

But it [writing] is one way to keep myself occupied and perhaps it is good therapy for my anxieties. Already I feel more secure. . . . It is such a long time since I’ve been silent, indifferent to people and to things. Today my only certainty is having come to life again.

I listen to my heart beating excitedly, and my blood rushing through my veins. (51)

The word “therapy” indicates a treatment and lets readers know that writing significantly aids Juletane. She also interrogates herself about the possible detriments to writing about her life, considering her creative focus:

I wonder if it was a good thing to have started this diary, to be trying to remember a past more filled with sorrows than with joys; to dwell on a present built on troubles, on solitude, despair and on a vague feeling of acceptance of a numb existence to which the regrets and resentments of the past have given way? Stirring up all that, isn’t it providing a sleeping tiger? (25-26)

Juletane is observing where her attention and focus go while writing. Sadly, she does not significantly alter her focus from pain; her pain transforms into rage and violence. Later, she consciously changes her writing direction in an attempt to “write about the present now” (49).

She later reflects on her life as a subject of composition: “Still, it is a very strange idea which I’ve had these last few days, to write the story of my life” (51).

In addition to stating her emotional connection to writing, she also notes her physical writing conditions. Several times she comments on a lack of light due to the time of day: “It is too dark to keep on writing . . . I can’t do anything else, because the light bulb in my room is burnt out” (8). “The semi-darkness of my room and all the bustle outside make it difficult for me to write” (58). She finally resolves her lighting issue:

The night is calm; it is still dark, the muezzin has not yet called the faithful to prayer. . . .
I have taken the bulb from the shower to replace the one in my room which had burnt out.
I should have thought of it sooner. At last I can write without opening my window, and especially without having to wait for it to be light. (67)

The fact that she mentions her lighting problems and a lighting solution signals that writing is important for her. Evening is also a source of consideration. After the death of the children, mourners will come to the house. “Evening will surely bring a great number of visitors and confine me to my room” (64). She also notes the dimensions of her bedroom where she writes: “My life unfolds in a room five paces by four” (26-27). These tiny details are part of epistolary history.

Juletane’s love and need for reading is another way in which she is a writing character. Juletane laments the lack of reading material:

Apart from Ndeye’s rosewater literature, there is the national daily from the previous day.
I flick through the adventures of Kouan Ndoeye, ‘The treasure of the Mossi,’ by Buster Diouf. Nothing of substance. I go back to my room and pick up the notebook which is on my bed. I open it and allow the past to surge up in a flood of memories. (21)

She is discouraged that what is lying around the house to read is devoid of “substance.” She desires literature that will touch her soul, that will inspire her. Literature is inspirational for Juletane because she is in love with language: “I have not written anything for a very long time and I am so pleased that I remember some grammatical rules which I thought I’d long forgotten. I allow myself to be captivated by the magic of the words, I concentrate on forming my letters” (50-51). Juletane appreciates a variety of elements about language, ranging from its structure to the sound of words to the shape of the letters.

Writing is how Juletane spends much of her time from August 22 to September 8. She uses this period to reflect on her life and to reconsider her path to her present unhappy situation. Through this collection of writing notations it is possible to see how Juletane orients herself to the page; it is also possible to feel her life and mind unfolding, for while such details as light, paper, and inspiration may seem banal, they are integral parts of Juletane’s present world and by coming into contact with them we experience her world more vividly. Writing does enable Juletane to acquire control over her life, but to what end? Part of her identity returns to her when she writes, as she acquires something of her own making through writing, albeit with a false goal of a caring husband. However, she is only able to enact violence. She is not able to break through the ice surrounding her so as to reclaim her life, though she does experience some psychological benefits. Ian Watt describes Richardson’s writing process and how it nourished him:

the pen alone offered him the possibility of satisfying his two deepest psychological needs, needs which were otherwise mutually exclusive: withdrawal from society, and emotional release. ‘The pen’ he wrote, ‘is jealous of company. It expects, as I may say, to engross the writer’s whole self; every body allows the writer to withdraw.’ At the

same time the pen offered an escape from solitude into an ideal kind of personal relationship. (190)

Juletane likewise withdraws from her cruel family that simply views her as the “madwoman” to her writing room where she can control language. Juletane’s ideal is a caring husband who will read her diary one day, and so she writes her diary with him in mind, motivated by the idea that somehow her diary might re-establish intimacy between them.

Conclusion

The diary expands beyond Juletane’s goal of re-unification with her husband. Juletane documents her abuse and her dreams. Through writing, Juletane is able to integrate her dreams and plans, allowing for both processing and formation. Sadly, her notations and reflections do not lead to her healing or peaceful transformation; however, the embedded non-narratee reader Helene shows signs of emotional transformation due to reading Juletane’s saga. In fact, Helene is a therapeutic double for Juletane, who through reading Juletane’s story is “reborn to emotional life” (Ngate 559), with “the possibility of developing a meaningful, rewarding relationship with Ousmane, her soon-to-be husband” (Ngate 562). Reading leads Helene to have “self-inquiries” that create “redefinition and new growth for her” (Rogers 602). Juletane’s story has made Helene “become responsive to feeling for the first time in years” (Fido 42). Helene’s consciousness has been expanded due to reading Juletane’s diary, but more importantly, Juletane’s journal has emotionally changed and impacted Helene. If we take Helene as Juletane’s double, then we must take Helene as a double for the reader as well. This is to assume the non-narratee’s emotional engagement as indicative of readers engagement with Juletane’s narrative.

Prior to reading Juletane's diary, Helene's emotional state was "a block of ice around her heart" (79), as proved by her prior life's description: "The whisky, the cigarettes, the wild parties were a way of arming herself against pity, of doing her work without exposing her own feelings of compassion" (56). The act of "read[ing] a true story . . . reflect[ing], . . . look[ing] back, [and] . . . question[ing] her usual attitude" help her to transform (56). Helene has released some prior suffering through reading Juletane's diary, but she certainly will not enter a "dream" state akin to Juletane's love for Mamadou (Warner-Vieyra 79). There is no portrayal of Ousmane (Helene's fiancé) and Helene interacting after Helene has found the diary, so it is difficult to say if she has changed in her interaction with him.¹⁶⁰ Helene's emotional reaction, her tears, is the only concrete proof of change due to Juletane's story. Helene's tears are significant because she has been unfeeling for quite some time. Although Juletane was not able to improve her life through her writing, she was able to impact Helene's life. Thus, the ending message of the novel is that writing has value.

¹⁶⁰ In another view, Juletane's diary is not solely responsible for Helene's emotional change, for Ousmane himself actually "touched a chord in her, deeper than he could have imagined" (57) when he tells her he wants to give her a child (57).

Conclusion: Transporting Readers with Gradations of Writing Characters

Starting from an examination of the reception of select African epistolaries, it became clear that the epistolary is a form conducive to emotional engagement. Many critics of *Zenzele* and *Imagine This* frequently commented on how they came to care for the narrators. Tone, language, and credible portrayals of characters were some of the literary elements that such critics as Handy, Ositelu, Smith, and Villeneuve observed in *Imagine This* or in *Zenzele*. Yet, this form is still viewed by some critics as simplistic, as devoid of literary techniques. Many critics were fixated with these book's locations. In fact, there are many different techniques (coming from the creative spirit, the heart, and the mind) that can create close feelings with narrators; these include similes, metaphors, dreams, self-reflection, and analysis. These techniques enable readers to feel intimacy with the narratee. Further letter mimesis comes about through second person address, use of an addressee, closure of letters, and greetings. Because these letters are private letters, not ones addressed to the public, there is further a sense of intimacy. This intimacy comes from the narrators sharing themselves and their lives. Many of the narrators' writing motivators, such as death, a child away at college, loneliness, and a wish for healing with a nemesis function as common forms of identification where readers can tap into their similar experiences or feelings and thereby become emotionally engaged. Connecting to characters' experiences and feelings harbors much transformative potential for readers.

The fact that these are writing narrators impacts an examination of intimacy techniques, for each narrator is in the world of her creation, working from a unique pallet. The common denominator of these palettes is a love of writing. The writing narrators' range of love for writing varies. Shiri of *Zenzele* and Doreen of *Going Solo* are the least writerly characters. They

only mention a couple of books that they have read. They do not note feeling a need to write for writing's sake. Both Doreen and Shiri are writing in order to communicate. Writing is not their vocation. However, they are somewhat skilled at writing, using similes for example. The narrator in *To a Young Woman* writes with an explicit purpose—to educate her daughter in order to prevent her from contracting AIDS. Her letter carries a full story within it, that of Jackson and Juanita. She skillfully weaves in and out of their story throughout her letter. She too does not mention a love of writing or a love of words or literature. On the other hand, Lola and Juletane tap into writing in order to access their own mental and creative spaces for their own self-development; writing is an integral part of their identities. They use writing to chart their hours, minutes, and days, and thus are more towards the categorization of professional writer. Both Lola and Juletane crave books and time to write. Lola explicitly mentions packing her journals with her when moving; this shows she values her own writing. Among all the writing narrators examined, Lola is the most writerly character. She relays having a rich relationship with books and words. Both writing and books help her orient herself in the world; they also are her passion. She, too, is a skilled writer. Ultimately, dedication is what determines if one will become a writer.

All these women writing characters serve as potential role models for future women writers. They do reflect different levels and reasons for engagement with writing. Yet, their use of similes and different ways of relaying information allows readers to enter the narrators' creative minds and spirits. They show that through writing one can examine and deal with both political and social issues in a local and private way. To return to the initial question of what African women writers need in order to write, it is complicated. On the one hand women still need laws and enforcement of laws ensuring justice and safety, as seen in *Going Solo* and

Imagine This. Some need basic amenities, like the narrator in *Going Solo* who is kicked out of her marital home with nothing but a suitcase of rags. Some need forced seclusion like the narrator in *Une si longue lettre* in order to write. Even bad conditions, like those experienced by Juletane and Lola, can be an impetus to pick up the pen. Lastly, the need to be heard is these writing characters' basic common denominator. It is not a coincidence that the epistolary genre was used for these writing characters, for the epistolary genre relies on addressees, which in turn automatically implies listeners.

While this project addressed a specific genre and African female writing characters, further scholarship is needed on African women writing characters outside the epistolary genre. In a broader examination of the epistolary form in the field of African literature, examination of gender differences is another point of needed inquiry. Specifically, there is also need for scholarship on the Ugandan epistolary trend (see appendix). Why have letters been incorporated into so many novels in Uganda? What is the connection between Hope Keshubi's epistolary work and the epistolary trend in Uganda? Globally the epistolary genre has become modernized and electronic, with novels emerging from text message compositions. Is this a trend in African literatures? And as letters (handwritten) are becoming a thing of the past, how does this impact writers' incorporation or exclusion of them in their stories?

Readers' emotional engagement and enlightenment by these texts is another topic of further study. For example, Lola's address to Jupiter, characters' different goals, Shiri's adventurous war stories, similes, and Juletane's dreams engage readers' imaginations. Heightening of consciousness may demand outside knowledge, for it could be possible for readers not to be aware of pertinent issues such as unjust inheritance laws, child abuse laws, polygamy, AIDS, and treatment of the mentally ill when reading about these issues in these texts.

Yet, what of merging emotional engagement and heightening of consciousness? Can readers become empathetic after reading these texts? Can their perceptions and values change as a result of intimately experiencing different situations? It would be interesting to empirically study groups reading these texts, giving a set of questions before and after, trying to ascertain if and how these texts might change people's perceptions on the above issues or on people's perceptions of African women since all the texts deal with African female narrators. What are the implications for intimacy with characters? Experiencing a character's emotions and internalizing those emotions are powerful mechanisms for social change. Scholars in the field of social justice and literature (Lazarus, Solomon, Bracher) call for an examination of emotional change, such as how compassion is "evoked" and "developed" (Bracher 472) because emotions are seen as leading to behavioral change more so than mere information. Literature, according to Guy Cook, has the potential to "alter our cognitive schemas," so we can readily respond to new experiences we may encounter in our own lives (Bracher 489) and, according to Robert Solomon, respond *empathetically* to those real events (Bracher 470). Social justice scholarship accords transformative power to intimacy and emotions from literature.

These five epistolary authors chose to feature one narrator, without an exchange of letters. They emphasize that writing is a solitary activity. In fact, one must withdraw to write. These authors are choosing to address social and political concerns through having one character, a female writing narrator, as a mouthpiece¹⁶¹ addressing the larger community with the aim of creating socially responsible individuals. These writing narrators show that it is possible to find the time and space to write. They are women capable of crafting ideas and capable of creating

¹⁶¹ Granted other characters' voices and stories do emerge; however, they do so through the writing of one character.

large writing projects. These writing narrators' writing emotionally engages, transporting readers into other worlds, which is writing's most noteworthy feat.

Appendix

Further African Epistolaries

An excellent starting point for exploring lists of African epistolaries is Mwamba Cabakulu's book *Forme Epistolaire et Pratique Littéraire en Afrique Francophone* that chronicles forty-five epistolaries in poetry, essays and fiction from 1935 to 1995 (18-21). Although his focus is on French authors, he does not mention Burkinabe author Patrick Ilboudo who wrote *Les Carnets Secrets d'Une Fille de Joie* in 1988. This political expose novel is a letter narrated by a prostitute to her friend in her village. It contains a prologue and epilogue, evocative of Hope Keshubi's works; however, there are constant addresses by name to the narratee, juxtaposed with third person omniscient narration. Another source that addresses lists of African epistolaries is Christopher L. Miller's chapter "Senegalese Women Writers, Silence, and Letters: Before the Canon's Roar," which is useful about early epistolary novels (277-278). He says that he believes a total of five epistolary novels exist (277). He contends that "when Mariama Ba was writing *Une Si longue lettre*, there were only two epistolary novels in the corpus before her," one of which was hardly known (278). *Lettres de ma cambuse* (after Daudet) by Rene Philombe was published in Yaounde, Cameroun by Editions Abbia in 1964. It was translated into English in 1977; however "the English translation of this work [*Tales from My Hut*,

trans. Richard Bjornson (Yaounde, Cameroun: buma Kor, 1977) dispenses with the idea of letters altogether" (Miller 277). According to the online Encyclopedia Britanica , "he had written [it] in 1957" and "won the Prix Mottard of the Académie Française" for this novel. Henri Lopes's book *Sans tam-tam*, published after Ba's novel, has "an actual exchange of letters" (277). Etoundi-M'Balla Patrice's *Lettre ouverte a Soeur Marie-Pierre* was published in Yaounde, Cameroun by Editions CLE in 1978; it is also an exchange of letters. Nsimba Mumbamuna's *Lettres kinoises* was published in Kinshasa, Zaire by Centre Africain de Litterature in 1974. Miller says this is "a thirty-two page pamphlet novel published by an obscure press in Zaire" (277-278). Lastly, Miller mentions Bernard Dadie's 1959 *Un Negre a Paris* published by Presence Africaine. He says that this book "is barely an epistolary novel: addressed to a vestigial reader who is not developed as a character, the novel reads like a journal addressed to a second person until the writer signs 'cordially yours' on the last page" (278).

Odile Cazenave in "Women Writers and Gender in the Sub-Saharan Novel" touches on the epistolary form, mentioning male and female African authors who employ it. She notes Calixthe Beyala's *Le petit prince de Belleville* (1992; *Loukoum, the Little Prince of Belleville*). She notes that in Beyala's novels *Tu t'appelleras Tanga* 1987; *Your Name Shall Be Tanga*), *Asseze L'Africaine* (1994; "Asseze the African"), and *Les honneurs perdus* (1996; "Lost Honors") there is "an abundant use of fragments of letters and of the narrator or narratee who finds a letter, diary, or manuscript" (92). Cazenave mentions the following African male writers who have

epistolary fiction works: Ahmadou Kourouma, Tierno Monénembo, Henri Lopès, Alain Mabanckou, J.M. Coetzee, Phaswane Mpe, and Jean- Roger Essomba.

South Africa has recently produced several epistolary novels. The diary novel *Agaat* by Marlene Van Niekerk was first published in Afrikaans in 2004 and in English in 2006. It is unique because of the long range of years for the letters; they are from 1953 to 1974. Also interesting is the fact that the letters start in 1960 and go forward to 1974, then back to 1953 through 1954. *Uselessly: A very funny book about me, my dad, the Devil and God* by male author Aryan Kaganof, published in 2006, is a series of letters to God relating a unification between a father and son. In the novel the son (the narrator) returns to South Africa after sixteen years to meet his Jewish Father, who is dying of cancer. It is a stream of consciousness novel with a sarcastic and witty narrator. South African Pamphilia Hlapa's 2006 *A Daughter's Legacy* includes four letters that the character writes to a lover, friend, and to her Mother, with replies received. Hlapa breaks taboos regarding sexual abuse, abortion, and women keeping silent about abuse. Somalian-Italian Cristina Ali Farah incorporates a whole letter as a chapter in her novel *Little Mother*, which was published originally in Italian and in English in 2011. In this letter a female character writes to a doctor so she can give him "clear and detailed description of my psychological and physical condition" (Farah 193).

Another recent epistolary novel is Chika Unigwe's 2007 *The Phoenix*. This novel is narrated primarily as a monologue to one's self employing the second person address. The story is about a Nigerian woman who falls in love with a Belgian man, moves to Belgium, loses her five-year old son due to a freak accident,

and while in denial of her son's death copes with a diagnosis of cancer. This novel includes insertion of the narrator's baby's baby book entries and a letter from another character to the narrator; Unigwe weaves omniscient third person narration against lines of the letter, really pushing the epistolary form in fiction. Unigwe's 1995 twenty-seven page novel *Born in Nigeria* I also include in the epistolary form because it has second person address, though it also could be considered in the diary genre. It is narrated by a driver with an economics degree who is an aspiring writer.

Many women's short stories have also been set in the epistolary format. Tsitsi Dangarembga's 1985 short story "The Letter" is about a female narrator receiving a letter and her reaction. In Nigerian Promise Onwudiwe's 1993 short story collection *Soul Journey Into The Night* her story "Sons of Yamanata" is the story of a woman who as an only child has an "obsessive love for children" whereby she has "nine negligent sons" (Onuekwusi 153). The story is narrated from "entries in Yamanata's diary from January to August 1988, cast in the epistolary mode. She manages to send this diary through a good Samaritan to an intimate friend Oynene, before she dies." (Onuekwusi 154). Adele King's anthology *From Africa: New Francophone Stories*, includes Ivoirian Koffi Kwahule's story "Babyface," which echoes Cyrano de Bergerac in the fact that it has a female character writing love letters for her friend. The novel *Babyface* was published in 2006 and won the 2006 Ahmadou Kourouma Prize; the story "Babyface" is from this novel. Another short story in the epistolary form is Ugandan Monica Arac de Nyeko's story "Jambula Tree" (winner of Caine Prize) in Ama Ata Aidoo's 2006 anthology, *African Love*

Stories. The whole story is a single letter from one woman to her female lover. The story revolves around a teenage lesbian love affair and the community's criticism. This story also mentions the narrator's mother reading the love letters her husband had sent her. South African author Kagiso Lesego Molope's 2012 story "Ask Me Anything," published in Michael Chapman's anthology *Africa Inside Out*, is a form of a monologue directed toward the reader, employing second person address, which could also be viewed as a letter. It is interesting to note that a variant of the epistolary form is used for taboo subjects, such as Molope's discussion of lesbianism and rape.

Nigerian Ayobami Famurewa's (penname Ayobami Adebayo)'s flash fiction story "Dear Daughter" and Ghanaian Prince Mensah's hilarious flash fiction story "An African's Epistle to the Mosquito" both appeared in the 2010 anthology *Speaking for the Generations* edited by Dike Okoro. In FEMRITE's 2012 anthology *Summoning The Rains*, epistolary stories are: "Mother of the Beast" by Sylvia Schlettwein (Namibia) and "Let It Be an Angel" by Hilda Twongyeirwe (Uganda). Other Ugandan authors with epistolary stories are: "The Lions Sleep Tonight" by Sarah Aluka (Uganda) in the anthology *Taboo Love: Short Stories from Africa*, "A Thank-You Note" by Doreen Baingana in her story collection *Tropical Fish*, and "Gift of a Letter" by Lilian Tindyebwa (Uganda) in *Pumpkin Seeds and Other Gifts*. Baingana's story is a revelatory letter from a woman dying of AIDS to her former lover.

In terms of contemporary African epistolary poetry, Nigerian Chris Abani's 2006 collection *Hands Washing Water* features twenty pages of an epistolary section titled "Buffalo Women." It is a series of letters in the form of poems between

a lesbian couple during the Civil War in America, where one of the women, dressed as a man, was fighting for the Union.

There has been an explosion of epistolary techniques in Uganda since Hope Keshubi's 1997 works appeared. *Memoirs of a Mother* by Ayeta Anne Wangusa, published in 1998, has a few brief letters and a poem between the mother narrator and her daughter, the narratee. The novel concludes with a note from the mother to the daughter to whom she is sending her her memoirs, also in the hope of reconciliation, akin to the framework of Hope Keshui's novel *Going Solo*. Bananuka Jocelyn Ekochu's 2004 *Shock Waves Across the Ocean* includes two letters, from two different characters. Glaydah Nanukasa's 2006 young adult novel, *Voice of a Dream*, which won the Macmillan Writer's Prize for Africa, deftly weaves epistles and poems, emphasizing writing for manifesting change. Namukasa shows at various times both of the central characters writing, one writing poems and one a letter. She particularly emphasizes the composition aspect of both. Also she integrates snippets of letters that the main protagonist receives. *I Will Not Fail* by Madinah N. Kisubi published in 2008 has two short epistles in it. One letter is from the schoolmaster to the protagonist's mother. Another epistle is from protagonist to her friend at another school. The font changes in the epistles, so they look handwritten. The novel also mentions schools writing to each other, with children very excited to receive letters.

Other Ugandan novels that include one or several letters are: *Bury Me in a Simple Grave* by Godfrey Mwene Kalimugogo, 2009, *Cassandra* by Violet Barungi, 1999, *Recipe for Disaster* by Lilian Tindyebwa, 1995, Mary Karooro Okurut's 1994

novel, *The Invisible Weevil*, (includes one letter), and *The Kind Gang* by Bob Kisiki
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