



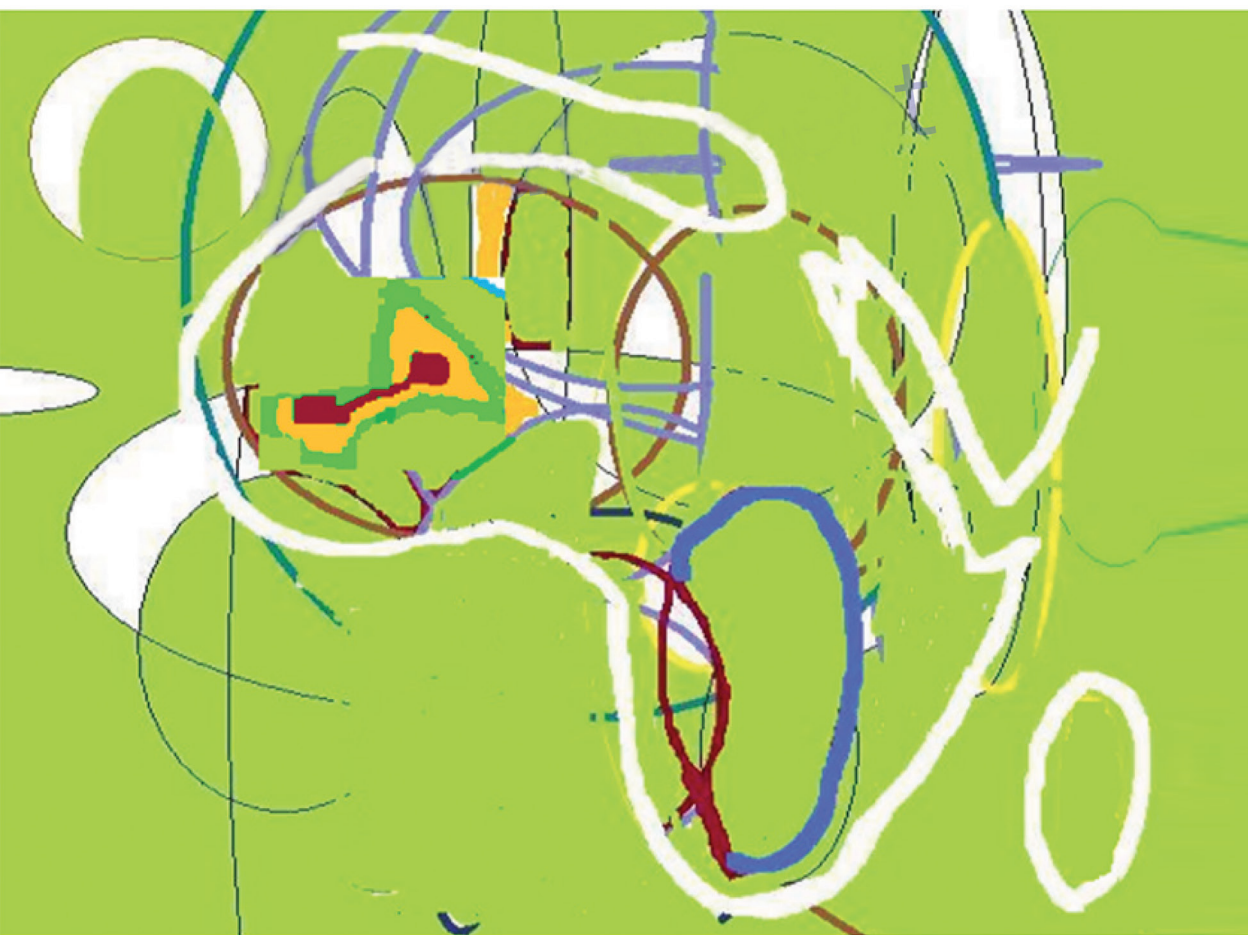
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# A CRITIQUE OF UNBOUND SEX IN AYI KWEI ARMAH'S *THE RESOLUTIONARIES* (2013)

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## ABSTRACT

The present paper is grounded on Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Resolutionaries* (2013). It aims to assess subversive sexuality. It emphasizes women's licentious heterosexuality and their proclivity for lesbianism. From a critical point of view, this insight focuses on the negative outlook of phallogentric Africa on immoral heterosexual experience and lesbianism, likening women to perversion. The feminist ideology, which is totally at odds with male dominant discourses, the feminist ideology confers unbound sex with some political and emancipating agendas; thus, contributing to the liberation of African women from age-old narratives on sex.

**KEYWORDS:** assess, women, licentious heterosexuality, lesbianism, feminist, perversion, liberation.

## RESUME

Le présent article est basé sur *The Resolutionaries* (2013) d'Ayi Kwei Armah. Il vise à évaluer la sexualité subversive. Il met l'accent sur l'hétérosexualité licencieuse des femmes et leur propension au lesbianisme. D'un point de vue critique, cette réflexion met l'accent sur la vision négative de l'Afrique phallogentric sur l'expérience hétérosexuelle immorale et le lesbianisme, assimilant les femmes à la perversion. Totalemment en désaccord avec les discours dominants des hommes, l'idéologie féministe confère au sexe émancipé des agendas politiques et libérateurs; contribuant ainsi à la libération des femmes africaines des discours moyenâgeux sur le sexe.

**MOTS-CLES:** évaluer, femmes, hétérosexualité licencieuse, lesbianisme, féministe, perversion, libération.



## INTRODUCTION

Sexual discipline is a common virtue that once characterized most traditional African societies. In such patriarchal communities, a set of sexual ideals and rules were promoted and enforced by cultural practices. These codes also maintained that individual sexual habits should be carried out in a context of matrimony. In line with such puritanism, a strict and permanent control was exerted over youngsters' sexuality, with a particular emphasis on that of young girls. And as they came of age, women would take to normative heterosexuality which defined their identity. More importantly, childbearing was an expected and acclaimed fruit of heterosexual unions. John Boswell in "Sexual and Ethical Categories in Premodern Europe" (1990) sees eye to eye with this view when he argues that in traditional societies, people limited sex to procreation within marriage. Conversely, in contemporary Africa, this norm is transcended due to the paradigmatic changes that have occurred in the condition of post-colonial African women. As a matter of fact, today, many of them turn their backs on marriage and its compelling dispositions. They thus experience some new forms of sexuality.

With an eye to these emergent forms of sexuality, Rebeka Njau and Ama Ata Aidoo have labored the issue of lesbianism in some of their literary outputs. For a fact, their respective *Ripples in the Pool* (1975) and *Our Sister Killjoy or Reflections from a Black-Eyed Squint* (1979) openly make an issue of female homosexuality which is seen as a new construction in the African cultural and social environments. Though it is an unbridled practice, these authors still do not hold homo-erotic sex as a deviant way of behaving. Similarly to the cited works, Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Revolutionaries* (2013) is also the epicenter of women's sexual experimentations. But, contrary to Njau and Aidoo's novels, Armah's text expresses divergent outlooks on females' same-sex desire. The same argumentative points of view hold true for heterosexual relationships carried out of matrimony. On account of the preceding idea, what is at issue in this paper is that conjugal heterosexuality is the norm, and any erotic experience carried out of this context is viewed as a subversive form of sexuality or unbound sex. And the thrust of this paper is to assess unbound sex by highlighting the negative and positive criticisms made about it. As a theoretical orientation, feminism is regarded as an oppositional movement which "attack[s] male versions of the world" (Barry, 2002: 122). This attack hints at women's transgressions of male's construction of sexuality. In this paper, the aforementioned issues allude to exploring women's subversive sexual categories in contemporary Africa. After highlighting their proneness to social aversion, I will show to what extent elusive sexuality is on a par with women's emancipation from phallogentrism.



# 1. WOMEN'S SUBVERSIVE SEXUALITY IN POST-COLONIAL AFRICA

In post-colonial Africa, women turn their backs on normative sexuality and now opt for elusive sexual experiences that can be classified in two groups. First, many African women have a proclivity for licentious heterosexuality. This points out their breach of patriarchal heterosexuality through their adoption of a woman-to-man sexual relationship which is not centered on marriage. In *The Revolutionaries*, Salimata Ka's mother typifies such an erotic identity. This is perceived through her sexual relationships outside marriage with Ibrahima Ka. With this judge, she used to have "furtive orgasm on her office chair" coupled with "many more hurried embraces on the sofa, table and floor" (Armah, 2013: 144). Rather than being a legitimate sexuality, their orgasm does not take place in a context of marriage. It is just a concubinary union between a female secretary and her boss. In her position of an unmarried woman who is attached to a man with whom she has sexual intercourses, Salimata Ka's mother does not even plan for marriage: "Sali's father had not married her mother" (Armah, 2013: 144). Besides, and more sadly, in their lust for more exciting sexual experiences, some mothers even dare to have sex with their daughters' lovers. Such women are amenable to love affairs with partners they should not normally get involved with. And most of the time, such sexual acts are just short-term experiences that completely degrade the image of women. Unfortunately, this is true of Salimata Ka in *The Revolutionaries*. In her hunt for handsome men, Salimata's mother finally falls in love with her own daughter's suitor: "Can you imagine what it felt like, surprising my mother and my lover making love? (Armah, 2013: 391), the young woman seethingly confides in her friend Nefert.

From the foregone analysis, it stands out that in contemporary Africa, some females have a proclivity for freer sexuality and change lovers at will. Their affair with both married men and younger men is the perfect illustration of their lecherous conducts. They show great or excessive sexual desire for all kinds of men. In Armah's novel, the case of Salimata's mother who dates both her boss and her 'son-in-law' best illustrates licentious heterosexuality. This amounts to saying that today in contemporary Africa many women live just for sexual pleasure. For the satisfaction of their sexual desires, they are even amenable to many male partners. This readiness to carry on with two sexual partners they are not legally married to, hints at their unbound heterosexuality. On account of this, Armah seems to cast light on African women's ambition to live their sexual life to the fullest, in contempt of moral restrictions. Through their elusive sexuality, they show their availability to find happiness at the hands of attractive and charming men. Hence with them, sex becomes an easily-gotten 'commodity'. And when a woman falls for a man, she does not prevent having sex with him. She does not even wait until she are married to the suitor before coupling with him. In Armah's novel, it stands to reason that Salimata Ka's mother feels an unquenchable sexual attraction

for men. To their sexual lusts, she always gives in. Men's bodies arouse in Salimata Ka's mother such a burning passion she cannot control. That is why her own daughter assumes that she "lived for love" (Armah, 2013: 392).

Armah opines that by considering heterosexuality as the only way to libidinal expression, African women come into alignment with African womanism which highly approves of females' intimate bonding with male sexual partners. As it does not make a difference between immoral heterosexuality and married cross-gender couplings, and given that it does not show a particular preference for either heterosexual practice, African womanism seems to validate all forms of heterosexuality (both unethical and normative ones). The following feminist stand point is illuminating: "I am feminist with a small 'f', love men and good men are the salt of the earth" (Nfah-Abbeyi, 1997: 7). This insight enables us to argue that Salimata Ka's mother is a true African womanist character. She is not a sexist who fosters anti-male sentiments, nor does she indulge in a sexual experience which excludes the male world. Also, Salimata Ka's mother does not maintain exclusionist prejudices and stereotypes against menfolk. That is probably why she has a natural urge and appetite for unmarried sexual activity with all men that come her way. As a matter of fact, she is likened to a feminist with a small 'f'. It means that she advocates African womanism by enjoying unmarried sexual affairs with potent married and unmarried men like Ibrahim Ka and the young medical doctor. She loves these men maybe because, to her mind, they contribute to honeying her life.

What is more, Armah observes that women's transgression of normative age-old heterosexuality is ascribed to their childbearing out of marriage. In *The Revolutionaries*, the fact that Salimata Ka's mother gets "pregnant" (Armah, 2013: 193) after some orgasms with Ibrahim Ka is a good reason to assert that she has unethical sexual habits. Nana Ama also becomes "pregnant" (Armah, 2013: 144) after some intensive sexual and erotic activities with a professional a translator; thus, giving birth to Jehwty. Here, Armah seems to predicate that by giving birth to children out of marriage, contemporary African women stand against the referential discourse of sexuality. African womanism is suitable to account for such an attitude with Muhamad Alkali saying that this political and cultural movement "wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children" (2013:3). Here, Alkali suggests that African womanism does not necessarily enjoin wedlock on sexual partners prior to childbearing. According to the principles of this feminist trend, a black man and a black woman, though unmarried, can still give birth to children. Given this, it is understandable why Salimata Ka's mother and Nana Ama do not bother about becoming pregnant and giving birth to their offspring out of wedlock. To Armah's mind, their transgressive childbearing takes root in the excessive freedom granted by African womanism which aims to set up an encompassing tie between male and female partners for the construction of a freer sexuality centered on illegitimate childbearing. But, when this freedom reaches its climax, it can lead

women to a queer sexual identity.

To Armah, unbound sex is given its most searching treatment when it culminates in lesbianism. This is the condition of women who are sexually or emotionally attracted to other women. Being in company with other females is an opportunity for homosexuals to try and win the love and affection of these ones through acts of seduction. In so doing, lesbian women want these women to become their sexual partners. During one of Salimata Ka's routine visits to Nefert in *The Resolutionaries*, the following episode of lesbian courtship takes place. Its reads:

*I felt Sali's right hand caress my left cheek, slide toward the back of my head, then, applying a very light pressure, pull my face towards hers. Kissing me on one cheek, Sali inhaled, eyes closed, and murmured: "Mmmm". She made as if she wanted to kiss me on the other cheek, but as her lips went past mine, she stopped her motion, kissed my lips, and tried to find an opening between them with her tongue. "Let me", she pleaded (Armah, 2013: 5).*

Female homosexual wooers who try to curry favor with sexual prospects for lesbian experiences use three strategies Armah opines. First, they try to lure the beloved ones into assenting to their courting through caresses. This seduction strategy is performed by stroking gently and lovingly friends' cheeks in the hope that they will succumb to their charm. Second, to make things easy, lesbians often try erotic kisses on friends' mouth. Third, when women being flattered still resist the courtships, then, lesbians openly voice out their feelings as in the case of Salimata Ka in *The Resolutionaries*. She straightforwardly and shamelessly declares her love to Nefert: "When I met you [...] I was in love, alone" (Armah, 2013: 392).

Taken together, all these evidences of same-gender courtship underscore Salimata Ka's desire to be in homo-erotic tandem with her friend, Armah suggests. Belief is placed in this assumption through the term 'lesbian' which "describes a relationship in which two women's strongest emotions and affections are directed toward each other" and in which "sexual contact may be a part of the relationship to a greater [...] degree" (Faderman, 1981: 17). As a proof, through caresses and kisses, along with the hot declaration of love, Salimata Ka clearly brings to daylight what she expects in terms of true sexual contacts and relations with her friend Nefert Lihamba. Truly speaking, the lesbian woman's sexual desires describe a relationship in which her strongest emotional affections with those of Nefert Lihamba should be directed toward each other, with the possibility of real sexual contacts. Through their construction of a lesbian identity, post-colonial African women are granted the possibility to try out some subversive forms of sexuality. And specific to Salimata Ka's queer sexuality, Armah suggests, women's

perception of sexuality erodes established norms now in Africa. Thus, heterosexuality no more stands out as the only way for women to express their sexual identity. Aside from normative sexuality, other forms of libidinal realities prevail. And that is the reason why a woman like Salimata Ka freely and easily involves herself in lesbianism which is supposed to grant her the possibility to woo women so much as she can also be wooed herself by other females. In the matter discussed, patriarchal Africa surely has its say.

## 2. SUBVERSIVE SEXUALITY: A PRONENESS TO SOCIAL AVERSION

In Africa, though mentalities have been exposed to the transformative agenda of modernity, many people still remain attached to some features of phallogocentric configuration of sexuality. Small wonder that the African collective consciousness takes a dim view of women who are given to stray sexual conducts. In *The Revolutionaries*, Armah highlights the African society's negative assessment of licentious heterosexuality by maintaining that a considerable part of the population still takes a dim view of subversive heterosexuality. More pointedly, the idea is that some African people do not shut their eyes to sociosexual relations whereby a woman is amenable to many male sexual partners or same-gender partners at a time. Such promiscuousness is not on in the eyes of such African communities. The contention that Nefert Lihamba is akin to nothing but a sexual 'butterfly' is outstandingly suggested by Salimata Ka who accuses her of "[s]winging from one man to another" (Armah, 2013: 269). While still carrying on with Shaka Foreman (their affair is on the verge of breaking down), Nefert Lihamba readily falls for Jehwty Lumumba, a colleague. To Armah, such frivolous sexual experience demonstrates women's inconsistency and fickleness in love affair. Swinging from one man to another is an erratic conduct according to the collective consciousness in Africa and the set moral ethics that govern phallogocentric African societies. In such cultural backgrounds, a woman should not date two men. Linking up with a second suitor while a previous affair is not yet completely over is degrading for the image of womenfolk. In *The Revolutionaries*, such promiscuousness is not healthy for the image of Nefert Lihamba who is considered as an unscrupulous woman by the population of Lebwo. By way of examining such casual and indiscriminate sexual habits, two incumbent narratives come to light.

First, according to African moral standards, licentious heterosexuals are likened to sexual butterflies. They do not seem to be in full possession of their emotions. They seem to fail to have a thorough control over their lustful longings. Thus, they are comparable with true Athanasian wenches, such women who cannot refrain from falling in love with men who ever come their way. Marie Krüger likens such a behavioral flexibility to an "attitude of acquiescence" (1998: 57). This hints at women who never

go hard with their suitors, the kind of females who are easily led by males. For sure, in *The Resolutionaries*, Nefert Lihamba's attitude of acquiescence is predicated upon her amenability to break way under the whimsical desires of her male suitors. Thus, she is comparable with the legendary whore called Lucia in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. She is so easy to get on with and ready to acquiesce in men's courtships that the villagers of the Shona community likens Lucia to "nothing of a woman" who "sleeps with anybody and everybody" (2004: 128) she is acquainted with.

Second, licentious heterosexual practices seem not to be adapted to the African cultural environment Armah opines. This assumption takes its impetus from the contention that if unbound sex is commonplace in some Western societies, this should not necessarily be the case in Africa. Swinging from one man to another reveals that women are totally ignorant of the ethical norms that prevail in the cultural milieus they inhabit. Nevertheless they are Africans, they still seem to be totally disconnected from puritan principles governing their cultural backgrounds. Consenting to sexual acts with many lovers in a society which takes issue with sexual immorality likens contemporary African women to what Fritz Morgenthaler calls "social misfit" (1984: 131). By adopting sexual perverseness, which is not an erotic experience that is promoted in phallogocentric Africa, Nefert Lihamba only stands in breach of values that construct a true African moral identity. Also noted is that by ranging in favor of acts of perversion in the expression of her sexual choice, the licentious heterosexual woman has only opted for a disconcerting experience. Along similar lines, same-sex courtships are also held in contempt in Africa.

For Armah, if untamed heterosexuality is socially despised, lesbianism is deservedly in the spotlight of patriarchal diatribes. He proceeds to say that acts of sexual relationships or courtships between female partners (which is an imported malaise) are on a par with evident abnormalities; and that a woman who gets used to such a proscribed conduct is automatically considered as strange. In *The Resolutionaries*, Salimata Ka's lesbian attitude makes her an uncommon female in the eyes of her friend Nefert Lihamba who, here, stands for the critical eye of the community of Lebwo: "I know she never had an open, loving, adult relationship with a man" (Armah, 2013: 269). Instead of being attracted to men, homosexual women rather prefer same-sex partners. Their sexual proclivity is geared towards attractive women. This is what accounts for their misandry, their anti-male discourses characterized by their desire to construct a sexual opportunity without men, excluding the phallus. The case of Salimata Ka in Armah's novel is a blatant example through this insight: "Man wants to use you for self-satisfaction" (Armah, 2013, 269). Yet, in Africa, constructing a sexual experience excluding men exposes female homosexuals to unprecedented homophobic discourses to the point of being belittled to the low level of baseness. In fact, diatribes and vehement criticisms are lashed out at the lesbian proclivity of African women. The society does not know what to make of such women's refusal to pair off with men. Also in Lebwo, people do

not understand why a beautiful and charming woman like Salimata Ka turns her back on males who are said to be “the salt of the earth” (Nfah-Abbeyi, 1997: 7) and rather gets interested in only woman-to-woman erotic courtships. John Boswell is in favor of invectives against such outcast women. He compares lesbian females to “abnormal persons” (1990: 21). Women’s cross-gender sexuality is abnormal because their lesbian identity runs counter to the prescribed heterosexual culture or connubial sexuality that prevail in phallogocentric and misogynist African societies. In the community of Lebw that is portrayed in *The Revolutionaries*, women whose sexual practices erode epistemologies that subordinate the female world to penetrative sex are condemned to a dire fate. Likewise, any form of sexuality (promoted by females) that excludes both men’s patronizing dogma and their active participation may spell doom for women.

Furthermore, Armah observes that the construction of homophobic discourses against lesbians is predicated upon their tendency to openly declare their feelings to other women, which is an eccentricity. In trying to lure her female colleague into having erotic experiences with her, Salimata Ka confesses: “When I met you [...] I was in love, alone” (Armah, 2013: 392). By paying court to other women through straightforward declarations of love, female homosexuals obviously adopt unscrupulous standards which stand in total breach of social and ethical codes governing African patriarchal communities. But what is thought of women who take such initiatives in love affairs? What is the outlook of society on women who openly cast their feelings to other females? In phallogocentric Africa, the right to woo a sexual partner is exclusively bestowed on the male world, not on females. As Salimata Ka deconstructs such a patriarchal disposition in *The Revolutionaries*, she definitely stands out as caught within the loops of a “negative process” (Nfah-Abbeyi, 1997:3). The reason for such a condemnation rides on the evidence that though the society does not confer her with a locus standi in sociosexual relations, she still takes the first lead in courtship. This is a real transgression of normative epistemologies on sexuality. Noticeably, female homosexuality is vehemently condemned in Africa and their shameless and blunt declarations of love to same-sex peers is negatively viewed as an attempt at a reversal of roles. In addition, homosexuality and its immoral courtship are so despised that societies have developed against their aficionados a form of unqualified hatred, heterosexism. It “refers to discrimination based on sexual orientation” (Rothblum and Bond, 1996: ix). Basically, women who court other women for sexual and emotional interests are discriminated against in Africa. Also noted is the contention that females who are known for currying favor with other women are sometimes publicly harassed and censured-in public venues, on buses, in schools, to quote but a few. At times, some homophobes even dare to molest lesbians physically as a patent token of social reproof of their sexual orientation. It is true that females’ queer sexuality is condemned through homophobic invectives, but what is the standpoint of the feminist trend on that issue?



### 3. FEMINIST THINKING AND UNBOUND SEX: WOMEN'S LIBERATION FROM PHALLOCENTRISM

Ayi Kwei Armah is at odds with phallocentric outlooks on elusive sexuality. He rightfully suggests that feminist thinking does not connect subversive sexual categories with evil. The Ghanaian author contends that feminism aims to contribute to women's liberation from men's patriarchy through unbound sex. This liberation has two main articulations. On the one hand, the compulsion to marriage is deconstructed through licentious heterosexuality. Women who adopt promiscuous heterosexuality feel exempted from male-controlled sexual norms which confine sex to matrimony. In *The Revolutionaries*, the wish for emancipation is so pressing in Nefert Lihamba that she keeps "[s]winging from one man to another" (Armah, 2013: 269). This woman acts in so a libertarian way because she does not want to be bound by the ethical codes of wedlock. Interestingly, as she does not want her sexual life to mimic a husband-wife union with its unending constraints and obligations, Nefert Lihamba prefers a sexual experience that not only enables her to express freedom with her own body but also which guarantees her independence from married life. For a fact, when a woman keeps swinging from one male to another, a man cannot remain attached to her for long. The reason for this failed union lies in the fact that the more a man gets infatuated with such a sexual butterfly and plans for marriage, the sooner she breaks his heart and shifts to another love affair. This ruins any possibility of marriage, this serious hindrance to women's freedom. Specifically, if Nefert Lihamba is in breach of connubial unions, it is because she wants to have power over her own body, and does not intend to be dragooned into sex on men's volitions. As it can be argued, what such a woman seeks is to exert control over men's sexuality by being the one who freely decides what man to choose or who to exclude from her carnal experience. As they are eager to lead an unbound heterosexuality with no possibility of marriage, the attitude of promiscuous women gives credence to the posit that "[t]o be feminist is [...] to grow wings and fly to unlimited heights" (Mugo, 1994: 36). Here, to 'grow wings' suggests women's awareness of their own assets for deconstructing phallocentric ideals. Thus, as they are no more submitted to men's sexual archetypes, contemporary women readily turn their backs on age-old sexuality centered on marriage. In *The Revolutionaries*, this is precisely the case of Nefert Lihamba. By changing male partners at will, she is viewed as a feminist character who rebuts phallocentric discourses of marriage-related heterosexuality.

Additionally, Armah emphasizes lesbians' resistance to heterosexual experience and their wish for emancipation from the male world. This agenda justifies their opposition to codes validated by phallocentric meanings of sexuality. In this process, lesbians stand against both mainstream feminism and its tolerance of man-to-woman erotic unions. Their philippic against normative sex is predicated on the fact that, in their eyes, heterosexuality does nothing but ruin the dignity of the female world. In the following



lines, Salimata Ka echoes: “Swinging from one man to another” (Armah, 2013: 296). Here, according to the lesbian ideology, a sexual practice that involves menfolk is disadvantageous for women and makes them suffer setbacks. For the sake of argue, their image and repute are often degraded by men. Given this, homosexual females contend that being in couple with males is an unreliable reality. It does not guarantee women’s sexual plenitude but only contributes to making them unhappy. It is this misery that compels them into changing sexual partners like in the case of Nefert in *The Revolutionaries*. For the lesbian world, this is an intolerable disaster which obviously brings about women’s hatred for menfolk. This hard-core rebuttal is supported by radical feminism which ranges against mainstream feminism that regards heterosexuality (both ethical and licentious) as the only way to love. For Peter Barry, this unflinching feminist trend or queer sexual orientation is “a moral condemnation of female heterosexuality as a betrayal of women and their interests, with the implication that women can only achieve integrity through lesbianism” (2002: 142). In *The Revolutionaries*, Salimata Ka (a homosexual woman herself) seems to condemn her friend Nefert Lihamba (a licentious heterosexual) for agreeing to man-to-woman sexual model. This contempt rides on the assumption that by yielding to both Shaka Foreman (she bears him her son Resy) and Jehwty Lumumba’s courting, according to Salimata Ka, Nefert Lihamba has betrayed African womenfolk and their fight to get a leeway from patriarchal sexual norms. In getting involved in a heterosexual experience, the young lady has not only tarnished her dignity through her ‘butterfly attitude’ but she has also fallen prey to the callousness of unscrupulous men: “It seemed to me, [...], that there could never be an honest connection” (Armah, 2013: 269) between a “[m]an to woman” (Armah, 2013: 269) illustrates the liability of heterosexual unions to always turn sour.

Given that the bonding between womenfolk and menfolk is not advantageous for women, Armah suggests that the only way for females to get out of the constraining epistemologies of males is to adopt a feminist attitude. More precisely, women’s common struggle for the construction of a homosexual identity is obviously underpinned by the ideals of queer sexual orientation. This subversive feminism holds that females’ sexuality should not be tied up with referential age-old sexual experiences. What lesbians suggest is that women should side with one another and vehemently denounce men’s authority (diktats) by excluding the latter from their sexual pleasure. For queer feminists, any woman who dares to indulge in a heterosexual relationship will end up held down by men, totally under their hegemony. Charlotte Bunch agrees with this doxa. In her article “Lesbian in Revolt” (1975), she corroborates that “relationships between men and women are essentially political, they involve power and dominance” (1975: 30). In clear terms, heterosexual models (ethical or licentious) often involves phallogocentric dogmas of sexuality and their misrepresentation of women’s libidinal identity. So, for Nefert Lihamba to be sexually emancipated, Salimata Ka, advises her

to turn her back on menfolk and pair off with her against male tyranny. What needs to be emphasized is that central to queer sexual orientation is the obligation of heterosexual women to turn lesbian. And if they ever consent to lesbianism, Armah argues, they should readily agree to side with lesbians (and espouse lesbian values) for an effective resistance against men's irresponsible ways. But for this anti-male rebuttal to come to fruition, heterosexual womenfolk should start by giving up sexual contacts with their male suitors or husbands (they should even divorce in the end). What prevails here is that Salimata Ka advises Nefert to stop having sexual contacts with both Shaka Foreman and Jehwty Lumumba because, for her, this is a good way to successfully shift to same-sex erotic experiences. If this is possible, Salimata Ka opines, together they can succeed in establishing an emphatic statement of sexual emancipation from men and their patronizing discourses: "We need freedom" (Armah, 2011: 403), Ibrahima Ka's daughter early evidences.

On the other hand, this paper reveals another feminist strategy against patriarchal premises: the refusal of childbearing. Through Salimata Ka, Armah suggests that by turning their backs on heterosexuality, contemporary African women can free themselves from the burdens of motherhood. This contention is based on the premise that the act of giving birth to children is a token of men's domination over women. Through her double heterosexual experience in *The Revolutionaries*, Nefert Lihamba is eventually prone to one of her lovers' controlling influence: "Unlike Shaka, Jehwty was all attention. Why, then, did Shaka continue to occupy space in my mind" (Armah, 2013: 94), she ponders. This excerpt predicates Shaka's overwhelming influence over Nefert Lihamba. Despite her new lover's kindness and attention, the young woman still does not succeed in getting Shaka out of her mind. And if she fails to rid herself of her liking for this man, it is thanks to the son (Resy) she has born him. Thus, owing to parental links that bind heterosexual partners together, the power of the male parent over the female parent is sometimes impressive. This explains why the young lady often keeps feeling no ill-will towards her ex-lover even though they are now parted. As it can be observed, women's subjection through motherhood epitomizes the failure of heterosexuality. Heedful of women's failed heterosexual experiences, tenets of queer sexual orientation seem to send a clarion call to African women, demanding them to stand against penetrative sex. Along with this anti-male posture, they assume that heterosexuality culminating into childbearing is an epitome of men's control over women in the sexual understanding of gender relationships. In *The Revolutionaries*, Salimata Ka's resentment towards childbearing is suitably corroborated by Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi's posit whereby in the African social and cultural milieu "men and patriarchal ideologies control women's reproduction and sexual capacities, and that as a result, women are trapped by their reproductive anatomy and by a dogma of compulsory heterosexuality" (1997: 17). For Armah, female homosexuals who are in

breach of mainstream sex and who do not want to undergo men's serfdom, irremediably become resentful of childbearing. *The Revolutionaries* indicates that Salimata Ka does not consent to childbearing because in so doing she is aware that she runs the risk of being controlled by men and patriarchal ideologies like her friend Nefert Lihamba. So, for an effective struggle against phallocentrism, queer feminism suggests a way: women should opt for a sexual practice which repudiates childbirth. Estelle B. Freedman calls this "nonreproductive sexual relations" (2006: 109), a pivotal strategy of lesbianism. And through Salimata Ka, Armah posits that nonreproductive sex is a reliable alternative for contemporary African females to ensure their liberation and independence from patriarchy. As a proof, when there is no child to bond a woman to man, the influence of that male over that female is thought to be lessened.

## CONCLUSION

As one tackles the twilight lines of this paper, it is arguable that today contemporary African women flout principles of heteronormative sexuality that used to prevail in most traditional and phallogentric societies. By turning their backs on connubial heterosexuality, many educated African women adopt both licentious heterosexuality and homo-erotic sexual practices. And in a critical perspective, an emphasis is put on the negative outlook that the society has on acts of unbound sex: especially those of subversive heterosexuality and lesbianism. Yet, the feminist ideology rather attaches to this transgressive form of sexuality, some political and emancipating agendas which contribute to the liberation of women from age-old meaning of sex.

This paper also campaigns for an awareness on the hardships women are faced with and men's unfair outlooks on them. So, it is high time males changed their negative views so far as women's are concerned because they have the same rights as men. Instead of criticisms, men should be more tolerant of women's choices and decisions. And it is only through tolerance that women will be fully integrated members of our societies.

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