The Politics of Exile: Ama Ata Aidoo's Our Sister Killjoy

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Abstract
Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy or Reflections from a Black-Eyed Squint* is a relentless attack on the notions of exile as relief from the societal constraints of national development and freedom to live in a cultural environment conducive to creativity. In this personalized prose/poem, Aidoo questions certain prescribed theories of exile (including the reasons for exile)—particularly among African men. The novel exposes a rarely heard viewpoint in literature in English—that of the African woman exile. Aidoo's protagonist Sissie, as the "eye" of her people, is a sojourner in the "civilized" world of the colonizers. In this article, I examine Aidoo's challenge to prevailing theories of exile, her questioning of the supposed superiority of European culture for the colonial subject, and her exposé of the politics of exile for African self-exile. Through a combination of prose, poetry, oral voicing and letter writing, Aidoo's Sissie reports back to her home community what she sees in the land of the colonizers and confronts those exiles who have forgotten their duty to their native land.

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Recommended Citation


Our Sister Killjoy: or Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint is the debut novel of Ghanaian author Ama Ata Aidoo, first published in 1977. It has been called "a witty, experimental work whose main point is a stylish dismissal of characteristic attitudes of both the white world and the black middle class." Our Sister Killjoy is about a young African woman named Sissie who goes to Europe to "better" herself (with European education) as described by her African counterparts. The novel revolves around An established Ghanaian playwright and short-story writer, Ama Ata Aidoo has long been determined to expose the irrelevance of literary standards adopted uncritically from British academics by her compatriots. Why look for "universality" in work wrung out of the local, immediate realities of Africa, or applaud it in the products of Western culture, which seems to her to have failed to act on the basic premise of the brotherhood of man? As a colleague of hers at the University of Cape Coast in the early seventies, I experienced at first-hand her withering scorn for those "comatos... Aidoo, Ama Ata. Our Sister Killjoy or Reflections from a Black-Eyed Squint. African Creative Writing Series. London: Longman, 1977. "The Politics of Exile: Ama Ata Aidoo's Our Sister Killjoy." Studies in Twentieth Century Literature 15, no. 1 (winter 1991): 159-74. [In the following essay, Wilentz asserts that Our Sister Killjoy deconstructs traditional 'prescribed theories of exile' and presents an original narrative from the perspective of a female African expatriate.] The term "politics of exile" calls to mind those sufferers who must leave their homeland for political reasons. But there is another aspect of the politics associated with exile—that of the so-called third world colonial who seeks the benefits and opp