الهجين الثقافي و إزدواجية الشعور تجاه الوطن في رواية اما اتا ايدو" أختُنا قاتلةُ البهجة"

الباحث: مريم محمد حسن مصطفى

أ.د رضا ذنون علي

كلية الآداب/ جامعة البصرة

البريد الإلكتروني Email : Mariam.mohammed@uobasrah.edu.iq
ridha.hanoon@uobasrah.edu.iq

الكلمات المفتاحية: دراسات ما بعد الأستعمار، الهجين الثقافي، إزدواجية الشعور تجاه الوطن، الفضاء الثالث، تفاوض الهوية .

كيفية اقتباس البحث

مصطفى ، مريم محمد حسن، رضا ذنون علي، الهجين الثقافي و إزدواجية الشعور تجاه الوطن في رواية اما اتا ايدو" أختُنا قاتلةُ البهجة"، مجلة مركز بابل للدراسات الانسانية، تشرين الثاني 2026،المجلد:16، العدد:11.

هذا البحث من نوع الوصول المفتوح مرخص بموجب رخصة المشاع الإبداعي لحقوق التأليف والنشر (Creative Commons Attribution) تتيح فقط للآخرين تحميل البحث ومشاركته مع الآخرين بشرط نَسب العمل الأصلي للمؤلف، ودون القيام بأي تعديل أو استخدامه لأغراض تجارية.

مفهرسة في Indexed
IASJ

مسجلة في Registered
ROAD

Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*: Cultural Hybridity and Ambivalence of Home

Mariam Muhammad Hasan Mustafa
Prof. Ridha Thanoon Ali
College of Arts / University of Basrah
English Department

Keywords : Postcolonial studies, cultural hybridity, ambivalence of home, Third Space, identity negotiating.

How To Cite This Article
Mustafa , Mariam Muhammad Hasan, Ridha Thanoon Ali, Aidoo's Our Sister Killjoy: Cultural Hybridity and Ambivalence of Home,Journal Of Babylon Center For Humanities Studies, November 2026,Volume:16, Issue 11.

This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

المستخلص:

في ظل دراسات ما بعد الأستعمار، يعد مفهوم الهجين الثقافي واحدا من أهم المفاهيم التي تسود العديد من النتاجات الادبية لمابعد الكولونيالية. لكن على غير متوقع، تتحدى رواية اما اتا ايدو "Our Sister Killjoy" الرؤية السائدة للهيجن الثقافي وخاصة لما طرحه هومي بابا في كتابه " موقع الحضارة ". من هذا المنطلق، تبحث هذه الدراسة في الرواية المفاهيم الغامضة للهجينية مثل " إزدواجية الشعور تجاه الوطن"، " الوجود البيني " ، " التفاوض الثقافي"، و " الفضاء الثالث" لتسلط الضوء على المشاكل الجوهرية التي تواجه المستعمرين السود في أوربا. تتحق الدراسة من أمكانية تطبيق نظرية هومي بابا على الرواية، مؤكدة على أهمية إزدواجية الشعور تجاه الوطن لتوضيح الحدود الحضارية وعمق الانتماء لدى بطلة الرواية كونها هجين ثقافيا ملحوظا. بهذا تقوم الدراسة بتقييم تأثير الأزدواجية في النص للكشف على تأثيراتها المعاكسة على الفرد الهجين ثقافياً.

وكذلك البحث يسلط الضوء على صورة " الآخر " في النص، وكيف تعاملت الكاتبة مع هذا المفهوم بوعي افريقي عميق من خلال بطلة الرواية، سسي. بعد تقييم حدود الفضاء الثالث وتشخيص حالة البطلة، تقوم الدراسة بكشف المقاومة الثقافية التي عاشتها البطلة في النص، نابعة من ازدواجية الوعي تجاه الوطن. تقدم الدراسة منظورا جديدا فيما يتعلق بالهجين الثقافي بشكل عام وازدواجية الشعور تجاه الوطن بشكل خاص. بينما يؤكد هومي بابا على انتاجية وابداعية الفرد الهجين ثقافياً، تقترح الدراسة بإن حالة الهجينية الثقافية كانت دائماً سبباً رئيسياً للأغتراب والهشاشة الانسانية لدى الفرد الهجين.

Abstract

Cultural hybridity, in postcolonial studies, is a fundamental concept that dominates many literary works. Interestingly, Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977) challenges prevailing views of hybridity particularly in terms of Homi Bhabha's concept. Therefore, this paper examines the ambiguous concepts of cultural hybridity such as ambivalence of home, cultural negotiating, in-betweeness, and third space in the novel to show the key problems faced by the colored people in the host countries. In this sense, it investigates the applicability of Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity to Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*, stressing the importance of the ambivalence of home, and uncovering its cultural boundaries for the hybrid subject, the protagonist. It assesses the impact of ambivalence of home in the novel, highlighting its adverse effects.
Moreover, the paper sheds light on the image of the "Other" in the texts, and how Aidoo has dealt with such issue in a profound African consciousness through her protagonist, Sissie. After measuring the limits of the third space and situating the main character in the novel, the study explores the cultural resistance experienced by the protagonist, stemming from an ambivalent feeling towards home. Ultimately, the paper offers a new perspective on cultural hybridity in general, and ambivalence of home in particular. While Bhabha emphasizes the productivity and creativity of the hybrid subject, the paper suggests that cultural hybridity has been a driving force behind the alienation and fragility of the hybrid subject.

1.Introduction

Published in 1977, Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*: or *Reflections from a Black- eyed Squint* represents a great contribution to post-colonial legacy in literature. It reveals the problems of cultural hybridity in African literature, examining the traumatic journey of Sissie, the protagonist, a Ghanaian girl who visits Europe on a scholarship. Her

Journal of Babylon Center for Humanities Studies: 2026, Volume: 16, Issue: 11

feeling of displacement intensifies the state of tension she is experiencing as an immigrant. She feels herself neither at Europe nor at home, which deepens her sense of ambivalence and resistance equally .Through Sissie's experience in Europe, Aidoo highlights the key problems faced by the hybrid subjects in the host countries, especially in Europe.

The title consists of two parts, the first part; ***Our Sister Killjoy*** shows the protagonist's attempts to ruin the joy of her colleagues and the people around her for the sake of Africa. She always tries to convince her friends to go back to Africa to the extent that she argues her lover to return to their homeland and supports the Ghanaians. Encouraging them to leave Europe and serve the miserable people in their countries, Sissie expresses a sense of duty to her African origins.

The second part of the title, ***Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint***, traces the racial issues prevalent at that time. Speaking of this part (Mdluli 52) stresses that the title "is an important part of Sissie's engagement with the gaze". Usually, the whole world is persuaded, convinced, and accustomed to see the Western world as the place where dreams are coming true. For them, Europe is a place of goals achievement, an area where even miracles are possible to be fulfilled. Therefore, such European superiority or "gaze" allows them to view the black as evil, savage, and uncivilized. They exert an effort to create false perception of the black people as violent and should be ostracized. However, Aidoo uses the "black-eyed squint" to draw attention to see the truth through the perspective of a black woman, and to make the reader understands how narrating the story from a different angles can change the way one perceives the novel.

The novel consists of four sections, each of which depicts a different encounter with Sissie. Avoiding conventional fictional writing, the novel does not follow a linear plot structure, but instead, develops an experimental form. Its language is neither purely poetic nor prosaic though mostly written in prose fiction, shifting occasionally into poetic style. Moreover, it challenges the European traditional models that describe the Africans as backward and exotic:

Ama Ata Aidoo defies the European representational models which deny the history of the continent … through a poignant and masterly use of irony and satire Aidoo destabilizes three important European genres: travel narratives, the novel of formation, and the epistolary novel. (Ferreira 58)

Clearly, Ferreira accentuates that Aidoo aims at refuting the perspective presented in the European travel narrative that portrays Africa as a primitive place. On the contrary, Aidoo has reversed the roles, introducing Sissie as the traveler who visits Europe and turns the gaze

back against the Western structures. Moreover, because the protagonist is not fully developed into maturity in the text, it can not be considered as a typical Bildungsroman novel. Sissie, the protagonist, constantly resists the Western way of life and remains emotionally distant from it.

Aidoo organizes *Our Sister Killjoy* so that every section reveals a new aspect of Sissie's experience. The first section, "Into a Bad Dream" tells the story of Sissie's journey from Ghana to Europe. The second section, 'The Plums" is devoted to Sissie's meeting with Marija, an Indian woman, who becomes a friend of her and keeps expressing an ambiguous attraction toward her. The third section, "From Our Sister Killjoy", shows Sissie's reflections on European society, starting with meeting Knule, an African young man who believes that the problems of apartheid can be solved by Western technology and advancement. The last section, "A Love Letter" dedicated to a love letter to her boyfriend who decides to stay in Europe. Clearly, there is no direct dialogue between Sissie and the other characters in this section that Sissie is speaking her mind alone. More significantly, there is no connection between the events of one part and another that each section tells a new story. Moreover, the narration is less about plot, and more about reflections or commentaries of the protagonist about colonialism and how those Westerners exploit the African elites and encourage them to leave their motherland.

With the exception of the last section, which is written in the epistolary form, the novel's first three sections shits perspective between third person narrator and second person narrator. This produces a sense of dialogue with the protagonist, and it draws the reader into deep contemplation. This is important to be noticed because, "the intended audience shifts according to how the text is written and places a larger significance on every minute detail of the social and environmental experiences that Sissie witnesses "(Wilentz 162). Such a fluctuating voice foregrounds an ambivalent feeling and self-interrogation, providing an important connection to the novel's major ideas that discuss the negative impacts of colonialism.

Although internalized as virtue, the European awkward attitude towards the Africans in the text is perceived by the protagonist as subjugation. For instance, Sissie criticizes the ''academic-pseudo-intellectual version'' (Aidoo 6) because it offers a method of subliminal enslavement by imposing educational curriculums on African students. While the Europeans established an educational system in Ghana to attract Africans and teach them in their universities, here the method is a pretext for

Journal of Babylon Center for Humanities Studies: 2026, Volume: 16, Issue: 11

domination and control: "The use of education and government serve as a microscopic look into all of the things that Ghanaians were supposed to be grateful for but could not be" (Mdluli 60), because in exchange for these services, they plundered the country's resources and imposed economic, social, and cultural control over it.

Ultimately, the novel explores the impact of colonialism on the African intellectuals living abroad, examining their fundamental problems of being culturally hybrid. Aidoo writes about "what Europe is and does to those Africans whom it "sponsors" and educates" (Gagiano 1). She blames those Africans who left their motherland to receive a proper education in Europe, stating how most of them are totally assimilated to the Western culture. For her, they internalize the European ideologies of the colonizer and abandon their duties towards their country. As a hybrid subject, the African intellectual in Europe finds himself in a gray area; he feels like he does not belong anywhere. Homi K. Bhabha later calls such a particular situation "Third Space". For him, cultural hybridity stems from the third space, specifically when two cultures are mixed together- that is both of the colonized and the colonizer. While he believes that hybridity serves as a mechanism that produces a counter-discourse against colonial power, this paper highlights the essential problems resulted from cultural hybridity in general. To be clear, it challenges Bhabha's theory of hybridity by offering alternative perspectives on key concepts such as "Third Space", ambivalence of home, and in-betweeness.

2. Homi Bhabha: The Hybrid Subject and the Limits of the Third Space

In Homi .K. Bhabha's theoretical framework, cultural hybridity emerges in the "Third space", more specifically, in the contact zone between the colonized and the colonizer's cultures. He believes that when cultures mix, overlap, and affect each other, new meanings will be created because the impact on both sides is reciprocal. Therefore, hybridity becomes a fine tool of resisting the colonizer, as it allows new third culture to be invented and destabilizes the superiority of the colonial power. Aidoo's novel, *Our Sister Killjoy* reflects some aspects of Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity. Nonetheless, many other aspects have been reversed; hence, the novel tests the limits of the "Third Space "and complicates the optimistic view on hybridity as productive space.

Here, it is necessary to mention that the term "ambivalence" has been first used by the African American thinker W.E.B Du Bois to describe a state of "Double Consciousness" in his collected essays *The Soul of Black*

Folk (1093). Bois proposes that Double Consciousness refers to the spiritual fragmentation and psychological ambivalence that the black people experience in America as they caught between two cultures- black and white (Al Hassan 692). Nevertheless, Homi Bhabha considers ambivalence as an in-between condition, generated in the third space of enunciation. He defines ambivalence as the description of "the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized" (96). Thus, for Bhabha, ambivalence is the product of the in-between space that often refers to the mixed feelings where one wants to adopt the host culture but rejects it at the same time.

In addition, situated under the umbrella of the term of ambivalence, the concept of home is articulated by Bhabha in his article "The World and the Home" (1992). Home, within Bhabha's framework is transformed into a site of confusion and duality instead of stability and settlement. It, therefore, becomes an ambiguous concept. Moreover, He relates the experience of the hybrid subject with the problem of the "unhomely moment", or the "unhomeliness", a condition when "the unhomely moment creeps up on you stealthily as your own shadow" (145). As a result, the notion of home as a stable concept collapses, opening a hybrid space for negotiating new meanings. It, therefore, is not necessarily associated with an actual homelessness, but rather a psychological and emotional division that is generated when " the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting"(143). For Bhabha, because of hybridity and ambivalence, the concept of home becomes pervaded with the traumas of colonial history. When the private and the public overlapped together by the broader effect of migration and cultural merging, a place will be created where no one can identify oneself. In this space, the hybrid subject occupies a space marked by ambivalence towards the concept of home.

Moreover, this third space Bhabha argues, "Provide the terrain for elaboration strategies of self-hood that initiate new signs of identity" (2). Ambivalence of home, as Bhabha suggests, creates hybrid spaces that can destabilize the colonial authority and enable the colonized to resist and creatively reshape a different outcome. It creates hybrid forms that can be both colonial and anti-colonial. As such, the hybrid subject becomes an active part of the host culture and therefore the colonizer's culture is also pervaded by external forces that disturb the colonial superiority by creating new cultural values and discourses. Consequently, it becomes an effective tool of resistance because it proves that the colonial façade is full of cracks and dualities, and that the boundaries between both sides become blurred, distorted and indistinct.

Journal of Babylon Center for Humanities Studies: 2026, Volume: 16, Issue: 11

In ***Our Sister Killjoy***, cultural hybridity becomes problematic in the colonial context, since it fails to be a source of strength for the hybrid subject. To be clear: first, there is no actual cultural negotiation in the text. Whereas Bhabha believes that identity negotiating produces new cultural meanings and, consequently, new "Third Space" that enrich the hybrid subject's productivity, Sissie rejects identity negotiation altogether contradicting thus Bhabha's ideas. Second, as a key concept of hybridity, mimicry fails to be a resisting strategy to subvert the colonial supremacy. Third reason is that cultural hybridity inflicts lasting psychological damage on Sissie, notably a sense of permanent ambivalence of home.

3. Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy:* Hybridity and Resistance

Apart from the hybrid form of the novel, *Our Sister Killjoy* presents various aspects of cultural hybridity. In *The Location of Culture* 1994, Bhabha argues, "Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture, have no primordial unity or fixity" (37). From this perspective, the protagonist's in-betweenness in the text can be clearly seen. Sissie is trapped between two worlds: Africa, her homeland, and Europe, the place where she is educated in. At times, she describes Europe as a prison that even the moon in Germany seems to be "Silent, deathly pale" (11), while at other times, she expresses resentment toward Africa and the elites that "the only pleasure they seem to get out of life is frustrating younger people" (127). She cannot deny that the elites leave their native place because of the deprivation from the necessities of life, though she shows love and hatred at the same time. She blames Africans who imitate the Europeans, yet charmed by the Western order and advancement. Thus, she reveals both rejection and attraction; therefore, the protagonist shows traces of Bhabha's model of the cultural hybrid rooted in her third space.

Overtly, *Our Sister Killjoy* employs hybridity not only in its content but also in its form. Examining cultural hybridity in the novel, it is clear that some aspects of hybridity permeate the novel through its style and narrative techniques, structure, and language. Linguistically, the novel merges both prose and poetic language. In writing her novel, Aidoo always makes a blend between prose that delivers the protagonist's cultural experience and poetic pauses that express her inward reflections and introspective thoughts:

"It is a
Long way from
Calcutta to
Munich:

Aero planes brought you here.
But what else did
Migrant birds of the world,
Beginning with such
Few feathers too, which
drop
And drop
And drop
From
Constant flights and
distances" (Aidoo 20)

In the above lines, Sissie asks Marija why she came to Europe where Aidoo disrupts the prose rhythm into verse-like lines. It is a common tradition in African oral folklore and African storytelling to break the narrative with poetic lines. It symbolizes Homi Bhabha's idea of the "Third Space" that allows for the creation of a new hybrid form of writing which is neither poetic, nor entirely prosaic.

Significantly, the narrative is fragmented; voices are shifting throughout the sections of the novel. Aidoo swings the narrations between first person, second person, and interior monologue as in the last section of the novel. (Wilentz162) accentuates that such a shift intends to make readers change via the text, and signifying thus the fractured hybrid identity of the post-colonial subject, leading the text to resonate with what Bhabha calls the process of hybridization. The novel adopts a hybrid form that cannot be categorized as an example of Western Bildungsroman or pure African narrative. Such is the case; it combines different narrative techniques, diverting from the conventions and the established norms of English literary writing.

However, (Goyal 13) notices "Aidoo stands firmly against the celebration of mobility, migration and hybridity, interested instead in how a neo-colonial world order comes into being in the wake of decolonization." Aidoo contends that hybridity arises corruption more than negotiation of new meanings. Hence, she rejects Bhabha's view of hybridity as a resisting tool against the colonizer; rather, she believes that hybridity causes moral and cultural decay. Bhabha anticipates that when the hybrid subject experiences third space and mixing of cultures, he becomes ready to enter the various social and political fields to be an innovative member as hybridity is for him "the sign of productivity". Nevertheless, Aidoo asserts the opposite. Because it creates cultural alienation rather than productivity, Sissie's position as a hybrid subject problematizes Bhabha's

Journal of Babylon Center for Humanities Studies: 2026, Volume: 16, Issue: 11

theory. She calls for cultural decolonization by the elites, seeing that the only way to challenge the colonizer's domination is through advancing an African ethical consciousness which allows the elites to return home and build their country.

The novel reveals a significant failure of cultural negotiation that prevents the Third Space from becoming a creative area. Instead, the protagonist does not allow herself to adopt the Western values by any means. She does not seem at ease in the in-between space; instead of mixing the two opposing cultures of black and white, she turns to be isolated. From the very beginning, she rejects the notion of multiculturalism and universal standards:

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 6)

As shown above, the protagonist criticizes those Africans who have been deceived into going overseas in search of better educational institutions. Such people are lured into migration to go to Europe to receive an advanced learning, forgetting that such kind of embracement of the Western values might lead them to be totally assimilated to the colonizer's culture. Sisse, therefore, refuses any form of cultural hybridization because it can lead to full internalization of the colonial costumes and thus the result will be the loss of pure cultural identity. She prevents the emergence of one hybrid culture because she does not encourage a negotiating space between the Western culture and her African heritage. According to her, superiority among Europeans is unchangeable because they still demand acceptance for their White culture under the pretext of creating something new and "universal" that could be purposive for the "Gross National Product". In this concern, Bhabha argues:

"It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or post-colonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that alien territory - where I have led you – may reveal that the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism or multi-culturalism of the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity. To that end we should remember that it is the 'inter' - the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between, the space of the entre that Derrida has opened up in writing itself- that carries the burden of the meaning of culture" (38).

Surprisingly, Sissie does not only negate the differences of the host culture, but also looks at them as a continuation of Western colonialism. For instance, she refuses the so called "Consumer Goods" that trickle to Africa, her mother land, and enjoys wearing local outfits: "She walked along in her gay, gold and leafy brown cloth, looking, feasting her village eyes" (12). Sissie rejects the polished and shiny Western products that bring delight to the hearts of folks in her home; instead of trying to adjust and accommodate oneself to the Western customs, she refuses to find state, remaining fluctuating between the two poles, the East and the West. She goes further to criticize the Western food and the weather as cold and spiritless. Again, rather than negotiating those cultural differences, the protagonist negates them. In so doing, she transforms Bhabha's "space of enunciation" into a space of denunciation where she does not blur the borders, but chooses a side, discards the other, and distances herself. Therefore, in states of third space, ambivalence of home emerges as an overwhelming means of intensifying cultural hybridity.

4. The Representation of Ambivalence of Home in Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*

Although Homi Bhabha introduces ambivalence of home as a productive tension that generates hybrid form to be a tool of anti-colonial antagonism, Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* questions the practicality of this stance for the postcolonial subject, and in particular, the African hybrid intellectual. Sissie, the protagonist, experiences ambivalence of home in Europe, as she is captivated by the European advancement and competence even if she condemns its colonial past. Yet, this tension does not evolve around the hybrid third space that Bhabha suggests. Rather, the ambivalent feeling is turned into an inflexible cultural split that idealizes an untainted African culture and discards any possibility of intercultural transformation. Therefore, ambivalence is revealed as a symptom of trauma rather than a source of freedom and productivity.

Certainly, Bhabha's understanding of ambivalent concept of home is applicable to Aidoo's ***Our Sister Killjoy,*** though only in some respects. In the novel, Sissie's ambivalent attitude towards Europe exceeds what Homi Bhabha explicitly demonstrates. She experiences both fascination and denial towards Africa, and at the same time, she is drawn to and sickened by the host culture. Right from the beginning of the novel, Aidoo introduces her protagonist as an African student who accepts a scholarship to Europe because:

> The need for law and order;
> The gravest problem facing mankind being
> Hunger, disease, and ignorance;
> On hijackings as a deliberate attempt to hold
> Decent society to ransom.(Aidoo 6)

Since Europe is viewed as a land of dreams for Africans, Sissie shows a strong desire to visit it, much of the values that were lost in Africa seem to be overlooked in Europe. She admits that "law and order" are lacking in her own society, thus, most African students sees such scholarships as "more like a dress rehearsal for a journey to paradise" (Aidoo 9), a chance that get them rid of poverty, improve their education, and elevate their social status. However, similarly, Sissie complains that these scholarships, which are introduced as a part of the "Gross National Product" (6), are used as an excuse to impose the colonial ideology. She clarifies that though such services the Europeans offer sound noble, but are used to justify dominance over Africans. They aim at delivering what they call "universal truth, universal art and "universal values" that eliminate the other non-European traditions. Moreover, by enforcing the Western educational system into the Africans' minds, they are creating a person that stops resisting their power structures. Ultimately, they create an obedient, non-revolutionary hybrid subject, though the case is not so with Sissie.

Not only do education shows Sissie's ambivalent attitude towards Europe but also food. At the beginning of the novel when Sissie visits the embassy, she observes, "The food, which she instinctively knew was first class in spite of its foreignness, was served from steaming pots" (8). She likes the way they serve the food and the European wine that she first tastes throughout her life. More importantly, she admires even the glasses and the cutlery that "shone", she appreciates the effort they make for her, though she looks at this European food as lacking of smell and flavor. This dinner, for Sissie, marks the beginning of her cultural alienation and her inability to merge in the new culture.

In section two, Sissie's reaction towards European food exposes an emotional struggle and an inner conflict about the cultural differences she experiences as a hybrid subject. When Marija invites Sissie to her home, she observes that Marija brings out all food "Sliced cold lamb. Pieces of cold chicken meat. Sliced cold sausages… Each of them stone cold" (Aidoo68), and she is puzzled over it:

Cold food. Even after she had taught her tongue to accept them, she could never really understand why people ate cold food. To eat ordinary cooked food that has gone cold without bothering to heat it is unpleasant enough. But to actually chill food in order to eat it was totally beyond her understanding. In the end, she decided it had something to do with white skins, corn-silk hair and very cold weather. (Aidoo68)

Apparently, the cold food stands as a symbol that reflects Sissie's ambivalence of home. Since it is unfamiliar to Sissie, the European food carries two opposing meanings: first, the warm food represents comfort and cultural familiarity, and second, the cold European meats and pickled items indicate oddness, alienation and dislocation. Throughout her stay in Europe, Sissie longs for the warm African food at home she is used to, and she "taught her tongue to accept them" (Aidoo 69), which implies

that she tries hard to adapt to Western culture and consequently accepts the other cultural differences she encounters but in vain. However, this adaptation cannot solve the problem of belonging, since she still feels emotionally distanced from a truthful embodiment of home. Hence, by associating food with cultural identity, Sissie demonstrates that she does not truly belong to the white culture. Her rejection of cultural differences prevents Europe from being a cultural home for her. Therefore, she serves as an example of Homi Bhabha's notion of the "unhomeliness" where home becomes "unhomely"; a notion captures the troubled experience of living in-between two opposing cultures, reinforcing ambivalence of home.

Similarly, in "The plums", Sissie observes diverse kinds of fruits and vegetables in the backyard garden that arise deep ambivalence of home. At first, she is stunned by the beauty, the size, and the freshness of these plants, specially, the tomatoes as they are "Lush, crimson, perfected"(Aidoo 37). On the other hand, as she walks with her friend, Marija, the protagonist recalls some pictures from home. While looking at the fruits, she tries to identify apples, pears, and the plums with local and cultural productions. Sissie finds it strange that "Though outside in the African sun, Giant trees stood for centuries" (Aidoo 37), she wonders how these plants can survive in this cold climate and be lush and fresher than those that grow under the warm sun in her homeland. For her, surely the African fruits are tastier, warmer, and more valuable, revealing a strong sense of belonging and a marked ambivalence of home.

Moreover, the plums, Marija gives to Sissie, are an instance that highlights Sissie's ambivalent reaction toward European food:

But
The Plums.
What plums.
Such plums. (Aidoo 38)

Sissie, it seems, has not seen real fresh plums throughout her entire life in Africa. Therefore, she used to buy sugared-up canned plums, "liked them all" (Aidoo 39), and Marija's plums fascinate her as they were "of size, sheen and succulence" (39). She also believes that these Bavarian plums owed their beauty to some certain qualities, such as:

Youthfulness
Peace of mind
Feeling free
Knowing you are a rare article,
Loved. (Aidoo40)

However, it appears that Sissie refers to people rather than plums in the above lines. She draws a contrast between how people are treated in Africa and how they are treated here, in Europe. The plums for her symbolize the Europeans, thus she likens them to the loved Europeans who are esteemed and well regarded by all, unlike the Black African

people who are marginalized, despised and devalued. Nonetheless, (Innes10) argues that the plums evoke the danger of being consumed by the West. It is not just a "plum", but it leads to negotiation, to an in-between space that creates a sense of ambivalent concept of home for the protagonist. Loving the plums means reinforcement of dominance and authority of European culture; therefore, observing those plums, our sister is experiencing self-fragmentation. The European plums clearly remind her of the traumatic colonial history and the dependency of Africa at the same time. Hence, eating this fruit does not allow Sissie to feel at ease because she feels that she is internalizing the power structures that once oppressed her own country. She feels like being expended by the colonial system as if she is the one that has been eaten, and as if Africa has been taken by the West again. For Sissie, the acceptance of those plums allows her to betray her native land and thus disturbing her sense of national integrity.

National products and local costumes are other aspects that caused ambivalent feelings for the protagonist in the text. Arriving at Frankfurt, Germany, she likes that shiny and luxurious clothes as well as perfumes the European women wear. However, she "walked along in her gay, gold and leafy brown cloth, looking, feasting her village eyes" (Aidoo 12), she looks at their "shine and glitter" as those "Consumer Goods" that are transported into people at home. For Sissie, those products represent neocolonial enterprise, symbolizing the continuation of colonial effect upon African folks. Meeting her African friend , Sissie criticizes him as wearing "some neo-colonial outfit"(Aidoo90) that she believes is supposed to make him more advanced, but they rather pushes him backward. Those perfumes, plastics, and clothes are ways to maintain Western cultural and economic domination. Moreover, our sister believes that her rejection of those products asserts her cultural identity and belonging. She also sees that empowering Europe economically is a main reason behind its hegemony upon the other nations because "for this is all anything is about. Power to decide who is to live, who is to die" (Aidoo 13). Therefore, refusing such Western materials evokes a sense of cultural independence, preferring to wear the African "leafy brown cloth" to avoid the risk of being herself consumed by the West. Using those colonial products is one way that makes the Europeans anticipating dependency and then fall into a total assimilation.

However, Sissie's description of the German landscapes shows her attraction to Europe, too. She admires the Alps, which are adorned with "the grey rocks" around it that are "so high in the sky" (Aidoo11). This view reminds her of the "Great Rift Valley" in her homeland. The European valleys were full of green corn that "would sway in the wind. A grazing ground for highland cattle"(Aidoo13). She is surely impressed by the breathtaking and those enchanting views in Europe, while annoyed by the coldness of its atmosphere, associating it with the pale whiteness of its people. Overtly, the color white evokes a sense of disgust, and at the same time, revealing her racism in public. The day she enters Frankfurt,

while walking in streets, a girl is stunned by "Black girl? Black girl?"(12). Sissie, for the first time, notices the difference in the color of human beings, a difference , she believes, evokes racism and allows the chance to such racist people to be vile and despicable:

looked around her, really well this time.
And it hit her. That all that crowd of people going and coming in all sorts of directions had the colour of the pickled pig parts that used to come from foreign places to the markets at home.
Trotters ,pig-tails, pig-airs.
She looked and looked at so many of such skins together.
And she wanted to vomit. (Aidoo12)

Sissie's disgust with white skin is evident in the novel; she associates the pale white color with the color of pigs, as if she sees the parts of pigs exported from Europe to Africa. Aidoo portrays her protagonist as incapable of adapting to the cold, harsh weather, and unable to tolerate White people, too. She longs for the warmth in her homeland, as the warm, dark color reminds her of her roots, thus unable to cope with her new landscape.

Aidoo, furthermore, stresses the racist attitudes of the Western people and how they used the color white as a symbol of superiority over the Black folks for centuries. She points out that the White people cultivate the idea in their children that to be a "Heaven-worthy individual" (25), they have to be White Christian, and have Christian names to sit side by side by angels and the elects:

Since , dear Lord, Your
Angeles, like you, are
Western
English, to be precise.
There are no other kinds of
Angeles, but
Lucifer, poor Black Devil. (Aidoo27)

The above lines illustrate the deep racist hierarchy rooted in Western education and imagination that "Angels" are always associated with the West and with English whiteness in particular. Moral qualities like purity, goodness, and virtue are widely regarded as core values in White culture. The only substitute "angel" allowed for the Black subject is Lucifer, the fallen, doomed figure, showing how Blackness is metaphorically allied to inferiority, wickedness, and elimination. This distinction shows the colonial logic that elevates the West as the moral world while degrading and dehumanizing the others, particularly, the Black ones. Seen via the context of ambivalence of home, such image captures the inner conflict of the protagonist who yearns for belonging but is sorely conscious that "home" in Europe is shaped upon racial superiority and the rejection of Black individuality. Therefore, such a view not only criticizes racial arrogance about the European whiteness, but also depicts the psychological struggle of being concurrently attracted to and repulsed by

Journal of Babylon Center for Humanities Studies: 2026, Volume: 16, Issue: 11

a cultural home, where people see in the difference of colors, an excuse to be mean and biased.

Moreover, the profound relationship between Sissie and Marija intensifies the ambivalent concept of home in the text. Aidoo dedicates the second chapter of her novel, *Our Sister Killjoy*, to introduce Sissie's relationship with Marija. Complicating the concept of home for the protagonist, Marija'a presence in her life creates ambivalent feelings. Sissie is torn apart by two clashing drives: the desire for love and the fear of losing her cultural identity. Marija offers her kindness, mutual understanding, and emotional comfort, but at the same time, she is afraid of accepting Europe as her cultural home. In fact, Sissie feels safe and comfortable with Marija as she feels welcomed, unlike the way she was treated by the other European in Germany. Marija is different; she appreciates Sissie's presence and tries to provide her with a kind of emotional refuge. She takes care of Sissie, coming to the nursery where Sissie stays to take her out every day and "was always reluctant to let Sissie leave early" (Aidoo 38).

However, Cheryl Sterling explains that by allowing the two to become friends, Aidoo makes an endeavor to dismantle all the social distinctions between the two cultures, both the European and African culture. Europe becomes an ambivalent cultural home, and ceases to be a place of advancement and discovery; it turns to be a place where comfort and suitability are not always available and that what really happens later in Sissie's friendship with Marija (141). Sissie is both attracted to and disgusted by her friendship that she likes the warmth that Marija offers, seeing her as:

The daughter of mankind's
Self-appointed most royal line,
An heiress to some
Legacy that would make you
Bow
Down
Your head in
Shame and
Cry. (Aidoo48)

For Sissie, Marija represents the entire Western culture, seeing that Marija belongs to an elevated race, a kind of culture that is grand and superior. In other words, the colonizer's culture makes minor societies to "Bow down" because their inferior culture gives them only shame and confusion. More importantly, for Sissie, "meeting Marija was her first encounter with the phenomenon" (Aidoo72). She falls in the third space of enunciation where she both likes and rejects Marija's affections to her. She feels momentary a sense of superiority in her relationship with Marija, imagining what a delicious love affair she and Marija would have if one of them had been a man. Especially if she, Sissie had been a man" (Aidoo61). She wishes if she is the kind of man that doomed Marija's love and longs to see Marija's tears to feel a sense of fulfillment. This is

Journal of Babylon Center for Humanities Studies: 2026, Volume: 16, Issue: 11

exactly what Bhabha demonstrates in *The Location of* Culture (1994) as "the problem of the ambivalence of cultural authority" (51). Bhabha believes that for the hybrid subject like Sissie, cultural dominance is not fixed. It is created out of differences and therefore it is always fractured. Marija's belonging to the superior, elevated culture, does not give her the credit to dominate her relationship with Sissie, the Black girl. Bhabha also affirms that the colonizer always creates "the attempt to dominate in the name of supremacy which itself produced only in the moment of differentiation" (51). This is precisely the situation with Marija's German neighbors, who are trying to stop her from "walk with the black girl" (Aidoo 44) because walking with other of a low culture would make her "neurotic" and "perverse". They ask Marija not to further cultivate her friendship with Sissie because that would break their Western supremacy.

Furthermore, when Marija invites Sissie to her home, Sissie feels a sense of ambivalence towards the European way of life and culture. As they go upstairs, She observes the details of Marija's house: "A giant rock that must have existed in the architect's mind. All triangles and disappearing corners. White walls. A giant white bed, laid out smooth"(Aidoo 63). She is convinced that she "had no right to be there"(Aidoo 63) Sissie sees that she does not belong to this place; from the moment they enter the house, she feels alienated as if this house symbolizes Europe, having the same sense of displacement she experienced at the moment of her arrival. Equally significant and central to the discussion of ambivalence of home is Sissie's final recognition of Marija's sexual attempt. While moving to the room of Marija's child, Sissie feels "she was moving not up, but down into some primeval cave" (Aidoo62). Aidoo gives such a foreshadowing to prove that Sissie does not feel a sense of comfort at the place even before something happens, and that becomes real when Sisse quickly rejects Marija's attempt at unwanted sexual advance. (R. Baer 124) explains that Marija's deviant behavior reflects the reality of the European societies and families, an element of a degenerated, defected western life. Hence, after her recognition, Sissie longs for home:

Sissie thought of home. To the time when she was a child in the village. Of how she always liked to be sleeping in the bedchamber when it rained. And now where was she? How did she get into those pinelands where not so long ago human beings stoked their own funeral pyres with other human beings. (Aidoo 64)

Sissie recalls her feelings at home, remembering the past when she was a little girl in the village when life was simple and satisfying. She sees Europe in all its glory, yet still has an emotional association with her native land in Africa. At this moment, home for Sissie was far away, fractured, and disillusioned. She wonders how she get into this land, the land of the colonizer. For her, Marija symbolizes European values that seem to offer respect for all, but still inspired by the colonial system. In the emotional encounter with Marija, Sissie sees different worlds and

experiences different lives in the third space as demonstrated by Homi Bhabha.

Although the protagonist of the novel can be regarded as a hybrid subject within Homi Bhaha's framework of cultural hybridity, her function becomes problematic when one questions the cultural third space of her behavior. Bhabha believes that "in-between space" or the "third space of enunciation", ambivalence and hybridity become "the sign of the productivity" (159) that helps in "shifting forces and fixities" (159), and "it displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination" (160). In that case, when different cultures meet, the fragmented nature of the colonial authority will be exposed. The merging of cultures destabilizes its power and shows that the colonial domination is never perfect. When the colonized subject experiences the ambivalent feelings of the third space, new productive identity is created, and thus, ways of resisting would appear to break the boundaries the colonial system relies on. However, in *Our Sister Killjoy*, the protagonist presents the exact opposite of the statement.

If someone were to say that Bhabha's theory could be applied literally to the protagonist, he would overlook the fact that not any cultural third space has the ability to make one innovative and creative as Bhabha claims, and Sissie, is an instance. She returns home alienated, psychologically exhausted, and unable to transform this cultural experience into a liberating action. Sissie closes the space that Bhabha imagines as productive. Aidoo diverges from Bhabha's model in three respects: criticizing other Africans who stay overseas and leave their homeland, cutting ties with Marija, and repatriating home without getting a converted or having a creative cultural vision.

After returning to her native culture, Sissie starts to question the ideology and discourse spoken by Africans in Europe. For instance, She dislikes Sammy's attitudes because he believes that going to Europe was like "a dress rehearsal to paradise"(Aidoo 9) .Sammy, an African young man, who meets Sissie at the German embassy and envies her because she is going overseas. For Sissie, She is confronted by the truth that Europe is not magical as Sammy says. From the very beginning, she is shocked that Germany is full of giant trees which are not blooming, withered, cold, and soulless. Not all "are mentioned in geography notes" (Aidoo 38), Europe, for Sissie, resembles anything but paradise. Moreover, (Wilentz 159) argues that Aidoo attacks the notion that living with another culture would prepare cultural environment allows for creativity .An example can be seen in Sissie's rejection of the other Africans overseas like Kunle and the doctor. She refers to them as "Some such hustlers" (Aidoo35). They think they are valued and appreciated, but, the truth that European always look at them with disdain and associate them with "criminality". In chapter three, the Christian doctor explains, "the niggerhearts are so easy to come by" (Aidoo100), because of their problems and childlike gambols. Kunle agrees with the Christian doctor, forgetting that his "identity has faded, already, so completely"

(Aidoo 97). Sissie tries hard to convince Kunle to return to Africa, but all goes in vain.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, the novel, *Our Sister Killjoy*, challenges Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity and the notion of Third Space, since the protagonist, Sissie, is unable to become productive as a hybrid subject. Her ambivalent concept of home indicates that Bhabha's Third Space is not always productive and applicable to all societies. In cases like Sissie's, cultural hybridity proves problematic because it produces emotional trauma that intensifies the colonial memory. More to the point, the ambivalence of home drives Sissie into a state of alienation and self-denial rather than empowerment and productivity. Through her experience of racial discrimination, fragmentation, and sense of un-belonging, the protagonist arrives at an opposite perspective of Bhabha's theory. She examines the defective version, where creativity and generating new signs of identity are made impossible. Instead of producing an active and productive hybrid subject, cultural hybridity creates an exotic figure, who is caught in a state of in-betweeness, unable to move in either direction.

6. Bibliography

Ahmed, Sara. "Embodying Diversity: Problems and Paradoxes for Black Feminists." *Race Ethnicity and Education*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2009, pp. 41–52.

Baer, Elizabeth R. *The Genocidal Gaze: From German Southwest Africa to the Third Reich*. Wayne State University Press, 2017.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 2012.

Al Hassan, Shawkat Ahmed Azeez. "Constructing the Black-Self in Langston Hughes's Poetry." *Journal of Sustainable Studies*, vol.7, no.2, 2025, pp. 692

Bhabha, Homi K. "The World and the Home." *Social Text*, nos. 31–32, 1992, pp. 141–153.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Paladin, 1970.

Ferreira, Nair Anaya. "Ama Ata Aidoo and the Black-Eyed Squint: Satire and Subversion in Our Sister Killjoy." *Anuario de Letras Modernas*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2021, pp. 58–77.

Gagiano, A. "Postcolonial Illuminations of Past Betrayals in Tan's *The Gift of Rain* and Owuor's *Dust*." *The Wenshan Review of Literature and Culture*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2019, pp. 1–27.

Goyal, Yogita. *Romance, Diaspora, and Black Atlantic Literature*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Innes, C. L. "Conspicuous Consumption: Corruption and the Body Politic in the Writing of Ayi Kwei Armah and Ama Ata Aidoo." *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, edited by Janet Witalec, vol. 177, Gale Cengage, 2004.

Mdluli, Yolanda. *Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa: Feminist Critiques of Post-Colonial Africa*. University of the Witwatersrand, 2022. Thesis.

Nguyen, Anh P. *The Novel of Unlearning: Education, Development, and Interracial Intimacies in Cold War Africa*. Georgetown University, 2019. Dissertation.

Sackey, Edward. "Oral Tradition and the African Novel." *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 37, no. 3, 1991, pp. 389–407.

Sterling, C. "Can You Really See through a Squint? Theoretical Underpinnings in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2010, pp. 131–150.

Journal of Babylon Center for Humanities Studies: 2026, Volume: 16, Issue: 11

Wilentz, Gay. "The Politics of Exile: Ama Ata Aidoo's Our Sister Killjoy." *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1991, p.12

Journal of Babylon Center for Humanities Studies: 2026, Volume: 16, Issue: 11