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RESEARCH PAPER

# The Illusion of Consent: Hegemony and Resistance in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*

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**ABSTRACT**

This research paper examines Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977) to expose postcolonial African elites being ideologically framed by Western worldviews, thereby perpetuating cultural and psychological domination even in the absence of physical colonization. The primary objective is to investigate the mental conditioning of African self-exiles who adopt and internalize Western ideologies with little resistance, reinforcing a passive form of consent. The secondary aim is to examine the process by which this internalization occurs, thereby revealing the subtle mechanisms of neocolonial control. It critiques the postcolonial notions of hegemony and consent through Sissie's experiences in Europe and her reflections on neocolonial Africa. A qualitative research design is employed using textual analysis of Aidoo's novel as the primary data source. The research is grounded in Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony and consent. Key findings reveal that the illusion of consent is maintained through ideological conditioning that frames Western values as universal and superior. They are presented under the guise of politeness or modernity, not through coercion.

**KEYWORDS** Consent, Hegemony, Ideological Autonomy, Illusion, Neocolonialism, Resistance

## Introduction

*Our Sister Killjoy: or Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint* (Aidoo, 1977) is a semi-autobiographical novel by Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo, first published in 1977. It is a hybrid of prose and poetry, offering both a narrative and sharp political commentary. The novel follows Sissie, a young, intelligent Ghanaian woman travels to Europe on a government-sponsored trip, supposedly for educational purposes. The story is divided into four sections: Into a Bad Dream, The Plums, From Our Sister Killjoy, and A Love Letter.

In the first section, In a Bad Dream (Aidoo, 1977), Sissie, a young Ghanaian woman, is shown to be selected for a scholarship to participate in an international youth exchange program in Germany. Before her departure, she attends a formal dinner hosted by the Ghanaian embassy, where she feels discomfort amidst the elite's pretentiousness. During her flight to Europe, she experiences subtle racial prejudices, such as being directed to sit with other Black passengers she doesn't know. Upon arrival in Frankfurt, Sissie becomes acutely aware of her racial identity when she overhears a child refer to her as a "black girl," leading to a profound realization about racial differences and the societal structures that perpetuate them. She demonstrates confidence regarding issues of race and shows a spirit of adventure, unlike many of the other foreigners she is grouped with during her stay in

Germany. The second section, The Plums (Aidoo, 1977), focuses on Sissie's stay in Bavaria, Sissie stays in a former castle converted into a hostel and works at a pine tree nursery. She befriends Marija, a lonely German housewife, and they spend time together exploring the countryside and sharing personal stories. Marija becomes emotionally attached to Sissie and eventually makes a sexual advance, which Sissie instinctively rejects. This incident leaves Marija distraught and highlights the complexities of cross-cultural relationships and misunderstandings. In the second to last section of the novel, From Our Sister Killjoy (Aidoo, 1997), Sissie travels to London and is disheartened by the living conditions of African immigrants, many of whom reside in substandard housing and live in poverty. She becomes involved with an African Students' Union, where debates arise about the "brain drain" and whether to return to their home countries. Sissie is the only one advocating for returning to Africa, expressing frustration with those who choose to remain in Europe, detached from their roots. She finds Europe to be a different where most Black people are surviving desperately in bad conditions.

In the final section, Sissie writes a letter to her ex-boyfriend, reflecting on their relationship and ideological differences. She expresses her disillusionment with the African diaspora's complacency and the challenges of communicating in a language imposed by colonizers. The letter serves as a cathartic process, allowing Sissie to reaffirm her commitment to returning to Ghana and contributing to its growth. As she flies back to Africa, she feels a sense of closure and purpose. This section, A Love letter (Aidoo, 1977), is more like an epistolary critical political commentary than a love filled note for her lover. Our Sister living up to her name challenges her lover—and by extension, other African exiles—to abandon their illusions and recognize their responsibilities to their homeland. Within the letter, Sissie recounts her encounters with fellow African expatriates, particularly a meeting of an African student union. There, she speaks out against their detachment from the continent's struggles. Though they spend considerable time debating Africa's political troubles, they fail to see their own absence from the continent as part of the problem. The letter closes on a deeply symbolic note. Sissie recalls a question her lover once posed, "I know everyone calls you Sissie, but what is your name?" (Aidoo, 1977). Her real name remains unknown to us, but her role is clear—she serves as a voice for her people in the land of the exiled.

Even after independence of former colonies, the ideologies, rules, and lifestyle of Europeans are adopted by the third world countries as the only possible and correct way out. They are conditioned/framed to live in a particular way in lure of superficial consent. The first world countries/ colonizers rules the third world countries/colonized under the same terms. This phenomenon of controlling the former colonies even after their independence by indirect say political, cultural, and economic means is called *neocolonialism* (Sartre, 1964). The word was for the very first time used by the first president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah which very positively contributes to the claims of this research. Aidoo presents a scathing critique of neocolonialism by exploring the lived contradictions of African intellectuals who voluntarily exiles themselves in Europe. This ideological apparatus of superiority is termed as *hegemony* by Antonio Gramsci (Gramsci, 1948-1951), whereby the cultural superiority of West is instilled as common scene and individuals celebrate it without physical or cerebral resistance. The manifestations of this cultural hegemony in Aidoo's novel are the African pseudo intellectuals; acting as the subjects. In the novel, Sissie as the reflective protagonist serves as a literary lens through which the illusion of consent is exposed on the other hand. *Consent* (Gramsci, 1948-1951) as Gramsci calls is not freely given but conditioned through colonial education, language, and economic aspiration. These hegemonic structures lead African self-exiles to mistake assimilation into European life for success, even as they endure alienation, racial

marginalization, and cultural erasure. Aidoo exposes the passive complicity of postcolonial African elites who, by adopting Western worldviews, unwittingly sustain neocolonial control. Gramsci's theory of *consent* (Gramsci, 1948-1951) is central here, especially the idea that subaltern groups can participate in their own domination through ideological submission rather than coercion. Sissie in contrast to Sammy and Kunle exercise agency by choosing to return rather than staying here to become another subject. She choose her stick to her independent identity and reject being a Western appendage. This research, thereof, is deeply rooted in examining how hegemonic power manifests within literature specifically in that of written by Aidoo's which serves as a space to unravel the psychological and cultural entrapment of the postcolonial subject. The researcher's interest in this topic arises from a broader concern with the long-lasting ideological impact of colonialism, particularly in postcolonial societies where the colonizer's worldview continues to dominate educational, social, and cultural systems. The study seeks not only to contribute to postcolonial literary criticism but also to highlight the urgent need for ideological decolonization and the reclamation of Afrocentric consciousness.

Our Sister Killjoy (Aidoo, 1977) is explored from different critical frameworks over the years. This research shifts the focus from broader post-colonial struggle to the individual internalized ideological submission by examining the novel in light of Gramsci's consent theory (Gramsci, 1948-1951). By applying the concept of 'consent', the research is significant to understand that the characters' acceptance of Western ideologies does not stem from their helplessness but from a deeply internalized belief in Western superiority—"the West is Best" (Aboulela, 1999) mindset. This perceived voluntariness illustrates the ways in which these postcolonial subjects live within a state of false consciousness, where the dominant center defines the reality of the 'periphery'.

In *Our Sister Killjoy* (Aidoo, 1977), Ama critiques neocolonial hegemony by exposing the African intellectuals been framed by Western ideologies, ultimately highlighting the illusion of consent in postcolonial Africa. Through Sissie's journey in Europe and her rejection of imposed Western norms, the novel challenges the ways in which former colonies continue to be controlled economically, culturally, and politically.

**Literature review**

African literary criticism has historically been dominated by men and shaped by colonial and patriarchal perspectives. Women never had a tongue, earlier because of African culture and tradition and later due to the imposition of colonial men. Initially produced in former colonial centers, early criticism of African literature often displayed Eurocentric and male-biased misreading, even when sympathetic. Although the post-independence shift toward African-led criticism marked progress, it remained rooted in patriarchal traditions. Critics like Mineke Schipper (Schipper, 1987) have noted the continued marginalization and stereotyping of women in African literature, both in content and critique. The main question is "Why should the woman be the only scapegoat? ... Is it because she is in a weaker position and therefore more a victim than he is? Or because the male perspective prevents him from blaming man - even partly?" (Schipper, 1987)

In contrast to male writers, female African women authors like Ama Ata Aidoo are rarely the subject of single-author studies; instead, their works are often grouped with strong voices and standpoints. *Our Sister Killjoy* (Aidoo, 1977) is a very different text compared to any of her male counterparts. Many critics like Theo Vincent have critiqued upon her novel saying that choosing a female protagonist does not seem to be a right choice (Wilentz, 1991). Although, it is believed that that no other writer or specifically no male author could have written such a piece of work that have critiqued over the self-exiles in a

way that Ama Ata Aidoo did. Her novel is a relentless attack on all of the self-exiles that have preferred to live in European foreign countries rather than their own country and doing something for its betterment. She notoriously commented on all these people living very happily as self-exiles in European countries rather than living a blessed life in their own country. She further says that these people enjoy being the lower strata in the European countries than living an elite lifestyle in 'Mother Africa'.

Critical reception of *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977) has often ranged from overtly negative responses to a troubling silence, with many African critics choosing to ignore the novel altogether. Ama Ata Aidoo herself has noted that what disturbs her most is not the criticism but the un-reception. Aidoo asserts that had *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977) been written by a man, it would have received far more attention, even acclaim. This neglect is symptomatic of a critical environment that remains largely male-dominated and Eurocentric, resistant to works that synthesize feminist and Afrocentric perspectives or challenge patriarchal literary traditions. In a speech she said, "[Some professors] shouted that I am not fit to speak on public matters. That I should leave politics and such to those [men] most qualified to handle it" (Aidoo, Unwelcomed Pals and Decorative Slaves , 1980)

Eagleton (1970) highlights how writers like Henry James and Joseph Conrad sought refuge in England for its perceived cultural stability and refinement—qualities they felt their own colonial backgrounds lacked. This notion underscores the cultural inferiority internalized by colonial exiles who were educated in the colonizer's language and values. However, these dominant theories of exile are deeply male-centered, failing to account for the experiences of women like Aidoo's protagonist, Sissie. Unlike her male counterparts, Sissie is not seduced by the illusion of Western cultural superiority or the false promise of neocolonial exile. Instead, Aidoo disrupts traditional narratives by presenting Sissie as a critical observer who remains rooted in her African consciousness. Sissie does not abandon her identity; she reclaims it by exposing the fallacy of self-exile and neocolonial assimilation. In *Our Sister Killjoy* (Aidoo, Our Sister Killjoy , 1977), Aidoo reclaims the novel as a tool of decolonization by narrating Africa's story from an African perspective. Her stylistic choices and thematic focus affirm African identity in deliberate contrast to European norms. Aidoo undermines the discourse of Orientalism, which traditionally defines and controls the Orient through the act of representation (Macheso, 2015). Through the character of Sissie, she critiques the Eurocentric frameworks of knowledge and uses the same frameworks against them that historically justified colonialism and constructed the African as the 'other'. By reversing the typical colonial travel narrative, Aidoo exposes the lingering effects of colonization, while also critiquing the lifelessness, superficiality, and alienation she associates with Western modernity and technological progress. This technique very aptly aligns with Spivak's Can the Subaltern Speak (Spivak, 1988), Spivak raise the ironic possibility that postcolonial theory, despite its critical aims, may inadvertently reinforce the very structures of imperialism it seeks to dismantle. She calls for the subaltern speaking for their selves rather than the Western academics specking on their behalf. Aidoo gave the mic to Sissie and shaped the narrative from her prospective, thus manifesting Spivak arguments.

Aidoo reframes the colonial narrative by positioning Germany—not the Congo—as the true 'heart of darkness, of the twentieth century. In *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977), she delivers a powerful critique of Western hypocrisy, highlighting that those who once claimed the civilizing mission in Africa were, in both the colonial and postcolonial eras, capable of committing horrific crimes against humanity (Baer, 2017). By exposing the moral failures of Europe, particularly through its historical atrocities and its ongoing neocolonial influence, Aidoo dismantles the myth of Western moral and cultural superiority. Her narrative thus turns the colonial gaze back on Europe, challenging its self-image and

exposing the violence beneath its 'civilized' veneer. Aidoo's portrayal of African intellectuals like Sissie offers a direct challenge to the neocolonial seduction of the educated African. Aidoo (1977) presents characters who, though educated abroad, become alienated from their roots. The internal monologue and bitter irony in Sissie's reflections reveal her increasing disillusionment with fellow Africans who adopt Western lifestyles and values without question.. Sissie's reaction to Marija's advances is not only about sexuality, but also a broader rejection of Western constructions of freedom and individuality that disregard African cultural sensibilities. Sissie sees such expressions as another form of violence because they overwrite her own cultural and personal agency.

*Our Sister Killjoy* (1977) reclaims narrative space from both Eurocentric and patriarchal discourses by centering African female agency within a fractured postcolonial modernity. The novel opens with the imagery of an airplane "bridging" Africa and Europe, a modern symbol reinterpreted through Aidoo's ironic lens. Rather than a celebration of technological progress, this "bridge" becomes a metaphor for a cruel colonial past and a fragmented present, illustrating how Africa's modernity is shaped by external impositions and internal crises. Aidoo constructs what critics describe as an 'aesthetics of unforgetting' (Korang, 1992)—a literary nationalist project that resists the collective amnesia afflicting Westernized African elites. She calls for the recovery of African identity and self-knowledge through cultural memory, offering a survivalist ethic that is deeply Afrocentric and feminist in orientation. The narrative does not merely critique the masculine myths of pan-Africanism but actively reclaims them through a womanist lens. By doing so, Aidoo positions herself within the lineage described by *Alice Walker: a womanist committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female* (kamiya, 2025).

**Theoretical Framework**

This study employs Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony (Gramsci, 1948-1951), focusing specifically on the notion of "consent." Gramsci (1948-1951) argues that domination is maintained not merely through coercion but through the voluntary acceptance of dominant ideologies by the subordinate class. In the context of *Our Sister Killjoy* (Aidoo, 1977) concept helps unpack the subtle mechanisms of neocolonial control and the complicity of African elites in perpetuating Western dominance.

Gramsci wrote his most famous radical work; 'Prison Notebook' (1929-1935) when he was put behind bars by the fascist Benito Mussolini. This work gave him most of his face value and laid the foundation of Marxist theory. He commented on Italian history, culture, and politics majorly in his work. Doing so he presented the concept of 'ideology, hegemony, and revolutionary strategy' (kamiya, 2025). Gramsci's (1948-1951) concept of hegemony refers to the way in which a dominant social class maintains its control not just through political or economic power, but through cultural and ideological leadership. Unlike traditional Marxist theory emphasizing coercion and state violence as the main tools of domination, Gramsci (1929-1935) argued that the ruling class secures its position primarily by winning the consent of the subordinate classes. This consent is cultivated in civil society—through institutions like schools, churches, media, and family—where dominant values, beliefs, and norms are presented as 'common sense' or natural. As a result, the oppressed often accept the status quo, not because they are forced to, but because they have been conditioned to see it as legitimate. Gramsci distinguished between political society, which includes the formal institutions of state power, and civil society, where ideological battles are fought. He also emphasized the importance of developing a counter-hegemony—an alternative worldview and culture—to challenge the dominant class's ideology. This process, he believed, required the work of organic intellectuals who emerge from within oppressed groups and help build a new, revolutionary consensus. In this way,

Gramsci (1948-1951) expanded Marxist theory by showing that cultural and ideological struggle is central to political change. Thus so, the idea of consent is not one that people think about, understand, and accept out of their will. Rather it runs into their mind without resistance because they view it as the only correct and possible way out because they minds are conditioned and programmed already by the ruling class's will. The set rules, guidelines, prescriptions, way of life, and ideology appears natural, inevitable, and in the best interest of all. This consent is generated through institutions in civil society, such as education, religion, the media, and cultural practices, which promote and normalize the dominant ideology. So, the concept is not given actively but passively by the local people.

**Material and Methods**

The research undertakes a qualitative textual analysis approach. By focusing on the textual analysis and close reading of *Our Sister Killjoy* (Aidoo, 1977), the study highlights the manifestation of hegemony and the illusion of consent through appropriate instances from the novel. Firstly, the whole text of the novel was carefully read. The irrelevant information was excluded and separated while the passages providing insights to the concept was retained and evaluated critically. Secondly, different other research papers, articles, critical evaluations, and book sections were scrutinized to understand what was already said about the research idea and what was left. Lastly, in order to fill in the literature gap, all the gathered data was analyzed, evaluated, and drawn out connections with other philosophical thoughts to validate the argument. In other words, after reading the whole the text, the relevant data was selected and analyzed in the light of Gramsci's (Gramsci, 1948-1951) concept of hegemony and passive consent, drawing connections between Aidoo's literary critique and postcolonial political philosophy. Where necessary, concepts from other theorists (e.g., Althusser's Ideological State Apparatus, Pêcheux's subject positions) were also integrated to deepen the analytical framework and validate the findings

**Results and Discussions**

*Our Sister Killjoy* (Aidoo, 1977) is deeply rooted in postcolonial African society, particularly Ghana, and the experiences of African individuals within a broader European context. Aidoo uses the protagonist Sissie's travels to Germany and England to contrast African and European values, highlighting the disillusionment and alienation felt by postcolonial African individuals in foreign cultures. This reflects the socio-political environment of the post-independence era, where many African nations were grappling with identity, cultural displacement, and neocolonial influence. *Our Sister Killjoy* (Aidoo, 1977) does just that—it critiques issues such as cultural mimicry, the romanticizing of Europe by Africans, the alienation of African diaspora, and the socio-political failures of postcolonial leadership. Aidoo's narrative is not just personal but deeply political, using literature as a platform for social commentary.

The first part of the novel starts with sentences written separately on three successive pages that catches the reader's attention in the first place due to its unusual format from that of a traditional novel. It says, "Things are working out / towards their dazzling conclusions.../ … so it is neither here nor there, what ticky-tackies we have saddled and surrounded ourselves with, blocked our views, cluttered our brains". (Aidoo, 1977, p. 3)

These opening lines could be seen as a commentary on the postcolonial condition. We never know for whom things are working out, but we can interpret for her journey that things are working out for her and for all the people who would take notes from her

experiences. *Towards their dazzling conclusions* (Aidoo, Our Sister Killjoy , 1977) could suggest that there's a realization or awakening that occurs for all the postcolonial subjects to come to terms with their own agency and challenge the imposed narratives of superiority. Colonial and imperial influences often create superficial values and distractions that mask the deeper realities of exploitation and oppression. These *ticky-tackies* ideologies and viewpoint instilled in the self-exiles by the Europeans prevent individuals from recognizing the true nature of their circumstances. They are viewing, understanding, and functioning in the word through the European lens which disregards everything and anything that is not white. This way they have *blocked* their *views* and *cluttered* their *brains.* Through Sissy's journey, the novel challenges readers to rethink and deconstruct these imposed narratives, advocating for a more authentic understanding of identity and agency.

**Manifestation of Hegemony in *Our Sister Killjoy***

According to Gramsci (Gramsci, 1948-1951) cultural hegemony is not merely exercised through political power or force, but through the consent of the governed; a consent that arises from dominant ideologies being internalized and accepted commonsensical. Here, the African intellectuals acts as the agents of hegemonic power by reproducing colonial values within postcolonial societies. Individuals trained in Western institutions are the product of western worldviews are the carrier of these hegemonic values. They continue to perpetuate Eurocentric ideals under the guise of universality. Sissie calls out these pseudo-intellectual to more dangerous than any other form of subjects. Even ignorant Black salves back then knew the reality of Europeans and their tactful devices of control, but these pseudo-intellectuals willful denial of their identity aids the maintenance of neo-colonial systems. "The academic-pseudo-intellectual version is even more dangerous, who in the face of reality that is more tangible than the massive walls of the slave forts standing along our beaches, still talks of universal truth, universal art, universal literature and the Gross National Product". (Aidoo, p. 6) Sissie critiques these so called aware self-exiles that they still believe and perpetuate on the idea of universality created by Imperialists to impose Western norms as global standards. When postcolonial intellectuals accept and propagate this illusion, as here the Black self-exiles does, they legitimize hegemonic worldviews, often to gain cultural capital or prestige. Aidoo (1977) is thus pointing to a kind of intellectual complicity—where those who should be resisting oppression instead validate the very systems that oppress them, often unconsciously.

European whites over the time used both the ISA and RSA (Althusser, 1970) to hold on to power. The difference is just that Aidoo focuses on the portrayal of ISA more with alluding to the RSA used in the past in Africa and Germany. As Sissie says it was all about *a way to get land, land, more land."* (Aidoo, 1977, p. 13)

The character of Sammy in the first section is an ace example of manifestation of European fan of European culture, language, education, and values. He laughed all evening and when he was not laughing loudly a fixed smile was there on his face all the time. Sammy perpetuates the ideology hegemony. Sissie says that she could not catch his correct name during the introduction but she referred to him as Sammy all evening long of the cocktail party. The disregard for his real name or identity shows how he as an African man doesn't matter/mean to them in the party, all it mattered was him being presented as the of the superiority of West over all the other races and especially Blacks. He is there in the party just to voice the *wonders of Europe* and to associate all the good binaries with West – *paradise,* leaving the bad binary opposites for Africa – presumably "Hell". Sammy had obviously been to their country before and seemed to have stayed for a long time. He was very anxious to get her to realise one big fact. That she was unbelievably lucky to have been

chosen for the trip. And that, somehow, going to Europe was altogether more like a dress rehearsal for a journey to paradise (Aidoo, 1977). Sammy as hegemonic subject come to accept and even promote the worldview of the colonizer as normal, natural, or superior.

This passage is a clear sign of how colonial ideology sustains itself through the minds of the formerly colonized. Sammy becomes an agent of cultural imperialism, even in the absence of colonial rulers. He reproduces the myth of Europe as being civilized, developed, superior, and a place of personal transformation or success unlike Africa. This is not just admiration; it's ideological submission, wrapped in the language of opportunity and self-improvement. Sammy submits to the ideology of the colonizer and attempts to recruit Sissie into this consensual participation. Sammy's insistence that Sissie should feel lucky reflects how hegemony operates through normalization. There is no need for Europe to assert its power directly—characters like Sammy do it for them. He views Western education, travel, and values as inherently superior and worthy of celebration. This is manufactured consent, "they published her picture in the local newspaper with some information on the trip. Our Sister had made it" (Aidoo, 1977, p. 9) – this shows how even going to Europe is painted as an achievement in the minds of postcolonial subjects. In contrast to Sammy, Sissie's narrative voice is sarcastic, ironic, and sharply observant. She often exposes the absurdity and contradictions in how her fellow Africans idealize the West, ultimately challenging the prevailing hegemony. Her internal monologue critiques not just Europe but also Africans who have adopted European ideologies—seeing them as victims of cultural brainwashing. Sissie does not see Europe as a paradise or a moral high ground. She recognizes that the glorification of Europe is part of a broader colonial illusion. While others celebrate Europe, Sissie remains emotionally and ideologically detached. She does not see herself as someone who has *made it*. Instead, she reflects on the emptiness and alienation involved in these so-called achievements under Western gaze. Unlike characters who mimic the West, Sissie holds onto her own cultural, racial, and political consciousness. She questions gender roles, colonial legacies, and African complicity in neo-colonial structures. Her self-awareness prevents her from becoming a vessel of hegemonic ideology. On the face of Europe all Sissie wants is to have the old Africa, her Africa, the Mother Africa, *JUST LIKE THE GOOD OLD DAYS BEFORE INDEPENDENCE* (Aidoo, 1977, p. 56)

The third part of the novel, *From Our Sister Killjoy*, starts as,

"If anyone had told her that she would want to pass through England because it was her colonial home, she would have laughed. She generally considered herself too smart to exhibit such weaknesses. But to London she had gone anyway, consoling herself all the while that that was the only way to get people at home to understand where she had been. Abroad. Over seas. Germany is overseas. The United States is overseas. But England is another thing. What this other thing is, has never been clear to anyone" (Aidoo, 1977, p. 85)

Sissie reflects that although Germany and the U.S. are also technically overseas, only London counts as truly abroad to her people back home. This shows how colonial hegemony has implanted London as the gold standard of civilization, culture, and recognition in the postcolonial mind. This is what Gramsci meant by hegemony: the internalization of dominant cultural values by the oppressed, even without being consciously aware of it. Sissie is smart, critical, and self-aware – but even she is affected by the residual pressure to validate her experience abroad by passing through London. London has become not just a geographic place, but a symbol – one that defines legitimacy, progress, and exposure to the real world. *England is another thing* (Aidoo, 1977, p. 85), this line is crucial. It reflects the mysterious but powerful nature of hegemonic ideas—they are accepted as truth even when their logic is unclear. The idea that England is somehow more

important than other countries is not questioned—it's just known. People don't know why England is better—they just feel it, believe it, and act on it.

**Illusion of Consent in *Our Sister Killjoy***

In the first part of the novel, an ironic incident portrays the idea of consent—particularly how it can be socially coerced, racially coded, and masked as politeness or convenience – just as the novel begins. Sissie, the Ghanaian protagonist, is seated at the front of the plane beside two white South African passengers. A hostess—politely but presumptively—suggests she move to the back to join two Nigerian men she does not know. Sissie complies, not because she wants to, but because to refuse would have created an *awkward situation*. This incident suggests how consent can be socially coerced, racially coded, and masked as politeness or convenience.

"You want to join your two friends at the back, yes?' 'My two friends?' wondered Sissie. She raised her eyes and, following the direction of the hostess's finger, saw two faces. She was about to say she had not met them before . . . Something told her to cool it … But to have refused to join them would have created an awkward situation, wouldn't it? … Naturally, she was only giving Sissie a piece of disinterested advice to make her fe el at ease enough to enjoy her flight" (Aidoo, 1977, p. 10)

Sissie's 'consent' (Gramsci, 1948-1951) to move seats is not the product of free will, but of social pressure, racial dynamics, and an implicit expectation to *keep the peace*. Sissie even says. But to have refused to join them, would have created an awkward situation, wouldn't it. (Aidoo, 1977, add page no) This rhetorical question exposes how consent is manufactured in systems of social expectation—especially for racialized individuals in white-dominated spaces. Sissie intuits that any resistance would violate the unspoken rules of behavior expected of her, and so she "chooses" to obey. It's a textbook example of what postcolonial theorists call coerced consent. The hostess's suggestion is racially loaded, despite being wrapped in courtesy. She assumes that because the Nigerian men are Black (like Sissie), they are naturally her "friends." It's an act of racial profiling disguised as hospitality, implying that Sissie's presence in the front—beside white passengers—is unnatural or inappropriate. Here, the plane becomes a microcosm of global racial order, where Black bodies are gently nudged into designated spaces under the pretense of comfort or logic. Her "consent" to move is extracted by the soft force of institutionalized racial norms, not individual choice.

Chatterjee (1993) explores the idea that colonial subjects internalize the colonizer's vision of modernity. Chatterjee argues that anti-colonial nationalist movements often adopted the very models and values of modernity introduced by colonial powers, thereby internalizing colonial frameworks even as they resisted political domination. Colonial subjects internalize the colonizer's vision of modernity, believing it to be their path to progress—even though it's rooted in the very system that dehumanized them. The passive acceptance of dominant ideology is because alternatives seem either unavailable or unimaginable. The oppressed "consent" not because they agree but because the dominant system has naturalized itself as the only possible system. On page 84 of the novel Aidoo illustrates the same concept through Sissie,

"Otherwise the story is as old as empires. Oppressed multitudes from the provinces rush to the imperial seat because that is where they know all salvation comes from. But as other imperial subjects in other times and other places have discovered, for the slave, there is nothing at the centre but worse slavery" (Aidoo, 1977, p. 87)

The colonized believe that relief from suffering, dignity, and success can only come from the colonizer's center. The imperial metropolis (e.g., England) becomes mythologized as a place of economic salvation and spiritual redemption, despite being the root of their historical suffering. Here, Sissie sees this as tragic irony: that the oppressed rush towards the very system that oppressed them. Their migration is not necessarily driven by genuine admiration but by a coercive illusion—a belief implanted through colonial education, missionary activity, and economic marginalization that Europe is the center of all progress. All the Ghanaian self-exiles are living in false consciousness, they mistake participation in the imperial structure (studying in Europe, dressing like Westerners, living abroad) as freedom, when it is in fact a more sophisticated, internalized slavery. Sissie gets anger at how *pitiful* the living condition of women especially was there when they could go back and live as a 'dignified matrons or attractive girls' in the home country. Sissie was not furious at the state of their living but at the state of them submitting themselves to the so-called global world. This seems as their active conscious decision to choose England over Africa, but actually, it is their subtle submission to the colonial beliefs and the passive acceptance framed through colonial education, media, and societal narratives that have led them to equate the West with opportunity, their consent is ideological, these narratives run into their heart and mind without resistance and thus derives their actions and decisions. These women have consented to a life of exile, not because it's better, but because they've been taught to believe it is. These postcolonial subjects ate programmed so aptly that they see their suffering as struggle of growth, Sissie wondered why they never told the truth of their travels at home. – And they will never do because they consider this life as their superficial choice; consent and how things actually work which make them alienated from the both the people they want to become and people, they actually are – identity crises.

Consent refers to the way colonized or marginalized people accept, internalize, and participate in dominant ideologies, even when those ideologies are harmful or dehumanizing. It's not consent as in free choice, this notion very aptly apply on the character of Kunle. Kunle speaks of a young Black man's heart saving an old white man, when Sissie and her friend seemed shocked to him, he shrugs it off, saying 'he must have experimented on the hearts of dogs and cats' (Aidoo, 1977, add page no) Kunle is comparing Black bodies to animals (dogs, cats) without even realizing it. He shows no resistance, no awareness of the dehumanizing implication. This clearly depict how unaware and passive his consent is. Worse, he thinks the act is noble, that it is a scientific and humanitarian achievement. This demonstrates that Kunle has internalized colonial hierarchies: Black lives are expendable if they contribute to white survival or progress. Moreover, he also believes that Apartheid can only be solved by the Whites unaware of the fact that they are the one who created this suppressive system. "…he was sure it is the type of development that can solve the question of apartheid and rid us, 'African negroes and all other negroes' of the Colour Problem. The whole of the Colour Problem (Aidoo, 1977, p. 96). This is a colonized worldview: the former colonizer is seen as the only possible savior, despite being the historical source of the problem. Like other characters in the novel, Kunle accepts England as the moral and civilizational superior, not out of rational evaluation, but because that belief has been naturalized through schooling, media, migration policy, and historical narratives. His consent is not conscious loyalty to the West—but a subconscious adoption of Western values and perspectives. This is more dangerous because it reflects how deeply hegemonic ideologies have infiltrated the minds of the colonized.

In the final section of *Our Sister Killjoy* (Aidoo, 1977), titled *The Love Letter*, Sissie exercises what we can understand as a form of "real" or conscious consent—an informed, deliberate, and ideological rejection of the dominant colonial narratives. This stands in sharp contrast to the passive, unconscious consent previously seen in characters like Kunle

or even Sammy. The real consent is the awareness of the ideological forces at play, and choosing to align (or not) with those forces on conscious, ethical, and political grounds. Sissie's consent is not passive submission, it is an intellectual and emotional confrontation with colonial ideologies, and a reaffirmation of self, culture, and resistance. While the other characters think their home country cannot afford their talent, Sissie sticks to her plan and return to her country to tell the story to all in her home country and do something for the Mother Africa. "After all, was it not part of the original idea that we should come to these alien places, study what we can of what they know and then go back home?" (Aidoo, 1977, p. 120). She had come. She had seen. And now she was going back.

**Conclusion**

The mindset of African self-exiles in *Our Sister Killjoy* (Aidoo, 1977) is shaped by an internalized reverence for Western culture, values, and systems resulting in a distorted sense of identity and belonging. Characters like Sammy and Kunle embody this psychological condition. They view Europe not just as a place of progress but as a validation of their worth. This admiration is not rooted in a rational or critical appreciation but in colonial conditioning, where Europe is seen as the gold standard of modernity. Their self-worth is tied to their acceptance by Western society, and this dependency hinders any critical self-awareness or loyalty to their homeland. As Aidoo illustrates, they function as willing participants in a neocolonial system, not due to external coercion, but because their thinking has been framed by colonial education, migration narratives, and media. The study shows that internalization occurs through what Gramsci (1948-1951) calls "passive consent." This is not an informed or free agreement, but an unconscious submission to dominant ideologies that are seen as natural or inevitable as portrayed by Sissie's fellow Africans praising European countries while ignoring their exploitative histories. They believe in the superiority of Western education, lifestyle, and political systems without questioning the cost of such beliefs. Even their physical relocation to Europe is presented as success, despite its degrading realities. This internalization is reinforced through civil society institutions like education, language, and media that embed the myth of Western supremacy. The illusion of consent is that these individuals believe they are making autonomous choices, when in reality they are enacting a script written by colonial history.

The adoption and internalization of Western values by African self-exiles occur through a gradual, systemic process rooted in colonial legacy and reinforced by cultural hegemony. Through formal schooling, media, migration policies, and the social prestige attached to Western affiliations, African individuals begin to see European ways of life as the natural model of progress and modernity. Sammy and Kunle, who echo colonial beliefs about European superiority without questioning their origins or implications. Sammy celebrates European travel as "paradise," while Kunle equates Western scientific advancement with salvation for Africans –even if it requires sacrificing Black bodies. These characters do not resist Western ideals because they do not perceive them as foreign impositions; rather, they believe in them as common sense, a key concept in Gramsci's theory of hegemony. The illusion of consent arises because these individuals are unaware of the ideological conditioning they have undergone. They adopt Western values not out of free will but because colonial structures have rendered alternatives invisible or inferior. Thus, their internalization is passive, automatic, and framed as choice –when in fact it is the product of deep systemic influence.

Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* (Aidoo, 1977) provides a powerful and layered critique of neocolonial hegemony by exposing the subtle mechanisms through which Western ideologies are internalized by African intellectuals in exile. Through the protagonist Sissie's journey across Germany and England, the novel reveals how

domination persists not through overt violence, but through the mental and ideological conditioning of postcolonial subjects – a process that Antonio Gramsci defines as the manufacturing of "consent" (Gramsci, 1948-1951). Sissie's observations and internal reflections illustrate that the glorification of Europe among African self-exiles is not a product of reasoned admiration but a deeply ingrained belief that Western ways are superior. This belief, inherited from colonial legacies and sustained through educational and cultural institutions, creates a false sense of autonomy. African individuals, like Sammy and Kunle, unknowingly perpetuate their own subjugation by celebrating and promoting the very systems that marginalize them. Their consent is not active or informed; it is passive and unconscious, crafted through ideological dominance. In contrast, Sissie emerges as a conscious subject who recognizes the artificiality of European superiority and the self-deception of African expatriates. Her return to Africa is not simply a physical relocation but a symbolic act of resistance. She chooses to disengage from neocolonial illusions and commit to rebuilding and redefining her homeland on her own terms. Aidoo, through Sissie, offers a compelling call to reject mimicry, reclaim cultural identity, and challenge the imperial definitions of success and modernity.

Ultimately, *Our Sister Killjoy* (Aidoo, 1977) is not just a critique of postcolonial failure but a roadmap to ideological awakening. It invites readers to question the legitimacy of inherited beliefs, recognize the subtle forms of domination, and move toward self-determined futures free from the influence of hegemonic consent.

**Recommendations**

Keeping the findings of the current research, further studies can be carried out by applying the comparative analysis for the concepts like mimicry, liminality, the third space, and ambivalence (Bhabha, 1994) offering deeper insight into the psychological and cultural complexities of postcolonial identity. Additionally, Althusser's theory of Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses (Althusser, 1970), as well as frameworks like the universal, misidentified, and enunciated subject positions by Michel Pêcheux (Pêcheux, 1982) may further enrich the study and enhance its theoretical credibility.

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