he following is a tentative comparison of Efua Sutherland’s short story *New Life at Kyerefaso* and Ayi Kwei Armah’s second novel, *Fragments*. It will focus on the gender gap over the issue of tradition and modernity in two literary works published by two major figures in Ghanaian Literature. The discussion will be carried out from a feminist perspective, i.e., the discussion will turn around the representations that women have of the concepts of tradition and modernity in the fictions of two contemporaneous female and male authors belonging to the same country (Ghana). The issue will be discussed in two sections. The first section will be devoted to the discussion of the context in which Efua Sutherland published her short story. It will be followed by a second section that will proceed to the analysis of the two works as both texts and inter-texts.

**Discussion of Contexts**

Efua Theodoro Morgue Sutherland was born in the English colony of the Gold Coast, the present-day Ghana in 1924. Apart from Mabel Dove Danquah, born in 1910, who had started publishing essays, short stories, and plays in the *West African Times* as early as the 1950s to express her concern over the place and role of women in contemporary Ghana, Sutherland can be regarded as the mother of West African Literature in English. Donald Herdeck has called her “Black Africa’s most famous woman writer”. Even though her name has been dropped out by feminist critics like Florence Stratton in her *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* and Adola James’s *In their Own Voices*, for reasons that are not easy to explain, she is far from being an occasional writer. Her works are published in both Longman and Heineman Editions and her short stories are anthologised both at home and abroad. Her place in West African feminist literature is neither a matter of seniority over other authors such as Flora Nwappa, Ama Ata Aidoo, and Buchi Emecheta, nor that of amount of publications. She deserves a place in the West African literary tradition because she has earned it through that literary process of revision which T.S. Eliot considers as being necessary for the affirmation of individual talents and the existence of literary traditions. Charlotte H. Burner has rightly placed her in the third position, after Mabel Dove Danquah and Adelaide Casely-Hayford in her anthology of African woman writers entitled *Unwinding Threads*.

It is true that Bruner’s anthology is not a book of feminist criticism, but as any literary cannon, it is necessarily based on literary excellence and notions like tradition. Efua Sutherland is a Ghanaian, and if Bruner has decided to include her among the African woman writers “unwinding threads”, it is because she has realised that Efua is quite representative of the Anansefaro/Anansewa, the spider man/woman who stands at the centre of the Akan orature. Apart from the fact that she was at one time made poet laureate by Kwame Nkrumah, the first Prime Minister and first president of Ghana, Sutherland has played major roles in the educational and cultural life of her country. She has had a leading role in the creation of the Experimental theatre, the Ghana Drama Studio, the Osagyefo Players, the Ghana Society Writers, and the Ghana Broadcasting Studio. As a dramatist, she is best known for her plays *The Marriage of Anansewa, Edufa*, and *Foriwa*. She has
also published juvenile literature in the form of children’s rhythm plays such as *Vulture, Vulture* and *Tahinta*, which she has tried to use in her private grade school.

The reasons for her exclusion from discussions on Western literature are surely various. But it can be argued that they are mostly ideological. The fact that she has done most of her artistic work under the aegis of Nkrumah, whose leadership goes from 1957 to 1966, has reduced her standing as a serious writer. Her decision to play a role in the cultural life of her own country reads as an abandonment of the service that she owes to her art and of her commitment to the cause of her own people. Indeed, her creation of theatrical troupes like the Osagyefo Players places her among the many *Obrafos*, the royal appellation reciters that Nkrumah had attached to his service. The other argument that can be developed relates to the fact that she has “married the man she wants”, a white American with whom she has founded a school and an experimental theatre in the upper region of Ghana. In the early period of decolonisation, mixed marriages like hers could only sound provocative especially to the manhood of those who have freed the country.

However, no matter the strength of the arguments above, they cannot explain alone the neglect that Sutherland has met in literary criticism. It is true that she has served the political establishment, but then the griots have done the same without forfeiting for ever their reputation as artists. It is also true that she has married a white stranger, but how long will the blame stand when the Akan tradition based on matriarchy encourages a system of kinship involving the exchange of husbands. Eva Meyrovitch’s studies of the Akan matriarchal system have shown that the custom of taking a stranger as husband is highly celebrated in the Akan oral tradition, which makes reference to Queenmothers married to white Libyan Berbers. It should be reminded that in a matriarchal system such as that of the Akans, the father’s role is only biological, it is the uncle who assumes the role of cultural model to be followed by the children.

Our opinion is that if Sutherland continues to be neglected in literary criticism, it is because her themes are not considered up to the accepted standards. She has shied away from the themes of protest literature and double consciousness, i.e., of the woman and man caught between cultures that have made the reputation of many of her contemporaries. For example, the themes of tradition and modernity, often seen in African literature as being dialectical for the African, are not developed in a dichotomy in *New Life in Kyerefaso*, the short story under study here. Sutherland does not consider modernity as being traumatic to the African. There is no urgent call for the “return to the sources” because the latter have never been abandoned, nor is there an appeal to the abandonment of tradition for modernity because these notions are far from being drawn between fixed and solid boundaries. As an art form, *New Life in Kyerefaso* shows the extent to which one can be both traditional and modern at the same time.

**Discussion of the texts**

To all evidence, *New Life at Kyerefaso* is autobiographical. The story of the central protagonist, Furowa, reads more or less like the author’s life story. It starts relating how Furowa, daughter of the Queenmother at Kyerefaso, has resisted the suitors of her hometown only to marry a stranger five years after her puberty rights. The story expands on how her defiance of her countrymen’s wishes has exposed her to poetic insults, and how her decision to marry a stranger has made her a tabooed person. However, Furowa’s life story does not end tragically as is the case in J.P. Clark’s *The Raft* and in Amos Tutuola’s story of the woman who defied patriarchal authority by falling in love with a gentleman in *The Palmwine Drunkard*. Her husband does not reveal himself a false gentleman, a frog that imprisons the maid in the forest, nor does he reveal himself as a cursed stranger, who as husband transmits the curse to his progeny. On the contrary, it ends with
the reconciliation of the mixed couple with the heroine’s community, and the reconciliation of her countrymen with life instincts.

However, to write that *New Life at Kyerefaso* is autobiographical does not mean that Sutherland has contented herself with the fictionalisation of her own life story. The story is also laying bare the narrow type of nationalism based on the romantic philosophy of organism whose tenets are rootedness in an agrarian soil, and the celebration of the cult of pure blood.

Basil Davidson has shown to what extent the appropriation of nineteenth-century Western nationalism by the African nationalists has become the black man’s burden after independence. Sutherland seems to have weighed up the recently invented tradition of nationalism against the oral tradition and has found the former paradoxically more retrograding both to man and woman.

Hence, Charlotte H. Bruner’s statement that Sutherland does not defend a thesis in her work should be qualified. As the text shows very clearly, the author intervenes several times in the narration to remind the reader that manhood cannot be affirmed in terms of blood and its shedding. For example, the heroine is described as being far from being an easy prey to male contests who continue to see themselves in the traditional role of warriors. She has remained deaf and blind to their appellation recital (*abodin* in the vernacular) of heroic deeds: “But still we are the leopards on the branches. We are those who roar and cannot be answered back. Beware, we are who cannot be answered back”. (p.19). The Queenmother has not waited long to answer those who make such show of manhood. She decides that since her daughter cannot be won by force of arms, the time has come to silence the “gun’s rage in the stream. (and) to let your weapons from now on be your minds and your hands’ toil”. (p;19). This episode of the story reminisces the “gun breaking ceremony” organised by the white man in Chinua Achebe’s *Arrow of God*.

Even when the men have abandoned their weapons and followed the suggestion of the Queenmother to court through dancing, her daughter has continued to refuse participation in a ritual mating whose sole purpose is fertility. To the Queenmother’s urge to find a partner, and to the male dancers’ call that “we are men, we are men”, Furowa responds “mother, the man is not here …with whom this new life shall be built”. (p.20) She sees them as hollow men. She says to her mother that her country “men’s faces are empty”. Implied here is the idea that the daughter is interested in a love relation with a foreigner, confirmed later in the story. In the context of what has been said above about marriage customs in Ghana, it is easy to see that Furowa’s refusal to bond with local partners springs from a deep understanding of her people’s traditions. Certainly, any one not familiar with the Akan folktales to which *New Life at Kyerefaso* belongs might find Furowa’s contemptuous rejection of her countrymen as being hurtful but it should be reminded that such tales do not “mean to say what they say”.

There are other reasons behind Sutherland’s placement of her heroine at the forefront of modernisation that paradoxically has its inspiration in tradition. First, such handling of tradition in *New Life at Kyerefaso* authenticates Kwame Nkrumah’s attempts to modernise Ghana without making it lose its soul. In one way, then Sutherland expresses the official ideology of her time. But this is not the only explanation that can be given for the resort to the traditional Akan mythos of an African princess seeking marriage with a foreigner. As a literary text, what Sutherland’s text say can mean something only if seen in the context of the African literary tradition. The names of Mabel Dove Danquah and Adelaide Casely Hayford have already mentioned in connection with Efua Sutherland to affirm that there is a continuity in their defence of the African women’s rights in contemporary Ghana. However, Efua Sutherland cannot remain indifferent to the way African women are represented in the African male literature of her time. One of them is particularly
damaging to the image of the African woman. It is Peter Abrahams’s *A Wreath for Udomo*. Peter Abrahams is South African, but because Ghana and its future leader Nkrumah are prominent in the predominantly nationalist discourse of the time he chose them as setting and protagonist of his novel, *A Wreath for Udomo* which he published in the late 1950s.

Abrahams novel reads as an allegory about the political career of Kwame Nkrumah. Its first sections are set in the England of the late 1940s and the early 1950s. They describe the nationalist agitation for the independence of African countries. The writer shows how Michael Udomo, standing as an allegorical figure for Nkrumah, emerges as the leader of the nationalist protest in England, a protest that he decides to follow up in his own home land when he realises that revolutionary fervour in his country is on the wane. With the help of Selena, a traditional African woman trader, he manages to defeat both the colonisers and their local stooges. The story moves to the morning after independence to show that the problem the protagonist meets in his nation building project is due to the traditionalist forces that have helped him to oust the colonial powers. In the final scenes of the novel, Selena appears in the garb of an African sorceress, a catalyst for the traditional African forces, to exorcise the intrusion of modernist ideas of the new political kingdom. The ritual murder of Udomo is strangely reminiscent of the murder of Emperor Jones in Eugene O’neil’s play of the same name, which shows that Peter Abrahams has reproduced the Western prejudices towards the Africa and the African woman.

It is our view that it is Abrahams’s representation of the African woman as obstacle to the modernist project in Africa that has led Sutherland to respond in order to correct such a degrading image. Nkrumah’s nation building project, predicated on the blending of tradition and modernity, is not spared by Abrahams in his novel. The latter prefigures a tragic ending for initiators of modernist national projects in Africa. Hence, Sutherland writes in vindication of the African woman and of the success of Nkrumah’s modernisation of Ghana. Foruwa is no mere “she”, a guardian of a backward tradition like Selena in *A Wreath for Udomo*. To the parochial mentality of her African men she opposes the dream of new political kingdom postulated on her marriage with a foreigner.

The discussion of *New Life at Kyerefaso* will be continued in terms of the artistic techniques employed by Sutherland. We have already indicated that the setting of the tale is an upcountry village in Ghana. Such a setting makes the tale fall within the category of pastoral. It has all the ingredients of this poetic genre; besides its agrarian dimension, it depicts the coldness of a mistress, the maid of Kyerefaso, towards her local suitors. They lay siege to the Queen mother’s house to have the hand of the princess Furowa accorded to one of them. Finally the “siege of the castle of love” ends with the arrival of a wandering knight with whom she unites in a love match. It is on this love match that some sort of arcadia is built.

It has to be observed that the setting is predominantly pastoral in African literature. Sutherland’s representation of the pastoral is, therefore, no exception. Yet she remains unique in its representation because she does not imagine it as an invaded one. Unlike other African writers, she does not invoke the pastoral way of life to show how it has been encroached upon by colonialist forces or whatever forces have superseded them. Nor does she attempt to make it viable as a realm of escapist fantasy, or a space of containment for women. Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* are representative of the first tendency where Cyprian Ekwensi’s *Jagua Nana* is representative of the second one. Achebe shows how the Europeans have destroyed the African pastoral way of life and Ekwensi, the first West African novelist of the city, depicts to what extent modern/city life corrupts African women, whose only viable space, it is suggested, is the pastoral reservation.
In Sutherland’s pastoral, the female protagonist is given epic proportion. Her status makes us her stand above the mere “wenches” that populate the pastoral settings in both Western and African literatures. She is “the maid of kyerefaso…daughter of the Queen mother”. She stands above the others even in terms of physical stature. It is said that she was “a young deer, graceful in limp…with head held high, eyes soft and wide with wonder”. The people remember that her voice in speech “was like a murmur of a river quietly flowing beneath shadows of bamboo leaves”. If Sutherland has been content with this representation of her heroine, Furowa would not have been different from other epic heroes and heroines like Anowa in the Akan folklore or Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart. But she distinguishes her out by showing her defiance of the male traditional order of life.

Furowa’s defiance of the traditional male order shows at several levels in the text. First, the author makes her stand for the ritual animal, the deer, hunted by men in the annual thanksgiving ceremonies in Ghana. The author expands on what she calls the “pathfind ceremony” showing how the local males have unsuccessfully tried to prey on Furowa. The men are represented as beasts of prey, “panthers” hanging on the branches of trees. Because they have not managed to make her fall prey during their ritual hunting, the men have resorted to the poetic Akan tradition of slandering, *Boakutia*, which in the vernacular means to deride or scold one in public without mentioning his/her name, in order to make her mind her dismissing behaviour towards them. Following this tradition, the men have sung a *boakutia* poem about the “strange girl…the stiff-in-the-neck proud, I am-the-only-girl-in-the village proud”.

Furowa refuses to comply herself with the male tradition even when her mother expresses concern over her belatedness in bonding with one of the males of the village, whom she has managed to make drop out the warrior-like way of life. To her saying that girls of her age like Maanan and Esi have already married, Furowa responds with the following feminist rejoinder:

‘Yes, Mother, they married and see how their steps once lively now drag in the dust. The sparkle has died out of their eyes. Their husbands drink palm wine the day long under the mango trees, drink palm wine and push counters across the draughtboards all the day, and are not already looking for other wives? Mother, the man I want I say is not here.’ (p. 20)

Furowa’s rejoinder expresses a critique of the marriage customs as they obtain in the traditional society. She rejects them because they allow for the oppression of women at the home. They are exploited because they are obliged to care for the numerous children that they have procreated while their husbands are out taking pleasure in palm drinking and playing draughts. In such home, it is implied, the natural right for the pursuit of happiness is non-existent for the woman is hold captive to the desires of man, who exchanges her for another one as soon as she loses her liveliness.

The reaction of the males to Furowa’s marital expectations is another *beokutia* male song:

There was a woman long ago,/ Tell that maid, tell that maid
There was a woman long ago,/ She would no Kwesi,
She would not marry Kwaw,/ She would not, would not, would not.
One day she came home with hurrying feet,/I’ve a found the man, the man, the man
Tell that maid, tell that maid,/ Her man looked like a chief,
Tell that maid, tell that maid,/ Her man looked like a chief,
Most splendid to see,/ But he turned into a python,
He turned into a python,/ *And swallowed her up.* (Sic) (pp.20-21)
In the *beokutia* song above, Furowa is regarded as a taboo/myth breaker. Her wish to get bonded with a foreigner is regarded as a transgression of the Akan myth of origins reported by R.S Rattray. According to the latter, the Akan people believe that the python, the god of the lakes, has created man and woman, and has ordered them to mate and prosper. By refusing to mate with one of her countrymen, Furowa exposes herself to divine punishment. Furowa does not heed the warning of the *beokutia* song because she decides to marry the man she wants, once she has found him. Such rebellion against tradition has made her a tabooed woman in her village, but this does not last long because soon her decision has proved to be judicious.

The position of Furowa changes from that of myth breaker to that of pathfinder to her community. Around her is evolved an African pastoral wherein African women are conceived of as agents of change and modernity. African men in Sutherland’s scheme appear as grotesque, a grotesque characterisation due to their reverential attitude to a bygone warrior ethos, and to the tradition of ‘merrie Africa’ that has maimed them in both body and soul. Furowa’s refusal of male parochialism and the African ‘feminine mystique’ has led to the construction of an idyllic political kingdom wherein tradition is refined to such a degree that it espouses modernity.

The refinement of tradition in Sutherland’s story appears at the level of the plot. *New Life at Kyerefaso*, as it is indicated above, starts with the evocation of the deer-catching festival *Aboakyer* described by Eva Meyrovitsch (1958) and R.W.Wyllie.(1967) The deer-catching is part of the annual *Odwira/Apo* ceremony celebrated by some of the Akan people to purify the tribe and to propitiate the gods and the ancestors. It involves the competition of paramilitary groups called the *Asafo* for the catching/hunting of a deer. E.M Mends writes that the conflict between the *Asafo groups* climaxes with one group prevailing over another group and concludes with “processions and…the sacrifice (of the deer) made to the Great god of the Effutu people as a whole”. In Sutherland’s story, deer-catching appears as a human sacrifice since the “deer” is a metaphor that she applies to the heroine “Furowa”.

The name that Sutherland gives to the heroine is metaphoric of human sacrifice. Read in reverse, the last part of Furowa’s name reads in the vernacular as “slave” and Furowa as “female slave”. R.S. Rattray reminds us that “Awo, Awo” constitutes one of the rallying cries launched during the sacrificial hunting of slaves in *Apo* ceremonies. In the first *beokotia song*, Furowa is referred to as a stranger as if in support of the idea that she is the ideal slave girl to be sacrificed on the altar of a warped manhood. Furowa’s escape from sacrifice follows a traditional pattern. In the deer catching festival, the deer is saved only if it manages to enter the precincts of the Queen mother’s court. Like the sacrificial deer, Furowa too manages to escape the grasp of the deer hunters the *Asafo* by going into her mother’s house. She, therefore, gets the protection of the Queen mother, not so much impressed by the recitation of appellation poetry about their being warriors.

The way that Sutherland evokes the survival of Furowa as a slave girl also reminds of the *Apo* ceremony. According to Rattray, the sacrificial slave hunted down during the old *Apo* ceremony can be saved in the case he manages to cross a river. In such a case, shots are fired in the air to indicate that the slave, male or female, has crossed the river carrying with him the sins of the community. It is in this context that the Queen mother’s following order to the *Asafo* groups who had fired their last shots at the metaphoric deer and slave girl Furowa: “It is well. The gun is silenced in the stream”.(p.19) Furowa then saves herself by crossing a river and saves her kindred spirit from further slave hunting because the Queenmother solemnly orders her male subjects to “let your weapons from now on be your minds and your hands’ toil”.(p.19).
Sutherland operates a displacement of mythos at the end of the story. From the evocation of the human sacrifice of slave girls, she moves to the evocation of a refined form of the ceremony of the Apo. The deer/slave girl has become the wife of a stranger/husband she loves. The village life has completely changed, and has re-organised itself around their modern couple. Its ethos is no longer inspired solely from the tradition of the warrior. When festival time has come again the people have remembered the ancestors as the ones “who found for us the paths…and bought for us the land with their blood”, but they have reminded themselves that they will continue the nation building with “our strength …(and) our minds”. (p. 22) A procession to the Queen mother’s house is described; at its head is Furowa’s husband “carrying a white lamb in his arms…singing happily with the men”. (p. 22). Hence, it is suggested that animal sacrifice is substituted for human sacrifice.

The displacement of a traditional variant of the Apo festival by a more refined one from the same tradition lends itself articulates well the development of the plot. However, it lends itself to possible misinterpretations since the role of the stranger in the ceremony is very much in the foreground, especially in the nationalist context of the post-independence period. It can be easily considered as a selling-out to the neo-colonialist ideology. The presence of the stranger is disturbing because he seems to play the role of redeemer. Indeed, the text invites such an interpretation. But if seen from the perspective of the Apo ceremony, it assumes another meaning. There is nothing strange in the Akan tradition about strangers taking part in the Apo festival. Nor is there any transgression in the imagining of a stranger presenting a gift, a lamb in New Life at Kyerefaso, to the Queen mother during the festival.

There arguments in support of our view are many. First, as it has been already said above, anthropologists like Eva Meyrovitz reports that the Akan people are familiar with the tradition of Queen Mothers marrying with foreigners. Second, several strangers including white men are until today made chiefs after their marriages to chief’s daughters. Third, during the Apo festival, as E.H. Mens remarks, “a big sheep, preferably white or brown, is brought in and cuts the throat of the sheep”. At the the same ceremony is performed in the Queen mother’s royal. Both ceremonies are followed up in the same manner. E. Mends writes:

A little blood (from the slaughtered sheep) is allowed to drip onto the floor, but much of the blood is collected in a bowl. Head stool carrier smears all the stools with the blood and then makes a cross with his bloody hand in Nana’s left foot indicating Nana’s connection with departed paramount chiefs. Water is poured outside for ancestors to wash their hands and a bell is rung to signify that ancestors are now eating. Nana (and the Queen mother) leave the stool room and breaks his fast…. Food and meat (fufu) is given to those assembled at the place –both subjects and strangers.

The anthroplogical information presented above are sufficient for the validation of the point that Sutherland has not departed from tradition in the representation of the coexistence of foreign and local elements in the Akan tradition as reflected in the Apo tradition ceremony with which she has propped up her story. It should be added here that the folktale form that Sutherland has adopted to tell her story has strong connections with the Apo ceremony on which it is articulate. In the Akan tradition, folktales are called Anansesem, literally the tales of the spider man, Ananse which is the figure of the trickster in Akan mythology. In New Life at Kyerefaso, Sutherland posits herself as a female Anansefaro, storyteller, and turns upside down the male representation of tradition and woman in the Ghanaian society. In her story, Furowa appears as an
Anansewa, the spiderwoman, the female trickster figure defying her countrymen’s parochial and androcentric vision of the world and substitutes for it a modernist and feminist world view.

**Discussion of Ayi Kwei Armah’s *Fragments***

In his *Shadow and Act*, Ralph Ellison writes that the best way to criticise a novel is to write another novel. Ellison’s statement is relevant for us in our comparison of Armah’s *Fragments* with Sutherland’s *New Life at Kyerefaso*. It is particularly so, because as we have said above Sutherland has been overlooked in African literary criticism. In our view, it is the Armah of *Fragments* who can be considered as one of the major critics of Sutherland’s *New Life at Kyerefaso*. Indeed, Armah’s novel invites comparison with Sutherland’s short story alluded to it in the following:

> Say/ Say it/ Say it just this way/ Gently, gently,/ For this was how the maid, 
> High-born princess of Amosema/ Brought light from a far, far land 
> Unto her nighted village people./Say it/ Pastorally, pastorally /Say.

The quoted stanza above is part of a poem parodying Efua Sutherland’s *New Life at Kyerefaso*. It is read by the Ghanaian poet laureate, Akosua Russel, at a cultural evening sponsored by the British council. Akosua Russel’s poem recalls in both its themes and form Efua Sutherland’s short story which starts as follows:

> Shall we say/ Shall we put it this way/ Shall we say that the maid of 
> Kyerefaso, Foruwa, daughter of the Queen mother, was a young deer, 
> graceful in limb? …

Armah’s parody of Sutherland’s short story shows that the clash between the two authors is due to a gender gap over the issue of tradition and modernity in their relation to the definition of nationhood and selfhood. To the gender gap can be added another gap which is that of generation. Efua Sutherland is fourteen years Armah’s senior, and she has preceded Armah in the literary scene. The feeling of belatedness is a factor of a psychopoetic anxiety that can explain Armah’s parody of Efua Sutherland.

Armah’s *Fragments* has its centre a family romance, involving among others a “been-to” to America, Baako, his mother Efua, his grandmother Naana, an expatriate girlfriend Juana, his sister-in-law Araba, his brother-in-law Koffi, his uncle Folli, and his school teacher Ocran. With the exception of Juana and Ocran, the other characters belong to the Onipa family. The members of this family are divided on the basis of the expectations they have of Baako’s journey abroad. Baako and Naana expect to gain spiritual returns from the journey. America is envisioned as a land of the spirits, i.e., of the ancestors from whom he will gain spiritual wisdom that he can invest for the good of the whole community. On the other hand, Efua, Uncle Folli, Araba and her husband hold materialist expectations. With regard to the women characters, Armah’s novel classifies themselves into two clear-cut categories: “women as destroyers and women as saviors” depending on the type of expectations they attach to Baako’s journey abroad.

It is not gratuitous that Armah gives the name of Efua to his female protagonist. It is relevant to recall that Sutherland’s first name is the same as that of Baako’s mother. At the beginning Efua is shown participating in a pseudo ritual believing that it will help her son Baako to return home. At first, the reader is let to believe that Efua’s worry about her son is solely a question of love of a mother for her son. But as the story unfolds, it becomes clear that her
impatience with Baako’s overstay in America is due mostly to her expectation of his return with a cargo. Baako’s mother, like Efua Sutherland, is a school mistress. She teaches in the “RADIANTWAY INTERNATIONAL DAY NURSERY” (p.69). It is in this school that Baako meets his mother Mrs Onipa after his unexpected return to his home country. During their journey home, Efua is described as “smiling…completely at ease in the enfolding luxury of the red leather upholstery” of a relative’s car. As they are travelling, the narrator reports the conversation of the mother and son: “When is yours coming, Baako?”/ “What?” he asked, surprised./ “Yours, your car so that my old bones can also rest”.

The conversation that Efua has held with her son resembles to a stranger-stranger conversation. It is purely transactional because what she is interested in is the cargo he is supposed to have brought from America than his own person. Even the female employees at the bank where Fifi, a relative of his, works are interested in him because he is “a been-to stranger”. They have also addressed him as “an American…a thin American”. (p.67) The snippets taken from the novel are probably formulated to satirise the materialism of the post-independent Ghana, but seen in the context of Sutherland’s vision of “the new life” in her imaginary kingdom of kyerefaso, they become a literary satire. Baako in Fragments stands for the stranger in Sutherland’s story; Furowa for all the women who are enamoured of “been-to” strangers, and Baako’s mother Efua for Furowa’s Queen mother. In his literary satire, Armah subverts Sutherland’s representation of women as agents of social change to replace it with a representation that makes them the “destroyers” of the social fabric because of their perverted form of love and their misinterpretation of tradition.

The misinterpretation of tradition shows particularly in the way women like Efua have appropriated the tradition of gift exchange. The theme of gift exchange holds a prominent place in the dirge songs of the Akan. Some samples of the dirge songs recorded by J. B. Nketia go as follow:

Mother, if you would send me something, I would like a parcel and a big cooking pot that entertains strangers
Mother, if you would send me something, I would like parched corn
So that I could eat raw if I could not fire to cook it.
Mother who sends gifts, send me something when someone Is coming this way.

According to Nketia, the messages of gift exchange in the Akan dirge songs spring from the traditional belief in the world of the dead, their invisible participation in the life of this world, and in the preservation of ties of kinship after death. Consequently, the messages for gifts are viewed more as an expression of a wish for continued fellowship with the ancestors than a purely materialistic craving. Such interpretation finds support in the deflation of the materialistic wish in some other messages in the Akan dirge like the following: “If the departed could send gifts, they would surely send something to their children”.

In Armah’s novel, Baako’s journey abroad is considered as a voyage to the land of the ancestors. His separation from his family is seen as a death to his living relatives who have organised for him a ritual to facilitate his passage to the other world. It is the ritual dirge song sung by his grandmother Naana that captures the attention because it expresses the contradictory wishes of his family, each member expecting a different gift from the other world. Baako’s return from abroad is also interpreted as a rebirth from the land of the spirits. As if in support of the idea, Armah makes the return/rebirth of Baako correspond to the premature birth of Araba’s son. Both Baako Onipa (a man) and Araba’s child remain nameless in the novel because they have not yet been
integrated in the community of the living. It is interesting to remark that Kwesi, Araba’s husband offers an electric aluminium fan as a gift to his wife.

The electric fan acts as an objective correlative in Armah’s novel. Its association with the traditional death fan, Owuo Papa, blowing spirit children into the world of the dead makes it a sinister object. In Armah’s women, it is women’s interpretation of gift exchange solely in terms of material gains that cause the fragmentation of the family and the community into a “thousand and thirty pieces”. The craving for material gifts has made Efua organise an out-dooring ceremony at an earlier time than the customary eight days after birth in order to collect substantial gifts from relatives and friends with fat paychecks. It is one of these material gifts, the “wind machine” as Naana calls the electric fan that kills Araba’s premature child when it is switched on by Efua.

By emphasising the darker side of gift exchange associated with the women characters, Armah attempts to inflect Efua Sutherland’s progressive world vision to show its incompatibility with the African way of life. Efua the character and Efua the author become killer mothers to the younger Ghanaian generation. Their names associate them to the wicked Earth Goddess Asase Yae, whose other name is Efua. If Armah associates Efua with cold winds, it is in order to suggest a comparison with the Earth Goddess whose underground world the Asamando is also believed to be full of winds. Efua’s coldness to her children is mythical; she thrives on human sacrifice.

The association of Efua Sutherland with human sacrifice appears in the third chapter, entitled “Awo”. At the literal level, “Awo” describes the return of Baako to his mother’s home. But the level of metaphor it points to the possible sacrifice of Baako’s on his mother’s altar. The word “Awo”, as it has been suggested above, in the Brong dialect of Akan language means mother, but it also refers to the cry that the king’s Okyeame (linguist) shouts out to rally celebrants during rituals of human sacrifice in the old thanksgiving Akan festival of the Apo. In answer to the Okyeame’s call “Awo e! Awo e Awo e!”- which translates as a slave! a slave! a slave! the response from a single mysterious voice is Yoe! Yoe! Yoe! . The response to Rattray’s question as to the meaning of the word “Awo” in the ritual call, many Akan informants have let him know that it is a reference to a hermaphrodite, who is the first human being/slave ever killed as a sacrifice to Asase Ya, the Earth Goddess.

As a prefigurative chapter, “Awo” announces the chase of Baako in the streets of Accra after his breakdown under his mother’s contempt. As if in a spirit of revenge for having to bring the expected material gifts, Efua takes the occasion when her son is at his lowest spirits to call the other members of the family in order to intern him, an internment equivalent to death. With the presence of the family sacrificer, Korankye/Foli the hunchback, the text suggests that the family is ready to sacrifice one of its members who has become just a stranger to the rest of the family. The impression is strengthened when Armah submits his own character to a ritual hunting which climaxes with his roping and his internment. It is only once her son has landed in the asylum that the mother Efua is assuaged.

The analysis of the plot of Armah’s novel shows that Fragments subverts/displaces Efua Sutherland’s plot in New Life at Kyerefaso. We have already seen how Sutherland refines tradition to show how her central character Furowa evolves from the position of a slave girl to that of a free woman who has espoused a stranger/lover. In the case of Baako, it is the contrary, he gradually assumes the position of a slave sacrificed to assuage the anger of his materialist mother. The reversal of Sutherland’s plot in Fragments indicates Armah’s view of women who want to refine tradition as “destroyers”. Such a view is far from being committed to the feminist cause because it starts from the male assumption that women are naturally entrusted with the task of supervising
society’s morals and education. The female characters who assume this function in the novel are qualified as “saviors”.

One such female “saviors” in Armah’s novel is Baako’s grandmother Naana. All through the novel, she worries about the proper celebration of traditional rituals. Everything she does is done exclusively in the personal service of the protection of the household especially the male progeny from the erratic behaviour of her daughter Efua. It is at this level of antagonism of mother against daughter that we notice another variation that Armah plays on Efua Sutherland’s New Life at Keyerefaso. It is perhaps worth reminding that the Queen mother in the latter story has shown only a weak resistance against her daughter’s dream of taking a foreign husband. It is even suggested that the mother has encouraged her daughter in her rejection of the male tradition. The mother as represented by the Queen mother are not against women. The case in Armah’s novel is different since Naana lays the blame for the fragmentation of the Onipa family, (the family of men) on her daughter who ignores her role as a mother in her research for the fulfilment of her own desires.

Bibliography